



What's Happening

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Coordination of instructional services by Washington State's Educational Service Districts

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Key findings

As public education budgets have tightened, states, districts, and schools have looked to educational service agencies such as Washington's Educational Service Districts (ESDs) to provide more coordinated and efficient instructional services. This descriptive study of Washington's ESDs finds that:

- Funding of services is almost evenly divided between instructional and noninstructional programs.
- The number of districts served and the expenditure per district vary substantially across ESDs.
- According to ESD staff, the most important or needed services do not always receive the most funding.
- According to ESD staff, the necessary coordination structures are not always in place for the services that the ESD leaders would like to coordinate.



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Summary

Educational service agencies (ESAs) are public entities that provide educational support programs and services to local schools and school districts (Association of Educational Service Agencies, n.d.). ESAs play an increasingly important role as service providers to local schools and districts within their geographic area. Nationally, 620 ESAs offer federal- and state-mandated programs and services to 79 percent of public school districts and 83 percent of private schools (Baldwin, Talbott, & Carmody, 2010). As public education budgets have tightened, states, districts, and schools have looked to ESAs to provide more coordinated and efficient services that take advantage of economies of scale. These services range from handling financial and data-processing needs to implementing school improvement initiatives to providing curriculum and professional development.

Washington State's ESAs are known as Educational Service Districts (ESDs). The state has a single network of nine ESDs that collectively serve more than a million students (the Washington ESD Network, which is in a research alliance with the Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest). The ESDs sought information about the coordination and funding of each ESD's instructional support services to better understand and improve service delivery, including whether funding of services aligned with ESD staff's perception of the importance of those services, the extent to which the network coordinated services across the state, and whether members thought more coordination was desirable.

To examine those issues, the study team analyzed state data on ESD funding and spending and administered a questionnaire to the ESD leadership teams. The questionnaire asked about 10 services (grouped into five overarching categories) that the ESDs offer and about perceptions of the value and need of each service and the levels of current and desired coordination.

Key findings include:

- The vast majority of ESD funding is divided almost evenly between instructional and noninstructional programs, and about 2 percent is allocated for administrative operations. Most funding for instructional programs—which constitute about half of ESD budgets—comes from federal and state sources (80 percent). The rest comes from local revenue (3 percent), fees-for-service (9 percent), and fees through cooperative agreements (8 percent).
- The number of school districts served and the expenditure per school district vary substantially across ESDs due to the geographic assignment of school districts. Within service categories, expenditure levels vary by ESD.
- ESDs spend substantially more on some instructional program services (early childhood education and special education) than on others (social studies and response to intervention services).
- Due to local resource limitations or the funding allocations provided by the state, the instructional program services that ESD staff perceived as most important or most needed (for example, English language arts, science, and math) do not always receive the most funding.
- While ESDs would like to coordinate some services, the necessary coordination structures (for example, ongoing communication, defined timelines, common program data, defined outcome measures, and defined deliverables) are not always in place.

- The potential for coordinating service delivery across the Washington ESD Network is strongest in instructional program services with external requirements and accountability (for example, math, special education, and Title I).

The Washington ESD Network plans to use the findings of this study to prioritize coordination of instructional program services that members agree are important to their mission, of value to their constituents, in high demand across all school districts, and likely to benefit from increased coordination. Because few research studies address ESA service coordination (Bruder & Dunst, 2006), this study's findings may also help other states improve their ESA system coordination.

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Why this study?

Forty-two states use an educational service agency (ESA) structure to support local schools and districts (see box 1 for definitions of key terms). ESAs are public entities that provide educational support programs and services to local schools and school districts (Association of Educational Service Agencies, n.d.). ESAs seek to efficiently improve student learning and performance. In most of the 42 states, the ESA structure has been in place for decades, and the services have focused primarily on helping schools and districts meet federal mandates.

The role of education service agencies is changing

Nationally, 620 ESAs serve 79 percent of public school districts and 83 percent of private schools (Baldwin et al., 2010). ESA program and service coordination have become more important due to shrinking education budgets and rising demand for accountability, especially in rural and remote school districts where service delivery can be especially challenging and expensive. ESAs can provide coordinated service management to students with specific needs (for example, students in special education or English language learner students) and offer economies of scale for highly specialized staff such as speech or physical therapists, who are often in short supply in rural communities.

Box 1. Key terms

Association of Educational Service Agencies. This national voluntary professional group represents education service agencies.

Association of Educational Service Districts. This voluntary group, comprising the nine Educational Service Districts (ESDs) in Washington State, oversees and provides collective supports and publications for Washington ESDs.

Educational service agency (ESA). Nationally, these regional government agencies provide services to schools and districts in their geographic areas. States have different names for these agencies. Examples include Boards of Cooperative Educational Services in Colorado and New York, the Cooperative Educational Service Agency Statewide Network in Wisconsin, Educational Service Districts in Oregon and Washington State, and Regional Education Service Areas in Montana.

Education Service District. The name for ESAs in Washington State. The nine Washington ESDs were formed when individual county superintendent of school offices were consolidated and reorganized to reduce duplication, equalize educational opportunity, and provide a more effective reporting and accountability system to the state legislature. ESDs link local public and private schools with one another and with state and national resources.

Washington's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. This is Washington State's department of education, responsible for implementing the statewide system of support for schools identified as in need of improvement, as mandated under the No Child Left Behind Act.

No Child Left Behind Act. This act, the 2001 reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, provides federal funding to public schools based primarily on poverty levels. Originally aimed at increasing equity in funding, the 2001 act focused on creating accountability systems to increase student achievement and close achievement gaps.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act added more funding and direction for ESA services. ESAs across the country are now helping local school districts meet the law's priorities and are providing more uniform services to improve schools (Baldwin et al., 2010).

ESAs play a strong but variable role in supporting school and district efforts to raise student achievement (Hallberg, Drill, Brown-Simms, Svedkauskaite, & Akerstrom, 2009; McIver, 2002; Peters & Svedkauskaite, 2008; Stephens & Keane, 2005). As state and federal directives for ESAs grow, "the role of ESAs in school improvement is in practice often applied through myriad local interpretations of school improvement processes, formats, structures, and definitions" (Peters & Svedkauskaite, 2008, p. 46). These diverse expectations and roles may cause ESA services to vary in content and quality across the country and within individual states.

To support districts and schools more uniformly, equitably, and efficiently, several researchers and practitioners recommend that ESAs coordinate their services around school improvement (Baldwin et al., 2010; Graber, 2002; Hallberg et al., 2009; McIver, 2002; Rickabaugh, 2011). There is, however, no empirical evidence that improving coordination will raise student achievement. Moreover, there is a lack of clear and uniform ESA goals, services, and data collection mechanisms to provide benchmarks of performance or resources for external evaluation (Hallberg et al., 2009). Washington State's network of ESAs (called Educational Service Districts, or ESDs) therefore sought empirical evidence to support decisions about coordinating some of its services.

