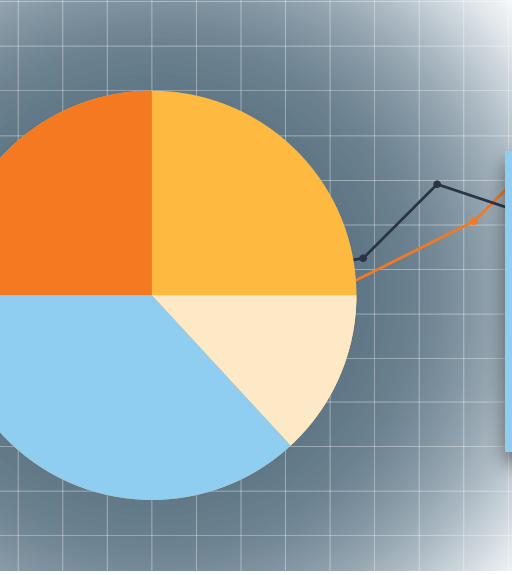

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Educator Enhancement Academies Evaluation Study

Phase 2. Teacher and Trainer Reports of NxGen Professional Development and Their Sense of Preparedness

Patricia Cahape Hammer and Nate Hixson, January 2015

As the final stage of West Virginia's rollout of the Next Generation Content Standards and Objectives (NxGen CSOs), the regional education service agencies (RESAs) conducted six train-the-trainer events in the spring of 2013 to prepare educators—mostly teachers—to provide professional development back in their home schools and districts. These events, called Educator Enhancement Academies (EEAs), lasted two or three days depending on which RESA conducted them, and targeted teachers in grade levels that had not yet received professional development in the NxGen CSOs, that is, Grades 2-3, 6-8, and 10-12.

The first phase of this study looked at how well prepared those trainers were at the end of their EEA experience by asking them about their experiences during the training and after they, themselves, conducted training sessions during the summer of 2013. This study further examines the experience of those same participants in providing their own training, as well as what additional professional development they received from the RESAs. It also asks about the experience of the end-user teachers who received professional development from the EEA-trained teachers and other sources in the targeted grade levels during the 2013-2014 school year.

Research Questions

EQ1. To what extent did participants in the EEAs follow up with their own training?

EQ2. What challenges did EEA participants encounter and what supports did they indicate they needed going forward?

EQ3. What follow-up did RESAs provide after the initial EEA training?

EQ4. What was the NxGen PD experience of end-user teachers and EEA teacher trainers during the course of the 2013-2014 school year?

EQ5. What were the outcomes of 2013-2014 professional development experiences in terms of teachers' overall sense of preparedness to teach to the NxGen CSOs and perceived impacts of those experiences on knowledge, practice, and beliefs?

EQ6. What training-related factors may have been at work to produce these outcomes?

Methods

We examined three populations in this phase of the Educator Enhancement Academies (EEA) study: (a) 953 teachers, district office staff, and others who received training at the RESA-sponsored EEAs to become teacher trainers; (b) professional development directors or executive directors from the eight RESAs; and (c) general and special education teachers involved in teaching English/language arts (ELA) and mathematics across the state in Grades 2-3, 6-8, and 10-12. For all groups, we surveyed the full population.

Using three instruments, we collected data as follows:

- For EEA trainees, we used the Follow-up EEA Participant Survey in September 2013;
- For RESA professional development directors, the RESA PD Director Interview Protocol (May 2014); and
- For ELA and math teachers in targeted grades across the state, we used the NxGen Standards Professional Learning Survey (April-May 2014).

Results

Of the 953 EEA participants, 599 responded to the Follow-up EEA Participant Survey, for a 63% response rate. Of the 4,686 ELA and math teachers in the targeted grades, participants returned 1,662 usable responses to the NxGen Standards Professional Learning Survey, for a 25% response rate. Although this is a lower response rate than we typically see–probably due to testing and other pressures on teachers during the April–May survey period–the total number of responses fell only slightly short of our calculated target sample size (1,740). PD directors or executive directors responded to the interview protocol for all eight RESAs. Findings are summarized and interpreted below by evaluation question.

Depending upon EEA participants' regular role in their counties, they reported providing more or less training to end-user teachers. District central office staff seemed in the best position to provide training as evidenced by the numbers they trained, the number of hours they had provided to a typical participant in their sessions by early fall 2013, and the additional hours of training they planned to provide.

EQ1. To what extent did participants in the EEAs follow up with their own training?

The great majority of the respondents (85%) to the September 2013 follow-up survey indicated they had provided training. Depending upon EEA participants' regular role in their counties, they were able to provide more or less training to end-user teachers. District central office staff seemed in the best position to provide training as evidenced by the numbers they trained, the number of hours they had provided to a typical participant in their sessions by early fall 2013, and the additional hours of training they planned to provide. By comparison, other role groups appeared at a disadvantage, especially teachers and principals with regard to planned follow-up.

EQ2. What challenges did EEA participants encounter and what supports did they indicate they needed going forward?

Most EEA-trained trainers were able to schedule at least some training; where training had taken place, scheduling was still difficult, as was getting people's attention and buy-in. Many of the trainers reported needing more training themselves, especially in the instructional shifts and other aspects of classroom implementation, and help in locating curriculum and other resources they needed for planning instruction.

