



Preparation and Support for Teaching:

Teachers' Response to State Education Reform

**A Working Paper Prepared for the
Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession**

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Executive Summary

This working paper describes the findings from the latest in a series of surveys administered to Washington teachers. The surveys are part of an effort to better understand teaching quality and support for teachers' work. The survey results discussed in this working paper focus on teachers' responses to state education reform in Washington during the last decade.

Teachers in this stratified random sample present a picture of state education reform that offers some encouragement for the long-term commitment to reform goals that have characterized this state. In short, teachers agree that the existing reform has had some positive effects on the quality of student learning and changes in teaching practice. At the same time, teachers also identify deeply held concerns that deserve to be understood and heard.

Benefits of State Education Reform

The responses of these teachers offer evidence that the state education reform has had some desired results. In short, according to teachers in the sample, the standards, assessments, and accountability system set up by the state reform process are having some positive impacts on classroom practice, student learning opportunities, and ultimately on student learning itself. Three overall themes emerge from the survey data.

The “theory of action” underlying the state education reform—that prominently features high student learning standards, grade-level expectations, aligned assessments, and an accountability system—is largely working. A majority of teachers indicate that they are familiar with the state standards (99 percent in the subjects they teach), see them as relevant to their teaching (84 percent), adjust their classroom practice to align with these standards (79 percent), and report a number of benefits from state education reform for their students (e.g., 72 percent attribute “increased rigor in student learning experiences” to state education reform). They take the state’s assessments seriously, as do their leaders at the school and district level, who are encouraging them

actively to improve the quality of teaching and learning. As the teachers see it, students are benefiting in various ways from the state education reform.

Teachers in a position to compare teaching and learning under the state education reform initiative to what preceded it are especially likely to report benefits from the reform. This view of state education reform is confirmed by comparing responses of veteran teachers (e.g., those who have taught fifteen or more years), who were in the classroom prior to the passage of the state’s Education Reform Act in 1993, with novice teachers (those with four or fewer years of experience), who do not have as clear a reference point for judging how the reforms compare with prior conditions. By comparison with novice teachers, veterans more frequently see a moderate or great deal of benefit from the reform across the last decade, in particular regarding increased rigor in student learning experiences (77 versus 63 percent), increased student performance (66 versus 46 percent), better ways of demonstrating what students have mastered (56 versus 43 percent), and more collaboration among teachers (56 versus 47 percent).

State education reform appears to be having the greatest impact on teachers and learners in the elementary grades—the level of schooling which has had the longest continuous exposure to state reform expectations. At the elementary level, teachers are more likely to be familiar with state learning standards, see the relevance to their work, have made greater adjustments to their teaching practice, and received more support from colleagues for their efforts to realize reform goals. In addition, these teachers perceive their students to be mastering essential aspects of the state’s learning agenda more readily than do teachers in the secondary grades. For example, 61 percent of elementary teachers see increased student performance as a benefit of state education reform as compared with 46 percent of high school teachers.

Deeply Held Concerns and Continuing Issues

Teachers made it clear that there are substantial issues that have arisen with the unfolding of the state education reform. In particular, ***teachers express nearly universal concern over testing, resources, special learning needs, public misunderstanding and***

instructional time. Eighty percent or more of the teachers in the sample agree or strongly agree that state reform has been accompanied by these concerns. What is especially striking is how consistently teachers voice these concerns—a third or more of the sample “strongly agreed” with all but one of the ten concerns listed in the questionnaire item, as contrasted with the more varied responses to an item about the benefits of state education reform.

Concerns also surfaced regarding effects on students, among them an increase in the anxiety about schooling manifested in the student population. *Teachers also worry that the state is not doing everything it could or should to support the reform effort.* For example, nearly three-fourths of teachers (73 percent) indicate that state education reform has done little or nothing to provide incentives to improve teaching. Two-thirds (66 percent) of teachers indicate state reform has done little or nothing to increase engagement of the public and professionals in the improvement of education.

Finally, there is a continuing question about whether the reform initiative as a whole, and its implementation at state and local levels, is adequately stimulating and supporting the considerable professional learning that such an ambitious reform effort presumes. Especially troubling are the data concerning the limited amount of professional learning about serving a diverse student population—for example, only 25 percent indicate that state education reform has prompted them to learn “a moderate amount” or “a great deal” about how to help children of color or linguistically diverse student populations succeed, as compared with 60 percent learning about assessment and how to incorporate it into classroom practice, or 67 percent learning how to align teaching with state standards. Even when one takes into account the fact that a small fraction of the classroom teachers teach no students of color or ELL students, a stark disparity remains.

