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Principal Engagement in the Professional Development Process: The Identification of Barriers, Resources, and Supports

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Principal Engagement in the Professional Development Process:
The Identification of Barriers, Resources, and Supports

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that served as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process and identify what resources or supports were needed to increase engagement levels. For the purpose of this study, the professional development process included the identification of the professional learning needs of teachers on an ongoing and annual basis and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the professional development that has been provided. This study used a qualitative approach to examine principal engagement in the professional development process throughout a large geographic area in the Midwest. 20 principals were purposefully sampled for an interview from among 249 participants in a larger-scale survey. The research questions for this study were:

1. What factors or conditions serve as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process?
2. What resources or supports would lead to increased engagement among principals in the professional development process?
3. Do building principals accept professional development planning and evaluation as one of their primary responsibilities?

The data was used to identify common themes regarding barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process. Common themes were also determined regarding resources or supports needed for principals to engage at high levels through planning and evaluation of individual and collective needs of teachers. Recommendations from this study include helping principals grow as instructional leaders, providing more resources and supports for principals, and creating time for effective teacher collaboration.

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While this process was very challenging, it was transformative for me in the way that I approach the day-to-day work in my current position. School districts, my department, and the organization that I work for have benefitted greatly, and they will continue to benefit from this experience. I look forward to continuing to serve school districts at the highest level possible by continually challenging their thinking and actions as a peer and colleague, while also walking with them as they work through their successes and challenges.

A sincere thank you goes to the faculty and staff at the University of Arkansas. I was very fortunate to have an insightful and responsive chair in Dr. John Pijanowski. Thank you as well to Dr. Ed Bengtson and Dr. Kara Lasater for serving on my committee and for your thoughtfulness, support, and feedback throughout the coursework and dissertation process. Thank you to Dr. Carleton Holt, Dr. Kevin Brady, Dr. Ian Mette, and Dr. Marcia Smith for your respective contributions in challenging our cohort to become something far more than maybe we thought we could be.

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My team where I work is phenomenal, and they pushed and supported me throughout this process. This work will help to inform the ways we can better serve administrators and teachers, and our hope is that, in turn, they can more fully support the academic, social, and behavior needs and growth of the tens of thousands of students throughout the area where we work.

Dedication

This entire process and final product is for my very special family. I am so thankful for my wife, Allison, and our sons, Graysen and Gavin, who understood from the beginning what this undertaking would mean in terms of the time that we would not be able to spend together. Thank you for your love, patience, support, and encouragement when I needed each the most.

To my sons, Graysen and Gavin: The secret to living a full and happy life is to never give up on yourselves or each other...ever. Even if something seems unpopular or impossible to accomplish or conquer, just remember to listen first, be patient, be kind, work hard, and put others before yourselves.

This is also and for my parents, John and Janie, and my sister, Michelle. Thank you, dad and mom, for the way that you thoughtfully raised us and for teaching us the value of a quality education, the importance of a strong work ethic, and for showing us how to serve others before self.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This study examined engagement levels among principals in the professional development process across a large geographic region in the Midwest. The purpose of this study was to identify factors that served as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process and identify what resources or supports were needed to increase engagement levels. For the purpose of this study, the professional development process included the identification of the professional learning needs of teachers on an ongoing and annual basis and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the professional development that has been provided. This study yielded insights into identifying and reducing or eliminating common barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process, thus providing opportunities for principals to engage meaningfully and more effectively in the future. This study utilized a qualitative methodology, and 20 principals were purposefully selected for an interview from among participants in a larger-scale survey across the region of interest.

Professional Learning, as both a concept and an activity, has changed significantly in recent years for classroom teachers and for school and district leaders (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). What was once a passive experience, seeking more to entertain than to teach, has shifted to a far more active, participatory, and job-embedded opportunity to gain new and enhance existing knowledge and skills (Guskey, 2000). As such, principals must be far more active and engaged than ever in the process of identifying and evaluating the professional learning needs of teachers in order to plan and provide meaningful professional development activities that positively and significantly impact both teacher growth and student achievement. Reeves (2010) states, “High-impact professional learning has three essential characteristics: (1) a focus on student learning,

(2) rigorous measurement of adult decisions, and (3) a focus on people and practices, not programs” (p. 21). However, some school districts in the region of interest have not embraced the habits of planning and evaluating professional development in order to consistently deliver high-impact professional learning, leaving some principals and even more teachers lost in the gap between past and present.

Given my position as a Program Director for a School Improvement Consortium, I have observed low engagement among principals in the professional development process over a recent five-year period across several school districts throughout a large region in the Midwest. As such, the significance of this study rested with my ability to determine what barriers are present that prevented or limited principal engagement in the professional development process. Additionally, determining what resources and supports principals need to meaningfully engage in planning and evaluating professional development is critical for the purpose of expanding teachers’ content area knowledge, pedagogical skills, classroom management, and more. In turn, maximizing professional learning on an individual and collective basis will ultimately impact student achievement. Supporting the need for engagement among principals in the professional development process, Sparks and Hirsh (1997) state:

Research and experience have taught us that widespread, sustained implementation of new practices in classrooms, principals’ offices, and central offices requires a new form of professional development. This staff development not only must affect the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of individual teachers, administrators, and other school employees, but it must also alter the cultures and structures of the organizations in which those individuals work. (p. 1)

Given this statement, the goal of this study was to significantly contribute to the field of practice through the identification of barriers to principal engagement and the identification of resources or supports that would provide opportunities for more meaningful and effective engagement in the professional development process.

Problem Statement

Low engagement levels among principals in the professional development process may occur as a result of school and district leaders who do not have the knowledge or skills to effectively identify professional learning needs on an annual and ongoing basis or evaluate the effectiveness of what has been provided to teachers. According to Sparks and Hirsh (1997):

In the past most school employees had the luxury of assuming that most staff development responsibilities belonged to someone else. Principals and teachers could look to a central office staff member who planned, coordinated, and sometimes even presented staff development programs. (p. 83)

Given my current role in the field of education, evidence of the aforementioned low engagement among principals specifically included an observed lack of annual professional development planning informed by the needs of teachers, both individually and collectively. Additionally, I have observed low engagement through infrequent or non-existent professional learning evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the provided professional development activities and their impact on teaching and learning.

City, Elmore, Fiarman, and Teitel (2009) share that problems of practice typically include the following characteristics: it is focused on instructional or systemic issues; it is directly observable; it is actionable; it connects to a broader strategy of improvement; and it is high-leverage. As a problem of practice aligned to each of the characteristics, I studied the barriers to engagement among principals in the professional development process. Additionally, I studied what resources and supports were needed to increase engagement levels among principals in the professional development process. This included examining how principals identified the needs of teachers to determine the scope and scale of professional development activities and goals. Additionally, this study examined the methods used by principals to evaluate professional

learning to determine the effectiveness and impact of the provided professional development activities.

Focus on Instructional and/or Systemic Issues

This problem of practice focused on both instructional and systemic issues. Regarding instructional issues, the potential impact professional learning can have in just one classroom through one teacher's intentional focus on gaining new, or expanding existing, knowledge and skills in the area of instruction is significant. Regarding systemic issues, a general lack of attention to thoughtful professional learning needs identification and evaluation of effectiveness for an entire district can lead to stagnation and the development of ineffective pedagogical habits and practices system-wide (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Latta and Wunder (2012) state:

To be useable, knowledge must enable practitioners to attend to practical consequences of their work; it needs to be valid but then it also has to reflect genuinely or authentically a problem of practice that comes from their practice, not simply an external notion or definition of practice or good practice. (p. 102)

In other words, professional learning is most effective when systems can identify the knowledge and skills teachers need to gain to solve their own problems of practice within the context of their classrooms and district, rather than applying best practices conceptualized through other contexts.

Given that this problem of practice is also a larger systemic issue, Hochbein and Perry (2013) state that school and district leaders "...have an obligation to resolve problems of practice by collaborating with key stakeholders, including the university, the educational institution, the community, and individuals" (p. 183). As such, planning and evaluating professional learning should include feedback, input, and support from a multitude of stakeholders in order to provide activities and options that will improve teacher instruction and student learning.

Directly Observable

The second characteristic of this problem of practice is that it is directly observable. In my current position, I lead a team of four School Improvement Administrators who assist 112 school systems across a large region of a state. On a consistent basis, approximately one-half of these school systems do not meaningfully and regularly engage with their assigned School Improvement Administrator to identify individual and collective teacher professional learning needs on an annual and ongoing basis. Likewise, these districts do not regularly evaluate the provided professional development activities to determine their effectiveness or application to current teaching and learning practices. Additionally, teachers from these districts are directly reporting to our team through dialogue and survey feedback that they are frustrated, disengaged, and do not have access to meaningful opportunities to improve their knowledge, skills, and practices, because of a lack of planning and little to no effort to identify professional learning needs on the part of school and district leadership.

Actionable

This problem of practice is actionable as it has the ability to be improved in real-time. In my role, our team has the ability on a frequent basis to assist each of the 112 consortium school districts in developing a customized, annual professional learning plan to continually improve teacher and leader practices around curriculum, instruction, assessment, evaluation, and climate. While this potential for actionable, improvement-focused support is available, approximately one-half of the consortium districts do not engage in planning and evaluation when determining their annual, or even monthly, professional learning schedule. Reeves (2010) states, “The greatest frustration for school leaders and classroom educators is the difference between what we know and what we do” (p. 23). As such, school and district leaders within the region of interest

likely know that they should plan and evaluate professional learning, but many simply do not. Therefore, this problem of practice called for a need to identify barriers to engagement and determine the resources or supports needed to meaningfully engage in the professional development process.

Connects to Broader Strategy of Improvement

This problem of practice meets the fourth characteristic, which is that it connects to a broader strategy of improvement. One of the challenges with examining problems of practice within districts is that not all practitioners have the skills or experiences to see the value or connection of formal research to their own work, or context (Latta & Wunder, 2012). This is where I can serve in an important role with my team by helping districts connect to and implement broader strategies of improvement, but do so in a manner that respects and reflects local context and any existing strategic improvement plans. Each of the 112 school systems relies on my team in some capacity to collaborate with key leadership throughout each district on a frequent basis in order to provide them with the latest information, research, and professional learning trends to impact teaching and learning. As such, we have the time and setting to begin making these systems' connections to help principals increase their engagement in the professional development process through the identification of teacher needs and evaluation of the professional development activities.

High Leverage

The final characteristic that this problem of practice exemplifies is that it is high-leverage and can help to make a significant difference in the practitioner's school and community.

Hochbein and Perry (2013) summarize this final characteristic effectively by stating:

A potential to transform the field of education lies in the scholarly practitioner's ability to apply the three tenets of research preparation—decipher, debate, and design--as a means

to “wage war” against not only the top-down, ill-conceived policies that neglect the realities that practitioners know and live every day, but also the multitude of universal problems faced by educators across the country. (p. 192)

With a variety of concurrent State and Federal initiatives and mandates facing teachers and leaders, planning and evaluating professional development is one of many responsibilities in the larger context of the field of education. Therefore, this study focused specifically on identifying the barriers among principals that limit their engagement in the professional development process. Additionally, identifying the resources and supports needed among principals to more meaningfully engage in the professional development process is reflective of the scholarly practitioners that Hochbein and Perry (2013) describe. Principals who can decipher and debate issues will better be able to effectively plan how to meet the professional learning needs of teachers. Additionally, providing professional learning in a manner that meets the needs of individuals and the educational system can invigorate continuous improvement efforts and habits (Guskey, 2000). Lastly, Reeves (2010) contends that when professional learning is evaluated properly, educational systems will continue with only the professional learning that is high-leverage, which supports and increases the opportunities for success experienced by students, teachers, and leaders.

Overview of Methodology

This study featured a qualitative research approach based in grounded theory with data collection methods and data analysis to inductively develop conclusions. Grounded theory, according to Wheeldon and Ahlberg (2012) is unlike other approaches in that researchers begin with no preexisting theory, hypothesis, or expectation of findings. Seated in the context of this study, grounded theory was useful as a methodology to generate and develop theory that might explain the observed low engagement level among principals in the professional development

process. Additionally, the research design identified barriers to principal engagement and synthesized recommendations for removing or diminishing the identified barriers. This study was guided by three research questions:

1. What factors or conditions serve as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process?
2. What resources or supports would lead to increased engagement among principals in the professional development process?
3. Do building principals accept professional development planning and evaluation as one of their primary responsibilities?

Two data collection methods were utilized to obtain information from key data sources, including principals, superintendents, curriculum directors, and teacher leaders. The first method was a survey provided to superintendents, curriculum directors, principals, and teacher leaders with prompts and questions aligned to the three research questions. The second method was to conduct interviews with approximately 20 principals chosen from among the survey respondents through purposeful sampling. The interview protocol contained ten open-ended prompts that explored further the three research questions. Upon completing the interviews, thematic coding was used to ascertain common themes among the research questions. Methods to ensure trustworthiness of this study were based on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), which included prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, and audit trail.

Positionality

I have the unique opportunity to observe and participate within the teaching and learning environments of the 112 school systems of the school improvement consortium. As such, I conducted this study as both the researcher and as a frequently involved practitioner. Given the

opportunity to serve as an insider in this study, positionality was addressed to articulate what roles and assumptions I brought to this study as well as identify any perceptions or biases that may be present. Regarding this dual role of researcher and practitioner, Herr and Anderson (2005) share that the degree to which researchers position themselves as insiders determines how a researcher will frame epistemological, methodological, and ethical issues in the dissertation. This, in turn, can create limitations on the impact or significance of the research, and every attempt was made throughout this study to minimize any possible limitations. Regarding my professional role, an introduction to readers will provide an understanding of how my background and educational experiences have influenced any perceptions or assumptions.

Researcher's Role

My current role as a Program Director for School Improvement with an Educational Service Center provides me with the opportunity to work directly with 112 school systems that participate in a School Improvement Services consortium. In my role as program director, I lead a team of three School Improvement Administrators, one Instructional Support Specialist, two Program Coordinators, and nearly 40 consultants. Our shared responsibilities include providing customized support and resources to school and district leaders in coordinating and, at times, providing professional development activities for each of the school systems within the consortium. I have served in this position since 2011 and have previous experience as a high school English language arts teacher and a middle school principal. Additionally, I currently hold district-level licensure and an Education Specialist degree in Leadership Studies. I was born and raised within the same geographic area of this study, which provides significant regional context to the identified problem of practice. I collected data as an insider and analyzed perceptions from school and district leaders through a survey and interviews that identified

barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process. Additionally, this study identified resources and supports that increased engagement among principals in the professional development process.

Assumptions

As a researcher and practitioner within the study, there were assumptions and potential biases that existed within the context of principal engagement in identifying professional learning needs among teachers and evaluating the effectiveness of what has been provided to teachers. The first assumption was that all teachers desire professional learning in order to enhance their own content knowledge and pedagogical skills. If this assumption is not true, then this may result in teachers actually supporting school and district leaders in not consistently identifying and evaluating professional learning so as to not experience the challenge of professional growth. Another assumption with this study, also through the lens of a practitioner, was that school and district leaders wanted to provide high-quality, high-impact professional learning for teachers, which included staff development for common opportunities for growth as well as more individualized professional development. If this is not true, then the data collection process and analysis may not fully reveal accurate perceptions of the value school and district leaders place on professional learning. Consequently, this could have impacted the identification of resources and supports to encourage principals to more meaningfully engage in the professional development process.

Regarding biases that will be brought to this study, each of the 112 school systems in the region pays a voluntary participation fee on an annual basis to receive the benefits, services, expertise, and support our team provides through the consortium. As such, the findings and conclusions from this study have the potential to negatively affect participation numbers through

non-renewals, should school and district leaders build adequate internal capacity to effectively identify and evaluate ongoing and annual professional learning on their own, without our support. If this occurs, the potential exists that one or more of the 112 participating school systems may no longer need the services of our team, thus impacting the revenue necessary to sustain our positions. While working oneself out of a job is not of concern at this time, it is a possibility that participation interests among school districts could change as a result of local implementation of these findings by school and district leaders.

Definition of Key Terms

Principal engagement in the professional development process brings with it several technical terms that have taken on additional meanings from expanded use as educational vernacular. As such, the following terms and definitions have been provided relative to the context of this study and its purpose in identifying factors that contribute to low engagement among principals in the professional development process. Additionally, providing an operational definition of these terms will help a reader better understand the issues discussed in this study as it relates to professional learning in general.

Best practices: A commonly used term that describes instructional, pedagogical, or systems improvement practices that have been proven to demonstrate growth or achievement when implemented with fidelity.

Curriculum: The articulation of what students should know and be able to do at each grade-level and within each content area by the end of a given academic year or within an otherwise defined time frame.

District leader: Any certified administrator serving as a superintendent of schools, associate superintendent, curriculum director, or other district-level leadership position where system-wide decision-making occurs.

Engagement: Active participation in tasks in which a person feels competent and confident in their skills and values the outcome expected.

Inservice education: An interchangeable term with staff development and professional development.

Pedagogy: The study, selection, and use of instructional practices that are focused specifically on improving student learning.

Professional development: Professional learning related to the individual needs of a teacher, administrator, paraeducator, or other education professional serving in a capacity that impacts student learning.

Professional learning: The overarching term that describes the methods and opportunities teachers, administrators, paraeducators, and other education professionals have to acquire new knowledge and skills, or expand existing knowledge or skills, in content and/or pedagogy.

Principal: Any certified administrator serving as a principal, associate principal, or assistant principal. Other school leaders may also include instructional coaches, building leadership team members, or other school-specific leadership positions where building-wide decision-making occurs.

Staff development: Professional learning related to the common needs of a school's staff of teachers or a district's staff of teachers. Topics include generalized and widely applicable strategies that impact student learning and teacher skill growth and development.

Student learning: Evidenced through multiple measures of data including, but not limited to, formative and summative assessments, teacher perceptions of individualized and collective student growth, and a student's perception of his or her own growth or achievement.

Systemic: Of and relating to issues, challenges, or strengths that impact all levels within an organization. When one level is affected, other levels also demonstrate an impact or change.

Organization of the Dissertation

This study is organized and articulated through five chapters. The first chapter includes an introduction to the study, the problem statement, research questions, an overview of methodology, positionality, and definitions of key terms. Each of these sections helps to situate the problem of practice within its context and provides clarity as to the purpose of the study. Chapter two consists of an introduction, review of the literature, the conceptual frameworks, and a chapter summary. Each of these sections seats the problem of practice within the existing literature and shares with readers the conceptual framework from which I completed this study. Chapter three reviews the inquiry methods and contains an introduction, rationale, problem setting and context, research sample and data sources, data collection methods, data analysis methods, trustworthiness, limitations and delimitations, and a summary. Each of these sections helps to articulate an understanding of methodological design and approach that I proposed. Chapter four provides the data that was collected using the inquiry methods. Chapter five articulates analysis of the data, leading to findings and conclusions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that served as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process and identify what resources or supports were needed to increase engagement levels. For the purpose of this study, the professional development process included the identification of the professional learning needs of teachers on an ongoing and annual basis and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the professional development that has been provided. Given my position as a Program Director for a School Improvement Consortium consisting of 112 school districts, I have observed low engagement among principals in the professional development process. This has been observed over a recent five-year period across several school districts throughout a large region in the Midwest. Recent studies (Guskey, 2000; Reeves, 2010; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009) confirm that the actual state of professional development for an overwhelming majority of teachers in school systems is not structured effectively by those who are assigned to, or responsible for, this function of teacher growth. The observed behavior of low engagement among principals contradicts recent studies on the impact of school and district leaders on student achievement, which also confirms the necessity of the role of principal engagement in the professional development process (Leithwood, 2007; Levin, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008).

Professional development, as a means to teacher professional growth and student achievement, has changed significantly in recent years (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Given these shifts and the existing body of research on the impact of leadership on professional growth, the desired state of the role of principals is that they meaningfully and effectively engage in the

professional development process. For the purpose of this study, engagement reflects an energy, commitment, and moral purpose to a shared vision by developing capacity in self and others to overcome challenges and achieve goals (Burns, 1978; Robinson et al., 2008). Such engagement is critical to creating and maintaining a climate and culture that promotes efficacy and improves teacher quality in order to impact student achievement (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006; Pajares, 1996). As such, this study was guided by three research questions:

1. What factors or conditions serve as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process?
2. What resources or supports would lead to increased engagement among principals in the professional development process?
3. Do building principals accept professional development planning and evaluation as one their primary responsibilities?

This study yielded insights into identifying common barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process and identified resources or supports to encourage meaningful and effective engagement among principals in the future.