Each ESD in Washington State serves a specific geographic area; together the ESDs reached more than 2,300 schools and more than 1 million students in the 2010/11 school year

Nine Washington Educational Service Districts serve more than a million students

The Washington ESD Network, which is in a research alliance with the Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest, originally comprised 14 Intermediate School Districts, which were established by the state legislature in 1969. Set up as regional quasi-governmental bodies, they were intended to provide training, technical assistance, administrative support, and other services to school districts throughout the state (Leddick, Marvin, & Pickering, 2008). In 1977 the Intermediate School Districts were renamed ESDs and reduced to nine. Each ESD serves a specific geographic area; together the ESDs reached more than 2,300 schools and more than 1 million students in the 2010/11 school year (box 2). The nine ESDs are diverse in student demographics and number of districts, schools, and students served (table 1).

Box 2. What is the role of Washington State's Educational Service Districts?

According to Washington State Statute 28A.310.010, the state's Educational Service Districts (ESDs) are regional agencies established to provide cooperative and informational services to the state's 295 local school districts, assist the superintendent of public instruction and the State Board of Education in performing their duties, and provide services to school districts that ensure equal education opportunities (Leddick et al., 2008). The ESDs provide administrative services (for example, assistance with transportation and budgeting), support for education improvement (for example, professional development for teachers in academic content areas), and data warehousing (for example, cooperative student data repository).

Table 1. Educational Service Districts in Washington served districts with varied student populations in 2010/11

ESD	Number of school districts	Number of schools	Number of students enrolled in districts served	Percentage of racial/ethnic minority students in districts served	Percentage of transitional bilingual students in districts served	Percentage of low-income students in districts served	Percentage of students in special education in districts served
A	15	118	50,016	25.3	1.9	39.6	14.1
B	30	206	99,265	53.0	6.3	44.4	13.4
C	59	227	90,607	15.6	2.4	45.9	13.6
D	35	384	165,924	35.2	7.6	37.6	13.2
E	25	138	60,701	66.4	22.3	71.1	12.7
F	29	128	42,151	46.8	15.9	60.1	12.1
G	44	181	70,936	26.3	3.6	45.2	13.8
H	23	134	67,419	47.9	17.1	54.3	12.4
I	35	815	394,203	25.2	8.4	37.3	12.7

Source: Authors' analysis based on data from Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (2013a, 2013b).

In 2008, to coordinate support for districts and schools, ESD superintendents proposed a plan for “a balanced system of unique and coordinated service that would be provided by the newly named Washington ESD Network.” (Association of Educational Service Districts, 2008) The plan provided guidance for network structure and processes, as well as possible performance measures to evaluate the network’s delivery system. Guidance included proposed definitions for services and criteria for determining which services would be coordinated and delivered consistently. Although individual ESDs could still provide unique services for their own service areas, the coordinated services would be available to all school districts, either delivered by a specific ESD or contracted through the network. Members regarded service coordination as a way of reducing costs and increasing efficiency, effectiveness, and equity in supporting improved student outcomes.

Since 2008, Washington ESDs have made modest progress in defining the purpose and structure of their emerging network. A coordinated services agreement adopted in 2012 described unique services provided by individual ESDs and the services to be coordinated statewide. ESDs would coordinate their services based on five jointly determined structures: ongoing communication, defined timelines, common program data, defined outcome measures, and defined deliverables. These statewide services would be monitored across ESDs to promote consistent implementation and continuous improvement (Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction & Association of Educational Service Districts, 2012). However, the agreement did not specify the mechanisms or coordination levels.

In 2012 the ESDs directed the Washington ESD Network to collect and analyze descriptive data on the following 10 instructional services:

- English language arts/literacy.
- Math.
- Science.
- Social studies.
- Arts education.
- Prevention.
- Title I school improvement.

- Response to intervention.
- Special education.
- Early childhood education.

The goal was to identify the services that might be good candidates for coordination, as well as resources that the network could integrate and use to deliver services more effectively across all ESDs. The ESDs were interested in data on funding sources and allocations, coordination levels, and perceived importance, value, and need for each service.

The 10 services were selected for study because they were considered crucial in supporting teaching and learning and because they are common across all nine ESDs and represent state priorities.¹ The 10 services fit into five instructional support categories (see box 3 for a description of the categories and how the 10 services fit within them).

Few studies address service coordination

Few studies have systematically examined ESA service coordination, and there is scant empirical evidence on the results of improved coordination. One obstacle may be the

Box 3. Five instructional support categories studied

Curriculum and instruction services include professional development, curriculum development, technical assistance, and some direct services to students (tutoring programs or sponsored art shows) within five specific content areas: English language arts/literacy, math, science, social studies, and the arts. Services also include supporting implementation of Common Core State Standards in the four core content areas. Modes of service delivery include face-to-face and virtual workshops. Although state-sponsored coaching networks support math, science, and literacy instruction, these services are not necessarily coordinated across ESDs.

Prevention services include any ESD service that assists districts and communities in preventing tobacco, drug, and alcohol use by minors, including services that encourage alternative positive behaviors.

School improvement services include federal Title I allocations and response to intervention programs to assist low-performing schools and at-risk students. Title I helps low-performing schools increase student achievement. Through response to intervention services, ESDs help districts and schools identify students at risk for poor learning outcomes, monitor student progress, provide evidence-based interventions, and adjust these interventions depending on a student's responsiveness.

Special education services are funded primarily through federal allocations and fees-for-service, which cover student services to ensure improved education results and functional outcomes for all children with disabilities. Services include providing specialized staff and assisting with federal regulation monitoring and compliance.

Early childhood education services receive state funding and include support for early learning centers and technical assistance. An example of a state-coordinated effort is the Early Learning Partnership Accountability Framework, which offers guidelines that describe behaviors and skills that children may demonstrate from birth through grade 3 and provides resources so parents and early learning professionals can support that development.

difficulty of coordinating services. Coordination can disrupt the well developed routines of individual organizations, and working more collaboratively can also require a fundamental rethinking of relationships and financial structures (Hacker & Wessel, 1998).

An early study discovered that states, including Washington, have required little evaluation data from ESAs (McIver, 2002). However, irregular analyses, such as the performance audits conducted by the Washington State Auditor's Office and work done by the Joint Legislative and Audit Review Committee, have been used to assess ESD efficiency and effectiveness. The data could inform decisions about service effectiveness and financial investment, leading to additional resources for important programs and eliminating or reducing ineffective or less critical programs.

What the study examined

To investigate ESD service and resource coordination levels, the Regional Educational Laboratory Northwest analyzed descriptive data for the Washington ESD Network Research Alliance. The analyses focused on funding sources, service and resource coordination, and perceived importance, value, and need for the 10 selected services. The following questions guided this study:

- What are the funding sources and allocations for ESD instructional support services to districts, and how do ESDs spend these resources?
- Is funding for specific instructional support services congruent with district use of services, the perceived importance and value of those services, and perceived need for those services?
- To what degree are instructional support services amenable to coordination, and which services would benefit most from coordination across ESDs?
- What do ESD leadership teams think about district use of services and district needs?

The answers to these questions are intended to help the Washington ESD Network prioritize services for coordination and identify the services that all nine ESD leaders agree are important to their mission, of value, in high demand across all districts, and able to benefit from greater coordination. The findings will provide a baseline portrait of the selected services against which additional coordination efforts can be assessed.

