EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Educator Enhancement Academies Evaluation Study

Phase 1—Preparation of RESA-Based, Next Generation CSO Trainers

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This is the first of three evaluation reports on the effectiveness of a regional train-the-trainer strategy to support classroom implementation of the Next Generation Content Standards and Objectives (NxGen CSOs). This report focuses on six regional Educator Enhancement Academies (EEAs) hosted by the eight regional education service agencies (RESAs) in the spring of 2013. The EEAs prepared RESA-based NxGen trainers who would provide professional development for educators—primarily teachers—in schools across the state. Later phases of this study will examine the extensiveness and quality of training offered by the RESA-based NxGen trainers during the subsequent months (Phase 2), and the ultimate impacts of those training experiences on teachers' instructional practices and student performance (Phase 3).

The six EEAs focused on the NxGen CSOs for elementary school (Grades 2-3), middle school (Grades 6-8), and high school (Grades 10-12).[1] They had durations of 2 to 3 days. The WVDE supplied content expert trainers for four of the EEAs. Corwin Press provided trainers for the remaining two (see Table 1).

Table 1. 2013 Regional Educator Enhancement Academy Schedule

RESAs	Dates	Location	Source of trainers
RESA 3	April 15-17	Charleston, WV	Corwin Press
RESA 7	April 15-17	Morgantown, WV	Corwin Press
RESA 2	May 17, 18, and 28	Huntington, WV	WVDE
RESAs 5 and 6	May 20 and 22	Wheeling, WV	WVDE
RESAs 1 and 4	May 29-31	Beckley, WV	WVDE
RESA 8	June 3-5	Shepherdstown, WV	WVDE

In all, 953 participants were prepared to be RESA-based trainers on NxGen instructional shifts. Slightly more than a third attended Corwin-led with remainder attending WVDE-led EEAs. Attendance at the academies ranged from 140 to 215. All 55 counties were represented, and the largest group of attendees was regular education classroom teachers.

Methods

An initial evaluation survey, the Event Survey, was conducted using two different methods. At WVDE-led academies, participants filled it out onsite either with paper and pencil copies or online. Participants at Corwin-led EEAs were contacted via e-mail and responded online. A second survey (Follow-up Survey) was administered to all 953 participants online in September 2013; it was intended to collect participants views, after they conducted their own training during the summer.

Results

The overall response rate for the EEA Event Survey was 78%. Response rates for the Corwin-led EEAs were considerably lower (54.4%) than for WVDE-led EEAs (89.6%), probably due to the challenges posed by the need to collecting data from them through e-mail communications during the summer months. Both groups were surveyed together in September for the EEA Follow-

[1] During the two previous school years, the remaining grade levels had been the focus of NxGen training provided through centralized Teacher Leadership Institutes (TLIs) conducted by the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE).

Up Survey; 62.9% responded overall, with WVDE-led EEA participants' response rate (61.6%) slightly exceeding Corwin's (56.4%).

We approach the discussion of findings from two perspectives: first in relationship to a review of the research literature published by the WVDE Office of Research (Hammer, 2013; see a summary in the Introduction of the full report); and second in response to six research questions.

Findings and Recent Research

Two major components must be in place for professional development to result in greater teacher and student learning: (a) a coherent instructional system, and (b) design features that research has shown to be effective (Hammer, 2013). Each of these major components is discussed below.

The academies provided important components of a coherent instructional system by focusing on the new NxGen standards and instructional shifts, and by introducing participants to materials and tools for use in their own trainings and classrooms.

Cobb and Jackson (2011) describe what constitutes a coherent instruction system—that is, one where various elements work together to raise student achievement. Elements especially relevant to this study include the following: (a) explicit goals for students' learning; (b) a detailed vision of high-quality instruction that specifies particular instructional practices that will lead to students' attainment of the learning goals; (c) instructional materials and associated tools designed to support teachers' development of these practices; (d) district teacher professional development that focuses on the specific practices, is organized around the above materials, and is sustained over time; (e) classroom assessments aligned with the goals; (f) school-based professional learning communities; and (g) additional supports for struggling students.

