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Professional Development for Teachers: Perceptions of Northeast Tennessee Principals

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A dissertation

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by

Scott A. Starnes

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ABSTRACT

Professional Development for Teachers: Perceptions of Northeast Tennessee Principals

by

Scott A. Starnes

This study was designed for the purpose of quantitatively examining the perceptions of northeast Tennessee principals as they compared their system's professional development plans to Learning Forward's, formerly the National Staff Development Council, recently revised definition of professional development. The theoretical frameworks for this study lay in the recent works of Schlechty (2009) on transforming schools into learning organizations, and Senge (2006), who provided the essential principles of learning organizations.

Data were collected from 124 principals in 19 school systems in northeast Tennessee, using a 4-point Internet based survey created by Learning Forward to evaluate perceptions of how well professional development programs address the individual components of Learning Forward's revised definition of professional development.

Findings included no statistical significance between the size of the school and perception of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive the professional development plan was or the method used to implement the professional development plan. Additionally, there was no significant difference between the perceptions of comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development and the method used to implement the professional development plan. Elementary school principals believed that their professional development plans were more comprehensive, sustained, and intensive than did their secondary school principal colleagues. However, there was no significant difference between their perceptions of methods for

implementing professional development plans.

This study is dedicated to:

My two wonderful children Rebecca and Brayden whose educational careers are on the horizon. My life was forever changed when you were born. I never fully understood a father's unconditional love until the two of you were born. I want you to know that you are destined to be winners in life no matter what vocation you choose to pursue, and that you cannot fail. Always remember that with God, all things are possible!

My loving wife Christy who has blessed me with two wonderful children, put up with my long hours at the library, consoled me when I was frustrated, and encouraged me when I was ready to give up. You are the most wonderful, loving, and compassionate wife and mother. Thank you for your devotion, love, and decision to be my partner for life! I love you with all of my heart.

My mother Judy who pushed me to be the best that I can at whatever I do in life. You modeled how to be diligent, patient, and perseverant to accomplish goals. Thank you for unconditionally loving me.

To the memory of my dad. Not a day goes by that my heart doesn't cringe because I so badly miss you. You became my closest friend. You helped me to understand that the only thing in life that no one can take away from you is your education. Thanks pop!

To the memory of my maternal grandparents Jack and Maude Wilson who modeled how to work hard (and enjoy it) to accomplish my dreams, how to persevere during struggles, and never quit. I miss you both.

To those students who may face worse challenges than I did growing up. Work hard, find your passion, strive to be the best, get a vision for the future, and create a plan to get

you there. Then work that plan until you accomplish your goals. Then get another vision; it is a never-ending process.

Above all, I am humbled by the journey that the Grand Artificer of the universe has caused me to travel to this point, and I look forward to living in His amazing grace to see what is yet planned for my life. I firmly believe in Romans 8:28-30, and I know that I am called.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

School administrators implement professional development activities in numerous ways. Wiebke and Bardin (2009) claimed that some teachers who are new to the field need focused help in order to transition from college to the classroom. Steiner (2002) indicated that these teachers and those that have become complacent need the help of well-informed administrators who are proactive and responsive to their needs. Ingersol (2003) indicated that a proactive approach to the creation and implementation of professional development programs is necessitated by the number of teachers who leave the profession within the first 5 years. He reported that 14% of new teachers leave by the end of their first year. Additionally, 33% leave the field of education within 3 years. Finally, it was reported that nearly 50% of all teachers who enter the profession leave within 5 years.

Recently, another study was conducted by the SAS Institute, Inc. and published by the State of Tennessee Department of Education (2010). The data indicated that 39% of new teachers leave the profession after the first year. Additionally, the data indicated that 47.8% leave the profession after 3 years. Finally, the study indicated that 54.4% of all teachers who enter the profession leave within 5 years.

Federal involvement in elementary and secondary education has brought about educational reform and created a cultural shift resulting in an increased focus on the subjects of mathematics and science. According to Spring (2005) increased federal involvement in primary and secondary education began with the passage of the National Defense Education Act of 1958. This legislation during the Cold War era caused more emphasis to be placed on the subjects of

math and science, thus providing states with much needed funding albeit with stipulations (Spring, 2005).

Drucker (1959) introduced the concept of knowledge workers to refer to individuals who would take jobs in the future that would require them to be able to sift through vast amounts of information, requiring them to be effective with research skills. This paradigm shift caused education professionals to create professional development opportunities that were meaningful educational opportunities and enhanced their practice as well as improved student achievement. One such opportunity was the creation of professional learning communities. DuFour and Eaker (1998) introduced their concept of professional learning communities as a method of professional development in an effort to increase teacher collaboration. They claimed that opportunities for increased student achievement were based on current best practices in the field.

Learning Forward (formerly The National Staff Development Council) has a documented history of providing resources for professional development. The organization released its original definition of and standards for professional development in 2001. According to Hirsh (2009) members of Learning Forward believed that professional development in the United States could become something that was universal and meaningful for all participants and realized the importance of redefining professional development. Therefore, in February 2009 Learning Forward issued a revised, comprehensive definition of professional development. In the fall of 2009 it published an instrument for use by schools and systems to assess professional development based on the new definition.

Student achievement is an issue that has challenged American society for years. For instance Spring (2005) reported that American schools were often blamed for failing to keep up academically with other nations. He claimed that issues such as the Space Race and declining

scores on standardized tests were used to compare American students to foreign students leading to educational reform efforts. Additionally, Spring reported that the publishing of *A Nation at Risk: The imperative for educational reform* was implemented to counteract America's perceived economic decline in world markets. Another reform movement occurred in 2001 with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act. Spring noted that this movement, which was a reauthorization of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, incorporated the use of standardized testing for accountability of student achievement.

There were also advocates who feel that there should be a total transformation in the way educators experience professional development activities. One such advocate is author Schlechty of the Schlechty Center in Lexington, Kentucky. Schlechty claimed that there was a distinct need for the transformation of schools from bureaucratic institutions into learning organizations that consist of professional learning communities (Schlechty, 2009).

Senge (2006) outlined five core disciplines that professional learning organizations needed to incorporate if they were to move past survival learning in order to engage in generative learning. He defined generative learning as learning that enhances a group's capacity to create. This capacity is unlimited in nature and is similar to the notion of synergy. This type of learning can only be obtained if the learning organization implements each of the five learning disciplines.

Senge's (2006) first discipline, personal mastery, was the discipline of personal growth and learning. He noted that personal mastery goes well beyond mere competence and the acquisition of new skills. He stated that it was beyond a spiritual unfolding. He referred to it as the means of approaching one's life and work as a creative work. This included the living of life from a creative rather than reactive point of view. He noted that personal mastery becomes a

discipline or an activity that is integrated into our lives. This discipline is based upon the ability to both continually clarify what is important and how to see current reality more clearly.

Senge's (2006) second discipline incorporated individuals' use of mental models, which include the assumptions or mental images that influence how people understand the world and take action. He also advocated the building of a shared vision within the organization. A shared vision allows people to excel and learn, not because they are told to, but because they want to.

Senge (2006) also wrote that all team members must be engaged in team learning. This is the process whereby members engage in true dialogue, suspending all assumptions. Senge claimed that these four disciplines were essential to all learning organizations. Additionally, Senge purported that these disciplines were ineffective unless the organization operated with a systems thinking mentality. His systems-thinking concept integrated the four other disciplines into a coherent body of theory and practice that allows the organization to thrive. Senge noted that these five disciplines must be employed in a never-ending quest for the expansion of the organization's capacity so that the organization experiences generative learning.

Wei, Hammond, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) cited the impact of Senge's concept of professional learning communities and conducted their own study among 900 teachers in 24 elementary and secondary schools across the United States. Their results suggested that sustained and intensive professional development for teachers was related to student achievement gains. Furthermore, they reported that effective professional development built stronger working relationships among teachers. The concept of building relationships led Learning Forward to reconstruct its definition of professional development.

Statement of the Problem

Wiebke and Bardin (2009) noted that new teachers were left to discern for themselves how to improve their teaching, without much assistance from the administration, school, or system. This lack of support has resulted in the built-up frustration of teachers over specified issues according to the Institution of Education Sciences (2008), which noted that as of 2004, there was a 47% attrition rate within the first 5 years of teaching.

Hirsh (2009) noted that one response to this problem was a well-crafted comprehensive professional development plan that included the cycle of analyzation of data, learning goals determination based on that data, joint lessons designed using evidence-based strategies, and providing access to coaches for support. The culmination of this plan is the assessment of how learning and teamwork affect student achievement and serves to provide these teachers with the knowledge and skill sets that provide them with a sense of accomplishment within the classroom.

The purpose of this study was to determine how 214 principals of schools within 19 school districts in upper East Tennessee perceived their professional development programs when compared to Learning Forward's revised definition of professional development. According to the revised definition professional development is to be comprehensive, sustained, and intensive in nature for the improvement of teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement (Hord, 2009).

Significance of the Study

This study focused on the perceptions of 214 principals in 19 upper East Tennessee school systems that have implemented the various descriptors of the Learning Forward's revised definition of professional development. The data gleaned from this study provided school

administrators with a framework to evaluate professional development activities for the respective systems' teachers and administrators.

Limitations

The study was confined to 19 school districts. A saturation sample of 214 principals was taken. The school systems differed in their composition. However for this study, care was maintained to refer to elementary schools kindergarten through eighth grade, and high schools as 9th through 12th grades. Therefore, the results may not be representative of the entire state of Tennessee.

Another limitation of this study was that there were only 19 school systems that participated. This study is potentially defining for Learning Forward because it is the self-evaluation by the school systems' administrators of how they perceived their systems' application of Learning Forward's revised definition of professional development. Educational faculty at East Tennessee State University will be able to evaluate the demographic data provided by the administrators to determine what percentage of their graduates apply the individual components of Learning Forward's revised definition of professional development. Replication of this type of study is recommended due to the impact that postsecondary institutions have on students seeking administrative endorsement.

Research Questions

1. What is the correlation between the size of the school and the principals' perceptions of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development is implemented at the school level?

2. What is the correlation between the size of the school and the type of support that is used to implement the professional development plan?

3. Is there a significant difference between the principals' perception of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development implemented at the school level and their perception of the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan?

4. Is there a significant difference between perceptions at the elementary and secondary school levels concerning how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development is implemented?

5. Is there a significant difference between perceptions at the elementary and secondary school levels concerning the type of support that is used to implement the professional development plan?

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions of terms further explain ideas and concepts encountered in this study:

1. *Learning Forward*: The National Staff Development Council began in 1969 and formally began promoting the professional development of teachers and administrators in 1976. In 2010, it decided to exemplify their commitment to change by changing its name to Learning Forward. According to its website, it is the largest nonprofit international professional organization for staff development and school improvement (Learning Forward, 2010b).

2. *Comprehensive, Sustained, and Intensive Professional Development*: Hirsh (2009) claimed that professional development was collective responsibility among all of the professionals within a school. She claimed that established learning goals must be aligned with rigorous state student standards. She further suggested that the learning must be conducted among the educators at the school facilitated by a well-prepared principal or other school-based

professional development leader. Hirsh claimed that this type of learning primarily occurs several times per week among established teams of teachers, principals, or other instructional staff members.

3. *Learning Organizations*: The framework for this research project is firmly rooted in Senge's definition, "Organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (Senge, 2009, p. 3).

4. *Professional Development*: Professional development is separated from training in that professional development is not for teaching a new skill. Professional development is a "comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement" (Hirsh, 2009, p. 10). This definition is further broken down into what professional development looks like and how it is to be implemented at the school level. The definition also identifies the roles of outside providers who provide professional development to schools and educators.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 1 presents an introduction to the concept of professional development, the statement of the problem facing educators, limitations and delimitations, research questions, and definitions of terms used in the study. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature pertaining to the field of professional development. Chapter 3 addresses the research methodology for this research project as well as the data and analysis of that data. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, and Chapter 5 contains the summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and further research pertaining to the subject.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This study was designed to determine how 214 principals of schools within 19 school districts in upper East Tennessee perceived their professional development programs when compared to Learning Forward's revised definition of professional development and was broken down into three areas for examination. The first area was to determine whether there were differences between average scores on the instrument. Second, data were analyzed to find out whether there was a correlation between a school's size and how the professional development program was perceived. Lastly, the data were examined to determine whether a significant difference was noted between elementary and high school principals regarding their perceptions of their professional development program.

