

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN OREGON

What Do Teachers Want, What Do They Get,
and Do They Find It Useful?

January 2008

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Well-designed and implemented professional development is linked to improved teaching practices and, ultimately, higher student achievement. Given its potential to strengthen education quality, educators and policymakers—in Oregon and elsewhere—know too little about how professional development is delivered or whether teachers view their professional development opportunities favorably. This report sheds light on the scope and perceived quality of professional development through an analysis of data from the 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and administrative data from the Oregon Department of Education. In addition, we report findings from teacher focus groups conducted during Fall 2006.

The analysis of the 2003-04 SASS indicates that Oregon teachers generally want the same kinds of professional development as their peers in other states, but on average, they appear less satisfied with what they receive. The 2006 teacher focus groups echoed a level of general dissatisfaction. The ODE administrative data suggest the level of resources devoted to professional development varies considerably across Oregon's school districts. However, precise inter-district comparisons are difficult because districts vary in the ways they report the time and resources spent on professional development.



INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

A growing body of literature points to strengthening teacher quality as the most cost-effective way to improve student achievement. Moreover, research has demonstrated that a well-designed professional development program can change teaching practices and accelerate student learning. Well-designed programs include those that focus squarely on a teacher's subject matter, are delivered through intensive multi-day or multi-week sessions, and permit active and collaborative learning. Despite growing evidence about what works, little is known about how much school districts invest in professional development, how it's delivered, and whether teachers are satisfied with the offerings.

This report seeks to answer some of those questions by reviewing data from two sources—the Schools and Staffing Survey, conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), and administrative data collected by the Oregon Department of Education (ODE). Teacher responses to the SASS allow comparisons between Oregon and other states on measures of teacher participation in, and satisfaction with, professional development activities. The SASS is a periodic, national survey of educators conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The 2003-04 survey is the most recent available, and it queried a sufficient number of educators to allow state-level estimates. The survey includes several questions about the scope and scale of professional development that teachers receive. The figures reported here are from responses

to SASS's teacher questionnaire, which NCES administered to 62,000 teachers at 13,300 schools across the United States, including teachers from 180 schools in Oregon.

Administrative data on district expenditures and time devoted to targeted staff development from the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) suggest both the variation in resources devoted to professional development across the state and the lack of clarity regarding specific activities that constitute professional development.

ANALYSIS OF THE NCES SCHOOLS AND STAFFING SURVEY

WHAT DO TEACHERS WANT?

The professional development interests of Oregon teachers generally mirrored those of their counterparts across the United States (See Figure 1). A plurality—40 percent— of 2003-04 Oregon teachers ranked “content or content standards of the subject I teach” as their top priority. One-quarter of Oregon teachers considered “teaching students with special needs or limited English proficiency” the top priority. Discipline, general teaching methods, and classroom technology were priorities of 10-15 percent of Oregon teachers. Oregon teachers were more interested in content and special needs/LEP and somewhat less interested in professional development around discipline and classroom technology compared to their peers across the nation.

WHAT DO TEACHERS GET?

The SASS teacher questionnaire asks about intensity of participation in four specific professional development areas: “content of the subject you teach,” “use of computers for instruction,” “reading instruction,” and “discipline and management in the classroom.” Survey responses indicate that (see Figure 2):

- **Professional development related to a teacher’s subject content was the most common category delivered.** Nearly 90 percent of elementary teachers and 75 percent of secondary teachers reported some amount of professional development related

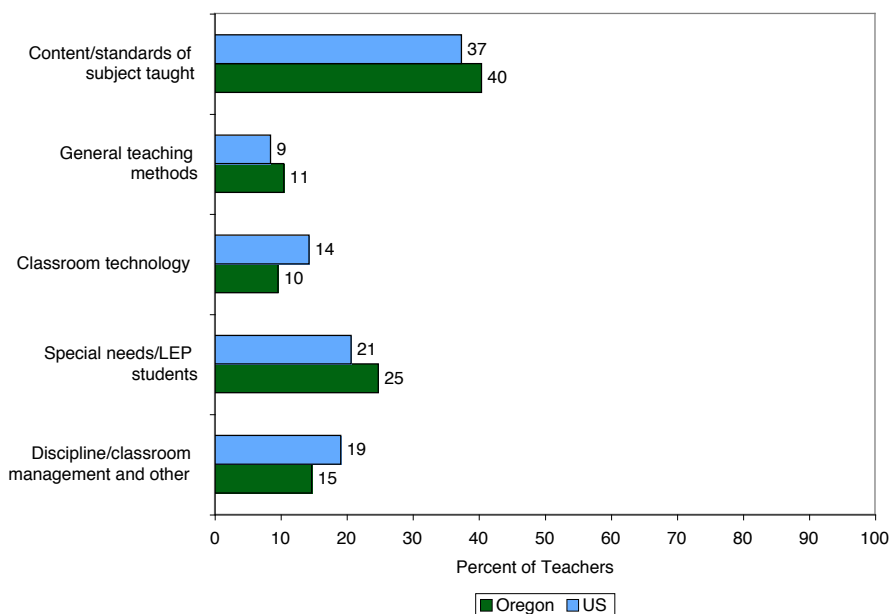
to the subject they taught.

- **A minority of teachers reported intensive, long-duration professional development in any category.** While large shares of teachers reported professional development of some kind, only small minorities indicated they

had received intensive professional development—defined here as 33 or more hours annually. One third of Oregon elementary teachers reported intensive professional development in their subject area; 18 percent of Oregon elementary teachers said they received intensive professional development around reading instruction. Only a small share of teachers report time-intensive professional development in the discipline or technology areas.

