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# K-12 INSERVICE EDUCATION STUDY

## Summary

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**T**his study responds to legislative questions regarding teacher compensation and how teachers can increase their pay by earning additional degrees and credits.<sup>1</sup> This study was required by the 1994 Supplemental Budget, ESSB 6244, Section 104 (3) (c).

Overall we found that the state allocation system, which was designed as a budget tool for the state to distribute money to local districts for teachers' salaries, has in effect become a compensation system at the local level. As a compensation system, there may be legislative concerns regarding the minimal standards in existence for training and the little accountability in the system.

We also concluded the following as a result of research on specific questions:

- Research on whether more training improves teacher performance is inconclusive.
- As a budget tool, the current method has few controls and is difficult to predict.
- Teachers' response to recent legislation on teacher training increased state costs by \$18 million annually, but the response may not have been in the direction intended by the legislature.

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<sup>1</sup>When the general term "teacher" is used in this report, we are referring to certificated instructional staff which includes classroom teachers and educational staff associates, e.g., librarians, counselors.

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## Overview

## THE COMPENSATION SYSTEM IN WASHINGTON

Washington State uses teachers' educational level and experience to determine how much it will provide districts to pay teacher salaries. The use of these two factors is the predominant way in which teachers are compensated throughout the country. However we found that research on whatever additional education results in improved teacher performance is inconclusive.

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Experience,  
education  
drive pay

The state allocation schedule is used to distribute over \$1.5 billion each year to local districts for teacher salaries. The placement of teachers on the schedule according to their years of teaching experience and level of education determine the amount the state provides local districts for teacher salaries. Since state costs are partially driven by the aggregate effect of individual teacher decisions to gain education, the current method has few controls on the pace of budget growth and is difficult to predict

Even though the state allocation schedule was designed for budget purposes, we found that the table operates, in effect, as a state salary schedule. Ninety-one percent of local districts who responded to our survey either use the exact allocation schedule or a slightly modified version as their salary schedule.

## RECENT TRENDS AND COSTS

Besides earning salary increments for experience, teachers can advance on the salary table by earning advanced degrees (master's track) or by taking general courses without obtaining a degree (non master's track). We found that legislative policy changes in the late 1980s, taken together, sought to encourage teachers to earn master's degrees. However, during the first few years after the policy changes, we found that most of the training reported was outside of graduate degree programs. The fiscal impact to the state of the additional training during this period is estimated to be \$18 million annually since 1992.

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Rate of  
training  
increased

Prior to 1992, the non masters track for teachers had the potential to pay better than the master's track. This may have acted as an incentive for teachers to choose the non master's track. However, since 1992, having a masters degree or Ph.D. pays more than the non degree track. Therefore, the long-term effect may be that teachers choose to obtain advanced degrees.

## ELIGIBILITY OF COURSES

There are two kinds of credits that teachers may acquire, academic credits and inservice credits. We found that academic credits (those taken at regionally accredited postsecondary institutions) accounted for 96 percent of all credits claimed by teachers (outside of degrees) as of school year 1992-93. Inservice courses are offered by entities that must be approved by the State Board of Education.

The state rules regarding what academic or inservice credits are eligible for teachers to report can be characterized as open-ended. Once a provider is approved, almost any course that provider offers can be applied by a teacher towards a salary advancement. In the case of academic credits, providers must be regionally accredited institutions. As for inservice credits, providers must be approved by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. We found that this method of approving the inservice provider rather than the course is unusual when compared to other states.

The state's apparent policy not to restrict or encourage certain types of training is carried down to the local level. Most districts are using the state rules regarding eligibility for credits and degrees to determine what they accept for their own local salary schedules.

## QUALITY OR RELEVANCY OF COURSES

Although there are no state requirements or incentives to take training in any particular area, we found that 40 percent of the credits (either academic or inservice) earned by teachers since their bachelors degree were taken in education. The remainder of the credits were taken in a variety of subject areas, no one area accounting for a major share of the remaining 60 percent.

We did not assess the value or quality of different courses as part of this study. We did, however, observe course titles that seemed "questionable" as to their relevance to the improvement of teaching, yet these titles were infrequent. Without additional information to explain the content and rigors of the course, we have no way of knowing what was actually taught and no criteria for judging its relevance.

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Most  
courses  
eligible...

...since  
standards  
minimal

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Education  
courses are  
the most  
common

## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

We found that while the state allocation schedule was designed as a tool for the state to distribute money to local districts, it has evolved essentially into a teacher compensation system for local districts.

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### Use of allocation schedule evolved

However there is no explicit state policy on what type of training is desirable and there is little accountability inherent in the system at any level. This may or may not be of concern to the legislature. In Chapter 3 we suggest that the need for any action is dependent on whether the legislature is content with the evolution of the schedule into a compensation system, and whether it believes the system is compatible with education reform efforts. Examples are given of policy options that could be considered if the legislature wants to change the intent.

## AGENCY RESPONSE

The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction indicates general concurrence with the report's policy considerations. The text of the response is included as Appendix 2.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report was prepared by Beth Keating, Lyle Davieau, Bert Hoff, and Lisa Robinson of the LBC staff and Theo Yu, project consultant. Ron Perry served as supervisor. We appreciate the assistance provided by staff of the Legislative Evaluation and Accountability Program, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Office of Financial Management, and legislative committee staff.

Cheryle A. Broom  
Legislative Auditor

On January 19, 1995, this report was approved by the Legislative Budget Committee and its distribution authorized.

Representative Jean Silver  
Chair