This study drew on two data sources:

- The 2010/11 Educational Service District General Expense Program Report, a publicly available database on the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction website that documents expenditures and funding sources for the nine Washington ESDs (see appendix A; Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, n.d.).
- Responses from the nine ESD leadership teams to a 234-item online questionnaire about services, including funding; perceptions of importance, value, and need; and coordination level (see appendix B).

Study findings

The key findings from this study suggest potential opportunities for coordination and reveal some of the challenges that the Washington ESDs (and ESAs in other states) face in coordinating across their networks.

Funding for instructional support services constitutes about half of Educational Service District budgets, with most funding coming from federal and state sources rather than local school district fees

Total nonadministrative funding for ESDs during 2010/11 was \$231,275,977. Funding was almost evenly divided between instructional and noninstructional programs. Noninstructional programs include nursing, transportation, youth training, food services, and other federal programs such as migrant education.

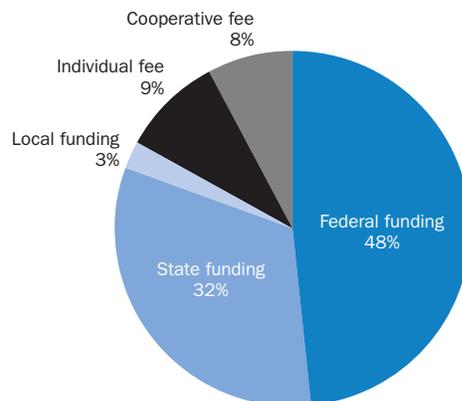
Funds for ESD instructional support services come from five main sources: federal allocations and grants (48 percent), state revenue and distributions (32 percent), local revenue (3 percent), fees for services (9 percent), and fees through cooperative agreements (8 percent; figure 1). Nearly half the funding for instructional services comes from federal sources such as special education and Title I school improvement allocations, which are disbursed to all states.

Although the state provides 32 percent of funding for the instructional services studied, this funding includes only 2 percent for the administration of ESDs (figure 2). This suggests that ESDs must rely on nonstate funding streams to support the infrastructure surrounding service provision. Only 17 percent of funding for instructional support services comes from fees-for-service, both individual and cooperative.

Instructional support services are funded through several mechanisms (federal, state, and local funding, and individual and cooperative fees; figure 3).

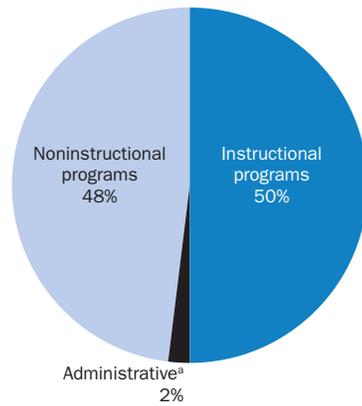
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Figure 1. About half the funding for instructional services by Washington State’s Educational Service Districts comes from federal programs, while a third comes from the state for targeted services, 2010/11



Source: Authors' analysis based on Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (n.d.).

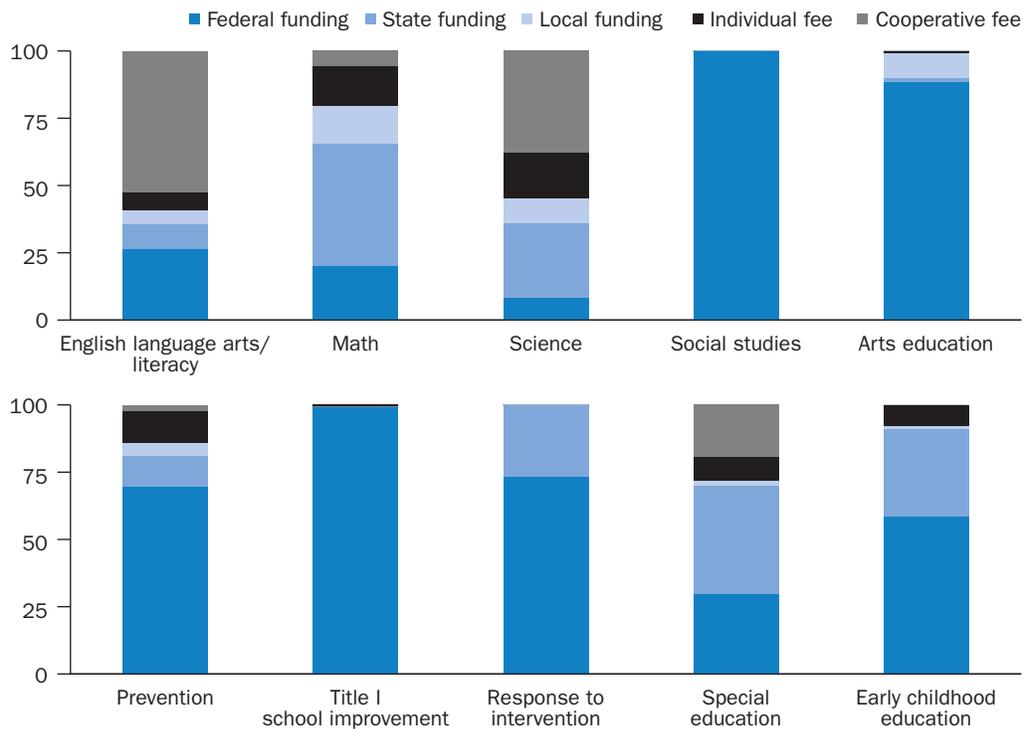
Figure 2. About half the funding for Washington State’s Educational Service Districts is allocated to instructional programs, 2010/11



a. Includes operations and indirect costs.

Source: Authors’ analysis based on Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (n.d.).

Figure 3. While federal and state funding predominates, some services of Washington State’s Educational Service Districts derive substantial revenue from individual and cooperative fees, 2010/11



Source: Authors’ analysis of questionnaire data from nine Educational Service District leadership teams (see appendix B).

This survey of funding mechanisms reveals the following:

- Early childhood education and math services are funded largely from local, state, and federal revenue sources.
- More than half of English language arts/literacy (59 percent) and science (55 percent) services are funded from fee-for-service revenue.
- Special education is funded approximately 28 percent from fee-for-service revenue.
- Prevention services are funded 14 percent from fee-for-service revenue.
- Social studies, Title I school improvement, and response to intervention services are funded almost completely through federal and state allocations.

Educational Service Districts spend substantially more on some instructional support services than others, with the distribution varying by ESD

ESDs spent about \$108 million on instructional program services in 2010/11 (table 2) from an allocation of about \$118 million, with a carryover of \$10 million. The amount expended on individual instructional services across all ESDs ranged from \$241,049 for social studies curriculum and instruction to nearly \$55 million for early childhood education. Early childhood education accounted for about 50 percent of ESD instructional support expenditures in 2010/11 and special education for about 30 percent, while Title I school improvement, response to intervention, and social studies each accounted for less than 1 percent. Of the curriculum and instructional services, ESDs spent more on science and math than on English language arts/literacy, arts education, and social studies combined.