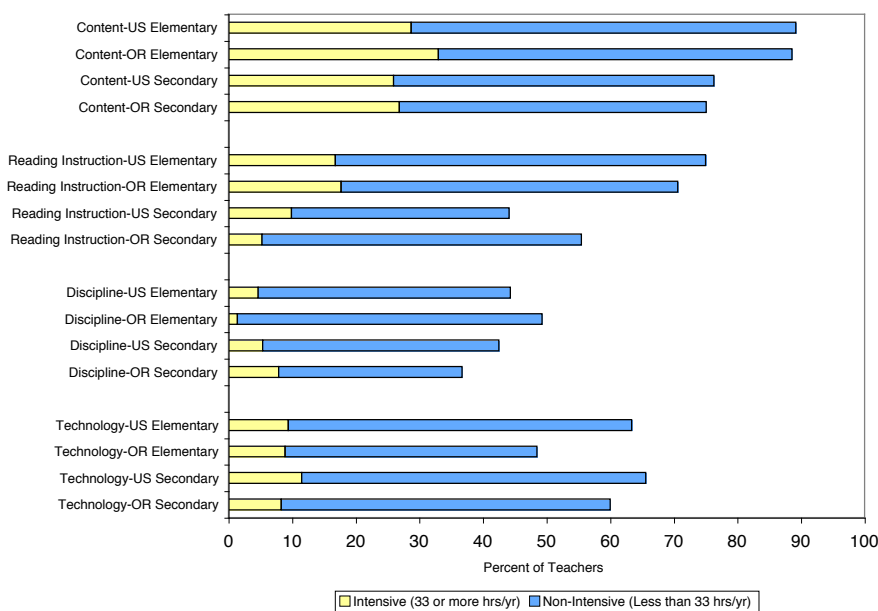
- **In Oregon and elsewhere, elementary teachers reported more professional development than secondary teachers in most categories.** In the content, reading instruction, and discipline categories, a higher share of elementary teachers reported receiving some amount of professional development. Secondary teachers received more classroom technology and intensive discipline/classroom management training.

Figure 1: Teachers’ Stated Top Priority for Professional Development



Source: NCES 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey

Figure 2: Percent of Teachers Reporting Participation in Professional Development, By Category and Intensity



Source: NCES 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey

DO TEACHERS HAVE ACTIVE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES?

Because the format of professional development can be as important as the substance, the SASS questionnaire asks teachers about opportunities to actively put new methods into practice. Specifically, the SASS asks whether teachers “engage in research,” “collaborate with other teachers on issues of instruction,” “observe, or be observed, at least 10 minutes annually,” or “act as coach/mentor, or receive coaching or mentoring.”

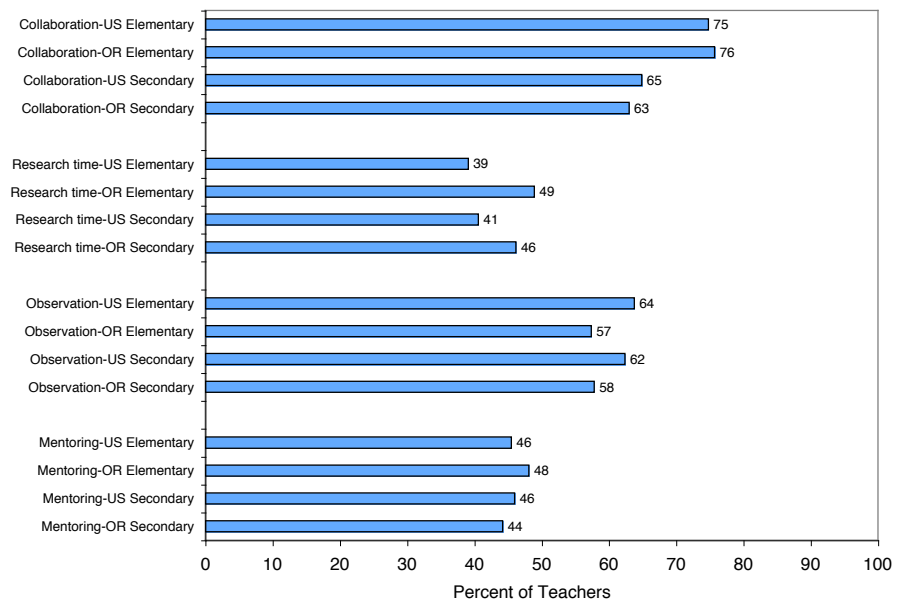
Collaboration was the most common form of active learning, with 76 percent of Oregon elementary teachers reporting some level of collaboration (see Figure 3). A majority of Oregon elementary and secondary teachers reported 10 minutes, or more, of observation annually; however, Oregon’s teachers are observed less than teachers elsewhere. A higher share of Oregon teachers reported opportunities for research while levels of mentoring reflected national norms.

DO TEACHERS FIND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES USEFUL?

For each of the professional development categories described previously—subject content, reading instruction, technology, and discipline—the SASS asked teachers to assess the usefulness of the activities they participated in as: “not useful,” “somewhat useful,” “useful,” or “very useful.”

While the SASS does not survey sufficient numbers of teachers to support precise state-

Figure 3: Percent of Teachers Reporting Participation in Selected Professional Development Activities



Source: NCES 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey

by-state rankings, the data do suggest groups of states in which teachers are generally more or less satisfied with their professional development opportunities. The SASS data show Oregon teachers fall on the less satisfied end of the scale when asked about professional development in their content area (See Figure 4). They also express lower rate satisfaction in the three other categories of professional development (See Appendix).

IS THERE A LINK BETWEEN INTENSITY OF PARTICIPATION AND TEACHER SATISFACTION?

