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Examining The Perceptions Of Principals To Improve Professional Development Opportunities And Support From Central Office: A Program Evaluation

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EXAMINING THE PERCEPTIONS OF PRINCIPALS TO IMPROVE

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND

SUPPORT FROM CENTRAL OFFICE: A PROGRAM EVALUATION

Noah L. Riley

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements of

Doctor of Education

In the Foster G. McGaw Graduate School

National College of Education

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Document Origination Statement for Digital Commons @ NLU

This document was created as one part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership Ed.D. is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006). For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The "program" can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

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A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

EXAMINING THE PERCEPTIONS OF PRINCIPALS TO IMPROVE PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND SUPPORT FROM CENTRAL OFFICE:
A PROGRAM EVALUATION

CREATING CONDITIONS FOR COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN
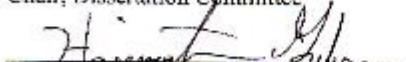PRINCIPALS AND THEIR SUPERVISOR:
A CHANGE INITIATIVE

23 ILLINOIS ADMINISTRATIVE CODE 50: REDEFINING THE FORMAL SCHOOL SITE
OBSERVATION IN PRINCIPAL EVALUATION:
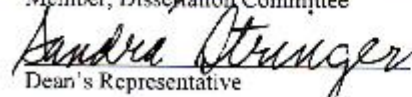A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Noah L. Riley

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program
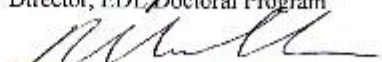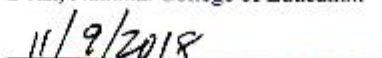
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Dean, National College of Education

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Date Approved

Signature Page

ABSTRACT

The work of Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson, (2010), Manna (2015), Leithwood and Azah (2016) validates that principals can have a powerful influence on instruction and learning in schools. Supporting principals' growth with professional development, therefore, is critical to building principals' competencies as instructional leaders. Although school districts are unique in internal and external conditions (e.g., educational, political, and financial); which may influence their approach to supporting principals, a useful place for all school districts to start is with an appraisal of principals' perceptions of current support and professional development from central office; regardless of district internal and external influences. This program evaluation examined how three case study principals in one suburban high school district in Illinois described the professional development content, and school district support they were receiving to improve their ability to influence instruction and student learning in their schools. It further offers guidance in the form of recommendations for school districts who may want to increase their effectiveness in supporting and growing principals as instructional leaders. An online survey questionnaire for principals, semi-structured one-on-one interviews with principals, and various district artifacts were used to collect data; which was then subsequently examined and analyzed through the lens of professional development and support system frameworks offered by a sample of high-performing districts; informed by a robust literature review.

PREFACE: LESSONS LEARNED

Since my altruistic departure from my last school district of employment over six years ago, my interest in supporting principals' growth with professional development has been a significant factor on the direction I have chosen to pursue in preparation for the next phase of my service to educating students. Also, the demands of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), the Race to the Top initiative (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), and more recently under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) progressively accelerated the role of principals as instructional leaders. These were driving forces for effective instruction and learning; holding principals more accountable for the instruction and learning that occurred in their schools. In retrospect, when I mentally examined support and professional development I received from the districts I served in, they each possessed varied approaches in their delivery of services to principals; most of which, in my opinion, was ineffective in its design to support and grow principals. In the majority of cases, principals had little or no actual influence on decisions concerning determining the content of in-service professional development programs for principals in their school district. Reminiscing on these experiences prompted me to examine and evaluate the skills of principals in one suburban high school district in Illinois to determine the professional development content, and school district support they were receiving to improve their ability to influence instruction and student learning in their schools. The overarching purpose was to ultimately develop a change plan that could serve as guidance for school districts who may want to increase their effectiveness in supporting and growing principals as instructional leaders. The literature review suggested that keeping the necessary skills

and knowledge of principals up to date is pivotal to adapting to the ever-evolving

challenges and accompanying expectations of principals as instructional leaders (Manna,

2015). The literature review prompted me to research successful approaches to

addressing change in this area.

DEDICATION

This document is dedicated with heartfelt appreciation and gratitude

to

all of the students, faculty, staff and parents

in the school districts I have had the privilege to serve as principal;

and to

Ms. Doris A. Pearl,

the greatest assistant principal a principal could ever wish for.

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Legislation (U.S. Department of Education, 2001) was a driving force for effective instruction and learning. Principals were held accountable for its occurrence in their schools. The Race to the Top Initiative (U.S. Department of Education, 2010) further accelerated the role of principals as instructional leaders. The focus was on improving teaching and learning (Alvoid & Black, 2014). More recently, under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), even though states get significant leeway in a wide range of areas; especially in accountability, the focus is still on improving teaching and learning and adopting challenging academic standards (Education Week, 2015).

Principal leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors as an influence on student learning (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). It is generally recognized and accepted that to raise student performance, schools need principals who have competencies to develop an environment where all students can learn (Gill, 2012). New professional standards for educational leaders outline guidelines for leadership in educating students—including students who enter school without preschool, social service support or technological tools. (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Keeping the skills and knowledge of principals up to date is pivotal to adapting to these evolving challenges and accompanying expectations (Manna, 2015).

Purpose

Through this study, I wanted to determine how three case study principals in one suburban high school district in Illinois describe the professional development content

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and school district support they were receiving to influence instruction and student learning. The primary intended use of the research findings was formative improvement. The intended users were principals and other building leaders and their supervisor. The focus of this study was to go beyond the usual recruitment, licensure, preparation, and placement of principals and examine professional development content and support that occurred subsequently. I wanted to specifically trace their professional development content and support throughout the current and last twelve months and three years prior. The three purposefully selected principals were not considered "effective principals" as used in this study. According to New Leaders for New Schools (2009)

> A highly effective principal is distinguished by making breakthrough gains in student achievement, including movement from "proficient" to "advanced" in higher performing schools, and a small number of additional student outcomes. The highly effective principal also makes accelerated progress in implementing strategic actions and school-wide practices that differentiate rapidly-improving schools. (p. 13)

Principals and other building leaders, in adapting to and preparing for a demonstration of new required expectations that focus more on instruction and learning must continue to maintain and deliver their responsibilities related to organization and management as well. The new focus and expectations brought about by new principal standards often require more than the usual recruitment, licensure, preparation, and placement of principals. To meet these demands, principals must be engaged in "ongoing evaluation and supervision and coaching" and "continuous career-long professional development" (Kelley & Peterson, 2000, p. 20).

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Rationale

As a former principal of approximately 20 years, I had noticed that in that role

standards for principal evaluation are continuously evolving in light of accountability

demands accelerated by NCLB legislation and the Race to the Top initiative.

