APPENDIX U

OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN IN WASHINGTON

February, 2003

A study conducted for the Certificate of Mastery Study Committee of the State Board of Education by Educational Service District 101

Geoff Praeger, Project Director

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Opportunity to Learn in Washington

Results of a Statewide Survey
February, 2003

Purpose

This study was conducted to assess the degree to which students in Washington state have had the opportunity to learn the content and skills required to earn the Certificate of Mastery as a high school graduation requirement. The study was conducted by Educational Service District 101 under a contract with the State Board of Education, using funds allocated by the State Legislature for that purpose. The survey results presented herein are intended to provide a source of information about opportunity to learn and serve as a baseline for further studies.

Design

The study consisted of sixteen surveys designed to gather perspectives from a wide variety of stakeholder groups in Washington. Prior to the development of the survey instruments, legal issues related to opportunity to learn were researched, reports from other states were studied, and educators and legislators were interviewed. Draft questions were reviewed with the State Board of Education and its Certificate of Mastery Study Committee. Technical review and guidance was provided by the State's National Technical Advisory Committee and members of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's Staff. Initial survey forms were then tried out with focus groups of students and staff members. Their input led to the pilot versions of the surveys, which were administered in May 2002. Results of the pilot guided further refinement of the survey questions. Final versions of the surveys were sent to a statewide sample in October of 2002. The information contained in this report reflects conditions existing at that time.

The stakeholder groups included in the sample were:

- 5th Grade Students
- 8th Grade Students
- 11th Grade Students
- Elementary Teachers and Principals
- Middle School Teachers and Principals
- High School Teachers and Principals
- Assessment Coordinators
- Counselors
- Curriculum Directors
- Special Education Directors
- Superintendents
- School Board Presidents
- Parents

Surveys were sent to 84 districts spread across the following enrollment categories: 1-499, 500-1999, 2000-4999, 5000-9999, 10,000-19,999, and 20,000 and above.

Surveys were sent to approximately 5000 students at each of the designated grade levels, over 3000 teachers, 300 principals at each level, 4000 parents, and all school district superintendents, curriculum directors, special education directors, assessment coordinators, and school board presidents.

A total of sixteen (16) targeted groups received surveys. The groups represented different roles in education and carry different perspectives as a result. Consequently, the surveys were not exactly the same, but there were similar questions relating to common topics, such as: reading, writing, listening, math, curriculum alignment with the EALRs, use of assessment results for instructional planning, resources, staff training, reinstruction and remediation opportunities, reporting of results to students and parents, awareness of the COM as a graduation requirement, coordination of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Each of the surveys listed above can be found on the State Board web site at www.sbe.wa.gov. (Click on "Grad Requirements" in the subject menu; then scroll down to "Opportunity to Learn Survey for Participating Districts.")

The surveys were designed to provide information about opportunity to learn issues on three levels:

- Legal Requirements: Expectations derived from previous court cases and opinions (e.g., notifying students of the requirements in a timely manner).

- Fairness Issues: Areas that might not be strictly necessary in a legal sense but would be considered fair practice (e.g., periodically informing students where they are in relation to the standards).

- Best Practices: Activities that are generally accepted to produce optimal student learning (e.g., individually diagnosing student needs).

Summary of Findings

The OTL survey results generally indicate favorable systemic progress toward providing all students sufficient opportunity to learn the EALRs before taking the high school assessments and earning the COM. Included among the areas responding stakeholders saw a need for improvement are: resources to complete curriculum alignment work; continuation of professional development opportunities for teachers and other staff; funding for support services for students whose social/emotional/physical problems are interfering with their opportunity to learn; and increasing the instructional time devoted to meeting the standards by providing resources for remedial classes, summer school, etc.

Although this should not be taken as the definitive study on opportunity to learn (It is important to keep in mind that the results reflect one source of OTL information, a single, point-in-time snapshot of the common school system taken in late Fall 2002**), a number of patterns do emerge:**

- The consistency of data among different groups, subgroups, regions and district sizes suggest that the issues under consideration are indeed statewide and systemic.

- Those areas where people feel that they have some control are rated more positively than areas where others are seen to be in control.

There clearly are a number of strengths:

- Most teachers claim a working knowledge of the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs).

- Curriculum alignment has been largely achieved at the elementary level and is moving forward at the secondary level.

- Many teachers report employing state-of-the-art instructional practices.

- Results of state tests are being used to guide planning and instructional practice.

- Specific test preparation activities occur in most schools.

- There is a high level of awareness about the WASLs in all-statewide groups.

- Most teachers support education reform.

- Test accommodations and alternative assessments are being used for most special population students.

- There is some extra help for students who need it.

- School Board Presidents generally support education reform.

There are, of course, areas where many of the stakeholders see a need for improvement:

- Creation of a listening curriculum at all levels.

- The need for resources to complete curriculum alignment work.

- Development of models for improved communication with students about where they are in relation to the standards and how what is taught aligns with the WASL.

- Providing written communication with parents about the standards, Certificate of Mastery requirements and their children's progress.

- Continuation of professional development opportunities for teachers and other staff.

- Providing funding for support services for students whose social/emotional/physical problems are interfering with their opportunity to learn.

- Increasing the instructional time devoted to meeting the standards by providing resources for remedial classes, summer school, etc.