Professional development activities delivered in intensive, multi-day sessions are more likely to improve student outcomes than less intensive training. But even intensive training can improve student achievement only if teachers effectively implement their new knowledge and if effective implementation can actually impact student performance. Teachers who do not find their professional development options useful are unlikely to improve either their teaching or the achievement levels of their students as a result

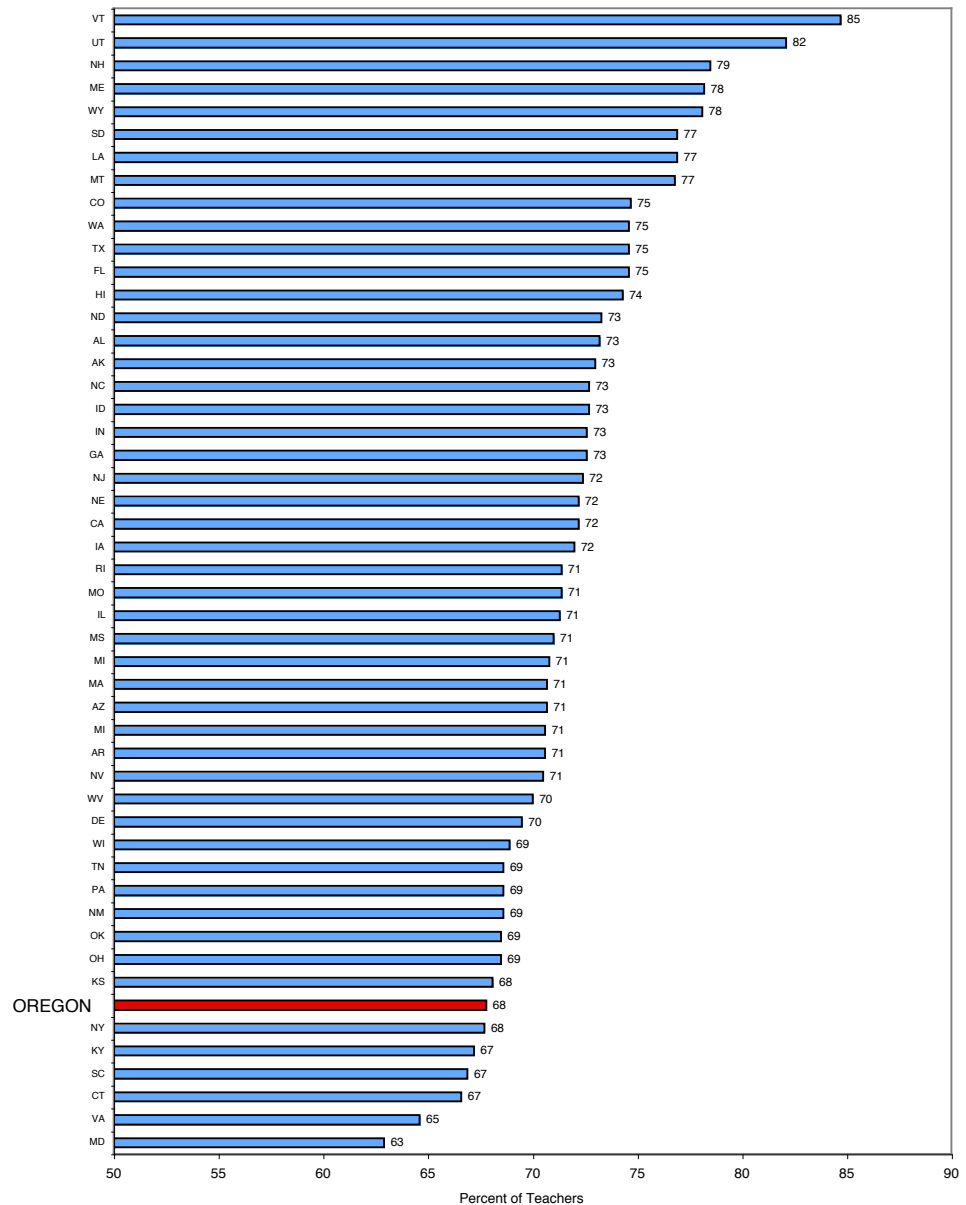
of participation, no matter how intensive the training.

It is therefore reassuring that in the SASS data, the teachers who participate in professional development more intensively also report the training as more valuable. It may be that the relationship between intensity and usefulness works in reverse—teachers who value professional development will participate relatively more when given the opportunity. But even teachers committed to professional development are probably less likely to participate, and less likely to value the result when they do, if options are few or of low perceived quality.

Regardless of the direction of causation, a similar result holds when SASS responses are aggregated by state (see Figure 5).

States with a higher percentage of teachers reporting 33 or more hours of content area professional development have, on average, a higher percentage of teachers who find the activities useful or very useful. This fact alone does not establish a causal link in either direction, but the apparent trend is at least suggestive. Based on this trend, displayed in Figure 5, increasing the share of Oregon’s

Figure 4: Percent of Teachers Reporting Professional Development in their Content Area was Useful or Very Useful



Source: NCES 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey

teachers receiving intensive, content-area professional development by ten percentage points could increase the share of teachers who report the training as useful or very useful by two to three percentage points. While not enormous, a change of this magnitude would push Oregon well into the middle-tier of states in Figure 4.

WHAT DO INDIVIDUAL OREGON TEACHERS SAY ABOUT THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

During Fall 2006, the Chalkboard Project commissioned three focus groups to learn more about the ideas teachers had for career enhancement, including a revamped professional development system. The focus groups, which were conducted by the Davis, Hibbitts and Midghall opinion research firm, involved 33 teachers from Southern Oregon, the Willamette Valley, and the Portland metropolitan area. Below, we highlight the key findings from those discussions.

All of the teachers were asked to record their level of satisfaction with their district's system to enhance professional practices and motivate exceptional teaching. Nearly all were somewhat or not very satisfied with their district's system. Those somewhat satisfied generally said they had some opportunities to participate in professional development opportunities but added there was little recognition for their efforts to participate.