Further Investigations in the Survey Series

The survey results underscore key aspects of the state’s education reform that deserve attention, as well as offering some evidence that from the teachers’ vantage point, the reform is having many of its intended effects on teaching and learning. The survey

leaves relatively unexplored some important topics, among them a deeper look at how teachers respond to student diversity, and how they are helped to address this crucial dimension of educating all children. This is the topic of the next round of the survey series. There are also questions about whether teachers' concerns are sufficient to prompt them to leave their current school, or exit the profession altogether, a topic we take up in a sixth and final survey, later this spring.

Together, these data offer information about the efforts of educators and policymakers to make the learning experiences for students in the state's schools more fulfilling. A summary report, projected for the summer, will pull together themes and findings from all of the surveys and related investigations (e.g., analyses of teacher retention and mobility using state databases), and interpret what they have to say to the state policy community.

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Introduction:
Hearing From Teachers About State Education Reform

Washington state has made a long-term commitment to improve the quality of learning in its schools, most notably through the passage of the Education Reform Act, HB 1209, in 1993. As a result of this and other efforts, the state has sought to strengthen the learning experiences for all students by establishing high learning standards linked to performance assessments, within a framework that holds students, schools and professionals accountable.

State Education Reform and the Classroom Teacher

Washington has largely stayed the course during the last 12 years, though there have been amendments, additions, and adjustments to state reform through legislative and citizen action (Initiative 728). Reform legislation has created mechanisms to support educators' work in pursuit of the learning standards through learning improvement grants in the 1990s, mentoring programs, increased access to technology, and other initiatives that have provided targeted assistance and professional development opportunities. Most recently, the state has undertaken an overhaul of the teacher certification system.

Districts, as well, have been active players in state reform, and in some cases provide a central role in the renewal of instruction. However, schools and districts have responded differently to state reforms, and their ways of interpreting and incorporating the reforms have also had an impact on teaching and learning.

The ambitious task of state education reform has placed a heavy load on the state's teacher workforce. It raises questions about whether teachers have the means, knowledge, and skills to realize the intent of the reforms in their classrooms. For example, reflecting a trend in this state and elsewhere, the state's teachers find themselves facing an increasingly diverse student population. Teachers in the highest poverty schools are more likely to encounter socioeconomic diversity, larger numbers of students for whom English is not the first language, and children from historically underserved racial and ethnic groups. The crucial issue has not to do with diversity itself, but with teachers'

preparedness for working with diverse student populations. A central question for state and local policymakers is what can and should be done to enhance the teaching force, the quality of teaching, and support for teachers' work, in pursuit of high learning standards for all students.

In this working paper, we explore from teachers' perspectives, how their classroom practice has been impacted by state reform—specifically, by the learning standards, assessment, and accountability provisions of the state's education reform—and the conditions under which these reforms support student learning.

The Survey Series and Participating Teachers

This survey is part of a “Fast Response Survey” system created by a research team at the University of Washington as a means to examine teaching and teaching conditions in Washington state. Based on a survey system designed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the Fast Response surveys are relatively short and administered to a sample of teachers who have agreed in advance to participate in the survey series. High response rates and quick turnaround of questionnaires make this kind of a system especially useful for gathering information on current issues that teachers face.¹

During the 2003-04 school year, the research team piloted a series of three Fast Response surveys which explored issues of preparation and support for teachers' work among a sample of approximately 400 teachers. The current survey, which focuses on teachers' views of state education reform, represents the fourth in the series, and the first of three new questionnaires administered in the 2004-05 school year.

¹ For a summary of these survey results, see Knapp, M. S., Elfers, A. M., & Plecki, M. L., (2004). *Preparing for reform, supporting teacher's work: Surveys of Washington state teachers, 2003-04 school year*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington. This report also can be found on the CSTP website http://www.cstp-wa.org/Navigational/Commissionedresearch/Research_reports/Research_reports.htm For more detail on the design of the survey series, see *Development and deployment of a “fast response” survey system in Washington state: Methodological notes*, on the same CSTP website provided above.

Teachers were selected based on a stratified random sample of all Washington classroom teachers by region of the state, experience level of the teacher, and poverty level of the school in which they teach (see Table 1). Using this kind of sample also provides an appropriate representation of teachers at each grade level. Participants agree to respond to three surveys over the course of the school year and are offered a modest honorarium for their time. About half of the participants from the previous school year chose to participate in the surveys again this year. Additional teachers were recruited at random to fill out the sample, based on the sampling frame.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Teacher Sample (Stratification Variables)

Demographic	Category
Region*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western Washington (outside of Central Puget Sound) • Central Puget Sound • Eastern Washington
Teacher Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0-4 years • 5-14 years • 15 or more years
School Poverty Indicator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0-20% enrolled in Free or Reduced Price Lunch program • 21-50% enrolled in Free or Reduced Price Lunch program • 51-100% enrolled in Free or Reduced Price Lunch program

* Region as represented by Educational Service District. Puget Sound region is represented by ESD 121. Western Washington (not including ESD 121) is represented by ESDs 112, 113, 114 and 189. Eastern Washington is represented by ESDs 101, 105, 123 and 171.