All nine ESDs provided at least some service to districts in math, science, English language arts/literacy, early childhood education, special education, Title I school improvement, and prevention services. Six ESDs provided arts education and response to intervention services, and three provided social studies services.

Early childhood education accounted for about 50 percent of ESD instructional support expenditures in 2010/11, while Title I school improvement, response to intervention, and social studies each accounted for less than 1 percent

Table 2. Expenditures by Washington State’s Educational Service Districts by instructional service category vary from less than 1 percent to more than half of total expenditures, 2010/11

Service	Expenditure (\$)	Share of total expenditure (%)
Early childhood education	54,719,224	50.6
Special education	32,496,180	30.0
Prevention	9,616,717	8.9
Science	4,278,367	4.0
Math	3,065,061	2.8
English language arts/literacy	1,405,628	1.3
Arts education (six ESDs)	1,290,641	1.1
Title I school improvement	647,429	0.5
Response to intervention (six ESDs)	423,215	0.3
Social studies (three ESDs)	241,049	0.2
Total	108,183,511	100.0

Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Source: Authors’ analysis based on Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (n.d.).

Individual ESD expenditures for the 10 instructional support services range from \$919 for arts education to more than \$36 million for early childhood education (table 3). While the size of the ESD service population affects total expenditure, so does the amount of grant and other funding available for specific initiatives and the extent of geographic dispersion of services, especially in rural districts.

Expenditures by service category vary considerably across ESDs (see table 3), primarily because of differences in the size of populations served: from slightly more than 42,000 students to nearly 10 times that number, at 394,203 students (see table 1). The greatest variation in service expenditures is for federal- or state-funded programs that serve individual students, such as early learning centers or special education services. Much of the variation in expenditures for early childhood education services is due to a very large expenditure (\$36 million) by one ESD, which received state and federal allocations to implement early childhood education services in an urban area. A second ESD spent about \$21 million on special education to provide direct services to a large proportion of rural students, rather than supporting services at the district level. There is less variation in expenditures for district-based services, such as curriculum and instruction or school improvement services.

Individual ESD expenditures for the 10 instructional support services range from \$919 for arts education to more than \$36 million for early childhood education

The number of districts served and the expenditure per district vary greatly across Educational Service Districts

Nearly all (99 percent or more) of the 295 districts across Washington served by ESDs received services in English language arts/literacy, math, science, and special education, suggesting that districts assign high priority to these services (table 4). Expenditures for math and science are two and three times as much as the per district expenditure for English language arts/literacy, which reflects the greater amount of grant and state allocation funding available for math and science professional development than for literacy. More than two-thirds of the districts in the state also received prevention (84 percent), early childhood education (81 percent), and Title I school improvement (67 percent) services.

Table 3. Expenditures by Washington State’s Educational Service Districts by instructional service category range from less than \$1,000 to more than \$36 million, 2010/11

Service	Minimum	Maximum	Median
Special education	205,438	21,000,732	1,450,278
Early childhood education	22,831	36,239,085	1,193,267
Prevention	216,675	2,782,035	982,834
Science	230,539	921,291	499,853
Math	202,702	583,602	370,289
Response to intervention (six ESDs)	1,800	180,107	120,654
Social studies (three ESDs)	94,490	146,559	120,525
English language arts/literacy	1,851	421,138	98,276
Title I school improvement	60,995	115,467	79,450
Arts education (six ESDs)	919	1,042,483	27,552

Source: Authors’ analysis based on Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (n.d.).

Table 4. Early childhood education and special education were the highest per district instructional service expenditures in Washington State’s Educational Service Districts, 2010/11

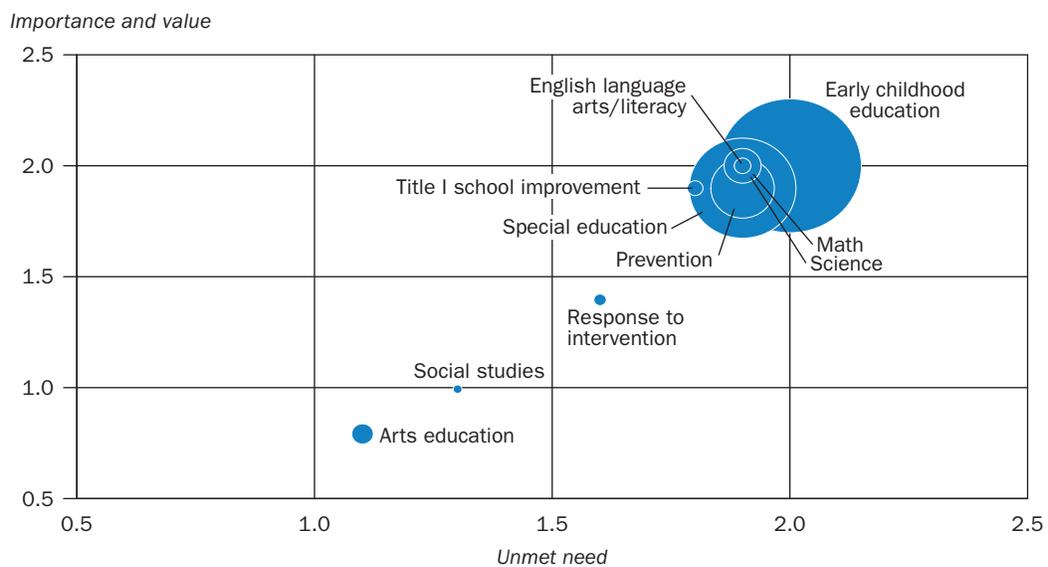
Service	Share of districts receiving services (%; N = 295)	Per district expenditure (\$)
Early childhood education	81	229,913
Special education	100	110,157
Prevention	84	38,777
Science	99	14,652
Math	99	10,461
Arts education (six ESDs)	55	7,967
Social studies (three ESDs)	13	6,515
Response to intervention (six ESDs)	26	5,496
English language arts/literacy	99	4,797
Title I school improvement	67	3,286
Overall		366,724

Source: Authors’ analysis based on Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (n.d.).

The most important and needed services do not always receive the most funding

Some of the services ESD leaders identified as the most important and most necessary, such as early childhood education, special education, and prevention services—also received the most funding, as represented by the size of the bubbles in figure 4. For example, social studies, the smallest bubble, received the least funding, while early childhood education, the largest bubble, received the most.

Figure 4. While there is a positive relationship between importance/need of services and the amount of funding allocated by Washington State’s Educational Service Districts, some important and needed services are not well funded, 2010/11



Note: The larger the bubble, the higher the funding associated with a service category. Questionnaire responses on importance/value and need were converted to a scale of -2 (strongly disagree) to 2 (strongly agree). Only the upper right quadrant of the chart is shown representing values 0–2 on both the x and y axes.

Source: Authors’ analysis of questionnaire data from nine Educational Service District leadership teams (see appendix B).

Early childhood education, special education, and prevention services have larger funding sources (and therefore larger bubbles), such as state grants and federal programs. Math, science, and English language arts/literacy services—perceived as very important, high-need services by ESD leaders—are less well funded (see smaller bubbles) and often rely on fee-generated revenue for up to half their funding. English language arts/literacy, which ESDs rate as very important and needed, receives much less funding than math and science. The state provides 46 percent of math funding and 28 percent of science funding but only 9 percent of English language arts/literacy funding (see figure 3), even though all three are state priorities.