In order to make sense of these data, a review of the literature was completed. Learning Forward created both the revised definition of professional development, and the instrument used in this study. This review of the literature was arranged to follow each of the components of the revised definition as outlined by Learning Forward as listed below.

Definition of Professional Development

The definition of professional development has changed over the past 10 years. Guskey (2000) defined the term as, "those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students" (p. 16). A year later, Learning Forward (2001) issued its definition that stated that professional development was a "means by which educators acquire or enhance knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs necessary to create high levels of learning for all students" (p. 2).

While many models of professional development have been researched and supported across all

occupational areas as effective methods to improve student achievement, Learning Forward

redefined the term for educators in 2009.

Hirsh (2009) noted that the new definition proposed by the Learning Forward was based

upon the organization's model of continuous improvement. Hirsh claimed that:

> Good teaching occurs when educators on teams are involved in a cycle in which they
> analyze data, determine student and adult learning goals based on that analysis, design
> joint lessons that use evidence-based strategies, have access to coaches for support in
> improving their classroom instruction, and then assess how their learning and teamwork
> affects student achievement. (p. 10)

Learning Forward, according to Hirsh in 2009, defined "the term 'professional

development' meant a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers'

and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement" (p. 12). This definition was the

basis for the evaluation instrument created by Learning Forward used in this study. This

definition encompassed the following areas:

(A)   Professional development fosters collective responsibility for improved student
      performance and must be comprised of professional learning that:
      (1) is aligned with rigorous state student academic achievement standards as well
      as related local educational agency and school improvement goals;
      (2) is conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by well-prepared
      school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches,
      mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders;
      (3) primarily occurs several times per week among established teams of teachers,
      principals, and other instructional staff members where the teams of educators
      engage in a continuous cycle of improvement that
      >   (i) evaluates student, teacher, and school learning needs through a
      >   thorough review of data on teacher and student performance;
      >   (ii) defines a clear set of educator learning goals based on the rigorous
      >   analysis of the data;
      >   (iii) achieves the educator learning goals of (A) (3) (ii) by implementing
      >   coherent, sustained, and evidence-based learning strategies, such as lesson
      >   study and the development of formative assessments that improve
      >   instructional effectiveness and student achievement;
      >   (iv) provides job-embedded coaching or other forms of assistance to
      >   support the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the classroom;

(v) regularly assesses the effectiveness of the professional development in achieving identified learning goals, improving teaching, and assisting all students in meeting challenging state academic achievement standards; (vi) informs ongoing improvements in teaching and student learning; and (vii) that may be supported by external assistance.

(B) The process outlined in (A) may be supported by activities such as courses, workshops, institutes, networks, and conferences that:
(1) must address the learning goals and objectives established by educators at the school level;
(2) advance the ongoing school-based professional development; and
(3) are provided by for-profit and nonprofit entities outside the school such as universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content-area specialists, and other education organizations and associations. (pp. 12-16)

Purpose and History of Learning Forward

Learning Forward's (2010a), formerly known as The National Staff Development Council, purpose was to ensure that every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves. According to its website the reason for adopting such a bold new purpose was to purposefully connect professional development and student learning. Mizell (2007) noted that it was imperative for every educator to engage in professional development activities and not passively participate. He claimed that educators had often failed to engage in professional development because it neither met their professional needs nor drew upon their prior knowledge or experiences.

Guskey (1996) noted that the field of education was both dynamic and ever changing, and that educators must stay current in their knowledge of the latest technological, teaching, and learning trends. This claim reinforced the need for Learning Forward. The historical focus of student achievement has also been a "hallmark of Learning Forward's definition of professional development" (p. 102).

Learning Forward was established as the National Staff Development Council in 1969, when Brandt, current editor of the Association of Curriculum Development's Educational

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Leadership, organized 15 educational leaders to discuss issues facing them (Learning Forward, 2010). Forty-one years later that group has grown to over 7,000 making Learning Forward the largest nonprofit international professional association for staff development and school improvement. As of fall 2010, it had affiliates in 44 states and one in British Columbia and offered various forms of professional development to schools nation-wide.

Formally created in 1976, Learning Forward began to focus on the professional development of teachers and administrators. Learning Forward initially released 12 standards for professional development in 2001 and expects to revise them in 2011. The standards encompass the context, process, and content of professional development for both educators and students (Mizell, 2007). In the fall of 2010 the organization officially changed its name from The National Staff Development Council to Learning Forward.

<div align="center">Research Base for the Revised Definition</div>

State of Professional Development

Teachers and administrators have been exposed to a variety of methods for professional development over the past 10 years. Allen, Eby, and Lentz (2006) indicated that there was minimal empirical evidence showing an impact of professional development on student achievement. Specifically, Howley, Chadwick, and Howley (2002) indicated a need to further explore the nature, quality, and outcomes of professional development that is offered to school administrators.

Organizations have recognized this need and have created standards to which school administrators are held accountable. They have provided policy makers and educational leaders with a common vision and goals for how to improve student achievement through better educational leadership (CCSSO, 2008; ISLLC, 2008; Learning Forward, 2001). An example is

the United States Congress's (2001) passing of the No Child Left Behind Act that specifically mandated highly qualified status for teachers. Additionally, Learning Forward (2001) created a set of standards against which the professional development of teachers was to be evaluated.

Learning Forward's standards for professional development have reflected the staff development community's ideals regarding professional learning since 1995 (Learning Forward, 2001). Creation of the standards was guided by three key ideas. The first addressed the expectations of what all students were expected to know and be able to do. The second was the determination of what teachers must know and do in order to ensure student success. Lastly was the determination of where staff must develop focus to meet both of these goals. Learning Forward (2010b) stated that these professional development standards provide direction for designing a professional development experience that guarantees acquisition of the necessary knowledge and skills. With their focus on what both teachers and students must know and be able to do to ensure success, Learning Forward (2010b) declared that professional development must be results-driven, standards-based, and job-embedded.

Roy (2010) stated that the Learning Forward standards redefined professional development and emphasized the importance of results-oriented, collaborative, job-embedded professional development. He further claimed that effective professional development contains specific characteristics that are:

- collaborative or team-based;
- sustained;
- job-embedded, occurring during the workday and the work week;
- aligned with student needs based on data analysis;
- aligned with rigorous content standards, assessments, and curriculum;
- continually supported in order for classroom implementation to be effective (p.3).

Roy (2010) noted that each of Learning Forward's 12 standards begins with the same phrase: "Staff development that improves the learning of all students" (p. 3), and he made two

assertions regarding them. The first claim was that the phrase affirmed Learning Forward's belief that districts and schools that invest in effective professional development improve student learning. He further asserted that the phrase reaffirms that strong and effective teacher learning and new classroom practices are necessary before student learning can improve. Because such emphasis was placed on Learning Forward's professional development standards, its examination in reference to the revised definition was warranted.

Learning Forward's (2001) standards for professional development have been divided into three categories: context, process, and content. The context standard consisted of subdivisions including learning communities, leadership, and resources. The process standard consisted of data-driven, evaluation, research-based, teaching designing and learning, and collaboration. The content standard consisted of equity, quality teaching, and collaboration.

Roy (2010) stated that Learning Forward's context standard addressed the organizational culture and climate that support learning, leadership that builds collaboration, and a support system that provides time and other resources. Learning Forward (2001) claimed that the context standard of professional development improves the learning of all students by organizing and aligning learning communities' goals with those of the school district. Additionally, Learning Forward (2001) claimed that the context standard improves the learning of all students by requiring instructional improvement from school and district administrators. Lastly, Learning Forward (2001) explained that the context standard improves the learning of all students by providing adequate resources to support adult learning and collaboration.

Learning communities exist to "organize adults…whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district" (Learning Forward, 2001, p. 8). Building a school's capacity to learn has been shown to be a collaborative task that involves creation of momentum to fuel consistent

improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Additional research has shown that learning communities should create normal operating procedures, establish goals to be accomplished, devise a means to assess the team's effectiveness, and define how the team will resolve conflicts (Eaker & Keating, 2009).

Job-embedded professional development has come to mean that educators in many roles must view themselves as teachers of adults and must view the development of others as an important responsibility (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Data may be obtained using this approach from professional development that includes training, coaching, study groups, action research, or discussion of student work (Sparks, 1999). Using the job-embedded method of professional development has been shown to be less expensive and more meaningful than professional development that requires teachers to attend expensive workshops (Norton, 2001).

Leadership

Leadership has been defined as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007). For this leadership to be effective, leaders must develop their skills through a never-ending process of self-study, education, training, and experience (Jago, 1982). Evidence has been gathered promoting two ways that individuals may learn to become a leader.

Jago (1982) claimed that some people have traits that can influence the application of actions for carrying out the process of leadership. Likewise, Bass's (1990) theory of leadership held that there were three ways for explaining how people become leaders. He claimed that some people possess personality traits that naturally lead them into leadership roles. He further claimed that crises or other important events may cause a person to display extraordinary leadership

qualities. Lastly, however, Bass stated that people are capable of choosing to become leaders by learning the process.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) defined the process common to successful leaders. First was the expectation of challenging the process. Leaders have been expected to find a process that needs to be improved the most. Second, leaders acted on that need and inspired a shared vision. Next, leaders shared their vision in words that can be understood by followers. This enabled others to act by giving them the tools, methods, and resources to solve the identified problems. As leaders acted on their visions, they were expected to model the way and show that it can be done. Finally, leaders encouraged the heart and shared the glory with their followers' hearts while keeping the pains of the process contained to themselves.

Leadership whether trait-based or process-based involves power (Northouse, 2007). Rowe (2007) argued that assigned leadership is power that is assigned based upon the position one holds, but that power itself is not what makes one a leader. Northouse defined power as the potential to influence. As such, he further indicated that there were two types of power, position and personal. Northouse claimed that position power was similar to Rowe's assigned leadership in that it involves the power that one "derives from having an office in a formal organizational system" (p. 13). He also indicated that personal power is given to leaders by followers "because followers believe leaders have something of value" (p. 13). Regardless of the type of power exuded, "the primary function of the leader is to inspire others to do things that they might otherwise not do and encourage others to go in directions they might not otherwise pursue" (Schlechty, 2002, p. xx).

A study conducted by the Hay Group, a global management consultancy, identified 75 key components of employee satisfaction (Lamb & McKee, 2004). The top two were identified

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as trust and confidence in top leadership and effective communication. Trust and confidence in top leadership was the single most reliable predictor of employee satisfaction in an organization. Additionally, effective communication was viewed to be the key to winning organizational trust and confidence and helped employees understand the company's overall business strategy, how the employees could contribute to achieving key business objectives, and how the company and the employees' divisions were doing relative to strategic business objectives.

The basis of good leadership has been shown to consist of honorable character and selfless service to the organization (The United States Army, 1983). Additionally, good leaders concentrated on what they are to be (beliefs and character), what they know (such as job, tasks, and human nature), and what they do (such as implementing, motivating, and providing direction). Additionally, it listed 11 principles of leadership:

- o Know yourself and seek improvement
- o Be technically proficient
- o Seek responsibility and take responsibility for your actions
- o Make sound and timely decisions
- o Set the example
- o Know your people and look out for their well-being
- o Keep your workers informed
- o Develop a sense of responsibility in your workers
- o Ensure that tasks are understood, supervised, and accomplished
- o Train as a team
- o Use the full capabilities of your organization (p. A-7).

High-quality leadership has been associated with positive school outcomes (Horng & Loeb, 2010). They provided evidence that emphasized instructional leadership was based on the effective schools movement of the 1970s and 1980s. They also noted how increasing demands are being placed on school leaders to be held accountable for student performance. Therefore, the presence of strong leaders is critical (Schlechty, 2002).

