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A Comprehensive Audit of Professional Development for K-12 School Leaders in
the Commonwealth of Virginia

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for:

EDLP 798 Capstone Plan Implementation

Presented to:

Dr. Genevieve Siegel-Hawley, Dr. Joshua Cole, and Dr. Kecia Lipscomb

March 23, 2021

Acknowledgments and Dedications

The group would like to collectively acknowledge the amazing support, coaching, and mentorship of Dr. Genevieve Siegel-Hawley. As a professor, you challenged us. As a committee chair, you mentored and welcomed us. We are grateful for your time and your friendship.

To our committee members, Dr. Joshua Cole and Dr. Kecia Lipscomb, we thank you for your time and guidance as we followed our path. You helped make our dreams become reality.

We also thank our Capstone client, the VCU School of Education Department of Educational Leadership and Dr. Whitney Newcomb.

Missy Hill

I would like to thank the *#bestteam* -- Tim, the APA guru, my calming voice and human jukebox; Melisa, the survey queen and my revision partner-in-crime; Major, thrower of idea spaghetti and champion of gifs. My love for you three fantastic humans and scholars knows no bounds. I also thank my mother, Kathey Davis, for instilling in me a love of learning and a desire to be an educator from an early age. I thank my father and guardian angel, Gary Davis, for helping me see that I can do hard things and for inspiring me every day. I thank my husband, Hoke, for encouraging my dreams, making them a priority, and helping them become a reality. I dedicate this work to my precious children, Jude and Wren. You can reach the stars if you want it and choose to go for it. May you chase every dream and work toward every goal as you grow and learn.

Melisa Naumann

I would like to dedicate this accomplishment to my parents, Donald and Debbie Naumann, for their unwavering love and support. I could not be prouder than to put the title of "Doctor" in front of my family name. I would also like to acknowledge the love of my life, Scott Collett, for believing in me and walking this journey with me, every step of the way. I would like to dedicate this achievement in memory of my brother, Matthew Naumann. The bond between a sister and brother is eternal and cannot be broken, so I would like to thank Matt, for being my guardian angel and inspiration to achieve my dreams. Additionally, I would also like to dedicate this work in memory of my former student, Grayson Shelton, for illuminating my life with your infectious smile and heart of gold.

Tim Tillman

I would like to acknowledge the support of my family, friends, and co-workers. I give special thanks to our cohort of professionals that continued to pull me toward a finish line. Without a shared experience, the journey would not have been as fun. To my team, I say thank you and recognize that each of us played a role in this effort that seemed tailor-made. *What's next?*

Major Warner

I would like to dedicate this work to my family for their unwavering support, specifically my wife Lisa and son Tre', my mom Josephine, and my dad Major Warner Sr. It is from you that I draw strength and inspiration. I love you guys more than anything. Finally, I wish to thank the best capstone team and chairperson ever, it was an awesome journey!

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	3
Chapter 1: Introduction	5
Chapter 2: Methodology	9
The Impact of COVID-19 and Social Justice on Data Collection	10
Research Questions	12
Study Design	13
Data Collection	14
Literature Review.	14
Survey.	16
Interview and Focus Groups.	17
Data Analysis	18
Chapter 3: Literature Review	18
Defining Terms Related to Effective Professional Development for School Leaders	19
Barriers to Effective Professional Development for School Leaders	21
Structural Barriers Limiting Professional Development for School Leaders.	22
Psychological Barriers Limiting Professional Development for School Leaders.	24
Social Barriers to Professional Development for School Leaders.	25
Participants in Pre-Service or In-Service Professional Development	27
Pre-Service Professional Development.	28
In-service Professional Development.	29
Effective Structural Components Preferred by Leaders in Professional Development	30
Real-World Application.	31
Alignment with School and District Values.	31
Alignment with Individual Leader’s Values.	32
Active Engagement.	33
Mentoring and Coaching.	34
Collaboration.	36
Feedback and Reflection.	38
Supporting Professional Development Needs through Effective Structural Components	39
Traditional Content Topics and the Use of Effective Structural Components.	40

AUDIT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	4
Supporting the Need for Effective Use of Data for Decision-Making.	41
Supporting the Need for Effective Social-Emotional Competence.	42
Supporting the Need for Effective Social Justice Leadership.	44
Gaps in the Literature on Professional Development for School Leaders	48
Chapter 4: Discussion of Findings	48
Findings Related to COVID-19 and Calls for Social Justice	50
Sitting School Leaders' Definition of Effective Professional Development	51
Creating Buy-in to Professional Development Provided to School Leaders	51
Garnering Engagement from School Leaders	56
Current State of Professional Development for School Leaders	58
Content Covered in Professional Development for School Leaders	59
Sitting School Leaders' Experience with Effective Professional Development	64
Providers of Professional Development for School Leaders	66
School Leaders' Perceived Effectiveness of Providers	67
Funding Specifically for School Leaders' Professional Development	69
Barriers to Professional Development for School Leaders	71
Summary of Findings	73
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations	75
Develop and Provide Effective Professional Development for School Leaders	82
Consider Delivery Method and Sustainability of Professional Development for School Leaders	83
Provide Targeted Content to Support Equitable Outcomes for All Students	85
Seek to Eliminate Funding as a Barrier to Professional Development for School Leaders	86
Increase Communication of Professional Development Opportunities	87
Practice Equity with People and Programs	88
Timeline for Implementation of Recommendations	89
References	91
Appendix A	98
Appendix B	108
Appendix C	112

Chapter 1: Introduction

Professional development occurs in public education to develop best practices among staff and to ensure students experience meaningful learning opportunities in safe and engaging environments. Often, professional development targets teachers as the primary audience; this practice ignores the role school leaders play in supporting their school and community (Hammond et al., 2017). Through effective professional learning opportunities, providers of professional development can improve school leaders' ability to implement and sustain practices that benefit their staff, students, and communities.

Professional development should address leaders' needs as they adjust to changes in their roles. Previously, school leaders practiced a traditional style of organizational leadership, one that functions like a manager to maintain stability within the organization through budgeting, directing tasks, and creating procedures. Today, school leaders are tasked with maintaining organizational stability while also creating the school vision, developing climate and culture within the school community, and inspiring and motivating all stakeholders (Northouse, 2013). Increased expectations of school leaders stem from societal calls for greater accountability in student outcomes, shifts in instructional practices for equitable policies and procedures, and needs for social, emotional, and mental support for students. To support school leaders as they respond to the shift away from deep-rooted, traditional school leadership, providers of professional development should provide programming that supports leaders as they guide instruction in their building and respond during socially challenging times (Johnson et al., 2017).

Highly effective professional learning experiences increase leadership performance by developing knowledge, skills, and strategies that tackle challenges faced by schools and school leaders. Previous and current professional development practices fail to provide depth of learning

to address societal changes impacting education today. The shift in accountability measures for school leaders requires them to take a more active role in addressing student outcomes and meeting the specific challenges of every student. *Instructional leadership* means more than *teacher evaluation*; it also encompasses providing resources and support for teachers to ensure classroom practices and procedures meet the needs of all students (Johnson et al., 2017).

Meeting the needs of all students is particularly important as school districts throughout America welcome more diverse populations. To fully meet all student needs, leadership practices and strategies shift focus away from pure content and curricular issues, and instead seek to strengthen teacher efficacy as they present the curriculum to students of varying experiences and backgrounds. To pivot and meet these expectations, school leaders require professional development that helps them function as both organizational and community leaders. They must be able to manage the daily tasks of a school while embracing instructional and relational leadership skills that center on fostering student growth for the most vulnerable population of students in their schools.

Providers of professional development need to be cognizant of structural barriers that limit their ability to address needed leadership skills. For example, school leaders struggle to balance the time needed to improve their leadership within the school community with the time necessary to meet the growing tasks and demands of the job. These time restraints are felt more significantly by leaders in smaller districts where there are fewer members of a leadership team to accomplish the many tasks assigned to school leaders (Cadero-Smith, 2020). Further, school leaders who engage in professional development need time to learn and apply new skills. When professional development sessions and workshops are too short, providers of professional development are unable to go in-depth on needed training and school leaders have limited

opportunity to engage and process the content (Daresh & Playko, 1992; Lester, 2003). Therefore, providers of professional development have the challenge of offering school leaders opportunities to engage in sustained professional development programming that aligns with their daily work.

Perhaps the greatest barrier school leaders face today, though, are social barriers that inhibit them from relating to stakeholders from differing backgrounds and experiences. Increased diversity in schools has resulted in a need to ensure leadership practices that allow all students to “acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills needed to function in an ethnically and racially diverse nation and world” (Santamaría, 2014, p. 353). School leaders are tasked with creating learning environments that accept and support students and families from varying backgrounds and ability levels while also ensuring teachers are equipped with instructional strategies to develop authentic and rigorous learning experiences. Therefore, school leaders need exposure to relational leadership skills to effectively practice relationship-building and conflict resolution (Lasater, 2016). These relational skills are integral to preparing school leaders for social justice leadership, a growing need as schools promote respect for and inclusion of all stakeholders regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, identity, or ability (Theoharis, 2007).

In Virginia specifically, a survey of 467 elementary, middle, and high school principals revealed that 78% of principals recognize that their attention to their own professional development and to school-based professional development programs directly impact the professional growth of their staff; still, only 57% of principals reported participating regularly in activities for their own professional development (Smith & Jones, 2020). According to Smith and Jones (2020), principals spend most of their time managing day-to-day tasks like transportation or discipline; principals across all three levels reported 68% of their time is

devoted to these immediate problems in the school day. Still, principals indicated they would prefer to spend their time on cultural responsiveness or improving instruction, skills that require on-going professional learning. Therefore, providers of professional development to Virginia school leaders must understand and overcome structural barriers like time to engage school leaders in professional development that allows them to build equitable school communities where instruction leads to improved outcomes for all students.

Addressing issues of diversity and social justice requires access to relevant professional development so that school leaders can ensure students have a safe and effective learning environment (Cox, 2001). Providers of professional development must recognize ways that current programming for school leaders lacks relevance and fails to truly impact leadership practices and adjust to better serve leaders' needs. Educational leaders must seek and embrace professional learning that deepens instructional leadership practices and emphasize strategies that allow the leader to support the school community during social change (Dintersmith, 2018).

This audit specifically considers professional development for school leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia. While most schools in the United States operate within a specialized government district with authority and geographic limitations described in state law, Virginia's schools are unique. School districts, in most states, operate as independent government units while Virginia's schools are considered subdivisions of their local controlling government entity. A Virginia school division is granted authority, receives funding, and is subservient to its local government. Virginia does not allow unified or consolidated school systems, although some incorporated cities and towns within counties may opt to allow a county to operate the schools within the city or town. Therefore, this audit refers to school systems in Virginia as divisions and other state school systems as districts.

To understand the current state of professional development for school leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia, this audit will utilize a mixed method approach to explore the following major research questions:

1. What does the literature reveal about effective professional learning for school leaders?
2. Who are the major providers of professional development for school leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia?
3. How do school divisions fund professional development for school leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia?
4. How do Virginia school leaders evaluate their experience with professional development?

Researchers will explore available current literature to define effective professional development for school leadership, note barriers to effective professional development for school leaders, identify effective structural components for implementing professional development, and consider school leaders' content topic needs with professional development. A survey will be conducted with 132 school divisions to better understand school divisions' financial commitment to professional development for school leaders. Interviews and focus groups with principals, their administrative teams, and division leaders will reveal school leaders' beliefs and experiences with professional development in their division.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Across the Commonwealth of Virginia, differences in school divisions lead to varied approaches when planning for and implementing professional development for its school leaders based on multiple factors specific to their experiences. The Commonwealth of Virginia consists of eight Superintendent's Regions, among which, there are significant differences in terms of demographics, size, geography, funding, and politics. These differences create variances in

school division resources, initiatives, and priorities. For example, school divisions in Region 1, like Chesterfield County Public Schools and Henrico County Public Schools, have professional development opportunities, including partnerships with Virginia Commonwealth University or the University of Richmond, as well as division-based cohorts largely because of proximity to schools. Meanwhile, school divisions in Region 3, like West Point County Public Schools and Mathews County Public Schools, are more remote and smaller, making access to resources a barrier to professional development. These examples frame the importance of school divisions, colleges and universities, and major providers understanding the definition of effective professional development for school leaders, particularly in Virginia's diverse educational ecosystem. With this knowledge, providers can take appropriate steps to meet leaders' needs and overcome barriers specific to regions.

