



Teachers Count:

Support for Teachers' Work in the Context of State Reform

**A Report Prepared for the
Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession**

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August 2005



This report was commissioned by the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP), a non-profit organization intent on helping students achieve by ensuring they have the teachers they need. To accomplish that goal, CSTP supports research to examine the conditions of teaching and disseminates both short summaries and full reports to those interested in improving teaching quality in Washington state.

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CSTP receives funding from the Stuart Foundation <www.stuartfoundation.org>. To view this report online, visit www.cstp-wa.org

The suggested citation for this report is:

Knapp, M. S., Elfers, A. M., Plecki, M. L., Loeb, H., Zahir, A. (2005). Teachers Count: Support for Teachers' Work in the Context of State Reform. Seattle, WA: University of Washington.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Teachers are the central agents of change in the movement towards the high-quality education system that so many desire in Washington state. Without them, what is envisioned by the state's decade-long reform movement can not be realized. High expectations and standards-based reform prompt many questions about how well classroom teachers are supported in their efforts to offer a high-quality education to the state's schoolchildren. Answering such questions presumes good data about the teacher workforce as a whole, and a mechanism for gathering accurate information directly from teachers about their practice, working conditions, and response to reform. The analyses contained in this report—derived from multiple surveys of a representative sample (n=400) of Washington's classroom teachers, supplemented by analyses of a database of all 55,000 teachers in the state—demonstrates what these kinds of information sources can do.

Overall, the results in this report indicate that the state's teacher workforce is relatively stable and committed to the profession, and that their work, more often than not, has been making contributions to standards-based reform. Survey responses offer evidence that *teachers take the reform seriously and that in many ways, the main assumptions underlying Washington's reform initiative are holding up*. In particular, most teachers:

- Are familiar with the standards, see them as relevant to their work, and align their classroom practice with the standards and related assessments.
- Say that the state reform has impacted the content of what they teach, as well as how they teach.
- Pay attention to assessment, take steps to incorporate assessment into their classroom practice, and try to prepare students for assessment.
- Believe that what they are doing is benefiting students—for example, by increasing the rigor of student learning experiences, helping students develop deeper understanding of certain topics in the curriculum, and increasing students' skills in problem solving and critical thinking.

Teachers whose experience enables them to compare current practice to what existed prior to the state reform are especially likely to report benefits of the reform for both classroom practice and students' learning. While no direct connection can be made between this data and student achievement trends, the steady improvement in Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) scores over nearly a decade may be explained, in part, by what teachers indicate they are doing in response to the reform.

In addition to reporting specific benefits of state reform, *teachers also express deep reservations about certain aspects of it—in particular, that too much is being asked of them, with too little time and too few resources to get the job done.* They also are concerned about what they see as an undue emphasis on testing, inflexible accountability requirements, and a consequent narrowing of the curriculum. Their concerns underscore certain aspects of the reform movement that deserve careful attention, if further progress is to be made.

Of particular concern are the patterns emerging for teachers' work with an increasingly diverse student population—29 percent of whom are now students of color (up from 23 percent eight years ago), 36 percent from low-income families (up from 31 percent), and 10 percent who are English Language Learners (ELL) (up from 6 percent). *While many teachers see important opportunities in the growing diversity of the student population they teach—for example, a chance to teach about differences in cultural background or ability—most teachers do not feel fully prepared for, nor well supported, in this aspect of their work.*

Conditions that Enable Reform to Work for All Students

Various conditions can enable teachers to make reform work for all students in the state. Several in the immediate vicinity of the teachers deserve mention. First, as teachers see it, *a series of workplace conditions have a central role in whether or not teachers are able to meet these challenges.* Of special importance are:

- The character of the collegial community in the school
- Access to the right material resources and classroom assistance
- The structuring of time and other aspects of school programs
- The quality of leadership support

Where such conditions are present, teachers feel more ready and able to address the challenges they face. For example, where teachers indicated they had adequate time to plan, prepare lessons, and collaborate with one another (true for two-fifths of our sample), they were more likely to feel “very prepared” to get their students ready for state assessments.

The quality of support for professional learning is another condition that matters a great deal to teachers. Our respondents noted that the absence of support or time set aside for professional learning could be a major reason to leave a school. In addition, *teachers seem to engage in and benefit from professional development in some ways, yet there are important missed opportunities.* On the one hand, professional development opportunities are often aligned with state reform goals. Most

teachers participate in them beyond the minimum required, and they do not generally find their professional development experiences a waste of time (contrary to some stereotypes of this support function). On the other hand, professional development often ignores some central problems of practice, particularly related to student diversity, and it is not typically arranged in ways that teachers find most useful (e.g., built into the school day, closely tailored to teachers' needs in individual schools).

The supportive conditions that matter for teachers depend in part on the stage of the teachers' careers, and also on the nature of the school in which they work and the challenges they face. Teachers in the early years of a teaching career, for example, present a profile of concerns and professional support needs that differ in noticeable ways from their more veteran colleagues. Novice teachers (those with four years or fewer in the classroom) move between schools more often than other teachers, are less secure in their professional skills and identity, and express less confidence in meeting diverse learning needs. At the same time, they respond more positively, on average, to professional development opportunities than teachers with substantially more experience, with one exception. The kinds of accomplished teachers who seek out the National Board Certification process indicate they are hungry for professional learning opportunities, and they appear to know how to make use of these opportunities to improve their own and others' practice. Teachers' immediate working situations such as the level of schooling or the poverty status of the students served by the school also make a difference in what teachers feel they need in the way of support. These differing needs highlight aspects of teachers' practice that could be substantially improved, given the right supports, with ultimate benefit for the learning of Washington's students.

Informing Current and Emerging Policy Concerns

The patterns just described, coupled with the relative stability of the state's teaching force, argue strongly for investing in those who are now in place—they are going to be with us for a while. The findings of the study help to identify ways in which such investments can strengthen the *system of support for professional learning*, for the full range of teachers from novice to more experienced. In addressing these matters, state and local policymakers may be able to make headway on four issues currently debated in Washington state (and elsewhere) that are likely to remain on the minds of policymakers in the near future:

- *High-stakes assessment and accountability policies*
- *The reduction of achievement gaps*
- *School improvement, especially in high-poverty settings*

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- *The quality and stability of the teacher workforce*

What teachers have told us through the surveys and what we have learned from database analyses have much to say about these important matters.

High-stakes assessment and accountability policies. In relation to the continuing debate about the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), the Certificate of Academic Achievement, and ways to make the state’s accountability system work for all students, our data help to demonstrate that teachers:

- *Are taking assessment seriously.* Teachers are generally taking the assessment seriously, and most are doing more to incorporate assessment into their instructional practice.
- *Are learning from, and about, assessment.* Teachers are learning from and about assessment, and they value this aspect of their professional learning. With colleagues, most are using assessment information in various ways, often to identify ways to improve the school program.
- *Often lack readiness for the WASL, especially at the high school level.* Those teachers who have had the least exposure to WASL testing—at the high school level—are least likely to feel able to ready their students for the state’s assessment and most concerned about their abilities to work with diverse learning needs. Across all grades, only a minority of the teachers (29 percent) feel “very prepared” to ready their students for state assessment.

Though it is clear that *teachers across the board believe too much emphasis is being placed on testing, it is not clear from these data that the WASL per se is the issue.* Preparation for assessment is part of the story, as is the amount of time and space in the curriculum that testing consumes across the school year.

The reduction of achievement gaps. The data reported here help to identify possible challenges in reducing achievement gaps in Washington state, and also where teachers feel they are getting more and less help in addressing this matter. The findings on student diversity alluded to above highlight one aspect of this issue and underscore the importance of adequate preparation to meet an array of learning needs that is growing steadily more diverse.

- *Increasing diversity in the classroom.* Approximately half of all teachers are noting that statewide diversity trends have shown up in their classrooms over the last five years, with increases in the number of ELL students constituting the greatest difference (62 percent of teachers in the sample serve such students).

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- *Substantial instructional challenges.* Teachers report substantial instructional challenges in serving this segment of the student population well; they feel similarly about students with disabilities.
 - *Lack of professional development and other supports.* Teachers find relatively little professional development support for working with ELL students, students with identified disabilities, or students of color more generally, and they often mention lacking other kinds of in-classroom assistance or school support services to help meet these students' needs.
 - *Predictions of failure to meet standard.* Not surprisingly, many do not think all of the students they teach will meet standard by year's end (they were responding in March of 2005).

Achievement gaps derive from many sources, not all of them attributable to schools. Nonetheless, if schools wish to do their part in narrowing or eliminating such gaps, the challenges teachers face and their specific needs for support deserve to be given close attention.

School improvement, especially in high-poverty settings. Though the study was not designed to gather school-wide data, the information we collected—from teachers in approximately 350 schools—yield some insights, from the vantage point of individual teachers, about improving school workplace conditions, especially in high-poverty settings. Because these sites are often persistently low-achieving, creating better working conditions in such settings may help address a major concern of state and federal policy.

- *The value of workplace environment and leadership support.* As noted earlier, the value placed by teachers on opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, adequate classroom resources and assistance, the organization of time, and the quality of school leadership, all point to opportunities for school improvement efforts. More important, our findings suggest that these conditions matter for the achievement of reform goals.
- *The particular concerns and needs of staff in high-poverty settings.* Teachers in high-poverty schools are especially sensitive to the amount of support for learning at home, increased disciplinary issues, and the quality of leadership support, not to mention the availability of professional development related to their biggest instructional challenges. These matters make a difference in teachers' desire to stay at these schools, and have implications for their effectiveness. Making sure teachers in these settings have the right support system is an obvious opportunity.

The quality and stability of the teacher workforce. Both state and local policies (e.g., state professional certification requirements, federal “highly-qualified teacher” requirements under the *No Child Left Behind* legislation) have brought to the fore questions about the quality of the teacher workforce. The data from this study speak to continuing concerns about ensuring a well qualified teacher workforce:

- *The role of support for novice teachers.* The tendency of novices noted earlier (higher mobility, underdeveloped professional skills, and lack of confidence in meeting diverse learning needs) call for reconsideration of investment strategies. At the same time, novices’ more positive response, on average, to professional development opportunities and to mentoring systems, sets the stage for assisting them at this impressionable stage in their career development.
- *Differentiation of professional learning needs.* Teachers across the career spectrum seem to need or value different kinds of professional development. Helping high school teachers prepare their students for the WASL, as noted above, illustrates a professional development target that is especially needed at that level of schooling. And by contrast with what is offered novice teachers, substantially different professional learning opportunities might work better for veteran teachers (e.g., the kind provided by the National Board Certification process)—their learning could be directed at fine-tuning their teacher leadership or mentoring skills.
- *Infrequency of professional development opportunities that teachers find most useful.* Teachers indicate that school-based opportunities are particularly useful, especially when they are built into the workday. They also report that opportunities to observe each other and to learn collaboratively are very useful, though the chances to do so are infrequent. These forms of professional development could be far more common.
- *Patterns of teacher retention or mobility.* Teachers choose to stay at a school or move based on various considerations, some personal, others professional. Especially important among the latter are the workplace conditions noted earlier—the nature of the collegial community, the presence of strong leadership, the availability of professional development opportunities, and the fit between the teaching assignment and the teachers’ expertise. Salary is not high on the list of factors they say is most important when they consider leaving the profession, or a particular school. However, salary is a larger concern for novice teachers than for veterans, and cost of living is a bigger consideration for teachers in Eastern Washington than their counterparts living elsewhere in the state.

What State and Local Policymakers May Do

The findings from this study make it clear that there is important work to be done by both state and local leaders and policymakers. *The opportunity for improvement of practice revealed by this study, coupled with relative stability of the state’s teaching force, argue strongly for investing in those who are now in place—they are going to be with us for a while.*

State-level responsibilities. Adjustments in regulations and expectations by the state, along with targeted (modest) investments in teacher support might go a long way towards improving the educational system and its outcomes. Furthermore, a rebalancing of the equation of supports and pressures (e.g., for high performance), with more attention to the supports, might address many of the teachers’ concerns about the difficult challenges they encounter in pursuit of reform goals. In particular, the findings of the study might encourage policymakers and agency officials to explore these kinds of actions:

- *Strengthening the mentor support system, especially for novice teachers, including more purposeful investment in a cadre of teacher leaders or accomplished veterans who can act in coaching and mentoring roles (National Board Certified Teachers are only one example of this).*
- *Constructing mechanisms to support school-based professional learning opportunities.* For example, a newer, more targeted version of the discarded School Learning Improvement Block Grants might now have a chance of working well, unlike the early years of reform when people at the state and local level had little idea about how to make good use of this mechanism.
- *Considering ways to strengthen the state’s curricular support role, especially in specialized areas of curriculum that correspond to student diversity needs.*
- *Engaging in targeted recruitment of teachers of color, to address the enduring demographic mismatch between students and the teacher workforce.*
- *Rethinking how the state approaches professional development support, now conceived of as a number of “professional development days.”*

These kinds of actions are examples of ways the state could bolster the “support” side of the equation. In this regard, the messages from teachers concerning an overemphasis on testing deserve a fair hearing at the state level.

Local-level responsibilities. For their part, district policymakers and school-level leaders can do much to strengthen the system of supports for teachers’ work and careers. Among them are actions such as these:

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- *Creating the conditions that support a collaborative work environment.* Leadership support, hiring and assignment policies, reorganization of the school day, participatory decisionmaking, and teaming structures are only a few of the ways that district and school leaders can foster collegial interaction.
 - *Providing regular access to instructional guidance, coaching, and curricular support.* Here, districts and schools could do more to increase teachers' access to relevant forms of expertise, especially related to serving a diverse student population.
 - *Improving the systems of support for struggling students,* with a special eye to the kinds of academic and other support services that can help ELL students or students with disabilities.
 - *Reconsidering the focus, content, and delivery of professional development activities,* to maximize teachers' access to the kinds of opportunities they find most useful, both those that operate through periodic, formal events (like professional development days) and those that operate more continuously and informally (e.g., mentoring and coaching systems). Here, local leaders might take note of the fact that teachers report little involvement in the decisions about their professional learning, and that the types of professional learning opportunities they find to be most useful are often the least available to them.

These possibilities do not exhaust the local courses of action that could contribute to a stronger system of support for teachers' work and careers.

Building a better base of information about teachers, teaching, and support for teachers' work. Addressing these matters presumes a continual flow of information about the needs that teachers face, and consequently *both state and local leaders and policymakers should not underestimate the power and usefulness of good information systems.* Such systems can yield the kind of database and survey findings reported here, as well as offering a vehicle for pursuing other matters that have yet to emerge on the policy agenda. Such a system would complement new developments in the student database by:

- *Assembling and regularly updating data on a variety of teacher characteristics* for all classroom teachers across the state (e.g., teacher demographics, experience, retention, mobility).
- *Integrating different state-level databases* that have relevance to questions about the quality of teaching and support for teachers' work (e.g., certification, personnel data).

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- *Incorporating new data elements*, now unavailable in state databases, that would permit analyses of topics such as teacher preparation and assignment (e.g., subjects and grades taught, students served).
 - *Creating mechanisms for assessing teachers' views directly* (such as the "Fast Response" Survey system) that, in conjunction with database work, enable analyses of priority topics, like novice teachers, mentoring, or the availability of high-quality professional development.

Absent such systems, policymakers are simply left with their initial assumptions, their hopes, and the sketchy images that emerge from anecdotes or media accounts. The state and local policy community should aspire to more. The reform movement in this state deserves the same vigilance and close attention to its unfolding implementation story that it received at the time of its conception. Only with those kinds of informational resources will we be able to tell whether ambitious reform goals are being reached, and more importantly how to improve the possibility of reaching them.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: UNDERSTANDING THE STATE'S TEACHER WORKFORCE AND HOW IT CAN BE SUPPORTED

Teachers count. They are the central agents of the movement towards a stronger, standards-based education system in Washington state, and without them, nothing that is envisioned in the state's decade-long reform movement can be realized. Put more specifically, without their engagement, considerable effort, and further learning, the ambitious goals set forth in Education Reform Act of 1993 would not have a chance of materializing.

To achieve the teachers' effective participation in standards-based reform presumes several things. First, for the success of educational reform, the policy community, and indeed the broader constituency for reform, need to understand who the teachers are, what they do, and how they are experiencing the state's commitment to realizing ambitious learning standards for all the state's schoolchildren. Second, policymakers and leaders need to identify aspects of teachers' work that need better support—conditions that motivate and enable educators' best work in the often difficult enterprise of guiding young people's learning. Third, they need to take actions that will improve the support systems surrounding teachers.

These aspirations imply that the state policy community has the means to listen carefully to what teachers are thinking and doing, and can assemble systematic information about each teacher, school, and district in formats that permit important questions to be asked and answered. While such informational resources are not usual in state policymaking, Washington state is the beneficiary of an emergent informational capability, sponsored (in pilot form) by the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP). This new nonprofit entity has been developing powerful database and survey system capabilities over the last several years that put sound information about—and from—the state's teacher workforce into forms that communicate well what is going on in the state.

Report Focus and Guiding Questions

This report, the most recent in a series of working papers and reports issued by CSTP, is intended to summarize work over the last year or two concerning central issues facing classroom teachers in Washington state. In particular, the report addresses these five questions :

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1. *How have classroom teachers responded to the standards, assessments, and accountability system that form the heart of the state's standards-based reform?*
 2. *How are teachers meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, in the context of reform expectations to serve all students?*
 3. *In what ways are workplace conditions in schools enabling or complicating teachers' work?*
 4. *What opportunities and conditions support teachers' professional learning, and how are they engaging in these opportunities?*
 5. *What do we know about teachers' career choices, and the consequent stability or mobility in the teacher workforce?*

Good answers to these questions are essential to understanding how teachers matter in the education of the state's children and how they can be helped to realize a high-quality education for these young people.

The report is aimed, first of all, at members of the state policy community (legislators, agency officials and their staff, other elected officials and Boards, professional associations), who participate in the deliberations, decisions, and subsequent actions that form the "policy environment" for teaching in Washington state. Secondly, the report seeks to inform members of the media, whose representation of issues related to teaching can be influential in policy debate. Finally, the report seeks to inform local school boards and other educational leaders (e.g., school district and ESD officials, school principals, and other school-level leaders), who are often in a position to take more immediate action in support of teachers' work.

Sustaining and Supporting a High-Quality Teaching Force: A Framework

The report proceeds from a set of assumptions about what matters in the education of young people and how teachers, local educational leaders, and state policymakers share in the support of student learning. A further set of assumptions concern the nature of standards-based reform, as a context for teachers' work and student learning.

The ultimate goal: student learning that meets high standards

Standards-based reform places student learning standards at the center of attention and uses them as the reference point for policymaking. Working in a standards-based reform environment has particular implications for teachers and raises many questions about classroom practice and how it is supported.

The immediate means: Fully qualified teachers and high-quality teaching

Loosely referred to under the rubric of “teacher quality,” three interrelated facets of the educational system work together to make reform aspirations happen in everyday teaching and learning. First, a high-quality *teacher workforce* comprises individuals who have the skills, knowledge, and commitments that standards-based practice implies, and who are motivated to put these to use in the classroom. The quality of the workforce, in large measure, is a reflection of the local and regional labor market for teachers, and within that labor market the available forms of initial preparation that bring teachers to the classroom. Second, in the classroom, the quality of *day-to-day teaching* reflects teachers’ understanding of standards-based practice, their feel for the student population being served, and their love of learning in the subject areas under the teachers’ purview. Lastly, how teachers’ work is supported and whether that support is delivered effectively and equitably influences opportunities for learning.

Local conditions supporting teachers’ work

Teachers engage in this work with support from many sources, some of them rooted in the local level, others in the state (and federal) levels. Within immediate reach of the teacher are resources, individuals, and conditions in the school, district, and community that can help their work with students to be successful. Of particular importance is the *quality of leadership*, and especially *instructional leadership*, from school administrators, instructional coaches, staff developers, and others who have specific expertise in the subjects the teachers are teaching. Also essential is the *nature of the collegial community* in which teachers find themselves. Among their fellows, teachers find moral support, advice, reinforcing norms of practice, and other ways of assisting them in their work, though not always in ways that conform to the state’s expectations. Other forms of local support also enter into the story, among them, the kinds of *materials or facilities* to which teachers have access, specific forms of *curricular guidance*, and the *structuring of time and the school program* that enables teachers and learners to do their best work.

State conditions supporting teachers' work

State conditions—beyond those set by the basic structure of standards, related assessments, and the accountability system—can also make their mark in teachers' work, and these, too, are part of the story of high-quality support for teachers' work. The state governs entry to the profession and continued professional credentialing. Regarding entry into the profession, states have much to say about expectations for initial professional preparation of teachers and the different forms it may take. The state also is in a good position to guide or support continuing professional education of teachers throughout their careers, especially in the early years of teaching when new teachers settle into their professional roles (though, to date, states have tended to do little with this responsibility, beyond some financial support for mentoring programs or requirements for “clock hours” of continuing education). Furthermore, states have much to do with how teachers are compensated, especially in Washington, which has a statewide salary allocation schedule. Finally, states are especially well situated to adjudicate among the diverse needs and interests of the different parties to public education, watching out for and supporting groups with special needs or who engage in schooling under less than optimal conditions.

Beyond these “basics” of the state's role, many other things are possible, subject only to the imagination of the policymakers and the willing consent of professionals and the public, such as infusions of special-purpose resources, guidance of varying forms, and efforts to build the regional infrastructure supporting educators' work.

The local, state, and federal context for teachers' work and efforts to support it

Finally, student learning, teachers' work, and the array of potentially supportive conditions that are traceable to local and state leadership or policy actions sit in a multi-level context that shapes what is possible and what ultimately transpires in teaching and learning. In this context are many constraints and enabling conditions that lie beyond the reach of policy. They reflect the nature of the communities served by schools and school districts, the state of the economy, demographic trends, and political developments of all kinds, to mention a few of these matters. All have identifiable implications for what happens in classrooms, either directly (e.g., through what students or teachers bring with them to teaching and learning), or indirectly (e.g., by creating a climate of expectations, possibilities, and limitations regarding what can affect what happens in classrooms).

These framework elements give clues about where to look when asking what supports teachers' work. And, as one sifts through the answers that emerge from teachers or other sources, these reference points help to imagine where and how constructive improvements could be made.

Emerging Context of Concerns and Issues in Washington State: View from the Summer of 2005

At the outset, it is helpful to consider the specific state context for teachers' work in Washington in the summer of 2005. In this context, education-focused deliberations combine with larger trends and events to set the stage for answering the questions on which this report focuses. In the foreground is the continuing climate of intense scrutiny resulting from the combination of federal and state accountability requirements. On top of the already strict requirements of the state's reform initiatives, the federal government's demand that all schools make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on measures of overall performance improvement and the performance of identifiable sub-groups of the student population has become a major preoccupation of the policy community, and of educators more generally.