Horng and Loeb (2010) indicated that instructional leadership consists of strong directive principals who are focused on curriculum and instruction issues, work directly with teachers, and are frequently present in classrooms. They further claimed that the traditional view of instructional leadership encompasses principals "mentoring their teaching staff by observing practice, providing pointed feedback, and modeling instruction when necessary" (p. 1).

Horng and Loeb (2010) provided an alternative view of instructional leadership that emphasized organizational management for instructional improvement. They claimed that the principal's involvement in the classroom only marginally affects the quality of teaching in the classroom. However, they noted that administrators have a "tremendous effect on student learning through the teachers that they hire, how they assign those teachers to classrooms, how they retain teachers, and how they create opportunities for teachers to improve" (p. 2). Their research study involving 1,900 principals revealed that no principal has a one-size-fits-all approach to supporting all teachers. They claimed that the key to effective school management involved "creation of a culture and climate by principals with effective organizational management skills provided the best environment for all teachers" (p. 4).

Culture and climate have been referred to as the atmosphere of the school (Hoy & Hoy, 2009). Broader in nature than climate, every organization contained distinct culture that was a combination of its founders, past leadership, current leadership, crises, events, history, and size (Hoy & Hoy, 2009; Newstrom & Davis, 1993). Newstrom and Davis (1993) further claimed that culture resulted in rites that were the routines, rituals, and general ways in which things are done, creating a reference for what it takes to be in good standing and what behavior is considered appropriate in specific circumstances.

Principals have been expected to support, obtain resources and materials, and be intellectual leaders who keep up with best practices while sharing them with teachers (Hoy & Hoy, 2009). Additionally, leaders have shared in the performance excellence of students and teachers in order to "reinforce a vision and culture of academic excellence" (p. 3). School leaders need the capacity to develop collaborative cultures that sustain and support teachers' use of new practices (Roy, 2010). In other words, "the school needs the support and assistance from the central office staff to prepare administrators and teachers to use a variety of data to determine the focus of professional learning, to build collaboration skills and structures, to use job-embedded professional development designs, and to have the skills to provide teachers with long-term support for using new classroom practices" (p. 4).

Climate has been considered the individual's feel of the organization, the shared perceptions and attitudes of the organization's members, and a short-term phenomenon created by the current leadership (Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2007). Principal support of teachers by creating a culture conducive to professional learning, nurturing professional relationships, and emphasizing the professional growth and learning of teachers have contributed to teachers' success (Blase & Blase, 2001; Drago-Severson, 2007).

The central office has been expected to partner with schools to create professional development that creates the capacity of school-level personnel to design, manage, and implement improvement efforts (Roy, 2010). He stated that the central office holds the responsibility for supporting administrators and teachers as they use data to "define focus of professional learning, build collaboration skills, plan and implement job-embedded professional development, and develop the skills to provide long-term support for the use of new classroom practices" (p. 53). He noted that it was this support that facilitated the meshing of professional

development with the school's improvement plan to focus efforts and energy on a few specific goals that were identified by in-depth analysis of student data.

Teague (2010) used Learning Forward's Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI) instrument to conduct an evaluation of the professional development culture within a large suburban school in Texas. His assessment evaluated, diagnosed, and aligned the professional development program in use with Learning Forward's standards. A modified version of the SAI survey was piloted to ensure reliability, and a focus group was established to surface any questions related to the instrument.

Teague (2010) found that each of Learning Forward's standards for professional development occurred "sometimes." He concluded that the professional development program was for beginning teachers, but not for veteran teachers. Similarly, he noted deficiencies among the English, math, and science departments.

Regarding data related to principals, McLean (2010) conducted a comparison study of two North Carolina assessments designed for principals regarding their perspectives and the role of the principalship in North Carolina. According to McLean the first assessment was administered in 2003 and the second in 2008. The study's purpose was to understand the factors that influenced principal roles as agents of school leadership, specifically in the areas of demographics, principal roles and responsibilities, school improvement, and professional development.

McLean (2010) found that there was no relationship between survey groups and their school region but noted an increase in the number of schools reporting data. She further found that the principals indicated that they had received "'acceptable'" or "'above average'" preparation and continued support in their positions. She also found that from 2003 to 2008 there

was a 9% increase in the number of principals who stated that their central offices provided meaningful professional development for principals.

The increasing complexity of the principal's role within the school has created a more challenging environment where leadership roles are more essential than ever (Engelking, 2007; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). These changing roles have created the necessity for principals to pursue various opportunities for professional development. These opportunities may include education, training, or obtaining additional credentials.

Romeyn (2010) divided professional development into three categories. The first category was education, which she defined as, "professional development that occurred within the formal education system from high school through various levels of higher education" (p. 173). The second category was training, and was defined as, "professional development pertaining to the field that occurred outside the formal education system, such as in-service trainings, local, state or national conferences, online trainings, and other internal venues" (p. 174). The third category was credentials, defined as, "indicators of professional development that meet specific state and local requirements or requirements of formalized training programs" (p. 174). While the latter focused on personal achievements through formal training programs, the former two categories focused on the collaborative learning process.

Collaboration

The initial portion of Learning Forward's revised definition specifically addressed the issue of professionals working together as teams to increase student learning (Hirsh, 2009). This concept was taken directly from Learning Forward's original definition of professional development, which claimed that professional development should occur by, "providing opportunities for peers to work, discuss, and solve problems together" (2001, p. 2). Additionally,

researchers have concluded that educators' collaboration has fostered increased student achievement, positive changes in teacher practices, the maximization of collective knowledge and skills, educators' collective knowledge, and the learning of new knowledge skills (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006; McLaughlin & Talbert 2006; Richard, 2003; Thompson, 2004; Tschannen-Moran, Uline, Hoy & Mackley, 2000). Research regarding collaboration has also indicated that these teams of collaborative educators emerged through interpersonal interaction rather than formalized administrative directives (Donaldson & Sanderson, 1996). These teams held common concerns that were characterized by high levels of trust and commitment as well as members who were willing to test new ideas (Donnellon, 1996).

Servage (2008) illustrated the need for collaboration as a means of teaching and offered the following definition:

> A professional learning community is one model within a constellation of models and theories that is characterized by a number of core beliefs: (1) that staff development is critical to improved student learning; (2) that this professional development is most effective when it is collaborative and collegial; and (3) that this collaborative work should involve inquiry and problem solving in authentic contexts of daily teaching practices. (p. 34)

Hirsh (2009) claimed that the process of implementing professional learning communities (PLC) was reformative, claiming that simply studying best practices was an incomplete representation of collaborative processes. She suggested that PLCs should be built upon the reflection of the teachers' own, "actions and the social and policy contexts within which these actions are framed" (p. 49). This reformation was best captured by Brookfield's (2003) incorporation of transformative learning theory. The theory fundamentally reordered social relations and practices, thereby creating a completely different lens through which to view learning that involved critical reflection and challenged previously held beliefs and assumptions.

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This theoretical construct supported the use of professional learning communities by stating that true transformation emerged from a group of learners with diverse perspectives.

While literature existed that encouraged the formation of professional learning communities, challenges were also revealed. Wells and Feun (2007) claimed that formation of professional learning communities often raised complex issues, thus inhibiting the collaborative process. In a meta-analysis of 10 American studies and one English study, Wells and Feun provided an overview of issues that principals encountered while participating in professional learning communities but suggested that professional learning communities had an overall positive impact on both teaching practice and student achievement.

Wells and Feun's (2007) mixed-methodological study further revealed that in the early days of transition to a learning community the learning community's focus was communal sharing of materials and resources rather than learning results or best practices. The study also focused on school culture from which four categories arose: collaboration, focus on student learning, teacher authority, and continuous teacher learning. These categories were included as individual sections of Learning Forward's revised definition of professional development. One way that culture within a professional learning community could be established was through the implementation of a comprehensive induction program (Wiebke & Bardin, 2009).

In a study that specifically investigated collaboration Wiebke and Bardin (2009) studied the effects of new teacher induction programs on both teacher retention and improvement of performance. Their primary emphasis was the support of new teachers within the first 3 years of teaching. According to their study a comprehensive induction program contained specific collaborative qualities in order to be successful. Those qualities included: (1) high-quality mentoring, (2) common planning time, (3) ongoing professional development, (4) an external

network of teachers, and (5) standards-based evaluation (The Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004). The Alliance for Excellent Education also noted that the success of this model depended upon strong principal support and high quality, sufficiently trained mentors who were adequately supported. They further maintained that this new teacher support provided the necessary foundation upon which the professional development process was built.

Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) provided a reference point for explaining how induction programs facilitated collaboration during the implementation of professional development programs. They noted that educator support within the first 5 years was of vital importance to retention rates and that teachers needed to teach in ways that specifically developed higher-ordered thinking and performance skills.

Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) also claimed that high-quality professional development was centered on student learning and emphasized active teaching, assessment, observation and reflection rather than abstract discussions. They noted that "when professional development became part of the school reform effort, administrators and coaches decreased disparities by linking curriculum, assessment, standards, and professional learning opportunities" (p. 77). Additionally, they referenced Saxe, Gearheart, and Nasir's (2001) notion of three essential types of support for new teachers development: (1) traditional professional development workshops, (2) a professional community-based activity that offered support using new curriculum units, and (3) the Integrated Mathematics Assessment approach. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) claimed that each of these areas assisted with the pedagogical content knowledge necessary to teach the curriculum.

The research indicated yet another component of high-quality professional development, that of active, sustained learning. Professional development lasting between 30 and 100 hours

and spread out over 6-12 months has been shown to have positive effects on student learning

(Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapely, 2007). Further, the authors noted that professional

development must address how teachers learn and provide active learning opportunities for

teachers to transform their method of teaching. According to their summary, "Taken together, the

research described here points to the effectiveness of sustained, job-embedded, collaborative

teacher learning strategies" (p. 88). They noted that if the process was effective, administrators

and educators must engage in continual dialogue that examined current practice and student

performance to develop and implement more effective instructional practices. They further

concluded that sustained and intensive professional development was related to student

achievement.

There are circumstances that have prohibited the effective implementation of professional

learning communities. Cranston (2009) conducted a case study of 12 Canadian principals in the

Manitoba region and found that these principals considered the development of professional

learning communities to be imperative within their schools. He quickly discovered that the

participants did not have a common definition for the term professional learning community, and

as a result, he uncovered eight main themes pertaining to the definition of the term professional

learning community. He discovered that professional learning communities were:

> heavy on process; required structural supports; rested upon trust within adult
> relationships; that congenial relationships determined the conception of community;
> learning was individualized; attitudinal attributes determined professional teaching;
> teacher evaluation molded principals' perceptions about learning in professional
> communities; and that teacher evaluation directly impacted teacher-principal
> relationships (p. 87).

Cranston (2009) also noted the complexity experienced by principals when viewing

teachers as members of a learning community because it focused attention on norms of

collegiality and the ethics of professional practice. He explained that the role of the principals

was to enhance the attitudes, skills, and knowledge of the staff to create a culture of expectations around the implementation of skills and knowledge, meshing those pieces together into productive collegial relationships. He noted that the process was transformational in nature and that the principals regarded professional learning communities as a continuous commitment to support the activities of the staff as they grew as a community, as learners, and as professionals. Fortunately, the participants viewed a professional learning community as a process or journey and a change in the way in which professional learning communities are typically viewed. He noted that it could be the result of schools of education not necessarily teaching the concept of implementing professional learning communities, and that they are in need of implementing this concept into their curriculum.

Dangel et al. (2009) suggested changing teacher education programs including the redesign of the curricula based upon the concept of professional development schools. They were specifically interested in assessing the impact of professional development schools as perceived by university personnel. They used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of ecological influence to provide a framework for understanding various perspectives given by people in differing roles at the university. His theory was based upon the premise that all human action is mediated by contextual influences, such as immediate relationships and cultural norms.

Dangel et al. (2009) claimed that the subjects involved in his study spent most of their time advising and sharing with principals. Additionally, they reported that their involvement with K-12 schools had broadened their perspectives. They failed to note any instance where the college professor was involved with the professional development of teachers in the confines of a professional learning community. However, they suggested it was possible that these

professional development schools change their focus to assisting new teachers by facilitating professional learning.