In their views, the key problems with the current professional development system included:

- Lack of support—no incentives to either participate or implement what was learned and lack of clear goals for participation
- Lack of reimbursement, with professional development sometimes paid for by teachers, with some having to pay for a substitute teacher

Some also said they lacked information about opportunities while others asserted that much of what they attended was of poor quality. "I have a colleague who calls professional development 'drive-by trainings'—it's a good way of describing what we get," said one.

Asked about how they would design things differently, nearly all mentioned more time – for collaboration on curriculum, for meeting with and observing other teachers to share ideas and learn, and other professional development. As one teacher put it: "There's an extraordinary amount of expertise and creativity in my school. I don't have access to it because I don't have time." They also wanted support for incorporating follow-up activities into their schools: "I've had the chance to go to lots of trainings but no incentive to bring it back."

Many also mentioned money or pay scale increases for outside classroom work. "Reward those who 'do' more, if it's effective and implemented; not just seat time." Some, though, said "time is a greater issue than money." Time was a critical theme throughout the discussions. As one said, "Exceptional teachers rapidly approach mediocrity as you cram in more kids."

Source: Davis, Hibbitts & Midghall Inc.

A similar relationship is apparent across the other types of professional development defined in the SASS, although the state-level results for reading professional development are less compelling.

These data suggest that, at a minimum, opportunities for meaningful professional development vary greatly across states. It seems unlikely that the observed differences across states are due simply to teachers in high-satisfaction states like Vermont being more receptive to professional development than those in low-satisfaction states like Virginia. More likely, Vermont has implemented, and made more readily available, professional development practices that teachers value more highly.

Vermont and Utah, at the top of the chart in teacher satisfaction with content area training, also rank at or near the top in intensity, while in Oregon, near the bottom of the satisfaction rankings, the share of teachers receiving the highest intensity of training is about average. Oregon's neighbors on the satisfaction chart,

Kansas, Kentucky, and New York, all have a much lower percentage of teachers with the highest intensity of participation. Thus, not only does Oregon rank poorly in the percent of teachers who find their professional development activities useful, the state falls well below what would be expected solely on the basis of participation intensity.

ANALYSIS OF ADMINISTRATIVE DATA FROM THE OREGON DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

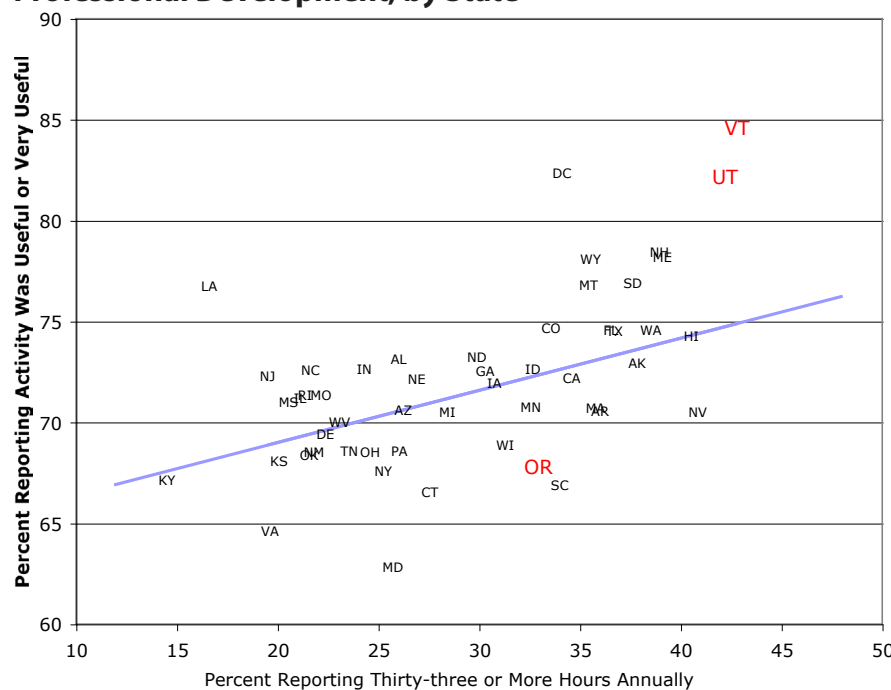
WHAT DO STATE DATA SAY ABOUT THE TIME AND RESOURCES DEVOTED TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

Teacher professional development is a sizable endeavor within the state—ECONorthwest estimates that Oregon likely spent more than \$130 million on teacher professional development during the 2005-06 school year¹—but the lack of standardized definitions and reporting requirements across state and local boundaries complicates any systematic analysis of the topic. ODE data highlight these definitional and reporting issues more than they identify consistent trends within the state, but the data nonetheless suggest a wide variation in resources devoted to professional development across districts.

We focus on two specific data resources collected by ODE:

- **Hours of “targeted staff development.”** Activities include “teacher training that is specifically focused on improving student

Figure 5: Intensity and Usefulness of Content Area Professional Development, by State



Source: NCES 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey

performance to achieve state standards and implementing the Education Act of the 21st Century.” Although this focus is narrower than the universe of activities typically considered professional development, data on targeted staff development could help to identify trends in professional development intensity over time and across districts. The department tracks the hours that licensed teaching staff devote to this activity, and annually reports per-FTE averages for licensed employees by school.

- **Expenditures for instructional staff development and improvement of instruction.** Oregon’s budgeting and accounting manual for school districts includes explicit expenditure functions for instructional staff development and for improvement of instruction. Staff development expenditures are for “activities specifically designed for instructional staff...to improve teacher performance.” Expenditures related to targeted staff development fall primarily within the professional development expenditure

function. “Improvement of instruction” expenditures are for “activities designed primarily for assisting instructional staff in planning, developing, and evaluating the process of providing learning experiences for students.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of hours per licensed FTE of targeted staff development across schools as reported to ODE. While nearly all schools report time spent on targeted staff development, over 1,100 annually since FY 2000, much of the variation in reported hours across schools and over time within schools likely reflects variation in reporting procedures as much as real trends in delivery of services. Even so, across the state, average participation is not inconsistent with results from the SASS.