The substantial funding for early childhood education reflects state efforts in 2009 to increase early learning across the state. Math, science, and English language arts/literacy have also been identified as legislative priorities in the last two years and will consequently receive more funding.

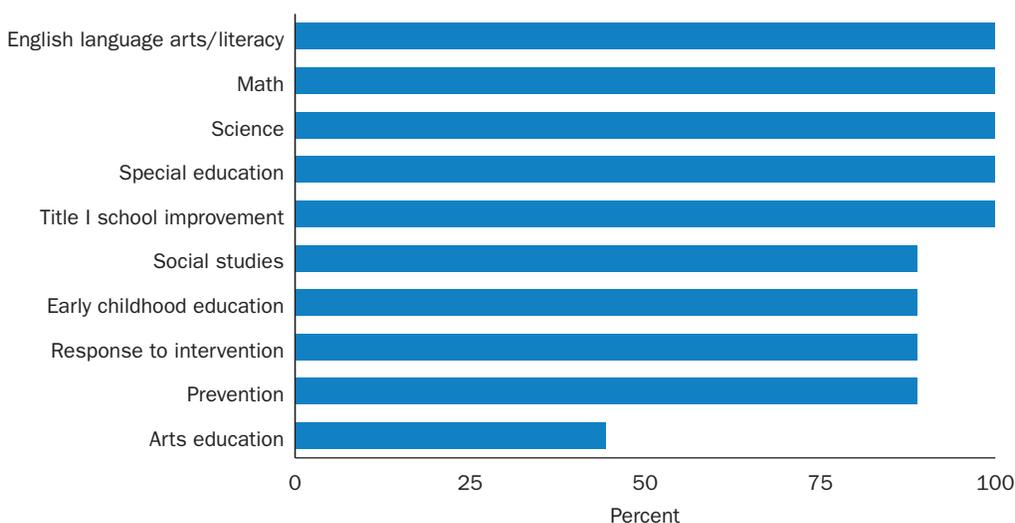
English language arts/literacy, which ESDs rate as very important and needed, receives much less funding than math and science

While Educational Service Districts want to coordinate some services, the necessary coordination structures are not always in place

Most ESD leaders believe that it is important to coordinate all 10 services selected except for arts education (figure 5).

The ESDs leaders commented on the current implementation of the five common structures they had jointly determined were important for coordinating their services: engaging in ongoing communication, defined deliverables, defined timelines, common program data, and defined outcome measures (figure 6). Of these structures, ongoing communication was rated as in place most frequently, while defined outcome measures was identified as least present. Collecting common data was also less frequent across ESDs for almost all services.

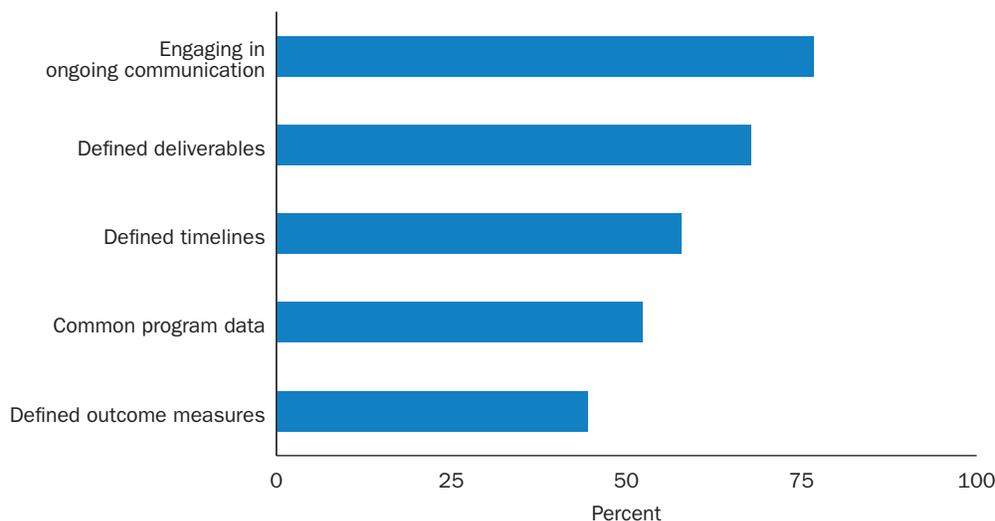
Figure 5. Service coordination is considered important in 9 of 10 service areas by Washington State’s Educational Service Districts leaders, 2010/11



Note: Responses are percent agree or strongly agree on a four-point scale.

Source: Authors’ analysis of questionnaire data from nine Educational Service District leadership teams (see appendix B).

Figure 6. Washington State’s Educational Service Districts report that ongoing communication was rated as most frequently in place, while defined outcome measures was identified as least present, 2010/11



The coordination support most frequently reported by the ESDs was engaging in ongoing communication; defined outcome measures were reported much less frequently

Note: Responses are percent agree or strongly agree on a four-point scale.

Source: Authors’ analysis of questionnaire data from nine Educational Service District leadership teams (see appendix B).

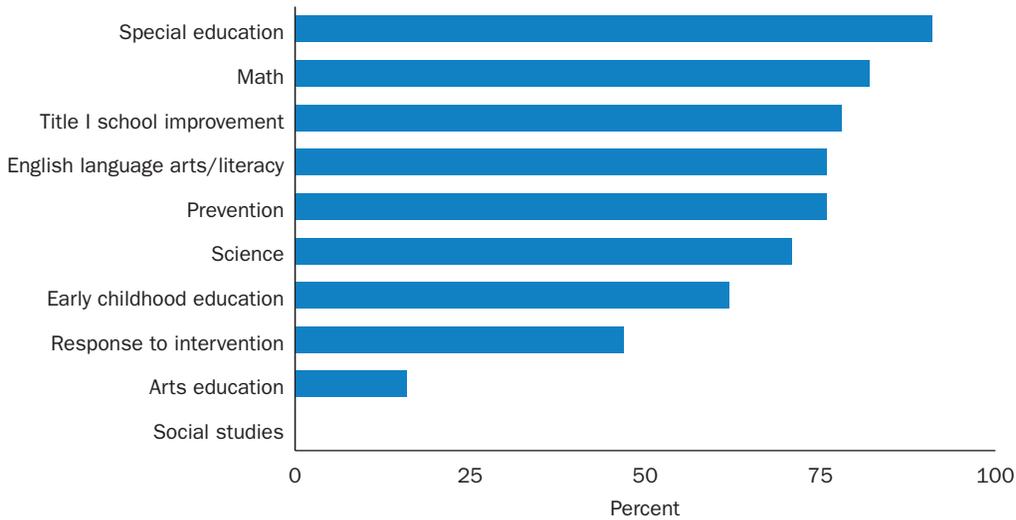
The potential for coordinating service delivery across the Washington Educational Service District Network is strongest in areas with external requirements and accountability

More common coordination structures were in place for instructional program services with external requirements and accountability. Questionnaire respondents indicated that special education had the most common structures in place (figure 7). Math, Title I school improvement, English language arts/literacy, prevention, science, and early childhood education services also had comparatively robust structures that could support future coordination across the statewide network. This may be due to the need to comply with external requirements and expectations. In contrast, response to intervention and arts education had fewer structures in place to support coordination, while social studies was rated as having no structures in place.