Rigorous Standards

Research has indicated that many teachers hold the belief that the concept of learning for all is both a philosophical premise and an ethos of survival (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Kim & Sunderman, 2005). However, inconsistency existed regarding the definition of learning proficiency (Cronin, Dahlin, Adkins, & Kingsbury, 2007). The goal of NCLB (2001) legislation was to ensure that all students would be proficient at grade level by 2014. This sweeping legislation resulted in the federal implementation of rigorous standards to which all students are held accountable by their respective states and local educational agencies.

Balfanz, Legters, and Jordan (2004) claimed that, "providing all students with a high quality, standards-based education was the primary intent of NCLB" (p. 4). Further, Alig-Mielcarek (2003) claimed legislators realigned the focus of the NCLB standards from providing a definition to determining whether they had been met. Additionally, their focus included establishment of consequences for not meeting the standards. They further claimed that NCLB legislation "shows federal commitment to raising exceptions of our public schools and holding them accountable for student achievement" (p. 64).

Mizzell (2010) noted that new teachers might become overwhelmed by the concept of state standards and accountability, which could cause them to establish counterproductive behaviors and habits. He suggested that additional support such as the use of mentors and induction programs might prove to be productive. This support for a collaborative process includes a myriad of opportunities for engagement.

Coaching and Mentoring

The standards movement has created a situation in which a need for specialized educators to assist with their implementation has arisen. Educators who were chosen for these positions included those such as curriculum coaches, mentor teachers, master teachers, and other teacher leaders. In effect these individuals played an important role in the improvement of classroom teachers' abilities to adopt and implement new teaching and learning practices (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001). This created a need for the clarification of roles and responsibilities.

Ehrich, Hansford, and Tennent (2004) defined formal mentoring as a structured and coordinated approach to mentoring by engaging individuals in personal and coordinated relationships to provide professional development, growth, and varying degrees of personal support. Knight (2006) was a proponent of this type of coaching model and claimed that it generated the development of new content, the demonstration and practice of new instructional strategies, reflexive dialogue, and the transfer of skills to new instruction over time. This collaborative framework justified the need for mentors, and subsequently the research indicated that new teachers who had received such intensive mentoring experienced significant effect on student achievement within the classroom in as little as 2 years (Serpell & Bozemann, 1999; Strong, Fletcher, & Villar, 2004).

Principals have had opportunities to provide support to instructional staff in various ways. However, Mizzell (2010) claimed that this support had been given by providing professional development and by assigning mentors. He further claimed that within an effective professional development program, the leadership team analyzed student achievement data for the identification of specific learning problems common to students within a particular grade or

class. This in turn determined which problems educators had the most difficulty addressing and allowed for the investigation of what information students needed to know and be capable of doing in order to become more successful and overcome learning obstacles. This direct assessment specifically led to research regarding the type and frequency of professional development needed.

Frequent Professional Development

The professional support of teachers is not a new phenomenon. The National Council of Elementary Schools (1999) conducted a teacher quality survey and found that teachers who engaged in 8 hours of professional development were 3-5 times more likely to improve their instructional quality. However, in a study of 237 principals Zimmerman and Jackson (2003) noted that 67% claimed that the lack of time for professional development activities was an obstacle. Supporting this notion was a study that reported very few respondents who received more than 16 hours of professional development (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos. 2009). To combat this realization recent studies have shown that teachers who received an average of 49 hours of professional development per school year also saw increases of 21 percentile points in student achievement (Garet, Birman, Porter, Desimone, & Herman, 1999; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapely, 2007).

Research has also revealed that when instructional leadership and strong support structures are present in schools, the schools will make gains, and teachers will flourish (Blase & Blase, 2001; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2005; Sparks, 2000). Learning Forward (2001) explained that, "It is essential that teachers and administrators become informed consumers of educational research when selecting the content of professional learning processes of staff

development efforts" (p. 20). The key to the effective implementation was the support created by the principals for teachers (Sparks, 2000).

Drago-Severson (2007) claimed that principals supported teachers by creating school cultures conducive to a professional learning environment, building rapport with teachers emphasizing teacher learning and focusing on teachers' personal growth. She further noted that these mechanisms were not functional without the gathering of meaningful data. Data gathering has been shown not only to be essential for supporting the professional development of teachers but also to make better decisions and to institutionalize systemic change for the promotion of continuous improvement (Bernhardt, 2004).

Continuous Cycle of Improvement

The revised definition proposed by Learning Forward (2009) included the ideal that professional development should be based upon a continuous cycle of improvement. According to their definition, this cycle of improvement consisted of the continuous gathering of data, the setting of goals, and the implementation of adult learning strategies. Collectively, these individual components accounted for a portion of the professional development of all teachers, regardless of the respective stage of their career.

Novice teachers, those who were categorized as preservice through the student teaching phase; apprentices, who were in years 1-3; professional teachers, who had more than 3 years of experience; expert teachers, classified as those who had completed the qualifications needed to become nationally certified, as well as those who were categorized as distinguished, all benefitted from implementing a continuous cycle of improvement that was based on the frequent collection of data, focused goal setting, and the use of adult learning strategies (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Jewett-Ramirez, 2009; Steffy & Wolfe, 2001). Well-designed professional development

programs grounded in practice, designed using adult learning theory, and focused toward specific

strategies were essential to the support of principals during their first 3 years (Jewett-Ramirez,

2009).

Bernhardt (2004) defined continuous improvement as the, "measuring and evaluating

processes on an ongoing basis to identify and implement improvement, thus generating a

proactive mentality for improving student achievement" (p. 13). She further noted that schools

committed to improving student learning analyze data in order to plan for the future through

understanding:

- the ways in which the school and the community have changed and are continuing to change;
- the current and future needs of the students, parents, teachers, school, and community;
- how well current processes meet these customers' needs;
- the gaps between the results the school is getting and the results it wants;
- the root causes for the gaps;
- the types of educational programs, expertise, and process adjustments that will be needed to alleviate the gaps and to meet the needs of all customers;
- and, how well the new processes being implemented meet the needs of the students, parents, teachers, school, and community (p. 5).

She further claimed that data can help to:

- replace hunches and hypotheses with facts concerning what changes are needed;
- facilitate clear understanding of the gaps between where the school is and where the school wants to be;
- identify the root causes of these gaps, so the school can solve the problem and not just treat the symptom;
- understand the impact of processes on the student population;
- assess needs to target services on important issues;
- provide information to eliminate ineffective practices;
- ensure the effective and efficient uses of dollars;
- show if school goals an objectives are being accomplished;
- ascertain if the school staffs are implementing their visions;
- promote understanding of the impact of efforts, processes, and progress;
- generate answers for the community related to: What are we getting for our children by investing in the school's methods, programs, and processes?
- continuously improve all aspects of the learning organization;
- predict and prevent failures;

- and, predict and ensure successes (p. 6).

The United States Department of Education (USDOE) (2010) noted that investments in data analysis and evaluation at the federal, state, and local levels were needed, and that these same entities needed to work together to use these data for continuous improvement. According to Bernhardt (2004) continuous improvement is impeded when administrators and teachers fail to see gathering and analyzing data as part of their jobs. These individuals perceive data gathering as a waste of time and have failed to obtain the necessary computer systems that use user-friendly software for data collection. Nonetheless, she continuously advocates for "gathering data to help educators know how they are doing, where they are going, and how they can get there in an effort to improve the school" (p. 7).

School Improvement

School improvement involves vision building, creating a shared sense of purpose, increasing organizational capacity, and generating a higher level of commitment from all staff members (Marks & Printy, 2003). Research has identified both teacher quality and strong leadership as important factors in sustaining school improvement and student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Desimone, Garet, & Birman, 2003; Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2005; Guskey & Sparks, 2002). Similarly, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) noted that efforts to improve the recruitment, training, evaluation, and ongoing development of educators were considered a highly cost-effective approach to successful school improvement.

Researchers have discovered that school leaders need to develop skills for coaching, teaching, and developing their faculties (Kee, Anderson, Dearing, Harris, & Shuster, 2010). Elmore (2000) claimed that principals must be able to supervise continuous improvement

processes that track student performance, which means that they must know the curriculum and be proficient in assessment. He stated that principals must also have strong interpersonal skills so that they can build authentic relationships in order to successfully build learning communities both within the school, and the school community.

Ongoing Improvement in Teaching and Student Learning

The available literature regarding professional development also included a focus on teaching and student learning. Research has shown that when teachers engaged in collective learning activities that were specifically focused on student learning, improvements to both instructional practices and student achievement resulted (Hord, 2004; Mizzell, 2010; Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). An example of this methodology was found in a research project that studied a model of professional development that implemented the use of a word study at the middle grades level. McCord (2010) discovered that professional development programs should address the implementation of strategies that promote high levels of learning. Parra's (2010) study investigated the issue of little professional development for teachers of online high school courses. She claimed that teachers, "need preparation, support, and professional development to help them change their teaching practices and become 21st Century teachers able to create 21st Century classrooms" (p. 25).

Hirsh (2010) cited evidence from a study commissioned by the Wallace Foundation and written by the University of Minnesota's Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement and the Ontario Institute for Students in Education at the University of Toronto that lead to the claim that successful principals were responsible for creating the conditions in which teachers were able to become better instructors. While the report noted that the

instructional leader was key to the success of the school, the principal was not necessarily the only person who should be responsible for teaching instructional strategies to teachers.

External Assistance

The role of the principal has grown to include many professional tasks and competencies (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Engelking, 2007; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The concept of the principal as the instructional leader had to be expanded to include the community and the school as contexts of student learning (Driscoll & Goldring, 2003). Recent research has revealed the need for these principals to establish networks of professional development providers from both academia and institutions outside its realm for the purpose of obtaining the qualities, proficiencies, and leadership skills that they may not possess (Davis et al. 2005; Elmore, 2000; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Keller, 1998).

Mizzell (2010) claimed that professional development may occur at sites such as the district office, professional development center, the school, or other third party site such as an education service center, corporate office, or learning center. According to Miller (2009) educational and noneducational organizations are expected to meet the demands of our ever-changing global society. In order to meet these needs and expectations, professional development and employee training have been identified as essential components for schools and businesses to excel and succeed in reaching their own goals. Due to NCLB pressures of accountability, organizations must prove the value of their professional development investment (Shaha, Lewis O'Donnell, & Brown, 2004). While these venues for professional development needed to be cultivated, the activities provided have drawn much attention from the field of research.

Activities for Professional Development

Learning Forward (2009) stated that effective professional development addresses

learning goals and objectives at the school level, advances on-going school-based professional

development, and is provided by both for-profit and nonprofit entities. These varieties of

resources from outside the school have provided opportunities and activities that benefit both

educators and administrators. Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) established a framework to

describe the majority of past and present professional development programs:

1. Individually guided learning in which educators developed an individual growth plan
   specific to his or her needs. This self-directed learning process exhibited the tenets of
   adult learning theory (Knowles, 1980).
2. Observation/feedback programs that allowed educators release time to observe good
   practices as well as receive feedback regarding their own. This was be accomplished
   by mentorship and peer coaching.
3. Development or improvement process where educators engaged in curriculum
   adoption decisions, school improvement planning, or collaborative problem solving.
4. Skill development and new behavior generation included such activities as in-service
   education and professional lectures, computer tutorials, or online courses.
5. Action research whereby teachers questioned their own practices and conducted
   scientific inquiry to obtain an answers (p. 173).

Professional development has taken place within informal settings such as discussions

among colleagues, independent reading and research, observations of a colleague's work, or

other learning from a peer (Mizzell, 2010). It has also taken place more formalized settings such

as instructional coaching, whole-faculty study groups, or results-oriented learning communities

(DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Murphy & Lick, 2005). Roy (2010) stated that

professional development should become school-based because each school is different. He

claimed that individualized instruction should be used to account for educators' varying levels of

experience and background knowledge. Mizzell (2010) noted that there are multiple modalities

for professional development. They include:

1. Individual reading/study/research

2. Study groups among peers focused on a shared need or topic
3. Observation: teachers observing other teachers
4. Coaching: an expert teacher coaching one or more colleagues
5. Mentoring of new educators by more experienced colleagues
6. Team meetings to plan lessons, problem solve, improve performance, and/or learn a new strategy
7. Faculty, grade level or departmental meetings
8. Online courses
9. College/university courses
10. Workshops to dig deeper into a subject
11. Conferences to learn from a variety of expertise from around the state or country
12. Whole school improvement programs
13. Proprietary programs by private vendors (p. 12).

