



# **Preparation and Support for Teaching:**

## ***A Survey of Support for Teachers' Professional Learning***

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

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## INTRODUCTION

This working paper presents the results of the third survey in a three-part series of “fast-response” surveys conducted during the 2003-04 school year. In this pilot year, the surveys have focused on teaching conditions in Washington state. This survey report, along with other analytic work, is commissioned and funded by the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP), for the purpose of offering timely and useful information to Washington’s policy community regarding K-12 teaching, the teacher workforce, and conditions affecting instruction. A working paper with the results of each survey and a separate methodological discussion describe the fast-response survey strategy and provide baseline information about the preparation and qualifications of a stratified random sample of teachers across Washington state.<sup>1</sup>

### What We Learned from the First Two Surveys

In the first survey, teachers provided information regarding their students, their degrees, certification and assignments, and their satisfaction with the profession. The first survey documented teachers’ generally high level of satisfaction with their choice of profession and current teaching assignment, yet noted several areas of concern, among them, overall workload, support for teachers’ work and school policies and practices. The survey also revealed that while most teachers feel equipped to teach their districts’ curriculum, many do not see themselves as well prepared to meet the challenges their students bring to the classroom. Issues of preparedness for teaching and the match between basic knowledge and teaching assignment were more likely to arise at the middle school level and to a lesser extent at the high school level. Only one-quarter indicated they always have the right professional development support.

The second survey dug deeper into issues related to the quality of support for teachers’ work. On the whole, teachers view their working environment in largely positive terms, indicating that their schools offer a clear sense of direction and provide a relatively collaborative collegial community. Beneath the surface of teachers’ satisfaction, however, are particular issues that frustrate or concern them. Specific aspects of their work situation that are most likely to cause them concern include an excessive workload, frustration with state education reform policies, and a lack of time to do their job well. Planning time and computer resources are often seen as inadequate, as well as academic support services and those related to psychological or counseling support for students. While teachers generally view school leadership in a positive light, they appear to get less instructional leadership than they might like or need, and often turn to their colleagues for support.

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<sup>1</sup> These documents are located on the *Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession* website at the following address: <http://www.cstp-wa.org/researchinprogress.html>

## **The Third Survey: Support for Teachers' Professional Learning**

The first two surveys both hinted at the importance of professional development, and also suggested that there were unresolved issues concerning the nature and availability of appropriate professional learning opportunities and how they serve teachers' needs. We therefore devoted the third instrument to these topics. Directed to the same individuals who had responded to the first two surveys,<sup>2</sup> this instrument sought teachers' views of the opportunities for professional learning over the last 18 months, their participation in them, and the ways in which these experiences contributed to their professional practice.

We framed our questions and carried out analysis with several assumptions:

- We construed “professional development” broadly to include any activities intended to increase teachers' knowledge of the academic subjects they teach, the students they teach, and/or to advance their understanding of effective instructional strategies.
- We assumed that support for professional learning might come from a variety of sources, not just the official events and requirements (such as “professional development days” dedicated to this purpose. Accordingly, we asked about colleagues, cultural norms in the school, and a variety of possible providers.
- We considered the possibility that professional development experiences might differ by level of schooling, the stage in a teacher's career, region of the state, or poverty level of the school. Consequently, we systematically broke out our survey responses to identify where these differences might lie.

We review the highlights of the survey findings below, followed by a few concluding remarks.

### **SELECTED FINDINGS**

Findings are presented in three major sections. The first discusses the focus and delivery of professional development, including the types of in-service opportunities in which teachers most frequently participate. The second section examines the usefulness of various forms of professional development. Various supports for ongoing professional learning are examined more thoroughly in the third section through a consideration of collegial, normative, structural, and financial supports.

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<sup>2</sup> Of the teachers who responded to the first survey, 96 percent also responded the second survey, and 93 percent to the third survey. Appendix A provides a breakout of selected teacher and school characteristics for respondents in Survey 3.

