

Contractor Report to the Board

Educator Needs Assessment

December 2004

Produced under contract by:

The Acorn Group



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Executive Summary

With passage of Senate Bill 373 (Torlakson, Chapter 926, Statutes of 2001, “School Diversion and Environmental Education Law,” or “DEEL”), the Office of Integrated Education within the California Integrated Waste Management Board and Cal/EPA is developing a unified K–12 education strategy. Among its directives is the establishment of a \$1.5 million grant program for county offices of education, school districts, and schools to promote programs that incorporate integrated waste management concepts into teaching and campus practices. The unified education strategy also calls for a review of existing material and consideration for the development of new material to meet the needs of educators.

Before launching a curriculum development project, the Office of Integrated Education (OIE) commissioned The Acorn Group in the winter of 2002 to conduct an educator needs assessment. Using the database of the State and Consumer Services Agency Teachers’ Retirement System, 20,000 surveys were mailed to K–12 educators and administrators currently active in California public schools. A total of 1,483 surveys were completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 7.6 percent (confidence level of 95 percent and a confidence interval of +/- 2.54).

The needs assessment served three specific purposes: (1) to identify current levels of interest in, and preferred formats of lessons that incorporate environmental concepts, (2) to identify constraints and criteria that influence the likelihood of using lessons that teach environmental concepts, and (3) to reveal information on student environmental projects.

Results indicate that educators do in fact spend some time teaching environmental concepts. Moreover, they expressed relatively high levels of interest in teaching environmental concepts, particularly when those concepts are relevant and standards-based.

While these educators use computers for teaching, they are reluctant to use a curriculum only available through the Internet. Preferred formats include lessons that last either a single class period or a week, packaged in grade-level specific modules that address several disciplines. Among those who did express interest in modules that focus on one discipline, science was the discipline most frequently identified. Respondents indicated a relatively high likelihood of use of the format they specifically selected in this survey. It is important to note, however, that such use is contingent upon preparation time required, hands-on emphasis, alignment to standards, and cost.

The greatest perceived constraint to incorporating environmental concepts into lessons is lack of time, followed by lack of material. This first constraint suggests the development of any material must be guided by the principle that it supplants existing course material and does not consume any more valuable teaching time. The second constraint suggests the need for more effective marketing, given the plethora of environmental education curriculum material already available, but still unknown to educators.

Results also suggest that educators are generally unaware of any environmental projects and service-learning opportunities currently taking place in their districts, but they are nevertheless interested in having their students become involved in such activities. Lack of time and funding are perceived as barriers, but both of these issues can be addressed and resolved with careful planning, guidance, and financial support, such as through the School DEEL grant program.

Introduction

Methods

Before creating new classroom material, the needs assessment was undertaken to identify those factors that influence the selection and use of curricula among educators.

To achieve the objectives identified in the Executive Summary, a survey tool was developed for distribution among California educators. This tool was designed as a single-piece mailing consisting of the survey on one side and cover letter and postage-paid reply form on the other (see Appendix A).

The study population was derived from the State Teachers' Retirement System database.

A list of 364,542 active educators and administrators was zip code-sorted and Nth sampled to create a mailing list of 20,000 names, the number necessary to reach a confidence interval of less than 5 percent. After erroneous addresses were eliminated, 19,463 surveys were mailed out in February 2002. A total of 1,483 surveys were completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 7.6 percent (confidence level of 95 percent and a confidence interval of +/- 2.54). This response rate exceeded the projections and effectively reduced the confidence level by half, allowing us to report that with 95 percent confidence, the survey results are plus or minus 2.54 percent of the entire study population.