Outside opportunities abound for teacher professional development. Therefore, administrators must address the learning goals and objectives at the school level, taking into consideration educators' varying levels of experience and background knowledge. In order to take these experiences and levels of knowledge into consideration, administrators must assess their teachers and devise their professional development program accordingly.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to determine how 214 principals of schools within 19 school districts in upper east Tennessee perceived their professional development programs when compared to Learning Forward's revised definition of professional development. Specific to this investigation was the determination of whether there was a significant correlation between school size and administrators' perceptions of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development was implemented at the school level.

Another part of this investigation was to determine whether there was a significant correlation between the size of the school and the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan. Further exploration of this concept led to the investigation into whether there was a significant difference between principals' perceptions of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development implemented at the school level, and the type of support that was used to implement such a plan.

The last portion of this study included the investigation into whether there was a significant difference between the elementary and secondary schools administrators' perceptions of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development is implemented at the school level. Further evaluation led to an examination into whether there was a significant difference between the type of support that is used to implement the professional development plan at the elementary and secondary school levels.

This chapter provides a description of the methodology and procedures that were used in this quantitative study to determine the extent to which the principals within the various 19 school systems involved in this study provided professional development that was

comprehensive, sustained, and intensive in nature for the improvement of teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement. This chapter is organized into the following sections: research questions and null hypotheses, population, instrumentation, data collection, and summary.

<p align="center">Research Questions and Null Hypotheses</p>

1. Is there a significant correlation between the size of the school and its principal's perception of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development is implemented at the school level?

    From research question 1 the following null hypothesis was generated:

    H_o1: There is no significant correlation between the size of the school and its principal's perceptions of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development is implemented at the school level.

2. Is there a significant correlation between the size of the school and the perceived type of support that is used to implement the professional development plan?

    From research question 2 the following null hypothesis was generated:

    H_o2: There is no significant correlation between the size of the school and the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan.

3. Is there a significant difference between the perception of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development implemented at the school level and the perception of the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan?

    From research question 3 the following null hypothesis was generated:

    H_o3: There is no significant difference between the perception of how

<p align="center">50</p>

comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development at the school level and the perception of the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan.

4. Is there a significant difference between perceptions at the elementary and secondary school levels concerning how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development is implemented?

   From research question 4 the following null hypothesis was generated:

   H_o4: There is no significant difference between perceptions at the elementary and secondary school levels concerning how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development is implemented.

5. Is there a significant difference between perceptions at the elementary and secondary school levels concerning the type of support that is used to implement the professional development plan?

   From research question 5 the following null hypothesis was generated:

   H_o5: There is no significant difference between perceptions at the elementary and secondary school levels concerning the type of support that is used to implement the professional development plan.

Population

The population for this study included each of the 214 principals within the 19 school districts located in upper east Tennessee. The primary focus was on elementary, defined as kindergarten through eighth grade, and secondary, defined as 9th through 12th grade, school principals. Private schools were not included within the study primarily because they do not receive federal funding that would impose a stringent program of professional development.

While the information contained in this study included individual principal data, averages of these data were used for the correlation studies. Removal of all identifiable information allowed for the strict confidentiality of results.

<div align="center">Instrumentation</div>

The instrument used in this study was published in the Winter 2009 issue of the Journal of Staff Development. It was designed by Learning Forward to assess teachers' perceptions of their school's professional development plan. Contact was made with Learning Forward, and permission was granted to the researcher to use this instrument.

The instrument was designed to compare a school's professional development plan to Learning Forward's revised definition of professional development in an effort to address flaws in the plan's structure. Using a forced-choice, Likert-type scale participants rated their professional development plan on a scale from 1-4. The rating scale was as follows:

Our school system's professional development…

1. does not include this element.

2. occasionally includes this element.

3. includes this element most of the time.

4. aligns perfectly with this element.

Participants also had the option of citing evidence of how their professional development opportunities reflected each of the various components of the definition. The instrument was not altered to maintain validity and reliability of the instrument. The only difference is that the instrument was used to solicit principals' perceptions as opposed to teachers' perceptions.

Data Collection

Contact was made by email with each of the directors of the 19 school systems in an effort to obtain permission and conduct the study with the principals. This letter informed the directors of the rationale and intent of the study, and clarified understanding of the importance of having a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development program. The directors were given 2 weeks to return the permission form. After obtaining consent from the directors, permission was sought and obtained from East Tennessee State University's Institutional Review Board to conduct the study.

After receiving the permission letters, dissemination of the actual research instrument was delivered online using the surveymonkey.com website. A follow-up email was sent on the 2 subsequent Wednesdays and Fridays as reminders to complete the survey. After allowing 2 weeks for the principals to complete the survey, the data were transferred to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The original file contained all 124 administrators.

Data Analysis

The first research question was designed to determine whether the size of a school related with the perception of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive a professional development plan was. Similarly, the second research question examined the relationship between the size of the school and the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan. Therefore, each of the first two research questions was analyzed with a Pearson correlation.

For the third research question, the data were entered to conduct a paired t-test to determine the perceived differences between how comprehensive, sustained and intensive professional development, and the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan. The fourth research question was designed to obtain perceptual data at the

elementary and secondary levels. An independent t-test was used to look at perception data from elementary and secondary principals to determine if there were significant differences concerning how they perceived comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development. Lastly, the data gathered from elementary and secondary principals were examined using an independent t-test to determine if there was a significant difference in their perceptions regarding the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan.

Each statement included an area in which the respondents could provide evidence that supported their rating. Not every respondent chose to provide feedback; however feedback was received for every statement in the study. However, the feedback that was given was useful and is documented in chapter 4.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine how 214 principals of schools within 19 school districts in upper East Tennessee perceived their professional development programs when compared to Learning Forward's revised definition of professional development. Specific to this investigation was the determination of whether there was a significant correlation between school size and administrators' perceptions of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development was implemented at the school level.

This chapter contained the research questions and null hypotheses that were tested, a description of the population chosen for the study, the instrument used to collect data, a description of the data collection process, as well as a summary. Analyzation of the data yielded results that would either reject or fail to reject the null hypotheses.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine how the principals of schools within 19 school districts in upper East Tennessee perceived their professional development programs when compared to Learning Forward's revised definition of professional development. The data were collected from an online survey that was distributed by the www.surveymonkey.com website. The survey consisted of 6 demographic questions and 14 attitudinal statements relating to principal perceptions of their systems' professional development programs. Each attitudinal statement was accompanied by a space where the respondents could share relevant evidence that informed their choices. These attitudinal statements were used by written permission of Learning Forward.

Respondent Demographics

One hundred twenty-four principals completed the survey. This figure represented 57.9% of the total principal population. Respondents completed the surveys at their leisure over a 2-week period beginning February 23, 2011, and ending March 12, 2011. Of the principals who completed the survey, 78 (63%) were elementary principals, 18 (15%) were middle school principals, 23 (19%) were secondary school principals, and 5 (4%) were categorized as others. This last category was used for those who did not fall into the previous three categories. For the purposes of this study, the elementary level was classified as prekindergarten through grade 4, kindergarten through eighth grade, and prekindergarten through eighth grade. Additionally, middle school was classified as grades 5-8, and included intermediate schools that house grades

5-6. Lastly, secondary schools were classified as grades 9-12. Demographics for the "Other"

group were not included in any of the statistical analyses. Table 1 shows the breakdown.

Table 1.
Breakdown of Percentages by School Level

School Level	n	Percentage
Elementary (PK-4) and (PK-8)	78	62.9%
Middle (5-8) and (5-6)	18	14.5%
Secondary (9-12)	23	18.5%
Other	5	4.0%
Total	124	99.9%

The number of principals was also broken down according to the number of full-time

administrators employed by the school. Forty-five elementary principals reported they have 1-3

full-time assistant principals, and 18 reported having 4-6 full-time assistant principals.

Additionally, 18 middle school principals reported that she or he has 1-3 full-time assistant

principals. Lastly, 9 secondary principals reported that they employ between 1-3 full-time

assistant principals, while 13 secondary principals reported that their school has between 4-6

full-time administrators. There was one principal who reported that his or her school employs

between 7-10 full-time assistant principals. This information is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2.

Number of Full-Time Administrators by School Level (n = 104)

Number of Full-Time Administrators	Elementary	Middle	Secondary
1-3	45	18	9
4-6	18	0	13
7-10	0	0	1
Total	63	18	23

The principals of this study were also asked to report the number of years they have spent in their current position. This information was broken down according to the number of males and females for each category, ranging from 0 years to 26 or more years of service, and divided into elementary, middle, and secondary levels.

For elementary school principals, the first category (0-5 years) consisted of 14 males and 27 females. The second category (6-10 years) consisted of 14 males and 14 females. The third category (11-15 years) consisted of no males and 3 females. The fourth category (16-20 years) consisted of 1 male and 2 females. The fifth category (21-25 years) consisted of 1 male and no females. The final category (26+ years) consisted of 1 male and no females.

For middle school principals, the first category (0-5 years) consisted of 6 males and 5 females. The second category (6-10 years) consisted of 2 males and 3 females. The third category (11-15 years) consisted of 2 males and no females. The fourth category (16-20) years consisted of 1 male and no females. There were no males or females who had served in their current roles for more than 20 years.

For secondary school principals, the first category (0-5 years) consisted of 10 males and 4 females. The second category (6-10 years) consisted of 4 males and 1 female. The fourth category (11-15 years) consisted of 3 males. The fifth category (16-20 years) consisted of 1 male. There were no males who had served in their current role for more than 20 years, and no females who had served more than 10 years in their current role. This information is represented in Table 3.

Table 3.
Years of Experience by Gender (n = 119)

Years in Current Position	Elementary School Principals		Middle School Principals		Secondary School Principals	
	Male	Female	M ale	Female	Male	Female
0-5	14	27	6	5	10	4
6-10	14	14	2	3	4	1
11-15	0	3	2	0	3	0
16-20	1	2	1	0	1	0
21-25	1	0	0	0	0	0
26+	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	31	46	11	8	18	5

Demographic information was also obtained regarding the principals' total years of service as an administrator. The information was broken down according to gender and was divided into six categories for each level. For elementary school principals the first category (0-5 years) consisted of 8 males and 14 females. The second category (6-10 years) consisted of 7 males and 13 females. The third category (11-15 years) consisted of 4 males and 11 females. The fourth category (16-20 years) consisted of 7 males and 5 females. The fifth category (21-25

58

years) consisted of no males and 2 females. The last category (26+ years) consisted of 6 males

and no females.

For middle school principals the first category (0-5 years) consisted of 3 males and no

females. The second category (6-10 years) consisted of 5 males and 5 females. The third

category (11-15 years) consisted of 2 males and 1 female. The fourth category (16-20 years)

consisted of 2 males and 1 female. There were no respondents in either the fifth category (21-25

years), or the sixth category (26+ years).

For secondary school principals the first category (0-5 years) consisted of 3 males and no

females. The second category (6-10 years) consisted of 3 males and 3 females. The third

category (11-15 years) consisted of 3 males and 1 female. The fourth category (16-20 years)

consisted of 6 males and 1 female. The fifth category (21-25 years) consisted of 2 males. The last

category (26+ years) consisted of 1 male. No females reported having more than 20 years of

experience as an administrator. This information is presented in Table 4.

Table 4.
Total Years as Administrator by Gender and School Level (n = 119)

Total Years in Administration	Elementary School Principals		Middle School Principals		Secondary School Principals	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
0-5	8	14	3	0	3	0
6-10	7	13	5	5	3	3
11-15	4	11	2	1	3	1
16-20	7	5	2	1	6	1
21-25	0	2	0	0	2	0
26+	6	0	0	0	1	0
Total	32	45	12	7	18	5

The final portion of demographic information that was obtained from this study was the breakdown of principals by school level according to gender. For elementary school principals, 32 (42%) were male and 45 (58%) were female. For middle school principals, 19 (63%) were male and 7 (37%) were female. For secondary school principals, 18 (78%) were male and 5 (22%) were female. These data are graphically represented in Table 5.