## The Focus and Delivery of Professional Development

Professional development comes in a variety of forms and serves many purposes. Districts and schools may create opportunities to make educators aware of new state or district standards and requirements, introduce new curricula, or discuss instructional strategies. Other groups, which may or may not be affiliated with the school or district, offer teachers various ways to expand their skills and knowledge, or augment their credentials for teaching. Informal opportunities abound, from conversations and joint work with colleagues to readings and conference participation. These opportunities for professional learning may be brief and happen at one point in time, or they may occur at more frequent intervals to provide training and support over a longer period.

Often professional development is required of teachers to fulfill specific district or state requirements or to renew a teaching certificate. Washington provides a minimum of two days of professional development during the school year, but districts may negotiate additional days in a contract, provide days through outside sources of funding, or structure time for professional development within the school day, after school, or during the summer.

Teachers participating in the survey shed light on the range of professional development activities in which they participate and how these are structured and delivered. Their responses indicated a broad connecting theme: *through they encounter many kinds of professional learning opportunities, teachers in Washington state are most often engaged in learning opportunities arranged by their districts and aimed at matters related to state reform.* And yet, as a provider of professional development, the district may not be offering as rich or sustained a set of professional learning experiences as it could or should.

This theme emerges from the data in several ways. First of all, teachers in our sample participate in a variety of forms of professional development, often involving workshops and conferences, and collaboration with other teachers, as displayed in Table 1. College or university courses are also common, with approximately half of the teachers taking advantage of such opportunities in the past 18 months. A variety of other professional learning activities also involve substantial numbers of teachers. Within this array of activities, teachers do not limit themselves to only one kind of professional learning opportunity: nearly three-quarters of teachers in the sample (73 percent) had participated in at least *three* different types of professional development activities during the last 18 months. However, access to certain types of professional development may be limited for teachers in some settings.

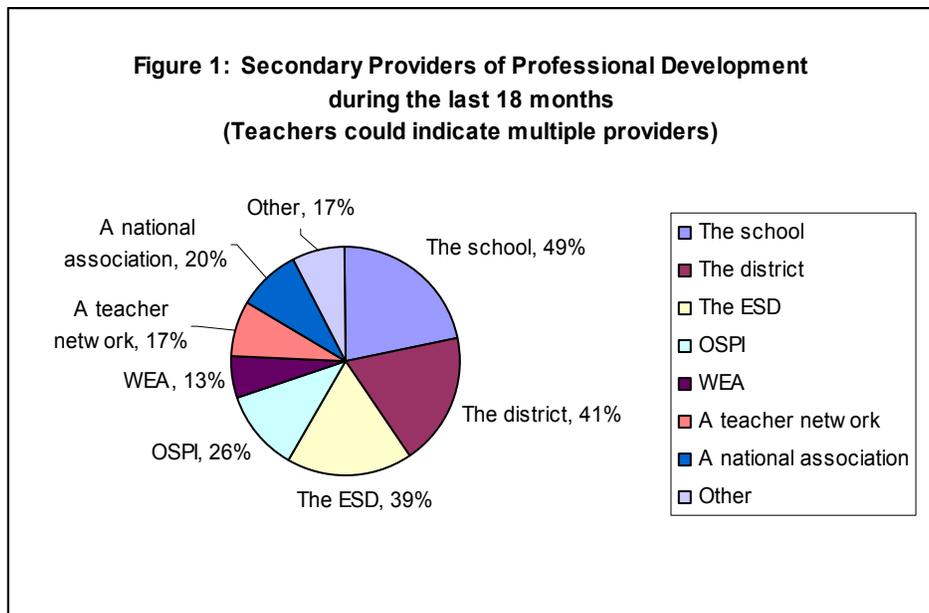
There are not huge differences in this overall activity pattern by levels of schooling or years of teaching experience. However, elementary, middle, and high school teachers differ to some extent in the types of professional development they participate in. For example, a greater percentage of elementary and middle school teachers report regularly-scheduled collaboration with other teachers (83 and 80 percent, respectively) than their high school counterparts (71 percent).