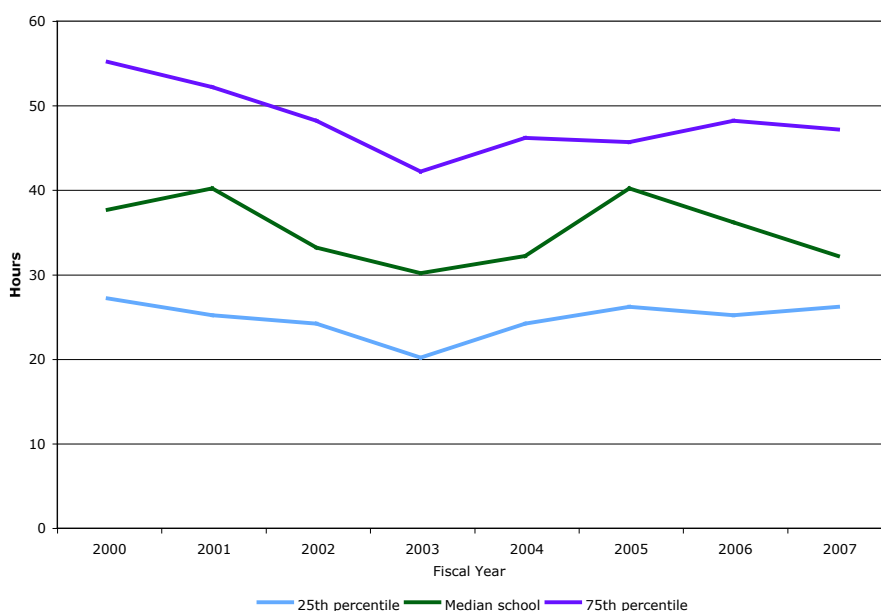
Trends in average hours per FTE reported by the median school may provide a reasonable indicator for trends in actual participation whether or not all districts accurately report the same activities from year to year. The trends at the 25th and 75th percentile, also displayed in Figure 6, illustrate the wide variation in

participation, but are less reliable indicators of the general nature of professional development given the variation over time within individual schools.

Figure 6 suggests a significant decline in targeted development time during the early years of this decade, with reported hours per FTE hitting its low point during FY 2003 that coincided with the budgetary turmoil described above and with the reference period for the 2003–04 SASS.

Assessing the variation in

Figure 6: Average Targeted Staff Development Time Per Licensed Teaching Staff by School, FY 2000-2007



Source: ECONorthwest analysis of ODE staffing data.

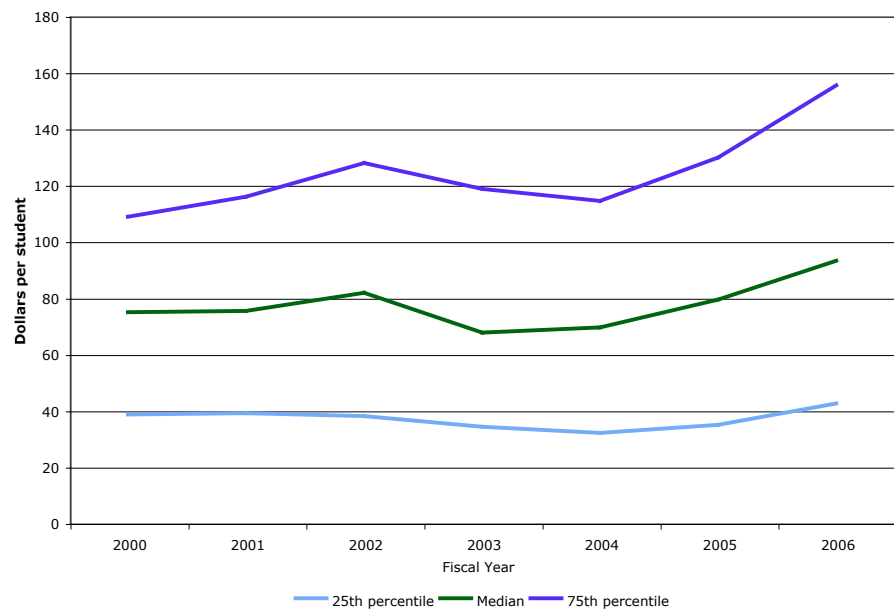
intensity of participation across Oregon schools reveals that, in any given year, average participation for the school at the 75th percentile is close to twice the average participation at the 25th percentile. During the 2005-06 school year, average participation at the 75th and 25th percentiles was 42 and 26 hours, respectively—a difference of two days of staff development time per licensed teacher. Average participation also varies greatly within schools over time, suggesting a lack of consistency, at some level, in policies regarding professional development.²

Clearly, the resources devoted to professional development are not tracked as closely as desirable, particularly given the large amount of resources involved, whether measured in dollars or in staff time. Since FY 2000, for example, schools at the 90th percentile reported average participation in targeted staff development of more than 60 hours per year. Unfortunately, exactly how much this time costs districts, and what it is used for, is unknown because of the way the data is, or is not, reported by schools and districts.

We do know that districts have been reporting ever-higher expenditures on instructional staff development and instructional improvement. In FY 2005, these expenditures were, at \$73 million, 8 percent higher than in FY 2000, while the FY 2006 total of \$88 million reflects an increase of 20 percent over FY 2005.

The aggregate totals mask several other thought-provoking trends:

Figure 7: Per-Student Staff Development and Instructional Improvement Expenditures by District*, FY 2000-2006



*Districts reporting positive expenditures. In a single year, up to 12 districts did not report expenditures under the relevant functions.