Table 5.
Percentage of Males and Females by School Level

	Gender			
School Level	Male	Percentage by School Level	Female	Percentage by School Level
Elementary	32	42%	45	58%
Middle	19	63%	7	37%
Secondary	18	78%	5	22%

Analysis of Data

The five research questions presented in Chapter 1 were used to frame the study. The five hypotheses presented in Chapter 3 were used to test the data.

Research Question 1

Is there a significant correlation between the size of the school and its principal's perception of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive the system's professional development plan is?

H_o1: There is no significant correlation between the size of the school and its principal's perception of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive the system's professional development plan is.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to test the relationship between the individual school's population and the principals' perceptions of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive their professional development programs were. The results of the analysis revealed a weak negative correlation between the size of the school ($M = 579.61$, $SD = 649.057$) and the principals' perceptions ($M = 2.999$, $SD = .606$) of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive the system's professional development plan was. However, there was no statistical significance, $r(111) = -.042$, p $= .658$, *ns*. Therefore, as a result of the analysis, the null hypothesis was retained. In general, the results suggest that the larger the population, the lower the principal's perception scores, though there was no significant difference.

Research Question 2

Is there a significant correlation between the size of the school and the perceived type of support that is used to implement the professional development plan?

H_o2: There is no significant correlation between the size of the school and the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan.

A Pearson correlation coefficient was computed to test the relationship between school population and principals' perceptions regarding type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan. The results of the analysis revealed a weak negative relationship between school population ($M = 579.61$, $SD = 649.057$), and the principals' perceptions ($M = 2.927$, $SD = .657$) of the type of support used to implement the professional development plan. However, there was no statistical significance, $r(111) = -.074$, $p = .438$, *ns*. Therefore, as a result of the analysis, the null hypothesis was retained. In general, the higher the school's population, the lower the principals' perceptions score, but not significantly.

Research Question 3

Is there a significant difference between the perception of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development implemented at the school level and the perception of the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan?

H_o3: There is no significant difference between the perception of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development at the school level and the perception of the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan.

A paired-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean scores for comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development and the means for the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan. The results indicated that the mean score for comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .61$) was not statistically different from the mean score for the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan ($M = 2.927$, $SD = .657$), $t (123) = 1.928$, $p = .056$, *ns*. The standard effect size index, *d*, was .173, with minimal overlap in the distributions for the 4-point Likert ratings of comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development, and the type of support, as shown in Figure 1.
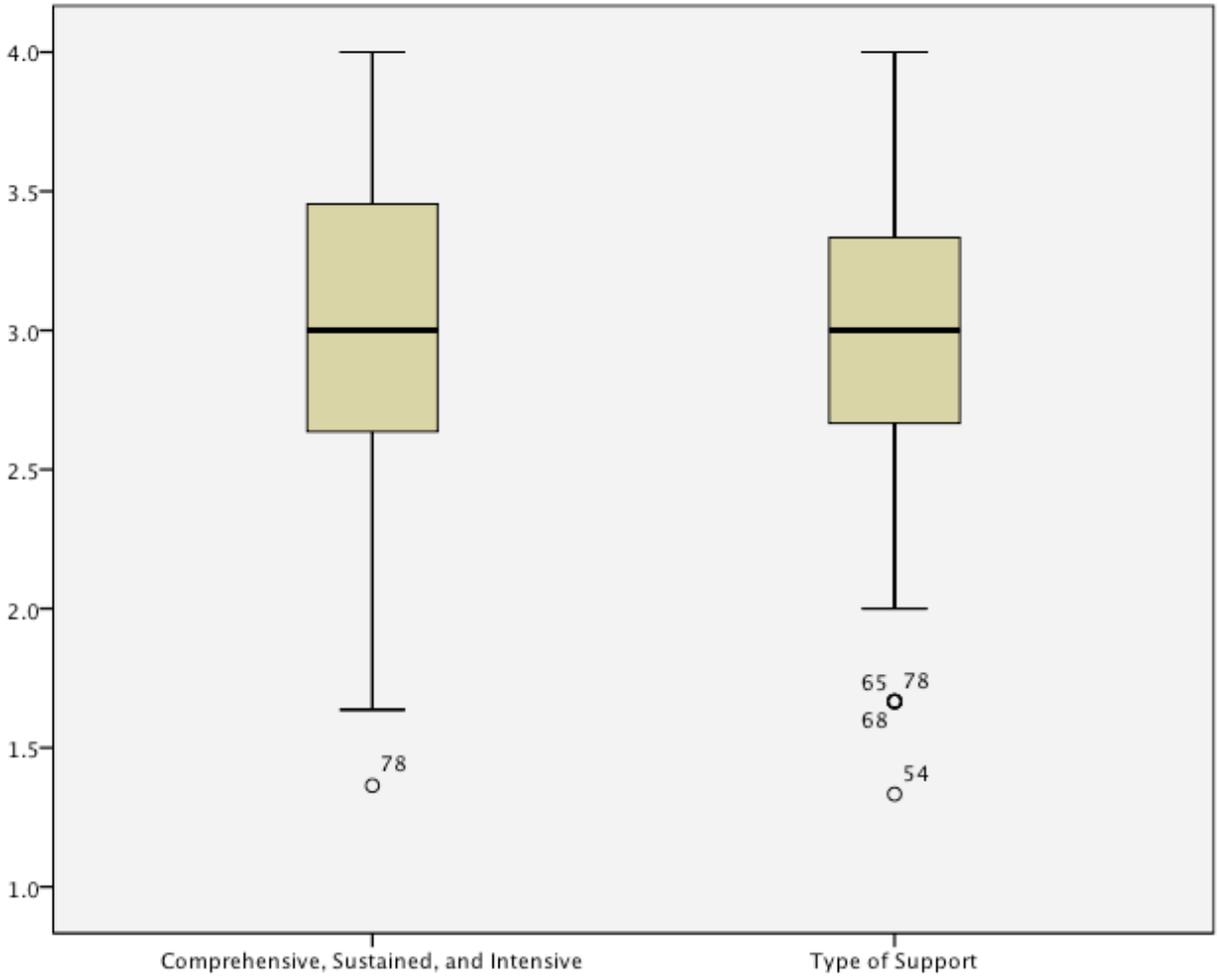
o = an observation between 1.5 times and 3.0 times the interquartile range

Figure 1.
Boxplot Comparing the Mean Scores of Comprehensive, Sustained, and Intensive Professional Development to the Mean Scores of Type of Support for Professional Development

Research Question 4

Is there a significant difference between perceptions at the elementary and secondary school levels concerning how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development is implemented?

H₀4: There is no significant difference between perceptions at the elementary and secondary school levels concerning how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development is implemented.

An independent-samples t test was conducted to evaluate whether elementary and secondary school administrators differed in their views regarding comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development. The test was significant, $t(99) = 2.078$, $p = .04$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Elementary school principals ($M = 3.053$, $SD = .612$) reported significantly higher scores regarding comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development than did secondary school principals ($M = 2.752$, $SD = .558$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .014 to .588. The η^2 index was .042, which indicated a medium effect size. Figure 2 shows the distributions for the two groups.
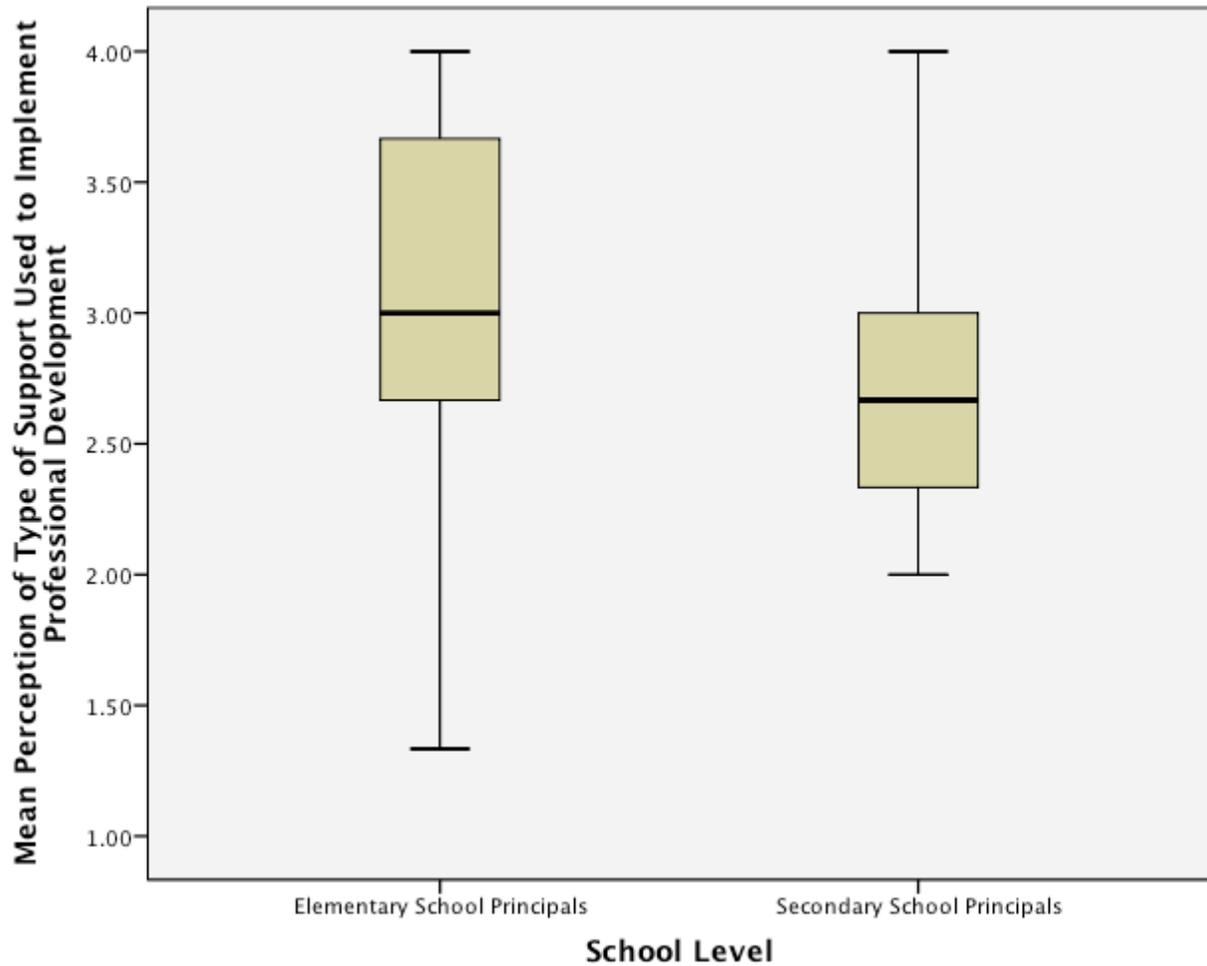
Figure 2.
Box Plot Diagram Showing Scores Among School Levels for Comprehensive, Sustained, and
Intensive Professional Development

Research Question 5

Is there a significant difference between perceptions at the elementary and secondary

school levels concerning the type of support that is used to implement the professional

development plan?

H_o5: There is no significant difference between perceptions at the elementary and

secondary school levels concerning the type of support that is used to implement the professional

development plan.