The coordination supports reported by the ESDs varied across service categories (figure 8). The most frequently reported coordination support was engaging in ongoing communication. In contrast, defined outcome measures were reported much less frequently. Defined deliverables were common in special education, math, English language arts/literacy, Title I school improvement, and science but less so in other areas. These five areas all have detailed federal and state reporting requirements, which might explain the commonality, while the other areas have fewer external requirements. To increase coordination, especially in the core curricular areas, Washington ESD Network members might consider establishing benchmarks for outcome measures, such as student learning and common program data for assessing implementation, as these are reported as in place less often.

There is also substantial variation across the ESDs as to which services have established deliverables and timelines. For example, federal and state services such as special education

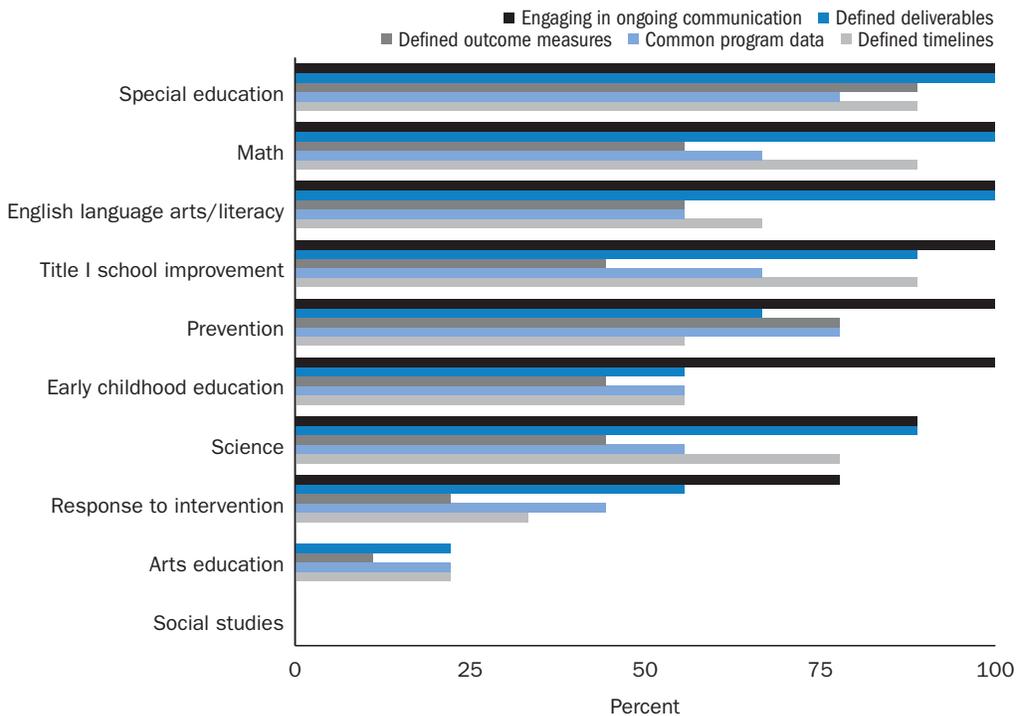
Figure 7. Washington State’s Educational Service Districts agree that special education services have the most structures in place to support coordination, 2010/11



Note: Values reflect the mean for each service based on the percent agree and strongly agree on a four-point scale across five questions related to coordination.

Source: Authors’ analysis of questionnaire data from nine Educational Service District leadership teams (see appendix B).

Figure 8. The structures to support coordination by Washington State’s Educational Service Districts across service categories vary, 2010/11



Note: Responses are percent agree or strongly agree on a four-point scale.

Source: Authors’ analysis of questionnaire data from nine Educational Service District leadership teams (see appendix B).

and Title I school improvement have required state and federal reports, as well as timelines for submitting them. Fewer respondents believed that response to intervention and arts education had common defined outcomes and timelines across the ESDs. In social studies, ESD respondents reported no coordination structures in place. These patterns suggest that programs with external accountability and requirements seem to be more readily coordinated. Coordinating services without these requirements and expectations requires internal criteria and planning, which the ESDs have indicated they have not done as frequently.

Next steps

While Washington State and ESD leaders agree on the merits of a statewide network with coordinated services, obstacles remain. As with efforts to coordinate other types of service provision (Hacker & Wessel, 1998), inconsistent definitions, monitoring, data collection, budgeting, and implementation practices have led to considerable variation in the design and delivery of ESD products, services, and initiatives (M. Dunn, president, Washington ESD Superintendents, personal communication, April 12, 2012). Other barriers include the differing views ESD staff members have about which services are most important to coordinate, the funding available for coordination activities, and the organizational readiness of the ESDs to do so (see figure 4).

Additionally, there appears to be a gap between which services are deemed a priority and how those services are funded. For example, although the state had prioritized English language arts/literacy, math, and science at the time of this study, much less state funding was allocated for these services than for some others, such as early childhood education. State funding for early childhood services rose dramatically after the state identified it as a priority, so increased funding may follow in the core curricular areas now that they have been established as state priorities.

Washington's adoption of the Common Core State Standards provides additional impetus and opportunity for coordination. Districts and schools are grappling with all aspects of Common Core implementation, from choosing and aligning curricula to helping teachers adjust their instruction and helping students meet the new standards. A coordinated network response could help the state more uniformly support Common Core implementation, increase efficiency, and reduce service duplication.

The new state priorities now being pilot tested provide another opportunity for the network to coordinate services. All districts in the state will be implementing services in these pilot areas as they are scaled up. These programs include the Teacher and Principal Evaluation Project, the Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills, and data literacy support to schools and classrooms. For example, ESDs provide training on how to implement the teacher and principal evaluation system to ensure consistency across districts.

Coordination of any service, however, will require some network changes. ESDs will need to agree on common programs, metrics, and data to monitor progress and success and establish common deadlines and deliverables for accountability and monitoring. These tasks are easier to accomplish for high-accountability programs such as special education, in which funding streams come from outside sources and the necessary structures are already in place due to federal requirements. Coordination is more difficult when the network ESDs must decide collaboratively on what services to offer, establish monitoring

A coordinated network response could help the state more uniformly support Common Core implementation, increase efficiency, and reduce service duplication

procedures, and agree to hold each other accountable for progress. It becomes even more complex when the services to be coordinated are funded largely through fees-for-service, which can require dealing with issues of market share and competition.

Because so little is known about what can or should be coordinated, how to coordinate such services, and to what effect, this study can not only guide the Washington ESD Network in its move toward a more integrated and effective network, it can also add to the broader research base on coordination of services. It may also suggest an approach and a sample instrument that other ESAs can use to explore the relationships between funding, priorities, and coordination.