Furthermore, having worked in both high performing and low performing schools, I have

experienced the disparity of facing challenges without the support of relevant

professional development and central office support. Many of my colleagues, due to the

stress of meeting the high demands of being a principal often had left their jobs to work

in more affluent schools and districts offering higher pay, multiple support resources

including ongoing professional development and void of the behavioral characteristics

often observed in students of high needs and low performing districts. As I reflected on

my personal and professional experiences in those settings, I contributed my

effectiveness as a principal to the relevant ongoing professional development

opportunities I engaged in areas I determined as needed to build competency.

Also, I credited the support and coaching of a mentor, Dr. Mark Smith, professor

emeritus Wayne State University, assigned to me by the state of Michigan when I first

began my service as principal at Martin Luther King Junior High School, Benton Harbor,

Michigan. The school, at the start of my tenure, was one of only seven schools in the state

of Michigan classified as *unaccredited*. The coaching partnership and support of the

district proved to be invaluable to my personal growth and to the reclassification of the

school from *unaccredited* to *interim accredited* during my first year there as principal.

I also reflected on the difference in available resources in that regard in the high

need and low performing schools compared to that of high performing more affluent

schools and districts that I worked. My experience was just a small fraction of a nationwide crisis. One-quarter of America's principals (approximately 25,000) leave their schools; many (almost 50%) quitting just after three years on the job.

Furthermore, principals that remain frequently do not stay in high poverty schools. They usually transfer to schools or districts serving more affluent populations. These retention and persistence realities not only leave millions of students' lives adversely affected but also hamper the ability for schools, particularly high need schools, to initiate and sustain school improvement efforts required to achieve meaningful gains for students. These realities are generally accepted to be the result of principals' lack of ongoing support and professional development required to increase their competencies and maintain sustained commitment (School Leaders Network, 2014). More attention is needed to focus on adequate continued support for principals; especially in high need districts that do not have the financial and other resources afforded more affluent ones.

It is incumbent on districts to provide high-quality professional development opportunities to principals once they are on the job so that principals can influence teaching and learning effectively; especially in high-need districts. A cluster of stakeholders stand to benefit from these efforts--superintendents and board members who have decision authority over funding; professional development directors (or similar title) and principal supervisors, those who have direct responsibility for principals' support and evaluation; and of course, principals, teachers, and students, their parents and community-at-large, who are intended beneficiaries of principal professional development (Patton, 2008). Professional development helps principals accomplish better outcomes for students. Principals develop the skills, strategies, practices, and

beliefs to establish and maintain highly effective school settings where students are continuously improving at consistently high levels (School Leaders Network, 2014).

Goals

Principals' effect on students contributes to 25% of the total school influences on a student's academic performance (School Leaders Network, 2014). Effective principals realize additional two- to seven-month gains in student learning above schools with less effective leaders (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). The intended goal of this research was to identify the value of content and nature of professional development activities, training, and support systems as perceived by three purposefully selected principals designed or chosen to help them perform their responsibilities as instructional leaders.

Research Questions

When individual school variables combine, the results are more significant effects on student learning. Practices of principals sustained over time help create this condition (Louis et al., 2010). The primary research question for this study was:

1. How did three purposefully selected principals describe the professional development (PD) activities and support they receive from the central office?

Through a series of discussions using research-practice partnerships (Coburn, Penuel, & Geil, 2013), the superintendent of a 'Priority' classified Illinois district and I engaged in conversations on the subject. Subsequently the superintendent sanctioned me to examine the *existence and content* of principal PD in the district. I used collected data to extend the study that resulted in a change plan initiative. As a result of these conversations, this question evolved to its final state. The following secondary questions were examined.

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2. What kind of professional development and support do high-performing districts with similar demographics give to their principals to help meet principals' need as effective instructional leaders?

3. What challenges do they encounter in supporting principals in these ways?

4. What benefits result from their professional development and support to principals as instructional leaders in these ways? These questions formed the basis for determining the relationship between professional development, school improvement and student achievement?

SECTION TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The training, preparation and support principals receive are related to their effectiveness as instructional leaders. The quality of preparation and training principals bring to their job varies from district-to-district depending on district hiring standards, expectations, and subsequent support to principals. Principals, especially in high needs districts, often are not afforded the financial aid and opportunity to participate in new and developing training necessary to meet the unique demands of new professional education leadership standards often experienced by principals in more affluent school districts. As a result, schools in low-performing districts more often than not are led by principals who do not have the necessary competencies for executing quality instruction and learning; and as a result, students in those schools fail to have the opportunity to benefit from best practices of effective leadership (Alvoid & Black, 2014).

Through the literature review, I present and discuss literature relevant to principal PD and support; with particular emphasis on *strengthening instruction*. To begin with, I examined the role of district administration in helping principals learn to improve their instructional leadership. Secondly, I studied the core knowledge about instruction that principals of high-achieving school districts execute to achieve quality instruction in their schools. Thirdly, I examined the characteristics and practices of highly-effective principals; including knowledge about *cultural relevance* and *restorative justice* practices. These three focus areas of the literature review answer the fundamental questions of school leadership: What highly effective principals know and do, and how and when they do it (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012).

The Role of District Administration in Building Instructional Capacity

Few principals enter the field fully skilled in all the competencies and capacity of effective instructional leadership. Even those principals who do so need continued ongoing support. Principals, like teachers, need to learn continuously to lead effectively, support, and hold teachers accountable for implementation of standards, curriculum reforms, and other instructional improvement initiatives in their schools (Fink & Resnick, 2001). Superintendents and principal supervisors must demonstrate their support of principals to become instructional leaders in their school (Wagner et al., 2006).

Fullan (2011) postulates that districts support instruction and learning by creating a *theory of action for change* that links the it's beliefs, vision, and mission; and identifies policy and strategy levers that have the least and best chance of driving successful transformational change. The *theory of action for change* must be grounded in the use of data, open dialogue, courageous conversations, and interpersonal accountability.

The role of school districts is to create the conditions for success in every school. Honig, Lorton, and Copland (2009) and McCombs and Miller (2007) promoted the idea that districts must *re-prioritize* service and support closer to classrooms and students, ensuring school leaders and teachers receive job-embedded professional development linked to performance feedback and student achievement. Their work reflects the creation of district-level teaching and learning teams designed to focus on the implementation of curriculum and instruction; with the intent to create learner-centered partnerships to continue to build principals' capacity as instructional leaders.

A growing body of research (Bedard & Mombourquette, 2015; Honig, 2012; Kelley & Peterson, 2000; Manna, 2015; Marsh et al., 2005; Mendels, 2012) has

documented the critical roles districts play in supporting and building principal capacity for instructional leadership development; making a strong case that executive-level district office administrators (e.g., superintendent, those close to the superintendent, deputy superintendent, etc.) could and should take the lead in helping principals learn to strengthen their instructional leadership. This research reveals that high-achieving districts do more than just revising their organizational charts to show a shift in responsibility on paper but are changing their day-to-day work to provide support for principals' development as instructional leaders. Executive-level district office administrators engage in new relationships with their school principals and provide job-embedded professional development support in building principals' capacity as instructional leaders (Honig, 2012; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wahlstrom & York-Barr, 2011). These studies, for example, identified specific practices (e.g., focusing on joint work, modeling, developing and using tools, intentionally designing and using materials, brokering and creating and sustaining social engagement) of district administrators consistent with helping principals learn to strengthen their instructional leadership.