Table 1: Percent of Teachers Participating in Various Forms of Professional Development in the last 18 Months

Form of Professional Development	Percent Participating
Attending workshops or conferences	91%
Regularly-scheduled collaboration with other teachers	78%
College or university courses	55%
Mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching	42%
Participating in a network of teachers (including online networks)	39%
Observational visits to other schools	30%
Presenting at workshops or conferences	24%

(sample = 350)

Whatever the professional learning activity, districts and schools are by far the most frequent providers of professional development, and as most see it, the district is most often the entity that determines what these opportunities will be. Other providers in the state also play a substantial role, including the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and Educational Service Districts (ESDs), as well as colleges and universities, teachers’ associations, private providers, and others. But among these, districts are considered a primary or secondary provider of professional development by nearly four-fifths (79 percent) of the teachers in the sample. Schools are considered a secondary provider of professional development by nearly half (49 percent) of the teachers. For other secondary providers of professional development see Figure 1.

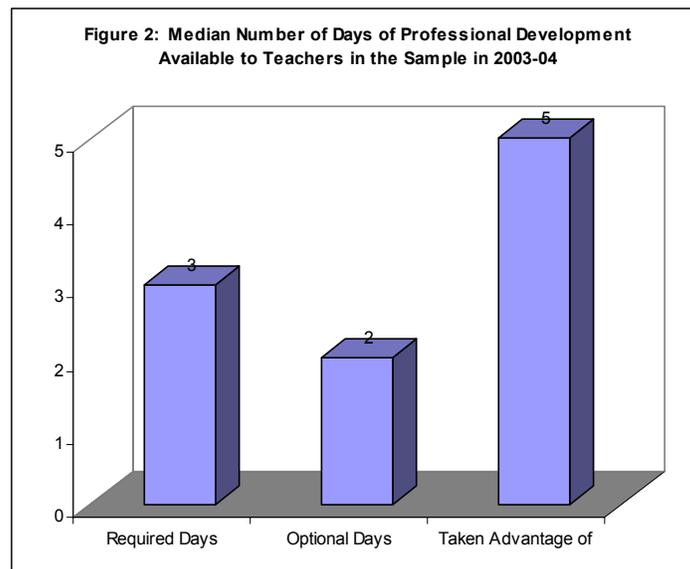


For certain groups of teachers in the sample, providers other than the school district figured prominently. Educational Service Districts (ESDs), for example, are mentioned more frequently as a provider of professional development for teachers *outside* of the Central Puget Sound region: half of the teachers in Eastern Washington and nearly as many (42 percent) in Western Washington outside of ESD 121 identified ESDs as a secondary provider of professional development, as compared with only a fifth (22%) of those within the Central Puget Sound area.

*In many cases, districts provide time for professional development beyond the minimum required by the state. While officially designated “professional development days” do not capture all the ways (nor the best ways, necessarily) to make time for professional learning, they offer one gauge of what is made available for teachers to improve their professional skills and knowledge.*

- *Teachers in the sample indicate that their district mandates, on average (median), three professional development days per year—one more than the two days required by state policy.*
- *Teachers typically do more than the minimum amount required. Including both required and optional days, teachers in the state take advantage of an average (median) of five professional development days per year.*

Thus, for a majority of the teachers in the sample, districts have figured out ways to provide additional days for professional development (see Figure 2). *However, a quarter of the teachers in the sample report having only two days (median), the minimum required by the state. Seventy-two percent of teachers indicate their district requires between 2 and 5 days of professional development per year. Approximately two-fifths of teachers indicate they have one to three optional days. Not all teachers have optional days available to them, as one-third of the teachers noted.*



*Professional development is often focused on one or another aspect of the state or local reform agenda—for example, through explicit connections to district or state standards or school improvement planning.* Many reformers believe that in order for professional development to show progress towards overall reform goals, it should be focused on classroom practices that emphasize high learning standards and alignment with reform initiatives. In our sample, the majority of teachers agree, at least somewhat, that professional development activities are aligned with district and state standards (90 percent) and school improvement plans (77 percent).

Assessment—especially as it occurs in the ongoing work of the classroom—appears to be a common topic of professional development activity, perhaps reflecting a commitment to meeting state standards and concern with adequate preparation for state testing, a theme we encountered in our first survey (see Working Paper #1).<sup>3</sup> With an increasing emphasis on the use of multiple sources of evidence of student learning, teachers are often involved in designing and developing local assessment instruments. Of the teachers in our sample, a majority (55 percent) indicate they are involved on a regular basis (monthly or more often) in developing classroom-based assessments and a quarter (24 percent) are as frequently involved in professional development related to school standards and assessments. Nearly all (97 percent) find developing classroom-based assessments a somewhat or very useful learning opportunity.

