

EVALUATION OF THE
WASHINGTON INITIATIVE
YEAR 2 (2002-03)

A STUDY OF LEADERSHIP

Laura Stokes
Jenifer Helms
Dianne Maxon

With assistance from
Mark St. John
Kathleen Dickey
Judy Hirabayashi
Allison Murray
Laurie Senauke

INVERNESS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

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DESCRIPTION OF THE STUDY

Background

Inverness Research Associates

We at Inverness Research Associates were contracted to carry out an evaluation study of the Washington Initiative (WI). Inverness Research Associates is a small educational research and evaluation group headquartered in Inverness, California, just north of San Francisco. Our work primarily involves the study of reform initiatives taking place at the K-12 grade levels (in both formal and informal education settings), but also includes projects in teacher education. Our research designs are multi-faceted and rely on data gained from participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus groups, surveys, and document reviews. Much of our focus is on study of the congruence of project theory and field realities. Our purposes are to help projects assess the quality and efficacy of their efforts, and to help funders better understand the design of their initiatives and the value of their investments. For more information about Inverness Research Associates, a sample of our projects, and copies of recent reports, please visit our website: www.inverness-research.org.

A three-year evaluation study of the Washington Initiative

Our evaluation study of the Washington Initiative focuses on a sequence of question areas over three years that reflect the program's development and multiple goals:

- ◆ Focus for Year 1 (2001-02): the quality and value of the support provided to National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) candidates who received WI scholarships. Additionally, we did a small-scale preliminary study of the leadership of National Board-certified teachers (NBCT).
- ◆ Focus for Year 2 (2002-03): the leadership and change agent work of NBCTs, and the WI's strategies for promoting teacher leadership. We are maintaining a minor focus on the quality of candidate support, and are also conducting a small-scale pilot study of school administrators' perceptions.
- ◆ Focus for Year 3 (2003-04): the extent to which school and district administrators across Washington recognize, value, and draw from the leadership resources of the WI and NBCTs; and the extent to which institutions of higher education are gaining value from their interaction and collaboration with the Washington Initiative. In this

culminating year, we will develop and disseminate a summative assessment of the contributions of the WI to education in Washington.

Evaluation in Year 2002-03: A study of leadership

The materials in this binder reflect the results of our work in Year 2.

Guiding questions for the leadership study

We have focused primarily on the leadership of NBCTs. Our study addressed the following broad questions:

- ◆ What leadership roles do NBCTs play, and in what arenas in the education system?
- ◆ What is the role of the WI in promoting and supporting the leadership of NBCTs? To what extent is the Washington Initiative (WI) adding value to NBCTs' leadership—both in the opportunities NBCTs receive, and in the nature and quality of the leadership NBCTs provide?
- ◆ What supportive and challenging conditions affect the leadership of NBCTs?
- ◆ What are the benefits—immediate and potential—of the leadership of NBCTs?
- ◆ What is the potential of the WI, as a network of leading teachers, to make a contribution to educational improvement in Washington?

Research activities for the leadership study

We undertook three major tasks to address these questions about leadership:

- ◆ A written survey of all NBCTs in Washington. To design it, we drew from our preliminary study during Year 1, we consulted with the WI staff about leadership issues important to the project's theory of action and its goals, we drew from a NBPTS-sponsored nation-wide study of NBCT leadership conducted in 2001, and we drew from our own past studies of teacher leadership.
- ◆ Three case studies of NBCT-led projects funded by the WI leadership grant program. We selected projects that would enable us to document and portray a variety of NBCTs' leadership work, and that would illuminate important issues associated with teacher leadership.
- ◆ Focus group interviews with both new and more experienced NBCTs, and observation of the Annual Leadership Conference.

Additional research activities

To help the WI and staff from participating institutions of higher education (IHE) continue to monitor the quality and value of the support system for NBPTS candidates, we conducted a survey of NBPTS candidates in WI-sponsored support groups. We also piloted a short survey for school principals to ascertain their familiarity with and perspective on the WI and NBCTs.

Reporting the results

We have prepared two sets of results. First, we conducted multiple analyses of the candidate survey, including results for all candidates for 2003, a comparison of overall results for 2003 compared to those from 2002, and comparison of the results for each university's groups against the whole. These analyses are designed to assist WI staff and IHE coordinators in reflecting on the quality and value of the support system.