To become more familiar with this problem of practice, a thorough review of the literature was completed through the use of multiple search engines and several search terms. Keywords and search terms that informed the literature review included: principal engagement; effective professional development; professional development leadership; efficacy; self-efficacy; principal efficacy; and academic optimism. Search engines included JSTOR, EBSCO, Google Scholar, and ProQuest. Within each search engine, I used several keyword search features. For example, connectors, wildcards, adjacency, proximity, nesting, and field limits, each assisted in

locating more refined and specific research related to the concepts within this problem of practice.

Review of the Literature

Concepts that emerged from the literature review that informed this study included social cognitive theory, efficacy, academic optimism, characteristics of quality or effective professional development, and the impact of leadership on professional development. As such, the following sections fully articulate how each area relates to the actual state of observed low engagement among principals in the professional development process throughout the region of interest. Given that a large body of research exists on each of these concepts, this study synthesized the existing information to inform ways to reach the desired state of high engagement among principals in the professional development process. Doing so helped to identify existing research-based themes that influenced or impacted engagement levels among principals in the professional development process and provided insights into resources and supports that may reduce or limit identified barriers.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory from Bandura (1986, 1997), including self-efficacy and collective efficacy (Goddard et al., 2000; Pajares, 1996), served as a significant concept that helped to frame this study within the context of the principals' perceived role and engagement in the professional development process. To begin, Bandura (1986) contends that an individual can control his or her thoughts, feelings, and actions through an internal, self-regulated system reliant upon cognitive and affective functions. This system also includes faculties that allow for learning from others to occur as well as

planning, self-regulation, and self-reflection. This core, fundamental theory speaks to an individual's ability to make decisions, and it certainly relates to the functions of a principal in consciously engaging in a process to effectively plan and evaluate professional learning for individual teachers and his or her collective staff.

On social cognitive theory, Pajares (1996) states, "People engage in tasks in which they feel competent and confident and avoid those in which they do not" (p. 544). Given this statement, social cognitive theory potentially speaks to one of the fundamental reasons, or causes, for the actual state of low engagement among principals in the professional development process. Simply put, to engage or not engage is a choice that is driven by both competency and confidence levels. Therefore, if levels of competence and confidence are low, then principals will avoid tasks, such as the planning and evaluation within professional development process. However, if levels of competence and confidence are high, then principals will engage in the work to effectively plan and evaluate professional learning.

Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory also features specific concepts of human agency and organizational agency, which are also significant and relevant to this problem of practice. Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk Hoy (2000) state:

Because agency refers to the intentional pursuit of a course of action, we may begin to understand school organizations as agentive when we consider that schools act purposefully in pursuit of their educational goals. The purposive actions schools take as they strive to meet their goals thus reflect organizational intentionality, or agency. (p. 483)

In other words, the role of principals in the professional development process should be intentional and purposeful in demonstrating leadership to provide opportunities for professionals to improve their practices, both individually and collectively. This can be

accomplished through the acquisition of new knowledge and skills as well as opportunities to expand on the use of existing knowledge and skills. A concept map for this study suggests in Figure 1 on page 30 that leaders that engage in the professional development process must consider planning and evaluating. Therefore, applying social cognitive theory, including the idea of agency, provides a frame to ensure that this process is done with intentionality and each phase of planning and evaluating professional learning is reflective of the purposeful pursuit of system goals.

Efficacy

Self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1997), represents “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute a course of action required to produce given attainment” (p. 3). In other words, efficacy describes how well, or to what levels, a person believes he or she can or cannot solve problems by acting or reacting on one’s own. This, too, is critically important as a part of cognitive and affective processes among principals that inform decision-making around planning and evaluation, within the professional development process. On efficacy, Pajares (1996) states:

Efficacy beliefs help determine how much effort people will expend on an activity, how long they will persevere when confronting obstacles, and how resilient they will prove in the face of adverse situations—the higher the sense of efficacy, the greater the effort, persistence, and resilience. People with low self-efficacy may believe that things are tougher than they really are, a belief that fosters stress, depression, and a narrow vision of how best to solve a problem. High self-efficacy, on the other hand, helps to create feelings of serenity in approaching difficult tasks and activities. (pp. 544-545)

Certainly, self-efficacy served as fundamental theory in this study, given that the aforementioned attributes of low self-efficacy align to the observed behaviors of low engagement among principals in the professional development process. In other words, the actual state, in most observed cases, is reflective of the beliefs and actions of low self-efficacy. Therefore, to achieve

the desired state of high engagement, which this study seeks to further examine, is reflective of the beliefs and actions of high self-efficacy.

Similar to self-efficacy, collective efficacy is reflective of a shared belief among a group that working together can produce positive effects or results. Bandura (1997) observed that leaders, such as principals, experience nearly-impossible challenges in developing high levels of collective teacher efficacy because teachers face a host of unique challenges, such as public accountability and shared accountability for student results while exerting little control over their own work environments. This, in turn, presents a host of challenges, or barriers, to principals and teachers to engage meaningfully and effectively in the professional development process. Goddard et al. (2000) state, “Analogous to self-efficacy, collective efficacy is associated with the tasks, level of effort, persistence, shared thoughts, stress levels, and achievement of groups” (p. 482). As such, a principal’s role in engaging in the professional development process, which includes planning and evaluating professional learning, is critical to ensure that teachers also have an active role, or some sense of control, in determining what professional development activities are needed or valued. Activities that often help to facilitate this include needs assessments, professional learning surveys, and committee input and feedback. Doing so will help teachers meet the needs of all students and help the system address, if not overcome, the challenges and stressors associated with public and shared accountability. Furthermore, Leithwood’s (2007) study on teacher work conditions concluded that what teachers care about most are improvement-related issues, such as effective leadership, collegial relationships, adequate resources, and the ability to learn through professional development, which builds collective efficacy and can positively impact students.

Four primary sources of Bandura's (1997) collective efficacy theory were of interest to this study, which include: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and affective states. Mastery experiences, when successful, help to build belief in a group's sense of collective efficacy. However, mastery experiences resulting in failure tend to undermine it. Second, vicarious experiences are reflective of the successes and failures of others, applied to one's own or a group's situation. Therefore, learning from others either individually or collectively can inform and influence collective efficacy in a positive way. Social persuasion, as the third primary source of collective efficacy, can strengthen a group's determination to achieve goals. In the context of professional development, when paired with model examples and positive experiences, collective efficacy can be positively influenced. Additionally, persuasion carries the potential to fuel persistence among staff, which can lead to effective problem solving. Fourth, affective states reflect the idea that organizations experience stress, similar to individuals. As such, systems with high collective efficacy have higher tolerances for pressure and function effectively even when crises arise. Likewise, systems with low levels of efficacy often experience failure in similar situations by overreacting or not reacting in an appropriate manner. Efficacy theory, both self-efficacy and collective efficacy, informed this study in a significant way by identifying and examining the root causes of low engagement levels among principals in the professional development process.

Academic Optimism

Academic optimism (Hoy et al., 2006; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006) is a relatively new construct that describes characteristics among schools impacting student achievement. As its own body of research, academic optimism will provide insights into this study, given that this construct describes the causal relationship among three specific concepts: academic emphasis in

schools, collective efficacy of teachers, and faculty trust in parents and students. This construct is relevant to this problem of practice in examining the desired state of a climate and culture of teaching and learning that is conducive to continued professional growth for teachers through principal engagement in the professional development process. This, in turn, leads to academic, social, and behavioral growth in students. Hoy et al. (2006) state:

Our conception of academic optimism includes both cognitive and affective (emotional) dimensions and adds a behavioral element. Collective efficacy is a group belief or expectation; it is *cognitive*. Faculty trust in parents and students is an *affective* response. Academic emphasis is the push for particular *behaviors* in the school workplace. (p. 431)

Hoy et al. (2006) focus on the role of collective efficacy on sustained culture and climate through academic optimism. Regarding collective efficacy through the lens of academic optimism,

Goddard et al. (2000) state:

Just as individual teacher efficacy may partially explain the effect of teachers on student achievement, from an organization perspective, collective teacher efficacy may help to explain the differential effect that schools have on student achievement. Collective teacher efficacy, therefore, has the potential to contribute to our understanding of how schools differ in the attainment of their most important objective—the education of students. (p. 483)

Given this statement, principals who effectively plan and evaluate professional development on a regular and on-going basis should begin to see the development and growth of a climate and culture with high levels of collective teacher efficacy, which ultimately and positively impacts student success. This reflects the desired state of this problem of practice and is the result of high engagement among principals in the professional development process.

Given the role of social cognitive theory and efficacy in this study as potential root causes for low engagement among principals in the professional development process, academic optimism serves as a fundamental construct reflective of what can occur in school systems when engagement levels are high among principals. For principals to help their teachers reach high

levels of academic optimism, the professional development process must intentionally address planning and evaluation to ensure that collective efficacy can be achieved at high levels. Doing so can create a focus on strategies and techniques to emphasize teacher and student behaviors reflective of high academic emphasis and trust.

Effective Professional Development

Given the actual state of observed low engagement levels among principals in the professional development process, the attributes of quality professional development planning and evaluation were of interest in this study. The characteristics of high-quality, effective professional development are often similar over time and across different studies that draw from a broad range of research (Desimone, 2011; Knapp, 2003; Reeves, 2008; Reeves, 2010; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). However, Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) contend that there is a significant gap between what teachers hope to receive and what they actually receive during professional development activities. This is where the role of principals is crucial, given that their positional power can be used to make decisions on what professional learning is provided or offered to teachers. Mizell (2009) comments on the actual state of professional development planning:

Many educators don't expect much because they have often been the victims of poorly conceived and executed professional development. Some people responsible for organizing professional development apparently don't expect much either, because they seldom determine whether and to what extent it produces positive results at the classroom level. (as cited in Reeves, 2010, p.24)

Therefore, while professional development is often thought of and generally accepted as a primary solution to acquire new knowledge or enhance existing skills in the field of education, principals may not understand the characteristics of effective professional development and the impact these characteristics may have on teaching practices and student learning. As it relates to

social cognitive theory and efficacy, principals may avoid this work altogether if competency and confidence levels are low.

Poorly planned professional learning not only impacts individuals, it impacts the collective staff within buildings and the school system as a whole (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). As such, the characteristics and impact of effective professional development design and delivery applied to this study, given the observed actual state of low engagement among principals in the professional development process. To this end, Reeves (2010) states:

The greatest frustration for school leaders and classroom educators is the difference between what we know and what we do. We know what effective professional learning looks like. It is intensive and sustained, it is directly relevant to the needs of teachers and students, and it provides opportunities for application, practice, reflection, and reinforcement. (p. 23)

The difference between what is known about effective professional development (desired state) and what is done during most professional development activities (actual state) may provide insights into the attitudes and behaviors of principals who engage at low levels or high levels. As such, this study identified and determined what factors served as barriers to high engagement among principals and identified resources or supports to facilitate higher engagement in the future.

To fill the proverbial gap identified by Reeves (2010), principals need strategies and their own professional learning to build the self-efficacy described by Bandura (1997) and to build academic optimism through collective efficacy, academic emphasis, and trust, as described by Hoy et al. (2006). To begin, Knapp (2003) draws from a broad range of research and concludes that six components of professional learning design should be present:

1. Concentrate on high learning standards and evidence of learning to that standard.
2. Focus on pedagogical content knowledge.

3. Model desired practices in instructional settings, such as classrooms and among adults.
4. Deliver professional development in collaborative, collegial, and school-based settings.
5. Offer high rigor and continuing opportunities.
6. Align to current reform initiatives.

Additionally, Reeves (2010) clarifies three characteristics of effective professional development

1. There is an intense focus on student learning.
2. Rigorous measurements are used to evaluate adult decisions.
3. People and practices are the focus, not programs.

Although common with other sources regarding high-quality and effective professional development activities, these characteristics are more concise.

Reeves (2010) contends that the most important characteristics when considering the strategies for delivering professional development activities are not their ease of use, popularity, or level of buy-in from staff. Given the observed low engagement among principals in the professional development process, these ineffective strategies are often utilized by principals across the region of interest. At times, our team receives calls for support from principals desiring easy, entertaining, and high-interest topics. These low engagement requests do not yield effective results reflective of an intense focus on student learning, rigorous measurements, and a focus on people and practices. Additionally, Reeves (2008) contends that gains in student learning are tied to specific teaching strategies at the classroom level. The second characteristic refers to measuring adult practices through consistent observation to balance the emphasis on reviewing student results frequently. Principals across the region of interest, at times, use classroom walkthroughs or instructional rounds to facilitate the collection and analysis of teaching strategies, or adult practices. From this information, further areas of professional

development emphasis can be determined to further support student learning. The final characteristic contends that people and practices trump programs. Reeves (2010) indicates that programs often fall short of their intended benefits and effects due to a lack of implementation. However, by focusing on people and their practices, professional development needs can be determined for individuals and groups in order to further enhance teaching strategies for the benefit of student learning.

Sparks and Hirsh (1997) share that several major shifts in professional development must occur to yield results indicative of teacher growth and student achievement. While traditional approaches should not necessarily be abandoned, some processes show promise of increased effectiveness over others. Of the recommended shifts and processes, the following most closely apply to this problem of practice:

- Provide professional development that is guided by a plan for the district, each school, and each department.
- Utilize school-based staff development approaches, rather than district-based.
- Focus on student needs and outcomes.
- Staff development is the responsibility of administrators and other leaders.

Each of these characteristics relies on the skills, knowledge, beliefs, and self-efficacy of principals to provide the guidance, structures, and resources necessary to create a professional learning environment where change and growth are supported, encouraged, and expected.

Desimone (2011) provides a framework that evaluates the effectiveness of professional development once it has been planned and delivered. Three characteristics articulate how professional development should ultimately impact teacher growth and student achievement:

1. Teachers should learn something from the professional development.

2. Teachers should change their practices because of the professional development.
3. Student achievement should increase after applying the techniques, strategies, knowledge, or skills from the professional development.

These evaluative statements are important, given that high-quality professional development may exist in a school system without any evidence of impact on teacher behaviors or student achievement. As such, this study emphasized and validated the impact of principal engagement on the professional development process, focusing partially on the evaluation of professional learning provided for individuals and staff as a whole.

Leadership in Professional Development

High levels of engagement in the professional development process can positively influence the climate and culture of teaching and learning (Hoy et al., 2006). As such, principals who are active, knowledgeable, and engaged may be more likely to accurately determine the annual and ongoing professional learning needs of teachers. Further supporting the need for this leadership and principal engagement in the professional development process, Sparks and Hirsh (1997) state:

Research and experience have taught us that widespread, sustained implementation of new practices in classrooms, principals' offices, and central offices requires a new form of professional development. This staff development not only must affect the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of individual teachers, administrators, and other school employees, but it must also alter the cultures and structures of the organizations in which those individuals work. (p. 1)

Given this potential for impact on the culture and climate of teacher performance and student success, this study determined factors that contributed to low engagement among principals throughout the region of interest.

The impact of leadership on professional development and on student achievement has been confirmed through recent studies. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) contend from their meta-analysis on the topic:

The leadership dimension that is most strongly associated with positive student outcomes is that of promoting and participating in teacher learning and development. Because the agenda for teacher professional learning is endless, goal setting should play an important part in determining the teacher learning agenda. Leaders' involvement in teacher learning provides them with a deep understanding of the conditions required to enable staff to make and sustain the changes required for improved outcomes. (p. 667)

Additionally, research confirms the role of principals in affecting the culture and climate of student achievement through engagement in the professional development process (Leithwood, 2007; Levin, 2008; Reeves, 2010).

The attributes of leadership in planning and evaluating professional development were of interest to this study, given that the problem of practice focused on the desired state of high engagement in the professional development process among principals. When effective leadership is present, Fullan (2010) contends that collective capacity drives improvement efforts, which includes teacher improvement and student achievement. Robinson et al. (2008) studied leadership through a recent meta-analysis of 27 other studies on the impact of instructional leadership and transformational leadership on student learning. Their conclusions were reached inductively, resulting in five dimensions of leadership.

1. Establishing goals and expectations.
2. Resourcing strategically.
3. Planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum.
4. Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development.
5. Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment.

Of these, the fourth dimension is of most interest to this study within the context of the problem

of practice of low engagement among principals in the professional development process.

This leadership dimension is described as both promoting and participating because more is involved than just supporting or sponsoring other staff in their learning. The leader participates in the learning as leader, learner, or both. The contexts for such learning are both formal (staff meetings and professional development) and informal (discussions about specific teaching problems). (Robinson et al., 2008, p. 663)

Likewise, other research has yielded similar dimensions or, according to Levin (2008), practicalities when referring to leadership potential.

1. Establishing a vision and goals.
2. Building a strong team.
3. Creating and supporting the right culture.
4. Communication, vision, direction, and accomplishment.
5. Recruiting, developing, and retaining leaders.
6. Building internal and external support.
7. Maintaining the focus on teaching and learning.

Of these, the sixth and seventh practicalities were of most interest to this study, given their roles in planning and evaluating professional learning in an ongoing manner and on an annual basis. Teacher growth, for example, may come from internal resources, or there may be times when individuals or organizations may be brought in from the outside. Regardless, principals who engage in the professional development process are making decisions with staff, not for them, that are aligned to and focused on both individual and collective needs to help build capacity, increase self-efficacy, and foster academic optimism.

Leadership in professional development was of interest to this study, given that principals may not be aware of the impact their role has on the culture and climate of teaching and learning. The research-based leadership attributes and characteristics mentioned in this section that relate

to teaching, student learning, and professional development informed this study in the creation of a survey and interview protocol to further examine the research questions. Furthermore, this research informed the identification of barriers to higher engagement levels among principals in the professional development process and informed resources or supports identified to reduce or eliminate these barriers.

Conceptual Framework

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that served as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process and identified what resources or supports may be needed to increase engagement levels. The conceptual framework that guided and informed this study on principal engagement in the professional development process included constructs derived from humanist psychology theory and research. Drawing from this body of work, I studied the actual state of low engagement among principals and the desired state of high engagement. Given the concept map in Figure 1, I focused on the role of principal engagement in the professional development process. Given the literature review and themes that have emerged to inform this study, low engagement may limit the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of teachers, which then may limit student learning. However, high engagement with the process, when done effectively, can positively affect the climate, culture, and efficacy of the organization while also influencing teacher growth and improvement.

Social cognitive theory, self-efficacy theory, and collective efficacy theory (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1997; Goddard et al., 2000; Leithwood, 2007; Pajares, 1996) served as significant concepts that framed this problem of practice within the context of school and district leaders' roles in professional development. Additionally, academic optimism (Goddard et al., 2000; Hoy et al., 2006; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006) informed root causes of the low engagement in

among principals in the professional development process. Leadership in professional development (Fullan, 2010; Levin, 2008; Robinson et al., 2008) informed the attributes and qualities of school and district leaders to efficaciously create and sustain teaching and learning cultures reflective of academic optimism. Lastly, the attributes of quality professional development (Desimone, 2011; Knapp, 2003; Reeves, 2010; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997) provided a framework to guide the meaningful engagement of school and district leaders to effectively plan and evaluate professional development.