Whatever its focus, the professional development available in a district may not provide the full support that teachers need. *Teachers across all levels of schooling disagree that professional development opportunities sponsored by the district are sustained over time, with ample participant follow up and teacher support* (68 percent somewhat or strongly disagree). In this regard, teachers are echoing a complaint long-voiced across the nation about the district as professional development provider: the tendency for districts to offer episodic and menu-driven arrays of professional learning opportunities, rather than focused and sustained sets of experiences that cumulatively build teachers' knowledge and skill. Here, it is important to note that teachers in the survey come from a wide range of districts that vary in their capacity to provide professional development. Some of the shortcomings of district-sponsored professional learning opportunities may trace to this fact, necessitating a larger role for other agencies, like ESD's, professional associations, or universities.

In some respects, teachers may be compensating for the limitations of district-provided professional development, as they appear to distinguish between overall professional development and district-sponsored offerings. The majority of teachers (61 percent), for example, describe their overall professional development experiences as generally sustained and coherently-focused, rather than short-term and unrelated,

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<sup>3</sup> See Elfers, A., Knapp, M. S., & Plecki, M. (2004). *Preparation and Support for Teaching: First Pilot of a "Fast Response" Survey System in Washington State—Working Paper #1*. Seattle, WA: Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP). This can be found on the Center website at the following address: <http://www.cstp-wa.org/researchinprogress.html>

especially at the elementary level where 69 percent agree with this statement, as compared with 55 percent of middle school teachers and 43 percent of their high school counterparts.

## **Usefulness of Professional Development**

While this survey afforded no means of ascertaining the impact of professional development on student learning, teachers were in a position to reflect on how their professional learning experiences served their own and their students' needs. Their perceptions of the usefulness of this aspect of their professional work reveal several important dimensions of the professional learning challenge confronting leaders and policymakers in the state.

*Overall, teachers in our sample see the usefulness of their professional development in various ways. In their view, this aspect of their professional life clearly contributes to their practice, but in several respects, it could contribute more.* Given that teachers can often be justifiably critical of professional activities they see as having little value, this fact is noteworthy: the great majority of teachers see their professional development experiences as somewhat or very useful (83 percent). Three-quarters of the teachers indicate that their professional development experiences over the last eighteen months have not been a waste of time. For nearly two-thirds of the teachers, professional development has included opportunities to work productively with other staff at their school. Furthermore, teachers could point to particular problems of practice for which their professional learning experiences were helpful: sixty-six percent, for example, report that professional development experiences helped them prepare their students for state assessments.

Not all teachers give their professional development a strong vote of confidence, however. Only 31 percent of teachers strongly agree that their professional development experiences were useful. *And despite being seen by most as offering something useful, professional development activities may not be addressing teachers' concerns and student needs to the extent that they could:*

- *Half of the teachers declare that the professional development opportunities available in their district do not address issues that concern them.*
- *Only half of the teachers agree that the professional development opportunities available at their school address their teaching needs (55 percent).*
- *While a majority (59 percent) see their professional development as addressing their students' needs at least somewhat, a substantial fraction (41 percent) disagree.*

These numbers are cause for concern. At a minimum, the numbers suggest that a substantial portion of the state's teachers do not always feel they are learning what they

need to learn, to address their own and their students’ needs most directly. And the figures may also suggest some disconnection between the large district-driven planning for professional development and the challenges teachers want the most help with.