The survey tool consisted of 28 questions. Eight questions focused on current status of teaching, numbers of minutes spent each week teaching four core disciplines, and current use of computers for teaching. Eight questions focused on time spent, level of interest in, and influences and constraints to teaching environmental concepts in the classroom. Five questions focused on awareness of existing educational resources, such as *Closing the Loop*, as well as on environmental projects currently undertaken in the school district. Four questions focused on preferred formats of curriculum material. Three remaining questions asked the likelihood of using new OIE materials, suggestions for what OIE can do to help meet the demands of standards-based education, and for contact information.

Results and Findings

Based on the data yielded in this study, the typical respondent is a classroom teacher (79.1 percent) with 13.5 years of teaching experience and an average class size of 24.5 students. This individual spends an average of 110 minutes per week teaching science, 202 minutes teaching mathematics, 332 minutes teaching language arts, and 108 minutes teaching social science.

State standards (37.8 percent) and district standards (25.1 percent) are the two sources of information that most directly influence teaching, while national standards (1.0 percent), API test results (1.5 percent), and scope and sequence (1.6 percent) are least likely to influence teaching.

Table 1. Sources of information that most directly influence teaching

District standards	Total	373	25.1%
National standards	Total	16	1.0%
API test results	Total	22	1.5%
Adopted textbooks	Total	178	12.0%
State standards	Total	561	37.8%
State frameworks	Total	71	4.7%
Scope and sequence	Total	24	1.6%
Other	Total	109	7.3%
No response	Total	129	8.7%

Surprisingly, 60 percent of all respondents were not aware of *any* of the State-level environmental education resources listed in the survey. While 29.2 percent were aware of *Project WILD* and 19 percent of *Project Learning Tree*, less than 3 percent indicated awareness of *Closing the Loop* (2.9 percent), *Earth Resources* (2.6 percent), or the *Curriculum and Compendium Project* (1.2 percent).

While nearly 73 percent of respondents use computers for teaching, more than 65 percent indicated they would not use a curriculum that was only available through the Internet. Nearly half of all respondents (46.7 percent) identified printed material, and nearly one-fourth (23.8 percent) identified VHS video as the one format of greatest interest to them in the presentation of curriculum material (see Table 2).

Table 2. Preferred format for curriculum material

CD-ROM	Total	137	9.7%
Web-based	Total	86	6.1%
DVD	Total	31	2.2%
Printed material	Total	659	46.7%
VHS video	Total	336	23.8%
Overhead transparency	Total	162	11.5%

When asked to indicate the amount of time they currently spend teaching environmental concepts using a scale of 1 (low)–4 (high), the average time was 1.9. Using the same scale to rank current level of interest in teaching environmental concepts, the average was 2.9.

When asked which one reason would compel one to incorporate environmental concepts into lessons, 27.4 percent selected “inclusion in standards” and 24.2 percent selected “relevance to community.” Only 7.6 percent selected “requirement by school.” When asked which one factor is the greatest constraint to incorporating environmental concepts into lessons, more than one-half (55.5 percent) identified “lack of time” and more than one-fourth (27 percent) indicated “lack of material.” This is a surprising response given the plethora of environmental education curricula

available. Less than one percent (0.4 percent) identified “parental concern” as the greatest constraint.

When asked to use a scale from 1 (low degree of influence) to 4 (high degree of influence) to rank criteria that can influence actual use of curriculum material, respondents ranked “preparation time” (3.2), “hands-on emphasis” (3.1), “standards-based” (3.0), and “cost” (3.0) highest, as summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. Rating of criteria that can influence a teacher’s actual use of curriculum material

Cost	Total	1313	3.0
Hands-on emphasis	Total	1313	3.1
Preparation time	Total	1314	3.2
Approval by school board	Total	1312	2.6
Length of lessons	Total	1313	2.6
In-service training	Total	1312	2.3
Standards-based	Total	1313	3.0

More than 80 percent (82.5 percent) of respondents were unaware of any environmental projects currently undertaken in their districts. Similarly, more than 80 percent (80.5 percent) indicated their students are not currently engaged in any service-learning projects, although nearly 74 percent (73.9 percent) expressed interest in having students become involved in such projects.