Teachers completed either a paper or online version of the survey, with approximately 60 percent using the web-based survey system. High response rates (87 percent for the current survey) and other indicators ensure that the responding teachers accurately reflect the sample and the state’s teaching force as a whole:

- *The even distribution of grade level teaching assignments.* The responding sample represents approximately the same number of teachers in each grade.
- *A relative distribution of teachers by school level.* Fifty-eight percent teach at the elementary level, 20 percent teach middle school, 19 percent teach high school, and 3 percent teach in schools with a wide range of grade levels.
- *A wide distribution of teachers from across the state.* A third of the teachers represented are from Western Washington (outside the Central Puget Sound), 35 percent are from Central Puget Sound, and a third are from Eastern Washington.

- *A broad range of teacher experience.* The sample represents 32 percent novice teachers (0-4 years of experience), 32 percent mid-career teachers (5-14 years of experience), and 36 percent of the most experienced teachers (15 or more years of experience).
- *An extensive representation of teachers by school poverty levels.* A third of the sample teach in low-poverty schools (0-20 percent of students participating in the Free or Reduced Price Lunch program), another third teach in schools with moderate-poverty (21-50 percent of students participating in the Free or Reduced Price Lunch program), and a third in high-poverty schools (51 percent or more students participating in the Free or Reduced Price Lunch program).

Nearly 90 percent of the teachers in the sample teach full-time. Twelve percent teach special education as their primary assignment, a statistic not far from the state average. Additionally, 42 percent of the teachers in the sample taught in Washington state prior to the passage of the Education Reform Act (HB 1209) in 1993. As a result, the survey can provide informative feedback from teachers who are well-acquainted with the long-term impact of the state's reform efforts.

What We Sought to Learn From Teachers

The results reported subsequently capture teachers' views of state education reform in several ways. We asked:

1. What teachers see as the overall benefits of state education reform, as well as any concerns they might have about the reform.
2. How state education reform has impacted teachers' classroom practice and their use of assessment to improve student learning.
3. How well state education reform is prompting or supporting teachers' learning about meeting the needs of a diverse student population.
4. Whether experienced teachers see state education reform differently from less experienced counterparts, and whether their views differ by level of schooling.
5. What kinds of support for professional learning related to reform goals teachers thought they were receiving.

We present the primary findings regarding each question, and related evidence, in the sections that follow.

1. Overall Views of State Education Reform and its Effects

Teachers in the sample present a picture of state education reform that offers some encouragement for the long-term commitment to reform goals that have characterized this state. In short, teachers identify benefits from the state’s reforms, including an impact on the quality of student learning and changes in instructional practice. At the same time, teachers are also telling us about deeply held concerns that deserve to be heard and understood.

Teachers’ views of the benefits of state education reform, summarized in Table 2 below, reveal that *a majority of teachers believe the reform has positively influenced the nature of expectations for teaching and learning, rigor of student learning experiences, student performance, and the connections between curriculum, instruction, and assessment.*

Table 2: Benefits of State Reform

How much has the state education reform over the last decade brought about the following benefits?	A little or not at all	A moderate amount or a great deal
Clear expectations for student learning	20%	80%
Increased rigor in student learning experiences	27%	72%
Clear expectations for teaching	35%	64%
Explicit connections between curriculum, instruction, and assessment	40%	60%
Increased student performance	43%	56%
More collaboration among teachers	46%	53%
Greater attention to the needs of <u>all</u> students	48%	52%
Better ways of demonstrating what students have mastered	50%	50%
Greater access to professional learning opportunities	55%	43%
Greater engagement of public and professionals in education improvement	66%	31%
Incentives to improve teaching	73%	26%

N=349

Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding and missing responses.

On the other hand, teachers are quick to point out a number of concerns, and their views are more uniformly and strongly voiced. As Table 3 indicates, *three quarters or more of all teachers hold concerns about the amount of testing and inflexibility of the accountability system, the way special learning needs are served, limited time and resources to do the job, and the narrowing of curriculum.*

Table 3: Concerns and Issues Raised by State Reform

To what extent do you agree that state education reform over the last decade has raised the following issues or concerns in Washington?	Disagree or strongly disagree	Agree or strongly agree
Too much focus or time on testing	10%	89%
Special learning needs not well served	13%	85%
Not enough resources to do the job well	15%	84%
Increased public misunderstanding of schools	19%	81%
Too little instructional time to realize state reform goals	19%	80%
Unrealistic expectations for teaching and learning	20%	79%
Accountability system that is too inflexible	20%	78%
Narrowing of the curriculum	24%	75%
Diminished discretion and autonomy for the classroom teacher	24%	74%
Too little help translating broad statements into grade-specific goals	25%	73%

N=349

Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding and missing responses.