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate whether the mean scores for elementary and secondary school administrators differed in regard to the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan. The test was not significant, $t(99) = 1.766$, $p = .081$, *ns*. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The η^2 index was .030, which indicated a small effect size. Elementary principals ($M = 2.987$, $SD = .697$) tended to score the same as secondary principals ($M = 2.697$, $SD = .625$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.036 to .617. Figure 3 shows the distributions for the two groups.
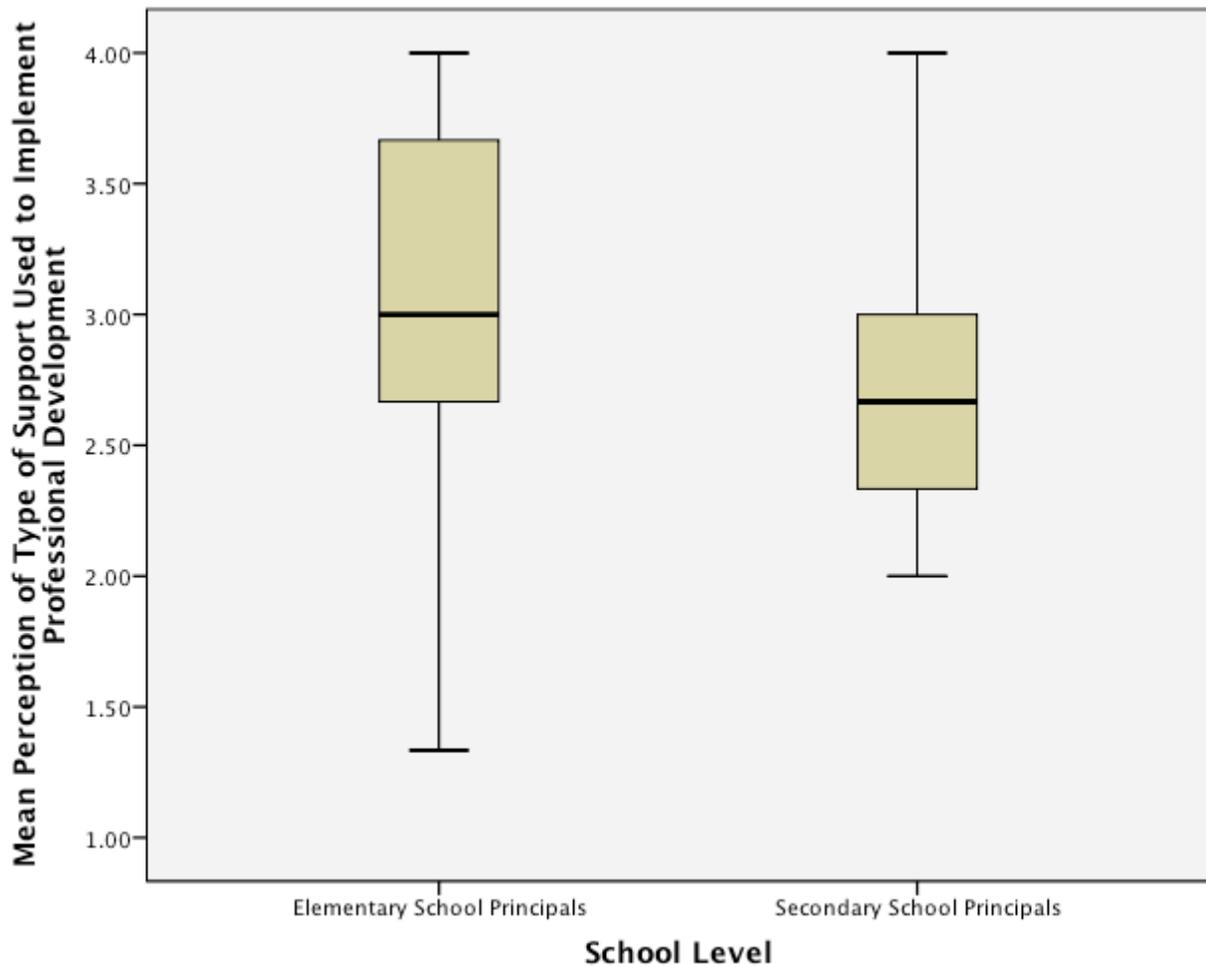
Figure 3.
Box Plot Showing Perceptions of the Type of Support for Implementing Professional Development According to School Level

Open-Ended Responses

The instrument that was used for this study gave an opportunity at the end of each question for respondents to add any insightful evidence that they considered when assigning their ratings.

Survey question 1 asked if the current professional development plan fostered collective responsibility for improved student performance. Six principals answered with the following responses:

> It is difficult to foster collective responsibility in teachers that teach special areas, teachers that float between several schools, with teachers in the lower grades (because they are not tied to achievement test scores).

> Very little is provided for administrators. Individual schools have to provide professional development in addition to what little is provided by the county. We have very little money for professional development. Most of our excess money is normally used for technology since we do not have access to Title I funds.

> The vision for this element is developing at good extent.

> Lean heavily on past test scores to justify not doing more.

> In past years, we have started some new trends and not given it time to show results. We would then start something new when a new trend was the new buzz in education.

> Sporadic and often moves without real focus.

Survey question 2 asked if the system's professional development program was aligned with state and district standards for student achievement. Three principals answered with the following responses:

> Adjusting to new standards and e-learning.

> We focus closely on the standards. Every staff development is chosen to help teachers be better prepared to teach our students based on the standards.

> Our teachers have been working/updating their pacing guides. These guides are used during each of the six weeks, and they have activities that are matched with state's curriculum standards.

Survey question 3 asked if the current professional development program was conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by well-prepared school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders. Four principals answered with the following responses:

Done at the school level, not at the system level.

We are going away from "county-wide" professional development to "school-based" professional development. This change will certainly make the professional development more relevant.

Structures for educators to learn from one another are in place.

Some of our professional development is conducted by our school personnel. For example, once these teachers have been to a conference he or she comes back to the district and presents information to all of the others.

Survey question 4 asked if the current professional development plan evaluated student, teacher, and school learning needs through a thorough review of data on teacher and student performance. Three principals answered with the following responses:

Done at the school level, not at the system level.

Many data points are used.

We have set four goals for our year that drives our decisions. These goals are grounded in giving the students the best teacher they can possibly have, meeting students' needs, being a leader not a manager, and letting data drive the instruction.

Survey question 5 asked if the current professional development plan primarily occurs several times per week among established teams of teachers, principals, and other instructional staff members in a continuous cycle of improvement. Six principals answered with the following responses:

Done at the school level, not at the system level.

We have professional learning communities that meet for a half-day six times during the year. Additionally, we have two monthly "strategy meetings" for the whole staff that are

devoted to professional development. These opportunities are in addition to district in-service days and district offerings during the school year.

These consist of whole group faculty meetings, grade level meetings, and team meetings.

Common planning time is provided during the school day for professional learning community teams. They are required to provide notes on each collaborative time. Administrators are rarely available to attend these times due to obligations within the school. I do not feel like these times are sued to the optimum for continuous improvement.

A common planning time is not available in small school settings, thus making it difficult to meet several times weekly as a collective group.

We have weekly grade level meetings to discuss progress and share ideas. We have faculty meetings once a month to discuss our school program as a whole. The dialogue is focused on instruction, data, and making our program better.

Survey question 6 asked if the current professional development program defined a clear set of educator learning goals based on the rigorous analysis of data. Two principals answered with the following responses:

Done at the school level, not at the system level.

Each teacher has a data binder that drives instruction. We share probes that are used for pre and post assessments that are both high and moderate difficulty and focus on specific standards. After the pretest, the teacher has individual meetings with each student to discuss the results. When the posttest is given, the teacher meets with each student individually and shares the results and growth points. We celebrate successes with students throughout the building.

Survey question 7 asked if the current professional development program achieved the educator learning goals identified above by implementing coherent, sustained, and evidenced-based learning strategies, such as lesson study and the development of formative assessments that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement. Four principals answered with the following responses:

Working on formative assessment, it is still a relatively new concept in our system.

Follow-through on the goals and strategies is not yet at the level I am working toward.

Teams are at different levels in their understanding and development.

System-wide use of Discover Education Assessments.

Survey question 8 asked if the current professional development program provided job-

embedded coaching or other forms of assistance to support the transfer of new knowledge and

skills to the classroom. Two principals answered with the following responses:

> Currently added a position to our faculty this year – DCI (Data, Curriculum, and
> Instruction) and this has truly been an asset to all teachers and administrators.

> We have an instructional coach that shares new ideas on a daily basis. Our teachers have
> common planning time in groups of four to share ideas and plan. Each first year teacher is
> paired with a mentor that must meet with him/her on a weekly basis for no less than nine
> hours per month.

Survey question 9 asked if the current professional development plan regularly assessed

the effectiveness of the professional development in achieving identified learning goals,

improving teaching, and assisting all students in meeting challenging state academic standards.

One principal answered with the following response:

> Our electronic professional development registration site has a built in evaluation model
> for all trainings. However, not all school-level programs are added to the program.

Survey question 10 asked if the current professional development program informed

ongoing improvements in teaching and student learning. One principal answered with the

following response:

> Done at the school level, not at the system level.

Survey question 11 asked if the current professional development program may by

supported by external assistance. Two principals answered with the following responses:

> Through district coaching and system-wide coordinators.

> Since our school is a Title I school our teachers benefit by getting to attend many outside
> professional development conferences.

Survey question 12 asked if the current professional development program addressed the learning goals and objectives established for professional development by educators at the school level. Three principals answered with the following responses:

Done at the school level not at the system level.

The majority of the goals established by educators are jointly determined by principals and teachers, which align with system and school level needs. However, not all needs are covered through system and school professional development opportunities.

Survey question 13 asked if the current professional development program advanced the ongoing school-based professional development. One principal answered with the following response:

Done at the school level, not at the system level.

Survey question 14 asked if the current professional development program was provided by for-profit and nonprofit entities outside the school, such as universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content-area specialists, and other education organizations and associations. Two principals answered with the following responses:

Our system has an excellent professional development program that is aligned with the 5-year plan approved by the Board of Education. Teachers attend professional development tied directly to the school improvement plan.

Our school system's professional development program does use staff from different universities and from the Tennessee Department of Education.

Chapter 4 provided a discussion of the statistical analyses used to conduct for this study. Detailed information regarding demographic information and disaggregation of the data was presented. Qualitative statements from respondents were included to provide more insight into why principals may have chosen their scores for each of the questions. Chapter 5 discusses the information more thoroughly and provides clarity to the findings of the research, conclusions drawn from the research study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to collect and analyze data about the perceptions of principals in upper East Tennessee concerning their current professional development plan. The population was 214 principals who represented 19 school districts in upper East Tennessee. Of these, 124 (57.9%) responded to the survey. The data were collected over a 2-week period. While middle schools were included in the initial collection of data so few were represented that they were coupled with elementary principals. Data from the respondents were organized and analyzed in two categories: principals of elementary schools and principals of secondary schools. Five research questions led to the formation of five hypotheses that were tested using computerized findings provided by the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Summary of the Study

Learning Forward re-established the importance of professional development in 2009 when it published its revised definition of professional development. This revision reiterated the organization's imperative that every educator must be engaged in effective professional development every day so that every student achieves (Learning Forward, 2010a). Learning Forward published an instrument used to evaluate the revised definition in fall 2009.

A review of the literature was conducted tracing the history and background of Learning Forward as well as providing a comprehensive background for Learning Forward's revised definition of professional development. Additionally, I discussed the various types of professional development that are available to schools.

Summary of Findings

This analysis focused on five research questions using a population of 214 elementary, middle, and secondary school principals from 19 school systems from northeast Tennessee. Of the 214, 124 principals chose to participate in the study.

Research Questions

Research Question 1

Is there a significant correlation between the size of the school and its principal's perception of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development is implemented at the school level?

Prior to conducting the Pearson correlation, I divided the data into elementary and secondary school principals' perceptions of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive their professional development programs were by combining survey questions 1 through 11. Learning Forward's revised definition instrument indicated that these questions combine to provide a view of the how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive a school's professional development program is. I used each of the reported school populations to conduct the correlational analysis.

I wanted to determine if there was a correlation between the size of a school and the principals' perceptions of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive their professional development plans were. The results of the analysis were not significant, and the null hypothesis was retained $r(111) = -.042$, $p = .658$, *ns*, thus confirming that there was no significant correlation between the size of the school and its principal's perceptions of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive its professional development program was.