Based on a concept of *assistance relationships* (Lave & Wenger, 1991), principal supervisors and principals engage in a coach-mentor like relationship. Researchers postulate that the extent to which executive-level, district office administrators engage their principals in these practices, determines the sustainability level of their engagement in ways essential to their learning. According to these theories, learners are more likely to participate deeply in activities they view as essential or whose importance is reinforced by their social or cultural contexts (Honig, 2012). When leaders attend to the context in which others around them learn, they strive to put in place structures and supports that are

likely to be effective. This observance is true whether the leadership comes from the central office or the building level (Wahlstrom & York-Barr, 2011).

Similarly, other studies (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Leithwood & Azah, 2016) also show that districts can grow their principals' capacity for effective instructional leadership through professional development and support. One particular study (Fink & Resnick, 2001), for example, shows how a high-achieving urban school district developed and sustained a culture of learning among its principals, while simultaneously maintaining a strong sense of accountability for student achievement by teaching principals how to function as instructional leaders. Using a concept of *cognitive apprenticeship theory* (Greenfield, 1984; Lave & Wenger, 1991) where principals develop their competencies by engaging in job-embedded professional development, the district created an environment consistent with helping principals learn to strengthen their instructional leadership. The newly created environment established centrally led principals' conferences and institutes that provided knowledge about instruction and built intellectual and attitudinal commitment to the district's programs and priorities and organized specialized institutes facilitated by outside consultants. Support groups focusing on some specific need of principals provided opportunities for intensive work on problems of practice and leadership to build an array of leadership strategies to help principals implement programs in their schools. Through literacy support focus groups, principals of schools with the most at-risk students convened to focus on specific problems and successes of implementation and practice, with emphasis on the particular needs of those schools and their students. Principals' study groups provided further opportunity for professional interaction among principals with peers and their

supervisors. Also, through a system of school *inter-visitation* and principal *buddying*, principals were encouraged to interact with their peers. The research points to the fact that when principals make regular visits to each other's schools and frequent requests for help, the knowledge base among principals of practices in schools increases throughout the district. Peer learning is further encouraged through the provision of individualized coaching and mentor principals (Fink & Resnick, 2001).

Collectively, the literature review suggests attributes of district-level support and professional development for building and sustaining the instructional leadership capacity of principals and other building leaders. District academic administrators would do well to intentionally make themselves accessible to building instructional leaders and maintain a relationship that is open, collaborative and reciprocal in nature. Districts must deliberately establish structures that encourage and provide opportunities for face-to-face sharing of information and advice among principals and between principals and district academic administrators; especially district executive-level administrators (Leithwood & Azah, 2016).

Core Knowledge about Executing Effective Instruction

Research suggests that whether students will learn and the degree to which they learn is determined by the presence or absence of high-quality instruction. A school leader's fundamental responsibility is high-quality instruction (Marshall, 2009). School districts everywhere are pressed to ensure higher achievement for all students (McCommons, 2014). Some studies find that reforming districts offer targeted support for low-performing schools (Massell, 2000; Massell & Goertz, 2000; Snipes, Doolittle, &

Herlihy, 2002); and gradually phase in instructional reform efforts (Elmore & Burney, 1999; Snipes et al., 2002).

McCommons (2014) posits that focusing on professional development improves student learning and achievement and also helps to develop a district-wide approach for continued success. A central finding is that significant gains in test scores require extensive efforts to align instruction with the test contents; detailed analysis of student responses to the tests or assessments designed to parallel these; and the provision of immediate and appropriate corrective strategies for individual students as indicated by that analysis (Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Marapodi & Beard, 2013).

Fink and Resnick (2001) reported that well-informed and equipped principals demonstrate their ability to select and cultivate staff for effectiveness in the district's instructional programs. They must understand the instructional programs that have been adopted well enough to guide teachers in its implementation actively. They must be able to identify effective instruction to select and maintain an excellent teaching staff.

 In their findings, Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, and Thomas (2007), Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012), and Marapodi and Beard (2013) report that highly effective principals recruit and build a faculty of professionals with a shared passion for ensuring success for every student. They provide each faculty member with the specific knowledge and skills he/ she needs to make this happen. They find a way to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to guide their practice and address student learning needs.

The literature review identified strategy levers that have the best chance of driving successful *transformational change* (Fullan, 2011) focused on improving student learning

and achievement and also helping to develop a district-wide approach for continued success (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012; Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Deane-Williams, Nelms, & Robinson, 2015; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Halverson et al., 2007; Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009; Honig et al., 2009; Marapodi & Beard, 2013; McCommons, 2014; Wagner et al., 2006).

Themes around strategies and levers for improving instruction stressed the importance of developing and refining a common language built on quality instruction and effective classroom practices. They also stressed troubleshooting intervention systems and procedures with principals and teacher leaders. Principals and teacher leaders must engage in and model the types of inquiry-based interactions the district wants to see in schools. Districts must find ways to equip principals and teachers with the knowledge and skills to guide their practice and address student learning needs (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012; City et al., 2009; Deane-Williams et al., 2015; Halverson et al., 2007; Marapodi & Beard, 2013; Wagner et al., 2006).

Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) reported that exceptional leaders use the four highest leverage actions of seven levers to leadership to engage their staff for effective instructional delivery and high learning for students: 1) data-driven instruction, 2) observation and feedback, 3) planning, and 4) professional development. He posits that new teachers improve faster, returning staff work smarter, and veteran teachers stay longer when leaders take these concrete, consistent actions. He further posits that doing so ensures that their staff is fully invested in habits of excellence that put students first throughout the year.

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) reported that

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Effective leaders…know which policies, practices, resources, and incentives to

align and how to align them with organizational priorities….Finally, they

understand and value the people in the organization. They know when, how, and

why to create learning environments that support people, connect them, and

provide the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to succeed.

In their role as *instructional leaders*, principals make classroom observations, and engage

in courageous conversations about what is good instruction and how it can be sustained

and improved (Wagner et al., 2006). To be useful in this endeavor, principals must

understand the adaptive nature of instructional leadership (Heifetz et al., 2009; Wagner et

al., 2006).

Transformational Practices of Highly-Effective Principals

Even though districts across America and abroad have produced impressive sets

of practices for improving instruction, no one district has created a system where every

classroom in every school is steadily improving student achievement year in and out

(Wagner et al., 2006). The few districts and schools that have demonstrated a dramatic

increase in the level of student achievement for all students, however, have common

practices that contribute to their success. Wagner has documented these common

practices in what is known as *seven disciplines for strengthening instruction.* Having a

working knowledge of these seven practices are believed to be at the core of principals'

instructional leadership capabilities. Principals must gain experience in and build a

vocabulary for courageous conversations with their supervisor, peers and staff about

improving not only their instructional leadership skills but also those of others as well

(Wagner et al., 2006).