The Impact of COVID-19 and Social Justice on Data Collection

The health pandemic caused by COVID-19 during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years forced schools to face and overcome challenges for which most were not and could not have been prepared. Never in the 385 years since the Boston Latin School opened in 1635 has such an overwhelming impact been seen on the American public education system. For the first time in history, millions of children and teachers engaged in virtual instruction provided through Virginia's school divisions starting in March 2020 and continuing through at least the 2020-2021 school year. Overnight, pedagogy transformed to online instruction. This abrupt change altered leadership needs for schools. Teachers became isolated from their support and administrators. Students became isolated from their peers and their trusted adults. Leaders were asked to fill the gaps, adapt, and support their teachers and students. Immediate professional development offerings were made available, and future sessions promise a greater focus on technological

changes and the impact of virtual learning. By fall 2020, approaches to instruction varied across the Commonwealth of Virginia which some students returned to school and while others remained in a virtual or hybrid learning environment; these varied approaches created challenges for all stakeholders, creating new needs and opportunities for professional development for school leaders.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted delivery methods and content topics for professional development in schools, increased the use of technology in education, and forced attention on weaknesses in both the traditional approaches to education and in virtual learning. School leaders are adapting quickly to the changing needs in schools and communities and shifting their leadership approach to adjust expectations of educators to help students learn in any location.

As a result of the pandemic, this study was conducted completely virtually, something that just a year ago would not have been proposed or accepted. Interviews and focus groups were conducted via live video conferencing software that has become an accepted means of both educational and business communication.

While the world struggled to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, America also experienced a call for social justice following instances of racial inequity across the nation. As demonstrations, marches, and activist efforts flooded the American media landscape, America started to learn the pain of its populations and school leaders recognized their responsibility to both teach and exemplify anti-racist and equity concepts to create safe learning environments for all educators and students. This audit sought to explore the relevance and availability of professional development focused on equitable practices and to report on changes to professional development occurring at the school and division level. Findings underscored a sense of urgency

around equity leadership and highlighted the emergence of professional development content provided to school leaders to ensure equitable access to education for all students.

Research Questions

To develop a comprehensive audit of the professional development provided to school leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia, this audit explores the following questions:

1. What does the literature reveal about effective professional learning for school leaders?
 - a. What does the literature state about effective delivery methods (e.g., in person vs. virtual, collaborative vs. individual, sit and get vs. interactive, etc.) for presenting professional development to school leaders?
 - b. What does the literature reveal about professional development content presented to school leaders?
2. Who are the major providers of professional development for school leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia?
 - a. Who are the major providers identified as using effective modes of professional development for school leaders?
 - b. Where are the major providers of professional development for school leaders located?
 - c. What are the professional backgrounds of the major providers of professional development for school leaders?
 - d. Do the major providers of professional development for school leaders employ presenters of racially diverse backgrounds when giving presentations?
3. How do school divisions fund professional development for school leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia?

- a. How do school divisions commit to professional development for school leaders in the budget process?
 - b. Rank order the percentage of funding for professional development for school leaders from Federal, State, and Local sources.
 - c. How much money (within specified ranges) was spent on school leader specific professional development in the 2019-2020 school year?
 - d. What other sources of funding are used for professional development for school leaders? (e.g., grants, donations, foundations, etc.)
4. How do Virginia school leaders evaluate their experience with professional development?
- a. What are school leaders' preferred modalities for professional development?
 - b. How do school leaders rate their engagement in the professional development they previously experienced?
 - c. How do school leaders rate the relevance of the professional development they previously experienced?
 - d. What professional learning opportunities have school leaders experienced and/or need to experience with regards to virtual learning and equity?

Study Design

The audit utilizes a mixed-methods approach, including a quantitative survey, qualitative interviews and focus groups, and a systematic literature review. A review of current literature provides context for school leadership needs and a definition of effective professional development based on both qualitative and quantitative studies revealing professional development content provided to school leaders and the impact that professional development has on leaders and leadership within a study. Further, a survey of key stakeholders related to

school leadership professional development will provide insight about major providers of professional development in their school division within the Commonwealth of Virginia. The survey will reveal information about budgeting and funding sources for their school leaders' professional learning. Interviews and focus groups will target principals, assistant principals, and other instructional leaders; interview questions will aim to collect qualitative data pertaining to school leaders' understanding of effective professional development and their experience with professional development in their division in terms of content, areas of strength, and opportunities for improvement.

The survey will be conducted first among all the methods, followed closely by interviews and focus groups.

Data Collection

Literature Review.

To review literature pertaining to effective professional development for school leaders, searches were conducted using digital libraries and databases including JSTOR, Education Research Complete by EBSCO, and Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). For all searches, filters were set to ensure articles were peer-reviewed and obtained from scholarly sources. Also, all searches were limited to publication dates of 1990 to 2020. The date of 1990 was selected due to emerging emphasis on educational standards, assessment, and accountability stemming from education reform in the 1990s (Hurst et al., 2003).

Search terms fell into three main themes related to the research questions: defining effective professional development, barriers for professional development, and funding for professional development. Paramount among these was understanding what the literature said about effective professional development, including delivery methods and content. Therefore,

researchers used multiple search terms to ensure multiple responses addressing effective professional development for school leaders; fewer search terms were used for barriers and funding.

Search terms for defining effective professional development included “effective professional development”, “effective professional development” and “school leadership or educational leadership”, “professional development” and “school administration”, “diversity leadership” and “school leaders”, as well as “in-service professional development” and “school leadership or educational leadership”, which altogether yielded well over 20,000 results. For this literature review, articles that focused on professional development of teachers were reviewed but used infrequently. Relevant articles identified shifting expectations for school leaders based on social or political changes in education. Further, articles were included when they detailed components of professional development deemed effective by school leaders as indicated through quantitative or qualitative measures. Additionally, articles were valued if they spoke to content provided to school leaders during professional development.

Search terms for barriers for professional development included “barriers to professional development” and “school leadership or educational leadership”, as well as “gaps in professional learning” and “school leadership or educational leadership”. These search terms yielded hundreds of responses. Articles that spoke to specific barriers for school leaders or school divisions provided the greatest relevance.

Finally, the combination of search terms “funding”, “professional development”, and “school leadership” as well as “budget”, “professional development”, and “school leadership” yielded a few hundred results. Among these results, only two articles addressed funding of professional development for school leaders, and no articles addressed specific information about

budgeting or funding sources for professional development of school leaders. Instead, articles broadly stated budgets and funding stem from federal, state, and local sources as well as grants when approved, indicating a gap in the literature and a need for the researchers to address funding for school leader professional development in survey questions.

For all search terms, researchers preferred articles addressing the United States educational system. Still, articles about educational leadership outside of the United States were included when common themes emerged in terms of leadership or aligned with common themes in the United States educational system.

Few non-peer-reviewed sources are referenced in the literature review. Texts that do not emerge from scholarly journals include the Virginia Department of Education Standards for School Leaders. Language within the standards assists in understanding the role of school leaders within their schools. Texts were also obtained through the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), which houses articles and books on educational topics including action research, coaching, cultural competence, and the impact of leadership on student achievement.

Survey.

Researchers provided a 23-question survey to the superintendents and superintendents' designees within each school division in the Commonwealth of Virginia¹. The emailed survey was sent in October 2020, instructing superintendents and/or designees to share with the person responsible for professional development within the school division. The survey asked if the person answering the questions was intimately aware of the role of providing professional development for school leaders in their division. To accomplish this, the survey asked the job

¹ See Appendix A to review the survey.

title of the respondent, the number of years the respondent served in their current role, and their job description includes providing professional development for school leaders. Further, the survey collected information on the major providers of professional development for school leaders within the division. The survey asked the type of major providers of professional development to school leaders, how they deliver professional development, and if the delivery method of the professional development is effective. Finally, the survey asked how the school division funds professional development for school leaders, indicating if the school division includes funding for professional development for school leaders in their budget. Further, respondents indicated if the division utilizes federal funding, state funding, local funding, grants, or donations to provide professional development for school leaders in the division.

Interview and Focus Groups.

Interviews were held with principals across all regions. Researchers aimed to complete one to two interviews per region. Four focus groups were conducted with four to seven people in each focus group. Researchers aimed to have four focus groups with school-level leaders from multiple regions and one focus group with division-level leadership from multiple regions. Interviews and focus groups were scheduled via email and conducted through the video conferencing platform, Zoom, recorded, and transcribed. Interviews and focus groups sought to understand school leader experiences and perspectives on professional development provided to school leaders in their division. Questions were structured to determine how practitioners define *effective professional development*; further, participants were asked to share what experience they have with effective professional development in their school division, how professional development could be improved in their school division, and what barriers they believe their

school division needs to overcome to provide effective professional development to school leaders².

Data Analysis

Convergence of results and validity of findings were analyzed through triangulation of the methods of data collection. The collected quantitative survey data was analyzed utilizing cross tabular reports organized by region, division, and job role. Frequency counts of common answers will be analyzed and compared across divisions and regions. Comparisons of data across division sizes, within the same region and region-to-region were performed to achieve an accurate picture across the Commonwealth. Qualitative results from interviews, focus groups, and literature review were organized and analyzed for common themes.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

A review of over 50 cited articles provides perspective over the current state of professional development for school leaders, which for the purpose of this audit includes principals and their administrative teams. To establish the state of professional development for school leaders, this review of literature first defines necessary terms, including the terms *effective professional development* and *leadership* as it relates to various leadership theories. The definition of terms provides a landscape for shifting approaches to leadership that have impacted professional development for school leaders as they seek to create organizational structure, improve instruction, and shape climate and culture in the educational environment.

Next, barriers to effective professional development for school leaders and school districts are explored followed by a discussion of the participants in pre-service versus in-service professional development. This information allows providers of professional development to

² See Appendix A for interview and focus group questions.

gain awareness of structural, psychological, and social barriers school leaders face as they pursue both professional learning and leadership employment opportunities.

The literature review will also outline effective structural components preferred by school leaders as they participate in professional development. These structural components drive the engagement and impact of professional learning on both the leader and the school community. For that reason, the literature review will also consider content topic needs of school leaders and where effective structural components are or could be used to improve professional learning.

Finally, gaps in professional development will be noted as they inhibit professional growth opportunities and reveal limitations in research that would help one better understand these issues.

Defining Terms Related to Effective Professional Development for School Leaders

To understand the literature surrounding effective professional development for school leaders, two key terms need to be defined: *effective professional development* and *leadership*. Effective professional development ensures educators understand the practical use of the skills presented, can actively use those skills, and align implementation of the skills with research-based standards for educators (Paulus et al., 2020). Further, effective professional development allows for collaboration between practitioners, often with an experienced leader serving as a mentor, leading professional development sessions, or supporting professional learning communities (Paulus et al., 2020). Ultimately, though, professional development is not effective unless learning is transferred, meaning the practitioner leaves with increased “knowledge, skills, or behaviors” to benefit both the professional and the work he or she does (Brion, 2020, p. 33). Effective professional development is contingent upon the ability to apply learning in a real-world setting, seek feedback, and reflect on the practice and its impact on the school. The more

successfully a leader applies this learning, the greater the opportunity for a positive view of school leadership.

The definition of leadership has changed as expectations of school leaders, including principals and their administrative teams, have increased over time. Traditional styles of leadership focused on organizational management or “top down, bureaucratic structures,” but current educational environments ask leaders to develop and sustain “dynamic and complex” learning environments while reacting to pedagogical, technological, and social change (Williams & Enright, 2020).

Daniëls, Hondeghem, and Dochy (2019) present five different approaches to leadership: instructional leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, situational leadership, and leadership for learning. Instructional leadership asks leaders to set a climate for school learning through clear organizational management and well-guided instructional programs. Transformational leadership calls for leaders to utilize shared leadership to motivate staff to achieve a common vision and school-wide goals. Daniëls et al. (2019) continue to define distributed leadership as an emphasis on collaboration in which a team or group responds to needs within the school and ultimately learns while working to achieve a goal together. Situational leadership occurs when leadership is influenced by needs within the school environment, particularly with regards to characteristics of the organization like “staff characteristics, task structure, hierarchy and power relations” (Daniëls et al, 2019, p. 114). These four types of leadership emphasize specific aspects of a school leaders’ job, like supporting instruction, guiding change, or communicating vision and mission to the staff. Leadership for learning, though, includes facets of the previous four approaches to leadership as leaders are asked to set the vision for the school, guide instructional and assessment programs, maintain

organizational management, create team-oriented professional learning communities, and advocate for social well-being of both students and staff (Daniëls et al., 2019).

To address the multi-faceted role of school leaders, organizations like the Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) have developed performance standards for school leaders' evaluation that help define leadership for school administrators. For example, in 2012, the Virginia Department of Education approved standards that align with the ISLLC and which help define school leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia; school leadership in Virginia requires the leader to demonstrate competency with "Instructional Leadership, School Climate, Human Resources Management, Organizational Management, Communication and Community Relations, Professionalism, and Student Academic Progress," aligning with the leadership for learning approach to developing leaders ("Advancing Virginia's Leadership Agenda Guidance Document", p. 5). Therefore, in Virginia, effective professional development for administrators must adjust to offer support in leadership for instruction and school improvement issues, shifting emphasis away from organizational tasks like funding and compliance (Busch, O'Brien, and Spangler, 2005).