The EEAs focused strongly on the first four of the elements described by Cobb and Jackson (2011)—that is, participants spent time learning about the NxGen standards for their content areas and grade levels (a, above). They also learned about shifts in instructional approaches that will be needed to teach to the new standards (b, above) and materials and tools to help them implement the new approaches in their classrooms (c, above). Participants indicated they greatly valued the time spent learning about the instructional shifts and related resources, and would like more of both. As for (d) above, the purpose of the EEAs was to prepare RESA-based trainers who could lead professional development for educators in schools and districts. The extent to this was a successful effort is the focus of this three-phase evaluation. Some preliminary evidence is presented later in this summary. The remaining elements in Cobb and Jackson's system (e–g, above) were not taken on explicitly in the EEAs, but could be the focus of future training.

Turning now to *research-based approaches to professional development*, consensus has developed around the need to include the following five design elements: (a) content and content pedagogy focused; (b) coherence with school and district goals, as well as participants level of knowledge and need for training; (c) active learning including time for planning implementation of newly learned practices; (d) collective participation of educators from the same school or district; and (e) duration (at least 30 hours) and time span (a year or more).

Evidence from the Phase 1 study supports at least the first three practices being present during the 2- or 3-day EEAs. The academies were strongly focused on content and approaches to teaching that content (a, above). Further, participants generally agreed that the training was tied to their school and district goals, although a small group of participants suggested that the content of the training was a mismatch with their needs (especially grade or programmatic level) or that the content had already been covered in previous training (b, above). As for active learning (c, above), in open-ended comments participants expressed appreciation for the discussions and information sharing that took place, as well as the opportunities for collaboration and planning. Participants in WVDE-led EEAs also indicated strong agreement that the EEA they attended included opportunities to practice. Participants at both Corwin- and WVDE-led sessions agreed that they had opportunities to collaborate. Phase 2 of this study may provide evidence of the final two design elements (d and e, above).

Findings in Response to the Research Questions

This part of the discussion directly addresses six research questions that guided the Phase 1 study. In doing so, we must address the differences between the two main providers—Corwin and WVDE—because the findings were notably different.

EQ1. *To what extent did the EEAs deliver high quality professional development?* When asked if the session they attended included six different research-based practices, participants in WVDE-led EEAs had mean scores that fell solidly in the agreed or strongly agreed range. On the other hand, for three of the six indicators, participants in Corwin-led sessions had mean scores in the neutral range, with the other three indicating weak agreement.

EQ2. *To what extent did the EEAs employ appropriate logistic procedures including the amount of time spent on the professional development?* Participants from both groups agreed that the trainers adhered to the schedule. However, there was stronger agreement that the WVDE-led sessions had clear objectives and were well organized. Phase 2 will investigate whether the duration of the training met the 30 or more hours called for in research.

EQ3. *To what extent did the EEAs prepare attendees to effectively train others regarding the NxGen CSOs?* Participants at the WVDE-led trainings were much more likely than those at Corwin trainings to indicate that the training had been a good start and they were looking forward to training others or that the training had provided everything they needed to train—by a margin of about 2.5 to 1. Conversely, attendees at Corwin-led events were about 12 times more likely to indicate they did not feel ready to train others. When asked about the quality of the training materials they were provided for use in their own trainings, there was agreement in both groups that they had received adequate quantities and that the materials were high quality and evidence based—although the WVDE-led participants agreed more strongly. The Corwin-led participants, however, were neutral about the materials being relevant to their training needs and useable for their own trainings, while WVDE-led participants quite strongly agreed they were relevant and useful.

Findings also showed differences between the four academies led by WVDE trainers compared with the two academies led by Corwin Press, with WVDE generally outperforming Corwin.

EQ4. *To what extent did the EEAs build sufficient knowledge of the NxGen CSOs and of critical shifts from the previous standards?* The knowledge test included in the EEA Event Survey showed comparable results for both providers except in one area: Individuals who attended WVDE-led elementary-level English/language arts sessions performed significantly better than those who attended Corwin-led sessions. In no case did the average raw score correspond to less than 58% correct. However, it is important to understand the inverse as well. In the worst case (i.e., middle school mathematics), the average respondent answered 42% of scenario items incorrectly. In the best case (i.e., elementary mathematics), the average respondent answered 22% incorrectly.

EQ5. *To what extent did the EEAs use qualified and knowledgeable personnel to deliver content?* On all of the quantitative measures of trainer quality, the WVDE trainers received extremely high mean ratings—at least 4.6 on a 5-point scale. Corwin trainers, on the other hand scored at least a full point lower. Corwin trainers' lowest score was for "Trainers modeled desired training techniques." Participants at the WVDE-led academies were almost three times more likely to mention the high quality of the presenters. In response to an open-ended question about what had been least useful, nearly 13% of participants in the Corwin-led academies thought the quality of the trainers was inadequate; about 5% thought none of the training was useful; and another 5% thought there was too much marketing of materials taking place.