Deane-Williams et al. (2015) stressed the importance of conducting school walks (planned and announced district-wide) to provide individualized support to principals (and teachers). This engagement in and modeling of the types of inquiry-based interactions highly effective districts expect to see in their schools, especially between principals and teachers, help build the capacity of principals & leaders (and teachers). The collected data informs support of professional learning plans for leaders and teachers. Marapodi and Beard (2013) promoted the idea of public and private data walls (in multiple forms and from various perspectives) displaying standardized test data, benchmark data, diagnostic assessment data, formative assessment data, progress monitoring data, attendance data, and demographic data. Both Deane-Williams et al. (2015) and Marapodi and Beard (2013) reported that routinely collecting and integrating classroom walk-through observation data with student achievement data creates a deeper understanding of student achievement as well as school and classroom practices and conditions that shape success. These practices and routines are conducted collaboratively by some form of leadership team consisting of at minimum the school principal, representatives of each grade and content area, school-based specialists, instructional coaches and division leaders, etc.

Marapodi and Beard (2013) promoted the idea of using technology tools to gather integrated achievement and instructional data to explore (five) broad discussion questions that guide the leadership team to identify improvement areas; define differentiated professional learning to support the identified improvement areas; and monitor the implementation and impact of the improvement strategies.

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While there is no one proven system for building staff culture, there are key principles that can make a school environment stronger. These principles (steps) are clearly identifiable actions and choices that help build strong staff culture as they become habits of practice. Bambrick-Santoyo and Peiser (2012) introduced the importance of how principals spend their time in this manner: He postulates how school leaders (central office and building level) use their time is the single greatest determinant of whether their district and/or schools will succeed.

He further posits that exceptional school leaders succeed because of how they use their time: a) what they do, and b) how and when they do it. The key to effective school leadership is prioritizing the seven levers mentioned in the previous and current sections. Exceptional school leaders' largest source of time allocation is on what is called 'day-to-day' instruction: observing classrooms, coaching teachers to make them better, leading or planning professional training for teachers, using data to inform instruction, and evaluating teachers.

The four highest leverage actions: Data-driven instruction, observation and feedback, planning, and professional development together showed the most promise of improving instructional practices of teachers and increasing learning in students. Additional leverage actions appearing in the literature included: 1) student culture where learning thrives; 2) staff culture – which is crucial to a successful school. When leaders create a vibrant and joyful culture, teachers are more willing to be held accountable and more willing to do the hard work that makes a school work because there is a level of respect, trust, and appreciation for the work that they do. Building staff culture is a skill through which principals can make a profound impact on how well their students can

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learn, and 3) managing school leadership teams. Principals must be able to train and grow instructional leaders from their team to expand their impact across the school.

Student culture, staff culture, and managing school, leadership teams had a comparatively moderate effect. Practices, processes and procedures relating to *administrative tasks*—(e.g., managing schedules, discipline issues, and compliance, etc.) and *organizational tasks*—(e.g., hiring, responding to teacher concerns, or checking to see if there was money in the budget for student field trips or teacher workshops, etc.) had the least influence on improving student learning.

A summative review of the literature focusing on what effective principals know and do, and how and when they do it (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012), made it plain that district-level administration must partner with principals in taking an active role in building instructional capacity to improve instruction and increase student performance (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012; Bedard & Mombourquette, 2015; Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Fullan, 2011; Greenfield, 1984; Honig, 2012; Honig et al., 2009; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Leithwood & Azah, 2016; Kelley & Peterson, 2000; Manna, 2015; Marsh et al., 2005; McCombs, & Miller, 2007; Mendels, 2012; Wahlstrom & York-Barr, 2011). Take-away lessons from the literature review can serve as the foundation for developing the pathway to building instructional capacity to improve instruction and increase student learning in U.S. District X. The program evaluation intends to identify the current existing conditions, context, content, and competencies of principals in U.S. School District X and how the district might create opportunities for building capacity to improve instruction and increase student performance.

SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

The design of this research was a mixed methodology (James, Milenkiewicz, &

Bucknam, 2008); through a utilization-focused perspective (Patton, 2008). The mixed

methodology was chosen to establish a sense of validity. To further strengthen the

validity I triangulated data from several sources (James et al., 2008; Patton, 2008). My

research design was based on three individual case studies using a constructivist

paradigm (Yin, 2009). Through this approach I examined the perceptions of three

purposefully selected principals of their professional development and contextual

conditions. From the viewpoints of these principals I sought to identify sources, training

and support systems related to their professional development and their leadership

practices; supported by data gathered from a compilation of documents and artifacts (e.g.,

district budget reports, district professional development agendas and calendars, minutes

from superintendent leadership team meetings and school board meetings.

Participants

A group of three purposefully selected principals (Patton, 2008) were asked to

respond to a series of one-on-one interview questions (see Appendix B) that were used to

determine the existence, content, and support of principal professional development

activities in the district. Face-to-face interviews were conducted one-on-one. Before

that, an electronically-based survey questionnaire (see Appendix A) was sent to each

participant with telephone follow-up. The survey questionnaire was used to collect

information that would provide a detailed composite of participants and their school.

Participants were asked to complete the survey within two weeks of receipt.

The three primary case study principals were selected because they failed to meet standards set forth by federal policies on the definition of a highly effective principal; had not demonstrated and documented five key practices central to effective school leadership (Mendels, 2012); and were principals of schools not strong on three or more of the Illinois 5Essentials Survey Framework. I intended to provide three individual perspectives on professional development; along with identifying themes and patterns across the three case studies. According to Patton (2008), utilizing this approach would likely increase projections of my findings.

Before the survey questionnaire and one-on-one principal interviews, participants received an email detailing the purpose of the research, the nature of the questions, and their choice to participate. Participants had the option of not answering any question they chose to skip for any reason. Data would be collected anonymously with any indirect identifiers being removed when data collection was completed. Data would be reported in aggregate. One-on-one interviews would be recorded. After receiving participants' signed informed consent, I provided each with a link to the online survey questionnaire.

The primary stakeholders who will utilize this research are the participating group of principals and district administration. One principal had not served as the principal of his/her current or any other school prior to the school year in which the survey was given. One had served 1-5 years and one 6-10 years. Before becoming a principal, one principal had zero years of elementary or secondary teaching experience, and two 6-10 years. Before becoming a principal, each of the case study principals had served as an assistant principal, or program director. Only two case study principals had participated in any

district or school training, or development program for aspiring school principals before becoming a principal (Principal Survey Questionnaire, see Appendix A).