Barriers to Effective Professional Development for School Leaders

When considering factors that limit school leaders' access to professional development, one must acknowledge structural barriers within the district and school, psychological barriers within individual leaders, and social barriers within the school community and individual leaders. Understanding these structural, psychological, and social barriers will allow professional development providers to better ensure learning opportunities meet the needs of their school leaders.

Structural Barriers Limiting Professional Development for School Leaders.

In general, school leaders are assigned a multitude of tasks, limiting the amount of time they can devote to professional development (Cadero-Smith, 2020). When time allows school leaders to participate in professional development, building level administrators' workload can negatively impact their enthusiasm for learning and implementation of new ideas (Lester, 2003). Further, school leaders report that “too much information is covered in a short period of time”, creating shallow learning opportunities for practitioners (Lester, 2003, p. 53). Without adequate time, leaders are not only too taxed to implement the learning, but also unable to process and comprehend how to apply the content presented, making it unlikely they will implement the skills effectively in their buildings. Time available for professional development for school leaders is directly impacted by the size of the school district and the geographic location of the school district; this reality partly stems from funding issues that exist in smaller and more rural school districts (Hildreth et al., 2018).

In small, rural school districts, insufficient funding stems from low-density populations generating decreased property tax revenues (Cadero-Smith, 2020). As student populations decline over time, fewer federal and state dollars are available to provide adequate staffing and resources for schools (Cadero-Smith, 2020). Without appropriate funding, school districts cannot invest in staffing and human capital which would distribute administrators' tasks among more people and create time for practitioners to invest in professional learning. Johnston, Kaufman, and Thompson (2016) illustrate ways larger school districts' access to funding and resources positively impacts professional learning for school leaders; they present findings from a web-based survey to which 175 randomly selected principals across the United States responded. Through that survey, principals from large districts indicated that school leaders had more access

to on-the-job supports like mentors or coaches; specifically, the survey found “91 percent of leaders in large districts reported that mentoring was available for first-year assistant principals, compared with 70 percent in midsize districts and 71 percent in smaller districts” (Johnston et al., 2016, p. 9). Also, “78 percent of principals in large districts reported that mentoring was required for first year [assistant principals], compared with only 44 percent in midsize districts and 41 percent in smaller districts” (Johnston et al., 2016, p. 9). Most telling, though, was survey data revealing that only 3% of school leaders from large districts and 0% of school leaders in midsize districts reported their district offered no professional development specifically for principals (Johnston et al., 2016). However, almost 25% of respondents from small districts reported that principals received no professional development tailored to their specific needs, indicating the impact of size of the district on available professional development for school leaders (Johnston et al., 2016). Small districts could attempt to increase funding to increase staffing numbers through federal grants. Federal grants are available to states to offset costs in rural school districts, but Cadero-Smith (2020) highlights challenges in grant funding as federal grants offer meager allocations, are too categorical to be used effectively, and require too much time for understaffed rural school districts to complete.

Size and geographic location of the school district also impact access to professional development. While all leaders carry a significant number of duties, district leaders in smaller and rural localities take on an even more diverse array of administrative responsibilities due to less central office staff; more job responsibilities limit the amount of time and energy given to each task (Cadero-Smith, 2020). When the district leader who is tasked with identifying professional development needs has insufficient time to devote to the task, he or she understandably overlooks specific topics that need to be addressed for school and district

improvement. Cadero-Smith (2020) cites the need for increased professional development around social justice in rural America as an example. Rural areas are seeing increased racial and ethnic diversity, but often, rural districts struggle to allocate money and resources like human capital to provide appropriate professional development to address these needs (Cadero-Smith, 2020). Rural districts experience a higher administrator and teacher turnover than their counterparts in larger districts which causes a disproportionate amount of time being spent on induction-related professional development activities instead of professional development that deepens their knowledge and expands knowledge in other content such as social justice and equity (Cadero-Smith, 2020).

Size and geographic location of a school district presents an additional layer of challenges when smaller, more rural districts consider opportunities for out-sourced professional learning (Culbertson & Billig, 2016; Glover et al., 2016; Smith, 2015). Some challenges include high travel costs to attend training in metropolitan areas, difficulties hiring professional development consultants, and challenges ensuring job duties are covered while professionals attend training activities (Cadero-Smith, 2020; Glover et al., 2016).

Psychological Barriers Limiting Professional Development for School Leaders.

Structural barriers can impact the psychological state of school leaders, impacting their willingness to be open to feedback that can directly impact their approach to professional learning. As an example, Hildreth, Rogers, and Crouse (2018) note that leaders in rural areas are often the only administrator in their school, creating a sense of “isolation and self-doubt” (p. 46). This sense of isolation in leadership appears in other geographic settings. A study conducted by Nir (2008) identified the need and willingness of school leaders to pursue professional development. Data collection for the study occurred through interviews that lasted 45 to 60

minutes with eight principals from elementary and junior high schools and three principals from high schools. Participants in the interviews said it is “lonely at the top” and saw the school leader as “a lonely wolf” dependent on his or her own “mental strength”, as they feel “totally alone” unless lucky enough to have “a group of close friends who are educators themselves” (Nir, 2008, pg. 180-181). One participant indicated that, when attempting to get help from colleagues, they felt alone when talking to fellow school leaders who “don’t want to expose their cards”, showing that leaders feel isolated from their colleagues and fearful of revealing weakness or appearing incompetent (Nir, 2008, pg. 181).

Wright and da Costa (2016) identify “an environment characterized by social trust, respect, and collegiality” as necessary to effective professional development, yet often, the fear of communicating one’s areas for growth inhibits meaningful collaboration among school leaders. One participant in the Nir (2008) interviews indicated that school leaders experience difficult and unique situations but are not encouraged to ask questions; instead, leaders are expected to have answers and solutions. The idea that leaders are the sole source for problem-solving creates an environment in which they distance themselves from colleagues to maintain a competent, professional image. The fear of appearing weak fuels a concern that the leader will appear incapable of managing and leading the school which may result in losing capacity to influence stakeholders. However, “many problems ... receive less than proper solutions” when leaders fail to seek opportunities for growth or refuse to utilize resources like colleagues, mentors, or coaches (Nir, 2008, p. 181).

Social Barriers to Professional Development for School Leaders.

A leader’s inability to seek help illustrates a personal inhibition, but this psychological barrier impacts social interactions with stakeholders, including developing trust. Lencioni (2002)

argues that the willingness to show vulnerability is “[t]he most important action that a leader must take to encourage the building of trust” (Lencioni, 2002, p. 201). Lasater (2016) found, though, that principals need significant professional development around relationship-building, including building rapport, developing trust, and communication. Even so, minimal professional development is provided for school leaders in these areas (Lasater, 2016).

The inability to be vulnerable also reveals an issue with personal and professional reflection within the leader. School districts need reflective practitioners as leaders, particularly as schools continue to see increasingly diverse student enrollment (Cadero-Smith, 2020). School leaders will be at different places in their journeys to be more equity-centered in their leadership, and professional development for school leaders should encourage relational skills like communication through conversations around diversity and differing cultural experiences. Santamaria (2014) asserts that embracing multicultural perspectives of leaders and community members encourages “leadership for social justice”, and as a result, “educational equity ensues” (p. 350). However, leadership theory often overlooks the impact of the leader’s “ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic, and gender differences” in terms of impact on how “leadership [is] practiced or expressed” (Santamaria, 2014, p. 348). Understanding the demographic make-up of the school and district staff, as well as the school community, allows leaders to develop a shared vision and common language when addressing goals and expectations for equitable practices and procedures. This shared vision should act as the foundation for leadership and should center professional development around examining the leader’s experience and biases; opportunities to reflect on one’s biases allows the leader to position his or herself as an educator who models behaviors that courageously meet the needs of all stakeholders in their school community (Blankstein & Noguera, 2016).

Even so, professional development for school leaders often fails to address implicit bias within the individual leader. In fact, professional development opportunities like mentoring programs fail school leaders due to inequities in the professional learning structure. Davis, Rogers, and Harrigan (2020) cite an assistant principal mentoring program that created inequitable situations for mentees, “particularly when female mentees have been matched with male mentors and African American mentees with Caucasian mentors” (p. 9). Ehrich, Hansford, and Tennent (2014) noted that race and gender issues manifested in the form of problematic mentor and mentee characteristics and behaviors, most often stemming from a lack of trust or cooperation. These relational issues often developed due to inadequate mentor training, emphasizing the need for effective professional development around mentoring and coaching (Ehrich et al., 2014). Therefore, professional development providers need to develop programs that target relational skills to ensure equitable outcomes for all participants.

Participants in Pre-Service or In-Service Professional Development

Providers of professional development need not only an understanding of barriers but also the needs of participants at different stages of their leadership journey. Participants in professional development for school leadership exist in two primary categories: pre-service, aspiring leaders and in-service, sitting leaders. Understanding the traditional pathways pre-service and in-service leaders pursue to engage in professional development allows providers to better anticipate their audience. Also, knowledge of shifts occurring in expectations of school leadership will assist professional development leaders in meeting participant needs. When offering professional development opportunities to a leader, school, or district, providers of professional development should seek awareness of the barriers that exist for that audience to ensure school leaders have access to training to improve their practices and schools.

Pre-Service Professional Development.

In 1999, a shortage of candidates for school leadership caused the United States Department of Education to recommend school districts identify potential leaders within their schools and provide professional development to prepare them to move into a school leadership position (Hurst et al., 2003). Continued concern about shortages of teachers and principals resulted in the “Preparing and Retaining Educational Professionals Act” (2019), an effort to increase access to both teacher and leader preparation programs and induction programs to retain school leaders.

Providers of pre-service professional development for aspiring leaders are typically colleges and universities or school district-developed programming. Aspiring leaders must take college coursework to meet requirements for licensure. Even so, college and university programs for educational leadership often lack opportunities to learn leadership theory and practice. According to Busch et al. (2005), programs can “infuse leadership theory and practice ... through the inclusion of formation activities” that gives leaders exposure to “social realities of the world in which they will work and come to understand themselves more completely” (p. 97). School districts can provide professional development programs for aspiring leaders, but these district-created programs will not assist in obtaining a licensure for administration. Still, school districts are in the position to connect aspiring leaders with practical application of leadership skills. To do so, school districts must recognize potential leadership in a staff member and encourage them to pursue leadership roles. Further, districts must provide opportunities to develop an understanding of leadership theory while also ensuring aspiring leaders can apply their learning in real world scenarios (Busch et al., 2005).

In-service Professional Development.

In-service professional development is provided to sitting school leaders. As with pre-service professional development, school leaders traditionally turn to college and university courses and degree programs as providers of leadership training (Daresh & Playko, 1992). When school administrators enroll in graduate coursework, they experience a structured learning opportunity guided by course syllabi and regular class meetings while learning content from an expert professional in the field (Daresh & Playko, 1992).

School leaders may also pursue out-sourced professional development, often provided by professional organizations or local or state agencies, colleges, or universities. Out-sourced professional development offers specialized training on specific topics, but these seminars and workshops tend to be short in duration and often provide a shallow examination of usually complex topics (Daresh & Playko, 1992).

School districts may provide in-house professional development for their school leaders to address specific needs within their locality. These programs should provide on-going, relevant training based on needs assessments for the practitioner, school, or district (Daresh & Playko, 1992). This style of professional development can be ineffective if sessions are provided as lectures with one-way communication from the lecturer to the school leaders. District-provided professional development is effective when it focuses on networking and collegiality to encourage school leaders to communicate openly when working to “achieve common, shared goals” (Daresh & Playko, 1992, p. 162).

Among providers, the mode of professional development varies, with some learning opportunities occurring through programs or workshops while other professional development is offered through coaching, mentoring, or collaborative teaming. For example, Mendels &

Mitgang (2013) discuss the impact of one-on-one coaching for principals in their first year of school leadership. Coaching sessions are “customized to each individual’s needs, which are identified through a self-assessment tool that gauges the principal’s strengths and weaknesses” in areas like “communications and student performance” as recognized during their daily professional practice (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013, p. 27). Busch et al. (2005), contrarily, look at needs for pre-service training as provided through a leadership academy, giving aspiring leaders exposure to theory, opportunities to practice, and access to mentoring. The two examples demonstrate a provider’s need to adjust both the content and the mode of professional development based on the practitioner's experience and specific needs.

Effective Structural Components Preferred by Leaders in Professional Development

School leaders need support as they attempt to maintain day-to-day functions of the school and seek to improve the learning environment for all stakeholders. Even so, educators often report dissatisfaction with the professional learning they experience (Bates & Morgan, 2018). Providers of professional development to school leaders are tasked with developing learning opportunities that effectively engage school leaders and result in improvements in the school community. Literature identifies seven effective components of professional development: real world application, alignment with school and district values, alignment with individual leader’s values, active engagement, collaboration, mentoring and coaching, and feedback and reflection. While all components of effective professional development are not necessary in every professional learning opportunity, a combination of multiple components increases the likelihood of impact on school leaders and the strategies and skills taken back to their schools.