As one might expect, certain kinds of professional development are more consistently found to be useful than others. *Yet curiously, the most prevalent forms of professional development—attending workshops and conferences—are least consistently seen as “very useful,” as compared with other forms, like regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers (see Table 2).*

Table 2: Teachers' Involvement in and Perceived Usefulness of Various Forms of Professional Development

Items	Percent Indicating involvement	Percent indicating not at all useful	Percent indicating somewhat useful	Percent indicating very useful
Attending workshops or conferences	91%	6%	60%	35%
Regularly-scheduled collaboration with other teachers	78%	3%	42%	55%
College/University courses	55%	7%	51%	43%
Mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching	42%	10%	49%	42%
Participating in a network of teachers (including online networks)	39%	7%	58%	35%
Observational visits to other schools	30%	5%	45%	50%
Presenting at workshops or conferences	24%	8%	49%	43%

(sample = 350)

The form of professional development activity, of course, does not tell the whole story about what makes these activities useful to teachers or not. So we inquired about particular topics addressed by professional development, especially those related to the state’s standards-based reform agenda. Here, *professional learning activities focused on standards and assessments and set at the school and classroom level were likely to be seen as useful.*

- *The development of classroom-based assessments*, a frequent activity for most teachers, a third of whom are engaged in this weekly or more often, is viewed particularly favorably, with over half finding this activity “very useful”(and 96% “somewhat or very useful”).
- *Collecting and examining school-wide data on student performance*, though somewhat less common among our sample (three quarters engaged in this kind of activity), generated considerable enthusiasm as well, with one third of the teachers finding this activity “very useful” (and 87 percent “somewhat or very useful”).

Teachers also helped us to see what aspects of their practice are touched by professional development. *Professional development in Washington state over the last 18 months has had apparent impact on certain aspects of teachers’ practice more than others—more so with subject matter and pedagogy, less so with techniques for working with linguistically or culturally diverse learners.* Slightly over half of the teachers in the sample note some or a great deal of impact on their grasp of subject matter and content-specific pedagogy, and a comparable percentage believe they have a better understanding of grade-level expectations for student learning, as a result of professional development experiences (see Table 3). On the other hand, approximately a quarter report impacts on skills to address the needs of English language learners or students from diverse cultural backgrounds (this may reflect the absence of ELL students from some classrooms, though the great majority of classrooms in the sample have at least some racial and ethnic diversity, as our first survey established). A similar small percentage found professional development helpful with matters of classroom management.

How teachers benefit from professional development depends, in part, on the stage in their careers at which they find themselves. *Teachers with the least amount of experience are most likely to find professional development experiences useful.* National surveys also suggest that newcomers to the profession often believe that professional development helps make them a better teacher, while veteran teachers may not see it this way. In general, teachers in our sample with fewer than five years of experience found various professional development activities to be more useful than teachers who had been in the profession longer.

Table 3: Perceived Impacts of Professional Development on Different Aspects of Teachers' Practice over the last 18 Months

Aspects of teachers' practice impacted by professional development	Percent indicating little or no impact	Percent indicating a fair amount of impact	Percent indicating a great deal of impact
Grasp of subject matter	48%	37%	15%
Knowledge of pedagogy appropriate for the subject matter	43%	41%	16%
How to meet instructional needs of English language learners	71%	21%	7%
How to meet the instructional needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds	73%	22%	5%
Classroom management skills	71%	24%	4%
Understanding of grade-level expectations for student learning	49%	36%	15%
How to ask for additional assistance and feedback when needed	67%	25%	8%

(sample = 350)

### Supports for Ongoing Professional Learning

Various activities and conditions converge to provide support and encouragement for teachers to pursue their professional learning. The survey shed light on four—colleagues, norms and leadership activity, structural support of several kinds, and financial resources—that, to our sample of teachers, seem especially important in creating a web of support over time.

#### *Collegial support*

*Colleagues appear to offer the most immediate and common form of support for teachers' professional learning.* Echoing and elaborating what we learned in Survey 2 about turning to colleagues for guidance--

- Fifty-eight percent of teachers somewhat or strongly agree that they turn to other school-based colleagues for most of their professional development needs.

- Four-fifths of the sample have participated in regularly scheduled collaborative activities with other staff, and among these teachers, more than half find these interactions “very useful,” and nearly all “somewhat or very useful.”
- Nearly two-thirds see district-supported professional development as promoting collaboration among teachers.