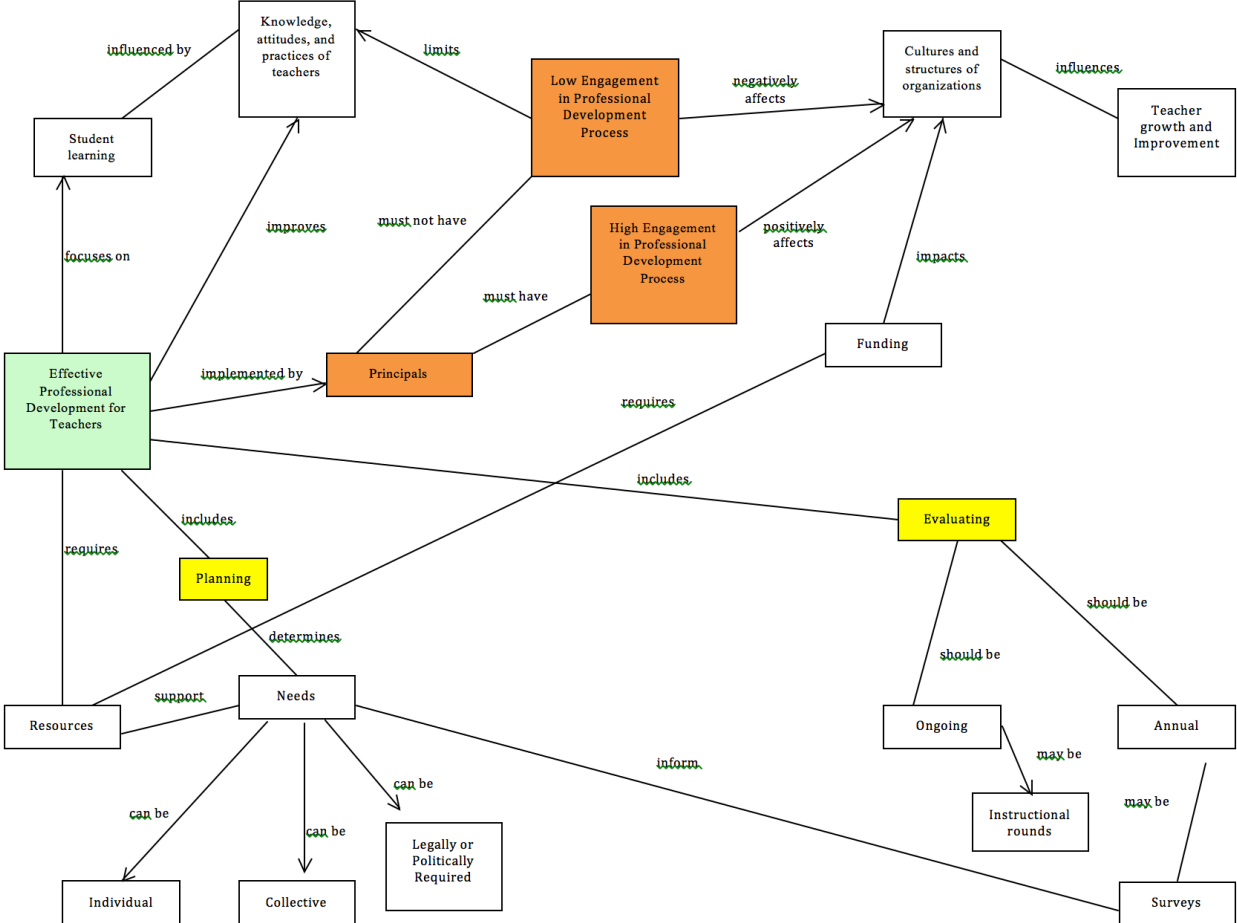


Figure 1. Concept map of the impact of principal engagement in the professional development process. With the goal of providing effective professional development for teachers through planning and evaluation, principal engagement levels can positively or negatively dictate the

climate and culture of teaching and learning. The lines with arrows are one directional relationships and the lines with no arrows influence each other in both directions.

Chapter Summary

The focus of this chapter included a review of relevant literature related to the identified problem of low engagement among principals in the professional development process, which includes planning and evaluating individual and collective professional learning needs. Concepts that emerged from the literature review that informed this study included social cognitive theory, efficacy, academic optimism, leadership in professional development, and the characteristics of quality or effective professional development. Each of these areas, to a high degree, provided insights into the three research questions of this study. The theories and constructs within and among social cognitive theory, efficacy, and academic optimism addressed the identification of barriers to high engagement levels among principals in the professional development process. Likewise, the existing body of academic literature on leadership in professional development and the characteristics of effective professional development addressed the identification of resources and supports that could increase engagement levels among principals in the professional development process. Additionally, the research presented confirms the existence of a gap between what is known about effective professional learning and what should be done to plan and evaluate professional development activities more effectively. Furthermore, research supported the need for active and engaged principals in the professional development process, given the role of school leadership in the culture and climate of teaching and learning through academic optimism.

Chapter three describes the methodology for further examining the research questions. Qualitative methods drove the research process in order to identify, understand, and examine

further the barriers to high engagement among principals in the professional development process. Additionally, this study identified resources and supports to increase engagement levels among principals in the professional development process. As an outcome, this study informed the field regarding reasons to meaningfully and effectively engage in the professional development process of planning and evaluating professional development, given current research that supports this claim. Chapter three includes an introduction, rationale of methodology, problem setting, research sample, data collection methods, data analysis methods, trustworthiness, limitation and delimitations, and a summary of the methodological design of the study.

To study the problem of practice of principal engagement in the professional development process and address the research questions, this study utilized a survey and interviews. Informed by concepts from the literature review, the survey and interview protocol focused on social cognitive theory, efficacy, academic optimism, leadership in professional development, and the characteristics of quality or effective professional development. The purpose of the survey was to determine the perception of the roles of principals in the professional development process. The purpose of the interviews was to identify barriers to engagement in the professional development process and identify supports or resources that could lead to higher engagement.

CHAPTER THREE: INQUIRY METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that served as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process and identified what resources or supports may be needed to increase engagement levels. Given my position as a Program Director for School Improvement that coordinates professional learning for a consortium of 112 school systems, I have observed low levels of principal engagement in the professional development process across school districts within a large geographic area in the Midwest. Low engagement is common among principals throughout the region of interest and has occurred despite known positive effects of principal engagement in the professional development process. As such, this study explored the barriers and factors that contribute to low engagement among principals in the professional development process, which included the identification of needs among teachers and the evaluation of professional development activities that are provided.

This section addresses the grounded theory methodology of this qualitative study, including the rationale, research sample and data sources, data collection methods, and data analysis methods. The research questions for this study were:

1. What factors or conditions serve as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process?
2. What resources or supports would lead to increased engagement among principals in the professional development process?
3. Do building principals accept professional development planning and evaluation as one their primary responsibilities?

The process for developing and administering a survey and an interview protocol will also be described. Methods to ensure trustworthiness of this study were based on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), which include prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, and audit trail. Limitations and delimitations will be articulated.

Rationale

This study featured a qualitative research approach based in grounded theory with data collection methods that included a survey and interviews. Data analysis through coding contributed to inductively developing conclusions and recommendations for further research. Grounded theory, according to Wheeldon and Ahlberg (2012), is unlike other approaches in that the researcher begins with no preexisting theory, hypothesis, or expectation of findings. However, an assumption does exist based on my experience that if principals were more actively engaged in the professional development process, then teacher efficacy could be positively impacted. As such, grounded theory was useful as a methodology to generate and develop theory that might explain why the actual state of engagement among principals in the professional development process is low. Additionally, the research design identified barriers to principal engagement and synthesized recommendations for resources or supports to reduce or limit the identified barriers.

Problem Setting/Context

I currently serve as a Program Director for School Improvement for an educational service agency in the region of interest. This role includes leading and managing a small team of School Improvement Administrators, Instructional Support Specialists, Program Coordinators, and Consultants. Our responsibilities include coordinating and facilitating professional learning for 112 school systems throughout the region of interest. Our team has multiple opportunities

each year to work with the administrators and teachers within these school districts. Each school system contracts with my department for professional learning services; however, approximately one-half of these school systems do not meaningfully and regularly engage with their teachers to identify individual and collective professional learning needs on an annual and ongoing basis. In other words, superintendents, curriculum directors, and teachers within these school systems are, at times, more active in making school-based professional learning decisions, rather than the principals. This, in turn, complicates our team's work in providing effective and meaningful professional development activities for teachers that meet individual and collective needs.

Research Sample and Data Sources

This study provided the opportunity to survey key school and district leaders throughout the 112 participating consortium districts in our education service center's geographic region. This population included a variety of roles, such as superintendents, district curriculum directors or specialists, principals, and teacher leaders. The goal of the survey was to collect and analyze perceptions on the role of the principal in the professional development process and determine at what level principals engage in this process. Based on the survey results, purposeful sampling was then used to identify and select a sample of 20 principals as interview participants that intentionally reflect the demographics of the larger body of consortium districts.

Superintendents

Superintendents provide the overall leadership and management within school districts or school systems. In this position, one might be more willing to disclose reasons that professional development is not emphasized as a priority among principals, given other district initiatives or challenges in meeting state and federal mandates. Additionally, superintendents might be willing to share what resource constraints prohibit a consistent and focused approach to high-quality

professional learning, led by principals. This, in turn, helped to inform purposeful sampling of principals to interview.

Curriculum Directors or Curriculum Coordinators

The roles of curriculum directors or curriculum coordinators vary and these assignments may include the responsibility of identifying professional learning needs and evaluating the impact of the professional development activities. While these individuals may have completed advanced coursework in curriculum design, they may not have the administrative licensure, knowledge, skills, or experiences to effectively plan and evaluate professional learning. Through the survey, purposeful inclusion of individuals who serve in this role informed the study in a significant way given their relationship with the problem of practice.

Principals

Principals offer a school-specific context, which provided insights into the culture and climate that exists reflective of how much, or how little, professional learning is valued among teachers. Additionally, principals provided insights into their multi-faceted responsibilities, including levels of competence and confidence with identifying professional learning needs and evaluating professional development activities. This informed preliminary reasons for the observed low engagement among principals in the professional development process. Additionally, the perspective of principals in the survey contributed to the process of purposeful sampling for selecting principals to interview.

Teacher Leaders

Teacher leaders, which included Instructional Coaches and Professional Development Council (PDC) Chairs, for example, offered unique perspectives in the survey that informed engagement levels of principals in the professional development process. While often still

defined as a teacher, some individuals in these roles assume administrative responsibilities. As such, the perspective of these individuals further informed the purposeful sampling process.

Ethical and Political Concerns

The ethical and political concerns with this study are limited but will be addressed in an effort to minimize their impact or influence. I have the unique opportunity to observe and participate within each of the 112 school systems in some capacity. As such, there are existing relationships that could have influenced the way participants responded to specific questions. Therefore, interview participants were carefully selected through specific purposeful sampling criteria as a means of protecting these relationships. Additionally, appropriate measures and methods were utilized to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

Regarding political concerns specifically, each of the 112 school systems in the region pays a voluntary participation fee on an annual basis to receive the benefits, services, expertise, and school improvement support of the consortium. This support includes professional development, targeted assistance, mentoring, and guidance from our team. As such, the findings and conclusions from this study have the potential to negatively affect future participation through non-renewals, should one or more principals in the region of study build sufficient internal capacity and efficacy to effectively engage in the professional development process. If this occurs, the potential exists that one or more of the 112 school systems may no longer need the services of our team.

Data Collection Methods

Perceptions from school and district leaders related to principal engagement levels in the professional development process were collected through the use of a survey and interviews. This study was conducted in accordance and in compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines with the University of Arkansas. All participants were provided with an

implied consent form along with specific information about the purpose and goals of the study. A copy of the implied consent was provided during the survey and during the interviews. No information that would identify individual participants of specific schools or districts was disclosed in the reports. Participants in this study were not exposed to any risks.

Survey

A survey was administered to superintendents, curriculum directors or curriculum specialists, principals, and teacher leaders within the 112 consortium districts across the region of interest. The survey (see Appendix A) collected demographic data and perceptions on the role of principals in the professional development process to inform the use of purposeful sampling for selecting 20 principals to interview. The collected demographic information became part of the criteria for purposeful sampling, which included district location, district size, and years of experience in one or more leadership positions, such as: one to two years; three to five years; six to nine years; and 10 or more years. Perceptions on the role of principals in the professional development process included questions reflective of topics derived from the literature review, such as effective professional development practices and aspects of leadership in professional development. Each survey participant was able to review a copy of the implied consent document prior to participating. As such, survey participants were informed of their right to remove themselves at any time from the study.

Interviews

Informed by the literature review on the topics of social cognitive theory, academic optimism, and efficacy theory, an interview protocol (see Appendix B) was used to further understand barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process. Additionally, the interview elicited opinions regarding resources and supports needed to reduce

or eliminate barriers to principal engagement. The interview process took place in a neutral environment that was convenient for each participant. The setting and process was informal and conversational and took no more than one hour. The purpose of these considerations was to create an interview environment that was comfortable so that participants would respond honestly and openly. As with the survey, each participant was a volunteer in this study and was informed of his or her right to leave the study at any time. Interview participants received an additional copy of the implied consent document prior to participating.

Managing Data and Recording Interviews

To accurately capture the survey information and interview information, several steps were taken to collect and manage data. SurveyMonkey was the online platform used to develop, administer, and collect responses for the survey. The platform is secure and requires specific username and password information to administer the survey instrument and review the results (SurveyMonkey, 2016). For the interviews, a recording device was used to capture the conversation and field notes were taken as needed. A transcript was then created for each recorded interview and was labeled using a process that provided for anonymity and confidentiality of participants. This process assigned a unique alphanumeric code to each participant and interview (IP1 through IP20). Precautionary measures were developed and implemented to protect individual participants and school or district information during the survey and interviews.

Data Analysis Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine engagement levels among principals in the professional development process. To analyze the qualitative data collected from the interviews, I utilized First Cycle and Second Cycle coding methods. First Cycle methods, according to

Saldaña (2013), include: Grammatical, Elemental, Affective, Literary and Language, Exploratory, Procedural, and Themeing the Data. Second Cycle methods include the use of analytic skills, such as classifying, prioritizing, integrating, synthesizing, abstracting, conceptualizing, and theory building (Saldaña, 2013). Regarding the decision-making process of the use of specific coding methods, Saldaña (2013), states, “The nature of your central and related research questions – and thus the answers you seek – will influence the specific coding choice(s) you make” (p. 60). Given this, the research questions for this study were:

1. What factors or conditions serve as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process?
2. What resources or supports would lead to increased engagement among principals in the professional development process?
3. Do building principals accept professional development planning and evaluation as one their primary responsibilities?

The research questions addressed theories of knowing and understanding the phenomenon of engagement levels among building administrators. As such, grounded theory guided the methodology and analysis to generate and develop theory that might explain why the actual state of engagement among principals in the professional development process was low. Therefore, according to Saldaña (2013), these question types suggest the further exploration of participant actions, processes, and perceptions, which can be gathered through the following coding methods.

- Elemental Methods: Descriptive, Process, and Initial
- Affective Methods: Versus and Evaluation
- Literary and Language Methods: Dramaturgical

- Procedural Methods: Domain and Taxonomic and Causation
- Themeing the Data

Through First Cycle and Second Cycle coding, I categorized and classified the data in order to develop themes that provided insights on current engagement levels among principals as well as identify barriers to engagement in the professional development process.

Trustworthiness

Methods to ensure trustworthiness of this study were based on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), which included prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, and audit trail. Prolonged engagement occurred through the interview process when instances occurred where follow up questions or clarification on one or more responses was needed. Additionally, within the initial setting of the interview, no more than one hour was spent with each participant to fully capture his or her context and engagement in the professional development process. Triangulation was present during the survey process through the participation of superintendents, curriculum directors or curriculum specialists, principals, and teacher leaders. Intentionally including these roles helped to inform the purposeful sampling process to select 20 principals as interview participants. Peer debriefing provided critical feedback regarding the data collection methods and data analysis for this study. Where needed, member checks strengthened trustworthiness by taking interview transcripts, coding, and analytic memos back to the interview participants to verify accuracy of the collection and interpretation of their comments and experiences. Lastly, an audit trail was utilized to provide a digital record of the processes, procedures, and products that originated as a result of this study. Examples included interview recordings, interview transcripts, field notes, shared documents, and the results of analyzed data and documentation.

Limitations and Delimitations

While the survey for this study was made available to key leaders throughout the 112 school systems, interview participation was limited through purposeful sampling. As such, the scale and scope of this research was limited by the sample size. Therefore, the results and conclusions may have inferential limitations but were reflective of the research questions and the larger problem of practice. The trustworthiness processes and procedures that were used in this study ensured that the information collected from participants through the survey and interviews informs meaningful and applicable results and conclusions throughout the region of interest.

Delimitations were also present in this study, reflective of intentional limits or boundaries. This study included only educational leaders as a part of the survey to gather perceptions of the role of principals in the professional development process and does not include a large number of teachers. For the purpose of this study, educational leaders were limited to superintendents, curriculum directors or coordinators, principals, and teacher leaders. Teacher leaders included Instructional Coaches and Professional Development Council (PDC) Chairs, for example. While teachers, in general, could have been included in this study to provide their perspective or perception of the role of principals in the professional development process, I intentionally chose to not include this group. The rationale for this decision rests with the idea that this group's perspective may not have contributed significantly to the research questions, which were to understand barriers to engagement among principals and the identification of resources or supports to increase engagement among principals.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine engagement levels among building principals in the professional development process. Through the use of a survey and interviews,

information was collected that helped to inform barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process. This constructivist approach adhered to the principles and practices of traditional grounded theory methodologies, where no preexisting theory or hypothesis was present. Upon collecting and analyzing the survey information, purposeful sampling was used to select 20 principals to interview. Social cognitive theory, efficacy, and academic optimism were the theoretical frameworks that supported the purpose of this study. First Cycle and Second Cycle coding methods were used to inductively derive results and conclusions from the interviews that helped to inform factors or barriers to more meaningful and frequent principal engagement in the professional development process. Based on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness was strengthened through methods that included prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, and audit trail.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that serve as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process and identify what resources or supports may be needed to increase engagement levels. For the purpose of this study, the professional development process included the identification of the professional learning needs of teachers on an ongoing and annual basis and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the professional development that has been provided. This study yielded insights into identifying and reducing or eliminating common barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process, thus providing opportunities for principals to engage meaningfully and more effectively in the future. This study utilized a qualitative methodology, and 20 principals were purposefully sampled for an interview from among 249 participants in a larger-scale survey across the region of interest. The survey and interviews provided data for addressing the following research questions:

1. What factors or conditions serve as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process?
2. What resources or supports would lead to increased engagement among principals in the professional development process?
3. Do building principals accept professional development planning and evaluation as one of their primary responsibilities?

The framework for presenting the results and findings from the survey includes a description of the sample and a summary of the results. The framework for presenting the findings from the interviews includes a summary of the sample and summaries of the participants' responses and findings aligned to the three research questions for this study. Grounded theory guided the

methodology and analysis of this study to address the research questions and explain why the actual state of engagement among principals in the professional development process is low within the region of interest.

Results and Findings

Survey

Sample. This study utilized a survey designed to assist in the process of purposefully sampling 20 principals for a follow up interview regarding their level of engagement in the professional development process. The survey was designed, administered, and analyzed using SurveyMonkey during the spring of 2017. Educators and administrators from a school improvement consortium of 112 school districts were invited to participate in this survey. Each participant was asked to select the school district that he or she represented. Of the 112 school districts invited to participate in this survey, 91 school districts had at least one respondent to the survey, resulting in an 81% participation rate among consortium school districts. Additionally, 69 school districts had at least two respondents to the survey, which represented 61% of the consortium school districts. Having more than one respondent per district helped to provide additional insights into the ongoing perceptions of the role of principals in the professional development process.

The opportunity to participate in the survey for this research study was provided to 492 individuals in the spring of 2017. 249 individuals participated in the survey, which is a response rate of 50.6%. Survey participants held a variety of titles or positions (see Table 4.1) and reported from which region of the state their districts belonged (see Table 4.2). The disproportionality reported in Table 4.2 is representative of the locations of the districts served in each region of the consortium. Additionally, participants provided information about the size of

their districts (see Table 4.3). Participants also reported how long they had been in their current positions (see Table 4.4) and how long they had been in education as a career (see Table 4.5). Each of these demographic questions or prompts provided information that allowed me to be very intentional during the process of purposeful sampling to select 20 building principals for an interview reflective of the larger consortium demographics.

Table 4.1
Survey: Distribution of Respondents by Position

Please select the role(s) that best describe(s) your position:	n	%
Superintendent	50	20.16
Assistant Superintendent and/or Curriculum Director or Coordinator	36	14.52
Principal	93	37.50
Assistant or Associate Principal	23	9.27
Teacher Leader, Instructional Coach, or PDC Chair	60	24.19

Notes. N=248 – one respondent skipped response. Total of percentages is not 100 because of selection of multiple roles.

Table 4.2
Survey: Distribution of Respondents by Geographic Region

Please select the geographic region of the state that best describes your school district:	n	%
Northeast (NE)	112	45.16
Southeast (SE)	118	47.58
North Central (NC)	10	4.03
South Central (SC)	8	3.23

Note. N=248 – one respondent skipped response.

Table 4.3
Survey: Size of District Based on Student Count Range

Please select the size of your district based on the student count ranges provided:	n	%
Fewer than 500	67	26.91
500-1000	96	38.55
1001-2500	75	30.12
More than 2500	11	4.42

Note. N=249.

Table 4.4
Survey: Total Years of Experience in Current Position

Please select the total years of experience in your current position:	n	%
1-2 years	75	30.12
3-5 years	72	28.92
6-9 years	35	14.06
10 or more years	67	26.91

Note. N=249. Total of percentages is not 100 because of rounding.

Table 4.5
Survey: Total Years of Experience in Any Certified Position

Please select your total years of experience in any certified position in education:	n	%
1-2 years	2	.81
3-5 years	1	.40
6-9 years	6	2.43
10 or more years	67	96.36

Note. N=247 – two respondents skipped response.