Real-World Application.

Professional development that is relevant to the work of school leaders allows administrators to immediately implement skills and strategies learned into the school setting. According to Daniëls et al. (2019), professional development should provide “transfer of knowledge, skills and attitudes to practice” and should fit the needs of the school and the practitioner “in order to facilitate transfer from [professional development] activities into principals' daily practice and consequently having a higher sustainability” (p. 120). Hildreth, Rogers, and Crouse (2018) agree, stating that “authentic, field-based learning experiences” empower leaders to face challenges in their work as these experiences “bridge the gap between theoretical concepts and practical applications” (p. 41). Mackenzie & Marnik (2008) assert that aspiring leaders need opportunities to practice skills learned from professional development and develop appropriate behaviors for the real-world setting. Similarly, sitting school leaders “become more invested when they see how [principal professional development] is directly applied to their setting and potentially addresses an immediate school need” (Davis et al., 2020, p. 5).

Alignment with School and District Values.

Because professional development needs to be applicable in the leader’s work setting, effective professional development will align with the values set forth by the school and district in that work setting. Professional development for school leaders “influences and is influenced by the organisational context in which it takes place and must be aligned to the particular context and emphasize the importance of authentic experiences in school environments” (Daniëls et al., 2019, p. 120). Davis et al. (2020) support this idea, noting that “high-quality [principal

professional development] has been tailored to the principal's school and instructional circumstances" (p. 3).

Fink & Resnick (2001) report an example of effective professional development for school leaders that aligns with school and district values. Community School District Two in New York City sought to build community and interdependence upon staff at all levels. To accomplish this, they developed a program that they called *nested learning communities*. Their approach to professional learning is likened to "those nesting dolls people like to bring back from their travels" because "the dolls are each independent, free-standing 'people,' but they share a common form" and each doll is important as "the tiny one in the middle ... establishes the shape for them all ... [while] the big one on the outside ...encloses them all" (Fink & Resnick, 2001, p. 600). In District 2, the nested learning communities train practitioners in the vision of interdependence by acknowledging the value of all stakeholders. An example of an instructional professional development program highlights the importance of stakeholders in varying positions. For instance, district leadership may identify and purchase programs for literacy and math. The principal, then, must understand the programs and guide teachers in instructional strategies while teachers implement those strategies to increase literacy and math outcomes with students (Fink & Resnick, 2001). Therefore, District Two's approach to professional development aligns with the district's vision for collaboration and addresses instructional needs within the district and school.

Alignment with Individual Leader's Values.

Beyond aligning with the school and district values, professional development also needs to be relevant to the learner. Davis et al. (2020) state that professional development needs to be purposeful and frequent; professional development should not be "left 'to chance or sporadic

activities” but instead, should allow for “continuous evaluation and revision of plans based on the needs of the individual” (p. 3). Mackenzie & Marnik (2008) further this idea, asserting that “[l]eadership knowledge revolves around performance skills that engage the whole person in the real world of her or his practice” (p. 184). Professional learning opportunities may be applicable to the work setting and align with district values, but if the practitioner cannot reconcile his or her own values with the content delivered, transfer of knowledge, skills, and behavior will not occur.

Active Engagement.

Active engagement in professional development involves the learner interacting with the content provided during professional learning. Bates & Morgan (2018) state that lecture-style professional development fails to effectively engage learners, and instead, professional development leaders should seek to provide interactive experiences that allow the learner to “grapple with, question, and reflect on problems of practice” (p. 623). Involving the practitioner in elements of the professional development program ensures the learning opportunity aligns with the values of the individual and creates buy-in to the program. Wright & da Costa (2016) suggest that effective professional development creates “an environment conducive to adult learning”, involves “adult learners in mutual planning to attend to specific learners’ needs and interests”, involves “adult learners in defining program goals and objectives”, engages “adult learners in program implementation”, and includes “adult learners within program evaluation” (p. 32). As a participant throughout the professional learning opportunity, practitioners can ensure training connects to problems of practice, addresses need within their school community, and provides opportunity to reflect and adjust the professional development program for greater effectiveness in future iterations.

Mentoring and Coaching.

Mentoring and coaching emphasize that a collegial relationship with another school leader provides an opportunity for collaborative discussions about problems of practice. Typically, the literature used the terms *mentoring* and *coaching* interchangeably. For example, Fink & Resnick (2001) state that, in a coaching model, school leaders set professional goals and collaborate to learn both organizational and instructional skills, like budgeting and student performance data review. Hildreth et al. (2018) suggest that mentoring builds “leadership self-efficacy” by providing support like “modeling of day-to-day activities, data gathering, and decision-making” (p. 41). Occasionally, though, literature details ways school districts create separate programs for mentoring or coaching. For example, Community Consolidated School District 15 in Illinois defines mentoring as a “long-term relationship between protégé and mentor that includes ongoing, continuous feedback” and allows more time to address a greater number and variety of problems of practice while coaching “entails short-term, issue-specific advice or guidance” (Conyers, 2004, p. 21). Though mentoring and coaching can function as separate programs, both center on a professional relationship through which school leaders deepen their leadership skills to improve the performance of students, teachers, and schools.

According to Davis et al. (2020), instructional accountability can affect school leaders’ mental and physical health, creating a need for mentoring and coaching programs that have resulted in principals gaining support and skills as they navigate challenges on the job. School districts also utilize mentors and coaches to “expand an individual’s or group’s capacity to obtain desired results” and “to facilitate individual or organizational development” (Wise & Cavazos, 2017, p. 224). Because mentoring and coaching programs provide these forms of professional support and encourage professional growth, many states have made mentoring a certification

requirement (Davis et al., 2020). Even so, being assigned a mentor does not necessarily lead to professional growth; purposeful matching of mentor to mentee based on “personal compatibility and similarity of school needs” leads to meaningful conversation rooted in professional practice and an increased likelihood of professional growth (Fink & Resnick, 2001, p. 22). For example, in the survey conducted by Johnston, Kaufman, and Thompson (2016), school leaders shared that they were “more likely to value the mentoring they received when they thought the mentoring focused more on instructional improvement” with 56% of respondents stating “their mentoring focused on improving teachers’ instruction ‘to a great extent’” and that mentoring experience was “highly valuable” while the other 44% saw that mentoring experience as “moderately valuable”; contrarily, respondents “whose mentoring had limited or no focus on instruction reported their mentoring experience as being slightly valuable or not valuable at all” (Johnston et al., 2016, pp. 7-8).

Mentoring and coaching are often preferred by school leaders as they can collaborate with a trusted colleague while applying their learning in a real-world setting; this structure is described as an “apprenticeship learning model” in which leaders work alongside a coach or mentor to conduct and reflect upon “the regular processes of running the school and the district” (Fink & Resnick, 2001, p. 603). School leaders value this type of professional learning for the opportunity to discuss decision-making, observe professional practice, and participate in the work as it is done; one leader embodied this sentiment in stating, “My development came largely through watching and learning from some very good examples and from taking on new tasks whenever I had the opportunity” (Raines & Alberg, 2003, p. 35).

Collaboration.

Collaboration occurs when educators work in partnership with a mentor or a group of colleagues to accomplish a common goal. Collaboration creates “a togetherness mind-set and develops collective knowledge that extends beyond individual, isolated experiences in classrooms” (Bates & Morgan, 2018, p. 624). According to the National Institute on Educational Governance, “research has shown that districts with successful [principal professional development] created 'collegial circles of principals that focus on improving teaching and learning rather than commiserate about day-to-day problems and frustrations'" (Davis et al., 2020, p. 6).

Wright & da Costa (2016) conducted a focus group of 17 principals to understand principal perspectives and reflection on practice after participating in face-to-face workshops, online discussions, and action research. Responses to a questionnaire reflected that respondents agreed or strongly agreed that collaborative dialogue was valuable to their professional learning when asked “the degree to which 'collaborative dialogue was beneficial and supported my learning'” (Wright & da Costa, 2016, p. 35). Fink & Resnick (2001) emphasize that strong interpersonal relationships allow for effective collaborative learning, but effective collaboration is dependent upon “deep knowledge” of one’s field, challenging professional development providers to “build those relationships around studying teaching and improving instruction” (Fink & Resnick, 2001, p. 601).

A process that educators prefer for professional learning is action research as it creates opportunities for leaders to actively engage in inquiry and real-world application while practicing collaboration with multiple stakeholders. According to Sagor (2000), action research is a “disciplined process of inquiry conducted *by* and *for* those taking the action” which allows the

practitioner to both improve and refine his or her practice (p. 3). The process for action research begins with selecting a focus for the research followed by clarifying theories, identifying research questions, collecting and analyzing data, reporting results to interested or affected parties, and taking informed action (Sagor, 2000). Because practitioners identify a focus for research within their work setting and analyze data produced within their school or district, this form of professional development aligns both with school or district values and individual values as the researcher determined the project, and thusly, reveals its relevance to the professional and the school (Sagor, 2000). Action research projects may be initiated by an individual or a group, but in both instances, practitioners find that “action research projects provided an opportunity for other staff, students, and parents to be engaged in learning and school improvement efforts” (Wright & da Costa, 2016, p. 37). Plus, the process requires collaboration as the researcher shares results with other practitioners who may be impacted by the findings and subsequent action steps.

Through their year-long study of principals’ reflections on practice, including action research, Wright & da Costa (2016) found that principals found action research to effectively improve their leadership skills while also supporting their efforts to improve the school they serve. Particularly, participants noted that action research provided “choice and flexibility,” allowing the practitioner to select “the research topic, grouping, and research methodology” that fit their individual or school needs (Wright & da Costa, 2016, p. 36). Participants reported a desire to share their findings with colleagues as their findings had relevance to their school environment (Wright & da Costa, 2016). Having completed an action research project, participants reported a shift in what they wanted from professional development, indicating a

desire to move “from top-down training” to opportunities like action research that provide more-hands on, data-driven training (Wright & da Costa, 2016, p. 37).

Closely related to action research is the use of micro-credentialing or evidence-based mastery of smaller topics. While professional development is often recognized by hours of attendance, micro-credentialing identifies specific skills, allows for evidence of leader mastery, and identifies the authoritative issuer of the credential (Jones, Hope, & Adams, 2018).

Feedback and Reflection.

Bates & Morgan (2018) explain that feedback and reflection are two distinct but complementary processes and are both part of effective professional development. Feedback allows an administrator to review data or to hear from a colleague, mentor, or coach about his or her ability to master and implement skills and affect outcomes in the school. This data review or collegial feedback allows the practitioner to question his or her practice and adjust for professional growth (Daresh & Playko, 1992). Feedback and reflection are critical to deepening knowledge, making it necessary for professional development programs to provide “built-in time” for educators to “think about, receive input on, and make change to their practice” (Bates & Morgan, 2018, p. 625).

Effective feedback occurs most readily when it is received as “constructive and not critical” and when colleagues have “a trusting relationship” where all members can “position themselves as colearners” in discussions of professional practice (Bates & Morgan, 2018, p. 625). When a school leader discusses strategies applied to affect a school environment with a colleague, they can offer both “personal and contextual feedback” rooted in applied practice and experience. This type of collegial consulting gives leaders greater confidence in their decision-making and eases the feeling of isolation they sometimes experience as the individual held

accountable for school climate, culture, and outcomes (Daniëls et al., 2019, p. 120). For example, a study cited by Davis et al. (2020) noted that principals participated in a focus group in which they analyzed their “thought processes, procedures, and position on a specific concept” and concluded that through the experience, they gained “insight into other approaches ... [and] learned the value of reflecting and sharing” (p. 8).

Feedback tools like self-assessments are also beneficial in guiding educators’ reflection and potential action steps. For example, Huber (2013) details a self-assessment given to teachers interested in pursuing school leadership, aspiring school leaders participating in a formal leadership program, and new and established school leaders; the self-assessment seeks to identify areas of strength and weakness to better understand potential career paths in school leadership. The self-assessment “promotes reflection” and motivates both aspiring and sitting school leaders “to gather more information about their behavior in day-to-day practice,” providing insight to personal areas for growth when pursuing future professional development in school leadership (Huber, 2013, p. 536).

Supporting Professional Development Needs through Effective Structural Components

When delivering content and skills to school leaders, providers should apply effective structural components of professional development in the training. Most important of these structural components is ensuring the content aligns with the needs of the leader, school, or district (Wright & da Costa, 2016). Consistently, literature revealed the need to identify specific strengths and weaknesses of school leaders and to tailor professional development so that participants leave with knowledge that benefits their leadership and school (Huber, 2013; Mendels & Mitgang, 2013). Traditional areas of need for school leaders’ professional development include organizational management and instructional leadership; emerging topics

of need include using data to inform decision-making, growing social-emotional competence, and developing social justice leadership skills.