2. Effects on Classroom Practice and the Uses of Assessment

In this section, the overall themes will be explored further. In particular, the survey offers more detail about the impact the reform is having on classroom practice and how the assessments are being used.

Impacts on Classroom Practice

State education reform has impacted teachers' classroom practice in many ways. *State standards and assessments have had a focusing effect on teachers' practice. Teachers are familiar with the EALRs, WASL and other aspects of state reform and hold strong opinions about the impact of these measures on student learning and their professional practice.*

- EALRs, WASL, and grade-level expectations have considerable relevance for teachers' daily classroom practice, as they see it. Teachers indicate a moderate or great deal of relevance for EALRs (84 percent), WASL (73 percent), and grade-level expectations (75 percent).
- For those who teach in subject areas and grades guided by state standards and grade-level expectations, 95 percent indicate their classroom-based performance assessments are somewhat or closely aligned to the WASL, as are 90 percent of district-required assessments.
- As would be expected, 99 percent of teachers indicate they are somewhat or very familiar with the EALRs in the subjects they teach, and nearly two-thirds (62 percent) indicate they are *very* familiar. They are less familiar with EALRs in subjects they do not teach (43 percent indicate they are not familiar at all).
- Virtually all the teachers (93 percent) indicate they are somewhat or very familiar with district standards or expectations based on or derived from state learning standards.

For those who teach in high-poverty schools, state assessments and grade-level expectations (GLEs) appear to play an even larger role in how teachers make sense of their work. Over half of teachers in high-poverty schools (54 percent) are likely to indicate that state assessments other than the WASL (e.g., second grade reading assessment) have a moderate or great deal of relevance to their daily classroom practice, compared to only 30 percent of teachers in low-poverty schools. In addition, 83 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools note that grade-level expectations have a moderate or great deal of relevance to their classroom practice compared with 71 percent of teachers in low-poverty schools.

According to teachers in the sample, state reform has impacted the content of what they teach, as well as how they teach.

- Teachers indicate that instead of teaching a broader range of skills (28 percent do this), they place more of an emphasis on teaching discrete basic skills (63 percent) and focus more deeply on a smaller number of topics (62 percent).
- Nearly three-quarters of teachers (73 percent) emphasize problem solving and critical thinking more than they did in the past, and nearly four-fifths (79 percent) organize learning activities more explicitly around state or state-derived standards.
- As a result of state standards or grade-level expectations, teachers in the sample indicate they integrate assessment into classroom instruction more extensively (76 percent), ask students to explain their thinking more often or in greater detail (81 percent), and encourage students to take more responsibility for their learning (75 percent).

Making Use of Assessment

Assessment of student learning is a central part of the theory of action guiding the state's reform initiative. *Most teachers are trying to incorporate assessment into their classroom practice in ways that are compatible with state- and district-required assessments.* As a result of state reform, over three-quarters of respondents indicate they:

- Pay more attention to assessment results (77 percent).
- Adapt the content to match what is tested (77 percent).
- Use instructional strategies that are compatible with WASL items (81 percent).
- Integrate assessment more with academic learning tasks (76 percent).

Furthermore, *a majority of teachers suggest that state education reform has prompted them to learn a moderate amount or a great deal about assessment and its role in instruction,* especially recently (e.g., the last two years), as Table 4 makes clear.

Table 4: Education Reform as a Prompt for Learning about Assessment

Teachers report that state education reform has prompted them in the last two years to learn about the following...	A little or not at all	A moderate amount	A great deal
Assessment and how to incorporate it into classroom practice	39%	37%	23%
How to use assessment results to guide my instructional planning	40%	38%	20%
How to align classroom teaching with state learning standards	32%	39%	28%
What student work that "meets standard" looks like	32%	38%	29%

N=349

Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding and incomplete responses.

Teachers are taking assessment results seriously. Teachers indicate that they, as well as their colleagues at school, pay close attention to what the assessments have to say about student learning, though more for understanding how the school's students as a whole are performing, rather than to diagnose what individual students may need.

- A majority of teachers indicate that teachers at their school pay close attention to assessment results (89 percent agree or strongly agree) and take school-wide responsibility for WASL results (81 percent agree or strongly agree).
- Teachers indicate that their schools analyze results to see how different groups of students are doing (88 percent agree or strongly agree) and use the results to identify what, as a school, they are doing well and where they need to improve (91 percent agree or strongly agree).
- However, thirty percent of respondents indicate they do not discuss the assessment performance of individual students to diagnose their learning needs.