When asked to use a scale from 1 (not discouraging) to 4 (very discouraging) to rank those factors that can discourage learning or conducting projects outside the classroom, “lack of funding” (3.3) and “lack of time” (3.3) were deemed the most discouraging factors. “Vandalism” (2.2) and “physical condition of school grounds” (2.0) were deemed the least discouraging.

When asked what reason would compel one to use curricula that focus on the environment, “making learning more relevant” was cited most frequently (46 percent), followed by “addressing standards” (18.7 percent) and “improving student performance” (13.2 percent) (see Table 4).

Table 4. Reasons to use curricula on the environment

Address standards	Total	268	18.7%
Improve standardized test scores	Total	77	5.4%
Improve student performance	Total	189	13.2%
Make learning more relevant	Total	660	46.0%
Reinforce concepts already taught	Total	73	5.1%
Meet differential needs and abilities	Total	74	5.2%
Other	Total	94	6.6%

A set of questions focused on preferred formats for the presentation of curriculum material. Forty percent (40.2 percent) of respondents preferred single lessons lasting 45–60 minutes and another 40 percent (39.6 percent) preferred week-long units. When asked to select the one approach

respondents would like to see OIE take in creating curriculum material, more than one-half (52.2 percent) indicated a preference for grade-level specific environment-based modules that address several disciplines. Only 10 percent (10.3 percent) indicated a preference for stand-alone, grade-specific lessons on the environment. Thirty-four percent (34.4 percent) indicated a preference for grade-level specific environment-based modules that address one discipline. Table 5 summarizes those disciplines according to interest.

Table 5. Interest in single-discipline modules according to discipline

Science	Total	205	41.0%
History	Total	71	14.2%
English	Total	94	18.8%
Math	Total	63	12.6%
Visual	Total	31	6.2%
Health	Total	37	7.4%

Using a scale from 1 (low) to 4 (high), respondents were asked to indicate the likelihood of using the format they selected. The average ranking was 3.2.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Office of Integrated Education is responsible for enhancing environmental education opportunities through the California Environmental Protection Agency. Two directives, the development of curricula and distribution of grant monies, have been identified as key components of the office’s unified education strategy. This needs assessment was undertaken to guide the curriculum development process; namely, to identify those factors that influence the selection and actual use of instructional material among educators.

The assessment served three specific purposes: (1) to identify current levels of interest in, and preferred formats of, lessons that incorporate environmental concepts, (2) to identify constraints and criteria that influence the likelihood of using lessons and opportunities that teach environmental concepts, and (3) to reveal information regarding innovative environmental projects currently undertaken by students in California.

Results indicate that educators do in fact spend some time teaching environmental concepts. Moreover, they expressed relatively high levels of interest in teaching environmental concepts, particularly when those concepts are included in state and district standards, and are relevant to the community.

While these educators use computers for teaching, they are reluctant to use a curriculum only available through the Internet. Preferred formats include lessons that last either a single class period or a week that are based on grade-level specific modules that address several disciplines. Among those who did express interest in modules that focus on one discipline, science was the discipline most frequently identified.

Respondents indicated a relatively high likelihood of use of the format they selected in this survey. It is important to note, however, that such use is contingent upon preparation time required, hands-on emphasis, alignment to standards, and cost.

What is surprising about the survey results is the large percentage of educators who are unaware of *any* of the environmental education curricula or resources identified in the checklist. Clearly, a marketing plan is in order. Before launching any curriculum project, the Office of Integrated Education needs to develop effective marketing and communication strategies and work closely with professional organizations and conference committees, government agencies, and State and county offices of education to ensure maximum exposure for its efforts.

The greatest perceived constraint to incorporating environmental concepts into lessons is lack of time, followed by lack of material. This first constraint suggests the development of any material must be guided by the principle that it supplants existing course material and does not consume any more valuable teaching time. The second constraint once again echoes the need for more effective marketing, given the plethora of environmental education curriculum material already available, but still largely unknown to educators.