Second, we prepared a comprehensive portfolio of results of all studies, with emphasis on the leadership study. In this binder, we present summary findings from all components of the leadership study, as well as specific results and lessons learned from the survey, the cases studies, and the focus groups. Each of the three components has been prepared as a stand-alone study, and each contributes to the whole. Additionally, we include results of the candidate survey and pilot principal survey.

We have prepared these materials for an in-person briefing and discussion with project staff and advisors in September 2003. We have also prepared them for broader distribution via web access.

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SUMMARY FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

In this summary document, we briefly enumerate the key findings from the full set of studies, including the survey of National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) in Washington, focus groups with NBCTs and observation of the annual leadership conference, and the case studies of NBCT leadership projects. We follow this with a reflection on the implications of these findings for the role of the WI, and of NBCTs supported by the WI, in contributing to educational improvement in Washington.

Summary Findings

NBCTs as leaders and change agents

- ◆ NBCTs perform in a wide variety of leadership roles beyond their classrooms. NBCT leadership occurs in multiple spheres of the education system, ranging from classrooms to the statehouse.
- ◆ Many NBCTs have some leadership experience prior to their gaining NBCT status. Those who had few leadership opportunities before have more opportunities now. Those who had prior experience are seeking out, and finding themselves thrust into, new leadership roles and spheres that offer new opportunities and make new demands.
- ◆ NBCTs are knowledgeable about effective teaching and they are skilled as reflective practitioners. The process of becoming board-certified honed this high-level knowledge and skill, and helped NBCTs become more articulate and confident. These assets serve NBCTs well in their leadership work.
- ◆ NBCTs who feel most effective as leaders, and whose leadership is most readily accepted by others, use strategies that emphasize empowerment of other teachers, collective work and shared responsibility, and leverage of relationships with those in other sectors of education.

The WI's contribution to NBCT leadership

- ◆ NBCTs believe strongly that the professional network of the WI is necessary to their ability to serve as effective leaders.
- ◆ The WI is increasing the number and variety of leadership opportunities that NBCTs have in many arenas.

- ◆ NBCTs believe the WI is necessary to increased acceptance of NBCT leadership within their profession and their schools.
- ◆ The Washington Initiative plays a multi-faceted role in enhancing NBCTs' leadership:
 - The WI is a professional organization that embodies NBCTs' professional values, validates their expertise, and renews their commitment to education reform.
 - The WI provides NBCTs with relevant resources and information that inspire their vision for education and support their leadership work.
 - The active and well-informed leadership of the WI lends crucial support and credibility to NBCTs' work as change agents.
 - The leadership grants program and the annual conference, together, serve as an "incubator" for NBCT leadership: offering start-up funds for innovative ideas, a relatively low-risk environment for experimentation, plentiful ideas, and encouragement to take risks.

The benefits of NBCTs' leadership

- ◆ NBCTs' leadership work—including that which they initiate—is frequently linked to and in service of school, district, and / or state policies and priorities that are associated with Washington content standards, student assessment, or teacher certification. NBCTs' specialized knowledge and skill are thus a resource that contributes to realization of these policies.
- ◆ Participants in NBCTs' leadership projects say that they gain valuable knowledge and experience through working with the NBCTs and their projects.
- ◆ NBCTs grow as skilled professionals, and feel increased career satisfaction, through their leadership experiences.

Challenges associated with teacher leadership

- ◆ NBCTs' leadership work often demands knowledge and skills beyond what they have gained through NB certification or their professional lives to date. NBCTs have little access to high quality professional development opportunity related to teacher leadership. The WI is a very important, but still developing, source of such professional development.
- ◆ NBCTs feel less efficacious in leadership roles when they lose a sense of agency (i.e., feel "used" by those in positions of greater authority) and when they experience resentment (from peers or others) that is defined as a reaction against NBCTs' differential or preferential status. There is ambivalence in the education system—particularly at the school level—about the appropriateness and value of NBCT leadership.
- ◆ Most NBCTs thrive on the leadership work, but simultaneously many are concerned that they will eventually suffer "burnout" because it is difficult to teach and lead at the same time.