Educators often indicate dissatisfaction with the professional development they receive, but typically, the issue is not the content of the training; educators need differentiated approaches to professional development that encourage engagement and personalization of learning, but these experiences are not occurring regularly enough (Fox et al., 2015). These complaints underscore that the presentation of needed content is not necessarily effective unless other components of effective development are available as well. Therefore, providers must develop opportunities for school leaders to learn needed content while also experiencing real-world application, active engagement, mentorship, collaboration, feedback, and/or reflection.

Traditional Content Topics and the Use of Effective Structural Components.

Organizational management and instructional leadership are essential skills for school leaders to effectively perform their job tasks. The role of a principal includes performing organizational tasks crucial to ensure the day-to-day functions in a school create a learning environment in which strong instructional practices lead to positive student outcomes (Williams & Enright, 2020; Wright & da Costa, 2016). Therefore, school leaders continue to need training in topics like organization, discipline, resource distribution, and policy implementation as well as opportunities to develop skills that improve teaching and learning.

Research indicates that the use of effective structural components in professional development occurs more frequently with instructional leadership training in comparison to training that addresses organizational management. Literature offers multiple studies indicating the positive impact of mentoring, collaboration, active engagement, feedback, and reflection on instructional leadership (Johnson et al., 2016; Shirrell, 2016; Wise & Cavazos, 2017; Wright &

da Costa, 2016). In contrast, leaders in need of training in supervision, behavior management, and budgeting reported that most of their professional learning came from trial-and-error or on-the-job practices as opposed to formal professional development programming or college coursework (Barnett, 2004; Hildreth et al., 2018). The literature, then, reveals an opportunity to continue utilizing effective structural components of professional development when providing school leaders guidance with instructional leadership and to identify appropriate structural components to offer more impactful support with organizational management.

Supporting the Need for Effective Use of Data for Decision-Making.

School leaders need to review data like student performance outcomes to direct programs and make decisions for the school. Mendels & Mitgang (2013) suggest that data analysis skills can help a school leader with “judging a school’s effectiveness, identifying learning problems, detecting patterns of low teacher expectations or social promotion, or forming professional development plans” (p. 27). DuFour & Marzano (2009) reiterate the need for school leaders to create a culture that looks for evidence of students mastering content and skills, emphasizing the need for school leaders to receive professional development on using data to inform decision-making within the school. Therefore, school leaders need professional development opportunities that include hands-on practice with data review and analysis.

Access to data alone, though, is not enough; school leaders need time and opportunity to develop their own skills with data analysis and response planning, and eventually, should begin “training school employees in data use and encouraging them to schedule regular data discussions to pinpoint and solve learning problems” (Mendels & Mitgang, 2013, p. 27). Specifically, leaders need to be aware of a common pitfall with data review and response: creating a program to fix a problem as opposed to changing practices that create the problem.

Mendels and Mitgang (2013) describe districts that have regular and sustained “data discussions to pinpoint and solve learning problems” and other districts that create “inquiry teams” consisting of “the principal and at least two other school employees” whose collaboration in data discussions seek to “identify a change in instruction that would address a learning problem for a specific group of underperforming students” (p. 27). Inquiry teams and data discussions utilize effective components of professional development, including collaboration, real-world application of learning, and active engagement in data usage, making the professional learning more likely to impact the leader and the school overall.

Supporting the Need for Effective Social-Emotional Competence.

Mahfouz (2018) states that a school leader’s emotional stability plays a role in establishing a positive, stable learning environment; therefore, “school administrators need to develop skills that enable them to interact with others consciously, with full awareness of how their actions impact themselves, others and their environments” (p. 602). Lasater (2016) provided school principals a survey, and the responses identify skills and strategies that impact feelings of trust between stakeholders and their leader. The survey reveals that school leaders need professional development in “relationship-building, communication, and conflict-resolution, yet these were the areas in which minimal to no professional development was provided” (Lasater, 2016, p. 20).

Strategies identified for social-emotional competence include being attentive to stakeholders’ experience, being cognizant of power dynamics, and practicing mindfulness. When leaders can connect with stakeholders’ personal stories, the leader demonstrates that he or she cares and has concern for the stakeholder’s experience (Lasater, 2016). Leaders also demonstrate awareness of stakeholder experience by giving attention to the hierarchy of leader and follower

as the power dynamic that can hinder relationship building; school leaders can “address unequal power dynamics, thus attending to the vulnerabilities of others” by “inviting stakeholders to share in decision-making processes” and “sharing authority and the consequences for joint actions” (Lasater, 2016, pp. 21-22). Professional development that helps leaders and teachers better understand vulnerability and their own vulnerabilities is life-mapping, an activity that embodies both reflection and collaboration as the learner creates a physical map of “their inner cognitive landscapes and share those with others in the cohort within a ‘circle of trust’” in an effort to “engage in the development of complex adaptive leadership and sense making related to their leadership journey” as an individual and within a team (Williams & Enright, 2020, p. 159). A study of 41 graduate students who participated in life-mapping felt encouraged to reflect on their leadership, their willingness to be vulnerable, and their relational understanding of others; the study did not explore the leader’s ability to apply learning in their school setting (Williams & Enright, 2020).

Finally, training for school leaders in mindfulness techniques can help them “learn how to effectively understand and manage their own emotions to improve their health and well-being” (Mahfouz, 2018, p. 604). Mahfouz (2018) documents the Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education (CARE) professional development program and notes that the program is typically used to support teachers rather than administrators due to a lack of policies in education supporting leaders’ professional growth in social-emotional competence. CARE’s mindfulness training addresses emotional skills, stress reduction practices, and compassion practices; through this training, educators would become more aware of topics like “individual differences in emotional experiences”, “breath awareness practices”, and “mindful listening partner practices”, all of which support the leaders mental and emotional health and allow for

improved relationships with stakeholders (Mahfouz, 2018, p. 605). The program uses mixed approaches to learning, including “direct instruction, small group discussion, dyadic interaction, reflection, role-playing and experiential exercises and mindful awareness practices” (p. 607). Therefore, CARE embeds effective components of professional development into the program by encouraging collaboration and real-world application of mindfulness techniques.

Supporting the Need for Effective Social Justice Leadership.

Theoharis (2007) states that social justice seeks to disrupt and subvert policies and practices in schools “that promote marginalization and exclusionary processes” and aims to implement processes “built on respect, care, recognition, and empathy” (p. 223). According to Theoharis (2007), social justice pertains to issues of “race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision” (p. 223). Therefore, social justice leadership asks school leaders to be cognizant of instances where groups of staff or students are marginalized, to act as a change agent to improve the school environment, and to have the relationships with stakeholders to influence and sustain change.

Lasater (2016) noted that administrators need relationship-building skills to connect with stakeholders from varied backgrounds. Hernandez & Fraynd (2014) note that colleges and universities have begun to include social justice issues in school leadership coursework provided to aspiring leaders. Even so, often preparation programs and professional development for school leaders fail to adequately prepare school leaders to build these relationships (Lasater, 2016). Santamaria (2014) asserts that school leaders of color are equipped to navigate inequities in the education system alongside students from diverse backgrounds. Their experiences within the educational system are not represented in the most studied leadership theories, yet those

experiences are informing “how they respond and approach challenges such as student achievement, motivation, and engagement”, meaning they have a different lens when thinking about “how students reach goals, frame tasks, create effective teams, and communicate ideas” (Santamaría, 2014, pp. 349-350). School leaders of color, then, can serve as professional development leaders, connecting with colleagues as fellow leaders and sharing their stories and strategies to promote more equitable practices. Utilizing school leaders of color as professional development leaders provides opportunity for collaboration and reflection by connecting leaders of varied backgrounds and asking leaders to reflect on differences of experiences that inform their professional practice.

Santamaria (2014) engaged in a year-long study during which six, non-white educational leaders review case studies, complete an identity survey, interview, and review of Critical Race Theory (CRT) methodology. The study sought to understand how the leaders’ experience as a leader of color and their knowledge of CRT leadership practices. Data indicated that the leaders of color tended to model reflection, demonstrated applied critical leadership, and practiced social justice leadership; skills present in the leaders of color included an ability to engage in critical conversations when it was not preferred by the group and responding to scenarios through a multicultural lens (Santamaria, 2014).

Utilizing leaders of color as professional development leaders promotes collaboration on issues of social justice. Professional development programs can introduce CRT as a lens through which school leaders can challenge both the educational and social systems that oppress leaders and students of color (Santamaría, 2014, p. 352). Professional development can apply CRT to promote culturally responsive leadership and to support school leaders with adjusting curriculum to include and empower black children, to develop and sustain collaborative community

partnerships, and to dismantle inequitable policies and procedures within the education system (Santamaria, 2014).

Maloney and Garver (2020) reviewed individual student reflections and compiled transcripts of in-class and on-line discussions from university coursework on equity within instructional leadership; the 82 participating pre-service leaders were also provided definitions and descriptions of multicultural perspectives in academic articles and considered case studies through this lens. The study found that leaders can “develop their critical reflective practices by completing cultural autobiographies, engaging in life history interviews, participating in prejudice-reduction workshops, and writing reflective analysis journals” to better understand areas of privilege and implicit biases (Maloney & Garver, 2020, p. 83). This coursework embedded effective components of professional development by encouraging collaboration through discussion with classmates and professors, reflection on personal experience and biases, and real-world application through review of case studies.

Hernandez & Fraynd (2014) acknowledge the need for schools to be inclusive of students who identify as LGBTQ, stating that school leaders have a responsibility to “create (and insist upon) opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to learn about LGBTQ issues and to dialogue with LGBTQ individuals using panel discussions or other formats” (p. 119). Further, school leaders and school staff in general can promote an inclusive environment by adjusting traditional conversation to avoid heteronormative statements and assumptions of a student’s heterosexuality (Hernandez & Fraynd, 2014). Though professional development for school leaders is not explicitly addressed, the implication that school leaders must guide professional development for teachers and drive the inclusive vision of the school implies a need for administrator training around inclusion of LGBTQ youth.

Literature pertaining to diversity and equity also addressed inclusion of students with disabilities. Leaders must ensure the school stays in compliance with special education law, meaning professional development should be provided to ensure students with disabilities have equitable access to education (Walton, 2006). Perhaps more significant, though, is a school leader's ability to set a leadership vision around inclusion within the school, ensuring professional development opportunities for teachers and access to necessary resources for both staff and students (Naraian et al., 2020). Hoppey and McLeskey (2013) used case study methodology to examine skills and practices of a veteran principal whose school's least restrictive environment (LRE) data showed increased inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings over a three-year period. The study supported the need for social-emotional competence; the successful inclusive leader demonstrates "focus on creating and cultivating relationships that are fueled by making personal connections with people" in the school and surrounding community while also embracing "a deeper moral conviction related to improving his school by helping his teachers and students reach their full potential" (p. 253). Further, the inclusive leader builds capacity for inclusive practices and student supports that deepen skills and develop strategies for inclusion for the leader and the staff of the school. For example, the inclusive leader from the study recognized that he and members of the staff could learn from teacher leaders who were knowledgeable in special education, so he tapped those individuals to lead professional development workshops (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). The leader also collaborated with a nearby university to engage in professional development alongside his faculty; in these professional development sessions, the leader and staff engaged effective components of professional development as they collaborated and reflected on practice during discussions of inclusion and school improvement (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013).

Gaps in the Literature on Professional Development for School Leaders

While reviewing available literature, information that focused on school leaders was scarce with most of the literature addressing professional development for teachers. Within the available literature on professional development for school leaders, little information was available on specific content provided; typically, the literature spoke broadly about types of leadership like instructional leadership or addressed modes of professional development like workshops or coaching.

Attempts were made to find literature that addressed funding and budgeting for the professional development of school leaders; because there were too few results, one could not synthesize texts for common ideas or issues. Similarly, literature speaking to social-emotional competence training for school leaders was minimally available, offering some insight to professional development needed for school leaders to serve as relational leaders and to develop an emotionally healthy school environment. Still, further research would allow for a deeper analysis of school leader needs with social-emotional competence. Also, literature addressing diversity or equity leadership was limited. Results yielded information about the need for inclusion of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, students with disabilities, and students who identify as LGBTQ, but literature specifically regarding professional development for school leaders to address issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality was lacking.

Chapter 4: Discussion of Findings

The audit of professional development sought to explore the thoughts and opinions of school division leaders pertaining to multiple factors of effectiveness and availability.