Assessment may be pushing students, teachers, and schools to teach in ways that are more effective. However, doing so may be having some side effects on students. Three-fifths of the teachers indicate reform has had a modest or great effect on students by increasing their anxiety about their performance in school. A small amount of anxiety may not necessarily be a bad thing, but it raises questions about the increased pressures

students may feel. Nearly half (48 percent) of teachers indicate the reform has had no effect on increasing student enthusiasm for school.

For teachers who work in moderate- and high-poverty schools, students may experience testing with more frequency than students in low-poverty schools. Half of teachers in low-poverty schools report that their students encounter tests required by the state two or more times a year, compared with 63 percent of teachers in moderate-poverty schools, and 73 percent in high-poverty schools. What teachers in these schools attribute to “state testing” is not entirely clear. They may be partially referring to district-required tests, because the state’s official testing cycle is the same for all schools. But one thing is clear: *teachers in high-poverty schools are indicating that their students are tested with greater frequency than teachers in lower poverty schools.*

3. Meeting the Needs of a Diverse Student Population

State reform emphasizes the need to serve all students well. However, *teachers in the sample express reservations about the challenges they face and the supports they need to work effectively with diverse student learners.*

- Among a list of challenges teachers face in their daily practice, the greatest challenges teachers identified include the range of abilities in the room (81 percent), too little time to plan instruction (71 percent), and students with identified disabilities (59 percent).

Perhaps because they are more likely to face student populations that are more diverse ethnically, linguistically and socioeconomically, teachers in high-poverty schools (those with more than half of the students participating in the Free or Reduced Price Lunch program) more frequently note challenges related to a diverse student population than their counterparts in low-poverty schools (those with a fifth or fewer of the students participating in the Free or Reduced Price Lunch program).

- Only 25 percent of teachers in low-poverty schools indicate that English language learners are a big or huge challenge in their daily practice, compared with 43 percent of those in high-poverty schools.
- A wide range of student abilities in the classroom creates greater challenges for 91 percent of the teachers in high-poverty schools, compared with 78 percent of teachers in low-poverty schools.

Despite the emphasis on helping all children learn, *state reform has prompted a majority of teachers to learn “little” or “not at all,” in their view, about how to help students of color succeed, work effectively with linguistically diverse student populations, or help students with identified disabilities meet standard.* This contrasts sharply with what teachers think state education reform has prompted them to learn about other aspects of the reform, as shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Education Reform as a Prompt for Learning: Assessment and Needs of Diverse Learners

Teachers report that state education reform has prompted them in the last two years to learn about the following...	A little or not at all	A moderate amount	A great deal
Assessment and how to incorporate it into classroom practice	39%	37%	23%
The subject matter taught	43%	35%	21%
How to align classroom teaching with state learning standards	32%	39%	28%
How to help students of color succeed	72%	16%	9%
How to work effectively with linguistically diverse student populations	72%	17%	8%
How to help students with identified disabilities meet standard	59%	25%	14%

N=349

Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding and missing responses.

To be sure, among teachers who work in high-poverty schools, state education reform has prompted them to learn more about how to help students of color and linguistically

diverse students than their counterparts in low-poverty schools (36 versus 22 percent, and 40 versus 19 percent respectively). That said, it is striking that, regardless of the school setting, less than two-fifths of all teachers see the state education reform as a stimulus for learning about how to serve a diverse student population.

4. Differences by Teaching Experience and Level of Schooling

The survey explored whether teachers who have more classroom experience differ from their counterparts with less experience, and whether their responses differ depending on whether they teach in elementary, middle, or high schools. In this regard, the survey results help to underscore the fact that state education reform often affects teachers similarly, regardless of school level or experience. However, some key differences are apparent related to how much benefit they attribute to the reform, and what impacts it has had on their practice.

Relationship of Teachers' Experience and Response to State Reform

Overall, teachers with differing amounts of teaching experience are responding to state education reform in remarkably similar ways. For example, novice teachers (those with 4 or fewer years in the classroom) and their more experienced counterparts:

- Are equally familiar with state learning standards and find EALRs, the WASL, and other aspects of state education reform relevant to their classroom practice.
- Are experiencing pressure to improve their practice from the same groups (especially school principals and central office administrators) in approximately the same proportions.
- Report concerns with reform—e.g., regarding the amount of testing, the degree to which special learning needs are well served, or the narrowing of the curriculum—in very similar ways.
- Note the effect of state education reforms on aspects of their teaching approach and content in roughly equal proportions.