Given the number of school districts participating in a school improvement consortium throughout a large geographic area of interest for this research study, I wanted to ensure that the 20 principals came from a variety of districts, as represented by location, size, years in their current position, and total years in education. As such, the survey questions

reflected these demographic values, so that a representative sample could be purposefully selected.

Results. In addition to the demographic questions, three additional selected response questions in the survey prompted participants to share their perceptions of the actual state of the role of principals in the professional development process in their respective school districts. These additional questions were designed and included in the survey to assist in the purposeful sampling process of selecting 20 principals to interview, representative of the larger survey population. Central to the purpose of this research study, the survey asked participants to indicate the position that primarily leads the process of planning and evaluating building-based professional development on an annual basis (see Table 4.6). Less than one-half of the total responses identified principals as the primary leader in the professional development process for their respective buildings. This information helped with the process of purposefully sampling 20 principals to interview by intentionally selecting many principals who were identified, or who self-identified, as not primarily leading the process.

Table 4.6
Survey: Position that Primarily Leads Building-Based Professional Development Process

Of the following positions, which one primarily leads the process of planning and evaluating building-based professional development on an annual basis? (Please select only one)	n	%
Superintendent	53	21.29
Assistant Superintendent(s) and/or Curriculum Director(s) or Coordinator(s)	46	18.47
Principal(s)	108	43.37
Assistant or Associate Principal(s)	2	.80
Teacher Leader(s), Instructional Coach(es), or PDC Chair	22	8.84
Other (please specify)	18	7.23

Note. N=249.

Responses to “Other” included roles and positions such as building leadership teams, student improvement teams (SIT), and assistant directors.

The next question on the survey prompted participants to identify from among the aforementioned positions which ones participated in the process of planning and evaluating building-based professional development on an annual basis (see Table 4.7). Participants could select more than one of the available positions, and this question provided insights on the engagement levels of principals in being involved at some level in the professional development process, but not necessarily leading the process for their respective buildings. According to the respondents, principals were equally involved in the process as teacher leaders, instructional coaches, or Professional Development Council (PDC) Chairs. Likewise, assistant or associate principals were equally involved in the process as Assistant Superintendents and/or Curriculum Directors.

Table 4.7
Survey: Positions Also Participating in Building-Based Professional Development Process

Which of the following positions also participates in the process of planning and evaluating building-based professional development on an annual basis? (Please select all that apply)	n	%
Superintendent	129	51.81
Assistant Superintendent(s) and/or Curriculum Director(s) or Coordinator(s)	71	28.51
Principal(s)	153	61.45
Assistant or Associate Principal(s)	71	28.51
Teacher Leader(s), Instructional Coach(es), or PDC Chair	153	61.45
Other (please specify)	27	10.84

Note. N=249. Total of percentages is not 100 because of multiple selection opportunity.

Responses to “Other” included PDC, assistants to administration, building leadership teams, technology director, curriculum council, and SIT.

The final question gave insights into perceptions of already-provided resources and

supports for principals in the professional development process (see Table 4.8) by asking survey participants to select one or more from among the provided options. More than one-half of the respondents indicated that both needs assessments or surveys and dedicated time were provided to principals.

Table 4.8
Survey: Resources or Supports Provided to Principals during Professional Development Process

If a principal primarily leads the professional development planning and evaluation for his/her building, what resources or supports are provided during the process? (Please select all that apply)	n	%
Needs assessments and/or surveys for building staff to complete.	164	71.93
Leadership training on continuous growth and improvement strategies and processes.	95	41.67
Professional learning on professional development structures and/or frameworks.	100	43.86
Dedicated time to work with other building and/or district administrators on annual and ongoing professional development plans.	122	53.51
Other (please specify)	27	11.84

Note. N=228 – 21 respondents likely skipped response because of prompt’s qualifying statement. Total of percentages is not 100 because of multiple selection opportunity.

Some of the responses to “Other” included a variety of comments and clarifying statements:

- All of the above can be found or provided but I have to initiate the process.
- Primarily he covers what the state requires to meet accreditation requirements.
- I have no real idea what resources are provided.
- Our strategic plan and accreditation model is also a part of the decision making process.
- Needs assessment that is brought about through discussion at Building Leadership Team (BLT) meetings.
- Most professional development is district led.
- Principals are involved in the planning with the Professional Development Council (PDC) Chair responsible for setting up the workshops.

- No structure or dedicated time.
- At the building level, the decision of what professional development is needed is determined by the teachers and/or building leadership team.
- Principal has very little influence so none are used.
- I don't feel like our district ever has a "plan." It seems like everything is last minute and professional development days are always a surprise, for everyone who shows up...including the person that planned them.
- Principals are not the primary leaders for professional development, but all of the above choices are implemented in our district.

Interviews

Sample. From the survey, 20 principals were purposefully sampled to participate as interview participants (IP1 through IP20) and represented the larger survey population by regional location, size, years in current position, and total years in education (see Table 4.9). Each principal was notified of the opportunity to participate, each agreed, and each received the implied consent information for this research study. Interviews were completed during the fall of 2017. Using the three research questions for this study as a guide, an interview protocol (see Appendix B) was developed and used to further explore and understand how principals perceive their role and responsibility with professional development, including barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process. Additionally, the interview process gathered information from participants regarding resources and supports needed to reduce or eliminate barriers to principal engagement. The interview process took place in a neutral environment that was convenient for each participant. The setting and process were presented as informal and conversational and the interviews took no longer than one hour each. The purpose

of these considerations was to create an interview environment that was comfortable so that participants would respond honestly and openly. As with the survey, each participant knew that he or she was a volunteer in this study, and each was informed of his or her right to leave the study at any time. Interview participants received an additional copy of the implied consent document (see Appendix C) prior to participating.

Table 4.9
Summary Demographics of Purposefully Sampled Interview Participants

Interview Participant	Region	Size	Current Years	Total Years
IP1	NE	>2500	1-2	10+
IP2	SE	500-1000	3-5	10+
IP3	SE	1001-2500	1-2	10+
IP4	NE	500-1000	10+	10+
IP5	SE	500-1000	10+	10+
IP6	SE	1001-2500	3-5	10+
IP7	SE	500-1000	1-2	10+
IP8	NC	500-1000	1-2	10+
IP9	SC	<500	3-5	10+
IP10	NE	500-1000	1-2	10+
IP11	SE	<500	1-2	10+
IP12	SE	<500	6-9	10+
IP13	NE	500-1000	3-5	10+
IP14	SE	500-1000	3-5	10+
IP15	SE	500-1000	3-5	10+
IP16	NE	>2500	1-2	10+
IP17	SE	1001-2500	1-2	10+
IP18	NE	1001-2500	10+	10+
IP19	NE	500-1000	6-9	10+
IP20	SE	500-1000	1-2	10+

Research Question 1

Findings. The framework for the interview included ten questions or prompts, and

each allowed for appropriate follow up discussion as needed. Of the questions or prompts, the following were most closely aligned to the first research question: What factors or conditions serve as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process?

1. In a magical world where you could change anything you wanted about professional development, and with no barriers (real or perceived), what would professional development look like in your district?
2. In thinking about the ideal or desired state you just described, what are some barriers that keep this from happening?
3. Tell me about other things that serve as blocks or barriers that keep principals from being more involved in professional development.

Analysis of the responses was conducted by reviewing the transcriptions of the 20 interviews. First cycle-coding methods were used to identify themes from each interview participant based on their knowledge, experiences, and thoughts regarding each question or prompt. Second cycle-coding methods were then used to find common themes from among all responses from participants and provided the basis for summary findings for this research question.

In a magical world where you could change anything you wanted about professional development, and with no barriers (real or perceived), what would professional development look like in your district? Principals shared common responses reflective of a variety of desired changes that focused on how to make the professional development experience on-going and job-embedded as well as more engaging and relevant for their teachers. Themes that emerged from the responses included application of the knowledge or skills in a more consistent and timely manner, implementation of professional learning communities and providing more collaboration time, offering teachers a higher quality professional development experience that

included individualization and coaching, ensuring a hands-on approach to professional development with modifications to schedules to accommodate teacher absences, and the use of technology to enhance or broaden the professional development experience.

The first major theme among the responses was application, as there was a common desire among principals to have teachers more consistently apply the knowledge and skills acquired during professional development. On this topic, one principal (IP18) stated:

So often we go to professional development and we get really excited. We want to try something and we may bring back maybe 5% of what we learned, or 10%, and don't necessarily apply it on a daily basis in the classroom. Sometimes I come back and I am trying to train my staff on what I have learned. Sometimes I struggle with remembering everything and doing it in a really quality way as I was briefed in the material, so I wish I could. I guess I wish my teachers could just bring back more to implement and not forget...not just let it die.

Along with this common desire among principals to have teachers consistently apply what has been learned during professional development, there was also a common desire for timely, and nearly instantaneous, knowledge acquisition and application as a means to improving instructional practices. One interview participant (IP4) proposed that, "In a perfect world, you would have the opportunity to train everybody immediately when an issue occurs. You stop everything, you keep the kids home until you can get everybody on the same page. That is in a perfect world, but it doesn't happen that way." Other principals commented that it would be desirable to be able to address issues immediately upon their occurrence, rather than waiting what was shared as "too long" until the next scheduled professional development day.

In the context of a magical world with no barriers, a second theme was that principals shared a common desire to more fully implement teacher-driven professional learning communities (PLCs) or, at a minimum, significantly increase the amount of collaboration time available to teachers. An interview participant (IP2) commented, "In a perfect world, I would

make sure that our departments had shared plan time where we could actually have true PLCs and, so, probably giving them more time together and trying to empower some of those teachers to make some professional development need decisions instead of it coming from the top down.” On collaboration specifically, another interview participant (IP13) shared, “I think just bringing teachers together and knowing what's going on in different school districts, I think that's so important.” Common desires were also shared regarding a change in schools’ scheduling structures to provide for additional collaboration or PLC time. A principal (IP10) stated:

I would like a common planning time, maybe an early start to the day, which is something small towns have a hard time grasping the understanding of. That would be a really good building site council conversation which then goes to a district site council conversation and getting other stakeholders to understand the importance and the ‘why’ behind the district's wanting to do that.

Regarding the ideal structure for time within a professional learning community, one principal (IP6) said:

I would love to have weekly PLC time. We used to have it but it was a late start so we'd have about an hour and a half every Thursday. And it worked out really well for us at the high school, but it didn't work out very well for the middle school and the elementary because their kids are coming and people are going. I would like for it to be at least an hour and a half, maybe two hours, because it does not always have to be professional development. Sometimes you need to have...you just have sit down and talk to your group and say, ‘Hey, where are we at? How are we doing?’ because now we are forced to do that by email and by just checking in and everybody is busy and we ask them to teach all day long. I would say at least monthly within your PLC time or professional development, but at least monthly something needs to be done district-wide with the same focus and the same idea. It doesn't necessarily need to be the same thing but the focus and idea need to be the same.

While many principals shared that they had experiences in implementing and managing these professional learning communities and collaboration times, the consensus was that much more could be done for the benefit of teaching and learning.

Given the prompt of the desired state of professional development, a third theme of higher quality professional development emerged from among the principals’ responses, which

included individualization and coaching. Principals shared how the role of individualization supports the process of engaging teachers in professional development to enhance current practices and future application. Furthermore, they recognized that all teachers do not necessarily need to acquire the same skills, depending on the individual needs of each teacher.

One principal (IP8) stated:

I think the individualized part of it would be huge and having lots of options. I mean, we bring in some great people, some great speakers, and it probably applies to some disciplines more than others. A lot of people we bring in it can apply across all but I would say just it being individualized, you know, what do you want to learn and get the honest truth from the teacher. 'Hey, I really want to attack this chemistry subject' or 'I really want this math subject' or 'This behavioral thing' and just kind of be instead of one size fits all kind of individualized I would think and then the teachers going in having time to say, 'Okay, here is a resource or here is a speaker' whatever for 30 minutes or an hour. Now, here's 2 hours to go and implement.

Other principals reflected on their time as a teacher and their previously negative experiences with professional development. For example, a principal (IP7) recalled:

It just got old as a teacher having the speaker come in and talk to me and tell me about strategies and things that we did and then I walked away and I was right back into my classroom pretty much doing so the same things. I maybe tried to pull some of those things in but not really having a lot of time to prep with that so I have really started looking more at how can we individualize that professional development learning because if it is more meaningful then I'm going to walk away and I am going to take something away.

Another principal (IP12) shared how individualization would enhance the professional development experience for teachers:

I would make professional development a good experience. You know how we have stressed for eons about how you want everything into an individualized plan, it's differentiated, it is completely catered to the student? Well, I think professional development should be the same way. I think it should be delivered the same way, you know it's not necessarily a lecturer, it's not just watching a video, it's not just, you know, hanging out for coffee and donuts.

Most principals also shared that a high-quality experience would include an opportunity to provide, or have teachers receive feedback from, an instructional coach when implementing newly acquired knowledge or skills. A principal (IP11) shared:

My moonshot for professional development is that we would be bringing the professional development here with kids in the building, with teachers teaching, with almost like a coaching model where someone could go in and coach. For example, here's this great new technology thing or see what the teachers are doing and then provide on site. This is how we could make that better. While individualization and coaching were common themes, principals next shared their thoughts about the importance of hands-on professional development experience for their teachers.

With the opportunity to share ideas about professional development in an ideal setting, a fourth theme surfaced among principals regarding the importance of hands-on professional development experiences for teachers along with creative scheduling to accommodate this desired state. One interview participant (IP3) said, “It would be cool to be able to take, you know, little field trips. Just make it more where it is not just a sit-and-get, but they are getting to do something. They are going to go do something fun. They are hopefully enjoying the day.” Several principals shared that creating this hands-on environment would also require new thoughts and actions regarding traditional school schedules. As such, principals proposed a variety of changes or provided new thinking about adjustments that could be made to their respective annual calendars. Regarding a traditional schedule with pre-planned professional development days, one principal (IP1) commented:

It doesn't necessarily have to occur from 7:45 to 3:30 on these magical seven days of the calendar. Like, we have those days and that can be a time where we can set aside things to get together but I would love to see an Ed Camp happen. I'd like to see focus on innovation and maybe even where middle schools on the PD day can go and see what else happening in the district to get ideas and share and see what kids are doing. I think it will blow some of their minds.

Given that each school district in the region of interest created its own annual calendar, principals from districts where very few professional development days were provided each year

commented on desired calendar changes. An interview participant (IP2) shared, “I would start with reorganizing our calendar to give more professional development time. I am kind of limited on what I have seen before at different districts and what I hear about, but I would say minimum a district-wide professional development day once a quarter instead of maybe once every other, or once every semester.”

A fifth theme that emerged from the comments among principals was the use of technology to enhance the professional development experience. Principals, in general, acknowledged that technology was an underutilized resource to connect teachers with other colleagues or experts. One principal (IP1) shared:

I would say that using an online technology because we have so much technology in the district but is there a way to have online courses where we could really thoughtfully tackle something that we want to study more or do some action research or Skype in with some experts, have Twitter chats, or they just utilize the technology piece. Google certification and things like that. I would say that just some of those out-of-the-box things get me really excited because I feel like once you remove some of those like boundaries that we have had exist for years, people can get excited and they can kind of tap into something they are interested in.

Within the theme of technology use to enhance the professional development experience for teachers, principals concurred that professional development is generally organized around more traditional thinking and structures. For example, most principals shared that their professional development days include all staff seated together for some or all of the day. While this model was discussed as convenient, there were differing opinions on the value this model brings to improvements in teaching practices and, as a result, student learning.

This prompt provided an opportunity for principals to think about and share ideas regarding their own school systems and reflect on the actual state of how professional development was offered to teachers. When given the chance to propose new ideas, the common themes that emerged in a desired state included:

- Consistent and timely application of knowledge and skills gained from professional development.
- Use of collaboration time and implementation of professional learning communities.
- A higher quality professional development experience that recognizes individualization and includes on-site coaching for teachers.
- Hands-on professional development opportunities for teachers and the need to modify traditional schedules and calendars.
- More fully utilizing technology to connect professionals with other colleagues and experts.

This interview question challenged principals to consider and share aspects of a desired state of professional development for teachers. Knowing their actual states of professional development, principals were quick to share reasons through the next two questions or prompts regarding barriers to achieving what they described as the desired state.

In thinking about the ideal or desired state you just described, what are some barriers that keep this from happening? and Tell me about other things that serve as blocks or barriers that keep principals from being more involved in professional development. Two themes were mentioned by all interview participants: time and money. These were cited as overarching barriers to achieving the desired state of professional development process. Additional barriers that were common themes among principals included substitute teacher availability and costs, parents and other stakeholder groups, student needs, lack of confidence or competence among teachers and administrators, school culture and climate, and a lack of communication and organization.

All principals shared that a shortage of time was the most significant barrier to further

engagement in the professional development process, which included planning to meet the needs of teachers and evaluating the effectiveness of the professional development that was provided.

One principal (IP5) stated, “Time is the biggest factor right now. And it comes in cycles too because, you know, we are getting ready for the end of the first quarter here. You know, I guess time is always a factor, and I don't know if you ever have enough time.” Another principal (IP4) shared, “There just isn't enough time to do -- and you fill in the blank, whatever that is.” A principal (IP2) commented:

Candidly, we don't have enough time for professional development to be done really the way that it ought to be done in our district. We have basically a day before school starts for professional development and we have got a day in the winter for professional development, and then that is basically it as far as full staff PD.

Principals shared common thoughts on the important role professional development plays in supporting the growth of teachers; however, finding the time to fully meet the needs of staff was an ongoing challenge. One principal (IP4) stated:

I think that the constant challenge is finding the time to actually meet the needs of expanding the resources that you have, both your own emotional and mental resources to draw from, as far as teachers that is, and for us as administrators to provide for those teachers when they need assistance or when we are trying to implement some new initiative. I think it is a constant struggle. It really is.

In examining the responses that included time as a barrier to principal engagement, there were a variety of factors that impacted the amount of time available for principals to focus on their engagement in the professional development process. For example, principals shared internal factors such as negotiated agreements and schedule structures. Regarding the opportunity to call meetings with faculty and staff, one principal (IP18) shared, “Time for meetings is a barrier. You were asking me about barriers, time for meetings because of negotiated contracts, negotiated time, time for the principal to call a meeting.” Principals also shared that even though some time had been devoted to professional development initiatives such as professional learning

communities, it was still not enough time to fully implement the practice. Regarding time, one principal (IP6) shared:

To me, thirty minutes is not even enough to really scratch the surface. I think you need a minimum of an hour to sit down with people. PLCs are just meeting times but I am just wondering how many people really have--I know they have PLC time. It's scheduled into their schedule--I just wonder how many people actually have found the way to do the professional learning communities and the professional development on a consistent basis, or are they doing what we're doing and schedule it in for three or four days during the school year and trying to try to cover every base with that.

Some principals were relatively satisfied with the amount of time allocated for professional development each year, but still insisted that more time would be beneficial for teachers and administrators. A principal (IP4) reported:

We probably have more professional development days in our schedules now than we ever did when--well, I have hinted, I am 30 years into this, over 30 years, and never before did we have the amount of time spent on professional development that we currently do. Ironically, it seems like now that I am in the role of an administrator, that doesn't seem enough. Yet, as a teacher, I was like, "Get out of my way, I have got things to do." And that's typically how teachers look at it.

Some principals are in districts where more time has been requested, but the process to add additional time has served as a barrier. One respondent (IP2) shared:

Well, you know, the number one thing is time. Our teachers aren't going to--they are not going to volunteer to stay after school until 6:00 once a quarter all together to work on professional development. So it needs to be in the calendar and that is a negotiated item. So it would take our superintendent and school board having the fortitude to put that as a negotiated item on the agenda to go through, and honestly it would probably need to be on a year where the teachers are getting something extra than what they are getting right now. As far as adding--because we are talking about adding calendar days, you know, they don't make up--we wouldn't be able to cut school days obviously because we are limited on minutes and time with students, and so we are actually adding calendar days. And this year in our district would have been the year to do that, but for some reason that didn't get done.

Overall, principals shared common difficulties with the process of adding days or adding additional time for professional development, which served as a barrier to principal engagement in the professional development process. However, there was a general consensus that it was far

more difficult to add time during a negotiations process, than to remove time.