Interviews, focus groups, and a survey were conducted with school leaders across the state

representing each of the eight Superintendent's Regions³ defined by the Virginia Department of Education. The Superintendent's Regions are broken up geographically as follows: Region 1 in Central Virginia, Region 2 in the Tidewater, Region 3 in the Northern Neck, Region 4 in Northern Virginia, Region 5 in the Valley, Region 6 in Western Virginia, Region 7 in the Southwest, and Region 8 in Southside.

In the mixed method study, the researchers sent a short survey to all division superintendents and superintendents' designees in Virginia, conducted seven one-on-one interviews with school principals, and hosted four focus groups with leaders at the school and division level. The survey response rate was 62.10% with all 8 Superintendents' Regions represented and 7 of 8 Superintendents' Regions having response rates of 50% or higher⁴. Approximately 92% of survey respondents indicated that their job description included responsibility for professional development within their division⁵.

Seven interviews were conducted with principals from Regions 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6. Four focus groups were conducted with division and school level leaders represented from all Superintendents' Regions. Both interviews and focus groups aimed to collect qualitative data regarding the availability of professional development specifically for school leaders, the effectiveness of that professional development, and impressions and experiences of school leaders as they engaged in that professional development; further, both interviews and focus groups discussed delivery methods, integration into leadership thinking, continuity, and school requirements. Findings indicated that there was overlap between leaders' experiences with

³ The Virginia Department of Education provides a map to indicate which counties are designated to each region (Commonwealth of Virginia, 2020). Review the region map in Appendix C below.

⁴ Appendix B, Table 5B indicates survey response rate by Superintendents' Region as well as the total response rate.

⁵ Appendix B, Table 6B illustrates the number of survey respondents who indicated their job description includes responsibility for professional development in their division as well as the number of years the respondent has served in that role.

professional development and themes identified in current literature focusing on professional development for school leaders, but also revealed unique information surrounding the current climate for school leadership.

Findings Related to COVID-19 and Calls for Social Justice

Findings from data collection discussed below are directly impacted by societal issues that emerged at the end of the 2019-2020 school year and throughout the 2020-2021 school years: the COVID-19 pandemic and calls for social justice in response to inequitable treatment of black and brown people in America. These societal issues impacted not only the instructional setting but also the social and emotional climate for schools across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

COVID-19 forced school divisions to close their physical school buildings and educators transitioned instruction to virtual platforms in March 2020. By the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, divisions were engaging students in virtual, hybrid, and/or face-to-face settings. Survey, interview, and focus group data indicated that the change in instructional setting caused by the COVID-19 pandemic caused many divisions to adjust their priorities. Emphasis shifted from previous initiatives to equitable access to instruction for all students, particularly in terms of instruction in the virtual setting. Findings indicated that schools are experiencing an increase in technology use. While schools continue to implement technology in the face-to-face setting, school leaders also need support in utilizing digital learning management systems and engaging students in virtual learning.

During the summer of 2020, calls for social justice in response to racial inequities across the nation further highlighted the need for equity leadership in schools. Survey, interview, and focus group data highlighted the emergence of professional development content to support

culturally responsive teaching. Further, findings indicated divisions recognized a need to engage in data review to identify and rectify inequities impacting student discipline and success. Finally, findings show that the COVID-19 pandemic and calls for social justice resulted in increased need for professional development focusing on social and emotional health for staff and students.

Sitting School Leaders' Definition of Effective Professional Development

To strengthen practices, school divisions utilize professional development as the key strategy in fostering growth among school leaders. The review of literature defined effective professional development as sessions that present skills that are aligned to research-based standards for educators and allow leaders to learn strategies that are relevant to their work and that can be quickly implemented to improve outcomes for the school and division (Daresh & Playko, 1992; Davis et al, 2020; Fink & Resnick, 2001). Findings from the interviews, focus groups, and survey mirrored this definition but further emphasized the importance of professional development modeling good instructional practices, having a focused topic, and occurring in a manageable timeframe to ensure implementation can meet the needs of students. Ultimately, school leaders discussed effective professional development in terms of its ability to create buy-in for the participants and to garner engagement during the professional learning opportunity.

Creating Buy-in to Professional Development Provided to School Leaders

Sitting school leaders outlined several different components in providing effective professional development for school leadership. Table 1 below outlines the components that participants in interviews and focus groups defined as essential when providing effective professional development for school leaders. Of the responses, three significant components were identified by participants. Relevance and real-world application was identified most

frequently by participants in the interviews and focus groups, with 68% naming it as necessary for effective professional development. Alignment to leaders' values and needs was identified second most frequently, with 48% noting it as a need for effective professional development. Finally, sustained sessions over a period was the third most frequently referenced component of effective professional development as 44% of participating leaders stated its importance.

Table 1

Sitting School Leaders Defining Components of Effective Professional Development Provided for School Leadership

Effective Component	Frequency of Response	%
Relevance/real world application	17	68%
Aligned to Leader's Values/Needs	12	48%
Sustained over time	11	44%
"Hands on"/active engagement	9	36%
Aligned to school and division values/needs	8	32%
Collaboration	8	32%
Mentoring/coaching	8	32%
Specific and manageable in content and time commitment	7	28%
Aligned to Needs of Students	5	20%
Research-based/Proven Results	5	20%
Aligned to Needs of Teachers	4	16%
Models good instructional practices	3	12%
Feedback/reflection	2	8%

Note. 25 sitting school leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia provided responses in either a focus group or one-on-one interview.

School leaders argue sessions must be relevant to their work and provide immediate opportunity to implement strategies discussed in professional development. An associate principal in Region 8 shared that she preferred attending professional development when she can "go put into action something that is usable immediately" and is frustrated by sessions when she has to "piece through and then figure out how to make it work in [her] building." A Director of Secondary Instruction in Region 6 supported this argument, stating that professional

development “has to be meaningful. It has to be relevant” to the work that they do on a day-to-day basis.

Participants in interviews and focus groups noted that relevance often occurs when professional development is aligned to a division’s strategic plan because schools and leaders set school improvement goals based on division values. They also argued that on-going, sustained professional development that is aligned to the needs of the division, school, and leader is most effective for their overall growth. An assistant principal in Region 1 stated that the vision of the division “guides the school vision which guides the improvement plan which guides the professional development.” A Director of Secondary Instruction in Region 6 added that this aligned professional development must occur frequently, that “it can’t just be this one hit and then it’s gone.”

This need for continuity can be overlooked, though, when divisions have multiple initiatives or face disruptions like a global pandemic. An assistant principal in Region 4 argued that, “A lot of times [professional development] gets stuck in the development phase, and it’s not implemented. ... Not because ... it’s not warranted, but because other things — uh COVID — other initiatives come into play, and you never really get the ball rolling.” Therefore, understanding what a division prioritizes allows sessions to align to the division’s values and creates opportunity for on-going sessions on a sustained topic.

School leaders argue that divisions could improve effectiveness of professional development by ensuring that the learning opportunities are aligned to the division, school, and leaders’ needs. While some participants shared that their division already works to provide professional development that supports the division’s strategic plan, some leaders, particularly those in smaller divisions, argued that this structure was not currently in place. An assistant

principal in Region 8 stated that what was “lacking for [his division] is ... a strategy for developing leaders in [the] division. It's not that there's a bad strategy; it's that there isn't one.” Through the development of a strategic plan, divisions help leaders prioritize what professional development to attend and communicate to providers what content will assist them as they attempt to improve outcomes for their division and the stakeholders they serve.

Leaders also asserted that professional development must further enhance individual leaders' strengths and target areas of weakness to ensure their leadership benefits the stakeholders they serve. Participants noted that school leaders need professional development to help them grow as leaders, particularly as they transition from the role of teacher to the role of administrator. A Director of Student Services in Region 1 stated the following:

I just remember truly being a fish out of water my first year as a building level assistant principal because the expectation was... You know, as a teacher, I think there's always embedded opportunities for professional development and learning. It's very focused on the content in which you teach and all of those things, and it seems pretty continuous and supported. But in my position as an assistant principal my first year, there was very much an absence of that, you know, even though I had gone through school programs.

This leader highlights the need for professional development that addresses the daily practices of a school leader and notes, in her experience, the opportunity did not exist. To meet this need, a Director of Equity in Region 1 stated that providers of professional development should find out “what the end user needs” and then “[take] theory and ... [shift] it to practice.” She recalled being “a former principal, carrying the radio and listening to the bells ring, and dealing with ...human beings every single day.” She argued that sessions that cannot shift theory to practice

are “not engaging. It's not meaningful and definitely not practical.” A Deputy Superintendent in Region 1 highlighted this idea by using school finance as an example. He argued that “a lot of new principals struggle with asset management and how to manage their resources in an effective way that leverages the highest rate of return.” This issue is likely because they “took their school finance class when they were a teacher or a dean of students ... not when they were a principal.” In pointing out an example gap in knowledge, this leader illustrated the importance of identifying specific areas of need for individual leaders to ensure they have effective professional development to hone their skills.

School leaders acknowledged, though, that it is not enough to align professional development with the division, school, and leaders' needs; it must also align with the needs of the students within the school. In one focus group, a conversation between assistant leaders emphasized this idea. An assistant principal in Region 5, when asked to define effective professional development responded, “As educational leaders, how does the professional development relate back to the kids we are trying to serve? We are trying to fail forward in the interest of serving our students better.” An assistant principal in Region 1 supported this idea further, asking, “What is effective? I mean, I think just in terms of student growth or improvement.” She argued that anything leaders or teachers learn should relate back to the students to ensure they are getting what they need, whether that is demonstrated through academic achievement or shown in their social-emotional growth. She continued to say that student success is “our ultimate goal at the end of all of this.” To this, the Region 5 assistant principal claimed that he is more concerned with the qualitative data and how what he learns in professional development can “relate back to those kids that we're trying to serve.”

Garnering Engagement from School Leaders

When participating in professional development, school leaders prefer sessions that model good instructional practices; among accepted best practices, school leaders recognize active engagement as a strategy to include participants in the learning process. When discussing effective components of professional development for school leaders, nine of the interviews and focus group participants (36%) called for active engagement within the session while three participants (12%) explicitly stated sessions should model accepted best practices that would be expected of teachers in a classroom. An assistant principal in Region 5 said that among educators there is a belief that “kids need to be up and moving, but then you go sit through an eight-hour session ... I like to be up and moving, and you know, interacting with folks, and I think the more we can do that and model that, the better off we are.” A principal from Region 5 shared in his interview that he is aware of best practices when he observes teachers in his building, but when he attends webinars or conferences, “the speaker stands there and the whole time they're clicking through their PowerPoint doing everything they're telling us not to do.” The idea that school leaders prefer sessions that model active engagement and other best practices is embodied in the following exchange from focus group participants:

Assistant Principal, Region 1: I understand there's a difference between pedagogy and andragogy and that adult learners learn differently. That does not mean that they can just listen to someone talk for hours in a monotone voice. It still needs to be engaging. You still have to connect with whether they're auditory, kinesthetic, whatever type of learner that they are.

Director of Student Services, Region 1: I know that this is not the right forum, but I'm just going to say, “Amen to that!”

As educators, school leaders desire professional development that provides opportunities for engagement, much like what they want made available to their students.

School leaders also noted that the many demands placed on them daily makes engagement in professional development sessions challenging. Often, professional development opportunities occur during the school day; an assistant principal from Region 8 shared that he has “almost felt guilty for stepping away from the building for a day to learn.” A Director of Students Services in Region 1 emphasized that, “if you can get the person out of the building that they serve to provide [professional development] ...that is optimal.” She argued that when administrators are attending professional development, particularly in the virtual setting, it’s important remember that “you know administrators carry those lovely little radios” and that they are “tied to that for any emergency or for anything” which can cause them to be less engaged as they are continuing to do important work when they are trying to engage in a professional learning opportunity. A principal in Region 5 also pointed out that sessions need to be focused on a smaller amount of content, saying “You're cramming so much in such a small space of time, and it's so much information” leaders may not be able to leave and implement it in their building with fidelity.

The exchange below occurred during a focus group and highlights the importance of targeted content in a timely fashion:

Assistant Principal, Region 1: One thing I found a lot with, especially administrative professional development is we like to put it in these categories. Many times, it may not be something that is all that useful for me in, you know, my specific clientele that I'm serving right now. Having someone go to you know, for example, an advanced placement PD, and you say, “Oh, I want all

administrators to sign up.” Dude, but I only have, you know, five percent of my school that may be taking those types of courses. It may not be the best use of my time.

...

Director of Curriculum, Region 3: It needs to be specific like [she] said. I’m not going to take all my administrators to do AP training when only five percent of my staff needs it, or you know do everything with high school that relates then to elementary school. So, make sure it's specific. I think then they’re more engaged.

The statements from interview and focus group participants illustrate the importance of professional development sessions that provide specific content and that are cognizant of the time demands placed on school leaders.

