

# DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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## ***Its Mathematics and Reading Professional Development Program Has Trained Fewer Teachers Than Originally Expected***

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### *Audit Highlights . . .*

*Our review of the Mathematics and Reading Professional Development Program (program) revealed that:*

- Only a small percentage of mathematics and reading teachers have completed the full 120 hours of training for their current assignments.*
- School districts we surveyed cited several barriers to increased participation in the program, including teacher apathy toward attending training, concerns about funding, and a lack of training providers in close proximity. Nevertheless, school districts in counties with relatively large or small numbers of eligible teachers in various geographic regions throughout the State appear equally capable of accessing program services.*
- The Department of Education (Education) has done little to actively promote the program and currently relies on school districts to navigate its Web site to learn about and apply for the program.*

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### **REPORT NUMBER 2005-133, NOVEMBER 2006**

#### **The Department of Education's and State Board of Education's responses as of November 2006**

The Joint Legislative Audit Committee (audit committee) requested that the Bureau of State Audits review the Mathematics and Reading Professional Development Program (program). Approved in 2001 (Chapter 737, Statutes of 2001), the program provides incentive grants to local education agencies that choose to send their teachers through standards-based instructional training. Under state law, the State Board of Education (board) adopts educational content standards and is responsible for approving the curriculum of providers wishing to train teachers under the program.

The audit committee asked us to review the board's and the Department of Education's (Education) policies and management practices to determine if they are consistent with the legislative intent of the program. Specifically, the audit committee asked us to assess the method used to track teachers' access to and participation in the program and the extent of any outreach efforts. The audit committee also asked us to identify the number of training providers that offer teacher development services and whether the board's approval process allows for a sufficient pool of training providers. Finally, the audit committee asked us to assess whether Education had adequate internal controls to track program expenditures and to identify any organizational, statutory, or regulatory impediments to the program.

**Finding #1: Only a small percentage of teachers have completed the program for their current assignments, while limited data at Education and the school districts makes assessing the program's success difficult.**

When the Legislature adopted the program in 2001, it envisioned that 176,000 teachers would receive training on the State's academic content standards over a four-year period. This target represented the majority of the 252,000 teachers statewide who were eligible for program-funded training at that time. Our survey of 100 school districts that participated in the program through fiscal year 2004–05, which represented 46 percent of the State's 398,000 eligible teachers as of January 2006, indicates that data exists at school districts to

- ☑ *Education has not ensured that program compliance audits are conducted in accordance with program statutes.*
- ☑ *Education's July 2005 report to the Legislature was of limited value because it lacked relevant and accurate data for gauging program outcomes.*
- ☑ *Education's ability to adequately track teacher participation in mathematics and reading training is complicated by the multiple funding sources involved and by reduced program-specific funding.*
- ☑ *The State Board of Education relied on the Sacramento County Office of Education to advertise and implement the program.*

substantiate that only 7,230 teachers have been fully trained. This amount represents roughly 3 percent of the 240,987 eligible teachers in school districts that had received program funds through fiscal year 2004–05. Further, 41 school districts from our survey, representing 105,764 teachers, could not readily tell us how many had completed the entire 120 hours of training. More than half of these 41 school districts indicated that they did not have enough information to report specifics about the number of teachers that had completed the training. We acknowledge that some of the teachers in these 41 districts may have completed part or all of the program. We also acknowledge that school districts have not likely been asked to provide complete information about the number of their teachers that have completed the program for their current teaching assignments.

Finally, we noted that Education's July 2005 report to the Legislature was of limited value because it lacks relevant and accurate data regarding the number of trained teachers that are currently using the training in the classroom and provides no correlation between teacher training and student achievement. Education's data collection process resulted in duplicated counts of teachers that had received, but not necessarily completed, program training. As a result, decision makers cannot gauge the progress being made toward accomplishing the program's goals and are ill-prepared to make future funding decisions. Education acknowledged that its report has limitations, stating as much in its report to the Legislature.

Given that only a small percentage of teachers have completed the full 120 hours of program training, and that teacher participation is voluntary, the Legislature should consider redefining its expectations for the program, clearly stating the number of teachers to be fully trained as well as any gains in student achievement expected. Based on how it defines the program's goals, the Legislature should consider making statutory changes to ensure that Education provides meaningful data with which to evaluate program success. Examples of meaningful program data include the following:

- Unduplicated counts of teachers who have completed the training with the aid of program and non-program funding, with a comparison of these figures to the total number of teachers who are eligible to participate in the program.
- Measures of the resulting gains in student achievement for teachers who have completed the program's training, such as higher student scores on standardized tests.

***Legislative Action: Unknown.***

**Finding #2: School districts responding to our surveys cited a variety of reasons for low teacher participation rates.**

During the audit we conducted two surveys, each comprised of 100 school districts, that either had or had not received program funding through fiscal year 2004–05. School district responses to both surveys indicated that participant districts and nonparticipant districts alike perceived similar barriers to increased teacher participation in the program. The barriers most frequently cited by school districts were teacher apathy towards the training, concerns about funding, and a lack of training providers nearby. The similarities in these results suggest an opportunity for Education and the board to take steps to improve the program.