Moreover, the drumbeat of high-stakes accountability is intensifying as Washington state moves closer to the first year (2008) in which passing the 10th grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) will be mandatory for a high school Certificate of Academic Achievement. Critics and proponents of the state's assessments have squared off, amid continuing concerns over achievement gaps among demographically defined groups, and the more widespread gap between many students and the standards to which the state's assessment is pegged. The apparent reliance of the system on a limited set of measures of educational mastery has generated considerable debate, as has the fear that students who take longer to pass will somehow be labeled for having done so. A growing number of proposals for diversifying the array of measures considered in awarding a diploma to high school graduates is testimony to the deep concerns of many parents, as well as teachers. As elsewhere in the country, the stark disparities apparent in achievement gap statistics have fueled the call by many, especially in communities of color, to guarantee that all students have equitable opportunities for reaching the standard.

The patterns of performance to date have also drawn increasing attention to the fact that many schools are underperforming and may not be as well staffed, led, supported, or funded as they need to be to help an increasingly diverse student population succeed in the current educational climate. Of special note are comprehensive high schools, widely viewed as structured, staffed, and led

in ways that are not responsive to current and emerging student needs. The efforts by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and others to support the transformation of high schools (e.g., through investments in the development of small learning communities, among other means), have helped to keep the spotlight on the challenges facing high schools.

Behind these concerns lie large questions of fiscal adequacy: are there enough resources for the system to provide equitable, standards-based learning opportunities for all students? The results of the recent analyses undertaken by the Rainier Institute, Washington Association of School Administrators, and the state's Parent Teacher Association suggest not, yet the means to augment the state's investment in education are not easy to come by.¹ Here, policymakers wrestle with long-term economic and political forces that influence the state's capacity to provide resources aligned with education policy goals. The governor's formation of a new commission, *Washington Learns*, to study the problem is one sign that lawmakers are taking this matter seriously, but the outcome of the commission's work is far from certain. There are more than a few parallels with the situation in the early 1990's, when a blue-ribbon group—Governor Booth Gardner's Commission on Educational Reform and Finance (GCERF)—created the framework for the current standards-based reform. Despite its mandate to do so, GCERF was unable to craft a lasting solution to the shortcomings of the state's educational finance system.

Concerns about the health of the educational system are gaining attention from a changing cast of characters in Olympia, as an overhaul of the educational governance system is taking place. Some functions (e.g., related to induction, certification, and teacher preparation) have moved from the State Board of Education to the Professional Educator Standards Board, a relatively new oversight body, while the former absorbs the responsibilities of the recently disbanded A+ Commission, the entity which has guided the development of the state's accountability system. The two groups are working hard to sort out the scope, nature, and relationship of their new responsibilities.

These events and developments have potential effect on teachers' work and efforts at the state and local level to support it. Making sense of teachers' perspectives on reform, their work with a diverse student population, the local workplace conditions, opportunities for professional learning, and long-term career trajectories must take account of the conditions that the policy community faces. Ultimately, the task of this report is to bring good information about the views and daily practice of teachers to bear on the policy-making process.

¹ "For details, see the following reports: *What Will it Take?* by the Rainier Institute (<http://www.rainierinstitute.com/issues/education/whatwillitake.php>), *Ample School Funding Project* sponsored by the Washington Association of School Administrators (<http://www.wasa-oly.org/asfp.htm>), and *Washington State School Finance: Does Every Child Count?* by the Washington State Parent Teacher Association (<http://www.wastatepta.org>).

What We Know and From What Sources

The findings and conclusions presented in this report are based on data from two primary sources: (1) analyses of a comprehensive longitudinal database, encompassing all of the state’s classroom teachers from 1996-2002; and (2) six surveys of a representative “standing sample” of the state’s classroom teachers over the past two school years. Using these sources, the report summarizes important insights into the state of Washington’s teaching force and support systems for teachers. A few notes below about each data source set the stage for the chapters which follow. Additional details about the data sources and analytic procedures used may be found in the appendix and in a methodological paper (which can be accessed on the CSTP website).²

Analyses of a comprehensive, longitudinal database of all teachers and administrators

With support from the Stuart Foundation, the research team at the University of Washington first constructed an enhanced version of the state’s S-275 personnel database, combined with data on school demographics and school performance, over a number of years, starting in 1996. Early analyses of this database were undertaken to create a baseline portrait of the state’s teaching force, described in *Who’s Teaching Washington’s Children?* (Plecki, Elfers, & Knapp, 2003). This data affords an opportunity to examine both district- and school-level influences on the teacher workforce, and changes in the composition of the workforce over time. As such, it can help inform the design and implementation of state and district policies, such as those aimed at improving retention rates in locations where turnover is greatest. The data from this source also provides a baseline of information from which to examine other questions related to the equity of distribution of teacher quality across a variety of schools and districts.

The analyses in this report derive, first of all, from this statewide database of approximately 55,000 teachers, and for other matters requiring more precise answers within districts (e.g., in comparing teachers characteristics across schools), a sample of twenty districts included in the database. This sample contained the three largest districts in the state and a range of others, varying by factors that might influence the composition of the teaching workforce—namely, poverty rate, enrollment size, and region of the state. Though only 20 out of the 296 school districts in the state are represented in this analysis, the sample nonetheless contained over 14,000 classroom teachers, or approximately 30 percent of the state teacher workforce, among them, teachers working under the full range of conditions that teachers face across the state.

² See Elfers, A. M., Plecki, M., & Knapp, M.S. (2004). *Development and Deployment of a “Fast Response” Survey System in Washington State: Methodological Notes*. Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession website: www.cstp-wa.org

For purposes of this report, the database was used primarily to consider questions of stability and mobility in the teacher workforce. Through analyses that tracked the assignment of teachers at two points in time, 1998-99 and 2002-03, the research team was able to identify which teachers were still employed somewhere in the system at the later time and which had exited the system. Analyses indicated whether teaching staff had stayed in their same school after five years, moved to another school within the same district, moved to a different district, or exited the Washington state system altogether. Analyses related patterns of movement or stability to other teacher characteristics, and school characteristics and other information that could be readily imported into the database (see Appendix).

“Fast Response” surveys of a standing sample of the state’s classroom teachers

Database analyses can only tell part of the story. To understand teachers’ work and how to support it in greater depth, one must get information directly from teachers and from the sites of their daily practice. The University of Washington team did so by constructing a “Fast Response” survey system, as a means of “hearing” directly from teachers regarding the various matters pursued in this report. 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 (and receive a modest honorarium for doing so). Quick turnaround of questionnaires and high response rates (in most instances, 90 percent or better) make this kind of a system especially useful for gathering accurate and representative survey data from teachers.

During the 2003-04 school year, the research team piloted a series of three “Fast Response” surveys which explored issues of assignment, certification, working conditions, and professional development, among a sample of approximately 400 teachers. In the following school year (2004-05), a similarly sized sample (half of whom had participated in the first-year surveys), replied to three more survey questionnaires, concerning:

- Responses to state education reform
- Approaches to teaching a diverse student population
- Stability and mobility in teachers’ careers

Teachers in the standing sample were selected, based on a stratified random selection 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 1.1). Using this kind of randomly generated sample also provides an appropriate representation of teachers at each grade level.

Table 1.1: 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 Districts. Central 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.*

A supplementary sample of Washington teachers who had earned certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards provides a useful reference group. This sample of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) were administered the same six questionnaires over the two-year period and provide a comparison group to the standing sample of teachers. In the first year 139 NBCTs participated (approximately 50 percent of all the NBCTs then holding classroom positions in the state during 2003-04), and 93 participated in the second year (approximately a quarter of the NBCTs in the recent school year). While not statistically representative of all NBCTs in Washington state, their responses offer insight into how the views of one group of demonstrably “accomplished” teachers might differ from other teachers (see Appendix for details).

Report Themes and Organization

The analyses contained in this report paint a picture of a relatively stable and committed teacher workforce, whose work in the classroom shows clear progress towards the state’s reform goals, though they are deeply concerned about certain aspects of the reform. Beneath the overall picture of stability lies considerable variation, across different kinds of school settings—especially those serving high- and low-poverty student populations—and among different groups of teachers—especially those in the early years of a teaching career contrasted with those with more experience. The variations in teachers’ approaches to their work and responses to reform, as well as the differences in the teachers’ immediate working situations, highlight aspects of their practice that could be substantially improved, with ultimate benefit for the learning of Washington’s student population.

The targets of opportunity for improvement of practice, coupled with relative stability of the state's teaching force, argue strongly for investing in our current teachers, as they are going to be with us for a while. What we know about retention, mobility, assignment, working conditions, existing professional development support, response to state reform, and working with diversity makes a strong case for looking carefully at the system of support for professional learning and teachers' careers, for the full range of teachers from novice to more experienced, and how this might be strengthened by state-level and local action.

That said, the apparent stability of the state's teacher workforce is not uniform across teachers' careers, and there are noticeable differences between novice teachers and their more veteran colleagues. The tendency of novices to move between schools more often, to be less secure in their professional skills and identity, and to be more sensitive to salary conditions points to possible targets for state investment that are not yet what they could be.

To elaborate these overall themes and ground them in evidence from the two data sources, this report is organized in the following six chapters. The subsequent five chapters address the questions noted earlier:

- *Chapter 2* reviews basic patterns of teachers' response to state education reform.
- *Chapter 3* zeroes in on what is arguably the most problematic and challenging aspect of teachers' response to reform: their approach to, and capacity for, helping all members of a diverse student population succeed.
- *Chapter 4* considers a first line of support for teachers' work, rooted in the immediate workplace conditions that surround teaching and learning. Here the report considers questions of collegial, material, and professional support, as well as school leadership.
- *Chapter 5* addresses in considerable detail the set of supports that explicitly aim at professional learning, considering these in the context of reform expectations, classroom practice, and local or state leadership actions.
- *Chapter 6* steps back to consider teachers' career choices and the conditions that influence it, including many of the matters discussed in preceding chapters, noting in some detail what teachers say are the compelling reasons why they stay in a school or move on to others (or outside the profession).

A concluding chapter reflects on the meaning of the findings reported above and offers ways that the state and local policy communities may learn from them.

CHAPTER 2

TEACHERS' RESPONSE TO 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. 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 (e.g., Initiative 728 in 2000). 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

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.

Without question, teachers are the most central "agents" of the reform initiative, at the same time that their work is also one of its targets (Cohen & Spillane, 1993). In that capacity, 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, skills, and supports 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 schools serving the highest poverty student populations are more likely to encounter 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 to do not 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 chapter, we explore, from the teachers' perspectives, whether state reform is "working," how it has affected classroom practice, whether it has enhanced student learning, how prepared they feel to meet its demands, and what conditions seem to enable them to support their students' learning.

Key Policy Questions and Answers from Survey Data

In seeking to understand how teachers are playing a pivotal role in state education reform, and how well they are supported in doing so, policymakers and the public need answers to the following questions.

1. *How is the "theory of action" that underlies state educational reform working in the daily practice of teachers? More specifically, are standards and assessments guiding instructional practice, and thereby, students' response to instruction?*
2. *What frustrations and concerns do teachers have about state education reform?*
3. *How well prepared do teachers feel to teach to the ambitious standards, and ready their students for state assessments?*

We summarize below what several rounds of survey data indicate concerning these questions, with special attention to the way teachers' responses reflect their years of experience, level of schooling, school context, or regional location.

Question 1. *How is the "theory of action" that underlies state educational reform working in the daily practice of teachers? More specifically, are standards and assessments guiding instructional practice, and thereby, students' response to instruction?*

The responses of these teachers offer evidence that the state education reform is achieving some of the intended results. In short, according to teachers in the sample, the standards, assessments, and accountability system set up by the state reform process are shaping classroom practice, affecting student learning opportunities, and ultimately enhancing student learning itself.

Put another way, a number of basic assumptions embedded in the state's "theory of action" appear to be playing out so far. In keeping with an enduring vision of standards-based reform in this and other states (Fuhrman, 2001; Knapp & Meadows, 2005), the theory of action posits that a framework of aligned

standards, assessments, and accountability requirements will provide direction and motivation for teachers' work:

- *Ambitious student learning standards* define what is desirable for all students to master in their schooling experiences, thereby giving direction to teachers' instructional practice.
- *Assessments, keyed to the standards* and emphasizing students' ability to use their knowledge appropriately, document students' mastery of the knowledge and skills implied by these standards.
- *An accountability system* makes it clear how well students are meeting standards and, thereby, how schools are performing, with ultimate consequences for both students and schools.

The state's reform theory implies that teachers' response to the reform will be apparent in their attention to the framework of aligned standards, assessments, and accountability requirements, in their attempts to follow its guidance and adjust classroom practice accordingly, and, ultimately, in measures of student learning. Specifically, the theory of action would predict that:

- Teachers will become familiar with the standards, take them and the assessments seriously, and try to align their practice with both.
- Educational leaders and local support structures will reinforce teachers' efforts to adjust their practice in accordance with the standards.
- Learning opportunities will be reshaped in ways that maximize central learning goals in the standards.
- Students will respond accordingly, by demonstrating improved performance on state assessments and other measures of their performance in school.

The logic of this theory is straightforward and, on the surface, makes sense. The question immediately arises: is there any evidence from what teachers say and do that the state's reform theory holds up?

Our survey data suggest that, in many respects, the state's theory of action is working. Consider the following evidence. First, survey responses indicate that *the great majority of teachers are familiar with the state standards and see them as relevant to their teaching.*

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- 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 (understandably, they are less familiar with EALRs in subjects they do not teach—43 percent indicate they are not familiar at all).
 - EALRs, WASL, and Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) 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 GLEs (75 percent).
 - In addition, 83 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools note that Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) have a moderate or great deal of relevance to their classroom practice as compared with 71 percent of teachers in low-poverty schools.

Second, it is clear that *school and district administrators, in particular, are actively encouraging teachers to improve their practice in line with the reform*—78 percent of the teachers in the sample say that their principals are doing so a “moderate amount” or a “great deal,” and a comparable percentage (73 percent) say the same about their district’s central office leaders or staff. In contrast, “parents of the students I teach” or “community members in this district” are far less frequently a source of encouragement for improving teaching practice in response to reform (20 and 18 percent, respectively, of the teachers indicated they were).

Third, for the most part, *teachers are adjusting their classroom practice to align with these standards and with the assessments that are mapped to the standards.*

- Nearly four-fifths (79 percent) say they organize learning activities explicitly around state or state-derived standards.
- Teachers indicate that, instead of teaching a *broader* range of skills (only 28 percent do this), they are more likely to place emphasis on teaching discrete basic skills (63 percent) and to focus more deeply on a smaller number of topics (62 percent).
- Nearly three-quarters of teachers (73 percent) emphasize problem solving and critical thinking—a major emphasis of the state’s reform—more than they did in the past.
- 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 (90 percent see district-required assessments the same way).

Fourth, state reform has impacted the content of what teachers teach, as well as how they teach, especially in the elementary school grades, as shown in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Impact of State Reform on Teaching Practice

Teachers agree or strongly agree that the state standards and Grade Level Expectations have affected how they teach and the content of what they teach, in the following ways:	Elementary School 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 assessments into classroom instruction more extensively	80%	70%	66%
Ask students to explain their thinking more often and in greater detail	87%	74%	69%
Use textbooks more selectively	66%	63%	48%
Adapt the content to match what is tested	82%	73%	67%

Sample (Year 2): N=349

What is more, it is clear that not only are teachers trying to incorporate assessment into their classroom practice, as the table suggests, *they are taking assessment results seriously and trying to orient instruction towards 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 of their teaching to match what is tested (77 percent)
- Use instructional strategies that are compatible with WASL items (81 percent)

Of particular interest is the degree to which learning about, and from, assessments has become a priority for teachers. This is a matter we take up in a subsequent chapter.

In some ways, this pattern of response to reform could be understood as “teaching to the test,” a common complaint about standards-based reform (e.g., Kornhaber & Orfield, 2003). The ultimate question is whether doing so improves learning opportunities for students and has the effect of inducing better performance on measures of knowledge and skills that matter. While these surveys cannot provide complete evidence on this score, *most teachers (at elementary and middle school levels, especially) believe that what they are doing in response to state reform is benefiting students*, as summarized in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Impact of State Reform on Student Learning

Teachers indicate that reform has brought about a moderate amount or a great deal of benefit to students, with regard to:	Elementary School Teachers	Middle School Teachers	High School Teachers
Clear expectations for student learning	71%	57%	52%
Increased rigor in student learning experiences	75%	73%	60%
Increased student performance	61%	50%	46%
Teachers indicate their response to state standards and Grade Level Expectations has had a “modest” or “great” effect on these aspects of student learning. Specifically students...	Elementary School Teachers	Middle School Teachers	High School Teachers
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%

Sample (Year 2): N=349

The teachers’ responses highlighted in this table suggest a link between rigor, clarity of expectations for learning, and student performance. Admittedly, these data offer only *perceptions* of benefit to schoolchildren, as the research we are reporting did not have any direct measures of actual classroom practice or student performance. Nonetheless, the pattern of steady improvement over time in student performance measures, summarized in Table 2.3, gives some clues that what teachers are indicating in the surveys actually plays out in student learning.

Table 2.3: Achievement Trends in the State: Percent of Students Meeting Standard, by Grade and Tested Subject, 1996-2003

4 th Grade	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Reading	47.9	55.6	59.1	65.8	66.1	65.6	66.7	74.4
Mathematics	21.4	31.2	37.3	41.8	43.4	51.8	55.2	59.9
Writing	42.8	36.7	32.6	39.4	43.3	49.5	53.6	55.8
7 th Grade								
Reading		38.4	40.8	41.5	39.8	44.5	47.9	60.5
Mathematics		20.1	24.2	28.2	27.4	30.4	36.8	46.4
Writing		31.3	37.1	42.6	48.5	53.0	54.7	58.0
10 th Grade								
Reading			51.4	59.8	62.4	59.2	60.0	64.6
Mathematics			33.0	35.0	38.9	37.3	39.4	44.0
Writing			41.1	31.7	46.9	54.3	60.5	65.4

Source: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Report Card

Two other findings reinforce the interpretation we offer above. The first piece of evidence comes from comparing veteran teachers and novices. *Teachers who were in the classroom before the reform's initiation in the early 1990s—and are therefore in a good 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.* As shown in Table 2.4, by comparison with novice teachers (those with four or fewer years in the classroom), teachers who have taught fifteen or more years, and therefore were in the classroom prior to the passage of the state's Education Reform Act in 1993, more frequently view the reform as having contributed to increased rigor in student learning experiences and increased student performance, as well as better ways of demonstrating what students have mastered and greater collaboration among teachers.

Table 2.4: Benefits from State Reform, as Seen by Veteran and Novice Teachers

Teachers indicating a “moderate amount” or a “great deal” of benefit from state education reform, in the following areas:	Veteran Teachers (15+ years)	Novice Teachers (4 or fewer years)
Increased rigor in student learning experiences	77%	63%
Increased student performance	66%	46%
Better ways of demonstrating what students have mastered	56%	43%
More collaboration among teachers	56%	47%

Sample (Year 2): N=349

State education reform also 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 (see Tables 2.1 and 2.2). In addition, these teachers perceive their students to be mastering essential aspects of the state's learning agenda more readily.

Question 2: What frustrations and concerns do teachers have about state education reform?

The fact that teachers' practice increasingly aligns with state reform and appears to be producing some learning benefits for students does not mean that there are no significant complications or issues raised by it. In short, the survey data make clear that, from the teachers' vantage point, there are costs, and possibly an intangible toll on teachers who are trying to meet a demanding standard of professional work. Large numbers of teachers feel frustrated about certain aspects of state education reform and have deep and widespread concerns

about it. These patterns point to aspects of the reform process that deserve attention from state policymakers, if they wish the reform to reach its ultimate objectives.

To begin, there are overall clues that for many teachers, responding to state education reform involves significant frustrations. For example, among various possible reasons for exiting the classroom, *frustration with state education reform policies is one of the leading reasons teachers give for thinking of leaving the profession.*³ Of the three-fifths of the sample who have considered leaving the profession, almost two-thirds (63 percent) cite this as one of the influences.⁴ This fact prompts a question about how the teachers' backgrounds, capabilities, or working conditions may be linked to this sentiment. Two observations can be made in answer to this question. Among those who have considered leaving the profession, frustration with state education reform:

- *Is not related in any obvious ways to teachers' experience, expertise, or assignment.* Put another way, virtually the same percentage of teachers in each category indicate a willingness (or lack of desire) to leave the profession over this issue. There is one noticeable exception. While similar percentages of National Board Certified Teachers and teachers in the standing sample have considered leaving the profession, the former are less likely to attribute this to frustrations with state education reform.
- *Is closely related to a "syndrome" of concerns about other teaching conditions, among them, overall workload, lack of time to do a good job, class size, salary, and administrative support.* In short, teachers who experienced acute frustration with state education reform have also felt overworked, short of time, and burdened with too many students, not to mention viewing themselves as undercompensated. They may also have experienced other conditions that ranked high on the list of reasons to leave the profession—lack of leadership, administrative support, or parental support.

A subsequent survey gives a more specific sense of what about the state education reform causes teachers to be concerned, as summarized in Table 2.5. As the table makes clear, a substantial majority (three-quarters or more) of the sample teachers are concerned about the amount of testing and what they see as the inflexibility of the accountability system. Equivalent numbers worry about the way special needs are served, unrealistic expectations for teaching and learning coupled with limited time and resources to do the job, and the

³ Only those teachers who considered leaving the profession responded to this specific set of items. Consequently, we do not know the extent to which all respondents in the sample felt frustrated with state education reform.

⁴ The 63 percent represents 135 of the 212 teachers who have considered leaving the profession, or 36 percent of the entire sample of 379.

narrowing of the curriculum. An equivalent number worry about “increased public misunderstanding of schools,” as a consequence of state education reform.

Table 2.5: Concerns about State Education Reform, from the Teachers’ Perspective

Teachers’ agreement or disagreement that state education reform over the last decade has raised the following issues and concerns:	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%

Sample (Year 2): N=349

What is especially striking is how consistently teachers voice these concerns—a third or more of the teachers “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 (which 60 percent of teachers noted). Finally, large numbers of teachers are worried about what the state is doing to motivate and guide the improvement in their teaching, as nearly three-quarters (73 percent) indicate the state offers little incentive to improve teaching practice.

Question 3: How well prepared do teachers feel to teach to the ambitious standards, and ready students for state assessments?

Teachers’ concerns about excessive testing, in the context of an inflexible accountability system, may also be accompanied by a lack of confidence that they are fully prepared to help students master the knowledge and skills implied by ambitious state learning standards. For example, survey data indicate that *relatively few teachers feel fully prepared to ready their students for state assessments*. While most feel at least “somewhat” prepared for this task, less than one third (29 percent), report feeling “very prepared” for this task, by contrast with preparedness to teach the official curriculum, a task for which three-fifths (61 percent) feel *very* prepared, as shown in Table 2.6.