The other theme that was a barrier to principal engagement, which was mentioned by all principals, was the impact of a lack of money to fund opportunities and experiences to provide professional development options for teachers. A lack of money was most often mentioned as it related to not being able to allocate funds to teachers for more of their time or for substitute costs to cover teacher absences. One principal (IP15) shared the following situation where a lack of money resulted in a reduction of professional development opportunities for teachers:

One of the things that I didn't think about when I was answering the question on barriers, kind of related to budget, when we can't offer salary increases, what we wind up doing is cutting days. We don't want to cut days with kids so we wind up cutting PD days. So like we only have, with my teachers, I get one full day – that's my October day and I get about a half a day plus staff meetings at the beginning of the year. Then I'll have, one, two--four other days where I will have about two and a half hours. That's it. That's all the out-of-school professional development time that we have allotted. That is not a lot of time and we kind of have gotten away from sending one teacher and letting them try something amazing that they learned at a conference because what we wound up with was all this disjointed stuff, not that any one piece was bad, it is just that we are not all working in the same direction.

Another principal shared the combined impact of lack of money and time as well by stating, “I think always a lot of things come back to budget. One key factor that decreased that time available to teachers is that we did our substitutes in-house and then we contracted that out with a company that cost double literally and so that meant instantly we had half the amount of professional learning time or those resources allocated to that.”

Principals commented on how limited funds impacted the quality of professional development offerings that were brought into districts. Additionally, limited funds restricted the quantity of opportunities that can be provided to teachers to attend out of district events because of substitute costs. Regarding quality presenters brought into districts, one principal (IP19) shared, “The quality of what we give sometimes is challenging whether it's based on budgets

because we can't hire the fanciest most expensive, you know, presenters or motivational speakers to come in.” Having speakers come in is one way to provide professional development; sending teachers out is another. A principal (IP9) commented on how limited substitute availability and associated costs restricted opportunities to send individual teachers and groups of teachers out of the district for professional development:

I mean, money is a huge barrier because we can't send people, I can't send my whole team or elementary team-- I mean, an intermediate team or primary team because I can't get that many subs for a day. Sending teams also cost the district money. I would love to be able to travel out of state. I would love to be able to send my teachers to conferences, national conferences, and we're really bound by the borders of state of Kansas by our district. That's a little disappointing because there's so much out there that I wish teachers had availability to do. So that would be the biggest thing is just to go to conferences and really have unlimited resources and substitutes so that I could send more than one or two teachers. I could send teams of teachers.

The same principal (IP9) also shared a barrier that involved out of state travel and their Board of Education:

I would say, in our district in particular, I know that out of state travel is really not allowed unless it's a trip approved by the board of education. So even if I wanted to send a teacher to a national conference in DC or Orlando, I have to take it before the board. To me that feels a little bit of an extra step or a hurdle instead of saying, ‘Oh my gosh, there's this great conference. I would love for you to be able to go,’ it always has to go in front of the board.

In addition to the costs associated with substitutes, their availability was also shared as a barrier to engagement in the professional development process. A principal (IP16) commented, “I don't know if this is the time that for this kind of caveat to this question but in my current position, professional development is a lot of times driven by the amount of days that we can provide substitutes to cover the classrooms or other days that teachers may have planning days.” On this same topic, another principal (IP18) shared:

We have a human resource problem in our district, finding substitutes and that kind of thing. It is really difficult to send a lot of teachers to one particular thing because of the lack of substitutes. We go many days with things uncovered. And if we had more school personnel on a daily basis too, like, for instance, my library. It is closed after 9:30 every

day. My library is literally open from 8:20 to 9:30 every day. If I had more school personnel, then maybe my teachers could have more release time or professional development, or to collaborate with other educators about implementing something.

The third theme that principals shared included parents and other stakeholder groups as well as challenges with addressing student-related needs. One principal (IP14) shared that many barriers to engagement in the professional development process occurred simultaneously:

You get pulled in so many different directions, you've got parents that want to talk to you, you've got a student down the hallway that needs your attention, or you're doing an evaluation, or you've got an email that the community member sent to you about an event that you need to get back to them about. There are endless reasons, the priorities that you have and making sure that you'll do them within a timely manner get in the way of that. I see it all the time how it can be so frustrating, even with myself. I don't do enough as far as getting into the classrooms and asking teachers because I don't have that time.

The challenges of being pulled in a variety of directions was also expressed by this principal (IP9):

Obviously, my job isn't just professional development. I work with kids, I work with parents, I have other hats I wear in the district. My day, as you know, a principal's day is not coming in at eight and leaving at five and having a 30-minute lunch. It's very unpredictable and sometimes even though you have the best intentions and you want to get this PD planned, you're throwing it together at the last minute.

Addressing student-related needs were mentioned as a barrier to further engagement in the professional development process. Principals mentioned that this was necessary and was a priority job function, but it did serve as a significant barrier to focusing on planning and evaluating professional development. A principal (IP6) shared, "Obviously discipline is an issue. I do, yes, I do have an assistant but there are times when both of us are needed in something or there are times when they're double-barrel stacked behind his door and yet you'll deal with that but then an even bigger thing happens."

The fourth theme that emerged as a common barrier among principals was a lack of competence and confidence among administrators when it came to the professional development process. This was often disclosed later in the interview after discussing initial barriers to

professional development planning and evaluation. One principal (IP20) shared, “I think so many times, we try to pretend we're complete experts on different things that we're really not. We know we heard it. We know a little bit about it but we're really not truly experts to be able to teach it and use it.” Another principal (IP19) stated, “I mean you know here I am supposed to lead this group of people and I didn't know much more about the topic than they did and that was extremely intimidating to try to do that.” Another principal (IP14) commented:

When you go to something and you learn about it, your confidence immediately has to-- Whatever you learn in there you have to make sure that you understand it, but the confidence level that you have will be what is presented to your staff, and when you go to present to your staff if your confidence level is not very good they're not going to have much buy into it. I think that's a huge part of the success, and then if you don't know what you're talking about obviously the staff isn't going to be looking into that as well. So if you're not confident about it, it makes it very difficult for them to buy in as well.

One principal weighed the differences between competence and confidence and ultimately decided that one might be more important than the other. This respondent (IP12) said:

Well I think, sometimes, I think you have to have more confidence than competence. I'm thinking because if you are confident enough to ask your people how to do something, that's huge. That's huge and I think a lot of time-I mean I don't think-I don't ever want to be the smartest person in the room, no, because there's always going to be somebody smarter and I also think that leaders need to ask, and sometimes I don't think that happens. I mean it's good that competence is wonderful, it's great, and I think it can lend to a lot of different avenues of thoughts but I don't think that is the be all end all for leadership. I mean you have those people that, and this is going to sound extremely rude but you know they are brilliant, and they've got no social skills so it's not going to work. So they can be the most brilliant person ever but no one is going to follow them because they're lacking all that extra stuff.

There was shared acknowledgement among principals that professional development is not only for teachers, but that administrators should participate too. One principal (IP14) shared:

Just as an administrator I'll just share this information. When the Individual Plan of Study came out, and then the new KESA [State Accreditation model] came out, I feel like within the administrative roles that we all serve it became very overwhelming at first, and just like any teacher it's one of those things you've got to learn it. And so that type of professional development that you have to feed down to teachers like teaching them about Career Cruising, and teaching them what an individual plan of study is, getting that

all professional development done is crucial that the principal does know what is going on. And so that education for our principal I think is very valuable. At the same time I feel like if there would have been some resources or if we could have more opportunities to just navigate that within our own administrative teams, like within our district, I think we could've maybe facilitated it even better. So it's administrators that need professional development as much as the teachers.

The fifth theme that served as a common barrier to principal engagement that was the existing climate and culture of schools. One principal (16) reported:

It takes time to change that culture of professional learning. The importance of sharing out your knowledge with not just your building but building partnerships across multiple elementary schools and that takes some time to change that culture. Sometimes in education, and I don't why this happens, but sometimes that 'professional development' word is like a bad word and people are like 'Ah, I got to go to this' or 'Why?' and their voice isn't heard. In our upcoming professional development day, there are no sessions actually tailored specifically to an art teacher or music teacher or library media specialist. So we're sitting down, going through the schedule, what would benefit them, but benefit the building. That's pretty tough when you have a requirement to be there and attend and then there really isn't a session specifically for that.

Within the climate and culture, some principals shared that a resistance to change among staff can also serve as a specific barrier. A principal (IP17) shared:

I know sometimes we sit and we talk in education that we want to make a change. Just the word technology for some of my staff, that just kind of puts them in a panic as well because they feel like that they're not ready for technology so we take a little tiny step so those are needs that you have to look at. Then, sometimes you just have resistance. You feel like there's a lot of teachers especially the past few years kind of feel beat up on, between budgets and just some changes that have happened in education. So, I think those are some of the things, the barriers that you'd see is definitely change is hard for everyone whether it's first order, second order change.

As a significant part of climate and culture, principals shared that lack of communication and lack of planning and organization served as barriers to engagement in the professional development process. One principal (IP12) shared:

I don't think a lot of leaders know how to communicate their vision, like, they can have an idea but I don't think it's clear. I think sometimes the lack of vision creates a lot of problems. It's hard; it's really hard. You can have as many messages sent out, that does not mean that the people are going to listen you. You know and so I think that, you know, if I figured that out you know I would rule the world but I think a lot of it is

communication, I think you need to be very clear and have to ask follow up questions and sometimes I don't think that takes place.

Regarding the need for an organized approach, another principal (IP11) commented, “We plan the profession development, come up with it, organize it, put it together and to be honest that's usually last minute. It's not a systematic organized approach. And I guess in a perfect world, I would like my leadership team to plan those things or to at least provide some input but they don't even know what they want.” When plans were developed, teachers and administrators expected follow through. When that did not occur, frustration set in which negatively impacted culture and climate. For example, a principal (IP2) shared:

Our professional development committee came up with a strategic plan -- and I wasn't part of it then so I don't know all the ins and outs of it, except I do know that they handed off this plan to our superintendent, and it got filed away somewhere. There were hours and lots of time spent on getting feedback from teachers, filling out surveys, coming up with a plan, and nothing was done with it for whatever reason. And so that kind of put a bad taste in our professional development committee members' mouths, and now they see themselves, or we see ourselves, I guess, as point counters, like a lot of PDCs.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 1. The research question for this section was “What factors or conditions serve as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process?” Three specific questions or prompts were used during a series of interviews with 20 principals to determine themes. Summary statements from each of the interview questions or prompts include:

In a magical world where you could change anything you wanted about professional development, and with no barriers (real or perceived), what would professional development look like in your district?

- Principals shared that the desired state of professional development should promote consistent and timely application of the knowledge and skills gained.
- Principals wanted to provide teachers with more collaboration time and supported the

idea of implementing professional learning communities.

- Principals concurred that a high-quality professional development experiences for teachers should be individualized and that coaching should be provided.
- Principals supported the idea of hands-on professional development and agreed that schedule modifications could allow for teachers to experience more professional development.
- Principals believed that technology, such as video conferencing, should be used to enhance the professional development experience and broaden access to more experts.

In thinking about the ideal or desired state you just described, what are some barriers that keep this from happening? and Tell me about other things that serve as blocks or barriers that keep principals from being more involved in professional development.

- All principals reported that time was a barrier to achieving the previously described desired state of engagement in the professional development process.
- Principals shared that negotiated agreements and existing school schedules are barriers to creating or providing more professional development time for teachers.
- All principals said that money was a barrier to an ideal professional development framework or structure for teachers and limited the ability for principals to engage in the professional development process.
- Principals reported that a lack of money as a barrier resulted in limited quality of professional development presenters, reduced time and opportunities to experience professional development, and substitute teacher costs also impacted the quality and quantity of professional development experiences made available to teachers.
- Principals shared that the lack of availability of substitutes to cover classrooms was a

barrier to teachers attending more professional development.

- Principals said that parent meetings, responding to the needs of stakeholder groups, and various student needs are barriers to their engagement in the professional development process.
- Principals shared that their own lack of competence or confidence in the professional development process limited their engagement level.
- Principals commented that the existing culture and climate of schools served as a barrier to further engagement in the professional development process.
- Principals said that a lack of communication and a lack of planning or organization of professional development served as a barrier.

Research Question 2

Findings. The framework for the interview included ten questions or prompts, each allowing for appropriate follow up discussion as needed. Of the questions or prompts, the following were most closely aligned to the second research question: What resources or supports would lead to increased engagement among principals in the professional development process?

1. Tell me about how your district organizes, plans, and provides professional development for teachers. What is your role as a principal in this?
2. Tell me about how and in what ways you and your administrative team process the effectiveness of the professional development that is offered to teachers.
3. What would be some ideal feedback you would like to hear from teachers that would tell you, "Yes...we were successful with this professional development day!"
4. Tell me about the resources and supports that you have asked for in order to become more involved in the professional development process?

Analysis of the responses was conducted by reviewing the transcriptions of the 20 interviews. First cycle-coding methods were used to identify themes from each interview participant based on their knowledge, experiences, and thoughts regarding each question or prompt. Second cycle-coding methods were then used to find common themes from among all responses from participants and provided the basis for summary findings for this research question.

Tell me about how your district organizes, plans, and provides professional development for teachers. What is your role as a principal in this? Principals shared a variety of responses that ranged from districts being unorganized and unplanned to highly organized and planned when they shared the ways in which their respective districts conducted the professional development process. A common theme for districts that were unorganized included a lack of understanding among leadership regarding the professional development needs of teachers resulting in an ineffective approach to professional development. For districts that reported higher levels of organization, a theme that emerged included principal involvement in the professional development process along with collaboration with the professional development council to effectively plan and deliver professional development.

The first theme of unorganized districts included principals revealing a breakdown in understanding the needs of teachers and providing effective professional development to meet the reported needs. One principal (IP2) shared, “There is still a disconnect whenever it comes to really understanding the needs of or teachers and our students, and providing professional development that meets those needs.” This disconnect was reported by several principals, which was often followed by a statement that professional development days did not seem to have much of a purpose. A respondent (IP2) commented, “It is an event more than a process. Our day's coming up, we need to have something for our PD day. And it is not --overall, I don't -- as

far as the way that teachers see professional development in the district, it is not a meaningful process.” Without a process to understand and meet the needs of teachers through professional development, many principals reported that the result was an ineffective approach. One principal (IP15) said, “When I first got here, it was kind of everybody has their own Professional Development. We kind did of whatever we wanted. Now, we’re doing a little more with strategic kinds of planning.” Some principals also shared that they are not included in the professional development process, which they attributed to the disconnect in understanding the needs of teachers and the resulting ineffective approach. One principal (IP10) shared the planning process that does not involve the principals:

The superintendent meets with his PDC council which I am not a part of, but probably should be really, but it's a teacher representative from each of the levels. There's one elementary, one middle, and one high school teacher that serve on the PDC and they created a survey and sent out to staff to kind of give what the teachers wanted as far as PD for this year. I don't know what was done the previous year for last year, but I know what was done last year for this year. The superintendent leads and will come to us and you know and just share with us what the PDC was kind of leaning towards or a direction they were wanting to go. And I think also you know he asked for our input that he can take to the PDC. Is it perfect? No.

Furthermore, when principals were not directly involved in the professional development process, many reported that the allotted professional development days seemed to be wasted. One principal (IP12) described the outcome of not being included in the process, “Well it has changed a lot since I've been here, this is my seventh year there and before hand, I mean I have been through three Superintendents and two Principals and beforehand, and the Superintendent is the one that would organize it. I think there's a lot of waste. It didn't apply to everybody, it wasn't applicable, it just didn't work.”

In more highly organized situations, two themes that emerged among the responses from principals were that they were directly involved in the professional development process and

they worked with a committee or group to develop a plan that met the needs of teachers. One principal (IP20) provided an explanation of their process, which included principal engagement and the use of a committee to develop a plan:

We have a professional development committee built up of an administrator and three or four teachers. They meet probably once a month or so and discuss needs for setting up the next year's inservice and we've planned for this year already. But if the need arises, we talk about that. I know last year when we were talking, we really hammered hard on NWEA MAP scores. This year, because I think that when we discussed it, there's a lot of teachers that get the data, but we just don't know how to dive on into it and actually analyze and use that to drive instruction. As a district, we felt, elementary-wise, we needed to have more instruction, so we had a representative come from NWEA and present to the elementary. The high school did a couple of other areas. It's one of those that this year, being on the committee, I have a huge hand in, even the plan for next year. We're going to start doing some more breakout sessions. Instead of only having one big group, we're going to have a few more breakout sessions, which that was something I brought up that I thought was very important in our district.

Some principals also reported recent changes to their approach in organizing, planning, and providing professional development. Moving to a structure with more principal engagement, a principal (IP19) discussed an approach that has been effective:

I'd say it's probably a three-pronged approach. The direction that the superintendent wants to see us go, input from the principals of where we see us going per building, and working with the PDC, the professional development committee, and their work in where they want to see us go because they represent staff. So, we'll bring together those three things and try to make a plan for a year integrating them as much as possible and sometimes just going left or going right because the principal, the superintendent, or PDC wants to do something. This year has been a little bit better because after living through it last year, we're better prepared for this year, but I think that and the accreditation changes have given us plenty to look at and work with as well.

Another principal (IP7) reported a recent shift in the district's approach that involved the PDC with more positive results, "This year I see a little bit of a different spin where the PDC has a lot of input asking, seeking, so I feel like it kind of changed that from last year to this year when we're looking at that. You know having building goals and district goals really helps, kind of helps guide the direction that you want to go and so that's helped quite a bit that we've

established that and so I see that happening with it.” Principals shared that higher levels of organization regarding the professional development process also allowed for some flexibility to allow buildings to address unique needs. One principal (IP4) shared that the district plans professional development through the PDC but principals also have time to work with their buildings:

Professional development in our district is primarily governed by our professional development council. However, in that framework, there is always opportunity for building level feedback, which that is where it sprinkles into us, where we focus on -- we have opportunities for that. That can be designed by myself and my teachers, and we can be more focused on what is unique to us and our situation. So again, overarching for us is the district professional development council, and then it works its way to where we do have opportunities that sprinkle into the district's plan at the building level.

As an attribute of a more organized professional development process, one principal (IP13) commented on the importance of teacher choice in the process of planning for professional development, “So, the district allows one day of choice by the teachers, and then if we set what to send them to as an administrator, we also make those recommendations. I try to get every teacher out and even, not just the teachers, but I think it's important for your secretary. I think it's important for your peer educators to also get that professional learning.” Furthermore, some principals reported that they visit individually with staff over the summer to help determine their needs. A principal (IP3) discussed this approach, “Well, over the summer before I got here, I met with all of my teachers, and that was one of the questions that, you know, kind of drove some of our conversations is, ‘What do you want? What do you want in your classroom? What do you want to improve in as we move forward with a new leader, and new ideas, and stuff?’”

Tell me about how and in what ways you and your administrative team process the effectiveness of the professional development that is offered to teachers. A theme that emerged among principals included that their administrative teams do not regularly process the

effectiveness of the professional development that was offered to teachers. Additionally, a theme was that most principals acknowledged that engaging in this process would be beneficial and should be done on a regular basis but there were no resources or procedures in place. A final theme was that principals needed a tool or resource to be able to more regularly process the effectiveness of the professional development that was offered.

Most principals reported that they and their administrative teams do not consistently lead an effort to examine and evaluate the effectiveness of professional development after it was provided to teachers. As a personal practice, one principal (IP17) shared, “Technically, no. I have not done that with my building. I mean, that's a great idea. Of course, like anything else that gets kind of lost in the middle of everything else.” Another principal (IP10) stated, “I don't think that we process it very well. I don't think that's something that we do very well as a district and I know I don't do it very well as the building principal.” One principal chose not to use surveys at all, hoping instead that the information gained through professional development would just be implemented in the classroom. This principal (IP5) said, “We don't do a bunch of surveys. We don't require reflection or anything like that. I don't really care what's written in the reflection if it is not later on used in your classroom.” Regarding the evaluation of professional development as an administrative team practice, a principal (IP15) commented, “I'm not sure. We don't ever process as a group.” Another principal (IP7) shared, “I don't think we're really good at that right now. I mean, I think that's something that we've definitely got to work on.” A third principal (IP1) reflected, “I don't think we have a real great system in place to say we're sure how it went.” Finally, another respondent (IP2) shared that teachers will reflect together, but administrators currently do not formally capture this feedback to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development:

I talk with other teachers just in dialogue, but there is no end-of-day questionnaire that's sent out, or anything like that. I have no doubt that they talk about it, such as: 'So, how do you think that went?' 'Pretty good... nice job' kind of a thing, you know. But as far as any kind of strategic, 'How was it?' or 'Do we need to change things moving forward?' or 'How are we going to use this?' no, we don't.