There are three comprehensive high schools in suburban U.S. School District X each with an International Baccalaureate Program and Advance Placement Courses. The district boasts of being student-centered and has a majority-minority (Black) student body with a population of 5,079 students in grades 9-12 and an 82% overall graduation rate. The district has a 90% attendance rate. Class size averages 18 to 1. Seventy-four percent of teachers have master's degrees. Teacher retention rate is near 90% at a 13-year average stay. The most recent district budget total $120M (U.S. School District X website).

Data Gathering

After engaging primary intended users, I gathered data with ongoing attention to its use (Patton, 2008). To collect and interpret data, I examined the findings from the survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Identifying key data points was the first step in establishing an understanding of the research problem.

Quantitative Survey Questionnaire

One source of data gathered was through a principal qualitative survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was intended to provide data on principals' participation in professional development activities and their perceptions of the existence, content, and nature of professional development opportunities and support through the district. Also, I intended to provide descriptive quantitative data on the context of principals and their school and on principal characteristics. The majority of questions had multiple choice responses. The questionnaire took approximately five to seven

minutes to complete. The questionnaire included approximately six questions on

examination of sources, training and support systems related to principal professional

development activities; in addition to three items that provided general, background and

contact information. Participants received an email invitation to take the survey

questionnaire through the Survey Monkey website and were asked to click on the 'Begin

survey' button to start. The results from this survey questionnaire were kept on a

password protected website and only I had access to aggregate data by school. Upon

completion of the research, all survey results were deleted or destroyed.

Qualitative Interviews

Notes from semi-structured interviews with follow-up sessions were intended to

provide more depth of knowledge to data collected from the survey questionnaire. After

an examination of the survey questionnaire results, I conducted one-on-one interviews

with each principal at each of their schools. During the meetings, I made every effort to

make each participant feel comfortable and not feel as though he/she was being *evaluated*

or *tested*. To accomplish this, each question was carefully designed to produce their

perceptions about the existence, content, and support of principal professional

development related to performing the duties of their position as instructional leaders.

Participants were asked the same questions about a fixed set of topics; to collect

comparable data (see Appendix B for a list of interview questions and protocol).

As part of the interview process, it was necessary to ask some additional probing

questions as a point of clarification or to probe further about an idea that was shared.

Those probing questions were completed at the time of the interviews. Participants were

assured that all items were being asked only for the purpose of the program evaluation

and not to be used for evaluative purposes in any way. Participants were sent a hard copy of their interview transcript and were invited to review it for accuracy of transcription (Maxwell, 2005). Participants elaborated on responses offered during interviews in their transcripts by providing clarifications and/or by adding information about their professional development experience and support from the district. After reading completed transcripts from initial interviews and participants' review of transcripts, it became apparent that a follow-up interview (aimed at checking my interpretation of data and following up on initial interview questions) was necessary. It was apparent, for example, that asking them about how their personal life responsibilities and job accountability affected their perception about their *use of time* relating to their professional development and growth was important; because each participant either discussed this during the interview or mentioned it in their review of transcript. This review of their transcripts and follow-up interview helped provide validity checks and triangulation of data.

Documents and Artifacts

A compilation of documents and artifacts (e.g., district/school websites, school report cards, Illinois 5-Essentials Survey report, district budget reports, district professional development agendas, and calendars, minutes from superintendent leadership team meetings and minutes from school board meetings) were reviewed to gather additional data. These documents assisted in learning about critical contextual features of the district as a whole and each school (e.g., student population and other demographics, along with the district's mission statement and each school's mission statement as well) and provided varied perspectives for validity purposes. Data from the

survey questionnaire, interviews, and artifacts were considered about the literature review (e.g., the role of district administration, core knowledge about executing effective instruction, and transformational practices of highly-effective principals) and helped provide comparisons for evaluating reliability and triangulation of data.

Data Analysis Techniques

In the data analysis phase, responses from the survey and pre-determined interview questions, with additional probing questions, and documents and artifacts, was used to collect data for subsequent examination and analysis. The literature review informed the lens perspectives of professional development and support system frameworks offered through a sample of high-performing districts. (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007**).** The analysis was intended to compare key findings with answers to critical questions.

I used both inductive and deductive reasoning (Patton, 1999) to analyze data from the survey questionnaire, interviews, along with documents and artifacts, and considered the data in relation to the literature review (e.g., role of district administration, core knowledge about executing effective instruction, and transformational practices of highly-effective principals) using the Survey Monkey tool to help provide comparisons for evaluating data. Interview and questionnaire responses were combined and grouped to examine responses across categories. Participants' professional development experiences were coded and analyzed for themes. Representative themes included PD from university course(s), visits to other schools, individual or collaborative research, mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching, participating in a principal network, workshops, conferences, or training, and leadership book clubs.

Using an iterative process, I developed a code guide of responses primarily using groupings of *never*, *seldom* and *frequently*; arched under themes of valued-experience and not valued (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2016). I next analyzed each participant's responses to the survey questionnaire and interview questions (Day, Gu, & Sammons, 2016), parallel to data collected from documents and artifacts; and the findings of the literature review (Louis et al., 2010). When it appeared there was a difference in interpretation of responses to survey and interview questions, depending on the context and how each participant made sense of the question, I indicated this on interview transcripts and in my analysis by referring to my notes on the coded transcript.

After coding, I wrote a summary in response to six overarching analytic questions that aligned with my initial key questions guiding the program evaluation. The six analytic questions were: 1) Does the district provide professional development for principals? 2) If yes, to what degree is it offered? 3) Does the district provide support to principals' growth and development in the form of finances, human or time? 4) If yes, to what degree is it offered? 5) What professional development and training do principals see themselves needing to become effective instructional leaders? 6) What recommendations do principals have to the district for providing professional development and support to principals in their ability to carry out their duties and responsibilities as instructional leaders?

These questions focused on each participant's understanding of how he/she perceived the support and professional development he/she received from the district; along with findings in research studies related to this topic (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). I then examined the data to identify how participants' aggregated perceptions

fared in accordance with data from documents and artifacts (e.g., district/school budgets, minutes of school board meetings, district/school professional development calendars; agenda and minutes from the weekly superintendent executive team meetings, etc.).

Narrative summaries, which included data from interview transcripts, survey questionnaire and document artifacts about codes and interpretation of responses, were then developed for each participant (Maxwell & Miller, 2008). These narrative summaries allowed for examination of each participant's perceptions and eventually led to cross-case comparisons (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) so that aggregate knowledge could be formed. These summaries also helped with establishing themes of principals' views of their valued professional development experiences and support from the district; and what recommendations (wish list) they expressed.

SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

From the survey data, findings concerning the overall question of principals'

perception of professional development (PD) and support from the central office were

straightforward and clear. There were no identifiable findings of a relationship between

demographic characteristics (e.g., years of experience as an elementary or secondary

teacher and as a school administrator or in a school leadership position, or participation in

a pre-preparation program for aspiring principals) and background of case study

participants and their perceived perceptions. Only slight inconsistencies appeared in both

survey responses and the semi-structured interviews. To clarify the inconsistent

interpretation of questions from case study participants, during the interviews additional

probing questions were utilized to build consistency in context of interpretation and its

potential impact on participants' perceptions of the influence of district PD and support

on their ability to effectively influence instruction and student learning.

The only significant discrepancy in data from the survey questionnaire was about

principals' perception of their *actual* influence in decisions concerning the content of in-

service professional development programs for principals in the district (Question 6 on

the survey). The three case study principals responded with minor influence, moderate

influence, and significant influence respectively-- 33% or one principal per option choice.

Data from the questionnaire survey indicated only 33.33% or one out of three case

study principals perceived that the central office provided principal PD during the regular

contract hours (Question 7 on the survey questionnaire). The percentage of those

participants who agreed that the district provided opportunities for visits to other schools

designed to improve their work as principal (Question 9b on survey questionnaire) was 0% or none out of three.

Survey data also indicated that 100% or three out of three case study participants agreed that the district had not provided PD designed or chosen to support their ability to guide their school in defining the roadmap for data-informed instruction (i.e., rigor, and adapting teaching to meet students' needs) (Question 8a on the survey questionnaire). Likewise, survey questionnaire data indicated the same response (100%) or three out of three case study participants who agreed that the district had not provided PD designed or chosen to support their ability to give all teachers professional, one-on-one coaching that increases their effectiveness as instructors (Question 8b on the survey questionnaire). This response (100%) or three out of three case study participants was consistent with their response to survey questionnaire number nine-d (9d) regarding opportunity to participate in or experience mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching of principals, as part of a formal arrangement that was recognized or supported by the school or district. It was not unexpected that these survey questions on PD would yield similar responses from case study participants regarding its ability to effectively influence instruction and student learning. As previously stated, additional probing questions were asked during one-on-one interviews to clarify and to build consistency in context of interpretation and its potential impact on participants' perceptions of the influence of district PD and support on their ability to effectively influence instruction and student learning.

Both survey questionnaire data and semi-structured interviews data pointed to one crucial overall data point that was consistent with the literature review regarding the

critical roles that districts play in supporting and building principal capacity for instructional leadership development (Bedard & Mombourquette, 2015; Honig, 2012; Manna, 2015; Mendels, 2012). As cited Kelley and Peterson (2000) and Marsh et al. (2005), in the literature review, the relationship between executive-level district office administrators with their school principals and the degree to which they provide job-embedded professional development support determines the degree of principal instructional capacity to effectively influence instruction and improve student learning (Honig, 2012; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wahlstrom & York-Barr, 2011).

As indicated above, each of the survey questions pertaining to district-sponsored PD for principals designed or chosen to a) support their ability to guide their school in defining the roadmap for data-informed instruction (Question 8a) and, b) support their ability to give all teachers professional, one-on-one coaching that increases their effectiveness as instructors (Question 8b) received a 100% response in the negative from case study principals. Additionally, when asked whether the district provided principals with time for PD during the regular contract hours, 66.67% or two out of three case study principals responded in the negative on the survey question. Later, once clarification and definition was given during the semi-structured interviews, 100% or three out of three case study principals replied in the negative. The response was likewise, 100% in the negative when asked how often district-sponsored PD for principals (Survey question 8c) was designed or chosen to support their ability to guarantee every student well-structured lessons from their teachers that teach the right content. Given the literature review's emphasis on the significance of the district's role in providing ongoing, job-embedded PD for principals, this was the key and most critical factor examined on both the survey

questionnaire and during semi-structured interviews to determine its impact on building instructional capacity.

Three major themes and one additional emerged from analysis of both survey and semi-structured interviews data: (1) effective in supporting principals' ability to coach teachers; (2) effective in supporting principals' ability to ensure the execution of quality instruction; (3) effective in providing opportunities to share their challenges and reflect on practice with colleagues; and (4) needed to become effective in executing quality instruction.

The semi-structured interviews provided the opportunity to examine further the findings identified from the survey questionnaire data. Responses of case study principals provided some insights to minor inconsistencies and discrepancies and the chance to clarify and define terms to build consistency in context of interpretation and its potential impact on case study principals' perceptions of the influence of district PD and support on their ability to effectively influence instruction and student learning.

To protect the anonymity of each participant quoted, findings are given in aggregate, and individual quotes are presented without names. Themes come together in an overarching way on the existence of professional development content, and support principals were receiving, according to their perception, designed to help their ability to influence instruction and student learning.

Effective in Supporting Principals' Ability to Coach Teachers

When asked to describe their professional development over the past twelve months of district-sponsored professional development (PD) designed to support their ability to coach teachers to improve their instructional practices, the aggregate response

was 'never.' The initial response of "I think they have on a limited basis" (recorded as 'seldom') from one case study participant indicated that there was a difference in interpretation and how he/she made sense of the question as he/she continued to support his/her response, "They have supported us with initiatives such as AVID to help teachers with instructional practices. They've supported us with Quantum Learning." This response changed when I probingly asked how the PD had helped him/her personally in his/her ability to *coach* (demonstrate or train teachers how to use those instructional practices effectively). The subsequent response "In that sense, not at all," confirmed the response of the other two participants. "In terms of specific focus on coaching we have not done anything this year" and "The district doesn't have anything in place; not that I know of, on how it should train its principals in those (coaching teachers) matters" were the detailed responses from the other two participants respectively.

Effective in Supporting Principals' Ability to Ensure

Execution of Quality Instruction

When asked to describe their professional development over the past 12 months of district-sponsored professional development designed to support their ability to ensure the execution of quality instruction in their building they each agreed to the response of 'never'; although one was hopeful for future offerings: "I think that the training is forthcoming." One response indicated the overarching perception from the principals of the district being one of *organizational management* rather than *instructional*: "So, the district hasn't provided any training; of sorts to help improve teaching and learning in the classroom, to support teachers, etc. There's no professional development on that." "…we're a district of management; not a district of instruction." Another response

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indicated that although the district did not provide strategic job-embedded professional development for principals, the district did provide financial support to principals in attending training and workshops elsewhere: "We usually seek out professional development opportunities on our own. I can say the district has been good about allowing us to attend those things." One respondent indicated frustration with district practice of only approving training or workshops within a particular locale:

> The district has an enormous amount of professional development money that has not been utilized (teachers and administrators) and is carrying over from year to year….I think we're too caught up in where the professional development is as opposed to what it has to offer. And the moment you say, *well, the professional development is being offered in Florida, or California or the like*, 'You can't go there!' is the district's response.