Source: ECONorthwest analysis of ODE school expenditure data.

- Expenditures from general fund revenue have fallen sharply in total, and as a share of professional development expenditures.** In FY 2000, the \$49 million in general fund expenditures accounted for 72 percent of expenditures for staff development and instructional improvement. The \$40 million in general fund reported under professional development in FY 2006 represented only 45 percent of the total for the year. At least some of the increasing share of special fund revenue spent on professional development likely results from increases in Federal NCLB funding for professional development (Title IIA), but the available data do not have sufficient detail to know with certainty how or where Title IIA funds are recorded.
- District reporting varies considerably by expenditure function.** While all but a handful of districts report expenditures in either staff development or instructional improvement, about 15 percent typically do not report any instructional improvement

expenditures and less than half of districts have reported expenditures on instructional staff development since FY 2004. Many non-reporting districts may well provide professional development services similar to those offered by reporting districts, but may not record expenditures in the same way or at the same level of detail.

- **Nearly half of Oregon's school districts report zero expenditure on targeted staff development.** The school district chart of accounts includes a code for expenditures related to targeted staff development. While nearly all districts report that staff devote time to targeted development, a declining share of districts, about half during FY 2006, report any expenditures using this code.

As with the data on targeted staff development time, the reported professional development expenditures suggest variation in district accounting procedures more as much as they suggest real variation in delivery of professional development. But, as with the time data, changes in the distribution of expenditures over time do suggest changes in focus the state's focus on professional development. Figure 7 outlines the distribution of per-student expenditures on staff and instructional development across districts and over time.

The trend since FY 2004 in reported expenditures is clearly upward across districts at both ends of the distribution. The gap in reported per-student spending has grown over time, although it isn't clear whether the gap results from true programmatic differences or from variation in reporting procedures.

CONCLUSIONS

This report represents a first attempt to answer some key questions for educators and policymakers seeking to improve professional development in Oregon, including: How much and what type of professional development do teachers want? What do they get and how do

the feel about the activities? How much does it all cost? What impact will it have? This report addresses these questions by analyzing the 2003-04 SASS and by analyzing school and district data collected by ODE.

The SASS data make clear that, at least during the reference year for the 2003-04 survey, the typical Oregon teacher wants professional development with the same characteristics do teachers across the nation. As in Oregon, nearly two in five teachers nationwide identified content area training as their highest professional development priority; between 20 and 25 percent listed special needs and LEP-related professional development first; another 15 to 20 percent identified discipline as their top priority in Oregon and in the country as a whole. Survey responses also suggest that Oregon teachers have a similar degree of access to content area professional development and active learning opportunities as teachers from other states.

On the other hand, a smaller share of Oregon's teachers engage in intensive (i.e., more than 33 hours annually) professional development than that of teachers nationwide and teachers who participate find the activities less useful than do their peers in most other states. The data also indicate a correlation between intensity of participation and satisfaction, and Oregon ranks poorly on both scales. Although these results are most striking for content area professional development, they are consistent across the four specific areas probed by the survey.

Analysis of ODE data implies professional development participation that is roughly consistent with SASS responses. More importantly, however, the data highlight a wide disparity in *reported* professional development time and expenses across districts. Because a surprising number of districts do not code *any* expenditure under certain professional development-related codes, it is likely that the extent of the observed variation may derive as

much from differences in accounting procedures as in variations in professional development offerings. Many districts simply do not report enough detail to create reliable inter-district comparisons. That said, the analysis contained in this report is consistent with information gleaned for six districts in ECONorthwest's companion report, *Developing Quality Teachers in Oregon: A Profile of the Successes and Challenges of Six Oregon Districts*.

While the data have produced a consistent picture of professional development within Oregon, the picture lacks detail, in part because of limitations inherent to district and school-level data. Only a more consistent and comprehensive accounting of professional development costs will allow a clear understanding about the extent and nature of teacher professional development in Oregon. This understanding is a necessary first step in understanding how well Oregon trains its practicing teachers and the impact the training has on student achievement.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Andrew Dyke and John Tapogna of ECONorthwest authored this report. The authors received valuable comments on drafts of this report from Kate Dickson of the Chalkboard Project and Dr. Judith Warren Little (University of California-Berkeley). All errors of fact and interpretation remain the responsibility of the authors.