Nevertheless, there are some important areas of difference. *On average, veteran teachers (those with 15 or more years of teaching experience), are more likely to see various benefits from state reform than colleagues who are relatively new to the classroom.* In comparison with novice teachers, veteran teachers more frequently see a “great deal of benefit” from aspects of the reforms over the last decade:

- Increased rigor in student learning experiences (34 as compared with 21 percent)
- Clear expectations for student learning (42 compared with 27 percent)
- More collaboration among teachers (22 versus 11 percent)

These differences are noteworthy for several reasons. First, they reflect a difference in perspective on state education reform that is rooted in teachers’ experience of an alternative. Unlike veterans, novice teachers have known nothing else as practicing teachers, and though they may perceive benefits that imply a change from past practice, they have not personally experienced it (except perhaps, as students). The stronger voice from veteran teachers regarding benefits of reform adds weight to the claim that the reform has actually had these effects. Second, it is possible that veteran teachers are more able to realize the benefits of the reform in their classrooms, and therefore speak more strongly concerning these benefits.

Despite the general agreement among teachers of different levels of experience, differences appear in the concerns which teachers voice, and these may point to specific aspects of the reform that deserve attention.

- By comparison with novices, *veteran teachers are especially likely to feel they have had too little help in translating broad standards into grade-specific learning goals* (76 versus 20 percent).

There are other differences between novice and experienced teachers, though these differences are slight (e.g., novice teachers are more likely than others to indicate that state education reform has prompted their learning in the past two years, and they note a

variety of professional learning opportunities, perhaps a reflection of their the earlier state of their teaching career when they are likely to be pursuing such opportunities).

Teachers’ Responses to State Reform at Different Levels of Schooling

Teachers working at different levels of the K-12 system do not always respond in the same way to aspects of state education reform. Among teachers in the sample, elementary teachers tend to feel more strongly about certain aspects of the reform, and in general they find some elements to be more beneficial than teachers at other grade levels.

Elementary teachers are especially likely to perceive the following benefits from state educational reform: clear expectations for teaching, increased rigor in student learning and performance, better ways of demonstrating learning and more collaboration among teachers. Table 6 demonstrates how elementary teachers’ responses compare to their counterparts in middle and high schools.

Table 6: Benefits of State Reform: Teachers' Responses by School Level

Teachers indicate a "moderate amount" or "a great deal" of benefit from the following aspects of state education reform in the last decade...	Elementary Teachers	Middle School Teachers	High School Teachers
Clear expectations for teaching	71%	57%	52%
Increased rigor in student learning	75%	73%	60%
Increased student performance	61%	50%	46%
Better ways of demonstrating what students have mastered	56%	36%	42%
More collaboration among teachers	57%	54%	39%

Overall, elementary and middle school teachers have had a longer experience with state reforms. Perhaps because of the length of exposure or because of the nature of their assignment and the subjects tested, *elementary and middle school teachers find that the state education reform is a great deal more relevant to their daily practice than do their counterparts at high schools. Furthermore, they report greater support from*

colleagues to improve the quality of their teaching. These patterns may also reflect the fact that not all high school teachers feel they are affected by the WASL, nor have all had GLEs targeted to the subjects they teach.

- Elementary and middle school teachers find more relevance of the EALRs to their daily classroom practice than high school teachers (90 and 88 percent, respectively, compared with 66 percent of high school teachers). The same pattern applies to their views of the relevance of the WASL (73 and 76 percent, respectively, compared with 58 percent of high school teachers).
- Elementary teachers find requirements for reporting school or student performance more relevant to their daily practice (75 percent compared with 65 percent of middle school teachers and 60 percent of high school teachers).
- Elementary and middle school teachers find more encouragement from their colleagues to improve the quality of their teaching and learning (56 and 61 percent, respectively, compared with 39 percent of high school teachers).

With regard to student learning, *elementary school teachers are more likely than teachers at other levels to perceive that their responses to state reform have had “modest” or “great” effects on their students’ learning,* as Table 7 shows.

Table 7: State Reform: Teachers' Responses by School Level

Teachers report their responses to state education reform have had the following "modest" or "great effects" on their students...	Elementary Teachers	Middle School Teachers	High School Teachers
Have mastered a wider range of material	43%	24%	28%
Have developed a deeper understanding of certain topics in the curriculum	61%	50%	37%
Show increased skill in problem solving or critical thinking	62%	53%	40%

Elementary school teachers also indicate they have changed the content of what they teach and how they teach as a result of state reform to a greater extent than teachers at other levels. Survey results show that the degree of adaptation decreases progressively across levels of schooling, with high school teachers less influenced to change their

practice as a result of state education reform, and elementary school teachers more influenced as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Impact of State Reform: Teachers' Responses by School Level

Teachers indicate the state standards and/or grade-level expectations have affected how they teach and the content of what they teach in the following ways...	Elementary Teachers	Middle School Teachers	High School Teachers
Focus more deeply on a smaller number of topics	67%	57%	52%
Organize learning activities more explicitly around state or state-derived standards	84%	77%	64%
Integrate assessment into classroom instruction more extensively	80%	70%	66%
Ask students to explain their thinking more often or in greater detail	87%	74%	69%
Use textbooks more selectively	66%	63%	48%
Adapt the content to match what is tested	82%	73%	67%

Elementary and middle school teachers find greater challenges with certain aspects of their assignment and state reforms than teachers at other school levels. They also identify aspects of the reform that have substantially changed their practice.