This pattern of support from colleagues needs to be interpreted. On the one hand, it may represent what is widely held to be desirable in schooling: a mutually supportive professional staff, helping each other to improve their practice, in both informal and formal ways. But the pattern may also indicate limitations in the web of support for professional learning. When colleagues are themselves struggling to solve similar problems of practice, this source of support may not always contribute to improved practice. Furthermore, as research on “open” and “closed” communities of practice has demonstrated, colleagues may socialize their peers to ignore or resist new ideas about teaching. Colleagues can represent a default resource: the people to whom you turn when no one else steps forward to offer instructional leadership, a possibility hinted at by our second survey (see *Working Paper #2*).<sup>4</sup>

#### *Normative and leadership support*

For a majority of teachers, participation in professional development is not just left up to the individual. *There are multiple reasons for teachers’ participation, including teachers’ desire to improve teaching and learning, norms in the school culture, and state or local requirements.* As displayed in Table 4, districts, if not the state and schools, communicate to teachers that some professional development is required. The state’s requirements for certification to maintain a teaching certificate is a major reason for engaging in professional development activities, as four-fifths of the sample see it. Other factors, among them, financial considerations, also play a role.

*Overall, two-thirds of the teachers see their participation in professional development as a cultural norm in their schools, though less so in high schools (58 percent) than in elementary and middle schools (72 and 70 percent, respectively).* The cup half empty is also worth noting here: a *third* of teachers in our sample do *not* see participation in professional development as a cultural norm in their schools, which raises big questions about the messages communicated by local leaders and peers concerning this aspect of professional work.

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<sup>4</sup> See Loeb, H., Elfers, A., Knapp, M. S., & Plecki, M. (2004, May). *Preparation and Support for Teaching: First Pilot of a “Fast Response” Survey System in Washington State—Working Paper #2*. Seattle, WA: Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP). This can be found on the Center website at the following address: <http://www.cstp-wa.org/researchinprogress.html>

Table 4: What Motivates Participation in Professional Development in the Teacher's School

Motivating factors, as teachers perceive it	Percent who		
	somewhat or strongly disagree	somewhat agree	strongly agree
Participation is a cultural norm in the school	32%	49%	19%
Release time is provided	37%	40%	23%
Additional funds are provided	33%	41%	25%
There is a general desire among school staff to improve teaching and learning	10%	53%	37%
School or district leaders require it	23%	40%	37%
It is required to maintain a teaching certificate	18%	39%	42%

(sample = 350)

### Structural supports

Despite the sense of support from colleagues or others around them, the structural conditions that enable this support to be exercised are not always in place. Here we considered three sources of structural support for professional learning: the allocation of time (in the school day and across the year), the development of mentoring relationships, and access to supportive networks.

#### *a. Structuring time for professional learning*

The essential pattern emerging from this survey is this: *professional development is generally not structured into the teachers' work day, but rather occurs outside of the regularly contracted working hours and even the school year.* Nearly three-fourths of teachers indicate that most of their professional development is outside of their contracted work day, and nearly half report spending time on professional development in the summer. However, teachers indicate that some of this time is compensated (for further discussion, see *Financial Supports* on page 15). The absence of a time and place for professional learning within the working day is striking:

- *Regular times for professional learning are not generally built into the weekly school schedule, as 71 percent of the teachers report.*

- *Even more (83 percent) indicate they do not have two or more hours per week to devote to this purpose with colleagues (two-fifths, however, do report common planning time on a regular basis).*

A possible consequence of this structuring of time is that less than a third of the teachers (31 percent) have opportunities for observation of peers at other schools, and even fewer (18 percent) have the chance to observe peers at their own school. If current literature on effective forms of professional development is to be believed, teachers may be missing some of the most powerful opportunities for professional learning, which are “job-embedded” and integral to the teachers’ work. It is possible that some teachers, however, are compensating for what is not built into their working day: over half of the teachers indicate that they make time in the school schedule for professional development activities.

*b. Setting up mentoring relationships*

In addition to making time available for professional learning activities, schools and districts may facilitate the connections of less experienced teachers with colleagues who have greater expertise. Through formal and informal ways, investments in teachers’ professional growth can make a difference throughout their careers, both at the front end and in mature stages. The assignment of mentors, typically to teachers in their first few years of teaching, is the most common way that a supportive relationship is structured.

The survey suggests that *inexperienced teachers are gaining greater access to mentors recently than in years gone by, and that they find these relationships helpful*. Substantial numbers (42 percent) of teachers in our sample have participated in mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching in the past 18 months, and the great majority find this activity somewhat or very useful.