Research Question 2

There is minimal research connecting school size with comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development. However, it is important to be mindful of Norton's (2001) conclusion that while job-embedded professional development has been shown to be less expensive and more meaningful, care must be maintained to use such models as training, coaching, study groups, action research, and discussion of student work (Sparks, 1999). Such inclusion of approaches in both large and small schools involves high-quality leadership, which has been shown to improve school outcomes (Horng & Loeb, 2010).

Is there a significant correlation between the size of the school and the perceived type of support that is used to implement the professional development plan?

To conduct this Pearson correlation, I obtained a mean score for principals' responses to questions 12 through 14 of the survey. Learning Forward grouped these questions to refer to the respondents' perceptions of the type of support that was used to implement their professional development plans. After obtaining this mean score, the same reports of school population were used to conduct the correlational analysis.

I wanted to determine if there was a correlation between the size of a school and the principals' perceptions of the type of support that was used to implement their professional development. The results of the analysis were not significant, and the null hypothesis was retained $r(111) = -.074$, $p = .438$, *ns*, thus confirming that there was no significant correlation between the size of the school and its principal's perceptions of the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan.

There is minimal research that connects the size of a school with types of support for the implementation of professional development. However, current research supports Horng and

Loeb's (2010) claim that instructional leadership consists of strong directive principals who are focused on curriculum and instruction issues, work directly with teachers, and are frequently present in classrooms. Therefore, the culture and climate of the school, which is established by the principal, may be what best determines the perception of support for professional development (Hoy & Hoy, 2009).

Research Question 3

Is there a significant difference between the perception of how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development that was implemented at the school level and the perception of the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan?

To conduct this paired-samples t test, I used the mean scores for principals' perceptions of both comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development ($M = 3.00$, $SD = .61$), and the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan ($M = 2.927$, $SD = .657$). The results of the analysis were not significant, and the null hypothesis was retained $t(123) = 1.928$, $p = .056$, ns, thus confirming that there was no significant difference between the principals' perceptions of comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development, and the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan. Additionally, the standard effect size index, d, was .173, with minimal overlap in the distributions for the 4-point Likert ratings of comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development, and the type of support.

Since the revised definition of professional development was released in 2009 and the instrument used in this study was subsequently released in 2010, minimal data exist regarding comprehensive, sustained, intensive professional development, and the type of support that is used to implement professional development plans. Contrastingly, recent research has indicated

that results-oriented, collaborative, job-embedded, data analysis, rigorous content standards, assessments, curriculum, and continual support of teachers and principals embody comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development (Roy, 2010). He additionally noted that school principals need the capacity to implement comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development efforts. This includes frequent conversations with district administrators to cultivate long-term support.

Research Question 4

Is there a significant difference between perceptions at the elementary and secondary school levels concerning how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development is?

To conduct this paired-samples t test, I used the elementary ($M = 3.053$, $SD = .612$) and secondary ($M = 2.752$, $SD = .558$) principals' perception scores for how comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development. The results of the analysis were significant, and the null hypothesis was rejected $t(99) = 2.078$, $p = .04$, revealing that elementary principals scored significantly higher than secondary principals when rating their professional development plans as being comprehensive, sustained, and intensive. Additionally, the 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .014 to .588. The η^2 index was .042, which indicated a medium effect size.

Minimal data are available connecting elementary and secondary school levels concerning comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development. However, because elementary school principals rated their professional development programs higher, one might speculate that a partial reason is the amount and type of support that is given to elementary school principals and teachers. Recent research has indicated that long-term support is

established by creating a culture conducive to professionally nurturing professional relationships and emphasizing the professional growth and learning of teachers (Blase & Blase, 2001; Drago-Severson, 2007). District support of these initiatives includes supporting administrators and teachers who use data to establish, plan, and implement focus for professional development that builds collaboration skills, and is job-embedded.

Research Question 5

Is there a significant difference between perceptions at the elementary and secondary school levels concerning the type of support that is used to implement the professional development plan?

To conduct this independent-samples t test, I used the elementary ($M = 2.987$, $SD = .697$) and secondary ($M = 2.697$, $SD = .625$) principals' perception scores to determine how their scores differed in regard to the type of support that was used to implement the professional development plan. The results of the analysis were not significant, $t(99) = 1.766$, $p = .081$, *ns*, thus confirming that there was not a significant difference between principals' perceptions at the elementary and secondary school levels concerning the type of support that is used to implement the professional development plan. Additionally, the η^2 index was .030, which indicated a small effect size, and the 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.036 to .617.

<div align="center">Conclusions</div>

1. The scores regarding comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development are lower as school level increases suggesting that professional development implementation is not as comprehensive at higher levels.

2. The scores regarding the type of support that is used to implement professional development decrease as school level increases suggesting that school principals at

higher levels do not seek either for-profit or nonprofit assistance in providing professional development for their teachers.

3. Elementary school principals perceived their professional development plans as more comprehensive, sustained, and intensive than did secondary school principals.

4. Both elementary and secondary principals similarly perceived the type of support for implementing their professional development plans.

Further research is needed to investigate differences in perceptions between elementary and secondary principals regarding the implementation of the type of support needed. In a study conducted by the National Council of Elementary Schools (1999), it was reported that teachers who engaged in 8 hours of professional development were 3 to 5 times more likely to improve their instructional quality. Alternatively, Zimmerman and Jackson (2003) noted that 67% of principals who were surveyed claimed that the lack of time for professional development activities was an obstacle. This need for further research has necessitated the recommendation for practice based upon the information gleaned in the review of literature contained in chapter 2.

<div align="center">Recommendations for Practice</div>

1. Administrators should focus on providing effective professional development that is collaborative, sustained, job-embedded, focused on evaluation of student needs as obtained from data collection and analysis, and continually supported (Roy, 2010).

2. Strong instructional leadership skills developed and supported by the school district are necessary for those principals who are focused on curriculum and instruction issues, work directly with teachers, and are frequently present in classrooms (Horng & Loeb, 2010; Schlechty, 2002).

3. Principals should provide collaborative opportunities for teachers that are facilitated by well-informed mentors or master teachers (Learning Forward, 2010b).

4. Frequent, school-based professional development that focuses on a continuous cycle of improvement should be implemented to increase teacher effectiveness and student achievement (Mizzell, 2010).

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was limited to the participation of 124 principals in northeast Tennessee. As such, its ability to be generalized to the entire population of principals is minimized. Therefore, the following list of research questions was generated to stimulate further thought and possible study.

1. How do principals', teachers', and system directors' perceptions differ in reference to Learning Forward's revised definition of professional development?

2. Do middle school principals differ perceptually from elementary and secondary school principals in regard to comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development and the type of support that is used to implement professional development?

3. Does a principal's gender have an effect the perceptions of on comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development and the type of support that is used to implement professional development?

4. Does a principal's education level have an effect on the perceptions of comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development, and the type of support that is used to implement professional development?

5. Does the number of full-time administrators have an effect on comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development, and the type of support used to implement professional development?

6. Could replication of this study on a larger level produce more meaningful data that could be used to further strengthen professional development for educators?

7. What are the qualitative differences of elementary and secondary principals regarding comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development, and the type of support that used to implement the professional development plan?

District administrators must support comprehensive, sustained, and intensive professional development. Additionally, that support should include trained mentor teachers, collaboration, and data collection and analyzation that is job-embedded. This can only occur in the presence of strong, high-quality leadership. In light of NCLB pressures of accountability, principals must maintain focus on curriculum and instruction issues and frequently work with teachers to maximize the teachers' capacity to become the best instructional leaders possible.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Learning Forward Permission Letter

NATIONAL
STAFF
DEVELOPMENT
COUNCIL

November 19, 2009

Scott Starnes
Eastern Tennessee State University

Scott,

The National Staff Development Council is pleased to grant you permission to use the following article in your dissertation.

Please ensure that the following citation and credit line appear on the first page of each copy.

"How do we stand, NSDC Tool", NSDC, JSD Fall 2009.

Reprinted with permission of the National Staff Development Council, www.nsdc.org. All rights reserved.

Thank you for your interest in the Council's work.

Sincerely,

Christy Colclasure

Christy Colclasure
Members Online Service Manager
NSDC Business Office
504 South Locust Street
Oxford, OH 45056

APPENDIX B

Director Permission Letter

Dear Fellow Educator:

I am a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership at East Tennessee State University, who is conducting research for the purpose of determining how the principals of schools, within 19 school districts in upper East Tennessee, perceive their professional development programs when compared to *Learning Forward's* revised definition of professional development. In the fall of 2009, *Learning Forward* revised their definition of professional development to streamline the process by which all schools can become "learning schools."

I am requesting the participation of every building principal within your system. The study will be used to evaluate the dimensions of *Learning Forward's* revised definition of professional development. The participation of your principals is requested. However, participation is strictly voluntary and will be guarded with the highest level of confidentiality. At no point will any particular participant's reflections be viewed by anyone except me.

With your permission, participants will receive an e-mail link to a 20- item online survey, and will be requested to evaluate their school or district regarding the level at which they feel the school or district addresses the various components of *Learning Forward's* revised definition of professional development. At the conclusion of the study, an executive summary will be mailed to the director's office for his/her perusal.

I ask that you reply to this email prior to 11 February 2011, indicating whether you will permit the elementary and secondary principals to participate in this study.

Respectfully,

Scott A. Starnes

Doctoral Candidate

East Tennessee State University

423/791-5914

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APPENDIX C

Professional Development Survey

Demographic Information

Please indicate your responses to the following demographic information by filling in the blank, circling, or placing a check by your intended responses.

1. System Name: _____

2. School Level: Elementary   Middle   Secondary

3. School Population: _____

4. Number of full-time administrators: 1   2   3   4   5+

5. Number of years in current position:

    _____   <1
    _____   1-4
    _____   5-8
    _____   9-12
    _____   13-16
    _____   17-20
    _____   20+

6. Total years as administrator:
    _____   <1
    _____   1-4
    _____   5-8
    _____   9-12
    _____   13-16
    _____   17-20
    _____   20+

Instructions

Using the elements of the National Staff Development Council's definition of professional development, rate where your school system stands on each element using a scale of 1 to 4, with 4 being the highest rating. Please feel free to add any insightful evidence you considered in assigning your rating. The process should take no more than 10 minutes of your time.

Rating Scale
> Our school system's professional development…
> 1. does not include this element.
> 2. occasionally includes this element.
> 3. includes this element most of the time.
> 4. aligns perfectly with this element.

Definition elements	Rating				Evidence

Comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement

Definition elements		Rating			Evidence
(A) Fosters collective responsibility for improved student performance	1	2	3	4	
(A) (1) Aligned with state and district standards for student achievement	1	2	3	4	
(A) (2) Conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by well-prepared school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders	1	2	3	4	
(A) (3) Primarily occurs several times per week among established teams of teachers, principals, and other instructional staff members in a continuous cycle of improvement	1	2	3	4	
(A) (3) (i) Evaluates student, teacher, and school learning needs through a thorough review of data on teacher and student performance	1	2	3	4	
(A) (3) (ii) Defines a clear set of educator learning goals based on the rigorous analysis of data	1	2	3	4	
(A) (3) (iii) Achieves the educator learning goals identified above by implementing coherent, sustained, and evidenced-based learning strategies, such as lesson study and the development of formative assessments, that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement	1	2	3	4	
(A) (3) (iv) Provides job-embedded coaching or other forms of assistance to support the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the classroom	1	2	3	4	
(A) (3) (v) Regularly assesses the effectiveness of the professional development in achieving identified learning goals, improving teaching, and assisting all students in meeting challenging state academic standards	1	2	3	4	
(A) (3) (vi) Informs ongoing improvements in teaching and student learning	1	2	3	4	
(A) (3) (vii) May be supported by external assistance	1	2	3	4	

(B) The process outlined in (A) may be supported by
activities such as courses, workshops, institutes,
networks, and conferences that:

(1) must address the learning goals and objective
established for professional development by
educators at the school level   1   2   3   4

(B) (2) advance the ongoing school-based professional
development   1   2   3   4

(B) (3) are provided by for-profit and nonprofit entities
outside the school, such as universities, education
service agencies, technical assistance providers,   1   2   3   4
networks of content-area specialists, and other
education organizations and associations

VITA

SCOTT A. STARNES

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