Table 2.6: How Prepared Teachers Feel to Teach the Official Curriculum and Ready their Students for State Assessments

Teachers' self-reported preparedness for...	Percent Feeling Somewhat or Very Unprepared	Percent Feeling Somewhat Prepared	Percent Feeling Very Prepared
...Teaching the official or intended curriculum	7%	32%	61%
...Preparing their students for state assessments	17%	53%	29%

Sample (Year 1): N=379

The surveys give a number of clues about what might contribute to their readiness for reform in general, and more specifically, to their sense of preparedness for state assessments. Four such attributes clearly make a difference:

- *Teachers' working experience.* The most veteran teachers (those who have taught fifteen years and more) report a substantially higher level of preparedness for readying students for state assessments than those in their first four years of teaching (40 compared with 17 percent feel “fully prepared”). Or, it appears that familiarity with testing and the kind of craft knowledge that grows with time equips teachers in some respects for the assessment demands of the reform.
- *Teachers' level of instructional expertise.* Though only a crude indicator, the contrast between the standing sample (which includes the full range of teachers' expertise) and the supplementary sample of National Board Certified Teachers dramatizes the link between added expertise and ability to prepare for state assessments (29 versus 59 percent, respectively, feel “very prepared”). This signals that more than experience alone may be involved in the preparation of students for rigorous standards-based assessments.
- *The level of schooling.* Teachers who teach in elementary and middle schools—once again, the schooling levels which have had more experience and exposure to the WASL—indicate a greater comfort level, on average, preparing students for state assessments than their counterparts in high school. Here, high school teachers' discomfort is especially noticeable in the tested grade (10th), in which 31 percent of the teachers in our sample feel somewhat or very unprepared to ready their students for state assessments.
- *The number of students with disabilities in the teacher's classroom.* Teachers in classrooms with fewer than 20 percent students with IEPs are twice as likely to feel very prepared for state assessments (34 versus 16 percent) than their counterparts serving greater numbers of children with disabilities.

Conversely, teachers who work in resource rooms or other settings that are populated exclusively by children with disabilities are twice as likely to feel *unprepared*. Among other things, this probably reflects the frequent incompatibility, even with accommodations made in assessment procedures, between standards-based curriculum and assessment, and the curricular modifications and accommodations needed for students with disabilities.

One final observation can be made: *regardless of level of schooling, experience, expertise, or student assignment, there are still many teachers in the state who feel less than fully prepared to ready their students for state assessments.* Note that, with a few exceptions (veteran teachers, National Board Certified Teachers), less than a third of the teachers we surveyed feel “very prepared” to ready their students for state assessments. That may be understandable, given that these assessments depart from past testing patterns substantially and imply a considerable amount of new learning on the part of teachers. But the survey data suggest that this learning process is not yet finished.

Teachers across the state feel relatively unprepared in another important area of their practice. Large numbers do not feel fully equipped to manage the diverse learning needs in their classrooms. Consider their responses summarized in Table 2.7, once again, contrasted with their sense of their preparedness for teaching the official or intended curriculum. Teachers are noticeably less confident in the face of “diversity,” although they may mean by this a variety of things, including but not limited to working with students who have identified disabilities and/or teaching a linguistically or racially diverse student population.

Table 2.7: How Prepared Teachers Feel to Manage Diverse Learning Needs and Teach the Official Curriculum

Teachers’ self-reported preparedness for...	Percent Feeling Somewhat or Very Unprepared	Percent Feeling Somewhat Prepared	Percent Feeling Very Prepared
...Managing the diverse learning needs in their classrooms	17%	48%	34%
...Teaching the official or intended curriculum	7%	32%	61%

Sample (Year 1): N=379

While this pattern of preparedness is fairly pervasive across the state, varying little by region or level of poverty in the school, several segments of the teacher workforce feel the matter more keenly than the figures above suggest:

- *High school teachers.* A higher percentage of them (28 percent) report feeling *unprepared* to manage the diverse learning needs in their classrooms.

-
- *Less experienced teachers.* Only a quarter of the novice teachers say they feel “very prepared” to manage diverse learning needs, as compared with 43 percent of teachers who have taught for 15 or more years.

A flip side of the pattern is also apparent. As one would hope for those considered “accomplished” teachers, National Board Certified Teachers are more likely to feel confident of their ability to ready students for state assessments—59 percent indicate they feel very prepared to do so (compared with 29 percent of the standing sample).

These data about teachers’ sense of preparedness point to a major issue confronting their response to state education reform. While teachers are clearly doing much to teach in ways that align with reform goals with apparent benefits for student learning, they are not necessarily doing so for all students (as the state reform urges) and may need additional support to do so. As the challenge of teaching a diverse student population is complex and multifaceted, we take up this matter in a succeeding chapter.

Summary: Understanding How Teachers are Responding to State Reform

The message that emerges from our survey data is twofold. On the one hand, teachers’ classroom practice clearly reflects state education reform in many of the ways that the reform intended. Teachers are aligning their practice with reform expectations. They are taking reform goals and requirements seriously, and it appears to pay off for student learning, both in teachers’ perception and in the actual trends in student performance measures (though we have no simple way of proving that these trends derive from what teachers say they are doing).

On the other hand, the reform is raising a number of serious issues for teachers, and these are so consistently voiced by respondents to our surveys that they are cause for significant concern among those who espouse the goals of the reform. One theme among their concerns has to do with what is being asked of them (too much) and the means—resources or time—they have for fulfilling these expectations (too little). Another theme involves the effects on the curriculum (narrowing), on the time or focus on testing (too much), and the appropriateness of the consequences (too inflexible). A third theme, signaled by the widespread perception that special learning needs are not well served under the reform, has to do with a fundamental goal of the reform—that of helping *all* students succeed. Overall, most teachers seem to feel neither confident nor fully competent to guide the learning of this diverse population.

The patterns of response to state education reform reported above beg numerous questions about the state and local efforts to support teachers' work, which we take up in succeeding chapters. Chief among these matters is the question of serving an increasingly diverse student population in ways that help them meet the expectations of the reform, a matter we address in the next chapter. Underlying teachers' ability to make standards-based practice work for all children are various local working conditions and specific resources and arrangements for guiding their further professional learning, which we address in two chapters that follow.

CHAPTER 3

MEETING THE NEEDS OF ALL LEARNERS

In the previous chapter, we discussed teachers' responses to state reform, and based on findings from the first four surveys in our series, we noted that in many ways the "theory of action" underlying the state reform effort seems to be holding up. Among the findings, however, were hints that the state's classroom teachers do not feel fully prepared to teach the increasingly diverse student population they face, nor are they getting the degree of support that they might need for this challenging task. In short, while teachers are making considerable effort to realize the reform goals, and they see some benefits for student learning, these benefits may not be extended equally to *all* schoolchildren—a key premise of the reform. We pursued these matters in greater depth in a subsequent survey that was devoted solely to asking teachers about how they worked to meet the needs of different groups of learners across Washington.

In this chapter, we discuss key findings from this survey and other research. Here, student "diversity" refers the wide range of learning needs in the classroom, but also to specific groups of students who make the student population more diverse. These groups include: (1) students with Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), or those who are likely to be referred to special education; (2) students with limited English language proficiency (often classified as English Language Learners (ELL) students); and (3) students from historically underserved racial and ethnic groups.⁵ We note that these categories of students are not the only ones that make a student population "diverse," but arguably, meeting the needs of these groups well, along with others, will go a long way towards addressing major shortcomings and inequities in the current system of schooling.

We preface our discussion in this chapter with one other central fact: the general lack of racial, ethnic, or linguistic diversity among the state's teacher workforce at a time of growing diversity in the student population. As in many states, classroom teachers in Washington are largely White (93 percent, a figure that is virtually unchanged across the last eight years), at the same time that the proportion of students of color among the population served by the state's schools is growing (now 29 percent, up 6 percent from eight years earlier). We take up the specific implications of this mismatch later in the chapter, but note at the outset that there are two sides to the issues we discuss in this chapter, one concerning changes in the student population, and the other, a lack of change in the teacher workforce.

⁵ We note that some students fall in more than one of these three groups simultaneously. In addition, for the purposes of our research, we considered historically underserved racial and ethnic groups to include African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Southeast Asians. We use the term "students of color" interchangeably with historically underserved racial and ethnic groups in this report.

Key Policy Questions and Answers from Survey Data and Other Sources

Four policy issues stand out when considering how Washington’s teachers work to meet the needs of all learners. As in the previous chapter, these matters are linked to the state’s intent to provide a quality education for all students.

1. *What demographic changes taking place in the student population in Washington pose challenges—and opportunities—for teachers, and what are these challenges?*
2. *Do teachers believe they will be able to bring all their students to standard by the end of the school year? If not, what proportion do they think are likely to succeed?*
3. *How prepared and how well supported do teachers feel they are for serving learners from different demographic and ability groups?*
4. *Do schools serving the most diverse student populations have stable, appropriately diverse teaching staff?*

Through both surveys and tracking school- and district-level retention and mobility of teachers between the school years 1998 and 2002, we were able to explore how teachers attended to this aspect of the overall challenge they face in responding to state reform.

Question 1: *What demographic changes taking place in the student population in Washington pose challenges—and opportunities—for teachers, and what are these challenges?*

The press to understand how Washington’s teachers serve a diversity of learners is related to demographic changes in the last seven years, in the context of a relatively unchanging teacher workforce. State-level data about public school enrollment between 1996-97 and 2003-04, summarized in Table 3.1, demonstrate that, *across the last decade, the student population in Washington state has both increased and grown more diverse racially, ethnically, and linguistically.* In 1996-97, African American, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic and Native American students accounted for 23 percent of those attending public schools in Washington. The enrollment of students of color has grown steadily since that year, reaching 29 percent in the 2003-04 school year, with students from Hispanic groups increasing at the highest rate (Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, State Report Card, 2005). The number of students in transitional bilingual and migrant programs has also grown, reaching seven and three percent respectively in the 2003-04 school year.

Table 3.1: Student Population Trends in Washington State, 1996-2003

	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Enrollment								
Student Count	974,504	991,235	999,616	1,003,701	1,004,843	1,010,424	1,015,968	1,021,309
Race or Ethnicity								
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	2.7%	2.8%	2.8%	2.7%	2.7%	2.7%	2.7%	2.8%
Asian/Pacific Islander	6.7%	6.9%	7.1%	7.2%	7.3%	7.5%	7.6%	7.8%
Black	4.8%	4.9%	5.1%	5.2%	5.3%	5.4%	5.6%	5.7%
Hispanic	8.3%	8.7%	9.1%	9.6%	10.2%	10.9%	11.6%	12.3%
White	77.5%	76.8%	76.0%	75.3%	74.4%	73.4%	72.5%	71.4%
Special Programs								
Free or Reduced Priced Lunch	31.2%	30.1%	31.3%	31.1%	31.2%	33.1%	35.6%	36.0%
Special Education	10.9%	10.8%	10.7%	11.8%	11.5%	10.7%	11.7%	11.7%
Transitional Bilingual	4.7%	4.7%	5.1%	5.5%	5.9%	6.1%	6.5%	6.9%
Migrant	2.7%	2.7%	2.6%	3.0%	3.0%	2.9%	3.0%	3.3%

Source: OSPI Report Card, 2005.

The increase in diversity reflects more than the racial, ethnic, or linguistic background of the student population. During the seven years included in the table, *the proportion of students from low-income backgrounds has also increased*. The proportion of children receiving Free or Reduced-Price lunches has risen from 31 to 36 percent.

How demographic trends show up in teachers' classrooms. We asked teachers in the survey about the populations they encounter in their classrooms as well as the challenges they face in serving their students. Their responses make it clear that, while not touching all teachers, the overall trends just described are affecting many classrooms. *Nearly half of the teachers (47 percent) in the sample indicate that their classrooms have become more diverse in the last five years—a change that has to do with increasing numbers of English language learners and students of color, more than increasing numbers of schoolchildren with identified disabilities, as Table 3.2 summarizes.*

Table 3.2: Demographic Differences in Classrooms of Teachers Facing Increasing Versus the Same (or Less) Diversity

Proportion of teachers' current student load who are from these identified groups:	Teachers indicating student populations they have taught have become more diverse over the last five years (n=146)	Teachers indicating student populations they have taught have the same (or less) diversity over last five years (n=166)
10% or more are ELL students	32%	17%
10% or more are students of color	80%	57%
10% or more have IEPs	53%	58%

Sample (Year 2): N=316

Whether or not student diversity is increasing in their classrooms, *most teachers work with some students who have IEPs, are English language learners, and students from historically underserved racial and ethnic groups, though generally in relatively small numbers:*

- An overwhelming majority (90 percent) of survey respondents served at least one student with an IEP. For over half of the teachers (55 percent), at least one of every ten of their students has an IEP.
- Sixty-two percent indicate that at least a portion of the students they teach are English language learners (ELL). However, for the majority (78 percent), ten percent or fewer of their students are identified as ELL. Only one in ten teachers have more than 25 percent ELL students.
- Nearly all teachers (93 percent) have students in their classrooms from historically underserved racial and ethnic groups. For two-thirds of the teachers, at least one in ten of their students represent a racial or ethnic minority.

In our sample of teachers, the most diverse student populations are concentrated in the Central Puget Sound region. Over half of teachers (54 percent) in the Central Puget Sound indicate that more than 20 percent of their students are from historically underserved racial and ethnic groups, compared with close to one-third of teachers in other parts of Western Washington (30 percent), and Eastern Washington (34 percent).

Compounding the challenges that increasing diversity may present to teachers, *the overall poverty level of the students in a school is linked to the presence of students with disabilities, ELL students, and those from historically underserved racial or ethnic groups.* The data make clear that students of color and English language learners are more likely than their White or English-speaking counterparts to attend high-poverty schools. For more than half of the teachers (56 percent) in high-poverty schools, a fifth or more of their students are from historically underserved racial and ethnic groups, compared with only a quarter of teachers

(24 percent) in low-poverty schools. The figures are even more striking when one considers the presence of English language learners. For over a quarter of the teachers (27 percent) in high-poverty schools, at least a fifth or more of their students are English language learners. This compares to only 4 percent of teachers in low-poverty schools. Not surprisingly, a larger percentage of the students in high-poverty schools speak a language other than English at home and receive support services. Teachers in the sample who work in high-poverty schools also work with a larger percentage of students with IEPs. Over two-thirds (68 percent) of the teachers in these schools indicate that at least 10 percent of their students have Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) compared with 55 percent of teachers in low-poverty schools.

Finally, the diversity in the student populations that teachers face is associated with the grade levels of the school in which they work. Overall, elementary teachers in the sample teach a larger percentage of students with IEPs than secondary teachers, while middle and high school teachers indicate that a larger percentage of the students they instruct are English language learners than their elementary school counterparts.

How student diversity poses instructional challenges and opportunities. We asked teachers about the challenges and opportunities they faced when working with a diversity of learning needs. In response, *the majority of teachers indicate that student diversity has generated a range of opportunities, with potential benefit to the curriculum as a whole, the quality of interaction among all students, and even their own learning.* Specifically, they note that the diversity of learning needs in the room has presented a “moderate amount” or “great deal” of opportunity to:

- Help students learn about and appreciate individual and group differences (66 percent)
- Discuss issues of race, language, and ability (52 percent)
- Introduce more multicultural content into the curriculum (52 percent)
- Address conflict and conflict resolution (57 percent)
- Teach about social justice and inequalities (48 percent)

A noticeable minority of teachers (39 percent) also found in the makeup of their student population a prompt to “learn how my racial and ethnic identity affects my teaching.”

Beyond these broad benefits, however, teachers noted a number of challenges, often difficulties they encountered in serving particular groups of students well. While the majority (65 percent) indicate that their lack of knowledge to serve students with IEPs presents no or only a small challenge (especially the case in high-poverty schools), they cite other difficulties with serving students from

this group. Nearly three-quarters indicate that the lack of one-on-one assistance for students with IEPs and the amount of time taken up by these students are moderate or great challenges. As elementary teachers face a higher percentage of students in their classrooms requiring special education services than their colleagues in secondary schools, they understandably express greater concerns regarding the variety of special learning needs, lack of one-on-one assistance for students, and the amount of time taken up by these students. Yet even though high school teachers tend to teach fewer students with IEPs, 69 percent indicate the lack of appropriate curriculum or texts for their students to be a moderate or great challenge.

The challenges experienced by teachers who have ELL students seem to be even more pronounced. Among the over 60 percent of teachers who serve English language learners in their classrooms, approximately half say they encounter moderate or huge challenges in working with this population of students. The greatest concerns include: communicating with students' parents (for 57 percent this is a moderate or huge challenge); the lack of one-on-one assistance for ELL students (47 percent); the difficulty in assessing ELL students' learning (45 percent); the lack of appropriate curriculum or texts (43 percent); and ELL students placed in the classroom before they are academically ready to do the work (42 percent). What is more, *the challenges of working with English language learners are especially noticeable for teachers who have experienced increasing student diversity over the last five years (much of it apparently due to growing numbers of ELL students in the teacher's classroom)*, as displayed in Table 3.3. The pattern is clear. As teachers see it, increasing linguistic diversity means greater challenges for them.

Table 3.3: Challenges in Working with ELL Students, for Teachers Facing Increasing Versus the Same (or Less) Diversity

Moderate or huge challenges faced by teachers in working with English language learners	Teachers indicating student populations they have taught have become more diverse over the last five years (n=105)	Teachers indicating student populations they have taught have the same (or less) diversity over last five years (n=95)
Communicating with students' parents	66%	48%
Lack of one-on-one assistance for ELL students	57%	36%
Difficulty in assessing ELL students' learning	53%	36%
Lack of appropriate curriculum or texts	50%	36%
ELL students placed in the classroom before they are academically ready to do the work	50%	33%

Sample (Year 2): N=200 (Questions were only asked of those who had ELL students in their classrooms)

Teachers' years of experience are also related to how ELL students are served. Novice teachers are more likely to experience these challenges, with nearly half (49 percent) finding the lack of appropriate curriculum or texts to be a moderate to huge challenge in working with English language learners, compared with 37 percent of the most experienced teachers. Over half of novices (51 percent) cite difficulty in assessing ELL students' learning to be a moderate to huge challenge compared with two-fifths of veteran teachers.

In contrast to disability or language diversity, *teachers generally do not report race or ethnicity as a source of instructional challenge—however, race may be a somewhat “hidden” factor in various aspects of students' daily life and school success (e.g., academic success, stigmatization, exclusion).* For example, nearly 30 percent of the teachers indicate that, on average, students from certain racial groups struggle with academic work and that this creates a challenge for their teaching, raises a number of questions about the subtle, racial dynamics of learning and teaching. Alongside the racial dimensions of the learning environment, a number of things may be operating at once in such instances, among them, peer group interactions, poverty background, and a lack of connection between home and school, not to mention the possibility of lower expectations or particular learning gaps that have not been adequately addressed.

Question 2: *Do teachers believe they will be able to bring all their students to standard by the end of the school year? If not, what proportion do they think are likely to succeed?*

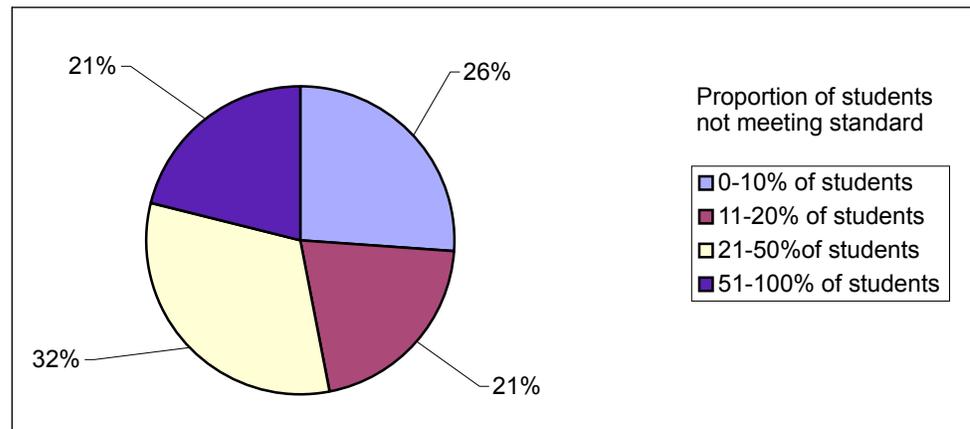
Despite the fact that a minority of teachers express that the struggle with academic work is a challenge for students from certain racial and ethnic groups, student achievement remains a pressing concern for students of color. Both statewide trends and our survey research underscore this issue. While recent achievement data from the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) indicate a gradual increase in the number of students meeting standard statewide, there have been persistent gaps in achievement between White and Asian students and those from African American, Hispanic, and Native American groups in all subjects at all grade levels since the 1996-97 school year (OSPI State Report Card, 2005). This parallels a more fundamental concern: regardless of race, a substantial gap remains between many students and the learning standards set by the state, a gap that teachers project will be there at year's end.

Teachers' predictions of students meeting standard by the end of the school year. A majority of the teachers in the sample report that a substantial portion of their students—a fifth or more—would be unlikely to meet grade-level standard by the end of the school year as shown in Figure 3.1. This was also the case across a variety of subjects.⁶ The percentages are even more striking for students in high-poverty schools and middle schools.

⁶ The response rates were similar for individuals teaching math, reading, writing, science, and social studies.

- Three-fourths of teachers in high-poverty schools express concern that at least one-fifth of their students will not reach standard, as compared with 40 percent of teachers in low-poverty schools.
- Middle school teachers are more often concerned that a fifth or more of their students will not reach grade-level standard in all subjects than their counterparts in elementary and high schools (65 percent versus 46 and 57 percent, respectively).

Figure 3.1: Percent of Teachers Who are Concerned Their Students Will Not Reach Grade-Level Standard in All the Subjects They Teach



What may be accounting for failure to meet standards. It may be tempting to view teachers' predictions as statements of their belief in the basic capabilities of their students, thereby revealing "self-fulfilling prophecies" about students' success that have long been linked to the achievement gap. Though low expectations may be part of what lies behind the survey responses, we have no way of distinguishing that from a simple "objective" appraisal of the students' chances for success, given the students' progress at the time of survey response (mid-year). Teachers' responses to the state reform, described in the preceding chapter, may provide other insights into these predicted gaps in achievement. Teachers in the sample indicate that state education reform has provided clear learning goals and targets for all students (73 percent) and focused attention on all students and their learning needs (62 percent), to a moderate amount or a great deal. But it has also caused them to narrow the content of the curriculum (67 percent, to a moderate amount or a great deal), and may be setting up unrealistic expectations for their teaching.

Question 3: *How prepared and how well supported do teachers feel they are for serving learners from different demographic and ability groups?*

The growing diversity of the student population, along with the perceptions of likely success just described, raises an important question regarding teachers' preparedness to meet their students' needs. As noted in Chapter 2, only a third of teachers (34 percent) in our sample indicate that they feel "very prepared" to manage the diverse learning needs in their classrooms. We explored this issue further by asking about the kinds of experiences that had equipped them to work with students with IEPs, English language learners, and students of color. We learned that teachers had varying levels of exposure to these experiences, but had limited exposure to the most valued forms of preparation.

For most teachers, *formal teacher preparation, professional development, and working experience are the means by which they have learned what they currently know about working with diverse student populations.* For obvious reasons, veteran teachers are likely to have had more working experience with diverse student populations, than their less experienced counterparts. Novice teachers, on the other hand, are more likely to have had opportunities during their professional preparation to learn about working with diverse student populations than their more experienced colleagues. Nearly all novice teachers (92 percent) have had this chance, as compared with only 61 percent of veteran teachers.