Other principals shared that while they do not consistently request and collect feedback to evaluate effectiveness, there are staff members who choose to provide some occasionally. One principal (19) shared, "You know, it's a terrible answer. We don't survey staff. Someone comes screaming or someone comes saying, 'Thanks' or 'Hey, great. Appreciate it!' But, both of those people move on down the road and we go on about our day. We don't have a feedback tool for that. So, it's really just what someone feels like telling us." Another principal (IP13) stated, "I don't think we really evaluate it, to be honest with you. I really don't think we sit down and say, 'Hey, was this good or bad?' We just put out a blanket statement, 'How did you like the inservice?' We might get one or two to respond." Another principal (IP4) discussed how teachers will come to administration with feedback, even if a survey was provided:

There are some teachers here that feel comfortable talking to us as administrators. They will be very honest with you and they are not there to, you know, sugarcoat anything. We have done some surveys. When there is something that comes up to where we really wanted their honest opinion, there is a survey, but it does not show what their responses are. I mean, we do get their responses, we just don't know their names. Just a lot of conversation one-on-one and when you have those conversations, you make sure that you don't ask the same people, and you ask other people in other departments, not who you think enjoyed it, or who benefited the greatest, but ask those that maybe sat back there with their arms crossed, were they listening, what is going on.

A second theme that emerged was that most principals acknowledged that engaging in a process to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development was important and would be beneficial. Some principals reported sporadic efforts to move in that direction. One principal (IP3) shared:

I think one of the ways that I try to gauge if it was effective is to just have conversations with the staff. Not just as a group, but individually. And just have that relationship with

the staff where they feel like, 'I can tell you that I thought that really stunk and here is why,' and then I can ask questions about that. Or 'I thought it was fabulous and this is what I want to tell you about the day.' So I think that relationships are really important with gauging whether or not this was a worthy piece of your time. And then also, just being visible in the classroom to see what or if it is being applied.

Another principal (IP4) reported, "In terms of getting feedback, we have been doing it more on a biannual basis through the professional development council, or it's been done administratively and anecdotally. People just talking to one another. It has not necessarily been in a formalized fashion." Some principals also shared that while they send a survey, the information received is not fully utilized on a consistent basis to inform future professional development offerings for individual teachers or groups of teachers. One principal (IP8) shared their progress in collecting feedback from staff, "We really started trying to do this and maybe it was done even more before me but we really tried to start sending out a kind of a survey afterwards. The feedback we've gotten over the past two years has really been pretty positive overall." Another principal (16) commented, "Currently days that are provided as district professional development days, there's a survey at the end of the day that the teachers take. They get to put down specifics about the sessions, specific needs they still have. Ideally that would then be used for the next day or, I mean, our next professional development time or possibly on Wednesday collaboration time." While another principal (IP11) reported attempts at surveys, there was no consistency of receiving feedback from staff, "You know we did it and, I think, what I hear sometimes is just verbal feedback. I'm trying to think, I may have once or twice sent out a SurveyMonkey, you know, to get some feedback, but there's little follow through. I think that comes prior from lack of planning, you know lack of planning and lack of preparation." Finally, a principal (IP9) shared how conversation and observation are used to collect feedback from a few teachers:

I really do a lot of intentional conversations with teachers. If I'm not presenting, I watch them. Are they engaged? Are they on their phones or Facebook or whatever? So I really

watch their engagement level. If they're highly engaged, I want to have those conversations with them, 'I noticed you really were into this PD, what was really good about it?' or 'What got your attention?' On the other hand, if I noticed that they're cutting out things for the bulletin board or whatever, I often say, 'What was it about this PD that didn't strike your attention or you felt like wasn't effective?' A lot of our professional development in this district and this is just, it's really professional development that I've been to across the board, is a lot of stand and deliver. You sit in a chair for two and a half hours while someone talks to you and that's just not an effective way to teach and I just don't think it's an effective way for adults to learn. I think that's the biggest thing that we get for feedback is, 'Just a lot of sitting.' Or 'It's a lot of sitting' and I wish there was a way we can leave that.

A third theme among principals is that they supported the collection of this information and would be more likely to use a survey if they simply had one. One principal (IP14) shared, "We do not have feedback for, specifically, professional development right after it happens. In fact, that's something that I would like, and I think it would help if I just had something."

Another principal (IP6) said:

We don't really, I mean, we talked about it. I've still got a stack from one of our last PDs that I'm going through responses. It was simple. This was after our video. It says, 'What is one thing that you can and will do to help students build resilience after we talk about traumatic situations? I'm still going through them all though we don't do a really good job of determining how effective it is. We talk about it and say, 'Hey, we want to keep this on their forefront,' but for us to just sit down and say, 'Okay, where are we at?' I can't really say that's done all the way across the board because we don't have one form. But if we're going to do professional development, we need to grade it and see how important it is really to be doing and if it's effective because if it's not, you're not going to reach them.

Having a survey to address the needs of newer staff to the profession was also mentioned by a principal (IP5), "Right now, one of our big professional development points in this building, and it is something for us to look at in the future, is we have a lot of new staff, and we are going to get more new staff with our retirement population increasing. So, how we do things and what we take for granted is something that we have been starting to talk about."

What would be some ideal feedback you would like to hear from teachers that would tell you, "Yes...we were successful with this professional development day!" A variety of themes

emerged among the responses from principals reflective of ideal feedback from teachers. These themes included that professional development was a good use of time, there was enthusiasm for the topic, there was more reflection than just “good” or “bad,” there was a commitment to applying what was learned, and there was a benefit to teachers and students.

The first theme regarding ideal feedback from teachers about professional development was that it was a good use of time. A principal (IP15) shared, “Part of it is just, when you hear a teacher say, ‘That’s such a waste of time,’ it becomes really frustrating then to try to put it together the next time. So, nobody wants to do something that teachers don’t find valuable. Nobody is out there trying to waste time.” On feedback received from teachers, another principal (IP11) commented, “You know some keywords will stick out: waste of my time; it was beneficial; I can use this in my classroom tomorrow. You know, those kinds of key terms. Teachers don’t want to sit and get, you know, they want to do. They want to take it and have it be effective for them.” Principals shared that there are challenges with determining immediately if professional development was good use time. As such, some principals shared that providing teachers with time to process and practice is just as beneficial as receiving immediate feedback. For example, one principal (IP4) commented:

Well, I think, first of all, you want people to think it is worthwhile, and you want growth out of that. Sometimes that is a hard one to measure at the end of a day. I think sometimes the that the merit of a professional development experience isn’t really known until you actually kind of work through it. I mean, if you are truly challenging people and their thought processes, which I think sometimes occurs, when there is absorption time where your mind has to actually organize and then determine how you make that work for you, the educator, whatever that role might be.

A second theme that described ideal feedback from teachers was that their comments were enthusiastic, but also would go beyond an indication of “good” or “bad” and provide a specific reflection for immediate or future consideration. As an example of enthusiasm, a

principal (IP3) shared:

That they thought it was a great day, and that they can't wait to get back in their classroom; a sense of renewed energy. When they come and talk to you about, you know, what was really good and I can see it working with this group of students. They are so excited about having SmartBoards, and the kids are excited to use them. So just seeing their excitement and wanting them to be using it in the classroom.

Another principal (IP13) said, "It would be the excitement, the enthusiasm we need to implement this. We need to look further into this. We need to send a team out to get more information. I think with that kind of excitement, that they would want to apply it." Moving beyond pure enthusiasm for professional development, principals shared that ideal feedback is more reflective than just emotion. One principal (IP19) stated:

You know, it wouldn't always have to be positive or that they loved it but at least giving us feedback on, 'This was what I wanted' or 'This was what I needed' or 'This was not what I wanted but here's what I'd like to see in the future.' That's one thing I've asked and I've asked and I've asked and they sometimes just don't answer me about what they want or the answer is that four-letter word 'time' and, well, time for what?

Another principal (IP9) commented, "I want it to be a more of a big idea type thinking, a reflection more than just, 'Yeah, it was okay.' I mean, a five on my little rating scale is great but I need more than that. I need specific feedback and big ideas and those kind of things. If I was in a classroom and I saw implementation of a strategy or a resource used, that's hitting the nail on the head."

A third theme emerged from the responses and focused on how ideal feedback from professional development could or would be applied in the classroom. One principal (IP6) shared:

First of all, it would look like they're just like kids. If you ask them something, if you don't get a lot of feedback either way, it probably wasn't very good. I find that when our professional development hits home is when I may ask a simple question, 'How can you use this in your classroom?' and I'll get half page responses from a bunch of people. To me I'm looking at, "Wow, that's pretty good PD." One way or the other, they were passionate about it. So a very simple question of, 'How can you use this in your

classroom?’ or, ‘Are you willing to use this in your classroom?’

Another principal (IP5) commented, “Ideal is if they use it in the classroom as well. If what you had for a training is being used in the classroom, that would be considered ideal. So something's that is brought back and helped student learning is the primary focus. If you can see that or if you can find that and see that is occurring, that would be what I would consider the ideal professional development.” To confirm that application has occurred, principals shared that follow up was important and observations of application were critical in confirming that the professional development offered was well received. A principal (IP7) said, “They're using it. I think that's the big part and sometimes it's not even just that verbal feedback. I like to just go in and I want to see it in action. I mean, I can be really smooth with my words sometimes but that doesn't mean I am always following through with it. So to me, it's getting out in the classrooms and seeing it actually happen with students.” With a similar mindset, another principal (IP14) commented:

Their feedback would say, ‘I'm using this in my classroom, I used it today; it was awesome.’ I would like the feedback to be a little bit later than when it was actually given like maybe a week or two afterwards, just because I think it all sounds good when you're in the meeting or when you're in the midst of the situation. But the feedback that I would look for would be how they implemented in the classroom. I think it's all at the application level.

Principals revealed a fourth theme that desired feedback from teachers included some benefit to teachers and students when using the knowledge or skills gained through the professional development. One principal (IP17) shared:

Probably one of the first things for me is, ‘Man, I got something from that. I just came straight back and the very next day I was able to try that in the classroom. The kids loved it’ or ‘I could just see the light-bulbs coming on.’ Another thing would be it kind of helps streamline their time and maybe it took something else off their plate. There are just so many things that would be of benefit, if it was a good one. So much professional development is not really beneficial.

Another principal (IP16) commented, “Well, I hope they'd be able to say this session is beneficial in terms of how I can share it with my other colleagues. I could maybe use an instructional strategy that I can implement tomorrow with my students. In regards to specific sessions, don't say the entire day was just good or the entire day was bad.”

Tell me about the resources and supports that you have asked for in order to become more involved in the professional development process? Principals shared the ways that they have requested additional support to improve professional development for teachers and become more engaged in the professional development process. Major themes that emerged with this topic included the addition of a position, like an instructional coach, to support teachers as well as leveraging available community supports and resources.

The first theme was adding a position to support teachers and gather information on future professional development needs. One principal (IP14) shared, “If there would be a position where I could have somebody who I could say, ‘Okay can you go meet with this grade-level? Give me their feedback, tell me what they think and then I can go meet with them or we can discuss this in a bigger scale.’ That would cover a lot of groundwork, and that would be very, very beneficial as administrator.” Even when instructional coaches are available in schools, principals shared that the individuals in these positions were not being fully utilized. One principal (IP6) commented, “I mean, I have an instructional coach and I don't ever see her. She basically does testing and data coordinating. She doesn't get to do instructional coaching because she's busy doing all that other stuff.”

A second theme that emerged from among the interviews with principals was leveraging available community supports and resources. Comments focused on establishing partnerships with local businesses, establishing an educational foundation, more fully utilizing PTO or PTA

groups, more fully utilizing Site Councils, and engaging local parks and recreation commissions. One principal (IP6) discussed an idea of collaborating with local resources to provide student programming so that schools could have more professional development time with teachers, “We've reached out to the local recreation commission and they're looking at offering our kids to get bussed down there for free and do some after-school programs.” Principals also discussed having strategic opportunities to engage parents and the community in building and sharing short-term and long-term goals through a strategic planning process. One principal (IP3) shared a recent experience of creating and implementing a strategic plan, “And that strategic plan included staff, students, community members, and board members. So everybody kind of came to the table and said, ‘What do we want to--what are our goals for the district over the course of the next five years?’”

When principals were asked the question directly regarding the need for additional resources and supports to be more engaged in the professional development process, a few additional themes surfaced, which included the use technology to remove barriers, establishing professional learning networks, and collecting additional data. A few principals shared that having access to more experts through technology would increase teacher engagement and remove the barriers of time and money to send teachers to professional development events. A principal (IP7) stated, “I think with the technology that we have at our hands nowadays there's really not that many barriers. We used to say, ‘Well, time and travel and money and all that could be issues and so I look at, you know, using some technology on how we could set up maybe tiers of different levels of learning that teachers have identified they need support in.” To increase principal engagement in the professional development process, principals also discussed

ideas to have staff develop professional learning networks. A principal (IP7) encouraged staff to develop professional learning networks and commented:

We've just started. We're doing the book *The Young Kids Deserve It* and so we're just really talking about how to get off your island and we've really had this conversation so I think it's finding something like a book or something that you can pull your whole staff together with and have a team concentration that from there have them talk about what they're needs are and then try the individualize that professional development.

A final theme regarding resources and supports that emerged among a few principals was access to additional assessments and data sources for teachers. By providing additional data sources on student achievement and aptitude, principals thought that these measures might inform future professional development offerings and help buildings focus on improvement strategies. One principal (IP2) shared:

I think if they had more access to data and had more of a background in understanding of how to read data and make a strategic plan, that would be good. At our district right now, we have state assessments at 7-12. And that's basically it as far as standardized data that we get; that is pretty much it. We have no AIMSweb, no MAP scores, no kinds of test like that, that would be a dipstick for us to be able to use formatively.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 2. The research question for this section was “What resources or supports would lead to increased engagement among principals in the professional development process?” Four specific questions or prompts were used during a series of interviews with 20 principals to determine themes. Summary statements from each of the interview questions or prompts include:

Tell me about how your district organizes, plans, and provides professional development for teachers. What is your role as a principal in this?

- Principals reported that their districts are either unorganized or organized regarding the professional development process.
- In unorganized districts, principals shared that there was a disconnect between teachers

and administrators in understanding individual and collective professional development needs.

- In unorganized districts, principals reported that the approach to, and delivery of, professional development was often last minute and ineffective.
- In organized districts, principals said that they were directly involved in the professional development process.
- In organized districts, principals shared that they had a professional development plan that was created with teacher input, such as a professional development council.

Tell me about how and in what ways you and your administrative team process the effectiveness of the professional development that is offered to teachers.

- Principals indicated that they do not regularly process effectiveness of the professional development that is provided for teachers.
- Principals acknowledged that engaging in the process of evaluating the effectiveness of professional development would be beneficial.
- Principals shared that having access to a tool, survey, or other resource would be helpful to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development.

What would be some ideal feedback you would like to hear from teachers that would tell you,

"Yes...we were successful with this professional development day!"

- Principals shared that ideal feedback would include an indication from teachers that the professional development was a good use of their time.
- Principals reported that ideal feedback would be enthusiastic but also more reflective than just a statement that was positive or negative.
- Principals indicated that ideal professional development feedback would mention an

intent to apply what was learning, either immediately or delayed.

- Principals said that ideal feedback from professional development would indicate an educational or instructional benefit to teachers and students.

Tell me about the resources and supports that you have asked for in order to become more involved in the professional development process?

- Principals shared that they have asked for, or wanted to ask for, the addition of a position to specifically support teachers and gather additional professional development information, such as an instructional coach.
- Principals shared that an additional position would provide opportunities for them to become more engaged in the professional development process because principals could work directly with the instructional coach, which was more efficient than working with each staff member to determine professional development needs.
- Principals reported that they have utilized community support and resources.
- Principals commented on the use of technology, the development of professional learning networks, and the acquisition of additional data as requested resources and supports to help them further engage in the professional development process.

Research Question 3

Findings. The framework for the interview included ten questions or prompts, each allowing for appropriate follow up discussion as needed. Of the questions or prompts, the following were most closely aligned to the third research question: Do building principals accept professional development planning and evaluation as one their primary responsibilities?

1. Is professional development a job responsibility that principals enjoy in your district?
2. If your only role was planning professional development for teachers, how would you go

about finding out exactly what each person needs and then determine the common needs and unique needs?

3. With the desired state in mind, should principals be the ones leading professional development efforts in their buildings?

Analysis of the responses was conducted by reviewing the transcriptions of the 20 interviews. First cycle-coding methods were used to identify themes from each interview participant based on their knowledge, experiences, and thoughts regarding each question or prompt. Second cycle-coding methods were then used to find common themes from among all responses from participants and provided the basis for summary findings for this research question.

Is professional development a job responsibility that principals enjoy in your district?

Principals shared their experiences with the professional development process and provided insights into what provides enjoyment and what takes away from it. When principals responded that professional development is an enjoyable job responsibility, the positive attributes that emerged as themes included that there is: a passion or interest in curriculum and instruction; comfort level and confidence; and a focus on growth. When principals responded that professional development is not an enjoyable job responsibility, the negative attributes that emerged as themes included that it is stressful, burdensome, and intimidating.

The first theme among the positive attributes of professional development planning and evaluation as a job responsibility included a passion or interest among principals in curriculum and instruction. One principal (IP18) shared:

I enjoy it for myself as well as my teachers. I think they enjoy it. It is very important. If you were to ask me, if they rated it on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the most important, I would say, 9, you know, 9 to 10. I just really want my teachers to be updated on the most current trends, and I think that it refreshes them and excites them when they get to go out and learn from others. They come back excited, they report out, and they share ideas.

In addition to when curriculum and instruction are interest areas, one principal (IP15) reported that professional development was enjoyable when there was also an identified direction or purpose, "I think that's a very individual thing because curriculum has always been my interest. I think when you have a direction, it becomes a little more enjoyable. So when I knew what we were looking for was math, we did math."

Other principals shared their passion for the professional development process and viewed this job responsibility as a critical function of their role. For example, this principal (IP9) said:

If it were up to me, I would still want to have a hand in the PD because that's a passion of mine. That's one of the reasons why I became a principal. I really wanted to work with teachers in that capacity. Now, I know other principals who are like, give it to the curriculum director, that's what they're for. For me, in my mindset, I still want that responsibility; I want to have that. That's how I feel connected to my teachers and to my kids. If I don't have anything to say about what's happening professionally, I feel like I'm just kind of on this island and who cares about what decisions I make or if I'm not involved in it that way.

A few principals reported growing into the role over time. One interview participant (IP8) stated:

I would say when I first started as a principal, it was one of most intimidating pieces just of what we do. I would say I definitely value it. I definitely want it to be meaningful and I would say even more so this year than my first year. I even take more time and make sure try to plan, 'Okay, what do we need to get out of this time?' and 'What needs to be done?' I let teachers have their own say in it and what they can do so it's valuable to them."

Another principal (IP4) shared, "I suppose the older I get, the more I value professional development, and especially in regard to the impact that it can have. So no, it is not enjoyable work, but yet it is rewarding on the back end of that to see the growth of educators. If you are impacting students and you can see data, it feels good about how it impacts kids."

Even though most principals expressed a passion or interest in the professional

development process, a few acknowledged that time presented a challenge. One principal (IP3) said, “Well, I guess I am just weird, but I love it because I like to learn new things. But the part that stresses me out is finding the time not only to provide good professional development, but then allowing your teachers to go in and apply what they have learned.” Another principal (IP16) reported, “It is a role that I value. That's the vision for a building principal; it is having that hat as an instructional leader. The time that is allocated towards it seems to, unfortunately, be decreasing over the past five or six years compared to twenty years ago.

A second theme regarding professional development as a job responsibility for principals was that an established comfort level and confidence in this work made for a generally positive experience. One principal (IP14) reported:

I think it's a comfort level; it has to do a lot with their comfort level. I personally enjoy it, and I know there's been administrators that I've had to work with that just totally stay away from it like the curriculum area is kind of foreign. Maybe they're not well-versed on what the State is asking or maybe they're not into what the subject matter is that we're focusing on. Sometimes I think it is a difficult task because it's one more thing they have to learn; it's one more thing they have to go to professional development themselves for. As an administrator you're kind of spread thin, so sometimes it's just prioritizing what's important but as an administrator I think if I didn't have a role in it, I don't think I'd have the buy-in with my staff.

Principals shared that comfort and confidence also played a role when they were the one actually delivering professional development to teachers. One principal (IP3), said, “I don't mind delivering it if I feel like I know what I am delivering. You know, I have to have a comfort level, just like the teachers do. I don't mind planning it because I think as an administrative team we have to know what our teachers need.”