The Washington ESD Network can use the findings of this study in three ways:

- To highlight ESD services that have strong funding and district participation and are already perceived to be well coordinated, so that commonalities among them can be identified.
- To inform decisions about which services might be well suited for future coordination and tracking.
- To serve as a baseline portrait of services selected for coordination and tracking.

Because so little is known about what can or should be coordinated, how to coordinate such services, and to what effect, this study can guide the Washington ESD Network in its move toward a more integrated and effective network and add to the broader research base on coordination of services

Study limitations

This study has several limitations. First, because this is a descriptive study, with much of the data derived from questionnaires of the nine ESD leadership teams, the findings cannot provide guidance to policymakers on coordination efficacy or the relationship between coordination—or lack of coordination—and changes in teaching and learning. Spending patterns and ESD leadership teams' perceptions cannot be attributed directly to service coordination or its absence.

A second limitation is that the study examines data and ESD leaders' perceptions during a single fiscal year. When using the study findings to select services for further investigation, ESDs should view the findings within the context of current ESD operations and ESD leadership teams' responses (one per ESD). For example, ESDs should take into account information about whether a particular service is likely to expand or contract in future years, perhaps in response to state priorities.

A third limitation of the study is that it presents perceptual information uniformly across ESDs, using means or medians, which must be interpreted with caution. For example, just because a majority of ESD leadership teams report that it is important to coordinate a service it does not mean that the service will be coordinated. A single opposing ESD may make coordination impractical. The Washington ESD Network can use the perceptual information gathered for the study to guide conversations on service coordination that will meet the needs of all ESDs and their regions.

Finally, the study did not examine how services are delivered to districts and schools or how service recipients feel about service quality and utility.

Appendix A. About the data

The study used data from the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) on Educational Service District (ESD) funding and spending and responses from questionnaires administered to each ESD leadership team.

Funding and spending data

As required under state law, OSPI approves and monitors ESD budgets. It maintains and makes publicly available on its website the annual *General Expense Program Report*, a downloadable Excel pivot table showing expenditures and funding sources for all nine ESDs (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, n.d.).

Program variables. The program variables in the *General Expense Program Report* represent all ESD spending, divided into four broad categories:

- ESD direct expenditures to support OSPI.
- ESD allowable indirect expenditures that support OSPI (for example, facility maintenance).
- ESD expenditures that support instruction in schools and districts.
- ESD expenditures that support noninstructional functions of schools and districts.

This study used program variables within the broad category of instructional support to schools and districts, as given in the *Accounting Manual for Educational Service Districts in the State of Washington* (Lunghofer, 2010).

Revenue sources. This study also used the revenue sources available in the *General Expense Program Report*. These revenue sources represent the total annual funding sources for each ESD and include:

- Local government sources (such as tuition, fees, and purchase of services from local governments).
- State government sources (such as the state's apportionments of ESD operations and early childhood).
- Federal government sources (such as federal funding for special education and Head Start).
- Payments for cooperative programs (such as payments from districts and other entities for services governed by state law RCW 28A.310.180 or chapter 39.34 RCW, which regulates joint purchasing and transportation agreements and other formal finance sharing between ESDs, districts, and other entities).
- Payments for other programs (such as payments from districts and other entities for services not governed by state law RCW 28A.310.180 or chapter 39.34 RCW).
- Other financing sources (limited to sale of real or personal property, compensated loss of capital assets, and long-term financing).

ESD leadership team questionnaire

Each of the nine ESD leadership teams—typically comprising the ESD superintendent, assistant superintendent, and chief financial officer—worked together to complete the questionnaire. These ESD team members were in the best position to provide informed answers on the questionnaire because they assisted in developing the study and understood

its purpose and data collection instruments; oversaw direct services to districts and schools and therefore had deep knowledge of these services; and had direct access to ESD employees, such as fiscal managers and program directors, to whom they could turn for additional information if needed.

The Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Northwest developed the 234-item ESD questionnaire through an iterative process similar to that used by McIver (2002), who reviewed relevant educational service agency (ESA) and school improvement documents, interviewed key ESA staff members, and then developed the questionnaire items. After reviewing the services and funding information in the Washington Association of Educational Service Districts 2010/11 legislative report (Association of Educational Service Districts, 2010) and the *Design of the Washington ESD Network* (Leddick et al., 2008), REL Northwest created a list of ESD services, service definitions, and questionnaire items for possible inclusion in the study. The list and questions were refined during a discussion with ESD assistant superintendents at their June 12, 2012, meeting. Participants recommended revisions and also requested that information from the *Partnership for an Aligned System of Statewide Assistance: Coordinated Services Agreement* (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction & Association of Educational Service Districts, 2012) be incorporated. Once this was done, the Washington ESD Network advisory group² was consulted.

The final version of the questionnaire had four sections, each related to one or more research questions:

- *Section 1 (13 items)*. This section listed all the ESD-identified services and asked participants to indicate how many public school districts in their region used each service or to indicate that their ESD did not provide a particular service.
- *Section 2 (91 items)*. This section listed services and asked respondents to indicate the dollar amount from each funding source for the service. The funding sources came from the *General Expense Program Report*. They include local, state, and general government sources; payments for cooperative and other programs; and other financing sources.

An additional item asked respondents to indicate the dollar amount that their ESD considers “discretionary” (funds that could easily be redistributed to support service coordination within a service area across the Washington ESD Network). Identifying discretionary funding across the ESDs may indicate how much flexibility is available for coordinating these services in the future.

- *Section 3 (13 items)*. This section asked respondents about total expenditures for the ESD-identified services. The REL Northwest used the *General Expense Program Report* to determine the amount each ESD spent on these services in fiscal year 2011. Following a technique used by Hallberg et al. (2009) to ease the burden on participants in their national inventory of ESAs, the REL Northwest prepopulated this information in each ESD’s questionnaire. This allowed those completing the questionnaire to simply indicate whether the estimate of the total spending for the service was accurate, and if not to correct it. For services that were not listed in the *General Expense Program Report*, ESDs provided their best estimates.
- *Section 4 (117 items)*. The questionnaire contained nine items for each of the ESD-identified services, relating to the importance, value, need, and coordination structures available for each service. Participants responded to these items using a four-point Likert scale in which 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree,

and 4 = strongly agree. Participants could also respond by indicating that their ESD did not provide the service or that they did not know (for items related to coordination structures only). Coordination structures were derived from the 2012 coordinated services agreement (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction & Association of Educational Service Districts, 2012).

The next section explains how the questionnaires were administered and how the items were analyzed to describe the services and their current coordination level.

Data collection. ESDs were given four weeks to complete the questionnaire online or to mail the completed paper version. All responses were received by the deadline.

The questionnaire data were stored in an electronic database and verified for completeness and accuracy. The data were reviewed to identify any missing responses, as well as values that differed from other data sources or that did not make sense. Examples of possibly discrepant data include reporting more districts than are served by the ESD, identifying funding streams not also reported in the *General Expense Program Report*, and finding differences in funding amounts between the questionnaire responses and the *General Expense Program Report*. No missing or discrepant information was found.

The questionnaire originally gathered information on 13 services, but three pilot services—Teacher Principal Evaluation Project, Data Coaching Initiative, and Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills training and implementation support—were eliminated from the analysis because not all ESDs were eligible to provide these services at the time of the study.