- Elementary teachers overwhelming indicate they have too little time to plan instruction (79 percent indicate a big or huge challenge, compared with 59 percent of middle school teachers and 61 percent of high school teachers).
- For middle school teachers, nearly three-quarters finding working with students with identified disabilities to be a big or huge challenge, compared with 59 percent of elementary teachers and 49 percent of high school teachers.
- Over half of middle school teachers (56 percent) find a greater challenge in classroom discipline and behavior management, compared with 41 percent of elementary teachers and 30 percent of high school teachers.
- Elementary and middle school teachers spend more time working with their students on practice tests modeled on those required by the state, and on classroom-based assessments related to the WASL, than do high school teachers.

- Elementary and middle school teachers use assessment results more extensively to guide instructional planning (77 percent and 73 percent respectively, compared with 60 percent of high school teachers) and integrate assessment more with academic learning tasks (79 percent and 80 percent respectively, compared with 61 percent of high school teachers).
- Most elementary and middle school teachers see their school as taking school-wide responsibility for WASL results (86 percent and 80 percent, respectively, compared to 63 percent of high school teachers), and indicate their school develops school-wide improvement plans based on assessment results (93 percent and 86 percent, respectively, compared to 76 percent of high school teachers).

Similarly to teachers' responses at different levels of schooling, the distribution of responses by WASL grades emphasize that 4th grade teachers have experienced greater effects of the state reform, while 10th grade teachers appear least impacted in their daily classroom and teaching practices. For the most part, 7th grade teachers fall between the elementary and high school levels, indicating that the state reform has been beneficial, relevant, and challenging in different aspects of the reform process.

Another way to understand differences in teachers' responses by school level and grade, especially at the high school level, is to group those teachers who teach subject areas tested by the WASL. In these analyses, *high school teachers with a primary teaching assignment in subject areas assessed by the tenth-grade WASL (math, sciences, reading and English language arts/literature) express considerable reservation about the clarity of expectations for teaching as a result of state reform.* When asked whether state education reform had brought about clear expectations for teaching, 59 percent of those who teach WASL subjects indicated little or not at all, compared with 46 percent of all high school teachers and only 28 percent of all elementary teachers.

5. Support for Professional Learning

Washington state has recognized the need for continuing education of educators and did so long before HB1209 tried to address this matter in several ways. Unfortunately, the

continuing education available to teachers is often not targeted in ways that are helpful. The number of providers is vast and highly varied, and not all professional development experiences are directly related to teaching. Often the investments in professional learning have little to do with the purposes of the state’s education reform or the needs of the audience for which they are intended.

Teachers in the sample indicate that, in response to state reform, their professional learning has resulted in a focus on particular aspects of classroom practice. Teachers also report the frequency, opportunity, and usefulness of certain kinds of professional development activities. *For some teachers, the reform has opened up new learning opportunities; while for others it offers relatively little, due in part to the availability of professional learning opportunities in the teachers’ immediate vicinity and the kinds of support teachers find in their collegial “communities of practice.”*

- State education reform prompted teachers to learn a “moderate amount” or “a great deal” about how to align classroom teaching with state learning standards (67 percent) and student work that “meets standard” (66 percent).
- Most often, teachers find opportunities to continue their education in ESD-, district-, or school-sponsored professional development events. Teachers report infrequent opportunities to participate in college or university-based coursework, with less than half (47 percent) indicating they have no such opportunities or only one such opportunity every few years.
- While these effects are fairly uniform across the state, teachers in Eastern Washington are more likely than their Western Washington counterparts to indicate that state reform has prompted their learning (e.g., regarding the subject matter they teach, 66 versus 51 percent indicating learning a moderate amount or a great deal). And generally speaking, for teachers in Eastern Washington, state reform has brought about greater access to professional learning opportunities (55 percent indicate a moderate or great deal compared with 35 percent of teachers in the Central Puget Sound region and 40 percent of other teachers in Western Washington).

State reform may differentially impact teachers’ learning depending on their school level. For example, while teachers at elementary, middle and high school levels have all been prompted to learn a moderate amount or great deal about what student work that “meets

standard” looks like as a result of state education reform, a smaller percentage of high school teachers have been prompted to learn about aspects of assessment and alignment to state learning standards (see Table 9).

Table 9: Education Reform as a Prompt for Learning about Assessment: Teachers' Responses by School Level

Teachers report that state education reform has prompted them in the last two years to learn "a moderate amount" or "a great deal" about the following...	Elementary Teachers	Middle School Teachers	High School Teachers
Assessment and how to incorporate it into classroom practice	63%	64%	43%
How to use assessment results to guide my instructional planning	63%	57%	42%
How to align classroom teaching with state learning standards	70%	61%	57%
What student work that "meets standard" looks like	69%	60%	63%

N=349

Totals may not add up to 100% due to rounding and incomplete responses.