- *Receiving support from a mentor is a more common practice among teachers of more recent vintage.* When asked to reflect on their first or second year of teaching, over two-thirds of the more recent teachers (with four or fewer years of teaching), report working closely with a master teacher, a mentor teacher or an instructional coach, as compared with only one-fifth of the teachers with 15 or more years of experience.
- *Teachers who receive mentoring help are very appreciative of the support their mentors provide:* the great majority (between 83 and 94 percent) agree that mentors helped them, at least somewhat, to understand their students better, pick up useful teaching strategies, and manage their classrooms more effectively (see Table 5).

Table 5: How the Relationship with a Mentor Teacher Helped Novice Teachers in their First or Second Years in the Classroom

My relationship with a mentor...	Percent who somewhat or strongly disagree	Percent who somewhat agree	Percent who strongly agree
...had a positive impact on my teaching.	5%	31%	63%
...helped me understand my students better.	12%	37%	50%
...provided me with specific strategies for improving my teaching.	9%	33%	57%
...helped me learn how to participate in the school community.	17%	38%	43%
...helped me make my lesson plans more effective.	27%	37%	35%
...helped me with classroom management skills.	15%	39%	45%
...helped me develop better strategies for addressing student discipline.	16%	41%	42%
...modeled effective practice in the classroom.	17%	33%	49%

(sample = 350)

These findings raise important questions about the one-third of novice teachers who did not have a formally assigned mentor, not to mention the large percentage of more veteran teachers who never had a mentor. This fact raises questions about whether schools, districts, and the state are doing everything they can to support new teachers at a formative stage in their careers.

Other findings from the survey establish that *the act of assuming a mentoring role can itself have powerful effects on the professional learning of teachers—in this case veterans*. Of all those in our sample who had taken on mentoring roles at one time or another (one third of our sample), half note an increase in leadership and coaching skills, as one might expect. But a third also noted that the experience taught them "a great deal" about their content area and teaching practice, as well as deepening their commitment to the profession (approximately three-quarters indicated having learned "a fair amount" or a "great deal").

*c. Informal support structures*

A powerful form of teacher learning may come from belonging to professional communities, both within and outside of the school building. For the members of our sample, teacher networks appear to offer a particularly helpful form of support to teachers who seek out this form of professional engagement. Forty percent of teachers in the sample report network participation in the past 18 months, and 93 percent of these find this activity somewhat or very useful.

Financial supports

Perhaps related to the fact that the majority of their professional development occurs outside of the contracted school day, *many teachers in our sample receive some form of compensation for this activity (see Table 6), though they may also be investing their own money in their professional learning.* Teachers note spending a good deal of their own money on expenses related to their career. On average, teachers report spending nearly \$200 on books, magazines or instructional guides for their own use, and nearly double that amount (\$380) on classroom materials for student use.

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Table 6: Monetary Resources Supporting Teachers' Professional Development over the Last 18 Months

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Type of monetary resource	Percent Receiving
Stipend for professional development that took place outside the regular workday.	55%
Full or partial reimbursement for college tuition	17%
Full or partial reimbursement for conference or workshop fees	61%
Full or partial reimbursement for travel or other expenses	41%
Books or instructional supplies	40%

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(sample = 350)

Incentives, may also be motivating teachers' response toward particular professional development activities:

- *Salary increments.* A third of teachers in our sample note that they have been able to move up on the salary schedule as a result of participation in professional development.
- *Credits toward certification.* Teachers report receiving some other non-monetary rewards for completion of professional development activities, most frequently credits toward certification (55 percent).

The patterns of financial support for professional development are largely unrelated to the poverty level of the teachers' school or their years of experience. Geography and level of schooling, however, may figure into the compensation teachers receive for professional development participation.

- *Regional differences.* A higher percentage of teachers in Eastern Washington and outside of the Central Puget Sound reported receiving compensation for conference or workshop fees, and travel related expenses, perhaps related to the greater geographical distances they often travel to reach professional development events that are not based at the school.
- *School level differences.* High school teachers receive financial support more frequently than teachers at other levels. Over three-fourths of high school teachers report receiving reimbursement for conference or workshop fees compared to 57 percent of elementary teachers and 52 percent of middle school teachers. More high school teachers (61 percent) also reported receiving full or partial reimbursement for travel or other expenses than elementary (31 percent) or middle school teachers (46 percent).

## SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

The picture of professional development that emerges from this survey—including what goes into it and what teachers say they are taking away from it—captures in specific terms various aspects of the environment for professional learning in the state of Washington. In this picture several noteworthy features and accomplishments stand out, and they include areas of considerable concern to those who wish to support learning and teaching in the state.

First of all, probably reflecting the pressures for teaching to state standards and performing well on state assessments, much of the professional development teachers have access to seems to be driven by districts, or districts and schools together, and it is often focused on aspects of the state reform agenda. Districts and schools require teachers to take part in professional development, often more than the minimum amount of time specified by the state, and the teachers are generally getting some financial support for doing so. This pattern may be both a strength and a weakness. On the one hand, teachers' professional learning experiences bear a somewhat coherent relationship to one another and to some central teaching challenges that the state's reform movement poses for them. On the other hand, the district, in particular, is not viewed as offering sustained or well-supported professional learning experiences. Additionally, the district is in the position of determining most of the teachers' professional learning opportunities.

Second, teachers are clearly getting something from the professional development they experience. It offers them something useful, often about subject matter and pedagogy, and it helps them address certain aspects of their teaching practice, if only in

small incremental steps. The fact that they are willing to characterize their professional development experiences as largely useful—or at least "somewhat useful"—is a far cry from characterizations that have been around in the literature for years, of menu-driven, mandated workshops that teachers do not find very satisfying. The teachers' active engagement with issues of assessment, for example, and satisfaction with these experiences speak well for one kind of help that professional development may be providing.

Yet for many teachers, there are important ways that professional development opportunities have fallen short of what they would want or need. Their concerns and the needs of their students are too often not the focus of their professional learning activities. Too few of them are getting help with what it takes to teach a linguistically and cultural diverse student population effectively.

The place of professional development in the teachers' day and lives may hold clues to what is lacking and what could be better. For the most part, these learning activities take place outside of the regular school day, and in that sense, may be disconnected from the immediate challenges and issues of their jobs. There are not enough teachers who report time built into their regular work week for professional learning, even though they often have some planning time with their colleagues (perhaps an hour a week) and appreciate this opportunity. It is clear from the survey that collaborative learning opportunities are valued by teachers.

Current accounts of powerful forms of professional learning that are an integral part of teachers' work, both in the structuring of time and in the cultural norms of the school, would suggest that there is much that can be done through local and state action to encourage ongoing professional learning. Teachers' reports of the effects of mentoring relationships gives one small taste of what might be done more widely and effectively. The fact that fully a third of all teachers never had such a relationship in their first or second year of teaching is important to note.

The survey begs additional questions about how these patterns of support for professional learning map on to what we know about working conditions in the school, its leadership, and teachers' preparation for their work, not to mention other characteristics of the school as well as its overall performance. A further line of analysis, now underway, will address these questions by linking what we have learned from the three pilot surveys. A report that summarizes our answers to these questions will be available by Autumn 2004. But burning questions will still remain, chiefly concerning the relationship between various forms of professional learning and actual teaching and learning outcomes.

## Appendix A

Selected Teacher and School Characteristics for Respondents in Survey 3, by Number of Teachers in Category	
	Number in Category
All Teachers	350
Region*	
West (not 121)	132
West 121	107
Eastern WA	111
Experience	
0-4 years	109
5-14 years	120
15+ years	121
School Poverty Indicator**	
0-20 % FRPL	127
21-50% FRPL	111
51-100% FRPL	112
School Instructional Level	
Elementary	203
Middle school	56
High school	83
Combined	8
<p>*Region as represented by Educational Service Districts. The Central Puget Sound region is represented by ESD 121. Western WA (not including 121) is represented by ESDs 112, 113, 114, and 189. Eastern Washington is represented by ESDs 101, 105, 123 and 171.</p>	
<p>**School poverty indicator is based on the percentage of students enrolled in the Free or Reduced Price Lunch program.</p>	