Protection of personally identifiable information. All parties agreed that all personally identifiable information exchanged would be protected, stored, disposed of, and otherwise kept confidential, as required by state and federal law. Specifically, the questionnaire was collected through a secure website or through the U.S. Postal Service (according to ESD superintendents' individual preferences). Paper questionnaires were stored in a locked cabinet on a secure floor. The database containing the online questionnaire data and transcribed questionnaire data were housed and analyzed in a secure folder on Education Northwest's shared drive. Only the study team had access to this drive, and the data will be destroyed three years after the report's publication.

Data in the tables or other displays in this report did not need to be suppressed to protect the identity of individual study participants because the report contains no information at the individual ESD, district, school, or student level. Study results (numbers, percentages, ratios, rank order, and ratings) are reported for the entire dataset (aggregate information across the nine ESDs). Additionally, since this information is about ESD services rather than individual students or employees, it presented minimal risk of personal injury or liability.

Appendix B. Washington Educational Service District Network questionnaire

This questionnaire is part of a foundational study of Educational Service District (ESD) services for the Washington ESD Network (WA ESD). REL Northwest is conducting this study to describe ESD services and their level of coordination across the WA ESD Network. Results of the study will inform further discussion among ESDs about the future coordination of services.

As a participant in the WA ESD Network and as an ESD leader who works directly with ESD staff delivering these services, your responses to this questionnaire are very important. For this study, the information you provide is confidential and will be reported only in aggregate across the nine ESDs. We will also combine the questionnaire data with relevant WA ESD documents and financial databases.

To complete this questionnaire, please follow these steps:

1. Review the attached questionnaire to determine if you will need to collect information before completing it.
2. Collect any additional information you may need, including consulting with others in your ESD.
3. Once you've collected this information, please fill out the questionnaire in one of two ways. You may complete the questionnaire online. To access the survey click on this link:

OR

Fill out the paper questionnaire attached to this email, make a photocopy for your records, and return it by mail to:

Caitlin Scott, Senior Evaluation Advisor
REL Northwest
101 SW Main St., Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204

If you have questions, please contact Dr. Caitlin Scott at caitlin.scott@educationnorthwest.org or 800.547.6339.

Thank you for your participation!

Section 1

Directions. For each area of service, please complete the items by indicating the number of public school districts served by your ESD in fiscal year 2011. If you do not provide a service, please respond by marking “N/A.”

Services	N/A	Number of public school district(s) served
Arts education	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Early childhood education	<input type="checkbox"/>	
ELA/literacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Math	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Prevention services	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Response to intervention/program improvement alignment efforts	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Science	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Social studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Special education	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Teacher Principal Evaluation Project*	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Title I school improvement	<input type="checkbox"/>	
WA Data Coaching Initiative*	<input type="checkbox"/>	
WaKIDS training and implementation support*	<input type="checkbox"/>	

*While the survey collected information about these services, they were eliminated from the analysis because they were pilot services and not all ESDs were eligible to provide them at the time of the study.

Section 2

Directions. For each service, please indicate the total dollar amount of funding from each funding source in fiscal year 2011. See the Accounting Manual for Educational Service Districts, chapter 3, pages 2–7 for definitions of these funding sources. Then, indicate the total dollar amount that your ESD considers “discretionary” (funds that could be easily repurposed to support service coordination within this service area across the ESD Network).

Services	Local government sources (10–29)	State government sources (30–49)	Federal government sources (50–69)	Payments for cooperative programs (70–79)	Payments for other programs (80–89)	Other financing sources (90–99)	Discretionary funds
Arts education							
Early childhood education							
ELA/literacy							
Math							
Prevention services							
Response to intervention/program improvement alignment efforts							
Science							
Social studies							
Special education							
Teacher Principal Evaluation Project*							
Title I school improvement							
WA Data Coaching Initiative*							
WaKIDS training and implementation support*							

*While the survey collected information about these services, they were eliminated from the analysis because they were pilot services and not all ESDs were eligible to provide them at the time of the study.

Section 3

Directions. For each area of service, please indicate your best estimate of the total dollar amount the ESD spent on this service in fiscal year 2011. Some estimates are filled in for you based on the General Expense Program Report available online. For these services, indicate whether this estimate is correct; if not, please provide a better estimate. If you do not provide a service, please respond by marking “N/A.”

Services	N/A	Your best estimate of the total dollar amount the ESD spent on these services in fiscal year 2011	The number in the column to the left is correct (Yes/No)	If no, please provide your best estimate of the total dollar amount spent on these services in 2011
Arts education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Prefilled</i>		
Early childhood education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Prefilled</i>		
ELA/literacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Prefilled</i>		
Math	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Prevention services	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Response to intervention/program improvement alignment efforts	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Science	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Social studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Prefilled</i>		
Special education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Prefilled</i>		
Teacher Principal Evaluation Project*	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Title I school improvement	<input type="checkbox"/>			
WA Data Coaching Initiative*	<input type="checkbox"/>			
WaKIDS training and implementation support*	<input type="checkbox"/>			

*While the survey collected information about these services, they were eliminated from the analysis because they were pilot services and not all ESDs were eligible to provide them at the time of the study.

Section 4

Directions. For each area of service, please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements. Mark **ONLY ONE**.

Area of service	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Our ESD does not provide	Don't know
This service is important to the mission of our ESD.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
This service is of value to our schools and districts for supporting teaching and learning.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Our schools and districts have unmet needs in this service area.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
This service should be coordinated across the ESD Network.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
This service has defined timelines across the ESD Network.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
This service has common program data that can be analyzed across the ESD Network.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
This service has defined outcome measures that are used to track progress across the ESD Network.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
This service has defined deliverables (including TA, PD, and all other aspects of the ESD implementation) across the ESD Network.	<input type="checkbox"/>					
ESDs are engaging in ongoing communication about this service across the ESD Network.	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Note: The nine items above were repeated for each of the areas of service: arts, early childhood education, ELA/literacy, math, prevention services, response to intervention/program improvement alignment efforts, science, social studies, special education, Teacher Principal Evaluation Project, Title I school improvement, WA Data Coaching Initiative, and WaKIDS training and implementation support.

Notes

1. ESDs provide a range of other services (migrant education, career and technical education) that may be considered instructional services. These services were not chosen for the current study for a variety of reasons, including inconsistency of the service across the ESDs and differences in perceived importance for coordination. In addition, the researchers originally collected data on 13 services, but three were eliminated from the analysis because they were pilot services and not all ESDs were eligible to provide them at the time of the study.
2. The REL Northwest is engaged in a research alliance with the Washington ESD Network. The alliance work is guided primarily by an advisory group that consists of the superintendent, the assistant superintendent of learning and support systems, and the assistant superintendent of operations and technical services from ESD 101; the superintendent and assistant superintendent for academic achievement from ESD 171; the assistant superintendent/director of teaching and learning from ESD 105; and the chief finance officer from ESD 112. The assistant superintendent of ESD 101 and the assistant superintendent of ESD 105 were chosen because they lead the monthly cross-ESD meetings for their positions. They recruited the other advisors for the study.

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