EQ3. What follow-up did RESAs provide after the initial EEA training?

EEA-facilitated follow-up training took place in schools, counties, and RESAs, although counties seemed to be squarely in the lead in most regions. It appeared that in general, counties focused on their own schools, although in two RESAs, (2 and 5), there was a more regional approach to developing and using EEA-trained trainers as local experts available across counties. Although two-thirds of the participants in the EEAs were teachers, they seemed to face more obstacles in both delivering and receiving additional training due to the real limits of county budgets for supporting release time. Most RESAs provided additional training to EEA-trained trainers in their regions, but a minority of them as of May 2014 has firm plans for providing additional support going forward. Most RESA PD directors appreciated the technical expertise of WVDE trainers that was exhibited at the EEAs and hope to continue to draw upon that expertise. While as a group they considered the EEAs an effective way to roll out the standards some expressed concern about sustaining the effort over the time it will take to fully implement the NxGen CSOs.

EQ4. What was the NxGen professional development experience of teachers during the 2013-2014 school year?

Whether they were EEA-trained or end-user teachers, relatively few teachers received professional development of a duration (at least 30 contact hours) that one would expect to produce changes in teacher practice or student performance. Further, it was relatively rare for end-user teachers to meet for NxGen training more than three times between June 2013 and May 2014. EEA-trained teachers fared better in that regard, with about half meeting more than three times.

Many of the trainers reported needing more training themselves, especially in the instructional shifts and other aspects of classroom implementation, and help in locating curriculum and other resources they needed for planning instruction.

For the most part, end-user teachers were trained by district or school staff (or both). EEA-trained teachers were quite likely to also receive training from RESA staff.

Most teachers reported that their training did not include time to plan classroom implementation of NxGen CSOs or to practice new skills. Teachers generally felt they had not met frequently enough, nor did they have adequate contact hours to learn the skills and content. They did engage in their training collectively, which research shows increases the chances of teachers gaining common understandings and collaborating back in their schools. They could also see the alignment of the training they received with their own schools' and districts' goals.

At the end of the school year preceding full implementation of the NxGen standards, just over a third of end-user teachers viewed themselves as well prepared to teach to the NxGen standards.

EQ5. What were the outcomes of 2013-2014 professional development experiences in terms of teachers' overall sense of preparedness to teach the NxGen CSOs and perceived impacts of these experiences on knowledge, practice, and beliefs?

At the end of the school year preceding full implementation of the NxGen standards, just over a third of end-user teachers viewed themselves as well prepared to teach to the NxGen standards. Among EEA-trained teacher trainers, nearly half shared that level of confidence. Notably, more than a quarter of all teachers responding to the survey considered themselves not at all prepared.

In addition to reporting their sense of preparedness, teachers also provided assessments—both before (retrospectively) and after their training during 2013-2014—of the extensiveness of their knowledge of the standards, practice of the instructional shifts, and belief that their students can achieve at levels benchmarked in the standards. Overall, they believed themselves to have gained the most from their training in their knowledge of the standards, less in their practice of the instructional shifts, and least of all in their beliefs about the potential success of their students in reaching the NxGen benchmarks. On average, they began and ended the year believing "to a small extent" that their students could reach the benchmarks.

EQ6. What training–related factors may have been at work to produce these outcomes?

When working in combination, district, school, and RESA staff were more likely than when working alone, to provide higher quality, more frequent, and longer duration professional development–all qualities associated in this study with heightened confidence in being prepared to teach the NxGen Standards.

Recommendations

While a close study of the findings in this study may point to additional needs, we make three major recommendations:

Strongly focus on raising trainers' and teachers' expectations and beliefs that their students can learn at levels benchmarked in the Next Generations standards.

The professional development that was offered during 2013-2014 did little to convince teachers that their students could learn at higher levels. Yet decades of research has shown the impact teacher expectations can have on their students achievement and the benefits of academic press, so this is a critical area of need.

Overall, they believed themselves to have gained the most from their training in their knowledge of the standards, less in their practice of the instructional shifts, and least of all in their beliefs about the potential success of their students in reaching the NxGen benchmarks. On average, they began and ended the year believing "to a small extent" that their students could reach the benchmarks.

Focus future train-the-trainer activities on district level staff.

The success of the train-the-trainer model depends on the ability of those trained to provide training back in their home school or district. In this study we learned that teachers and principals were at a disadvantage to provide such training, especially in terms of scheduling the number of hours and follow-up meetings that research indicates it takes to change teacher practice and improve student performance. District central office staff were in a much better position to provide such training and, in fact, did provide most of the training received by teachers in the targeted grades across the state.

Provide an infrastructure for ongoing training and access to guidance materials for local trainers.

After providing their initial training back in their home districts, many participants in the EEAs reported needing more training themselves and help in locating guidance resources such as sample lesson plans, pacing guides, and the like. Very few of the EEA-trained teachers had received professional development of sufficient duration to effect changes in their own practice, and only about half considered themselves fairly well or very well prepared to teach to the standards themselves, let alone train others to teach to the standards.

The full report is available on the WVDE Office of Research website: http://wvde.state.wv.us/research/reports2015.html.