

# EVALUATION OF EDUCATOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IMPLEMENTED AT THE REGIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

## FINAL REPORT



PREPARED FOR THE TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY  
A REPORT TO THE 80TH LEGISLATURE



**RESEARCH AND EVALUATION**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In May 2006, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) contracted with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) and its subcontractors Applied Research Solutions (ARS) and Academic Information Management (AIM) to evaluate educator professional development (PD) programs implemented at the local and regional level in Texas. The evaluation was designed to accomplish two primary tasks:

- 1) to review the implementation of educator PD programs in reading, math, and science at the regional and local level; and
- 2) to report on the characteristics and best practices of these programs.

For the purpose of the study, *regional PD* was defined as trainings provided by Educational Service Centers (ESCs) and *local PD* was defined as training provided by a school district and/or used by a district from other PD providers such as universities and commercial vendors.

### **Evaluation Questions**

The evaluation study was guided by the following evaluation questions:

- 1) What PD programs are being implemented at the local level throughout the state?
- 2) What regional reading, mathematics, and science PD programs in Texas are identified as among the most promising?
- 3) What content and delivery practices are employed in the identified sample of promising regional PD programs?
- 4) What are the factors related to the accessibility of local and regional PD programs across the state?
- 5) What key characteristics and practices are present in promising regional PD programs in the state?

To address these areas of investigation, data for this study were collected using a variety of methodological approaches including interviews, surveys, and expert reviews.

### **Major Findings**

Major findings of the study are described below organized by major areas of investigation.

#### **Local PD**

- PD provided at the local level is a major source of staff development for Texas teachers and district administrators rated this training high on quality indicators. Available local PD includes specific programs in all three major content areas (reading, mathematics, and science) as well as trainings focused on specialized topics and serving a diverse set of instructional purposes.
- Frequently used local trainings have content that focuses on: developing writing skills, specific reading, math, and science curriculums, whole school reform,

Texas state standards (TEKS) and TAKS, and reaching special groups within the student population (e.g., students in poverty and English language learners).

- Districts implementing local PD training use a large variety of providers and vendors (e.g., district providers, private consultants, national for profit companies, regional ESCs, and universities).

## **Regional PD**

- There are also a large number of regional-level PD programs being delivered to teachers by the 20 ESCs around the state. The study identified over 40 programs meeting most or all of the criteria established for high-quality PD in the study that were delivered by ESC offices during the 2005-2006 school year. Six of these programs were selected for more detailed examination (including expert reviews of training content and delivery strategies and feedback from teachers who had participated in them) in this evaluation. The six promising programs identified for the study, representing the major content areas as well as a variety of grade-level foci, were:
  - Elementary Reading Institute (Developed by ESC Region 6)
  - Secondary Struggling Readers Institute (Developed by the Vaughn Reading Center, UT Austin)
  - Elementary Mathematics Institute (Developed by ESC Region 6)
  - TEXTTEAMs: Middle School Proportionality (Developed by the Charles A. Dana Center, UT Austin)
  - Bridging II TAKS: Light and Optics (Elementary Level) (Developed by ESC Region 4)
  - TEXTTEAMs: Biology (Developed by the Charles A. Dana Center, UT Austin)
- The experts who reviewed the content of the six regional PD programs found that they were grounded in current research in each of the three major content areas (reading, mathematics, and science) and that they incorporated good, research-based instructional strategies. They also concluded that the trainings met many of the national standards for quality professional development defined by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) and other discipline-specific organizations. All of the trainings were aligned with the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and incorporated strategies to improve student performance through direct applications to classroom practice.
- Training participants confirmed that these six programs were of high quality and that they equaled or surpassed other trainings they had attended in the same content area. The vast majority of teachers who provided feedback also expected that their participation in these PD offerings would result in improvements in both their teaching practice and their students' performance.
- The content area experts who contributed to this study identified a number of characteristics and promising practices in the six regional-level PD programs they

reviewed. In addition to several content-specific, research-based strategies found in the training materials, the expert reviewers identified the following eight promising practices in these PD programs:

- Grounding training materials in current research in the areas of PD design and implementation, area content, and teaching pedagogy
- Making direct and explicit connections between training activities and state standards
- Discussion of all instructional strategies and activities includes a rationale and an examination of context for use, with a constant relating of ideas back to classroom practice
- Using the strategy of going from “big ideas” to specific illustrative activities
- Focusing on more in-depth knowledge of a few concepts
- Using ongoing assessment to monitor progress and growth throughout the training to reinforce learning
- Inclusion of time for individual and group work to reflect and collaborate
- Designing materials that work for participating teachers at different levels

On a broader level, these features typify high-quality PD practice more generally, across content areas.

### **Teacher Access to PD**

- The study also found that teachers throughout the state have adequate access to PD trainings to improve their classroom practice. The highest percentage of teachers reported having spent between 2 and 5 full days in PD trainings during the 2005-2006 school year and a very low percentage of teachers reported low attendance (0-9 hours).
- Teachers in lower performing schools were more likely to report higher levels of participation (over 40 hours) than those from the higher performing districts. This finding suggests that regardless of district performance, teachers across Texas have equal access to PD opportunities.
- The most consistently important factor influencing teachers’ decisions about what PD to attend was the content of available trainings. This finding suggests that the use of PD is goal-driven and targeted toward fulfilling specific needs. Other important factors included the availability of stipends, and training time, scheduling, and location issues. Results also showed that teachers are involved in trainings with alternative formats including online and distance learning, although they prefer one-day workshops.

Overall, this study provides evidence that high-quality PD opportunities are currently being offered at the local and regional levels to educators in Texas, and that teachers in a variety of settings have access to these opportunities. Further research could focus more specifically on: local-level PD trainings, factors that would increase teacher participation rates in available PD, and outcomes of the trainings being offered.