Results also suggest that educators are generally unaware of any environmental projects and service-learning opportunities currently taking place in their districts, but nevertheless are interested in having their students become involved in such activities. Lack of time and funding are perceived as barriers, but both of these issues can be addressed and resolved with careful planning, guidance, and financial support, such as through the School DEEL grant program.

In summary, the results of this needs assessment reiterate the importance of working closely with educators as curriculum materials are developed. The Office of Integrated Education intends to restructure existing curricula rather than create new curricula to better meet the needs of classroom teachers. But considerable attention needs to be paid toward standards, relevancy, and presentation of material. Expansion of service-learning opportunities, particularly those that relate to integrated waste management practices, should also be considered.

Appendix A

Research Instrument

1. What is your current teaching position?

classroom teacher special ed teacher

administrator other (please specify:

2. What grade level(s) do you teach? _____

3. How many years have you taught? _____

4. At what school do you teach? _____

5. In what city do you teach? _____

6. On average, how many students are in your classroom each period? _____

7. Each week, how many minutes do you teach:

science: _____ minutes per week

mathematics: _____ minutes per week

language arts: _____ minutes per week

social science: _____ minutes per week

8. Which **one** of the following sources of information most directly influences your teaching?

district standards state standards

national standards state frameworks

API test results scope and sequence

adopted textbooks other: _____

9. Which of the following educational resources offered by the State are you familiar with?

Closing the Loop Earth Resources

Project WILD Project Learning Tree

Project WET A Child's Place in the Environment

Env. Ed Compendia

other: _____ none of the above

10. Do you use computers for teaching?

yes no

11. Would you use a curriculum that was only offered through the Internet?

yes no

12. What **one** format is of greatest interest to you in the presentation of curriculum material?

CD-ROM printed material

web-based VHS video

DVD overhead transparency

13. On a scale of 1–4 with 1 being no time and 4 being extensive, indicate the amount of time you currently spend teaching environmental concepts:

1 2 3 4

14. On a scale of 1–4 with 1 being low and 4 being high, indicate your current level of interest in teaching environmental concepts:

1 2 3 4

15. Which **one** of the following reasons would compel you to incorporate environmental concepts into your lessons?

included in standards required by school

students' interest personal interest

connection to improved student performance

relevance to current issues in community

16. Which **one** of the following is the greatest constraint to incorporating environmental concepts into your lessons?

lack of time current policies

parental concern lack of material

do not know other: _____

17. There are many criteria that can influence a teacher's actual use of curriculum material. Please rate **each** of the following using a scale of 1 (low degree of influence) to 4 (high degree of influence).

cost length of lessons

hands-on emphasis in-service support

preparation time standards-based

approval by school board or administration

18. Are you aware of any innovative environmental projects currently undertaken in your district?

yes no

19. If you answered yes to Question 18, may we contact you to learn more?

yes no

20. Are your students currently engaged in service-learning in which they participate in community service projects that are directly integrated into the curriculum?

yes no

21. If you answered no to Question 20, are you interested in having your students become involved in such projects?

yes no

22. There are many factors that can discourage learning or conducting projects outside the classroom.

Please rate **each** of the following reasons using a scale of 1 (not discouraging) to 4 (very discouraging) for your situation.

threat of vandalism concern for safety

lack of training lack of funding

lack of materials lack of time

lack of transportation lack of support

physical condition of school grounds

23. What **one** reason would compel you to use curricula on the environment for your lessons?

to address standards

to improve standardized test scores

to improve student performance in general

to make learning more relevant

to reinforce concepts already taught

to meet differential needs and abilities

other: _____

24. In lesson plan design, what **one** time format do you prefer ?

single lessons (45-60 min.)

week-long units

month-long units

other: _____

25. Which **one** of the following best describes the approach you would like us to take in creating curriculum material that supports standards-based education:

one environment-based module per grade level that addresses **several** disciplines such as science, mathematics, and language arts

or

one environment-based module per grade level that addresses **one** discipline. If so, please check off which discipline:

science mathematics

history/social science visual arts

English/language arts health/PE

or

stand-alone, grade-specific lessons on the environment, or

other: _____

26. On a scale of 1–4 with 1 being low and 4 high, indicate the likelihood of your using the format you selected in Question 25.