EQ6. *To what extent did the EEAs provide a better experience as regionally based academies, compared with the previous state-based professional development models?* Although just under 40% of both groups thought their experiences had been about the same as in previous events, about 56% of WVDE-led EEA attendees thought their EEA experience was more useful, compared with 16% for Corwin—a 40-point difference. Conversely, about 46% of Corwin attendees thought it was less useful than previous events, compared with 5% of WVDE attendees who held that view, which is another 40% gap.

With the exception of the knowledge test items, the differences between the two groups was important and consistent across nearly all measures, with WVDE-led EEAs getting very high marks on nearly every measure, and Corwin receiving notably lower ratings. Evidence

from comments supports possible explanations for these differences:

- *Lack of preparation on the part of the Corwin trainers*—Trainers lacked knowledge about NxGen standards and were often unable to answer participants' questions.
- *Lack of experience in a train-the-trainer setting*—Participants' gave the trainers relatively low marks for the materials they provided in terms of their usefulness and relevance, and indicated a lack of modeling of training techniques they would be able to use. Further, only about a quarter of the participants in the Corwin sessions were looking forward to training others or felt they had everything they needed compared with two thirds of the participants in the WVDE-led sessions.
- *Mismatched expectations between the RESAs who contracted with them and Corwin Press*—The Corwin trainers did not seem to understand their role in training RESA-based trainers. Participant complaints about trainers' efforts to sell their books suggest they may have viewed the sessions more as a marketing opportunity than as a critical component in West Virginia's implementation of the NxGen CSOs.
- *Duration of the training*—The Corwin-led sessions were significantly briefer than the WVDE-led sessions; that is, 12–15 hours compared with 24 hours.

Limitations

Participants from the two RESAs that used Corwin Press were surveyed more than two months after their training; participants at trainings provided by the remaining RESAs were surveyed immediately, onsite—which poses a risk of temporal bias. Response bias may also have played a role in the EEA Event Survey. Due largely to the way the survey was administered, about 90% of WVDE-led EEA attendees responded to the survey compared with only about 54% of attendees—perhaps the most vocal ones—in the Corwin-led sessions. The six knowledge tests were developed by WVDE staff, tested by at least two outside educators working in the appropriate grade level and content area, vetted by members of the WVDE Office of Assessment and Accountability, and tested using factor analysis to cull out ineffective items. The tests were not normed, however, or subjected to rigorous statistical validity and reliability testing, so these results should be viewed as indicative and not summative.

Recommendations

Based on what we learned in Phase 1, we have the following recommendations (additional recommendations will likely follow as we learn more in later phases:

- Develop additional materials and associated tools to support teachers' use of instructional practices to help students meet the new NxGen standards. Consider using this development process as a professional learning opportunity for teachers who would create and vet new resources.
- Sustain the commitment to professional learning among the RESA-based trainers and the educators whose learning about the NxGen standards and instructional shifts they will guide. Thirty contact hours over the course of a year should be the minimum, more should be provided if at all possible.
- Settle on standards for professional development, such as the Learning Forward standards adopted by the West Virginia Board of Education, or the components and qualities outlined in this report.
- Develop standards for train-the-trainer events that clearly specify what should be provided, for example, adaptable PowerPoint presentations, activity descriptions, and modeling of effective training practices.
- Include standards and clear objectives for training in contracts with vendors and other providers, and hold them accountable.
- Evaluate the success of the training based on the trainers' effectiveness in meeting the standards and objectives. Publish the results to motivate providers to align their offerings to state goals, priorities, and standards for professional learning.

References

Cobb, P. & Jackson, K. (2011). Towards an empirically grounded theory of action for improving the quality of mathematics teaching at scale. *Mathematics Teacher Education & Development, 13*(2), 6-33.

Hammer, P. C. (2013). *Creating the context and employing best practices for teacher professional development: A brief review of recent research*. Charleston, WV: West Virginia Department of Education, Division of Teaching and Learning, Office of Research.

The full report is available on the WVDE Office of Research website: *http://wvde.state.wv.us/research/reports2014.html*.