The most frequently available opportunities for learning to work effectively with student diversity, however, are not necessarily the most valuable, as teachers see it. Teachers tend to see their experiences in formal preparation programs as somewhat less helpful, on average, than those in which the teachers had either been in the role of outsider or had worked with diverse groups. These included living for at least six months in a country in which English was not the predominant language, and living and working in a context in which one is not in the majority racial or ethnic group. Teachers also see long experience working with a diverse student population (e.g., five years or more) as a helpful way to prepare for these kinds of teaching challenges.

Some powerful forms of preparation are within the reach of state and local policy, among them, helping teachers acquire deep content knowledge in an academic subject, which four-fifths of the teachers claim they have had the chance to do. Of these, 41 percent find this kind of professional experience "very helpful" in preparing them to work with student diversity.

Other kinds of helpful experiences, which for the most part lie beyond the reach of professional development policy may still figure into policies concerned with the *recruitment and hiring* of new teaching staff. Given that these kinds of life

experiences are often seen as very helpful, states and localities, not to mention teacher development programs, might be more proactive in their search for individuals who have these characteristics in their backgrounds:

- Living for more than six months in a country where English is not the predominant language (70 percent of those who have done this find it “very helpful”).
- Living or working in a context where one is not a member of the majority racial or ethnic group (50 percent of those who have done this find it “very helpful”).
- Knowing the language spoken at home by ELL students (32 percent of those who have this skill find this to be “very helpful”).
- Having family members or friends with identified disabilities (35 percent find it “very helpful”).
- Growing up in a home or community similar to that of the majority of the students they served (29 percent find it “very helpful”).

We also examined the ways in which districts provide support for teachers. While awareness of resources does not necessarily mean that teachers will utilize them, three-quarters of teachers identify staff and committees dedicated to the support of students with identified disabilities, and 55 percent see district efforts in promoting professional development to help teachers work with this student population. Two-thirds of teachers recognize district-level staff or committees dedicated to the support of ELL students in their district, but fewer than half (47 percent) can identify district efforts promoting professional development to help teachers work with this population.

Experience and school poverty matter when it comes to awareness of supportive services for special student populations. Novices are less well informed about particular district programs and efforts to serve these students. Teachers working in high-poverty schools demonstrate greater awareness of district-level supports for English language learners and students from historically underserved racial and ethnic groups. They are less likely to report that they do not know whether their district provides staff or committees dedicated to the support of students from these groups, professional development regarding meeting the needs of students from a racially or ethnically diverse student population, and outreach activities aimed at the parents of students of different abilities, races, and language backgrounds.

Question 4: Do schools serving the most diverse student populations have stable, appropriately diverse teaching staff?

Our analyses shed light on one other dimension of the capacity of the state's teacher workforce to meet the needs of all students. There is good reason to believe that racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity in a school's teaching staff may well help it be responsive to the needs of an increasingly heterogeneous student population. More generally, the stability of a qualified staff over time also enables schools to fulfill this responsibility. For obvious reasons, schools with relatively inexperienced or unskilled staff, and greater turnover of staff, are less likely to serve their students well. While there are limitations in our data sources for addressing these matters fully, several observations can be made, drawing on both survey responses and analyses of teacher retention and mobility.

Both our analysis of teacher retention and mobility and the related survey of teachers' mobility and career choices uncovered differences between low- and high-poverty schools in the makeup and the perspectives of teachers. The results of these analyses underscored the following: *the state's teachers and the students they serve are not particularly well matched demographically, nor is teacher experience necessarily equitably distributed among schools.* The net result is that, for some groups of students who make the student population more diverse—especially students of color and those from non-English speaking backgrounds—the teachers they face every day may be less likely to be well prepared to help them succeed in school.

The demographic mismatch between teachers and students. While the proportion of students of color has been growing, the overall numbers of non-White teachers remain small in Washington: ninety-three percent of the public school teaching workforce in the 2003-04 school year was White (OSPI, 2005), a figure that has changed little over the past decade. Villegas and Lucas (2002) explain that the absence of people of color from teaching is problematic because teachers of color serve as role models for all students, especially those from non-White groups. The authors reason that this background more easily enables students from marginalized groups to create bridges between home and school, at the same time challenging them to examine the consequences of disengaging from school.

Our recent survey data provides further evidence of this mismatch. *The racial and ethnic profile of teachers in the schools included within our survey seldom matches the diversity of the student body.* Only 12 percent of teachers indicate that their school has tried to support the needs of a diverse student population through a racially and ethnically diversified teaching staff. Additionally, only 17 percent of

teachers indicate the school has tried to support the learning of these students by employing a racially and ethnically diverse group of paraprofessionals. The lack of racial or ethnic diversity among teaching staff represent a continuing challenge to schools which seek a more effective means for educating all students.

That said, there is some evidence that *the teaching staff in the most diverse schools is at least somewhat more diverse than elsewhere*. Earlier database analyses have demonstrated that teachers of color in Washington state tend to work in communities where the largest proportions of students from the corresponding groups attend public schools (Plecki, Elfers, & Knapp, 2003). Furthermore, the state's larger school districts—which serve the most diverse student populations in the state—tend to have greater proportions of Asian and African American teachers, exceeding the state average in districts that are larger than 20,000 students. In districts between 10,000 and 20,000 students, Asian American and Latino teachers account for 2.6 percent of the workforce while the fraction of other non-White teachers are at or below the state average.⁷

Our retention analysis in 20 districts indicated that teachers of color are retained at the same school after five years at approximately the same rates as White teachers, with the exception of African American teachers whose retention rates are slightly lower. In some districts, the retention of teachers of color exceeded retention rates for White teachers.

The stability of teaching staff in the most diverse schools. Whether or not the school's staff is racially or ethnically diverse, it matters whether it is *stable* and able to ensure continuity in its academic program. By taking a closer look at individual districts, especially larger districts which tend to serve the most diverse student populations, we were able to identify important connections among student diversity, teacher retention, and student performance, without the potentially confounding effects of differing district conditions.

Based on one of our earlier analyses of seven large districts in the state (Plecki, Elfers, Loeb, Zahir, & Knapp, 2005), it is clear that teacher retention is related to student diversity—in particular, to the poverty level and ethnic and racial makeup of students served by the school. *Schools serving a greater number of students in poverty retain fewer of their teachers after five years; similarly, schools with a greater percentage of non-White students tend to retain a smaller percentage of their teachers at the same school after five years.*

While teacher turnover is not necessarily a negative phenomenon, this comparison within districts suggests that high-poverty schools—those that are the

⁷ The largest concentrations of Latino teachers work in districts serving between 5,000 and 19,999 students, however they are found in districts of all sizes across the state. Only Native American teachers work in a greater proportion of the state's smallest districts. Also reminiscent of national trends, people of color are concentrated in specific regions in Washington state.

most likely to serve students of color and English language learners—are more likely to experience the effects of teacher mobility. In other words, *in a mutually reinforcing pattern, school poverty, teacher retention, and school performance are linked to one another*. Poverty rates are strongly associated with student performance. In some districts, higher performance (on measures of mathematics and reading) is associated with both lower poverty and higher retention rates of both experienced and novice teachers. Even though the overall pattern between retention and poverty is generally similar in most of the seven largest districts in our sample, the strength of the relationship varies across the districts, though it is not confined, as people often suppose, to the most urban districts. We found evidence of this relationship in large suburban districts as well. In addition, our survey research indicates that student characteristics affect teachers' decisions to remain at their schools, as we explain in more detail in a later chapter (see Chapter 6).

Summary: How Teachers Are Meeting the Needs of All Students

The rationale for exploring how Washington's teachers serve a diversity of learners is related to recent demographic changes, in the context of the statewide commitment to helping all students meet high standards. As the state's student population has increased in overall size, it has grown more diverse racially, ethnically, linguistically, and socioeconomically. For half the teachers in our sample, these trends have shown up in their classrooms across the last five years. Whether or not the proportion of these students in their classrooms have changed, a sizable majority of Washington's teachers work with students who have IEPs, are English language learners, and students from historically underserved racial and ethnic groups, but they do so in relatively small numbers. There are instances where teachers face greater numbers of diverse learners, particularly in schools in the Central Puget Sound region and also in high-poverty schools.

As teachers see it, the diversity of learning needs in the classroom has presented them with both opportunities and instructional challenges. Opportunities include the chance to explore with students what cultural or racial differences mean, and even for the teacher, to become clearer about what their own racial and ethnic identity might mean. The instructional challenges teachers report are generally expressed as difficulties they encounter in trying to serve particular groups of students well. For example, elementary school teachers, who face a higher percentage of students receiving special education services than their colleagues in secondary schools, express greater concerns regarding the variety of special learning needs, lack of one-on-one assistance, and the amount of time taken up by students with IEPs.

The diversity of the student population appears to be related to persistent gaps between current levels of performance and state standards. Teachers do not expect a sizable proportion of their student population to reach standard. Over half of the survey participants thought this applied to more than 20 percent of their students. More teachers in the Central Puget Sound—the region in which students of color and English language learners are most concentrated—reported discomfort regarding the state reform expectations.

Growing student diversity in the classroom raises questions about teachers' sense of preparedness for this dimension of their work and about the sources of their preparation. Generally speaking, teachers indicate that they are relatively unprepared for this aspects of their classroom practice. Only a third of the sample reported feeling prepared to serve learners from different groups. Although the majority of teachers were exposed to formal preparation for working with a diversity of learners through teacher education, these experiences were not as highly valued as those in which they had either been in the role of outsider or had worked extensively with diverse groups. Novices are consistently less likely to know about particular programs and efforts by their school and district on behalf of these students. Teachers in high-poverty schools appear to be more knowledgeable about these supports.

These patterns take place in the context of a teacher workforce that, for the most part, does not reflect the demographics of the student population and is not as equitably distributed across schools as it might be. While teachers of color generally work in communities in which they share the backgrounds of students enrolled in the public schools, the ethnic and racial profile of the state's workforce is far less diverse than the student population, thereby depriving many students of adult role models and instructors who might understand their experiences and backgrounds in a more nuanced way. In addition, our analysis of some of the state's largest districts indicate that schools serving a greater number of students in poverty retained fewer of their teachers after five years; similarly, schools with a greater percentage of non-white students tend to retain a smaller percentage of their teachers at the same school after five years. In a mutually reinforcing pattern, school poverty, teacher retention, and school performance are linked to one another.

Overall, this crucial aspect of teachers' work in Washington state—finding ways to make education work well for the full range of students in the increasingly diverse student population—presents a continuing challenge to state policy, and to all who prepare or support teachers. Aspects of this challenge, which are reflected in workplace conditions and professional learning opportunities, will be taken up in the next two chapters.

CHAPTER 4

WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT AND LEADERSHIP SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS' WORK

Whether one is concerned about the quality of education more generally, or specifically with teachers' response to state education reform, the nature of the workplace environment and the leadership support it offers make a crucial difference in teachers' ability to do their jobs well (Rosenholtz, 1989; Seashore Louis & Kruse, 1995; Leithwood, 1994). Of particular concern are four ways in which the school workplace environment affects teaching and learning in the classroom. First, the school is a group of professionals who, in varying ways, comprise a "community" of co-workers engaged in educating young people—and as such it can be a source of ideas about teaching, norms for practice, and moral support for teachers' efforts. Second, the way time and programs are structured in the school sets boundaries around teachers' efforts, and either enables or constrains what they can do. Third, materials, classroom assistance (e.g., offered by paraprofessionals), and targeted forms of instructional guidance provide specific resources for instruction in classrooms, and hence the quality and availability of these resources can influence teachers' work. Finally, school leadership itself orchestrates the preceding three forms of support, and in other ways sets a more general tone for teachers' work and the activities of the school.

To get at these matters, we surveyed teachers on multiple occasions about the role that colleagues, leaders, time, materials, and related workplace matters might play in their attempts to realize reform goals, meet the needs of all learners, and ultimately their desire to stay working at a school or go elsewhere. As before, we looked systematically to see if teachers' views of workplace supports differed depending on their years of experience, level of schooling, the socioeconomic makeup of the school population, and region of the state.

Key Policy Questions and Answers in Survey Data

The analysis in this chapter explores four questions that concern these central features of the teachers' workplace environment:

1. *In what ways does the collegial community in the school support teachers' work? What are the implications for their efforts to help students meet state standards?*

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2. *Do current organizational and time structures (e.g., class size, planning and preparation time, access to technology, overall workload) enable teachers to implement state education standards?*
 3. *Do teachers get the right level and kind of material support (e. g., textbooks, computers), classroom assistance (e. g., instructional assistants), and instructional guidance to do their jobs well?*
 4. *Are school leaders creating workplace environments that motivate and guide teachers' work effectively?*

Though teachers' responses to our questions reflect dynamics within their individual schools, there are potential implications for state and district leadership and policy throughout. Ultimately, our examination of teachers' responses to the availability, adequacy, and effectiveness of these support structures sheds light on how well the system enables teachers to meet state education reform goals, as reflected in student learning and school performance. There are, of course, limitations to what survey data of this sort can say, but we can offer some insights into what teachers across the state and across grade levels believe is helping or hindering their efforts to guide students in meeting state standards.

Question 1: *In what ways does the collegial community in the school support teachers' work? What are the implications for their efforts to help students meet state standards?*

Consistently across the survey series, a large number of teachers report that *the existence of a collegial and collaborative work environment is an important source of support, as well as an incentive for them to remain at their school and in their jobs*. In effect, teachers are saying not only that good collegial working relations provide a positive work environment, but also that they turn to one another for guidance and advice, often with greater frequency than seeking the support of building leaders or specialized support staff. They find in each other a resource for dealing with daily problems of practice, handling larger schoolwide improvement issues, and responding productively to state reform. For example:

- *An immediate source of daily problem solving:* Fifty-eight percent of all teachers report that they meet at least weekly with their peers to discuss common problems and challenges they face in the classroom, or to discuss subject matter content.
- *A means for school improvement:* School improvement initiatives are perceived to be "somewhat to very useful" when the improvement strategy features grade-level teams (94 percent), cross-grade teams (88 percent), subject-matter teams (90 percent), and whole-school restructuring (84 percent).

- *A way of responding to state and federal reform expectations:* Teachers' responses to state education reform presume several forms of collaborative work, which they generally value. Eighty-six percent of all teachers note that they engage in developing classroom-based assessments, 73 percent collect and examine school-wide data on student performance, and 73 percent participate in developing school standards and assessments.

All of these activities point to the fact that teachers draw on their immediate collegial community to carry out various responsibilities. But there is more specific evidence that *a supportive collegial community helps teachers to realize education improvement goals*. In particular, a majority of elementary teachers (57 percent) and middle school teachers (54 percent) indicate that collegial support contributes to their efforts to bring students to standard. Less direct but similarly important, 86 percent of all teachers state that access to an informal expert colleague offers a “somewhat” to “very helpful” source of support in implementing standards-based practices. Finally, collegial support is clearly related to preparedness for state assessments, as Table 4.1 suggests.

Table 4.1: How Prepared Teachers with Different Levels of Collegial Support Feel to Ready Their Students for State Assessments

Teachers' self-reported collegial support: Degree of collaboration among staff †	Percent Feeling Somewhat or Very Unprepared	Percent Feeling Somewhat Prepared	Percent Feeling Very Prepared
Low	23%	54%	23%
High	11%	53%	36%

† Indicated by an index of 7 items concerning different aspects of staff collaboration
Sample (Year 1): N=359

We should note that stronger collegiality in the school will not automatically translate into assessment-specific advice or guidance. However, there are indications from other analyses of this survey data that assessment is a frequent focus of teachers' work with each other and that they value the chance to work together on this aspect of their teaching.

Beyond the specific ways in which a collaborative working environment enables teachers to realize reform goals, this dimension of the school workplace satisfies more fundamental needs for finding a professional home base over the long term. As will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 6, the qualities of the school collegial community are prominent in teachers' thinking about whether to stay, or leave their school. Large numbers of teachers mention as a *strong* reason to stay at a school, “presence of staff with whom I feel comfortable working” (67 percent), “presence of staff who share my values about teaching

and schooling,” (52 percent), “staff willingness to go the extra mile” (50 percent), and “degree to which staff value collaboration” (45 percent).

However, although our analysis indicates that colleagues and collaborative collegial communities present a strong and important source of support to teachers, we need to be cautious in interpreting the above findings. Collegial support is not automatically a force for the improvement of instruction. As work on communities of practice has demonstrated (e.g., Gallucci, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001), some such communities are open to new ideas, while others are more closed—in such instances, colleagues may socialize their peers to resist new ideas about learning or to ignore school leaders. In other words, while the strength of a collegial community lies in creating an environment in which teachers like to work and are inspired by the opportunities to collaborate, collegiality is not by itself an indicator that instructional improvement goals will be well supported.

In sum, *collegial community and collaboration are clearly an important resource to teachers and schools, and they have important contributions to make to the success of state reform.* As state and federal accountability measures and state education standards oblige teachers and schools to examine and change their practices, collaboration becomes a central means not only to comply with this mandate but also effectively foster student achievement.

Question 2: *Do current organizational and time structures (e.g., class size, planning and preparation time, access to technology, overall workload) enable teachers to implement state education standards?*

The basic pattern to emerge from the surveys is this: *the adequacy of organizational and structural supports for teaching—such as class size, overall workload, and planning or preparation time—affects teachers’ perception of their capacity to be effective.* While these are perennial concerns for many teachers, the increasing pressures from testing and accountability requirements may have brought these structural supports to the foreground of teachers’ attention.

Time for teaching, planning, and collaborative work is a case in point. For example, we found the following:

- Four-fifths (80 percent) of the teachers indicate that they have too little instructional time to realize state education reform goals.
- More generally, 62 percent of the teachers in the sample state that they lack the time to do their job well, and this contributes to their consideration to leave the profession.
- Time for planning is inadequate for three-fifths (61 percent) while two-fifths (40 percent) note that they rarely or never have time for planning and preparing lessons.

More to the point, teachers with more time to plan and prepare their classes express less frustration about their surrounding working conditions (e.g., class size, workload, and other school policies and practices), as the data summarized in Table 4.2 indicates.

Table 4.2: Time for Planning and Preparing Lessons, in Relation to Satisfaction with Particular Working Conditions

Teachers' satisfaction with particular working conditions	Percent indicating they have time for planning and preparing lessons...	
	...Not at All or Rarely	...Sometimes or Always
The number of students in my classes		
Dissatisfied	60%	40%
Satisfied	35%	65%
My overall workload		
Dissatisfied	68%	32%
Satisfied	24%	76%
School policies and practices		
Dissatisfied	55%	45%
Satisfied	34%	66%

Sample (Year 1): N=372

In other words, *when teachers are pressed for time, they are likely to feel more dissatisfied with their workplace environment as a whole.* Conversely, structuring adequate time for planning and preparation goes along with a number of other structural features of the workplace environment, not to mention other essential aspects of teachers' work, such as professional learning. As discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, building time for professional development into teachers' regular working hours is linked to teachers' feeling better prepared to deal with new and existing challenges to their practice.

Teachers made one other thing clear about the structuring of time in the school. *Making time for planning and preparing lessons does not necessarily mean taking time away from instruction, as is sometimes believed.* Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) of the teachers who report they usually or always have time for planning and preparing lessons indicate "my school has a school day that is organized to maximize instructional time," as compared with one-third (36 percent) of the teachers who rarely or never have adequate planning and preparation time.

As with other aspects of workplace environment, organizational and time structures—and the importance teachers attach to them—vary somewhat in

different regions of the state, in schools with varied degrees of poverty, at different school levels, and with more or less years of experience. For example, while the size of the district, school, or classroom constitutes a moderate to strong reason for teachers to *remain* at a school in Eastern Washington, teachers in the Central Puget Sound area appear less inclined to stay for the same reasons. Although school size does not generally provide a strong reason for teachers to leave their schools, large class sizes are a big concern for many of the least experienced teachers, and for those who teach in middle schools. Similarly, workload triggers nearly a third (31 percent) of all teachers to entertain thoughts of leaving their schools.

In short, as state and federal education reform measures move along, schools are increasingly faced with the challenge of bringing all students to standard. In particular, schools serving the most diverse student populations are thereby pressed to serve students with a range of abilities, causing teachers to spend more planning and preparation time to differentiate instructional materials and academic tasks. Given the demands on adapting teaching to meet state assessments and the presently available time structures for instructional planning, collaboration, school improvement, and professional learning, district and state educators need to be mindful about how, and under what circumstances, the interaction between workload and time creates effective or problematic working conditions.

Question 3: *Do teachers get the right level and kind of material support (e. g., textbooks, computers), classroom assistance (e. g., instructional assistants), and instructional guidance to do their jobs well?*

Other kinds of support offer more specific resources for classroom practice, in particular, material support (e.g., textbooks, computers), classroom assistance (e.g., paraprofessional aides, support services to address specific student needs), and instructional guidance (e.g., from instructional coaches or expert colleagues). Our survey results indicate that, *while a majority of teachers note a number of these supports are in place, teachers often question the adequacy of the materials or assistance for particular aspects of their work.* For example, 41 percent report computers and appropriate software to be insufficient, and a third perceive academic and psychological support services for students to be lacking. These concerns are more acute at certain grade levels than others. Nearly half of the middle school teachers report a lack of textbooks and workbooks, as compared to a quarter of elementary and high school teachers, while 45 percent of elementary teachers view academic support services for their students (e.g., specialized services for students with special learning needs) to be insufficient, compared to slightly less than a third of middle and high school teachers.

Frequent lack of appropriate material resources. The availability of material and resource supports appears to have a particular role in teachers' struggle to serve a diverse student population well, as described in Chapter 3, where we noted that nearly half (43 percent) of teachers who work with ELL students, and especially those with less teaching experience or who are working in high-poverty schools, indicate that the lack of appropriate curricula and texts impacts their ability to serve these students. More generally, while many *teachers see the lack of material supports as presenting a challenge to their teaching of ELL students, especially teachers in high-poverty schools* (76 percent) report this as a challenge, in contrast to only 63 percent of teachers at low-poverty schools. Noting a similar concern but for a different group of students, over two-thirds of high school teachers say they lack appropriate curricula and texts for students with identified disabilities (compared with 59 and 53 percent, respectively, of middle and elementary school teachers).

Lack of classroom assistance and academic support services for students. As pointed out in Chapter 3, the lack of instructional assistance in the classroom may have particular ramifications for serving a diverse student population effectively, but it hints at the possibility of a potential problem in the school. The extent to which the school offers support services that address students' learning needs is a concern for many teachers. When pushed to rate the adequacy of such services overall, 39 percent of the teachers said that "additional academic support for students"—defined as tutorials, homework club, study groups, etc.—was *inadequate*. These patterns suggest that there are concerns in the workplace environment from *the perspective of many teachers in the state*.

Lack of instructional guidance. Regarding help that teachers might get with teaching issues they encounter in the classroom, *there appears to be a general lack of guidance from others who might be in a position to offer instructional leadership*. In those instances where a department head, teacher on special assignment, or content area specialist is available,⁸ the majority of teachers (58, 74, and 73 percent, respectively) report having received "no or only some guidance" from such people, rather than "a good deal or great deal of guidance." Accordingly, teachers appear to turn to their colleagues for help, yet as noted earlier, doing so is likely to be helpful only when their colleagues possess the right instructional expertise.