1 2 3 4

27. What can the Office of Integrated Education do to help you meet the demands of standards-based education?

28. Please provide the following information so we can send you a gift for completing this survey.

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone: (_____) _____

Thank you for your time.

Appendix B

Data Tabulation: Numeric

Total number of respondents: 1483

	Count	Mean/Pct
1. What is your current teaching position?		
Classroom Teacher	Total 1174	79.1%
Administrator	Total 35	2.3%
Special Ed Teacher	Total 123	8.3%
Other	Total 149	10.0%

(See Data Tabulation—Narrative)

2. What grade level (s) do you teach?		
Kindergarten (& Pre-K)	Total 239	16.1%
1st	Total 270	18.2%
2nd	Total 267	18.0%
3rd	Total 284	19.1%
4th	Total 231	15.5%
5th	Total 232	15.6%
6th	Total 223	15.0%
7th	Total 216	14.5%
8th	Total 215	14.5%
9th	Total 319	21.5%
10th	Total 331	22.3%
11th	Total 336	22.6%
12th	Total 324	21.8%
College	Total 8	0.5%

3. How many years have you taught? 1473 13.7

4. At what school do you teach? (See Data Tabulation—Narrative)

5. In what city do you teach? (See Data Tabulation—Narrative)

6. How many students are in your classroom each period? 1420 24.5

7. Each week, how many minutes do you teach:

Science	Total	1483	109.8
Math	Total	1483	202.0
Language arts	Total	1483	331.9
Social science	Total	1483	108.2

8. Which one of the following sources of information most directly influences your teaching?

District standards	Total	373	25.1%
National standards	Total	16	1.0%
API test results	Total	22	1.5%
Adopted textbooks	Total	178	12.0%
State standards	Total	561	37.8%
State frameworks	Total	71	4.7%
Scope and sequence	Total	24	1.6%
Other/No response	Total	238	16.0%

(See Data Tabulation—Narrative)

9. With which of the following educational resources offered by the State are you familiar?

Closing the Loop	Total	43	2.9%
Project WILD	Total	434	29.2%
Project WET	Total	175	11.8%
Compendia	Total	19	1.2%
Other	Total	31	2.0%

(See Data Tabulation—Narrative)

Earth Resources	Total	39	2.6%
Project Learning Tree	Total	282	19.0%
A Child's Place in the Environment	Total	68	4.5%
None	Total	892	60.1%

10. Do you use computers for teaching?

	Total	1462	100.0%
Yes	Total	1065	72.9%
No	Total	397	27.2%

11. Would you use a curriculum that was only offered through the Internet?

	Total	1443	100.0%
Yes	Total	494	34.2%
No	Total	949	65.8%

12. What one format is of greatest interest to you in the presentation of curriculum material?

	Total	1411	100.0%
CD-ROM	Total	137	9.7%
Web-based	Total	86	6.1%
DVD	Total	31	2.2%
Printed material	Total	659	46.7%
VHS Video	Total	336	23.8%
Overhead transparency	Total	162	11.5%

13. On a scale of 1–4 with 1 being no time and 4 being extensive, indicate the amount of time you currently spend teaching environmental concepts.

1457 1.9

14. On a scale of 1–4 with 1 being low and 4 being high, indicate your current level of interest in teaching environmental concepts.