Effective in Providing Opportunities to Share Challenges and

Reflect on Practice

Case study principals reported that whereas little or no ongoing district job-embedded support or professional development wherein they could share their problems and reflect on practice *with colleagues*, they each took responsibility for their development. One principal stated: "I tend to try to seek out training through ASCD and organizations such as that because there is a big focus on, you know, principal and trainee/training and coaching." "… and also IPA." "So I kind of, you know, sought out opportunities on my own and then requested permission to attend." Another principal's response supported this: "Well, you get the training from NASSP. You get it from the *Educational Leader* (journal/periodical). You get it from IPA." "All of those

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organizations that assist and expose principals to the best research practices out there--

attending those conferences (NASSP/ASCD/NABSE, etc.) and playing an active role in

those conferences." Still, another responded:

> I base my professional development on the six standards set forth by ISBE. I pick
>
> maybe two standards to focus on in a year and try to sort of hone my professional
>
> development around those; or what I've done also is if I've been seeing myself
>
> constantly in a challenge in a particular area, then I want to get professional
>
> development in that area as a way of, in terms of knowing how to meet that
>
> challenge.

Other findings of principals taking responsibility for their development included

university course(s), individual research, participation in a principal network, and other

seminars or conferences in which they were not a presenter.

Needed to Become Effective in Executing Quality Instruction

Case study participants were also asked to describe the professional development

and training needed to become effective in executing quality instruction. This request

proved to be another area in which it was apparent there was a difference in interpretation

of the context and how each participant made sense of the question. Examples of this are

as follows:

> The first PD that needs to take place for division chairs is how does the division
>
> leader coach content in a non-threatening way that both holds the teacher and the
>
> division chair accountable for high standards. The professional development that
>
> I need to solidify the change or not so much the change but the shift in content
>
> area leadership is to seek out professional development that is content-based for

those divisional leaders so that they won't be walking into a naked situation. The

move to have divisional leadership is only going to be as good as the candidates

that you would hire.

Subsequently, when probed to consider specific multiple-choice areas of need and

support recommendations, the aggregate response affirmed the need for training that was

designed or chosen to support their ability to guide their school in defining the roadmap

for data-driven instruction (i.e., rigor, and adapting teaching to meet students' needs),

designed or chosen to support their ability to strengthen both culture and instruction

within their school with hands-on training, and designed or chosen to support their ability

to expand the school leadership team's impact on instruction and culture throughout the

school. These categories were taken directly from the initial survey questionnaire. A

careful and thorough perusal of district professional development calendars, agenda items

on weekly superintendent cabinet meetings, and minutes of school board meetings almost

never included topics of professional development specifically designed for principals.

These findings, in my interpretation, support the need to provide support and ongoing

job-embedded professional development to principals in U.S. School District X.

SECTION FIVE: JUDGMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

With today's leadership challenges of principals making the shift from a focus of

management to that of the more demanding focus of *instructional leadership*, it is

incumbent on school districts to provide focused ongoing job-embedded professional

development and deliberate support to help build leadership capacity, improve

instructional practices of teachers and, ultimately, increase student achievement and

learning. This program evaluation illuminated the importance of districts providing

consistent ongoing job-embedded professional development for their principals. It

offered insight into ways to fulfill this district obligation. It also pointed to

recommendations of specific actions and tools that school districts seeking to build

leadership capacity can use.

School districts need to re-establish priorities to provide opportunities for

principals to build their instructional competency and leadership capacity. These

communities must do more than revise their organizational charts to show a shift in

responsibility on paper but actually must change their day-to-day work to provide support

for principals' development as instructional leaders. School communities must ensure

school leaders receive professional job-embedded development that is linked to

performance feedback and student achievement through re-prioritized service and support

(Honig et al., 2009; McCombs, & Miller, 2007) grounded in the use of data, open

dialogue, courageous conversations, and interpersonal accountability (Fullan, 2011).

These new priorities can be helpful in many ways. The literature review offered

guidance for districts in this area by providing specific practices (e.g., focusing on joint

work, modeling, developing and using tools, intentionally designing and using materials,

brokering and creating and sustaining social engagement) for district administrators.

Districts must provide opportunities for principals to experience working in a leadership

learning community comprised of discussion that is reflective about their work

challenges.

Districts make this provision by engaging principals in structured exercises and

protocols. Secondly, this feature is further enhanced by the creation of a forum for

reflective practice with colleagues, resulting in the promotion of both individual and

collective development and growth and eliminating a tradition of isolation among

principals. Thirdly, but not least, districts must provide opportunities for principals to

learn from each other about practices that support teacher growth as well; which in turn

helps to improve student achievement (Drago-Severson, 2009; Drago-Severson, Blum-

DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013).

Multiple accompanying activities specific to implementation of these strategies

are possible. The central office can create district-level teaching and learning teams to

focus on execution of curriculum and instruction. It can engage principal supervisors and

principals in a coach-mentor like relationship. Centrally led principals' conferences and

institutes that provide knowledge about instruction and builds intellectual and attitudinal

commitment to the district's programs and priorities can be established. Support groups

focused on some specific need of principals can be formed. Specialized institutes

facilitated by outside consultants can be organized. Focus literacy support groups in

which principals of schools with the most at-risk students can be convened to focus on

specific problems and successes of implementation and practice, with emphasis on the

particular needs of those schools and their students. Other recommended strategies

include organizing principals' study groups, and allowing time for school inter-visitation and principal buddying.

Findings in this program evaluation study indicated that principals in U.S. School District X recognized the need for and desired ongoing district-sponsored job-embedded professional development and support. They agreed that this support and relevant professional development would benefit them in becoming more effective in meeting the demands and responsibilities they face as instructional leaders; especially in the area of providing instructional feedback to teachers. Most of the professional development they received, however, was initiated themselves with only limited support and direction from the district. They, not unlike many other principals, can become challenged in providing focused, useful instructional teacher feedback. Districts must provide evidence-based strategies that are aligned with new evaluation instruments and systems (Halverson & Clifford, 2006).

Reprioritized practices of the superintendent (or another principal supervisor) must include not only accompanying and observation of principals during classroom visits and post-observation conferences but also subsequent conversations together to discuss evidence of how effectively principals have delivered focused feedback to teachers. The focus should not be on whether principals have all the answers but more about developing their skills in facilitating productive conversations with teachers in a way that teachers positively receive the feedback and allows them to reflect on their classroom successes and challenges and ideas to improve their instructional practices. Further research could focus on developing a deeper understanding of *leverage*

leadership theory practices (seven levers of instruction) and how they help build competency and increase capacity for instructional leadership.