The third theme that emerged was that when principals were growth-focused, they enjoyed professional development as a job responsibility. Some principals shared that they enjoyed participating in, and leading, a process that provided opportunities for teachers to grow

in their practices. Additionally, principals reported that engagement in this process created opportunities to build relationships with teachers. A principal (IP5) shared, “You know, professional development is very important just for the fact that you being able to sit down and have professional conversations with teachers without the hustle and the bustle of daily school life.” In addition to supporting the growth of staff, principals recognized that their involvement in the professional development process also supported their own growth. A principal (IP9) commented:

Well, since it's just me and one other principal, I would say I enjoy it greatly. My first master's degree was in curriculum and instruction so I really, really enjoy getting in to that side of teaching, really getting into quality instruction, quality curriculum, how to support learning through materials and engagement. So yes, that's something that I look forward to. I actually ask to go to things often so that I can work on my own PD goals and those kind of things as well. So yeah, I enjoy it a lot.

The first negative attribute that emerged as a theme was the stress or burden the professional development process placed on principals. Principals specifically shared that it took a significant amount of time to effectively plan and organize professional development days. On their respective lists of job responsibilities, these principals indicated that professional development was near the bottom. One principal (IP19) shared:

I would say unfortunately it's last. Enjoyment is tough because I don't feel like I can really jump in and teach because in some cases if we're having professional development on our new textbook, I'm hiring or finding professionals that know that textbook. I'm doing the behind-the-scenes work. I don't really get to teach like I used to or even if it's adults. I'm not teaching. The planning of it, it seems like it happens after everyone's gone 6 o'clock at night. You know, it's not in a usual workday setting. I don't have the peace of sitting at a desk and making it happen and being creative. It sometimes happens more on the fly. I understand its importance, but I'm going to go back and saying the time, the freedom to be creative with it is minimal and that makes it stressful. You don't just pull quality professional learning out of a drawer, you know, out of a file because you did it last year. It is important in the school system but it ranks low in my enjoyment.

Other principals shared that because of district size and fewer staff to assist in planning and delivering professional development, there were limits on variety. In these cases, principals then

coordinated and scheduled outside consultants to come in, when the preference was to use existing staff within districts. One principal (IP20) commented:

For me, I think it would be sometimes a burden because we're a very small district. There are times that when you have one big professional development meeting for the whole district, you have some experts or lead teachers come in for the whole day, and we need to offer a variety. It's like going in a restaurant and everybody's going to eat chicken and not everybody likes chicken. We need to use our abilities as educators and use our lead teachers more to do some breakout sessions.

The second theme among principals that made professional development a job responsibility not enjoyable was that it was intimidating. Some principals reported discomfort with presenting professional development to staff and preferred that this not be a part of the role of principal. Principals shared that a lack of knowledge and skills contributed to this feeling of intimidation. A principal (IP1) shared:

I don't think that it's something that they would ever categorize as something they enjoy. So, that's something that we're trying to change as this area is more of a focus here that you should be an instructional leader. I think that's made the principals uncomfortable because I haven't had to take that role before and so that's part of what I see as my responsibility is to help them feel like we're building tools for their toolbox so that they do feel comfortable standing in front of their staff presenting and having the knowledge and the skills to do that.

A few principals shared that their training and experiences in the role were mostly managerial and that others led the curriculum, instruction, and professional development initiatives in the district. One principal (IP17) stated, "I will be the first to admit, I am more of a manager than a curriculum person. I would do it but it is not going to be the quality that she brings."

If your only role was planning professional development for teachers, how would you go about finding out exactly what each person needs and then determine the common needs and unique needs? Principals shared a variety of ideas, given the freedom a single-purpose position would have. Themes that emerged from among the responses included: alignment of professional development to the school's vision and continuous improvement plan; observing

teachers and using surveys to help determine needs; building relationships with staff; and networking with others in similar positions.

The first theme was that principals would align individual and collective professional development plans to existing school vision statements and goals. There were several comments that planning for professional development was difficult given that so many different needs existed among teachers. Therefore, beginning with existing district and school initiatives provided a starting point for principals. One principal (IP16) shared:

I would start at the beginning of the year. I think it's very important that those beginning days, you know, three, four, five days before the school year starts, be devoted to professional learning and to that specific vision, a building's vision or how it was aligned to the district's vision. I feel every one of those days should be devoted to professional learning or to the topics that are aligned to your building goals and district goals.

Other principals commented on the need to have a plan to guide the professional development initiative. A principal (IP7) stated:

I think the real world would be nice if we could just concentrate on having a plan. I think that's why sometimes professional development gets diluted because you're working on so many other things and all of a sudden it was like, 'Oh hey, November 6th is coming up. What are we going to do that day?' You don't want to plan that way so kind of go and back to your district goals. From there laying out a good solid plan and then that evaluation and monitor piece has to come in. So making sure we meeting our goals. If it's not working, was there some kind of outlier that we missed? And do we need to bring something else since so you can kind of change that plan?

A second theme among principals was to determine the individual and collective professional development needs of staff through classroom observations and the use of surveys. This was important to principals, as they wanted to avoid making assumptions and collect more information before developing a professional development plan or goals. One principal (IP15) shared, "I would want to go out and see what other people have done. Definitely visit the classrooms. Visit with teachers. Just truly watch and observe." Another principal (IP12) said, "A lot of observing, a lot of meetings, a lot of shadowing I think. Seeing if they know their

content, honestly. I would do a lot of communication, a lot of interpersonal communication.” A principal (IP6) stated:

Well, the first thing I would do is start very early in the year and set expectations of how are you going to gauge involvement, how are you going to get your classroom to follow rules, your basic simple stuff, and you just have to get in there and get in the classroom and you've got to watch and you have to observe, and you have to build that relationship with your teachers that, “Hey, I'm here to help. I'm not here to catch you doing something wrong or whatever.

Regarding the use of a survey to collect this information, a principal (IP9) shared:

I think I would do the same thing any good teacher would do. I would interview my teachers. I would send out either electronic forms or talk to them, ‘What are your interests? Where are you willing to teach with us? What are some things that you really wish you had time to do? What are some things you're struggling with in curriculum? What are some things in management that you need help with or you're wondering about?’ So really having those intentional conversations would be the first step into finding out what we needed to bring forward for PD.

Another principal (IP4) commented on the use of a survey, followed by a conversation to determine the needs of teachers, “So I would like to get a survey, then pull it together, sit down, and I think it is a face-to-face conversation in a perfect world. Sometimes that is very difficult in a bigger facility, but it would be great to know what makes people tick, what makes people better, and give it to them or send them out and give them that opportunity to experience and explore.”

The third theme that emerged from the responses was that principals would take the time to build relationships with staff in order to further determine their individual and collective needs. This was important to principals so that a line of communication could be established and trust could be built over time that they were a source of support, not just evaluation. One principal (IP14) shared:

I think when you really have good relationships with those individuals and you're able to really go into the classrooms and see what they're using and what they're not using, and as far as technology or what they're using as far as resources and books, you can really

see, 'Okay this is what we have, maybe we can see what's available within this area.' And open up those conversations, so you're not a threat to them in any way but they really feel you are a resource.

Another principal (IP1) commented:

I think I would need to gather a lot of information. One thing that would probably do is I'd wanted to know what type of learner that each person is, that's powerful. It could be really short survey but through a series of questions you know that someone's already created and validated, you know here's the type of learner, here's what works best for me. I also would sit down with each team of teachers and talk about where they are as a team on their level and what they felt like would benefit their team most. I'd meet with all the building leadership teams and kind of talk about the culture and climate of their school and what has historically been frustrating for teachers about PD and then what they think would be a good way to move forward or ways to really engage people.

The fourth theme in this ideal scenario was networking with others in similar positions to observe their practices and then apply those practices where appropriate in their districts.

Principals commented that even though they had the freedom in this ideal scenario, some of them would still want to network with similar colleagues as a first move. One principal (IP10) shared:

The first thing I would do would be lean on former curriculum directors that I have looked up to and value their knowledge and I would ask them how they went about or currently how do they go about getting constructive feedback from staff as to the needs. I would also have each of the building principals put that on their site council agenda to get a perception from the community. Are we going to do exactly what the parents say? No, but I think it's good to know their perception, their opinions, and if their opinions match what the survey comes back from staff then that's obviously something that we really need.

Another principal (IP2) said, "I would probably make several visits to several other districts to find out what people in my similar position have done, what's worked and what hasn't, and steal from them."

With the desired state in mind, should principals be the ones leading professional development efforts in their buildings? The responses from principals began with either a "yes" or "no." After these general responses, several principals provided insights into reasons that principals should, or should not, lead profession development efforts within their own buildings.

Themes that emerged among the interview participants for reasons that principals should be the ones leading the professional development process included accountability and staff buy-in as well as modeling continuous learning. Only a few principals shared concerns with designating the principal as the one that should lead the professional development process in a building.

The first theme among principal responses that affirmed their role in leading the professional development process was accountability and staff buy-in. Principals shared that, ultimately, someone had to be responsible to develop and implement a professional development plan for staff. As such, most principals concurred that it should be them for accountability purposes. One principal (IP1) shared, “I think the principal has been the expectation just because that's a person that district administration can hold responsible.” Regarding staff buy-in, many principals viewed themselves as instructional leaders and wanted to be a good model and resource for their teachers. A principal (IP16) said:

I definitely think it is a priority for principals and it should not be given away. I think when it is given away then staff will lose that buy-in, and it does not become as viable to the building and my vision as a principal in being that instructional leader. If I am that instructional leader but I am not a part of the professional development process, there's a disconnect between what's happening in the building, what I'm seeing, and what's being presented.

Principals also shared the importance of staff buy-in as it related to being visible in classrooms to better understand the challenges of students and teachers. A principal (IP14) stated:

I do believe they need to have a role in it because they're in the classrooms and that instruction is the key to how successful those teachers are. Teachers have to be evaluated in their professional development as well. So if they don't have buy-in with knowing that administration is knowledgeable and knows what's going on I think you're just passing the buck and you're really not valuing what the teachers are doing in the classroom as well.

The second theme that emerged regarding the principal's role in leading professional development efforts was modeling continuous learning. Principals shared that their role required

profession development as well. By participating in the professional development process and in specific professional development sessions, workshops, and conferences, principals commented that this helped them to serve as a model for their teachers. One principal (IP9) remarked, “I go to many conferences on professional learning. I’m on many social media professional learning groups. I try to keep abreast of this information and bring things back for them to learn and then we can implement those if the team feels like it’s something that we want the district to learn about.” Principals also shared that while they helped to model participation in professional development, improvement of the school district through professional development was a team effort involving other administrators. A principal (IP7) stated, “Yes. I mean it definitely feels like we have a role but it’s like with anything that I do, you just can’t have one person that’s leading that piece of it. I think I’m the lead learner. I think it takes people who have interest but I definitely feel, yes, the superintendent and the building administrators have an important role but you’re not the only person driving that ship.”

There were a few principals who shared that perhaps the principal was not the one to be leading professional development efforts in their buildings. Principals who shared this indicated that knowledge and skills with professional development planning and evaluation were lacking and that other individuals or groups should lead this important initiative. A principal (IP1) commented:

While I think the best thing to do would be to have principals that have a desire for leading professional development, I think it depends on what’s in the principal’s tool bag. Not every principal is going to be effective in doing that. And if you have got that type of principal, find somebody else that would be. I would like for our district to lean more on our professional development committee because we have got people in there that really know what is going on in our buildings and really know the needs.

A few principals shared that their training and coursework to become a principal dealt more with managerial aspects of the position over curriculum, instruction, and professional development.

As such, this impacted their comfort level in serving in the role as an instructional leader. One principal (17) said:

You know I think, to be honest, I think part of it just has to be my own chemical make up of myself. I want to be able to knock this off, this off, this off, and this off, and get it out of the way to make sure nothing happens. If I am spending all my time doing that, then the curriculum stuff is not going to happen. I would personally rather do the management kind of stuff. Maybe I just personally don't even feel as comfortable with the curriculum, not trying to make excuses. And I do remember looking back over my masters degree and I struggled to recall any type of the class that really dealt with managing the curriculum in the building. I struggle with the profession calling us instructional leaders when I hate to guess what the percent of time we actually have to do that is.

Summary of Results and Findings for Research Question 3. The research question for this section was “Do building principals accept professional development planning and evaluation as one their primary responsibilities?” Three specific questions or prompts were used during a series of interviews with 20 principals to determine themes. Summary statements from each of the interview questions or prompts include:

Is professional development a job responsibility that principals enjoy in your district?

- Principals responded either “yes” or “no” to this question and then provided clarifying statements. Most principals answered “yes.”
- When the answer was “yes,” principals shared that there was a passion or interest in curriculum and instruction. Principals also indicated that there was a comfort level or degree of confidence in accepting this responsibility. Finally, principals wanted to experience their own growth.
- When the answer was “no,” principals indicated that the responsibility of professional development was perceived by principals as stressful, a burden, and was intimidating.

If your only role was planning professional development for teachers, how would you go about finding out exactly what each person needs and then determine the common needs and unique

needs?

- Principals shared that they would align professional development initiatives to the school or district vision and ensure that a professional development plan was in place.
- Principals said that they would observe teacher and use surveys to gather and understand the individual and collective needs of staff.
- Principals commented that they would work to build relationships with staff to ease and streamline communication regarding professional development needs.
- Principals stated that they would network with others in similar positions to discuss ways to determine professional development needs.

With the desired state in mind, should principals be the ones leading professional development efforts in their buildings?

- Principals responded either “yes” or “no” to this question.
- When the answer was “yes,” principals shared that leading professional development in their buildings ensured accountability and promoted staff buy-in.
- When the answer was “yes,” principals reported that by leading these efforts, they were modeling continuous learning for staff.
- When the answer was “no,” principals said that they were managers and not instructional leaders.

Chapter Summary

This study used a qualitative approach to examine principal engagement in the professional development process throughout a large geographic area in the Midwest. For the purpose of this study, the professional development process included the identification of the professional learning needs of teachers on an ongoing and annual basis and the evaluation of the

effectiveness of the professional development that has been provided. This study yielded insights into identifying and reducing or eliminating common barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process, thus providing opportunities for principals to engage meaningfully and more effectively in the future. Twenty principals were purposefully sampled for an interview from among 249 participants in a larger-scale survey. The survey and interviews provided data for addressing the following research questions:

1. What factors or conditions serve as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process?
2. What resources or supports would lead to increased engagement among principals in the professional development process?
3. Do building principals accept professional development planning and evaluation as one their primary responsibilities?

An interview protocol was developed and used to examine each research question, and the common themes that emerged from the responses among principals are as follows:

- All principals reported that a lack of time and money were barriers to achieving the desired state of principal engagement in the professional development process.
- Negotiated agreements and existing school schedules were barriers to creating or providing more professional development time for teachers. Parent meetings, responding to the needs of stakeholder groups, and various student needs were necessary but were also time-related barriers to principal engagement.
- Lack of money as a barrier resulted in limiting the quality of professional development presenters, reducing time and opportunities for teachers to experience professional development, and limited the use of substitute teachers to allow for professional leave.

- Principals shared that their own lack of competence or confidence in the professional development process limited their engagement level.
- Lack of communication, a lack of planning or organization, and existing school climate and culture were barriers to engagement in the professional development process.
- Use of teacher observations and surveys assisted in gathering and understanding the individual and collective professional development needs of staff.
- Building relationships with staff eased and streamlined communication regarding individual and collective professional development needs. Networking with others in similar positions would allow principals to discuss ways to determine professional development needs.
- The consistent use of a survey after professional development activities would benefit principals by more regularly processing and evaluating the effectiveness of the professional development that is provided for teachers.
- More collaboration time was needed in schools for the implementation of professional learning communities and to promote consistent and timely application of the knowledge and skills gained.
- High-quality professional development experiences for teachers should be individualized, provide hands-on experiences, utilize technology to increase access to experts, provide an educational or instructional benefit to teachers and students.
- Effective professional development plans are aligned to school or district goals and the vision.
- The addition of an instructional coach position supported teachers and helped principals determine additional professional development needs and informed planning.

- Additional resources and supports included utilizing available community-based resources, establishing professional learning networks, and acquiring additional data sources to further analyze student performance and determine professional development needs.
- Most principals enjoyed and accepted the responsibility of professional development as a part of their role and are directly involved in the professional development planning with input from teachers and teacher groups.
- Principals who enjoyed and accepted professional development as a job responsibility indicated that there was a passion or interest in curriculum and instruction, a desire for their own professional growth, and a comfort level or degree of confidence in this work.
- Principals who did not enjoy or accept the responsibility of professional development viewed it as stressful, a burden, and intimidating. They believe their role was to manage.
- Principals who led professional development in their buildings viewed their role as being accountable, promoting staff buy-in, and modeling continuous learning for their teachers.

Examining the comments, recommendations, and themes from the interview participants informed the implications for practice that are explored in the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Study Overview

This problem of practice examined the observation of generally low engagement levels among principals in the professional development process over a recent five-year period across several school districts throughout a large region in the Midwest. For the purpose of this study, the professional development process included the identification of the professional learning needs of teachers on an ongoing and annual basis and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the professional development that has been provided. This study used a qualitative approach to examine principal engagement in the professional development process throughout a large geographic area in the Midwest. This study yielded insights into identifying and reducing or eliminating common barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process, thus providing opportunities for principals to engage meaningfully and more effectively in the future. Twenty principals were purposefully sampled for an interview from among 249 participants in a larger-scale survey. The research questions for this study were:

1. What factors or conditions serve as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process?
2. What resources or supports would lead to increased engagement among principals in the professional development process?
3. Do building principals accept professional development planning and evaluation as one of their primary responsibilities?

Limitations

During this study, I had the unique opportunity to observe and participate within the teaching and learning environments of the 112 school systems of the school improvement

consortium. As such, I conducted this study as both the researcher and as a frequently involved practitioner. Regarding this dual role of researcher and practitioner, Herr and Anderson (2005) share that the degree to which researchers position themselves as insiders determines how a researcher will frame epistemological, methodological, and ethical issues in the dissertation. While this could have created limitations on the impact or significance of this research, every attempt was made throughout this study to minimize any possible limitations. For example, I purposefully approached the interview process with each of the 20 principals seeking to understand who they were as individuals and professionals, even if I already knew them as an insider. Additionally, I developed questions and prompts to learn more about their roles as principals and stepped through the interview process with them as we discussed the actual and desired states of the professional development process.

While the survey for this study was made available to 492 key leaders throughout the 112 school systems throughout a large geographic area in the Midwest, interview participation and representation of the larger population was limited through purposeful sampling. As such, the scale and scope, and the applicability of this research to other geographic regions, was somewhat limited. Therefore, the results and conclusions had inferential limitations but were reflective of the research questions and the specific context of this problem of practice.

The trustworthiness processes and procedures that were used in this study ensured that the information collected from participants through the survey and interviews provided meaningful and actionable results and conclusions throughout the region of interest. Methods to ensure trustworthiness of this study were based on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985), which included prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing, member checks, and audit trail. Prolonged engagement occurred throughout the interview process where follow up questions or

prompts were provided to seek clarification on one or more participant responses. Additionally, close to one hour was allocated with each participant providing adequate time and attention to fully capture his or her professional context and further understand engagement levels in the professional development process. Triangulation was present during the survey process through the participation of superintendents, curriculum directors or curriculum specialists, principals, and teacher leaders. Intentionally including these roles helped to inform the purposeful sampling process of selecting 20 principals as interview participants. Peer debriefing provided feedback regarding the data collection methods and data analysis for this study. I work with a team of experienced and passionate educators, and we would visit frequently about this research study and what themes were beginning to appear, which informed some next steps as a service-focused organization for our consortium of 112 school systems. As needed, member checks strengthened trustworthiness by sharing interview transcripts with the interview participants to verify accuracy of the collection and interpretation of their comments and experiences. Lastly, an audit trail was utilized to provide a digital record of the processes, procedures, and products that originated as a result of this study. Examples included interview recordings, interview transcripts, field notes, and the results of analyzed data and documentation.

Summary of Results and Findings

The last chapter included an analysis of the collected data to address the three research questions. This study used a qualitative approach to examine principal engagement in the professional development process throughout a large geographic area in the Midwest. Twenty principals were purposefully sampled for an interview from among 249 participants in a larger-scale survey. An interview protocol was developed and used to examine each research question. First cycle-coding methods were used to identify themes from each interview participant based

on their knowledge, experiences, and thoughts regarding each question or prompt. Second cycle-coding methods were then used to find common themes from among all responses from participants and provided the basis for summary findings for the three research questions. Seventeen statements summarized the common themes that emerged from the responses among principals:

- All principals reported that a lack of time and money were barriers to achieving the desired state of principal engagement in the professional development process.
- Negotiated agreements and existing school schedules were barriers to creating or providing more professional development time for teachers. Parent meetings, responding to the needs of stakeholder groups, and various student needs were necessary but were also time-related barriers to principal engagement.
- Lack of money as a barrier resulted in limiting the quality of professional development presenters, reducing time and opportunities for teachers to experience professional development, and limited the use of substitute teachers to allow for professional leave.
- Principals shared that their own lack of competence or confidence in the professional development process limited their engagement level.
- Lack of communication, a lack of planning or organization, and existing school climate and culture were barriers to engagement in the professional development process.
- Use of teacher observations and surveys assisted in gathering and understanding the individual and collective professional development needs of staff.
- Building relationships with staff eased and streamlined communication regarding individual and collective professional development needs. Networking with others in similar positions would allow principals to discuss ways to determine professional

development needs.