REFLECTIONS ON THE ROLE AND POTENTIAL OF THE WASHINGTON INITIATIVE

Below, we discuss some realities that can confound efforts to reform education. Our study suggests that the WI is addressing these realities in ways that give it potential to help strengthen the teaching profession in Washington and to enhance the capacity of accomplished teachers to contribute to educational improvement.

Teachers as leaders

There is a paradox embedded in the idea and the reality of teacher leadership. On the one hand, highly knowledgeable, skilled, and articulate teachers are well equipped—arguably, best-equipped—to play a strong leading role in the improvement of teaching and learning. Because of their accumulated knowledge of teaching and learning, the system’s best teachers are potentially the system’s greatest resource and asset. NBCTs are not the only teachers with these assets, but they are a significant subset of those teachers. On the other hand, teachers have very little positional authority in the education system. Further, the teaching occupation itself has a history and set of norms that limit teachers’ achievement of differential status or role as leaders. Teacher leadership is thus a resource that may be integral to a stronger profession and to educational improvement, but is only partially (at best) embraced by the system as such a resource. This paradox can result in inherent limitations on the influence of leading teachers.

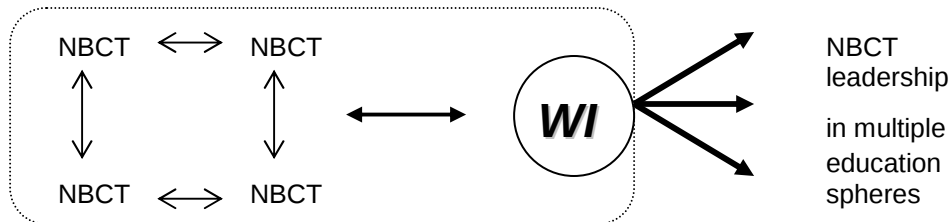
In our research on the WI, we found evidence of the challenges associated with this paradox; however, we also found evidence of conditions and opportunities that may begin to break it down. **Several functions of the WI are important to improving the conditions for teacher leadership:**

- ◆ enhancing the sophistication of NBCTs as leaders, and in particular, developing those skills specific to the challenge of leading from the classroom;
- ◆ connecting NBCTs to one another and expanding their collective capacity as leaders;
- ◆ educating those in various spheres of the education system—particular within the teaching profession itself—to enhance the legitimacy of NBCTs’ work and roles;
- ◆ creating and leveraging relationships among NBCTs and other actors in different spheres of the system, particularly those actors who hold positions of authority and who value the leadership of teachers; and
- ◆ investing directly—through funds and other tangible resources—in the promulgation of NBCTs’ change agent efforts.

In the diagram on the following page, we portray how the WI builds capacity for teacher leadership, both by supporting NBCTs and their work together and also by creating and enhancing their opportunities for leadership in various arenas.

Figure 1.

**The WI enhances NBCT leadership capacity and
contribution of NBCT leadership to educational improvement**



To continue improving the conditions of teacher leadership, we believe the leadership network will need to offer more and better professional development associated with the particular nature and dilemmas of teacher leadership, and will need to develop a strategy for addressing constructively the deep egalitarian values of the teaching profession.

Institutional boundaries

Washington's K-12 education system can be seen as a tripartite one in which the state establishes policy through the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the State Board of Education (SBE), and in which K-12 districts/schools and departments of education in institutions of higher education (IHE) carry out that policy within their different institutional frameworks. Even when the different institutions espouse similar educational goals, the boundaries among them can limit the congruence between policy vision and actual practice.

The WI has positioned itself (and its NBCT members) to work at the intersection of the three institutions (state, IHE, K-12), and to foster improvement efforts that create new bridges among them. The WI does this by, for example:

- ◆ embracing IHEs as leading institutions in the support of NB candidates;
- ◆ sponsoring new collaborative relationships among IHE faculty and NBCTs that can help bring a vision of a "seamless" K-16 profession closer to reality;
- ◆ promoting NBCT leadership efforts that bring NBCTs, K-12 administrators, and IHE faculty together in the instantiation of state policy associated with ProCert qualification;
- ◆ supporting NBCT leadership work that helps classroom teachers strengthen their teaching practices associated with state standards;
- ◆ enhancing NBCTs' opportunities to serve as advisors to IHEs and the State education office.