School administrators can also be a source of instructional guidance, yet here, principals and assistant principals appear to be missing an important opportunity. As displayed in Table 4.3, *while teachers see their school leaders as able to identify good instructional practice, most are not getting specific kinds of help from these leaders*. More than half (54 percent) somewhat or strongly disagree

⁸ Note that in a large number of instances—48, 56, and 39 percent, respectively—such individuals are not even present.

that they regularly discuss their instructional practice with the principal or assistant principal. Yet there are hints in the data that such attention can pay off. Among those teachers whose school leaders pay regular attention to their instructional practice, 34 percent feel very prepared to ready their students for state assessments, as compared with 25 percent who receive infrequent or no attention from their school leaders.

Table 4.3: Teachers’ Perceptions of Selected Aspects of School Leaders’ Support

School Leaders’ Actions: The principal (or assistant principal)...	Somewhat or Strongly Disagree	Somewhat or Strongly Agree
...is able to identify good instructional practice.	19%	79%
...discusses my instructional practices with me regularly.	54%	45%
...is an effective manager who makes the school run smoothly.	29%	70%

Sample (Year 1): N=364

Missing responses account for approximately 1%

Question 4: Are school leaders creating workplace environments that motivate and guide teachers’ work effectively?

Instructional leadership is not the only thing teachers need or may want from their school leaders. Throughout the surveys, teachers’ responses to questions about school leadership clearly indicate a consistent finding: *the quality of school leadership represents an important working condition for classroom teachers, in the context of school improvement.* For example, three-quarters of teachers responded that a school administrator is a somewhat to very helpful source of support in the implementation of standards-based practices, while 78 percent of teachers state that their school leaders’ support in dealing with parents and students constitutes a moderate to strong reason to stay at their school. In effect, as we noted last year, teachers who are the most satisfied with their school’s policies and practices are also those who see their school leaders create working conditions that allow a school to run smoothly and in which teachers feel valued (note the high percentage in Table 4.3 of teachers who see their principal as helping the building to run smoothly). Teachers also make it clear that their school leaders could be responsible for the structural supports noted earlier: the stronger the overall management of the school the more likely teachers are to indicate they have adequate time for planning and preparing lessons (for more information see Knapp, Elfers, & Plecki, 2004).

While teachers in our sample are generally satisfied with the school leadership they experience, in some school settings, leadership support is less consistent. Most notably, *teachers in high-poverty schools consistently indicate the greatest degree*

of dissatisfaction with the quality of leadership support. For example, results from our first series of surveys shows that 45 percent of teachers in high-poverty schools have considered leaving teaching as a profession due to a lack of leadership, compared with only 22 percent of teachers at low-poverty schools. In addition, teachers in high-poverty schools report more frequently that their principals are less effective as building and staff managers than do teachers at schools with lower poverty rates. Curiously, teachers in the Central Puget Sound area are consistently more critical of their school leaders than teachers elsewhere in the state. These views of leadership effectiveness in high- and low-poverty schools may reflect a broader syndrome of conditions that are typical of these settings, as we discuss further in Chapter 6.

The level of schooling may also be a part of the story of leadership support. Teachers in elementary schools and, to an extent in high schools, are less critical of their school leaders than their counterparts in middle schools. *Nearly a third of the middle school teachers, for, example, thought that their school principal's communication skills, fairness, and inclusion of staff in decision making might constitute a moderate or strong reason to leave the school,* by contrast with a fifth or fewer of the teachers in elementary or high schools. The pattern suggests that there may be a need for more attention to the quality of leadership and leadership support at this level.

One final matter concerns the stability of leadership in the school. Teachers are most likely to get good leadership support from individuals who have been in the school for a while. Our analyses of retention and mobility underscore several important ideas (Plecki et al., 2005). School principals move more often than teachers, and there is some connection between instability of school leaders and instability of teachers.

In sum, effective school leadership support helps create working environments in which teachers have the right time structures, opportunities to collaborate with each other as well as their leaders, are included in school-wide decision-making processes, and feel treated fairly and supported by their leaders. Moreover, school leaders are knowledgeable and skilled about how to deal with the student population the school serves. Although good school leadership is in place in a number of schools in Washington state, our survey results over the course of two years suggest that more could be done to prepare school leaders for a complex set of tasks that include managing a school to “run smoothly” and making sure that teachers are well-equipped to bring all students to standard. In particular, schools with greater degrees of diversity appear to provide challenges that not all leaders are yet able to meet.

Summary: Workplace Environments and Leadership Support for Teachers' Work

Clearly, teachers have access to various potential supports in the immediate context of their schools. Especially important to them are their colleagues and the extent to which a collegial community has developed in the school. Teachers' collegial communities seem to be offering them a degree of guidance and assistance in many instances that teachers value highly. While there is no guarantee that colleagues are indeed helpful—or even open to reform ideas—the existence of strong collegial communities seems for the most part to be supportive of reform goals.

Material support and classroom assistance appear to be uneven, not always what teachers feel they need to get the job done well. The lack of these resources in many instances appears especially noticeable in situations where teachers face a greater diversity of student needs.

Organizational structures and the allocation of time in the school—e.g., to enable teachers to work more collaboratively—are also critical resources for teachers' work. Where these supports have been provided, there is evidence that reform goals are enhanced. These matters trace in part to school leadership support, which teachers indicate is of considerable importance to them.

While many of these school-level working conditions are particular to the school and mostly influenced by school-level actions, they are necessary for district and state policymakers to understand, and can be encouraged or enhanced by judicious action at the policy level.

CHAPTER 5

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND WASHINGTON'S TEACHERS

Teachers improve their instructional practice through a continual process of informal and formal *professional learning*. Whether by enhancing their subject matter knowledge, broadening their understanding of pedagogy, or gaining new insights into how schoolchildren learn, the state's teacher workforce has the potential to enrich their instructional expertise throughout their careers. To support this learning, Washington state has invested in teachers' knowledge and skills through a variety of strategies, including additional time for professional development activities in state-supported Learning Improvement Days (LIDs), some opportunities for the mentoring of new teachers, and instructional support in specific subject areas. Districts have supplemented these investments with their own resources, in varying ways and degrees. Given that Washington's teacher workforce is relatively stable and has low overall rates of attrition, these investments are sensible, with a potential long-term "return" on the investment.

There is much professional learning to do in the context of state education reform. By introducing the ambitious learning standards, curricular guidelines, aligned assessments, and accountability measures described in Chapter 2, the state reform initiative has placed additional responsibilities on teachers who are charged with implementing these reforms. The instructional challenge is great, and so is the challenge of learning how to make it work for *all* students.

Key Policy Questions and Survey Answers

In this chapter we examine professional learning within three contexts: the context of state reform, the context of classroom practice, and the context of the teaching profession, as seen through the eyes of the state's teachers. Within this framework we examine how well the state has supported teachers in making professional changes with regard to the education reforms, the recent focus of professional development activities, the fit between what teachers and students need and what is provided, and the value of professional learning as teachers see it. In relation to each context, we address a central question that can inform further policy action:

1. *What has state reform prompted teachers to learn and how has it supported this learning?*

-
2. *In what ways and in what forms is currently available professional development contributing to the improvement of teachers' classroom practice? How useful and relevant is it to the needs of teachers and students?*
 3. *How do leaders make opportunities for professional learning part of teachers' work, and how do teachers respond to these opportunities?*

The surveys offer answers to these questions, however teachers responses vary in noticeable ways, depending on their experience level, and the nature of the school setting in which they work.

Question 1: *What has state reform prompted teachers to learn and how has it supported this learning?*

An ambitious reform agenda such as the one adopted by the state in the last decade may prompt various kinds of professional learning. As previous chapters have discussed, teachers find themselves trying to teach an increasingly diverse student population and to help them meet the demanding learning standards set by the state. This situation sets the stage for teachers to engage in many kinds of new learning—assuming that there are incentives and opportunities for engaging in this learning.

From the teachers' perspective, *strong incentives and good opportunities for professional learning are absent all too often*. While teachers in the sample acknowledge some benefits of state education reform, over half (55 percent) indicate that the reform has brought about little or no greater access to professional learning activities, and nearly three-quarters (73 percent) indicate few or no incentives to improve teaching. This is particularly striking given the critical role teachers play in helping students to reach the goals set by the state. Furthermore, nearly three-quarters of the teachers (73 percent) indicate they have had too little help in translating broad statements into grade-specific goals. Readyng students for state assessments is also a challenge for teachers, and as noted in Chapter 2, relatively few teachers (29 percent) indicate they feel “very prepared” to do this.

That said, it should be acknowledged at the outset that state reform has not impacted all teachers equally, nor do all have the same kinds of professional learning needs. For that reason, we have paid attention to differences between novice teachers and more experienced colleagues, teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools, those in high- and low-poverty schools, and those in different regions of the state. We have also contrasted the full range of teachers across the state with our supplementary sample of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs), individuals who have been able to demonstrate

“accomplished” teaching practice (and who have been the recipients of powerful forms of professional development). For some teachers—novice teachers, for example—the reform has opened up new learning opportunities. For others, it offers relatively little or at least nothing new, 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,” as described in Chapter 4. Regardless, the reform has clearly affected the topics addressed by professional development.

The focusing effect of standards and assessments. While they may not have provided strong incentives or numerous opportunities for professional learning, *state standards and assessments have had a focusing effect on the kinds of professional development opportunities available to the state’s classroom teachers.* Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs), the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), and Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) have become a regular part of teachers’ vocabulary and professional practice. Since districts and schools are the most frequent providers of professional development, they often determine what these activities will be. In recent years, much of the professional development offered by schools and districts has focused on one or more aspects of the state or local reform agenda. 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).

In the same sense, *state reform appears to have prompted teachers to learn more about certain aspects of the reform initiative that are central to its success.* 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, subject matter, and the alignment of classroom teaching with state learning standards. These areas of professional learning coincide well with the aspects of classroom practice, described in Chapter 2, where teachers feel the reform has had its greatest effects.

Opportunities to learn about working with diverse student populations. While the pattern just described affirms that state reform is impacting some aspects of teachers’ knowledge and skills, the opportunity for learning in other areas of professional practice may be missing. For example, *despite the emphasis on helping all children learn, state reform has prompted a majority of teachers to learn “little” or “not at all” about how to help students of color succeed, to work effectively with linguistically diverse student populations, or to help students with identified disabilities meet standard,* a sharp contrast with other areas of professional learning prompted by the reform (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1: 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%

Sample (Year 2): N=349

As the figures in Table 5.1 suggest, teachers may need more support for helping an increasingly diverse student population learn. This is a nationwide issue, not just an issue in Washington state. Nationally, the professional development content areas reporting the smallest participation by teachers were “those addressing the needs of students with limited English proficiency” (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2002, p. 93). Also at the bottom of the list of professional development activities attended by teachers nationally were those addressing the needs of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Teachers in our state also indicate relatively little opportunity to learn about working with linguistically or culturally diverse learners, or those with special learning needs. For example, consider the contrasting frequencies of participation in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: Most Frequent Foci of Professional Development over the Last Three Years

The following topics have been a focus of professional learning opportunities in the last three years.	Percent of Teachers Who Participated
Strategies for addressing conflict, bullying or harassment	80%
The achievement gap and strategies to address it	66%
The effects of poverty on student learning	66%
Understanding and appreciating cultural differences	62%
Instructional strategies for students with identified disabilities	53%
Instructional strategies for ELL students	36%
Assessment strategies for ELL students	30%
How to work with newcomers to the U.S.	15%

Sample (Year 2): N=316

While more than 60 percent of teachers have one or more English language learners in their classroom, relatively few teachers have participated in professional development regarding instructional strategies for ELL students

(36 percent), assessment strategies for ELL students (30 percent), or ways to work with newcomers to the U.S. (15 percent).

To be sure, for teachers who work in high-poverty schools, state education reform has prompted them more frequently to learn about how to help students of color or ELL 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 state education reform as a stimulus for learning about how to serve a diverse student population.*

Differing professional learning needs in response to reform. Years of teaching experience, school level (elementary, middle, or high school), and regional location matter in the relation between state reform and professional learning opportunities. Since the reforms in Washington were first phased in at the elementary level, elementary teachers have had more time and experience with changing requirements and expectations. Similar issues are now facing teachers at all grade levels, but only recently have Grade Level Expectations been developed for some subject areas at the secondary level.

In this regard, *teachers give a clear indication that not everyone needs the same types of learning experiences, nor do they face the same challenges.* For example, experience matters when it comes to knowledge of supports for special student populations. Novice teachers are less likely to know about particular programs and efforts by their school and district on behalf of these students, and they are most likely to find related professional development experiences useful. Consequently, novice teachers may benefit from different forms of professional learning and support than their more experienced colleagues.

Teachers' regional location also influences the way the state reform has impacted their professional learning. Teachers in Eastern Washington are more likely than their Western Washington counterparts to indicate that state reform has prompted their learning in some respects (e.g., regarding the subject matter they teach). 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).

Question 2: *In what ways and in what forms is currently available professional development contributing to the improvement of teachers' classroom practice? How useful and relevant is it to the needs of teachers and students?*

Ultimately, what matters most in schools happens in classroom interactions between teachers, students, and content. In the classroom, teachers' subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills are translated into teaching and learning opportunities with students. The crucial issue for professional development is that it contribute directly to classroom practice, thereby meeting both the teachers' and learners' needs.

Nationwide, many teachers do not consider the professional development they receive to be valuable or relevant (Farkas & Duffett, 2003). The mismatch may occur for many reasons, but chief among them is that "these activities are frequently short in duration, unrelated to individual classrooms, and unconnected with the work of colleagues" (Neville & Robinson, 2003, p. 8). To its credit, Washington state has issued guidelines for effective professional development practice.

What makes professional development useful and relevant to classroom practice. Fortunately, the picture of professional development experiences that emerges from Washington teachers is not so problematic. In short, Washington teachers indicate that *the professional development they have experienced over the last 18 months is contributing to their classroom practice in several ways, though it may not address teachers' concerns and students' needs to the extent that it could.* Overall, the great majority of teachers see their professional development as "somewhat useful" or "very useful" (83 percent). Three-quarters of the teachers indicate that their professional development experiences during a recent 18-month period have not been a waste of time. For nearly two-thirds of teachers, professional development has included opportunities to work productively with other staff at their schools. Furthermore, teachers point to particular problems of practice for which their professional learning experiences were helpful.

Nonetheless, the survey responses give unmistakable clues that substantial improvement in professional learning support is both possible and needed:

- Half of the teachers in the survey indicate that they have the right content knowledge only "sometimes."
- Only 26 percent of teachers feel they "always have the right professional development support." These findings are troubling because they indicate that teachers may not have what they need to work effectively with students.
- Only half of the teachers agree that 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.

Since districts and schools are often the direct providers of professional learning, it is possible that they are often not offering as rich or sustained a set of professional learning experiences as they could or should. To be sure, districts and schools vary greatly 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 ESDs, professional associations, or universities. One of the characteristics of high-quality professional development is that it is developed with extensive participation of teachers, principals, parents and administrators. However, *a substantial proportion of teachers in the sample, especially those with the least teaching experience and those working in middle schools, report no involvement in decisions regarding the content of their professional development.*

The usefulness of school-based professional learning opportunities. Teachers participating in the surveys offer insight into forms of professional development that for them offer the most useful contributions toward improving classroom practice. *The most prevalent forms of professional development—attending workshops and conferences—are least consistently seen as “very useful.”* For example, half of the teachers declare that professional development opportunities available in their district do not address issues that concern them. *Overall, teachers tend to find school-based efforts more effective than district-sponsored opportunities—especially “regularly scheduled collaborations with other staff.”*

The form of the activity, of course, does not tell the whole story about what makes these professional learning activities useful to teachers. When examining particular professional development topics related to state’s standards-based reform agenda, activities 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, is viewed particularly favorably, with 57 percent finding this activity “very useful” (and another 40 percent finding it “somewhat useful”). Of those teachers who collect and examine school-wide data on student performance, 87 percent find this activity to be “very useful” or “somewhat useful.” Among specific professional development opportunities directed toward learning to work with diverse student populations in the last three years, the most frequently cited by teachers include:

- Collecting and/or examining school-wide data on student performance (76 percent)
- Developing classroom-based assessments (75 percent)
- Regularly-scheduled collaboration with other teachers (73 percent)
- Developing school standards and assessments (64 percent)

Appropriately, *teachers in high-poverty schools are somewhat more likely than their counterparts in low-poverty schools to report greater participation in school-based professional learning associated with serving a diverse student population.* Teachers in high-poverty schools note they have participated in professional development focusing on the needs of English language learners and historically underserved racial and ethnic groups with somewhat greater frequency than their colleagues in low-poverty schools.

What motivates participation in professional learning activities. Two different forces seem to make the most difference in motivating teachers to take part in professional development—collegial and normative support. Collegial support is the most immediate and common form of support for teachers, and as noted in Chapter 4, teachers see this as a valued working condition. As a context for professional learning, colleagues can clearly offer an important source of new insights into teaching practice. Over half of the teachers indicate they receive “a good deal” or “a great deal” of guidance from other teachers, with a majority (58 percent) reporting that they meet with other teachers at least weekly to discuss common challenges and problems. This is especially true of elementary and middle school teachers, most of whom find encouragement from their colleagues to improve the quality of their teaching and learning as a result of state reform (56 and 61 percent, respectively, compared with only 39 percent of high school teachers).

Normative support for professional learning stems from the expectations and requirements of the school, district, or state towards professional learning. There are multiple reasons for teachers’ participation in professional activities, including the desire to improve one’s own teaching, norms in school culture, and state or local requirements. Overall, two-thirds of the teachers see their participation in professional development as a cultural norm in their school, though less so in high schools (58 percent) compared with elementary and middle schools (72 and 70 percent, respectively). On the other hand, a third of teachers in the 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.

Usefulness and role of professional learning at different stages of teachers’ careers. The benefit teachers derive from professional development depends, in part, on the stage in their careers at which they find themselves. *Teachers in the sample with the least amount of experience are most likely to describe their professional development experiences as 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.

There is a striking exception to the pattern just noted. National Board Certified Teachers—who are regarded as accomplished teachers—are especially likely to report having benefited from their participation in professional development. To be sure, by virtue of the intensive certification program to which these teachers have access, they have had a substantively different type of professional development experience, which focuses on structured and sustained training, use of student data, evaluation by colleagues, and intensive reflection on teaching practices. Nevertheless, it is instructive to see how the professional development experiences of these teachers are more positive in many regards than the response of colleagues from the statewide sample, as shown in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Teachers’ Views of Professional Development in a Recent 18 Month Period (Differences between NBCTs and Standing Sample)

My professional development experiences...	Percent Somewhat or Strongly Disagree	Percent Somewhat Agree	Percent Strongly Agree
...were useful to me			
State Sample	17%	52%	31%
WA NBCTs	8%	47%	43%
...led me to make changes in my teaching			
State Sample	15%	65%	19%
WA NBCTs	11%	46%	43%
...were directly applicable to my classroom needs			
State Sample	22%	50%	27%
WA NBCTs	13%	47%	40%
...helped me prepare my students for state assessment			
State Sample	33%	48%	19%
WA NBCTs	24%	43%	31%
...positively impacted student learning in my classroom			
State Sample	19%	52%	28%
WA NBCTs	10%	44%	44%

Sample (Year 1): State Sample=350, NBCTs=134

In short, it would appear that *NBCTs are individuals who have learned how to make professional development work for them, or to seek out the kinds of professional learning experiences that would have that effect, or both.* In turn, given their leadership roles in their respective schools and districts, they are also likely to share what they have learned with other teachers.

Question 3: *How do leaders make opportunities for professional learning part of teachers' work, and how do teachers respond to these opportunities?*

Teachers' professional learning is guided in part by local and state leaders whose view of professional work may lead them to construct specific opportunities for teachers. They may do this by allocating time and money to professional development and by creating structures or arrangements that encourage professional learning (e.g., mentoring or coaching arrangements, study groups, academies and institutes). Also, teachers' knowledge about their own professional learning needs must be taken into account. Our surveys shed some light on these matters, by demonstrating how opportunities for professional learning have or have not been built into teachers' work, and how professional learning opportunities serve as a motivation to stay in teaching.

Structuring time and resources to support professional learning. Teachers participate in various forms of professional development, often involving workshops and conferences, and collaboration with other teachers. *Teachers do not limit themselves to only one kind of professional learning opportunity—nearly three-quarters had participated in at least three different types of professional development activities during an 18 month period, though access to certain types of professional development may be limited for teachers in certain settings (e.g., geographically isolated locations).* The question arises how the state, district, or school make all this possible.

In short, state and local leaders allocate time for professional learning, and make decisions about how to prioritize teachers' use of this time in relation to teaching or other responsibilities. In many cases, districts provide time for professional development beyond the minimum required by the state. On average (median), districts mandate three professional development days—one more than the two days required by the state. *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.* However, a quarter of the teachers report having only two days (median), the minimum required by the state.

An essential pattern emerging from the survey data is that *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. The absence of time and place for professional learning within the work 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. While it is possible that some teachers try to compensate for what is not built into their working day—over half the teachers indicate that they are able to *make* some time in the school schedule for professional development activities—this clearly doesn’t substitute for a more regular investment of time for this important function.

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, 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.

Mentoring as part of the professional work of the school. A different kind of “professional development” can be built into the school day through the activities of individuals (principals or assistant principals, school-based staff developers, instructional coaches) who act as mentors, coaches, or “critical friends” for the classroom teachers. As discussed in Chapter 4, many classroom teachers report they do not have access to various kinds of instructional support, though they turn informally to colleagues on a regular basis.

An important exception to the pattern just noted concerns one-on-one mentoring and coaching arrangements, often set up for the least experienced teachers.

Here, schools and districts facilitate the connections between novice teachers and colleagues who have greater expertise. Through formal and informal ways, this sort of investment in teachers' professional growth can make a difference throughout their careers.

The surveys suggest that *inexperienced teachers are gaining greater access to mentors now than in years gone by, and that they find these relationships helpful*. Substantial numbers (42 percent) of teachers in the sample have participated at some point in their careers in mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching, either as a mentor or recipient of mentoring, and the majority find this activity "somewhat useful" or "very useful." Furthermore, the benefits of the mentoring relationship are mutual. Teachers indicate that *the act of assuming a mentoring role can itself have powerful effects on the professional learning of experienced teachers*. Of those in the survey who had taken on mentoring roles at one time or another (one third of the sample), half note an increase in their leadership and coaching skills as a result of this experience. A third also indicate 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 indicate having learned "a fair amount" or "a great deal").

As might be expected, accomplished teachers like those who have received National Board certification frequently serve as formally assigned mentors. And the evidence suggests that such teachers bring key capabilities and experience to the task. While they are similar to teachers throughout the sample in many ways, National Board Certified Teachers report feeling more prepared to teach the curriculum, ready students for state assessments and manage diverse learning needs than teachers in the state sample. As noted in earlier chapters, 59 percent of NBCTs feel "very prepared" to ready students for state assessments compared with 29 percent of the state sample, and they are more likely to express confidence in their ability to manage diverse learning needs in the classroom (50 percent feel "very prepared" compared with 34 percent of the state sample). In addition, NBCTs are more likely to see a great deal of relevance of EALRs and WASL to classroom practice, and to report "a great deal" of benefit of reform for student learning. NBCTs, along with other accomplished teachers, are in an excellent position to mentor their less experienced colleagues.