Current State of Professional Development for School Leaders

Sitting school leaders during the 2020-2021 school year are experiencing an abnormal year in their work life and their exposure to professional development. Still, data collection tools sought to gather information about the status of professional development for those serving as educational leaders. Free response questions answered primarily by those who organize professional development within their division as well as discussions held with sitting school leaders during interviews and focus groups showed that school leaders experience common content topics when attending professional development. School leaders also revealed inconsistent exposure to effective professional development⁶ and identified strategies that would

⁶ Appendix B, Table 1B illustrates that, of 25 sitting school leaders participating in interviews and focus groups, 18 responded that they are receiving effective professional development inconsistently or are not receiving effective professional development in their division.

improve their professional learning experience⁷. Finally, school leaders shared ways their divisions engage with internal and external providers of professional development and shared information about division and school-level funding intended to provide professional development specifically for school leaders.

Content Covered in Professional Development for School Leaders

Data collection revealed that content covered in professional development for school leaders fell into two categories: training for traditional aspects of the job role and professional development around emerging topics in education and educational leadership. Through discussions, leaders used the terms “training” and “professional development” interchangeably, but through their conversations, leaders revealed that there is a nuanced difference between training and professional development. Training refers to sessions that communicate information with little transformative learning occurring in terms of leadership while professional development sessions provide an opportunity for a leader to learn and ultimately implement skills that have the potential to transform the division, the school, the leader, and the stakeholders he or she serves.

Traditional job roles for school leaders include supporting instruction and maintaining compliance in areas like special education and civil rights law while emerging topics include content that relates to today’s society like the use of technological tools, particularly in response to COVID-19, as well as promoting equity in schools and understanding social-emotional learning (SEL) when working with staff and students. Table 2 below illustrates the frequency of responses for professional development content experienced by school leaders; in both survey data and data collected from interviews and focus groups, these five categories — Curriculum

⁷ Appendix B, Table 2B illustrates the frequency of responses from sitting school leaders when asked what changes could be made for professional development for school leaders to be more effective.

and Instruction, Technology, SEL, Compliance, and Equity — are the most often occurring content topics referenced by school leaders.

Table 2

Content Discussed in Professional Development Provided to School Leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia

Professional Development Content Topics	Focus Group & Interview Responses	%	Survey Responses	%
Curriculum and instruction	15	60%	76	88.37%
Technology (Virtual learning, digital platforms, LMS, etc.)	11	44%	28	32.56%
Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) / Positive Behavior Intervention Strategies (PBIS)	10	40%	29	33.72%
Compliance (Legal, SPED, Title IX, etc.)	9	36%	24	27.91%
Equity	7	28%	26	30.23%
Data review/ Leading with data	6	24%	19	22.09%
Professional growth training	6	24%	20	23.26%
School safety	3	12%	7	8.14%
Leadership theories	3	12%	27	31.40%
Professional learning communities	0	0%	4	4.65%
Communication	0	0%	4	4.65%

Note. 25 sitting school leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia provided responses in either a focus group or one-on-one interview. 82 different school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia provided a total 86 unique survey responses.

Curriculum and Instruction exceeded all other content topics referenced with 60% of focus group and interview participants and 88% of survey respondents, indicating they experience professional development directly linked to instructional leadership as illustrated by Table 2. School leaders shared that topics like textbook adoption and use of instructional tools tended to be training, where they were provided information about how the new tool would be used. A superintendent in Region 7, for example, shared that their division provides training on pacing guides, a tool that assures leaders are looking for instruction to align the Virginia's

Standards of Learning and for consistent instruction across grade levels. Sessions on topics like literacy strategies, differentiated instruction, and embedding Virginia's 5C skills for success⁸ tended to be true professional development, where leaders not only gained information about a new initiative but how implementation had the potential to impact instruction and student outcomes.

School leaders also indicated that a shift has occurred to align school leaders' instructional professional development with the training that teachers are receiving on the same content⁹; a principal in Region 1 noted that "previous PD was administrators in a bubble doing [their] PD and the teachers did a separate PD, and [he has] seen more of a trend recently to doing the same PD alongside the teachers." An associate principal in Region 5 echoed this sentiment, stating that his division "is able to provide a diverse set of training and one of the things that they do a pretty good job of in all honesty is including us as administrators in that training and then also having a parallel process with teachers."

Like instruction, compliance is a content topic that aligns with traditional expectations of school leaders. Table 2 also shows that compliance was referenced as the fourth most frequent content topic among leaders participating in interviews and focus groups and the fifth most frequent content topic identified by survey respondents. Compliance topics discussed as professional development experienced by school leaders include special education law, civil rights law, and school security and safety requirements set by the Code of Virginia. Survey data illustrated that compliance training. A principal in Region 1 noted that this content ensured school leaders understood legal expectations that schools must meet while an assistant principal

⁸ The Profile of Virginia Graduate specifically identifies the 5Cs - citizenship, creative thinking, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking - as a required aspect of instruction for all students in all grade levels.

⁹ Appendix B, Table 4B illustrates content changes over time in professional development provided to school leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Changes to instructional topics is among changes identified.

in a neighboring division of Region 1 added that these types of sessions have less professional development and more training that makes sure leaders have the most recent legal updates to ensure they maintain compliance.

A Director of Instruction in Region 3 shared that, in previous years, sessions tended to be training in which leaders were told the different items that had to be accomplished while currently, sessions attempt to be more transformative professional development where leaders can discuss and think about “how we get [students] ready to learn.” This change is a response to societal events and issues that require a response from leaders so that students can access the curriculum, and therefore, asks that professional development providers are cognizant of school leaders’ emerging professional development needs.

COVID-19 forced school divisions to move to virtual instruction, creating increased needs for professional development that targeted digital learning management systems and instruction in the virtual setting. Table 2 illustrates that leaders participated in professional development content focusing on technology; as a content topic, technology was referenced third most frequently among leaders participating in interviews and focus groups and second most frequently by survey respondents. In some instances, leaders stated that technology training is still necessary for students to access information presented by teachers; educators attend training to understand how to use learning management systems and virtual learning platforms like Canvas, the Google Suite, and Desmos. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, though, leaders like a Director of Secondary Instruction from Region 6 and an assistant principal from Region 1 also experienced professional development to learn and implement strategies to increase instructional effectiveness and student engagement during virtual learning. Through these

sessions, leaders had the opportunity to identify specific needs for their teachers and students and reflect on how to implement strategies to improve outcomes from instruction.

As calls for social justice arose in the summer of 2020, school leaders throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia felt a sense of urgency to develop skills in equity leadership. Table 2 shows equity to be the content topic referenced fifth most frequently among survey respondents and participants in interviews and focus groups. Leaders in Regions 1, 3, 4, and 5 indicated that these professional development opportunities sought to support leaders in efforts to be equitable in their leadership. Specifically, an assistant principal in Region 4 indicated that she participated in professional development that sought to encourage the use of instructional resources that “thoughtfully represented students from diverse backgrounds so that the kids see the relevance of the content they are learning.” Because this is an emerging topic and an on-going societal concern, school leaders acknowledged there needs to be more professional development focused on equity. A Director of Student Services in Region 1 referenced a continued need for school and division-specific equity walks in which leaders can collect data on instruction occurring, “looking at disparities within that data” to ensure that instruction is “equitable for all students.” An assistant principal in Region 1 reiterated the importance of equity training because in larger divisions, “there is so much of a difference in what different parts of [a] county needs” and leaders need an opportunity to get targeted support for the communities they serve.

Equity needs will often impact social-emotional learning needs, the content topic referenced second most frequently by survey respondents and third most frequently by focus group and interview participants as indicated in Table 2. A Director of Equity in Region 1 pointed out that the protests in response to the death of George Floyd in the summer of 2020 paired with the difficulties that families face due to the COVID-19 pandemic meant professional

development was needed for school leaders, not only “to support students but also the well-being of [the division’s] staff.” Therefore, professional development centered on SEL allows leaders to develop and implement skills around social awareness, relationship development, and self-awareness and management to ensure they recognize their role in developing a school climate that is conducive to learning. Data collected indicates that divisions are providing professional development around Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports, trauma-informed care, and mindfulness strategies, but like equity, school leaders need continued professional learning opportunities to reflect on the needs within their school and engage sessions that grow their leadership in these targeted areas.

Sitting School Leaders’ Experience with Effective Professional Development

During interviews and focus group discussions, 16 of 25 school leaders indicated they had experienced effective professional development opportunities in their division, but 11 of those 16 indicated that their access to effective professional development is inconsistent¹⁰. Of the remaining seven participants, five indicated that they did not experience effective professional development for school leaders and two did not explicitly state their experience with effective professional development. School leaders pointed to varying issues with what was billed as professional development for school leaders. For example, an assistant principal in Region 8 shared that, often, he attended sessions that were “more like a training on how to survive”, reiterating that he would not “call it development; [he] would call it training”. The sentiment that professional development was not readily available was echoed by an assistant principal in Region 1 who indicated that she anticipated receiving layers of support during her first year as an administrator but “was let down” to discover that was not the case; similarly a Supervisor of

¹⁰ See Appendix B, Table 1B.

Professional Learning in Region 2 shared that there is a “a lot of support for teachers, a lot of support for other staff members, but [school leaders are] kind of being left out.”

Acknowledging that they experienced inconsistent access to effective professional development led to school leaders discussing desired professional learning opportunities. School leaders shared a desire for mentorship and coaching, especially for administrators early in their career. An assistant principal in Region 1 noted that first year administrators need an experienced leader to assist them as they attempt to transfer the theory learned in their administration and leadership programs to their day-to-day practice. Statements from an assistant principal in Region 8 support this idea, as he shared that he wanted “someone with more knowledge and more experience to help [him] figure out how to grow” his leadership; he argued that access to a mentor would allow him to “get better at what [he is] doing every single day” which would allow him to “help other people become better which ultimately trickles down and helps kids.”

School leaders noted that mentorship and coaching are valuable professional development opportunities because they are immediately relevant to their work¹¹. An assistant principal in Region 1 stated that mentorship is “ultimately job embedded but it’s also sustained” and “immediately relevant to what your school needs.” The Deputy Superintendent in this assistant principal’s same division responded by saying the best professional development she could receive would come from her principal, allowing to target her areas for growth, hone her areas of strength, and ultimately become a greater leader because she “stood on the shoulders of giants.”

¹¹ Appendix B, Table 7B illustrates survey data regarding the frequency divisions utilize personally-developed programming like mentorship and coaching as well as the perceived effectiveness of personally-developed programming like mentorship and coaching.

Participants in the interviews and focus groups indicated a desire for voice in determining professional development offered for school leaders. Leaders in seven of eight regions indicated that professional development should align with the school leaders' needs. Even so, multiple leaders indicated that they did not have input into professional learning opportunities in their division. An associate principal in Region 8 explicitly stated that she did not find her "division asks [leaders] what [they] need a lot" and that she felt school leaders could give insight to what would "hit those hot topics that [she and her colleagues] are seeking out to become stronger leaders." An assistant principal in Region 1 argued that needs assessments should be utilized "because people tend to be very reflective and they can tell you what their areas of weakness are," and even if "some may not know, ... there will be general themes that emerge from a needs assessment" that will help structure relevant professional development programming, making it more effective for participants.

Providers of Professional Development for School Leaders

Participants in interviews and focus groups represented 19 different school divisions in the eight Superintendent's Regions. Of those 19 divisions, four indicated leaders exclusively participate in internal, division-created professional development, four indicated they exclusively participate in professional development from external providers, one indicated no professional development was offered for school leaders in that division, and the remaining ten divisions use a combination of internal and external professional development providers¹².

School leaders in Regions 1, 3, 6, and 8 indicated that their division utilizes a train-the-trainer approach where an individual or team attends external professional development and returns to disseminate the presented information to members of the division. The train-the-trainer

¹² Appendix B, Table 8B illustrates the provider types referenced by interview and focus group participants when discussing professional development experienced during their tenure as a school leader.

approach allows divisions to overcome financial barriers, particularly for smaller divisions. Focus group and interview data further indicated that most train-the-trainer opportunities stemmed from external professional development from professional organizations or guest speakers rather than colleges or universities.

Four leaders from Regions 1, 4, and 5 indicated they participated in external professional development provided by colleges and/or universities. Participants referenced engagement with the University of Richmond, the University of Virginia, and Virginia Commonwealth University. Specifically, leaders indicated they participated in leadership development programs like Next Generation Leadership Academy (NGLA) through the University of Richmond, Statewide Communities of Practice for Excellence (SCOPE) through the University of Virginia, and equity training around disrupting racism through Virginia Commonwealth University. These three universities are in close physical proximity to the three regions — Region 1 in Central Virginia, Region 4 in Northern Virginia, and Region 5 in the Valley — where leaders are engaging in the professional development provided through each university provider.