The findings also have important policy implications as well. Current federal policies such as the Every Student Succeeds Act focus on providing technical assistance to qualifying schools and districts. Program evaluation findings suggest the need for districts to provide intentional and specific ongoing job-embedded professional development and support that focuses on what principals should know *about instruction*, improving not only principals' leadership practices but also teachers' as well (Bambrick-Santoyo & Peiser, 2012). If it can be shown that improvement in student achievement and teacher instructional practices can be linked closely to the support and professional development principals receive from the central office, then perhaps school districts will include these intentional and specific processes in their job descriptions and expectations for principals and other building administrators. Admittedly, this program evaluation study is a reflection of research already done on the topic (Honig, 2012; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wahlstrom & York-Barr, 2011). The continued focus of attention on the subject, nonetheless, further supports school districts' realization that they must heed Elmore's (2000) theme of "reciprocal accountability": *For every unit increase that the district holds principals accountable, it has equal responsibility and obligation for providing support.* It also points to an urgent need to develop policies that support principal competency development and sustainability as effective instructional leaders. School boards and district leaders have an obligation to create conditions for this to occur.

New policies need to be created to support the implementation of more ways to better support principals and provide more effective job-embedded professional

development. These policies would create and financially support ongoing job-embedded professional development for principals to grow and improve their leadership practices and teachers' instructional practices as well and also help districts gain an understanding of the resources, support and professional development principals need to ensure they not only are instructionally knowledgeable but also know how and when they should use that knowledge. Districts must intentionally seek alternate ways to better support and develop the competency skills of principals that allow them to move from the theoretical knowledge they gained in college, pre-preparation programs (e.g., Aspiring Principals, etc.) to being able to execute effective practices in their role as instructional leaders. They must implement new strategies to support principals' development and growth and ability to adapt current and new district initiatives; again, heeding Elmore's (2000) theme of "reciprocal accountability" referenced above. The decision to provide the necessary resources, support and professional development supported by policy changes has the potential of making a positive impact on schools and districts.

School districts have the responsibility to help principals increase their competencies and capacities to adapt to the multiple complexities of their work. This program evaluation study pointed to specific strategies and actions that districts can use to support professional development that leads to improvement in leadership, teacher instruction, and increased student achievement.

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APPENDIX A: PRINCIPAL SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Principal Experience and Training
1. PRIOR to this school year, how many years did you serve as the principal of THIS OR ANY OTHER School?
2. PRIOR to this school year, how many years did you serve as the principal of THIS SCHOOL?

Principal Professional Development
3. Before you became a principal, did you participate in any district or school training or development program for ASPIRING school principals?
4. In the past 12 months, have you participated in any professional development activities related to your role as a principal?
5. In the past 12 months, have YOU participated in the following kinds of professional development?
    a) University course(s) related to your role as principal
    b) Visits to other schools designed to improve your own work as principal
    c) Individual or collaborative research on a topic of interest to you professionally
    d) Mentoring and/or peer observation and coaching of principals, as part of a formal arrangement that is recognized or supported by the school or district?
    e) Participating in a principal network (e.g., a group of principals organized by an outside agency or through the internet)?
    f) Workshops, conferences, or training in which you were a presenter?
    g) Other workshops or conferences in which you were not a presenter?
6. How much ACTUAL influence do you think you have as a building principal on decisions concerning the content of in-service professional development programs for principals in the district?
7. Does the district provide PRINCIPALS with time for professional development during regular contract hours?
8. How often is district-sponsored professional development for PRINCIPALS in your district –
    a. Designed or chosen to support your ability to guide your school in defining the roadmap for data-driven instruction (i.e., rigor, and adapting teaching to meet students' needs)?
    b. Designed or chosen to support your ability to give all teachers professional, one-on-one coaching that increases their effectiveness as instructors?
    c. Designed or chosen to support your ability to guarantee every student well-structured lessons from their teachers that teach the right content?
    d. Designed or chosen to support your ability to strengthen both culture and instruction within your school with hands-on training that sticks?
    e. Designed or chosen to support your ability to create a strong school culture where learning thrives?

f. Designed or chosen to support your ability to build and support the right team for your school?

g. Designed or chosen to support your ability to expand the school leadership team's impact on instruction and culture throughout your school?

h. Evaluated for evidence of improvement in student achievement?

Contact Information

9. The survey questionnaire may involve a brief follow-up. The following information would assist me in contacting you if you have moved or changed jobs. Please keep in mind that all information provided here is strictly confidential and will only be used in the event that I need to contact you for follow-up. All your responses that relate to or describe identifiable characteristics of individuals may be used only for statistical purposes and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose, unless otherwise compelled by law. Please indicate your name, cell number, and your e-mail address; in addition to your responses regarding questionnaire completion.

10. What is your first name?

11. What is your last name?

12. What is your cell phone number?

13. What is your work e-mail address?

14. Please enter the date you completed this questionnaire. (Use 01/07/2016 format).

15. Please indicate how much time it took you to complete this questionnaire—not counting interruptions. (Please record the time in minutes; e.g., 5 minutes, 17 minutes, etc.).

APPENDIX B: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(**Focus:** The *existence, content, and nature* of principal professional development in the district)

1. **What has been your greatest & least valuable professional development experience as principal in the past twelve (12) months**? **Why was it valuable/least valuable**? (**Probe**: Try to get him/her to talk about the nature of the professional development, and how it has affected his/her practices as an instructional leader (e.g., learned about effective teaching and curriculum, how to evaluate and provide feedback to teachers, how to use data in providing feedback to teachers to improve student performance).

2. **To what extent do you as a principal take responsibility for your own professional development**? **What examples do you have of you doing this**? (**Probe**: Try to get him/her to talk about university courses related to the principal role, individual or collaborative research on a topic of interest to him/her professionally, participation in a principal network organized by an outside agency or through the internet, or other workshops, conferences, or training in which he/she was not a presenter—all mentioned in the survey questionnaire responses).

3. **Tell me about the Aspiring Principals training or development program you participated in prior to becoming a principal**. (Only those who indicated 'yes' on survey questionnaire).

4. The superintendent often uses the term "student centered". According to the definition from the source he references (McCombs & Miller) book-- *a focusing on individual learners (students) and combining with a focus on the best available knowledge about learning and the teaching practices that support learning for all teachers and students*. **Has the district provided professional development for PRINCIPALS designed to support your ability to create a *student-centered* culture in your building**?

5. One of the questions on the survey questionnaire basically asked the same thing several ways. The essence of the question was: **Has the district, and if so, how often, sponsored professional development for PRINCIPALS that was designed to support your ability to *coach* teachers to improve their instructional practices?**

6. The board has approved the superintendent's recommendation to replace *Area Instructional Leaders* with *Division Leaders*. For the most part these new positions and their job description will at best provide content-specific assistance to (you) and your teachers. Although this is a good thing, there is no definite indication that simply adding such a position with a new job description is going to guarantee the practices and strategies necessary for growing and supporting teachers in improving instruction. **What training has the district provided you to insure the execution of quality instruction in your building**? **What professional development and training do you see yourself needing to become effective in this area?**

7. **Is there anything else you'd like to share about your professional development experience influence in U.S. District X on your leadership development or ability to carry out your duties and responsibilities as an instructional leader**? (**Probe**: Try to get his/her view on what ways, if any, would he/she like to improve professional development (learning) opportunities in the district context? What, if anything, does he/she wish could occur)?