The role of professional learning in teachers' careers. Teachers value professional development opportunities and consider them in decisions to stay or leave their school or pursue other professional options. A third of teachers in the sample indicate that lack of time and resources for professional learning are a "moderate" or "strong" reason to leave their current school, as Table 5.4 indicates.

Table 5.4: Professional Development and Reasons to Stay or Leave a School

	Strong Reason to Stay	Moderate Reason to Stay	Moderate or Strong Reason to Leave	Not a Factor
The value placed on professional development	35%	43%	12%	9%
The number of opportunities for professional learning	30%	46%	13%	10%
Degree to which time is built into our school day, week, or year to enable professional learning	20%	36%	34%	9%
Resources or financial incentives to support professional learning	20%	36%	33%	11%

Sample (Year 2): N=313

National Board Certified Teachers hold stronger views than other teachers regarding opportunities for professional development and the influence it has on whether to stay at or leave their school. Across a range of factors, including the number and types of opportunities, time built in to the school day, support for mentors and access to instructional coaches and other professionals, NBCTs were more likely to leave their school because of these issues than other teachers (see Table 5.5). As discussed earlier, NBCTs are active consumers of professional development, and so it is not surprising to see them more willing to leave a school, if the situation didn't offer them avenues for continued professional learning.

Table 5.5: Professional Development and Reasons to Leave the School

Percent of teachers indicating a "moderate" or "strong" reason to leave:	WA NBCTs	Standing Sample
Degree to which time is built into the school day, week or year to enable professional learning	44%	34%
How the school mentors and supports inexperienced teachers	41%	23%
The fit between these opportunities and what I feel I need to be learning	34%	22%
The number of opportunities for professional learning	34%	13%
Presence of staff who can act as instructional coaches	30%	19%

Sample (Year 2): Standing Sample=313, NBCTs=87

These patterns are significant for several reasons. First, school districts, and the state as a whole, need to consider what it takes to invest in a viable teacher leadership cadre, to make it possible for people like those who participate in the National Board process to find continuing intellectual challenge and professional growth opportunities in the teaching profession. Second, there is a high likelihood of payback from these investments, in the sense that teacher leaders are likely to help a number of their colleagues over time.

Summary: Opportunities and Conditions Supporting Teachers' Professional Learning

The story of professional learning for Washington's classroom teachers, in the context of the state's reform initiative, is one of partial successes and missed opportunities. On the one hand, it is clear that professional development is somewhat aligned with state reform goals, and that teachers are participating in it, beyond the minimum amount of time allotted. They tend not to see this as a waste of their time, and their responses belie some widely held stereotypes of professional development noted in national studies. What is more, Washington teachers are finding some aspects of their professional development experiences useful.

On the other hand, some aspects of their response to reform are problematic—their confidence and competence in serving the learning needs of all members of a diverse student population—are apparently not well addressed through existing professional development arrangements. Even though teachers in high-poverty schools are receiving professional development that is more tuned to culturally and linguistically diverse student populations, the frequency of participation in these events is short of what may be needed to bolster teachers' capabilities. Furthermore, the means and resources supporting professional learning, to which most teachers have access, are often not configured to realize the most effective arrangements. For example, professional development that is regularly built in to the school day, and adequate access to high-quality instructional leadership, are two strategies that teachers value and could be made available.

Given how much there is for teachers to learn in making their classroom practice standards-based and equally effective for *all* learners, there is work to be done at all levels of the system to seize these opportunities.

CHAPTER 6

INFLUENCES ON TEACHERS' CAREERS: ENTRY, CONTINUITY, MOBILITY

Teachers play a critical role in helping students acquire essential knowledge and skills. Consequently, when schools and districts are unable to attract and retain qualified staff, the end result can be dire for students, and costly for institutions. For this reason, it is important to understand what attracts teachers to particular teaching positions and what motivates them to stay, or causes them to consider other professional options. This chapter focuses on teachers' career choices and the factors that influence their decisions to stay in their school and in the profession.

In recent years, questions of teacher retention and turnover have sparked considerable debate in some policy circles. Earlier statewide analysis of teacher retention in Washington indicates a relative stability of the overall workforce, though individual schools may vary dramatically with regard to teacher turnover (Plecki et al., 2005). The earlier analysis refutes several myths regarding teacher retention and mobility within Washington state. For example, despite widely held beliefs that the state is losing huge numbers of teachers across any five-year period, these analyses demonstrated that from 1998 to 2002, 58 percent of teachers statewide were still teaching in their same school and 72 percent were still in the same district. And contrary to a widely held perception that half of all new teachers have left after five years, only 25 percent had left the Washington education system across after this same five-year period. However, novice teachers clearly move with greater frequency than their more experienced colleagues, and this may be due to more than just the natural process of settling into a new profession.

Key Policy Questions and Answers from Surveys and Database Analyses

These overall patterns offer helpful reference points for understanding the career trajectories of the state's teachers, but they stop short of addressing important questions regarding what motivates teachers to stay or move from one school or district to another, or to seek out other professional opportunities. In particular, the following questions deserve more complete and systematic answers than Washington policymakers have yet been able to assemble:

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1. *Why do Washington teachers choose teaching as a career, and stay in teaching or entertain alternatives?*
 2. *What kinds of initial teacher preparation launch Washington teachers' careers and how well does this preparation match with their eventual teaching assignments?*
 3. *Why do teachers stay in their schools?*
 4. *Why do teachers consider leaving a school or district?*
 5. *How do teachers' reasons for staying or leaving differ in low- and high-poverty schools?*

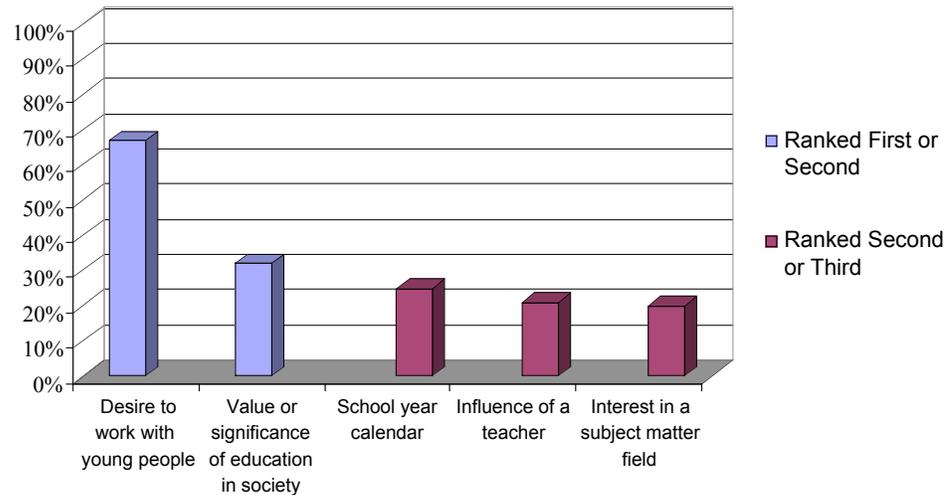
Answers to these questions can do much to inform current and emerging deliberations at state and local levels concerning the recruitment, preparation, and ongoing support of teachers across their careers. The information presented in this chapter integrates the two data sources described in Chapter 1. The earlier analysis of state databases provides information on retention and mobility trends statewide, while survey data complement these findings by investigating the reasons behind teacher movement and issues of career satisfaction. From these data sources come both breadth and depth of insight into the factors that influence the preparation, retention, and mobility of teachers in Washington.

Question 1: *Why do Washington teachers choose teaching as a career, and stay in teaching or entertain alternatives?*

The survey data collected from Washington teachers across the last two years provides a solid basis for probing more deeply into the factors associated with teachers' original reasons for becoming a teacher and what influences them to stay in the profession. The surveys also shed light on issues that prompt teachers to consider other career options besides classroom teaching.

Reasons for entry into teaching. Most teachers in this state enter the profession for altruistic reasons, and very few individuals indicate that extrinsic factors such as salary or benefits were important considerations. However, external conditions can influence teachers' job satisfaction and their desire to remain in their current position, and in teaching as a career. When asked to rank their top three choices from a list of reasons for joining the profession, teachers commonly report either a desire to work with young people (67 percent ranked this first or second) or the value or significance of education in society (32 percent ranked this first or second). Teachers mentioned with less frequency reasons associated with the nature of the work, such as the school year calendar, interest in a subject-matter field, or influence of a teacher (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: Major Reasons Teachers Give for Originally Deciding to Become a Teacher



Sample (Year 1): N=361

The teachers' reasons vary only slightly by school poverty measures, years of experience, and region of the state. The most substantive difference in responses occurs among high school teachers, who rank interest in subject matter field more highly as a primary reason for entering the profession, thereby sharply differentiating themselves from their counterparts teaching in earlier grades. Forty-seven percent of high school teachers cite this as their first or second reason for joining the profession, as compared with 16 percent of middle school teachers and 13 percent of elementary teachers.

General satisfaction with teaching. Most Washington teachers in the sample (75 percent) report being satisfied with their choice of profession and plan to remain in teaching. Asked in a different way in the survey series, two-thirds of the state's classroom teachers (67 percent) say that teaching is a good lifelong career choice, and another 19 percent describe teaching as a good occupation for now, but can't say for how long. Only three percent of teachers in the sample do not view teaching as a good fit or are actively pursuing alternative career options.

This is consistent with findings from earlier analyses (Plecki, Elfers, & Knapp, 2003), which suggest that, statewide, Washington does not appear to have a teacher shortage, though certain subject-matter fields and regions of the state may have more difficulty finding qualified candidates. As such, this serves as another indicator of the overall stability of the workforce. Most teachers in the sample assert that they would certainly (41 percent) or probably (32 percent) become a teacher again if they could go back to their college days. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) plan to remain in teaching as long as they are able or until retirement.

Veteran teachers (those with 15 or more years of experience) and teachers in Eastern Washington report the highest levels of satisfaction in teaching. Over 80 percent

of veteran teachers report teaching is a good lifelong career choice for them, compared with 56 percent of novice teachers. A larger percentage of Eastern Washington teachers (75 percent) view teaching as a good lifelong career choice, compared with Western Washington teachers (64 percent), and fewer have considered other professional options outside of education.

Consideration of other professional opportunities within education. Washington teachers do consider other professional opportunities in education outside of the classroom, and when they do, schools and districts may continue to benefit from their expertise. *Most frequently, teachers considering other professional opportunities in education have in mind collegial leadership positions which enable teachers to draw on their classroom experience.* Forty-five percent of those who consider other opportunities somewhat or very seriously would choose roles as teacher leaders or teacher developers. The majority of teachers have *not* considered a position as a school principal or assistant principal nor a district leadership position.

National Board Certified Teachers have considered other professional opportunities within education more seriously than teachers in the statewide sample. While a majority have considered roles with significant teacher leadership responsibilities and as teacher developers, most are not interested

Table 6.1: Other Professional Opportunities in Education Teachers Have Considered (Comparison between NBCTs and State Sample)

	Not at All	A Little	Somewhat Seriously	Very Seriously
A role with significant teacher leadership responsibilities				
State Sample	24%	29%	25%	20%
WA NBCTs	6%	15%	24%	55%
A teacher developer role (coach, staff developer, mentor, etc.)				
State Sample	24%	31%	22%	22%
WA NBCTs	5%	12%	21%	63%
A position as school principal or assistant principal				
State Sample	63%	17%	10%	9%
WA NBCTs	51%	28%	10%	10%
A district office leadership position (e.g., curriculum coordinator, teacher on special assignment, assistant superintendent, etc.)				
State Sample	53%	20%	15%	10%
WA NBCTs	23%	17%	28%	31%
A teacher educator in a teacher preparation program				
State Sample	39%	28%	18%	14%
WA NBCTs	7%	25%	25%	43%

Sample (Year 2): State Sample=313, NBCTs=87

in school administrative positions as a school principal or assistant principal, as Table 6.1 illustrates.

Compared to their elementary school colleagues, middle school and high school teachers express greater interest in roles related to content area expertise and leadership, such as positions as a curriculum director, assistant principal, or other administrator.

Other career options. When viewed in the aggregate, the teachers' responses paint a picture of relative satisfaction and stability in the state's teaching force. However, it is noteworthy that *a majority (60 percent) of teachers in the sample have considered leaving the profession at some point. And over a third of the teachers have considered a period of non-employment to pursue other goals.*

Furthermore, Washington has a substantial number of beginning teachers who are entering the workforce at a later age. In 2000, nearly one-fifth of teachers (18 percent) with less than one year of experience were 40 years old or older (Plecki, Elfers, & Knapp, 2003). Consequently, it is not surprising that 44 percent of the teachers in the sample report having worked in another profession prior to teaching.

Leavers from the Washington education system. The characteristics of teachers themselves, in particular, their age and level of experience, make a difference in whether they leave the profession. From state database analyses, we know that *the oldest, the most experienced, and the least experienced teachers are the most likely to leave the Washington education system altogether.*

Though a database cannot offer a full account of the reasons for leaving teaching, one can get some clues from the available data. *Only a fifth of the teachers leave the Washington education system altogether after a five-year period, and of these, many are likely retirements* (Plecki et al., 2005). The extent to which retirement is a likely reason for leaving the system can be estimated by analyzing the age distribution of those who exited the Washington system after five years (1998-2002). Of these teachers, 41 percent were age 56 or above in 2002-03, and an additional 15 percent were in the range of 51-55 year old. Based on this data, we can estimate that retirement was a likely reason for the departure of a sizeable portion of those who left the system—probably close to half of the leavers. It is also possible that some of those left only temporarily, and may have re-entered in a subsequent year.

In a related study, an analysis of two cohorts of beginning teachers (1996 and 1997) reveals that approximately 28 percent left teaching in Washington after five years (Plecki, Elfers, & Knapp, 2003). By comparison, teachers with between five and 25 years of experience show the lowest rates of attrition, with 88 percent retained in some capacity after five years. It should be noted, however, that *while*

most novice teachers in Washington are not fleeing to other professions, they are more likely to experience professional moves between schools and districts during this early period of their career. As a result of this database work, we note that understanding teacher mobility is likely to be more important to policymakers than delving into the reasons why teachers leave teaching altogether.

Question 2: *What kinds of initial teacher preparation launch Washington teachers' careers and how well does this preparation match with their eventual teaching assignments?*

Survey responses confirm what many have suspected about the initial preparation of the state's teacher workforce. *Most teachers in the sample (70 percent) received their professional training from local colleges and universities within Washington.* The remainder received their training in 28 other states—five percent in Oregon, four percent in California, and three percent in Idaho. Two percent of the teachers received their formal preparation for teaching outside of the United States.

Regional factors appear to play a substantial role in where teachers receive their preparation and where they end up teaching. Among the teachers who received their formal professional training in Washington, most received it from an institution in the region where they are currently teaching. Washington State University's Pullman campus and Central Washington University's Ellensburg campus are exceptions, in that teachers trained in these institutions tend to be scattered in schools across the state. Because they are two of the largest teacher preparation institutions in Washington and because the majority of schools are located in the Western half of the state, it is logical that teacher candidates from these institutions would find employment in other regions of the state.

The Washington colleges and universities (including branch campuses) which trained the most teachers in the sample include Washington State University (11 percent), Central Washington University (11 percent), University of Washington (9 percent), Western Washington University (8 percent) and Eastern Washington University (8 percent). Among Washington's private institutions, Pacific Lutheran University trained five percent of the teachers in the sample, and Seattle University, three percent.

Further clues in the survey data confirm the regional pattern of preparation and subsequent employment:

- Among the teachers who attended one of the University of Washington's three campuses, 86 percent are currently teaching in Western Washington, while only 14 percent are teaching in Eastern Washington.
- Of those who attended Eastern Washington University for their professional training, 80 percent are currently teaching

in Eastern Washington, while 20 percent are located in Western Washington.

- Two-thirds of the teachers who attended Western Washington University for their teacher preparation are currently teaching in Western Washington outside of the Central Puget Sound, while one-third are teaching within the Central Puget Sound. None of the teachers in the sample prepared at Western Washington University are teaching in Eastern Washington.

For policymakers and local districts, it is important to realize that most Washington teachers receive their professional training within the state, and tend to stay in the region where they receive their training, with the exception of the largest pre-service institutions. This local effect means that districts are directly impacted by the types of programs and preparation teachers receive from these regional institutions. This connection potentially could create natural partnerships between districts and pre-service institutions and offer mutual benefit by targeting the training within the regional teacher labor markets to address specific local needs.

Types of preparation programs. The type of preparation program offered by regional institutions does impact the kind of degree and training teachers within their region receive. A look at the teachers in this sample reveals that *teacher preparation institutions have restructured their programs in recent years and the types of degrees they are now offering.* The introduction of alternative, fifth-year and post-baccalaureate programs can be seen, particularly among novice teachers in the sample. For example, nearly three-quarters of the veteran teachers (72 percent) indicate they went through a university-based undergraduate teacher preparation program in which education was one of their majors, compared with only half of teachers (49 percent) with fewer than five years of experience. Over a quarter of novice teachers, by contrast, participated in a post-baccalaureate fifth-year or graduate-level teacher preparation program compared with only ten percent of veteran teachers. Teachers in Eastern Washington were more likely than their counterparts in Western Washington to have completed a university-based, undergraduate teacher preparation program in which education was one of their majors (67 percent versus 55 percent), rather than a post-baccalaureate or other type of teacher preparation program.

Over two-thirds of the teachers in the sample report holding a Masters or other advanced degree. The advanced degree most frequently cited by teachers is a Master of Education (38 percent of all degrees). Novice teachers (0-4 years of experience) by contrast hold a higher percentage of Master of Arts in Teaching (MIT or MAT) degrees (21 percent), compared with 6 percent of teachers with 15 or more years of experience).

Factors contributing to teachers' initial school assignment and its match with their preparation. For many teachers in the sample, *the decision to accept their first teaching position was influenced by the location of the school and their view of the school as a desirable place to work.* Thirty percent of the teachers identified their first school as a desirable place to teach, and 29 percent indicated it was located near their place of residence. For 28 percent of teachers, their first assignment was in the first school that needed a teacher with their credentials and training. A quarter of the teachers had a connection or prior relationship with the school, such as through substitute teaching, tutoring or volunteering. For over 20 percent of novice teachers, the school was affiliated with their teacher preparation program. For almost a fifth of the teachers (19 percent), their first school was one of the few places where a position was offered.

As Chapter 4 made clear, it is not a foregone conclusion that teachers' preparation would match their teaching assignments, especially for new teachers, and for good reason, "out-of-field" teaching is a significant concern for policymakers here and nationwide (Ingersoll, 2003). Happily, most teachers in the sample (60 percent) indicated that their first classroom teaching position was closely matched to their training in all ways. Yet for over a quarter of the teachers, the story was different. Though their first position mostly matched to their training, they had little or no training for part of their assignment. Nine percent more indicated only some match between preparation and assignment, and for much of the assignment they had little or no training. Only three percent indicated that their first classroom teaching position was not matched at all to their subject matter and pedagogical training. *Regarding their current assignment, three-quarters indicate their current classroom teaching assignment closely matches their training in all ways.*

Teacher certification. Teachers' certification status provides one indication of teacher qualifications. Nearly all Washington public school teachers are fully certified; that is, they hold a regular state teaching certificate. The number of limited certificates (substitute, emergency, conditional, etc.) issued annually continues to remain small in Washington state.⁹ Certification has changed over the years such that teachers hold a variety of different kinds of certificates depending on when they applied for the credential. Among teachers participating in the first year of the surveys, twenty-four percent held a Standard/Continuing (lifetime) Teaching certificate, while 28 percent held a Continuing (clock hours) Teaching certificate. This data indicates that perhaps nearly a quarter of the state's classroom teachers hold lifetime credentials that are untouched by current certification requirements. Among elementary teachers in the sample, a slightly higher percentage report having Standard/Continuing (lifetime) certificates than other teachers. The number and types of certificates held by

⁹ For more information, see the Office the Superintendent of Public Instruction's *Annual Report 2003-04: Certificates Issued and Certificated Personnel Placement Statistics* (2005).

teachers in the sample reveal little variation by region, or percent of students eligible for free or reduced price school lunch.

Question 3: Why do teachers stay in their schools?

As our earlier discussion noted, the overall stability of the state’s teacher workforce belies considerable movement among schools, either within a district or less frequently between districts, especially for teachers at an early point in their careers. While statistics about teacher retention shed some light on the matter, a deeper understanding can be gained from an examination of the reasons why teachers decide to remain in or to leave their schools and can only come from asking them directly. Accordingly, we asked our standing sample of teachers about the factors that influence their decisions to stay or leave a school. We begin with an analysis of those factors that influence teachers’ decisions to stay in a school. As in other chapters, the analysis includes ways in which teachers vary in their reasoning by region of the state, experience level of the teacher, and level of schooling (elementary, middle, and high school).

Our survey asked teachers to indicate whether or not particular factors were reasons to stay or leave the current school in which they were teaching, as summarized in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Reasons Teachers Give for Staying in Their Current School (or Moving to Another School)

	Strong Reason to Stay	Moderate Reason to Stay	Moderate or Strong Reason to Leave	Not a Factor
My teaching assignment	75%	17%	5%	3%
Presence of staff with whom I feel comfortable working	68%	22%	7%	1%
Stability in assignment	65%	23%	6%	6%
Collegial community with other teachers	63%	27%	8%	2%
Geographic region or school location	60%	24%	11%	5%
Personal or family considerations	56%	20%	12%	11%
Presence of staff who share my values about teaching and schooling	52%	38%	7%	1%
Overall school climate	51%	35%	12%	1%
Staff willingness to go the extra mile	51%	34%	11%	3%
Respectful and orderly learning environment	49%	31%	17%	2%
Support in dealing with parents and students	48%	29%	17%	4%

Sample (Year 2): N=313

When looking at the entire sample of teachers, *particular conditions stood out as strong reasons for teachers to remain in their current schools. These are related to the type or stability of teaching assignment, the nature of their colleagues and collegial community, school location, personal or family considerations, school climate, and support in dealing with parents and students.* Table 6.2 provides details about teachers' responses. As can be seen in the table, *two of the three most frequent factors cited by teachers as a reason to stay in their school concern the nature of, and stability in, their teaching assignment.* Additionally, as noted in Chapter 4, a majority of teachers consider the presence of staff with whom they feel comfortable working, collegial community with other teachers, presence of staff who share their values about teaching and schooling, and staff willingness to “go the extra mile” to be strong reasons to stay in their school. Another set of reasons teachers indicate as influences on their decision to stay in a school relates to the geographic region in which teachers are working or the location of their school and personal and family considerations.

Teachers' reasons for wanting to stay in their schools vary somewhat by region of the state. *The largest regional difference concerns the cost of living.* More than three times as many teachers in Eastern Washington (58 percent) noted cost of living as a strong reason to stay at their schools than teachers in the Central Puget Sound (21 percent). Only one third (33 percent) of teachers located in Western Washington but outside of the Central Puget Sound indicate that cost of living is a strong reason to stay.