ENDNOTES

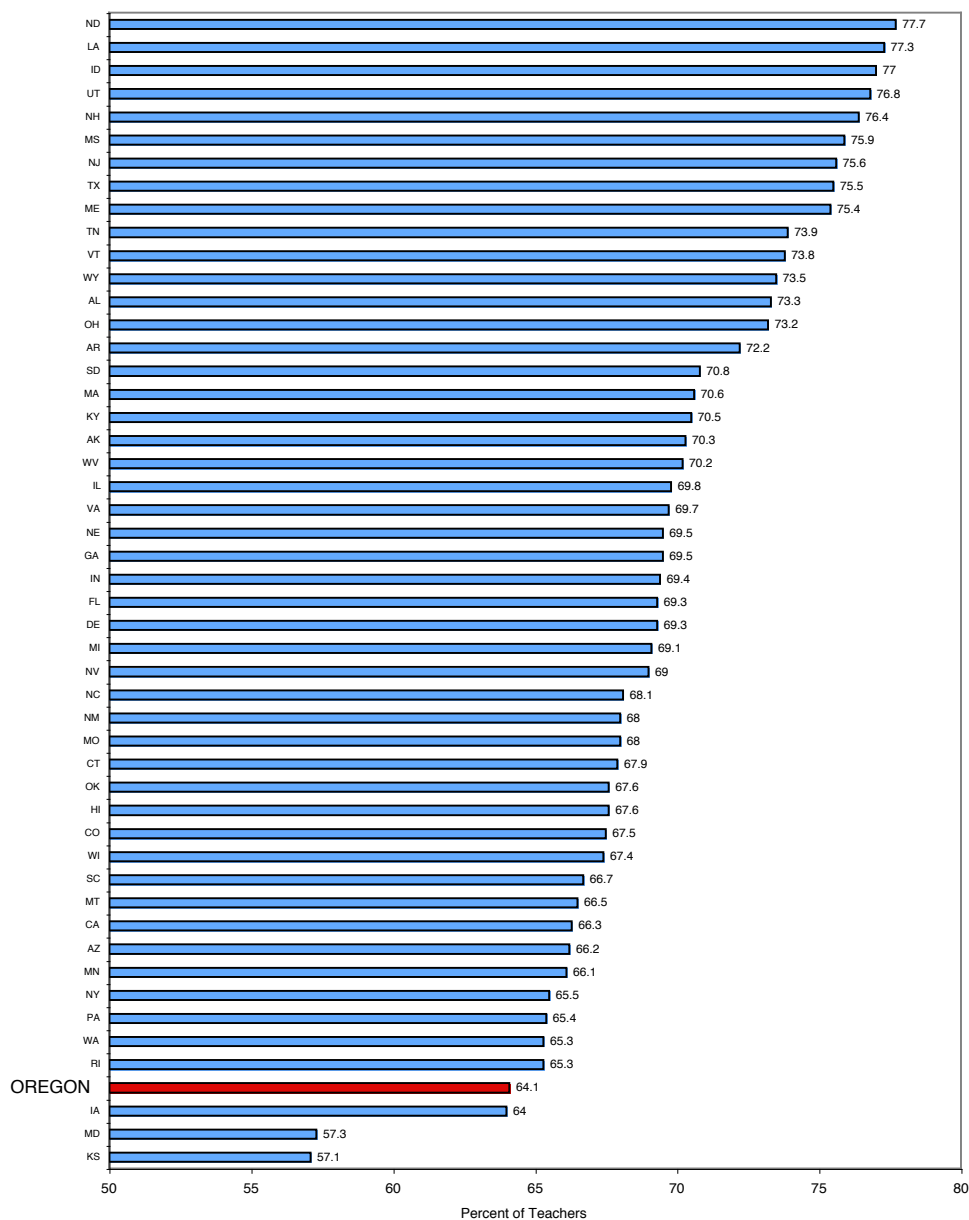
¹ See ECONorthwest's companion report *Developing Quality Teachers in Oregon: A Profile of the Successes and Challenges of Six Oregon Districts*.

² In *Developing Quality Teachers in Oregon: A Profile of the Successes and Challenges of Six Oregon Districts*, ECONorthwest reports that contractual requirements for compensated professional development ranged from 32 to 106 hours annually across the six districts. Compensated professional development does not overlap exactly with targeted staff development, but the expenditure data present a consistent picture of variation in professional development opportunities across the state.

APPENDIX

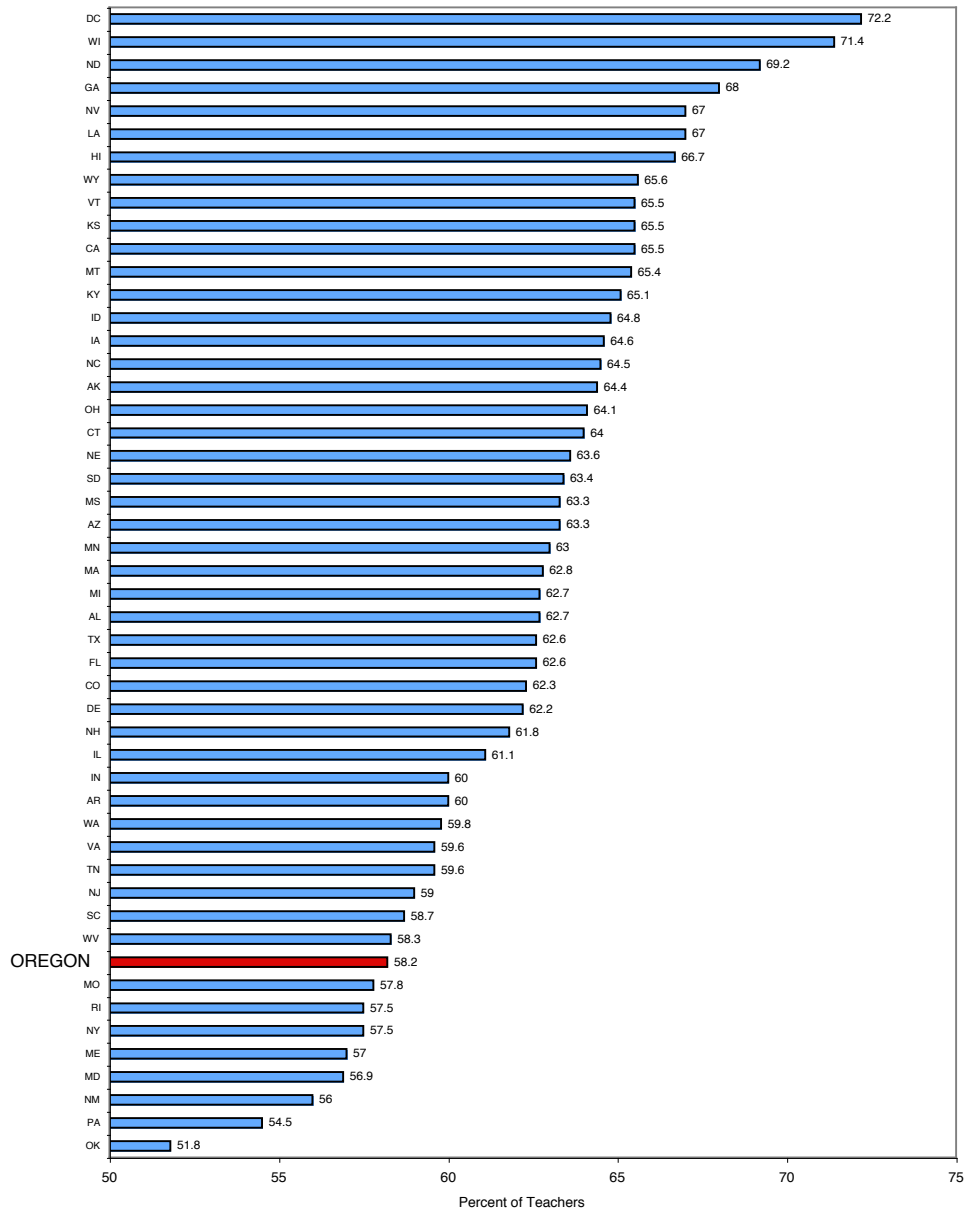
This appendix contains three charts, Figures A.1 through A.3, similar to Figure 4. The figures show the share of teachers reporting their professional development activities as useful or very useful for three additional professional development focus areas: reading instruction, discipline, and education technology. As with content area training, the 2003-04 SASS sample size is not large enough to create precise state-by-state rankings for the three focus areas covered below. In each case, however, the point estimates suggest that Oregon provides teachers with professional development that is at best, of average usefulness to teachers and, more than likely, of below average usefulness.