We received 169 responses to our surveys of 200 school districts. Responses from 51 of the 169 school districts indicated that a lack of teacher interest was a barrier to greater teacher participation. Some districts indicated that their teachers felt the training program was too long or too closely tied to textbooks, as opposed to a broader focus on understanding state standards. In addition, 42 of the 169 school districts cited funding concerns, primarily related to the timeliness of payment or the amount of funding. Some school districts stressed that they must initially pay for program training with their own funds and then seek program payment from Education, which can take many months. We noted that the program’s payment process can be as long as four to six months for any single year’s first payment. Some of this delay is caused by Education’s need to wait for the board to approve annual certifications from school districts before making program payments.

The remaining barrier cited most frequently by school districts was the lack of training providers in close proximity to the school district. In particular, 33 of the 169 survey respondents cited this as a concern. Some respondents stated that rural school districts are placed at a disadvantage in obtaining training for their teachers because they have more difficulty accessing training providers. However, our review of program payments through fiscal year 2005–06 revealed that counties with relatively large and small numbers of eligible teachers in various geographic regions throughout the State appear equally capable of accessing program services.

To remove a barrier to increased teacher participation in the program, Education should explore opportunities to expedite its payment process to school districts. One such opportunity would be to seek legislation authorizing Education to approve the annual certifications submitted by school districts instead of waiting for board approval, thus removing any payment delay caused by the need to wait for the next board meeting.

***Education’s Action: Pending.***

Education indicated in its response to the audit report that it will explore the possibility of seeking legislation that would authorize it to approve the annual certifications submitted by school districts.

**Finding #3: Education does little to encourage districts to participate in the program.**

Education’s role in administering the program has essentially been limited to forwarding school districts’ annual application to the board for approval and to processing program payments. Although not specifically required to do so under the program’s statutes, Education has done little to actively promote the program. This lack of ongoing outreach may contribute to the low percentage of school

districts that have participated in the program, and may explain why nine of the districts that responded to our nonparticipant survey indicated that they were unaware of the program's existence or were confused about the eligibility or funding aspects of the program.

To ensure that school districts are aware of the program and that as many teachers participate in the program as possible, Education should conduct annual outreach activities to all school districts. A component of such an outreach program should include directly informing each school district of the amount of funding for which it is eligible each year.

***Education's Action: Pending.***

In its response to the audit report, Education indicated that it will continue to update its Internet Web site, including program information pages, frequently asked questions, and lists of eligible teachers and training providers. In addition, Education anticipates working with the board to develop an outreach plan. This plan will include annual letters to districts about the program, changes mandated by new legislation, and the available funding for the fiscal year.

**Finding #4: Education has not taken the necessary steps to ensure that program compliance audits occur at school districts.**

Education has not ensured that program compliance audits are conducted in accordance with program statute. Specifically, Section 99237 of the Education Code requires that annual financial and compliance audits of school districts include steps to ensure that teachers for whose training districts received program funding were, in fact, trained and that the training met program requirements. In addition, this section requires Education to withhold monthly apportionment payments to school districts to the extent that the results of audits reveal noncompliance with these requirements. Given this responsibility, we would have expected Education to take the necessary steps to ensure that these audits are actually taking place. However, discussion with Education staff revealed that such audits have likely never taken place because the compliance requirements have never been included in audit guides.

According to program statute, the compliance audits are to be performed by licensed local auditors, as opposed to Education's audit division, with the assistance of an audit guide specifying state compliance requirements. The Education Code, Section 14502.1, requires the State Controller's Office (controller), in consultation with the Department of Finance, Education, and representatives of specified organizations to propose the content of the audit guide and submit it to the Education Audit Appeals Panel for review, possible amendment, and eventual adoption. To Education's knowledge, the program's compliance requirements have never been included in the audit guide, and a controller representative confirmed that Education never informed that office of the program and its compliance requirements. As a result, Education has disbursed about \$113 million through fiscal year 2005–06 without ensuring the level of oversight required by statute.

To ensure that required compliance audits are occurring, Education should take steps to ensure that the program's compliance requirements are included in audit guides related to the annual audits of school districts.

***Education's Action: Pending.***

Education asserted in its response to the audit report that it has drafted the necessary program compliance requirements for consideration by the controller and Education Audit Appeals Panel for inclusion in the audit guide.

**Finding #5: The board did not obtain approval from the Department of General Services for program-related contracts with two county offices of education.**

Our audit noted that the board relied on two county offices of education for various program functions, including the development of criteria for evaluating training providers and the facilitation of the evaluation of curricula submitted by potential training providers. To provide these services, the board, acting through Education, entered into various contracts with the Sacramento County Office of Education and Orange County Department of Education. According to state law, all contracts entered into by state agencies, except those meeting certain exemptions, are not in effect unless and until approved by the Department of General Services. The board did not obtain the required approvals before the beginning of the contract term for all three program-related contracts and related amendments requiring approval. As a result, the board exposed the State to potential liability for work performed before the contract was approved.

To ensure that it does not expose the State to potential liability for work performed before the contract is approved, the board should ensure that it obtains the Department of General Services' approval of its contracts and amendments before the start of the contract period and before contractors begin work.

***Education's Action: Corrective action taken.***

In its response to the audit report, the board indicated that Education's procedural revisions to its contracting process, which it had implemented since the time of the program-related contracts referenced in the audit report, has had a profound effect on eliminating late contracts. Specifically, Education's Contracts and Purchasing Unit requires staff to submit contract request forms 60 days prior to the start of the contract. The board also cited an administrative order by the Department of General Services, clarifying the general policy on the timely submission of contracts and the circumstances under which contracts can be approved after the start date.