- The consistent use of a survey after professional development activities would benefit principals by more regularly processing and evaluating the effectiveness of the professional development that is provided for teachers.
- More collaboration time was needed in schools for the implementation of professional learning communities and to promote consistent and timely application of the knowledge and skills gained.
- Higher quality professional development experiences for teachers should be individualized, provide hands-on experiences, utilize technology to increase access to experts, provide an educational or instructional benefit to teachers and students.
- Effective professional development plans are aligned to school or district goals and the vision.
- The addition of an instructional coach position supported teachers and helped principals determine additional professional development needs and informed planning.
- Additional resources and supports included utilizing available community-based resources, establishing professional learning networks, and acquiring additional data sources to further analyze student performance and determine professional development needs.
- Most principals enjoyed and accepted the responsibility of professional development as a part of their role and are directly involved in the professional development planning with input from teachers and teacher groups.
- Principals who enjoyed and accepted professional development as a job responsibility indicated that there was a passion or interest in curriculum and instruction, a desire for

their own professional growth, and a comfort level or degree of confidence in this work.

- Principals who did not enjoy or accept the responsibility of professional development viewed it as stressful, a burden, and intimidating. They believe their role was to manage.
- Principals who led professional development in their buildings viewed their role as being accountable, promoting staff buy-in, and modeling continuous learning for their teachers.

Examining the comments, recommendations, and themes from the interview participants informed the recommendations for practice.

Recommendations for Practice

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that served as barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process and identify what resources or supports were needed to increase engagement levels. Through a survey and 20 interviews with purposefully selected principals, themes emerged through questions and prompts aligned to three specific research questions that examined barriers to principal engagement and resources and supports needed to increase principal engagement. Concepts that emerged from the literature review that informed this study included social cognitive theory, efficacy, academic optimism, characteristics of quality or effective professional development, and the impact of leadership on professional development. These concepts served as the foundation for the following recommendations: Help principals grow as instructional leaders; provide more resources and supports for principals; and create time for effective teacher collaboration.

Help Principals Grow as Instructional Leaders

Responses from the survey and interviews indicated that principals would benefit from intentional professional development on instructional leadership. The data in this research study indicated that principals who did not enjoy or accept the responsibility of

professional development viewed it as stressful, a burden, and intimidating; they believed their role was to manage. They also shared that their own lack of competence or confidence in the professional development process limited their engagement level. With the desired state of high engagement among principals in the professional development process and the actual state of low engagement among some principals who avoided the job functions of instructional leaders, social cognitive theory helps to explain the gap. Pajares (1996) states, “People engage in tasks in which they feel competent and confident and avoid those in which they do not” (p. 544). Given this statement, social cognitive theory speaks to the actual state of low engagement among principals. Simply put, to engage or not engage is a choice that is driven by both competency and confidence levels. As such, if levels of competence and confidence were low in the area of instructional leadership, then principals avoided such responsibilities and tasks like the planning and evaluation within professional development process. However, if levels of competence and confidence were high, then principals were more likely engage in the work to effectively plan and evaluate professional learning. In fact, principals who led professional development in their buildings reported that this role held them accountable, promoted staff buy-in, and allowed them to model continuous learning for their teachers. Helping principals grow as instructional leaders includes the following recommendations:

- Provide professional development for principals that includes curriculum frameworks, effective instructional methods, observation and feedback protocols, assessment administration and the evaluation of results.
- Provide professional development for principals that includes theories and practices to maximize adult learning. Additionally, provide opportunities to learn

about professional development practices, frameworks, and evaluation methods to build their efficacy and capacity to lead these initiatives in their respective schools.

- Align school and district professional development plans with school and district goals and vision statements, respectively.
- Facilitate and provide higher quality professional development experiences for teachers that are individualized to meet their needs through hands-on experiences and encouraging technology use to increase access to colleagues and experts.
- Monitor and address school culture and climate issues regarding professional development through enhanced communication and thoughtful, collaborative planning and organization of professional development activities.
- Actively participate in opportunities to network with others in similar positions to discuss additional and different ways to serve as an instructional leader.

Provide More Resources and Supports for Principals

Principals reported that they needed more resources and supports to further engage in the professional development process. Specifically, principals would benefit from resources on determining the individual and collective professional development needs of teachers and methods to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development that has been provided. Having principals understand and accurately respond to, and provide for, the needs of teachers fosters collective efficacy. These concepts are part of a larger construct known as academic optimism, and principals play a critical role through higher levels engagement in the professional development process. Hoy et al. (2006) state:

Our conception of academic optimism includes both cognitive and affective (emotional) dimensions and adds a behavioral element. Collective efficacy is a group belief or

expectation; it is *cognitive*. Faculty trust in parents and students is an *affective* response. Academic emphasis is the push for particular *behaviors* in the school workplace. (p. 431)

Regarding collective efficacy, Goddard et al. (2000) state:

Just as individual teacher efficacy may partially explain the effect of teachers on student achievement, from an organization perspective, collective teacher efficacy may help to explain the differential effect that schools have on student achievement. Collective teacher efficacy, therefore, has the potential to contribute to our understanding of how schools differ in the attainment of their most important objective—the education of students. (p. 483)

Therefore, principals who effectively use resources and supports to plan and evaluate professional development on a regular and on-going basis should experience a positive impact on collective teacher efficacy, which ultimately and positively impacts student success.

Recommendations to support principals in reaching this desired state of collective teacher efficacy and academic optimism include:

- Providing principals and teachers regular access to a qualified instructional coach with the purpose of supporting teachers to develop and implement: a viable curriculum; evidence-based instructional strategies; and consistent and frequent data analysis on student performance.
- Consistently using teacher observations and surveys to assist in gathering and understanding the individual and collective professional development needs of staff.
- Consistently using surveys and interview processes after professional development activities to process and evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development that was provided for teachers.

Create Time for Effective Teacher Collaboration

All principals shared that time and money were barriers to further engagement in the professional development process. Specific barriers to creating additional time included

restrictions because of negotiated agreements, existing schedule structures, and limited use of substitute teachers due to cost and availability. Even with unanimously agreed upon barriers, principals must still find ways to lead by leveraging existing resources for the benefit of teacher growth and student achievement. Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) contend:

The leadership dimension that is most strongly associated with positive student outcomes is that of promoting and participating in teacher learning and development. Because the agenda for teacher professional learning is endless, goal setting should play an important part in determining the teacher learning agenda. Leaders' involvement in teacher learning provides them with a deep understanding of the conditions required to enable staff to make and sustain the changes required for improved outcomes. (p. 667)

Therefore, when new time cannot be created for teachers, principals may need to consider modifying the use of time that has already been dedicated to professional development in order to fulfill existing and future needs. Reeves (2010) contends that the most important characteristics when considering the strategies for delivering professional development activities are not their ease of use, popularity, or level of buy-in from staff. However, these were the strategies most often utilized by most principals across the region of interest from this study. Therefore, recommendations for creating time for effective teacher collaboration include:

- Provide training for administrators and teachers on how to effectively collaborate in meaningful ways, resulting in the creation of goals and plans with outcomes.
- Provide opportunities during existing professional development days to reflect and practice application of new knowledge and skills.
- Utilize evidence-based professional development structures and frameworks when providing professional development for teachers.
- Implement a professional learning community model that addresses the academic, social, and behavioral needs of students.

- Consider recruitment strategies to increase the number of available substitutes for covering classrooms, allowing more teachers to attend professional development or participate in a professional learning community.

Locus of Control Considerations

Given the three recommendations for practice from this study, the concept of locus of control becomes a relevant and related consideration. Principals serve in a variety of settings where they may encounter barriers to growth and improvement in self, others, and the school system's climate and culture. Their ability to overcome these barriers through the utilization of available or requested resources and supports, such as professional development, may often be contingent upon both internal or external locus of control factors. Regarding internal locus of control factors, social cognitive theory and efficacy levels among principals play significant roles. Bandura (1997) describes self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute a course of action required to produce given attainment" (p. 3). Therefore, principals must believe that they can and should be the driving force in advocating for, or controlling, opportunities for themselves and their teachers to gain new knowledge and skills. Doing so increases competence, builds confidence, and supports individual and collective growth in becoming more efficacious. Additionally, this core belief regarding their role is an important precursor in further building their own capacity to effectively lead the professional development process.

Principals must also identify and address barriers to growth and improvement where external locus of control factors limit opportunities for positive changes to school culture and climate. Given what principals reported in this study, many felt limited in

their abilities, at times, to affect positive change because of other individuals or groups who hold positional, referential, or historical power. This information is represented in

Table 4.10.

Table 4.10
Locus of Control for Principal Engagement Recommendations

Recommendations	Locus of Control	Barriers to Change
Help Principals Grow as Instructional Leaders	Superintendent and Curriculum Director	Time, Money, Competence, and Confidence
Provide More Resources and Supports for Principals	Superintendent, Curriculum Director, and Teachers	Time, Money, Surveys, Observation Protocols, and Human Resources
Create Time for Effective Teacher Collaboration	Superintendent, Curriculum Director, Board of Education, and Teachers	Negotiated Agreement, Schedule Structure, Communication, Organization, Planning, and Substitute Availability

Should external locus of control factors persist in limiting opportunities for growth, self-efficacy within principals and collective efficacy among groups of teachers may develop into a shared belief that limits the real and perceived value of professional development. Furthermore, this shared belief and the resulting school climate and culture may significantly limit a principal's ability to serve in the role as an instructional leader for the school. As a result, external locus of control factors may be responsible for perpetuating a school climate and culture that does not seek to grow, improve, or change through professional development.

Implications of the Study

The themes that emerged through this study confirmed the actual state of low engagement levels among principals in the professional development process. Wei et al. (2009) contend that there is a significant gap between what teachers hope to receive and what they

actually receive during professional development activities. This gap between hope (desired state) and what is received (actual state) is where principal engagement is crucial, given their positional power to make decisions on what professional learning is provided how it is provided to teachers. Likewise, Mizell (2009) comments on the actual state of professional development planning:

Many educators don't expect much because they have often been the victims of poorly conceived and executed professional development. Some people responsible for organizing professional development apparently don't expect much either, because they seldom determine whether and to what extent it produces positive results at the classroom level. (as cited in Reeves, 2010, p.24)

The following themes from this research study were consistent with the previous comment:

- Principals shared that their own lack of competence or confidence in the professional development process limited their engagement level.
- Lack of communication, a lack of planning or organization, and existing school climate and culture were barriers to engagement in the professional development process.
- Principals who did not enjoy or accept the responsibility of professional development viewed it as stressful, a burden, and intimidating. They believe their role was to manage.

However, the desired state is within reach as the characteristics of high-quality, effective professional development are often similar over time, are accessible, and are consistent across different studies that draw from a broad range of research (Desimone, 2011; Knapp, 2003; Reeves, 2008; Reeves, 2010; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). The following resources and support identified as needs by principals in this research study provide hope that principals will choose to engage at high levels in the professional development process:

- Most principals enjoyed and accepted the responsibility of professional development as a part of their role and are directly involved in the professional development planning with

input from teachers and teacher groups.

- Principals who enjoyed and accepted professional development as a job responsibility indicated that there was a passion or interest in curriculum and instruction, a desire for their own professional growth, and a comfort level or degree of confidence in this work.
- Principals who led professional development in their buildings viewed their role as being accountable, promoting staff buy-in, and modeling continuous learning for their teachers.
- Use of teacher observations and surveys assisted in gathering and understanding the individual and collective professional development needs of staff.
- Building relationships with staff eased and streamlined communication regarding individual and collective professional development needs. Networking with others in similar positions would allow principals to discuss ways to determine professional development needs.

Recommendations for Additional Research

This study examined principal engagement in the professional development process throughout a large geographic area in the Midwest. Twenty principals were purposefully sampled for an interview from among 249 participants in a larger-scale survey. The results from the survey and interviews and the subsequent recommendations were limited to the context of the 112 school improvement consortium districts invited to participate in this study. Future considerations and recommendations for researching similar or related topics or concepts include:

- Examining the relationship between reported competence or confidence levels among

principals in the professional development process and the three fundamental aspects of academic optimism: academic emphasis; collective efficacy; and faculty trust in students and parents.

- Examining the relationship between reported engagement levels in the professional development process among principals and total years of experience as a principal.
- Examining graduate-level educational administration preparation program outcomes and curricula to ensure there is an emphasis on instructional leadership over management.
- Exploring the ways in which principals construct their roles based on their personal core values.
- Conducting a longitudinal study on cohort groups of administrators beginning in their first year through their third year or beyond to examine successes, challenges, and professional development needs.
- Examining the impact of low engagement levels on other core responsibilities of the role of principal beyond the professional development process.
- Examining the effectiveness of professional learning communities based on the models and schedule structures that are in place.
- Exploring the impact of instructional coaches on the delivery of instruction by teachers.
- Examining the effect of specific professional development provided to teachers based on their reported needs and changes to instructional practices.
- Completing a comprehensive review of case studies of principals who identified themselves as instructional leaders and determine common traits, attributes, and training received.

While this research study produced specific recommendations to examine and address the problem of practice, additional research will be needed to continually determine and evaluate the needs of principals to further increase their engagement in the professional development process.

Impact of the Research Study on the Scholar-Practitioner

I knew immediately what I wanted and needed to study as the concept of a problem of practice was shared with our cohort group during our first summer session together. Following shortly after the idea of studying what would become “principal engagement in the professional development process” as my problem of practice, I found the following quote from Sparks and Hirsh (1997) from 20 years ago:

Research and experience have taught us that widespread, sustained implementation of new practices in classrooms, principals’ offices, and central offices requires a new form of professional development. This staff development not only must affect the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of individual teachers, administrators, and other school employees, but it must also alter the cultures and structures of the organizations in which those individuals work. (p. 1)

Sadly, these two authors are very likely disappointed to see that their discussion of a “new” form of professional development back then remains the same discussion today. Likewise, staff development, or professional development, holds as much potential to affect changes today in the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of teachers and administrators as it did back then.

That single quote kept me motivated throughout the entire process of studying, examining, and discovering barrier, resources, and supports within my problem of practice. It also helped to change how our school improvement team serves the consortium of 112 districts. Latta and Wunder (2012) state, “To be useable, knowledge must enable practitioners to attend to practical consequences of their work; it needs to be valid but then it also has to reflect genuinely or authentically a problem of practice that comes from their practice, not simply an external notion or definition of practice or good practice” (p. 102). In other words, throughout this

research study, our school improvement team implemented new practices and procedures that we studied and decided would address and solve our own problems of practice, allowing us to provide more effective support and encouragement to administrators to engage in the professional development process for their districts and building. To accomplish this, some of our practices and programming changed significantly, and we now provide professional development support and resources by:

- Modeling ways to create and implement annual professional development plans that meet the needs of teachers and that are aligned to building or district goals.
- Providing needs assessments for use by building principals, professional development councils, or others to determine district, building, department, and grade-level needs.
- Providing professional development to principals and instructional coaches specifically on curriculum, instruction, and assessment issues.
- Facilitating collaboration among job-alike administrators and instructional leaders through forums and cohort group professional development.
- Providing a customizable observation and feedback tool to principals and lead teachers.
- Modeling effective professional development day structures that allow time for teachers to practice new skills.
- Providing model surveys to use after professional development activities to understand and gauge their immediate or potential benefits.

Changing our programs and practices will undoubtedly build capacity and efficacy among those we serve. These changes are only the start of more to come, even though this journey has come to an end.

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Appendix A – Survey

This survey was administered to superintendents, curriculum directors or curriculum specialists, principals, and teacher leaders within the 112 consortium districts across the region of interest. The purpose of this survey is to collect demographic data and perceptions on the role of principals in the professional development process to inform the use of purposeful sampling for selecting 20 principals to interview. The collected demographic information will become part of the criteria for purposeful sampling, which will include district location, district size, and years of experience in one or more leadership positions, such as: one to two years; three to five years; six to nine years; and 10 or more years.

Survey for the Role of Principals in the Professional Development Process

1. Please select your USD number and name.
2. Please select the role(s) that best describe(s) your position.
 - A. Superintendent
 - B. Assistant Superintendent and/or Curriculum Director or Coordinator
 - C. Principal
 - D. Assistant or Associate Principal
 - E. Teacher Leader, Instructional Coach, or PDC Chair
3. Please select the geographic region of the state that best describes your school district.
 - A. Northeast
 - B. Southeast
 - C. North Central
 - D. South Central

4. Please select the size of your district based on the student count ranges provided.
 - A. Fewer than 500
 - B. 500-1000
 - C. 1001-2500
 - D. More than 2500

5. Please select the total years of experience in your current position.
 - A. 1-2 years
 - B. 3-5 years
 - C. 6-9 years
 - D. 10 or more years

6. Please select your total years of experience in any certified position.
 - A. 1-2 years
 - B. 3-5 years
 - C. 6-9 years
 - D. 10 or more years

7. Of the following positions, which ONE typically plans and evaluates most of the building-based professional development on an annual basis?
 - A. Superintendent
 - B. Assistant Superintendent(s) and/or Curriculum Director(s) or Coordinator(s)
 - C. Principal(s)
 - D. Assistant or Associate Principal(s)
 - E. Teacher Leader(s), Instructional Coach(es), or PDC Chair
 - F. Other (Please indicate as a comment)

8. If a principal does most of the professional development planning and evaluation for his/her building, what resources or supports are provided to guide him/her through that process? (Please select all that apply)
- A. Needs assessments and/or surveys for building staff to complete.
 - B. Leadership training on continuous growth and improvement strategies and processes.
 - C. Professional learning on professional development structures and/or frameworks.
 - D. Dedicated time to work with other building and/or district administrators on annual and ongoing professional development plans.
 - E. Other (Please provide a comment)
9. If a principal does not participate in the professional development planning and evaluation for his/her building, what barriers exist that limit his/her engagement in this process? (Please select all that apply)
- A. This work is the responsibility of another person / position in the district.
 - B. Limited resources to determine the professional learning needs of building staff.
 - C. Limited exposure to professional learning theory or practice during Building Administrator endorsement / licensure program.
 - D. Limited exposure or opportunity to further study and/or review professional literature in the area of professional learning theory and practice.
 - E. Limited exposure or opportunity to further study and/or review professional literature in the area of leadership theory and practice.
 - F. Limited time for planning and/or evaluating.
 - G. Not Applicable (Principal is involved as indicated in number 9)
 - H. Other (Please provide a comment)

Appendix B – Interview Protocol

This interview protocol was used with 20 principals who were selected through purposeful sampling. The purpose of this interview protocol was to further identify and understand barriers to principal engagement in the professional development process. Additionally, the interview elicited responses regarding resources and supports needed to reduce or eliminate barriers to principal engagement.

Interview Protocol for Principals

1. In a magical world where you could change anything you wanted about professional development, and with no barriers (real or perceived), what would professional development look like in your district?
2. In thinking about the ideal or desired state you just described, what are some barriers that keep this from happening?
3. Tell me about other things that serve as blocks or barriers that keep principals from being more involved in professional development.
4. Tell me about how your district organizes, plans, and provides professional development for teachers. What is your role as a principal in this?
5. Tell me about how and in what ways you and your administrative team process the effectiveness of the professional development that is offered to teachers.
6. What would be some ideal feedback you would like to hear from teachers that would tell you, "Yes...we were successful with this professional development day!"
7. Tell me about the resources and supports that you have asked for in order to become more involved in the professional development process?
8. Is professional development a job responsibility that principals enjoy in your district?

9. If your only role was planning professional development for teachers, how would you go about finding out exactly what each person needs and then determine the common needs and unique needs?
10. With the desired state in mind, should principals be the ones leading professional development efforts in their buildings?

Appendix C – Institutional Review Board Approval



Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

April 6, 2017

MEMORANDUM

TO: Michael Koonce
John Pijanowski

FROM: Ro Windwalker
IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #: 17-03-541

Protocol Title: *Principal Engagement in the Professional Development Process*

Review Type: EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 04/05/2017 Expiration Date: 04/04/2018

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (<https://vpred.uark.edu/units/rscp/index.php>). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 1,250 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes. All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 109 MLKG Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.