Years of teaching experience—and the more settled relationship with an employing organization that accompanies longevity in a career—can also affect a teacher's reasons for wanting to stay in a school. While a majority of all teachers consider the geographic region or location of their school as a strong reason to stay, 70 percent of veteran teachers hold this view, compared to only half (51 percent) of novice teachers. Also, veteran teachers view some district policies and conditions as somewhat more important in influencing their decision to stay in their school, perhaps because they matter more, given teachers' longer-term relationship with the employing organization. Specifically, personnel policies, such as hiring, transfer and assignment, are a strong reason to stay for 30 percent of veterans compared with 15 percent of novices. And nearly a third of veterans (32 percent) consider the academic performance of the district a strong reason to stay, compared with 14 percent of novices.

Question 4: Why do teachers consider leaving a school or a district?

Our earlier work on teacher retention and mobility indicated that 14 percent of all teachers who were working in schools in 1998-99 had moved to another school in the same district five years later, while 9 percent had moved to another

school district (Plecki et al, 2005). Thus, when teachers leave their schools, they are more likely to move to another school within their same district than to work for another school district. We also found that teacher mobility and attrition is more pronounced for novice teachers (0-4 years experience) than teachers in the mid-career range of experience.

Another component of our analyses of teacher retention and mobility rates revealed that teacher retention is related to the composition of the school’s student population, particularly to the poverty level and racial makeup of students. As noted in Chapter 3, schools serving a greater number of students in poverty retain fewer of their teachers after five years. We also found evidence of a link between school poverty, teacher retention, and student performance. Consequently, understanding the reasons why teachers consider moving from their schools may serve to help inform policies aimed at increasing teacher retention at the individual school level.

Survey analyses offer a more direct indicator of what might influence movement among schools. *Of the influences on decisions to move from a school, the most frequently cited reasons have to do with the amount and nature of support for students, both at home and in the school, and resources for professional learning.* Other frequently occurring reasons include student disciplinary issues and fairness in how staff are treated. Table 6.3 provides the specific items that were identified most frequently as “strong” or “moderate” reasons to considering leaving their school.

Table 6.3: Reasons Teachers Give for Moving to Another School (or Staying)

	Strong Reason to Stay	Moderate Reason to Stay	Moderate or Strong Reason to Leave	Not a Factor
The amount of support at home for students’ learning (e.g., homework help, positive attitudes towards schooling)	18%	39%	35%	8%
Degree to which time is built into the school day, week, or year to enable professional learning	20%	36%	34%	9%
Resources or financial incentives to support professional learning	20%	36%	33%	11%
Nature of support services to meet students’ needs	25%	36%	30%	8%
Level of disciplinary issues in teaching students at this school	28%	36%	29%	6%
Fairness in how staff are treated	44%	27%	25%	3%

Sample (Year 2): N=313

The amount of support at home for students’ learning (e.g., lack of homework help or positive attitudes towards schooling) is viewed by more than a third of teachers (35 percent) as a strong or moderate reason to consider leaving

their school. A third of teachers also indicated that the degree to which time is built into the school day, week, or year to enable professional learning, and the resources or financial incentives provided to support professional learning form moderate or strong reasons to leave their schools.

While Table 6.3 identifies factors that were cited as reasons influencing teachers' decisions to leave the school, other influences were characterized by teachers as "not a factor" in their decision. Conditions noted by at least one-fifth of teachers as "not a factor" include the percentage of students from historically underrepresented racial or ethnic groups (41 percent), salary (30 percent), the amount of pressure parents or community members exert on the school to boost student achievement (24 percent), how the school mentors or supports inexperienced teachers (21 percent), the value placed on diversity (22 percent), and school size (20 percent).

When looking at differences in responses within the standing sample, *salary was a consideration in a decision to stay or move more frequently by novice teachers than veterans*. Only 21 percent of novice teachers considered salary "not a factor" in their decision to stay or move, compared with 36 percent of veteran teachers, for whom salary was "not a factor." Additionally, more teachers (22 percent) in Western Washington consider salary (that is, low salary) to be a moderate or strong reason to leave their current school, compared with only 9 percent of teachers in Eastern Washington. There were no notable differences between teachers in high-poverty schools compared to those in low-poverty schools with respect to the influence of salary in their decisions to stay or move.

Teachers were also asked to indicate the extent to which particular conditions in their school district might influence their decision to stay or leave their district. *The district factor mentioned most frequently as a moderate or strong reason to leave (45 percent of all teachers) was the emphasis placed by the district on testing*. Recall the nearly universal concern voiced by teachers in Chapter 2 regarding the excessive emphasis placed on testing, an emphasis which teachers are likely to attribute to their districts as much as to the state or federal government. Another regional difference that surfaced was that a smaller proportion of teachers in Eastern Washington (14 percent) noted the district's funding and fiscal health as a reason to leave, as compared with 33 percent of teachers in Western Washington

Once again, comparing views of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) to teachers in the standing sample is instructive. Overall, NBCTs are more attuned to particular factors as reasons to consider leaving their schools. In addition, support for professional learning, noted in an earlier chapter, is of great concern to NBCTs. *Teachers who have attained the National Board credential feel more strongly about factors related to school leadership, school climate, and school culture as issues that may influence their decision to leave their schools*. Specifically, more than a third of NBCTs (36 percent) view school leadership as a strong or moderate reason to

leave, compared with 21 percent of the standing sample. A third of NBCTs also cite overall school climate as a strong or moderate reason to leave, compared with just 12 percent of the standing sample. Additionally, proportionately more NBCTs cite communication about school policies, expectations, and norms (31 percent) and the degree to which a respectful and orderly environment has been established (31 percent) as moderate or strong reasons to leave than the standing sample of teachers (18 percent and 17 percent, respectively). A larger proportion of NBCTs indicate a school-wide culture supporting the improvement of instruction (29 percent) as a strong or moderate reason to leave, as compared with 12 percent of the standing sample. The responses of these accomplished teachers give some clues about the conditions that can support a more differentiated and highly trained teaching corps.

Question 5: *How do teachers' reasons for staying or leaving differ in low- and high-poverty schools?*

Earlier chapters in this report, as well as earlier sections of this chapter, have noted the substantial differences between teachers who work in high-poverty settings and those in the lowest poverty schools. Because high-poverty schools are often viewed as, and may be—"hard to staff," it is essential that we understand how teachers view and respond to this kind of workplace setting. To do so, we compared responses of those teachers working in schools with greater than 50 percent of students in poverty (as measured by the Free or Reduced Price Lunch count) with teachers working in schools with poverty rates of 20 percent or less.

Most notably, teachers in high-poverty schools differ from their counterparts in low-poverty schools in the extent to which issues related to available resources, parents and community influences, and students and their needs constitute reasons to consider leaving their school (see Table 6.4).

As can be seen in the table, *there are considerable differences in the views of teachers working within high- and low-poverty schools regarding the amount of support at home for students' learning (62 percent compared to 16 percent) and the level of disciplinary issues in teaching students (53 percent compared to 10 percent) as factors which influence teachers' decisions to leave their schools.* Additionally, the ease of communication with parents about their children's learning, the degree to which parents and community actively participate in school, and the responsiveness of students to teaching and school are additional influences that distinguish the views of teachers in high- and low-poverty schools. These findings are particularly relevant given the negative correlation that exists between teacher retention and school poverty (Plecki et al., 2005), and have implications for what policymakers, school leaders, and school communities might consider when tackling the problem of increasing teacher retention in high-poverty schools.

Table 6.4: Reasons Teachers Give for Leaving High- vs. Low- Poverty Schools

Percent of teachers indicating a “moderate” or “strong” reason to leave:	Low-Poverty Schools	High-Poverty Schools
The amount of support at home for students’ learning (e.g., homework help, positive attitudes towards schooling)	16%	62%
Level of disciplinary issues in teaching students at this school	10%	53%
Ease of communication with parents about their children’s learning	4%	40%
Nature of support services to meet students’ needs	18%	44%
Degree to which parents or community members actively participate in school	5%	35%
Responsiveness of students to teaching and school	7%	35%
Level of student performance at the school	6%	33%
Resources or incentives to support professional learning	23%	43%

Sample (Year 2): N=210

Further survey responses reveal more about how leadership and leadership support matters to teachers, especially in schools serving a range of poverty levels. Consider, for example, the percentages of teachers indicating different aspects of school leadership as a reason for staying at their current school, in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5: Aspects of School Leadership or Leadership Support that Might Influence a Teacher to Stay at their Current School, Varying by Poverty Level

Percent of teachers indicating a “strong” reason to stay	Low-Poverty Schools	High-Poverty Schools
Degree to which a respectful and orderly learning environment has been established	59%	38%
Fairness in how staff are treated	52%	38%
Degree of focus on student performance in the classroom	48%	29%
Support in dealing with parents and students	58%	35%
Organization of time in the school day	32%	21%

Sample (Year 2): N=210

Several things about the figures in the table deserve note. First, the data signals the many ways leaders can affect the school’s working environment that matter to teachers. Leaders’ actions and values touch, among others, the treatment of staff, the orderliness of the school environment, focus on student learning, the organization of time, and interactions with parents. Second, the generally low percentage levels in high-poverty schools suggest that most teachers in these settings may not see their school leaders as particularly effective in these aspects of running the school—to be fair, these are often major leadership challenges in schools serving an economically disadvantaged student population, for various reasons. Third, the lower the level of poverty in the school, the more likely teachers are to see leadership support as a compelling reason to stay.

Summary: Influences on Teachers' Careers: Entry, Continuity, Mobility

Our analyses help to solidify a picture of the career trajectories of the state's teacher workforce, and the role that personal and policy-related conditions may place in career decisions. At the outset, it is clear that Washington's teacher workforce is relatively satisfied with their choice to pursue teaching and their satisfaction with their choice means that most will stay with it over the long term. Though a minority have considered options outside of the classroom or outside of education altogether, there is not a great deal of movement from the classroom to other roles, although a fair number of teachers move from school to school, especially in their early years.

Teachers' careers are launched through various teacher education programs, mostly in Washington state, and mostly in relation to regional teacher labor markets (graduates of Washington State University and Central Washington University are exceptions, as they are educated in large numbers within areas that are sparsely populated). The nature of the preparation of the programs is changing over time, with more recent graduates more likely to emerge from fifth-year and graduate level training, often with Masters degrees, than individuals with more years of teaching experience. For the most part, teachers' preparation matches the demands of their teaching assignments, and progressively more so over time, such that across the statewide sample at present, three-quarters of the teachers see their preparation as fully matched to the subjects they teach. That said, the remainder exhibit some degree of "out-of-field" teaching (though our data do not permit us to pinpoint the areas of mismatch with any precision).

From our analysis of teachers' views of their career choices and the factors which influence their decisions to stay or leave their current schools, several findings may inform policies surrounding teacher retention and mobility. First, teachers' views differ by region of the state, experience level of the teacher, and the poverty level of the school. These differences include the more prominent influence of cost of living as a factor in teacher retention for teachers in Eastern Washington and the importance of support for students' learning from school and home, particularly for those teachers working in high-poverty schools.

While policymakers need to be mindful of these differences, the results of our analyses do point to a number of factors that influence teachers' career decisions more universally. For example, the type and nature of a teacher's particular assignment has a strong influence on teachers' decision regarding retention and mobility. The presence of a strong collegial community and the existence of support for professional learning also positively impact teachers' decisions to stay at a school.

The overall school climate and the existence of supports for students emerge as important influences on teachers' decisions to consider leaving a school. Teachers indicate that issues related to school supports for student learning, student disciplinary issues and the amount of support and participation from parents and community are important considerations.

Other factors which are strongly associated with teacher's decisions to stay or leave a school have implications that are not as closely tied to state or local policy influences. For example, many teachers view personal or family considerations as very important factors in affecting teachers' decisions to stay or leave.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS: WHAT TEACHERS ARE SAYING ABOUT SUPPORT FOR THEIR WORK AND HOW IT CAN BE IMPROVED

Valuable insights into the quality of teaching, the teacher workforce, and support for teachers' work can be gained from the routine collection of survey data from a representative sample of the state's teachers, and the systematic analysis of information on the teacher workforce from state databases. These insights would be difficult to develop without such data resources—resources that the Washington state policy community has been in need of for a long time. This report illustrates what can be learned given these resources.

The main messages of the report are summarized in terms of several overall patterns, which suggest opportunities for improving the system of supports for teachers' work. These findings have bearing on concerns prominent in current policy debates within the state, as well as for issues that are likely to emerge in state and local deliberations.

Overall Patterns

The analyses contained in this report paint a picture of a relatively stable and committed teacher workforce whose attention, more often than not, has been focused on particular aspects of standards-based reform. Teachers report benefits of the reform for both classroom practice and students' learning, particularly for those whose experience enables them to compare current practice to what existed prior to the state reform. Their responses offer evidence that *teachers take the reform seriously and that in many ways, the main assumptions underlying Washington's reform initiative are holding up*. In particular, most teachers:

- Are familiar with the standards, see them as relevant to their work, and align their classroom practice with the standards and related assessments.
- Say that the state reform has impacted the content of what they teach, as well as how they teach.
- Pay attention to assessment, take steps to incorporate assessment into their classroom practice, and try to prepare students for assessment.

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- Believe that what they are doing is benefiting students—for example, by increasing the rigor of student learning experiences, helping students develop deeper understanding of certain topics in the curriculum, and increasing students' skills in problem solving and critical thinking.

While no direct connection can be made between this data and student achievement trends, the steady improvement in WASL scores over nearly a decade may be explained in part, by what teachers indicate they are doing in response to the reform.

In addition to reporting specific benefits of state reform, *teachers also express deep reservations about certain aspects of it—in particular, that too much is being asked of them, with too little time and too few resources to get the job done.* They also are concerned about what they see as an undue emphasis on testing, inflexible accountability requirements, and a consequent narrowing of the curriculum. Their concerns underscore certain aspects of the reform movement that deserve careful attention, if further progress is to be made.

Though teachers' concerns are remarkably uniform, state reform does not impact all teachers equally. Their responses to reform reveal considerable variation, across different kinds of school settings—especially those serving high- and low-poverty student populations—and among different groups of teachers—especially those in the early years of a teaching career and those with substantially more experience. The variations in teachers' approach to their work and response to reform, as well as the differences in the teachers' immediate working situations, highlight aspects of their practice that could be substantially improved, with ultimate benefit for the learning of Washington's students.

Of particular concern are the patterns emerging for those teachers who work with diverse student populations. *While many teachers see important opportunities in the growing diversity of the student population they teach—for example, a chance to teach about differences in cultural background or ability—at the same time, they do not feel fully prepared for, nor well supported, in this aspect of their work.* For example, the growing linguistic diversity in the classroom is a particular challenge—one for which teachers find relatively little professional development support, or other kinds of in-classroom assistance or school support services. In the context of a persistent achievement gap between different demographic groups of students, and an increasing ethnic and linguistic diversity in the student population, these become matters of considerable concern.

Immediate workplace conditions have a central role in whether or not teachers are able to meet these challenges. Of special importance is the character of the collegial community, access to the right material resources and classroom assistance, the structuring of time and other aspects of school programs, and the quality of

leadership support. Where such conditions are present, teachers are more ready and able to address the challenges they face, not to mention their long-term commitment to remaining at a particular school or in the teaching profession. The structuring of time is a case in point. Where teachers felt they had adequate time to plan and prepare lessons—a state of affairs that only two-fifths indicate they have—as well as time to collaborate with one another, they were more likely to feel “very prepared” to get their students ready for state assessments. For obvious reasons, school leaders have a lot to do with creating these time structures and motivating staff to make good use of them.

The quality of support for professional learning is one such workplace condition that matters a great deal to teachers. Our respondents were quick to point out that the absence of support or time set aside for professional learning could be a major reason to leave a school—a third of our respondents thought of this as a “moderate reason” or “strong reason” to leave, comparable to the degree of support at home for student learning or support from administrators in matters of student discipline. It is also clear from teachers’ responses that *their access to professional development has achieved some partial successes, while at the same time there is evidence of missed opportunities.* On the one hand, professional development opportunities are often aligned with state reform goals. Most teachers participate in them beyond the minimum required, and they do not generally find their professional development experiences a waste of time (contrary to some stereotypes of professional development). On the other hand, professional development often ignores some central problems of practice, particularly related to student diversity, and it is not typically arranged in ways that teachers find most useful (e.g., built into the school day, closely tailored to teachers’ needs in individual schools).

Finally, our surveys shed light on the trajectories of teachers’ careers in Washington state, and indicate places where support for teachers’ work could be significantly improved. A major finding concerns the overall stability of the teacher workforce, teachers’ general satisfaction with teaching as a career, and the relatively low levels of mobility among districts, or out of the educational system. Furthermore, their entry into the profession, mostly through regionally-focused teacher preparation programs in the state, gives most teachers the kind of knowledge and skill they feel they need in their assignments. There is more movement, however, among teachers new to the profession, and these teachers make clear that their work is not always as well supported as it might be.

Informing Current and Emerging Concerns in Washington State

What teachers are telling us suggest particular improvement strategies for local and state educators and others who wish the reform to realize its ambitious goals. The capacity of teachers to work with growing student diversity, noted above, is a case in point. The persistence of this theme across two years of survey data underscores its presence as a basic concern of many teachers, and a general deficiency in the system of support for their work. Such strategies may include differentiating and restructuring professional development resources, stimulating the creation of academic support services for struggling learners, and focusing leaders' attention on issues of teaching diversity.

These opportunities for improvement of practice, coupled with relative stability of the state's teaching force, argue strongly for investing in those who are now in place—they are going to be with us for a while. What we know about retention, mobility, assignment, working conditions, existing professional development support, response to state reform, and working with diversity makes a strong case for looking carefully at the system of support for professional learning and teachers' careers, for the full range of teachers from novice to more experienced, and how this might be strengthened by state and local action.

These improvement strategies relate to various issues that are currently debated in Washington state (and elsewhere) and are likely to remain on the minds of policymakers in the near future. Consider for example, the following four issues:

- High-stakes assessment and accountability policies
- The reduction of achievement gaps
- School improvement, especially in high-poverty settings
- The quality and stability of the teacher workforce

What teachers have told us through the surveys and what we have learned from database analyses have much to say about these important matters.

High-Stakes Assessment and Accountability Policies

The WASL and the Certificate of Academic Achievement continue to draw fire from various critics, while enjoying continued support from some staunch advocates of standards-based reform. At issue are several concerns wrapped up into one contentious debate. Some question the validity of the assessment itself, but more often the concerns have to do with the wisdom of placing so much emphasis on a single measure of academic worth. In addition, parents and teachers of students who are likely to do poorly on the test—and especially for students whose language background or basic abilities mean that they are at

a disadvantage on the WASL—often complain that Washington’s educational system has not offered sufficient or equitable opportunities to prepare for the state assessments. The debate is growing more heated as the year 2008 approaches, the first year in which the 10th grade WASL results will count for graduation. However, there is evidence to suggest that progress is being made across the grades and subjects tested.

Our data shed light on this debate in various ways. First, it is clear that teachers’ concerns about testing are widely held, and they are not restricted to teachers in situations where students are likely to fare less well on this assessment. Second, the data underscore that teachers are generally taking the assessment seriously, and most are doing more to incorporate assessment into their instructional practice. Furthermore, teachers note that they are learning from and about assessment, and they value this aspect of their professional learning. Finally, those teachers who have had the least exposure to WASL testing—at the high school level—are least likely to feel able to ready their students for the state’s assessment and most concerned about their abilities to work with diverse learning needs. Though it is clear that teachers across the board believe too much emphasis is being placed on testing, it is not clear from these data that the WASL per se is the issue. Preparation for assessment is part of the story, as is the amount of time and space in the curriculum that testing consumes across the school year.

The Reduction of Achievement Gaps

Though some progress has been made over the years, not all students are reaching state standards and a substantial gap persists between White students and students of color. The concern over persistent achievement gaps has roots in the standards-based reform movement, which established high learning standards for all students, and proceeded on the premise that, given the right supports, all students were capable of meeting these standards. More recent federal policy, embodied in the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, has added emphasis to the attempt to make schools work for all children, underscored by the specific data requirements of this law designed to keep achievement gap issues plainly in view.

The data reported here help to identify possible challenges of reducing achievement gaps, and also where teachers feel they are getting more and less help in addressing this matter. The findings on student diversity alluded to above are especially instructive, for they underscore the importance of adequate preparation to meet an array of learning needs that is growing steadily more diverse. Half of the teachers in our sample indicate that their students are more diverse now than five years ago, and many more find the diversity they face a major instructional challenge. The increase in ELL students is especially

noticeable, and it constitutes the biggest difference between the teachers who report their classrooms are getting more diverse (roughly half the sample) and the half who face the same (or occasionally less) degree of diversity. Not surprisingly, many do not think all of the students they teach will meet standard by year's end (they were responding in March of 2005).

Teachers report substantial instructional challenges in serving segments of the student population well. Teachers are not getting many professional development opportunities to learn about how they might help English language learners or students of color succeed, yet the majority serve such students, though often in relatively small numbers. At the same time, most are receiving professional development focused on assessment issues, subject matter, and social management issues like bullying. What teachers are telling us could be a classic case of insufficient attention to the needs of a *minority* group, at a time when concerns about the majority swamp the school improvement agendas.

School Improvement, Especially in High-Poverty Settings

Reformers have long recognized that the school as an organizational unit provides an essential set of working conditions that can support standards-based reform goals, and hence school-wide improvement efforts. The matter is most visible in the case of schools that serve concentrations of students from low-income families, settings in which teachers face numerous challenges. Given the enduring link between socioeconomic status and achievement, these schools are also likely to show patterns of low performance, thereby bringing them to the attention of both the state school improvement system and federal requirements that schools show adequate yearly progress.

Here, even though the surveys did not investigate school-wide phenomena (our sampling procedure was designed to include one teacher per school, thereby maximizing the number of school settings included in the survey), the data we collected—from teachers in approximately 350 schools—yield some insights about school workplace conditions and their importance to teachers, especially in high-poverty settings. Our database analyses demonstrate that teacher retention, school performance, and characteristics of the student population are all related, with the most diverse and impoverished school settings likely to have lower performance *and* higher mobility among the teaching staff. The findings also show where teachers project relatively low rates of student success and the working conditions associated with these instances.

The value of the teachers' workplace environment and leadership support. Here, teachers emphasize the roles played by collegial support, adequate classroom resources and assistance, and structural supports (embedded in the organization of time and the school program), and especially through attention to the quality of school leadership. Our data made clear both the importance of leaders'

support for teachers' work and the connection between leadership support and teachers' response to state reform. They also highlight the relative lack of specific instructional guidance and curricular supports aimed at particular student learning needs.

Perhaps most salient to our respondents, teachers indicate that they place great value on the presence of a collegial and collaborative working environment. Because our data make clear that a supportive, collegial community can help teachers realize reform goals, it is logical that efforts be redoubled to strengthen this aspect of the workplace. Improving the character of the school workplace environment should receive the attention of leaders at all levels of the system.

The particular concerns and needs of staff in high-poverty schools. Our data are also helpful in identifying aspects of the school that matter to teachers who face a large number of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or those who believe that a substantial number of their students will not meet grade-level standard by year's end (given the strong and enduring relation between poverty and achievement, the two are often overlapping). In particular, teachers in high-poverty schools are especially sensitive to the amount of support for learning at home, the higher level of disciplinary issues, and the quality of leadership support. These matters make a difference in teachers' desire to stay at these schools, as well as having implications for their effectiveness.