Figure A.1: Percent of Teachers Reporting Professional Development in Reading Instruction was Useful or Very Useful



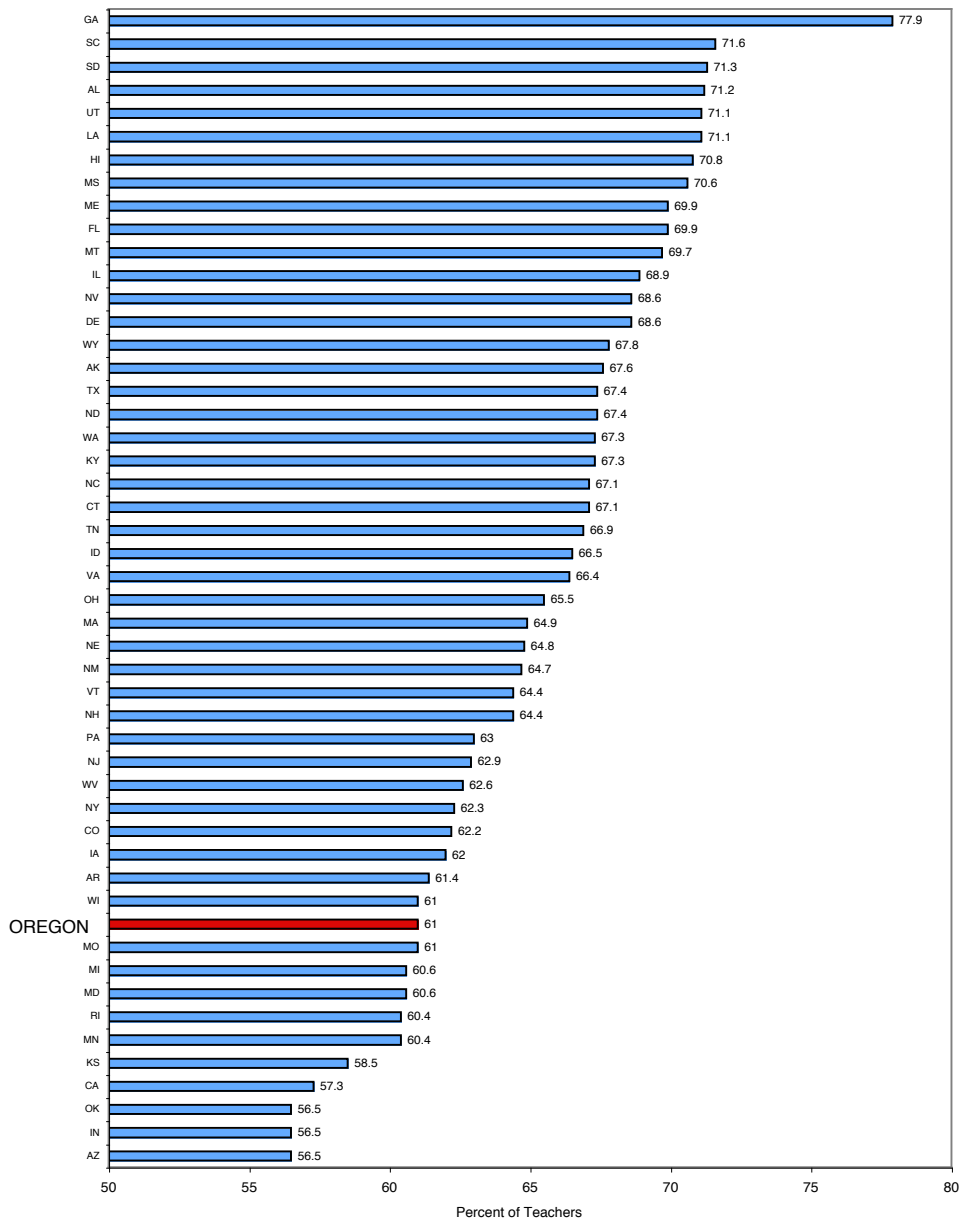
Source: NCES 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey

Figure A.2: Percent of Teachers Reporting Professional Development Related to Discipline was Useful or Very Useful



Source: NCES 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey

Figure A.3: Percent of Teachers Reporting Professional Development Regarding Education Technology was Useful or Very Useful



Source: NCES 2003-04 Schools and Staffing Survey