Professional learning that is close to the school and supported by colleagues and school leaders seem especially useful to the teachers in the sample.

- Teachers report that the most useful opportunities to learn in response to state reform are self-guided professional learning (40 percent very useful), individual work with an instructional leader such as a principal, mentor or coach (37 percent very useful), and study sessions organized by the department grade or school (37 percent very useful).
- School-based support is viewed as most helpful by teachers. The perceived helpfulness of those who provide support for standards-based practices (if available to them) is listed in Table 10.

Table 10: Sources of Support for Teachers Regarding Standards-Based Practices

	Not very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Very helpful
Expert colleague (no formal role)	14%	51%	35%
School administrator	25%	46%	29%
School-based developer	25%	48%	27%
Department head or grade-level team leader	29%	48%	23%
District administrator/curriculum coordinator, etc.	41%	44%	15%
Instructional coaches	34%	46%	20%
State technical assistance provider	50%	42%	8%

Sample sizes vary for each item as teachers responded only if the support from these individuals had been available to them. Percentages are based on those teachers who accessed each source of support.

Conclusions:

What Teachers Are Saying About State Education Reform

The results of this survey take us one step closer to understanding what reform is accomplishing and what issues it raises in the state’s classrooms, as the reform is experienced by the teachers who staff these classrooms.

Some Positive Effects of State Education Reform

The responses of these teachers offer evidence that the state education reform has had some desired results. In short, according to teachers in the sample, the standards, assessments, and accountability system set up by the state reform process are having some positive impacts on classroom practice, student learning opportunities, and ultimately on student learning itself.

One way to understand what teachers are saying is to see their responses as an affirmation of some aspects of the “theory of action” underlying the state education reform. In short, there are identifiable long-term benefits of high student learning standards, grade-level expectations, aligned assessments, and an accountability system. Furthermore, these features of the state reform are being noticed and responded to at the classroom level. A majority of teachers indicate that they are familiar with the state standards, see them as relevant to their teaching, adjust their classroom practice to align with these standards, and report a number of benefits from state education reform for their students. They take the state’s assessments seriously, as do their leaders at school and district levels, who are encouraging them actively to improve the quality of teaching and learning. As the teachers see it, students are benefiting in various ways from the state education reform.

Two other patterns in the teachers’ responses add weight to the contention that, over the long term, the reform effort is having some of the effects that it set out to achieve:

- Teachers in a position to compare teaching and learning under the state education reform initiative to what preceded it – that is, teachers with 15 or more years of experience – are especially likely to report benefits from the reform.
- State education reform appears to be having the greatest impact on teachers and learners in the elementary grades—the level of schooling which has had the longest continuous exposure to state reform expectations.

Where State Education Reform May be Missing the Mark

But from the teachers’ point of view, there are serious concerns accompanying the state education reform, and the consistency of their responses in this survey suggests that their views should be given full attention. Teachers’ concerns over testing, resources, special learning needs, public misunderstandings, and instructional time are among the matters that may indicate substantial barriers to the reform’s ultimate achievement of its goals.

Concerns also surfaced regarding effects on students, among them, an increase in anxiety about schooling among the student population. Teachers also worry that the state is not

doing everything it could or should to support the reform effort. For example, nearly three-fourths of teachers indicate that state education reform has done little or nothing to provide incentives to improve teaching. Two-thirds of teachers indicate state reform has done little or nothing to increase engagement of the public and professionals in the improvement of education. Finally, there is a continuing question about whether the reform initiative as a whole, and its implementation at state and local levels, is adequately stimulating and supporting the considerable professional learning that such an ambitious reform effort presumes. Especially troubling are the data concerning the limited amount of professional learning about serving a diverse student population.

Further Investigations in the Survey Series

While this survey has highlighted key aspects of the state's education reform that deserve attention, as well as offering some evidence that the reform is having some of its intended effects on teaching and learning, there is much that this survey does not explore.

Especially important is the matter of how teachers respond to student diversity, and how they are helped to address this crucial dimension of educating all children. This is the topic of the next round of the survey series. There are also questions about whether teachers' concerns are sufficient to prompt them to leave their current school, or exit the profession altogether, a topic we take up in a sixth and final survey, later this spring.

Together, these data will offer information about the efforts of educators and policymakers to make the learning experiences for students in the state's schools more fulfilling. A summary report, projected for the summer, will pull together themes and findings from all of the surveys and related investigations (e.g., analyses of teacher retention and mobility using state databases) during the 2004-05 school year, and interpret what they have to say to the state policy community.