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## Washington's Educational Service Districts: Design for an Evaluation

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 1993 Washington Legislature, in ESHB 1211, directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to develop "...recommendations for the design of a comprehensive study of the role and performance of educational service districts." This report, submitted to the Education Committees of the Washington State Senate and House of Representatives, presents recommendations to assess the role and performance of Educational Service Districts (ESDs) in Washington's K-12 education system.

**Part One** of the report is the recommended evaluation design. Four major evaluation questions make up the framework of the proposed study, including: evaluation perspectives, issues to examine, methodology/cost options, and recommendations. **Part Two** largely answers the first evaluation question and gives comparative information on ESD activities in two time frames: 1981-82 and 1991-92.

#### *Major Evaluation Questions*

**1. What are the roles and functions of ESDs in Washington and how have they changed?** A ten-year comparative perspective on the changing roles of ESDs in Washington makes up **Part Two** of this report.

**2. How effective are ESDs and what is the quality of their services?** Important components of ESD effectiveness include: participation rates, cost-effectiveness, and assessment of administrative costs and major services, with a focus on staff development and curriculum innovation services. As each ESD in Washington has unique features, a comprehensive evaluation should include all nine ESDs.

**3. What should be the role of ESDs in current state education reform efforts?** The Washington Legislature's 1993 education reform legislation is being implemented. The role of ESDs should be part of the discussion of the future shape of Washington's educational system.

**4. What should be the future role(s) of ESDs?** Beyond the immediate issues associated with education reform, the issues of future roles, the level of state funding, the relationship between an ESD and, respectively, urban, suburban and rural school districts should all be reviewed.

#### *Cost of the Evaluation*

Cost estimates range from \$86,000 for the low-cost option, which would cover all questions, but include only three ESDs, to \$176,000 for the high-cost option, which would assess activities and programs in all nine ESDs. Limiting the number of questions and issues addressed, as well as the number of ESDs, could reduce costs further. Additional options can be created from the "menu" provided in the evaluation design.