The Quality and Stability of the Teacher Workforce

The quality of the teacher workforce has remained a topic of considerable concern to policymakers in Washington state, and has been intensified by federal requirements that all teachers be "highly qualified." Most recently, state policymakers have wrestled with a new performance-based teacher certification system, that puts a particular focus on the early years of a teaching career. The professional certification requirements, in particular, have been the focus of considerable discussion, with numerous complaints from the field that the system was unwieldy and failed to provide teachers seeking the professional certificate (the second step in the certification system, attained within the first four to five years) with the right kind of support. The upshot in the last legislative session was an amended version of the professional certification system. But this specific issue, now temporarily resolved, belies a broader set of concerns about helping relatively new teachers settle into the profession and demonstrate their ability to perform well in the classroom. Also related are questions of advanced certification or the equivalent, and associated efforts to recognize and nurture accomplished teachers as a cadre of teacher leaders.

Our data have various things to say about these matters, in particular, concerning support for novice teachers, differentiation of professional learning needs among

all teachers, the frequency of professional learning opportunities that teachers find most useful, and incentives to stay at a school or leave.

The role of support for novice teachers. This research underscores the differences between novice teachers and their more veteran colleagues. The tendency of novices to move between schools more often, be less secure in their professional skills and identity, and express less confidence in meeting diverse learning needs, coupled with the fact that they are more sensitive to salary conditions, point to possible targets for state investment that are not yet what they could be. At the same time, novices' more positive response, on average, to professional development opportunities and to mentoring systems, sets the stage for the establishment of more powerful ways to assist them at this impressionable stage in their career development. This represents a major opportunity to expand mentorship capacity, guided by NBCTs and others like them who have demonstrated effectiveness.

Differentiation of professional learning needs. Beyond the matter of targeting professional support to novice teachers, as just discussed, our data suggest that teachers seem to need or value different kinds of professional development, depending on their level of schooling, the demographic character of the students they serve, and other aspects of their teaching situation. Secondary teachers, for example, seem much less sure of how to work with a diverse student population and more anxious about their readiness to prepare students for impending state assessments. These facts suggest obvious targets for professional learning at that level of schooling. Similarly, the response of teachers from high-poverty settings suggest a logical differentiation in the kinds of professional learning opportunities that would serve them well (e.g., concentrating on ELL issues, ways to strengthen home-school connections), as compared with their counterparts working in low-poverty settings. Finally, the hunger for professional learning exhibited by NBCTs is one more reminder that accomplished teachers are still learners—their learning could be directed at fine-tuning their teacher leadership or mentoring skills.

There is also reason to take regional considerations into account in fashioning professional development strategies. Given differing concerns and needs across regions, coupled with the fact that most teachers are prepared by regionally-focused teacher education institutions, there may be some opportunities for local and regional institutions (districts, teacher education institutions, and ESDs, for example) to forge more purposeful partnerships targeting the professional development needs of teachers in the region.

Access to professional learning opportunities that teachers find most useful. State reform has served as a prompt for teachers' professional learning—and there is clearly much to learn, if the ambitious goals of this reform are to be

realized. In this context, teachers have been able to learn more about certain aspects of their practice (e.g., related to assessment, subject matter), yet professional development on other important aspects of their practice has not been so available (e.g., how to help students with identified disabilities or students of color succeed). Furthermore, teachers' opportunities for professional learning are often not constructed in ways that are likely to maximize their learning. Teachers indicate that school-based opportunities are particularly useful, especially when they are built into the workday. They also report that opportunities to observe each other and to learn collaboratively are very useful, though they are infrequent. These productive forms of professional development could be far more common.

Patterns of teacher retention or mobility. Teachers' responses to various items concerning their reasons for entering or persisting in the profession, and their desire to work in one kind of setting over another, shed light on the stability or mobility of the teacher workforce. For example, our data make it clear that teachers enter the profession for altruistic reasons and for the most part, are satisfied with their choice of profession. Their satisfaction with particular school sites varies. The reasons they give for staying include the nature of the collegial community, the presence of strong leadership, the availability of support for professional learning, and the fit between the teaching assignment and the teachers' expertise. While matters of a personal nature (e.g., concerning geography, family considerations) also figure into teachers' decisions in this regard, it is clear that conditions within the control of school, district, and even state policymakers can make a difference in teachers' retention or mobility decisions. Salary is not high on the list of factors teachers say is most important when they consider leaving the profession, or a particular school, as many have suggested. This is not to say, however, that salary is not a concern for some teachers. Salary is a larger concern for novice teachers than for veterans, and cost of living is a bigger consideration for teachers in Eastern Washington than their counterparts living in elsewhere in the state.

What State and Local Policymakers May Do

The findings from this study and the issues they inform embrace both state and local leadership and policy. Solutions and improvements will ultimately involve both. It is essential that policy audiences avoid two temptations when confronted by teachers' views on the matters addressed in this report. First, while the state is the primary source of standards-based reform, policymakers should resist the notion that the state is the main or only player in trying to address these matters. On the other hand, the state should not simply assume that the framework of standards, assessments, and accountability requirements will carry the day. The state can and should support local districts' improvement efforts. Local policymakers need to identify and act on the specific educational challenges that exist at district, school and classroom levels. Together, state and local efforts must coherently address the challenge of adequately supporting teachers' work.

State-Level Responsibilities

So, at the state level, there is work to be done. Adjustments in regulations and expectations, along with targeted (modest) investments in teacher support might go a long way towards improving the educational system and its outcomes. Furthermore, *a rebalancing of the equation of supports and pressures (e.g., for high performance), with more attention to the supports, might address many of the teachers' concerns about the difficult challenges in front of them.* In particular, the findings of the study might encourage policymakers and agency officials to explore these kinds of actions:

- *Strengthening the mentor support system, especially for novice teachers, including more purposeful investment in a cadre of teacher leaders or accomplished veterans who can act in coaching and mentoring roles (NBCTs are only one example of this).*
- *Constructing mechanisms to support school-based professional learning opportunities.* For example, a more targeted version of the discarded School Learning Improvement Block Grants might now have a chance of working well, unlike the early years of reform when people at the state and local level had little idea about how to make good use of this mechanism.
- *Considering ways to strengthen the state's curricular support role, especially in specialized areas of curriculum that correspond to student diversity needs.*
- *Engaging in targeted recruitment of teachers of color, to address the enduring demographic mismatch between students and teacher workforce.*

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- *Rethinking how the state approaches professional development support, now conceived of as a number of “professional development days.”*

These kinds of actions are examples of ways that the state could bolster the “support” side of the equation. In this regard, the messages from teachers concerning an overemphasis on testing deserve a fair hearing at the state level.

Local-Level Responsibilities

At the same time, district and school leaders can do much to strengthen the system of supports for teachers' work. Among them are actions such as these:

- *Creating the conditions that support a collaborative work environment.* Leadership support, hiring and assignment policies, reorganization of the school day, participatory decisionmaking, and teaming structures are only a few of the ways that district and school leaders can foster collegial interaction.
- *Providing regular access to instructional guidance, coaching, and curricular support.* Here, districts and schools could do more to increase teachers' access to relevant forms of expertise, especially related to serving a diverse student population.
- *Improving the systems of support for struggling students, with a special eye to the kinds of academic and other support services that can help ELL students or students with disabilities.*
- *Reconsidering the focus, content, and delivery of professional development activities, to maximize teachers' access to the kinds of opportunities they find most useful, both those that operate through periodic, formal events (like professional development days) and those that operate more continuously and informally (e.g., mentoring and coaching systems).* Here, local leaders might take note of the fact that teachers report little involvement in the decisions about their professional learning, and that the types of professional learning opportunities they find to be most useful are often the least available to them.

These possibilities do not exhaust the local courses of action that could contribute to a stronger system of support for teachers' work and careers.

Local leaders should take note of the fact that teachers report little involvement in the decisions about their professional learning, and that the types of professional learning opportunities they find to be most useful are often the least available to them. District leaders, and their counterparts in schools, are in a good position to work collaboratively with teachers to identify professional development

content and craft opportunities that are tailored to teachers' specific needs. Finally, addressing the distinctly different needs of teachers in high-poverty schools can only come about with more strategic and deliberate approaches and support from the district level.

Building a Better Base of Information Concerning Teachers, Teaching, and Support for Teachers' Work

Addressing these matters presumes a continual flow of information about the needs that teachers face, and consequently both state and local leaders and policymakers should not underestimate the power and usefulness of good information systems. Such systems can yield that kind of database and survey findings reported here, as well as offering a vehicle for pursuing other matters that have yet to emerge on the policy agenda. Such a system would complement new developments in the student database by:

- *Assembling and regularly updating data on a variety of teacher characteristics* for all classroom teachers across the state (e.g., teacher demographics, experience, retention, mobility).
- *Integrating different state-level databases* that have relevance to questions about the quality of teaching and support for teachers' work (e.g., certification, personnel data).
- *Incorporating new data elements*, now unavailable in state databases, that would permit analyses of topics such as teacher preparation and assignment (e.g., subjects and grades taught, students served).
- *Creating mechanisms for assessing teachers' views directly* (such as the "Fast Response" Survey system) that, in conjunction with database work, enable analyses of priority topics, like novice teachers, mentoring, or the availability of high-quality professional development.

Absent such systems, policymakers are simply left with their initial assumptions, their hopes, and the sketchy images that emerge from anecdotes or media accounts. The state and local policy community should aspire to more. The reform movement in this state deserves the same vigilance and close attention to its unfolding implementation story that it received at the time of its conception. Only with those kinds of informational resources will we be able to tell whether ambitious reform goals are being reached, and more importantly how to improve the possibility of reaching them.

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APPENDIX:

TECHNICAL NOTES

This Appendix offers detailed information about the data sources and analytic procedures used to conduct the research. The findings presented in this report are based on data from two primary sources: (1) analyses of a comprehensive longitudinal database, encompassing all of the state’s classroom teachers from 1996-2002; and (2) six surveys of a representative “standing sample” of the state’s classroom teachers over the past two school years. Information about each data source and some methodological notes are provided below.

Database Analyses

For the database analyses described in this report, the core data comes from the Washington state personnel database spanning the years 1996-99 to 2002-03. The personnel data are based on annual personnel reports (Form S-275) submitted by each school district, which primarily support school apportionment and financial services. It includes all certificated and classified persons employed by public school districts, Educational Service Districts, and private schools in the state. Data includes demographic information, certification number, academic credits, years of experience, assignment, salary and benefits, and other information. Because the primary purpose of the state’s personnel database is to track fiscal information, other information is not stored in a manner that is easily accessible, nor is it designed to study issues of teacher quality. However, an advantage of the S-275 database is its uniformity, longitudinal nature, and accuracy for a database of this size.¹

The research team created a new type of database using the S-275 and other existing state data sources, in order to include student demographic and school-level information and to render the data in a form that would be relational and easier to analyze. The breadth of information provides analytic flexibility not possible with smaller datasets or survey research. For example, multiple years of data on all teachers in the state make possible longitudinal analyses and the ability to assess whether a trend is a recent phenomenon or one that has persisted over time. By merging databases, the researchers were able to look across several dimensions including teacher characteristics, district fiscal information, region of

¹ For more information regarding analyses using the S-275 database, see the report, *Who’s Teaching Washington’s Children? What we Know—and Need to Know—About Teachers and the Quality of Teaching in the State* (Plecki, Elfers & Knapp, 2003).

the state, student demographics, and student performance on state assessments. Though complex to use, the newly combined relational database provides an informational resource that has considerable potential utility.

Working Definitions

This work includes retention and mobility analyses at several levels (state, district and school) and uses individual teacher data (both headcount and FTE) in calculations. Consequently, it is important to clearly define the criteria for the schools and teachers included in these analyses.

Teachers are defined as those public school teachers whose assignment is the instruction of pupils in a classroom situation. As reported in the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's personnel database (S-275), they are certificated instructional staff with a duty root designation of 31 or 32 or 33 (elementary teacher, secondary teacher, or other classroom teacher). Analyses were completed using both teacher headcount and full-time equivalent (FTE) designations. Teachers whose full-time equivalent (FTE) designation was zero for the 1998-99 year were excluded from the study.² Special attention was paid to teachers with split assignments, to create unduplicated counts of teachers. In other words, district- and school-level headcounts were unduplicated, but headcounts at the school level cannot be summed or duplication will occur.³

Teacher experience and ethnicity. Teachers' experience and ethnicity were also tracked in this analysis. Teachers were placed in one of four categories, based on their years of teaching experience: 0 to 4 years, 5 to 14 years, 15 to 24 years, or 25 or more years in teaching. In addition, OSPI's ethnic code designation was used to denote belonging in one of the following groups: American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, or White.

Schools. In order to examine differences across school level, schools were categorized according to grade level served. *Elementary schools* included schools with any of the grades K-6 and none of grades 7-12. *Middle schools* included

² We excluded teachers with zero FTE because there was no way to accurately represent their assignment or mobility at the school or district level for the years under investigation. This likely impacts those teachers who were on-leave for the 1998 school year and consequently may slightly over-represent leavers from the Washington state education system.

³ Teacher FTE represents the portion of the teacher's assignment in a particular building or role including split assignments. However, when looking at individual teacher characteristics, such as experience or ethnicity at the district level, a person cannot be represented in more than one category without duplication. At the district level for purposes of individual teacher counts, in those cases in which teachers had split assignments between more than one school, the following decision rule applied: if the teacher's assignment changed from a classroom teacher to some other role within the district or if they changed schools within the district from their original assignment in 1998, they were classified as movers in district at the district level. This only impacted the headcount of teachers at the district level, not FTE.

schools serving primarily any of grades 6-9. *High schools* included any of grades 9-12 and none of grades K-8. *Combined schools* included those schools with one or more of grades K-6 and one or more of grades 9-12.⁴

Timeframe and Retention/Mobility Categories

The primary retention analysis tracked the assignment of teachers at two points in time, 1998-99 and 2002-03. Using the S-275 database, we located the classroom teachers working in each of the twenty Washington districts during the 1998-99 school year, and those who were still employed in the state five years later, in 2002-03. We found some of the 1998 teachers had changed duties, schools, and districts and some had exited the Washington education system. Since this analysis captures a snapshot of the workforce at two points in time, we are not able to note gaps in employment during the five-year period, nor is it possible to distinguish voluntary and involuntary departures.

In order to examine retention patterns, teachers were placed in one of four retention categories: stayers, movers in district, movers out of district, or leavers. *Stayers* were teachers assigned to the same school(s) as classroom teachers in 2002-03 and in 1998-99. *Movers* were those teachers who had changed assignment (other than a classroom teacher) or moved to a different school or district than in 1998-99, or to a private school. If the individual had moved assignment or school within the same district, they were classified as “movers in district.” If they moved to a different district as a classroom teacher or in some other assignment, or to a private school, they are classified as “movers out of district.” *Leavers* were teachers who had a classroom teaching assignment in 1998-99 and were no longer in the Washington state database as either public or private school teachers or in any other capacity in 2002-03. Leavers may have retired, re-entered the system in subsequent years, left Washington to teach in another state, or completely left the profession.

Survey Work

This section offers information on the way survey instruments were developed and deployed, and how samples were selected and recruited for the survey series. Notes are also included concerning the separate sample of National Board Certified Teachers.

⁴ The schools included in this analysis met the following criteria: a) Traditional schools with regular classes and/or alternative schools with non-transitory student populations. The study excluded juvenile justice centers, home school centers, special education centers, vocational education centers, and newcomer centers. The headcount and full-time equivalent (FTE) designations of classroom teachers in these other contexts are included in an “other” category by district. b) Schools were in existence for at least 6 years (5 year’s worth of data, plus one) and were open during each year from 1997-98 to 2002-03. c) The schools were not primarily preschools.

Instrument Development and Deployment

We began the development of survey instruments by using an item bank of questions, some of which were borrowed from existing national, state and local instruments, and some of which we created specifically for the Washington context. Each survey instrument was piloted with a group of elementary, middle and high school teachers to review the item content and format.

Instruments were developed in two formats: paper and web-based. Recognizing that web-based surveys offer faster turn-around times, simple branch logic and less data entry, we wanted to test this format as an efficient means for gathering information from teachers. However, acknowledging not only that people differ in their comfort levels with web-based applications, and also that access to technology may be a problem for some, we allowed teachers to opt for a paper version (with identical items to the online version). Among respondents in the last two years, approximately 60 percent chose web-based surveys; 40 percent chose paper-based surveys.

Sample Selection

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. The sampling frame was generated by pulling a stratified random sample of the state's teachers using the state's personnel database (S-275) for the 2002-03 and 2003-04 school years. The personnel database includes all teachers in the state of Washington. For example, from the database in 2002-03, we identified 57,247 classroom teachers based on duty root (31, 32 or 33), of which we were able to include 54,807 or 96% in the sampling frame.

In order to identify teachers by region of the state, teachers were linked to their district's Educational Service District and then grouped in one of three broad regions. The Central Puget Sound is represented by ESD 121. The districts in Western Washington outside of the Central Puget Sound ESD 121 are represented as a group (ESDs 112, 113, 114 and 189). Eastern Washington is represented by the four ESDs which roughly correspond to the eastern side of the state (ESDs 101, 105, 123 and 171).

Teachers were grouped according to three experience levels: 0-4 years of experience, 5-14 years of experience, and 15 or more years of experience. Additionally, each teacher was linked to his or her school building by a school code. By tagging each school code to the percentage of students enrolled in the Free or Reduced Price Lunch program for the school, a rough indicator of

school poverty could be identified. In this way, teachers were grouped into three categories according to school poverty level: low-poverty (0-20% students receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch), moderate-poverty (21-50% of students receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch) or high-poverty (51-100% of students receiving Free or Reduced Price Lunch).

A sampling grid containing 27 cells (the total possible combinations of teachers in each of these categories) was generated by the three stratification variables (region, experience level and school poverty level). In order to generate an initial sample of 400 teachers, we randomly selected teachers who fit the appropriate criteria to fill each cell in the sampling grid.

Sample Recruitment

The state's personnel database (S-275) is the most current source of information on the state's teachers. However, because the database contained information from the prior school year, some teacher turnover was anticipated (estimated at 7%). This required an extra step to confirm that the teacher was still teaching at the same school as in the previous year. A phone call to the school was made to confirm whether or not the teacher was currently teaching at the school. If the teacher was no longer teaching at the school, was unwilling to commit to the survey series or was unreachable, a replacement was selected from the randomly drawn pool within the corresponding cell of the sampling grid. In addition, because the database contained information from the prior school year, it is not possible to include first year teachers in the sample during the survey year.

Effort was made to represent teachers from different schools by recruiting only one teacher per school, if possible. Recruitment in Eastern Washington was complicated in this regard because there are so few schools whose poverty levels are between 0 and 20 percent of the students enrolled in the Free or Reduced Price Lunch program. Among the 2004-05 participants, for example, there were nine Eastern Washington schools in which two teachers were located at the same school.

A letter of invitation was sent to potential teachers soliciting their participation. Participants were compensated with an honorarium (\$25 gift certificate to Amazon.com) for their involvement in the three surveys. Survey participants had the option of completing either a paper or a secure online version of the survey questionnaire.

Teachers from the initial pilot year were invited to continue the following year. Among the participants from the previous year, 54 percent chose to participate in the surveys in the 2004-05 year. Additional teachers were recruited at random to fill out the sample, based on the sampling frame.

The ethnicity, years of experience, and age of the survey participants generally mirror state averages. The majority of teachers in the sample, as in the state, are white (94 percent), with slightly over 5 percent of the sample representing ethnic and racial minorities. Years of experience and age of participants also closely correspond to the state's general population. Using a randomly generated sample also provided an appropriate representation of teachers at each grade level. For selected teacher characteristics of the sample compared to the state population, see Table 1.

Table 1: Selected Teacher Characteristics for the State and the Sample (2002-03 and 2003-04)

	2002-03		2003-04	
	% of State	% of Sample	% of State	% of Sample
Region*				
Western WA (not 121)	37%	37%	37%	33%
Central Puget Sound (ESD 121)	38%	29%	38%	35%
Eastern WA	25%	34%	25%	33%
Ethnicity				
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.4%	3.2%	2.4%	3.7%
African American	1.5%	1.9%	1.5%	0.3%
Hispanic	2.1%	0.3%	2.2%	1.4%
Native American	0.7%	0.3%	0.7%	0.3%
White	93.3%	94.4%	93.2%	94.3%
Experience				
0-4 years	23.4%	32.5%	22.1%	36.7%
5-14 years	35.7%	33.1%	36.5%	28.7%
15-24 years	24.5%	21.4%	24.6%	23.5%
25 years or more	16.4%	13.0%	16.8%	11.2%
Age				
21-30	13.2%	16.7%	15.1%	20.3%
31-40	23.2%	22.5%	23.3%	21.5%
41-50	27.6%	31.7%	27.8%	30.7%
51-60	32.0%	26.5%	30.5%	25.8%
61+	4.0%	2.6%	3.4%	1.7%

* Region as represented by Educational Service Districts

Survey Deployments and Response Rates

All three of the surveys deployed in the first year had a completion rate in excess of 90 percent. Survey 4 had a completion rate of 87 percent and Surveys 5 and 6 had a completion rate of 90 percent. Reminder phone calls were made to those completing paper surveys and email messages were sent to those using the online system for those who had not completed the survey by the return date. All of the surveys in both years had high rates of return.

Survey of National Board Certified Teachers

In 2003, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction provided the research team with a public list of the 345 teachers in Washington state who held National Board Teacher Certification at that time. Of these National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs), 85 percent (294 individuals) held primary assignments as classroom teachers. Using that list, we invited all the NBCTs with classroom assignments (as determined by the state's personnel database S-275) to participate in the same survey sequence administered to the standing sample (those who agreed were only able to use the online survey system and did not receive an honorarium). Over half (57 percent) agreed to participate, and these constituted the supplementary sample of NBCTs in the first year. In the second year, 93 NBCTs participated in the survey series.

While not selected to be a statistically representative sample, the NBCT survey participants closely resemble the statewide NBCT population and are similar to other classroom teachers, with the exception of experience and age, as would be expected.



Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy A National Research Consortium

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON (lead institution)

CTP studies the way policies and conditions in schools, districts, states, and teacher education institutions shape the quality of teaching and learning in the nation's elementary and secondary schools. The Center pays particular attention to the ways these policies and conditions interact with each other to influence the teaching profession and its practice.

Participants in CTP's research and dissemination program include researchers at other consortium institutions (Stanford University, University of Michigan, and University of Pennsylvania) as well as other scholars affiliated with Indiana University, Michigan State University, Pennsylvania State University, the University of California at Santa Barbara, the University of North Carolina, and Research for Quality Schools.

The Center's program of research is carried out in collaboration with various other research organizations, among them other OERI-funded research centers, including the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), the Center for Research on Education, Diversity, and Excellence (CREDE), and the Center on English Learning & Achievement (CELA). The Center is affiliated with a variety of professional and advocacy organizations that represent teachers, teacher educators, state and local policymakers, disciplinary groups, and educational reform interests.

This report reflects the ongoing collaboration between CTP and the Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession (CSTP) in Washington state. (See inside front cover.)

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