The pair of diagrams below portrays the three-part system and the WI as a network that helps create new relationships among the three institutions.

Figure 2a.
A Tripartite Education System

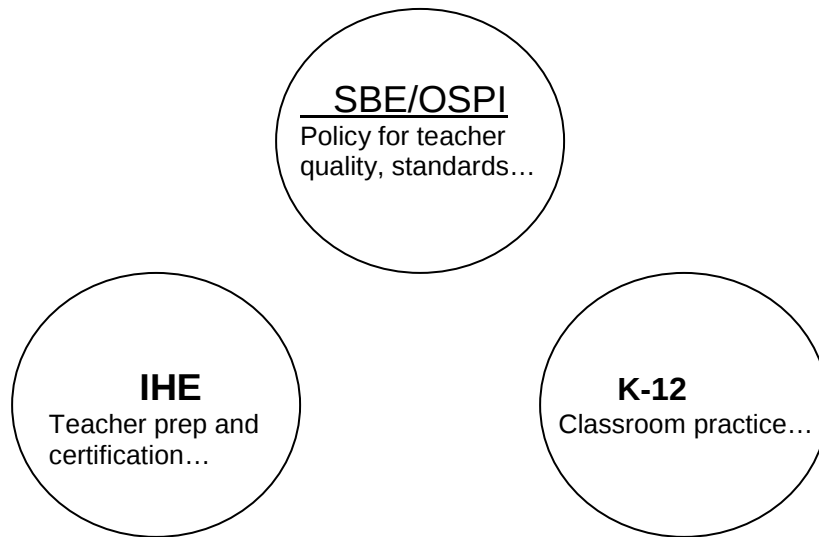
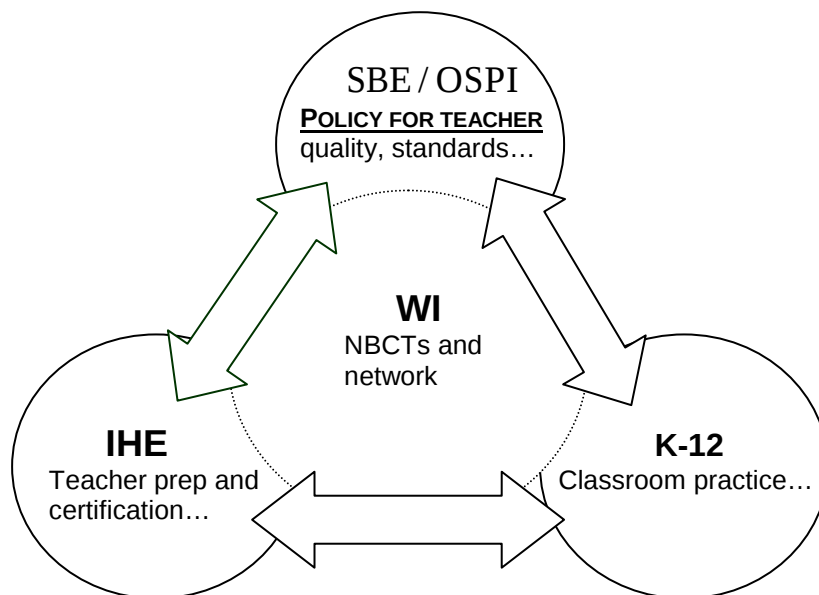


Figure 2b.
The WI strengthens the education infrastructure by creating bridges among the SBE/OSPI, IHE and K-12



By creating these bridges and supporting the NBCTs who traverse them, the WI can bring the perspectives and knowledge of accomplished teachers to bear both on policies and on the practices envisioned in those policies. This has the potential benefit of helping to make policy better and helping to make practice more congruent with sound policy.

The WI as an infrastructure that supports educational improvement

In sum, the WI is a professional network that is helping to develop teacher leadership capacity (individual and collective), and is working to strengthen the positive influence of teachers in educational improvement efforts. And the WI is an organization that is helping to strengthen the state's educational infrastructure by creating bridges that span the divides between schools, universities, and the state schools office.