1466 2.9

15. Which one of the following reasons would compel you to incorporate environmental concepts into your lessons?

	Total	1411	100.0%
Included in standards	Total	387	27.4%
Student interests	Total	161	11.4%
Connection to performance	Total	221	15.7%
Relevance to community	Total	342	24.2%
Required by school	Total	107	7.6%
Personal interest	Total	193	13.7%

16. Which one of the following is the greatest constraint to incorporating environmental concepts in your lessons?

	Total	1448	100.0%
Lack of time	Total	803	55.5%

Parental concern	Total	5	0.4%
Do not know	Total	47	3.3%
Current policies	Total	92	6.4%
Lack of material	Total	391	27.0%
Other	Total	110	7.6%

(See Data Tabulation—Narrative)

17. There are many criteria that can influence a teacher’s actual use of curriculum material. Please rate each of the following using a scale of 1 to 4.

Cost	Total	1313	3.0
Hands-on	Total	1313	3.1
Preparation Time	Total	1314	3.2
Approval	Total	1312	2.6
Length	Total	1313	2.6
In-service Training	Total	1312	2.3
Standards	Total	1313	3.0

18. Are you aware of any innovative environmental projects currently undertaken in your district?

	Total	1470	100.0%
Yes	Total	258	17.6%
No	Total	1212	82.5%

19. If you answered yes to Question 18, may we contact you to learn more?

	Total	328	100.0%
Yes	Total	167	50.9%
No	Total	161	49.1%

20. Are your students currently engaged in service-learning in which they participate in community service projects that are directly integrated into the curriculum?

	Total	1448	100.0
Yes	Total	282	19.5%
No	Total	1166	80.5%

21. If you answered no to Question 20, are you interested in having your students become involved in such projects?

	Total	1080	100.0%
Yes	Total	798	73.9%
No	Total	282	26.1%

22. There are many factors that can discourage learning or conducting projects outside the classroom. Please rate each of the following reasons using a scale of 1 to 4 for your situation.

Vandalism	Total	1361	2.2
Training	Total	1361	2.5
Materials	Total	1361	3.1
Transporting	Total	1361	3.1
Condition	Total	1360	2.0
Safety	Total	1360	2.3
Funding	Total	1361	3.3
Time	Total	1361	3.3
Support	Total	1361	2.8

23. What one reason would compel you to use curricula on the environment for your lessons?

	Total	1435	100.0%
Address standards	Total	268	18.7%
Improve scores	Total	77	5.4%
Improve performance	Total	189	13.2%
Make relevant	Total	660	46.0%
Reinforce concepts	Total	73	5.1%
Meet differential needs	Total	74	5.2%
Other	Total	94	6.6%

(See Data Tabulation—Narrative)

24. In lesson plan design, what one time format do you prefer?

	Total	1457	100.0%
Single	Total	586	40.2%
Week-long	Total	577	39.6%
Month-long	Total	193	13.3%
Other	Total	101	6.9%

(See Data Tabulation—Narrative)

25. Which one of the following best describes the approach you would like us to take in creating curriculum material that supports standards-based education:

	Total	1456	100.0%
Several disciplines	Total	760	52.2%
One discipline	Total	501	34.4%
Stand-alone	Total	150	10.3%
Other	Total	5	3.1%

(See Data Tabulation—Narrative)

25b. If you indicated a preference for modules that address one discipline, which discipline are you interested in:

	Total	501	100.0%
Science	Total	205	41.0%
History/ social science	Total	71	14.2%
English/ language arts	Total	94	18.8%
Mathematics	Total	63	12.6%
Visual arts	Total	31	6.2%
Health/ physical education	Total	37	7.4%

26. On a scale of 1-4, indicate the likelihood of your using the format you selected in

Question 25. 1443 3.2

27. What can the Office of Integrated Education do to help you meet the demands of standards-based education? (See Data Tabulation—Narrative)

Appendix C: Data Tabulation: Narrative

Available online at

www.ciwmb.ca.gov/Publications/Schools/56004007appC.doc