School Leaders' Perceived Effectiveness of Providers

Division-level leaders who completed the survey were asked to indicate the frequency with which they used division-developed professional development and programming provided by colleges and/or universities, as well as the perceived effectiveness of the programming offered by these providers. Table 3 below illustrates that school divisions utilize division-developed programming more frequently; 28 of 86 unique survey responses, or 33%, indicated they always use internal providers. These 28 respondents were split almost evenly when considering the effectiveness of these internal trainings; approximately 43% perceived the division-developed training to be very effective while about 46% believed it to be just effective.

To indicate they used internal providers multiple times in the last school year, 55 of 86 unique survey respondents, or 55%. Of these 55 respondents, 52 labeled the division-created professional development as either effective or very effective.

Table 3

Survey Data: Frequency of Division-developed Programming and Perceived Effectiveness of Division-developed Programming in Percentages

Frequency of Division-developed Programming	Not Applicable # / %	Very Effective # / %	Effective # / %	Somewhat Effective # / %	Not Effective # / %	Total # / %
Always	0 / 0%	12 / 42.86%	13 / 46.43%	3 / 10.71%	0 / 0%	28 / 32.56%
Sometimes	0 / 0%	21 / 38.18%	31 / 56.36%	3 / 5.45%	0 / 0%	55 / 63.95%
Rarely	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	2 / 100%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	2 / 2.33%
Never	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	1 / 100%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	1 / 1.16%

Note. 82 different school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia provided a total 86 unique survey responses. The following was used to define frequency: Always = We only use this type of material in our sessions. Sometimes = We have used this material type multiple times in the last school year. Rarely = We have used this material type at least once in the last school year. Never = We have not used this material type recently.

Table 4 below shows that 59 of 86 respondents, or approximately 69%, selected the answer “sometimes” to indicate they utilize professional development programming from a college or university to support school leaders. In terms of perceived effectiveness, though, there is more discrepancy in comparison to the division-developed programs. While a majority — about 58% — of respondents indicated college and universities provide effective professional development for school leaders, about 20% believed it to be very effective while about 22% felt it was only somewhat effective.

Table 4***Survey Data: Frequency of Programming Provided by College/University and Perceived Effectiveness of College/University Programming in Percentages***

Frequency of Programming Provided by College/University	Not Applicable # / %	Very Effective # / %	Effective # / %	Somewhat Effective # / %	Not Effective # / %	Total # / %
Always	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%
Sometimes	0 / 0%	12 / 20.34%	34 / 57.63%	13 / 22.03%	0 / 0%	59 / 68.6
Rarely	5 / 26.32%	1 / 5.26%	6 / 31.58%	7 / 36.84%	0 / 0%	19 / 22.09%
Never	6 / 75%	0 / 0%	1 / 12.5%	1 / 12.5%	0	8 / 9.3%

Note. 82 different school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia provided a total 86 unique survey responses. The following was used to define frequency: Always = We only use this type of material in our sessions. Sometimes = We have used this material type multiple times in the last school year. Rarely = We have used this material type at least once in the last school year. Never = We have not used this material type recently.

Discussions during the interviews and focus groups help illuminate the quantitative data above. A principal in Region 4 noted that colleges and universities bring a sense of authority as professionals on content topics, but she is less concerned with who the provider is and more interested in ensuring sessions provide relevant information that align to school and division needs. An assistant principal from Region 1, though, acknowledged that external providers offer fresh perspectives but can also have “a credibility problem” because they “are from the outside” and do not know “what we’re dealing with here in our space and our school and our experience.” She continued to explain that “any really good outside professional development is going to include that buy-in, that ability to demonstrate the credibility and show the need or the sense of urgency for what they’re bringing to the table.”

Funding Specifically for School Leaders’ Professional Development

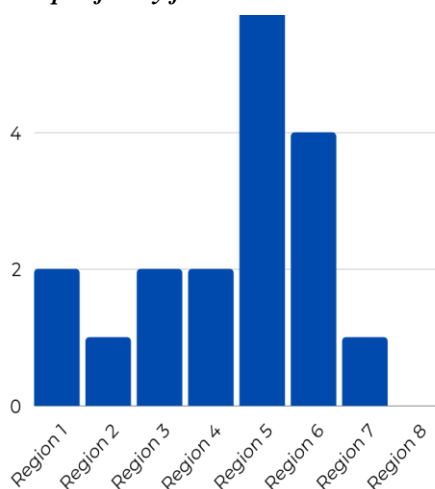
Of 82 divisions responding to the survey, 64 or approximately 78%, stated that their division did earmark funding for professional development specifically for school leaders.

Eighteen said no, their division did not earmark funding specifically for school leaders’ professional development, and one survey respondent did not respond to this question.

Figure 1 below illustrates, by region, the number of divisions that do not currently fund professional development specifically for school leaders. Many divisions that do not allocate funds for school leaders’ professional development are in Region 5 located in the Valley and

Figure 1

Frequency of divisions not funding professional development specifically for school leaders.



Region 6 located Western Virginia geographically. Per VDOE School Quality Profiles¹³, 12 of the 18 divisions have fewer than 5,000 students enrolled while the remaining six have between 5,000 and 11,000 students enrolled. These numbers indicate that the divisions are small in comparison to neighboring divisions, some of which serve between 60,000 and 90,000 students. These 18

divisions also report high numbers of economically disadvantaged students. Except for one division that reports approximately 17% of its population is economically disadvantaged, the remaining 17 divisions report between 25% and 50% of its population is economically disadvantaged. Knowing that smaller divisions in lower socioeconomic settings may have limited financial resources to allocate to leader development calls attention to inequitable access to professional development in divisions that may have a greater need for sessions to support students’ social and emotional needs.

¹³ School quality profiles are a resource provided by the VDOE. The school quality profile shares data about school and school division enrollment and performance.

While most school divisions indicated they do allocate funds specifically for school leaders on the survey, school leaders participating in interviews and focus groups discussed how they perceived funding to be used in their division. An assistant principal in Region 1 pointed out that divisions ultimately prioritize their interests by “how [they] want to allocate the budget.” She perceived that her county, which she labeled “well-off,” prefers to utilize internal resources to provide professional development for school leaders to save money, even though there may be instances where external providers may offer more effective programming.

When asked, principals indicated they would like funding to be provided to them at the school level to provide targeted professional development for the leaders in their building. Of six interviewees, four said they did not have money allocated to them as building leaders to provide training for themselves or the assistant leaders in their building.

Barriers to Professional Development for School Leaders

School leaders recognize barriers that exist for their divisions when attempting to organize professional development opportunities for school leaders. They identify time, money, and the leader’s mindset as limiting factors to effective professional development¹⁴.

Sitting school leaders identify time as the greatest barrier to effective professional development for school administrators. Focus group participants discussed the importance of having adequate time to participate in professional development opportunities and having time to implement what was learned with fidelity. Participants expressed interest in implementing new ideas and strategies, but they also recognized the need to ensure there is adequate time to devote to implementation of new skills. A superintendent in Region 7 said, “If you can find the money

¹⁴ Appendix B, Table 3B illustrates barriers to providing effective professional development for school leaders as indicated by interview and focus group participants. Among these, time, money, and mindset are the top three barriers identified.

to send somebody to professional development, then they've got to have the time to go. They've got to have the time to come back after they've gone to think about what they learned and be able to try to implement it within their school or within the division.” School leaders struggle because there is never an overabundance of time. Therefore, when leaders attend a session, they also expect that time is protected to ensure they can utilize the skills gained for the betterment of their school. A principal in Region 1 stated, “Protecting time is so important. So, when it is scheduled you know, we have to make sure we support the outcomes with fidelity.”

Sitting school leaders note that money is a potential barrier to effective professional development for school administrators, particularly for smaller divisions. A Director of Secondary Instruction in a small division of Region 6 noted that she relies heavily on grant writing to have access to money to allocate for school leaders’ professional development; she stated, “Money isn't everything because your resources are your people, ... but darn it if money just doesn't help make it a little bit better.” Leaders in larger divisions, though, acknowledge that they also see money as a barrier in terms of cost effectiveness. A Deputy Superintendent in Region 1 connected money to time, arguing that it is important to recognize the ratio of “time value” when working with providers of professional development. To protect time and use public funds ethically, he shared that his division negotiated, saying “They say, ‘Oh I got a 10 series.’ And it's like, I’ll give you four [sessions], and I think some folks sometimes get offended to that, but what we want is your best four, not your whole focus.” Ultimately, both small and large divisions are navigating ways to overcome obstacles when obtaining and allocating money to support school leaders.

A school leader’s mindset about professional development can be a barrier to engagement in learning opportunities; providers of professional development can play a role in improving

buy-in to the sessions they offer to school leaders. Mindset is affected when school leaders feel that they do not have a say in the skills they are being asked to learn. A Director of Curriculum in Region 3 pointed out that “We ask for input from our teachers, but when it comes to leaders this is what you’re going to do. Not a whole lot of choice.” Mindset may also be impacted by longevity in the career and exposure to reinvented initiatives. An assistant principal in Region 5 illustrated a negative mindset, stating that today, “there is a different generation of people, I heard this [concept] 20 years ago; it’s just called something else now.” Also, the demands placed on school leaders can create mental fatigue, causing them to disengage in professional development and fail to implement the presented skills. An assistant principal in Region 4 argued that leaders sometimes attend “professional learning, and it’s like, “Oh, I got to go sit through this.” Or “I already know what this is going to be like. I don’t want to sit through it.” She argued that leaders need greater buy-in to develop an open mind so they can think, ““Okay, I’m going to get something out of this.”” To address these mindset issues, divisions can utilize needs assessments to better understand what school leaders recognize as their areas for growth, and providers of professional development can give attention to how school leaders define effective development to offer sessions that improve buy-in and provide opportunities to get relevant and engaging content.

Summary of Findings

Through review of survey, interview, and focus group data, researchers identified that school leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia define effective professional development as on-going, relevant professional learning that actively engages them in the learning process and impacts outcomes for their school and division. Most school leaders do not report consistently participating in effective professional development though they desire opportunities to engage in

effective professional development. Even so, findings indicated that most school divisions in Virginia do allocate funding specifically for school leaders' professional development. The disconnect between allocated funding for professional development and perceived access to professional development illustrates a need for not only financial support for professional development but also buy-in to the programming provided. Findings indicated that funding is typically handled from the district level rather than the school level, but principals welcome the opportunity to have some funding at the school level to support professional development for their leadership team and themselves.

Their desire for greater financial control underscores a greater desire for voice in what professional development is provided to them. School leaders desire sustained programming that provides real solutions and strategies to the issues and needs they face in their day-to-day work. Further, they want professional development to be engaging, allowing them to participate in the learning through hands-on experiences, collaboration, and real-world problem solving. Also, leaders want access to mentorship, especially in the first one to three years on the job as an administrator.

Findings indicated school leaders distinguish differences in the type of learning opportunities they are provided. To maintain organizational management and compliance in schools and divisions, school leaders are often provided logistical training that requires little true professional growth. Instead, leaders want more access to professional development that allows them to develop skills that will have a direct impact on outcomes for stakeholders they serve. In terms of content, leaders expressed interest in professional development that supports instructional strategies to benefit all students, equitable practices, and social-emotional learning. These topics are especially relevant as schools work to provide equitable access to education

during the COVID-19 pandemic and continued calls for social justice in America.

While content topics for school leaders' professional development are shifting due to societal issues, how school leaders are engaging sessions are changing as well. Interview and focus group participants shared that video conferencing platforms create greater access to professional learning opportunities, allowing engagement for more people from more locations. Because virtual options for professional development are both available and accepted by practitioners, providers have more opportunity to offer effective professional development to school leaders.

In terms of providers, findings show that school divisions in Virginia tend to use a combination of internal and external providers of professional development. Internal professional development opportunities are often viewed as more effective, though, likely because it is immediately relevant to their daily work thanks to alignment with division, school, and leader values and needs. Still, survey data, interview, and focus group participants indicated that external providers, like colleges and universities, can provide credible, research-based information that result in effective professional development when participants see that barriers like funding and distance can be addressed, can apply theory to practice, and gain knowledge that immediately meets their professional and school needs.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The goal of this audit was to identify the state of professional development provided to school leaders within the Commonwealth of Virginia. To complete the audit, we reviewed current literature documenting professional development for school leaders, conducted a survey through all division superintendents in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and held interviews with principals and focus groups with school and division leaders representing all eight

Superintendents Regions. This mixed-methods approach aimed to address the following research questions:

1. What does the literature reveal about effective professional learning for school leaders?
2. Who are the major providers of professional development for school leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia?
3. How do school divisions fund professional development for school leadership in the Commonwealth of Virginia?
4. How do Virginia school leaders evaluate their experience with professional development?

Four themes emerged from our data: effectiveness and relevance of professional development, providers, funding, and impressions of school leaders. Through the audit, we were able to define the term “effective professional development” with regards to school leaders, capture current school leaders’ experiences with professional development content, delivery, and providers, and identify gaps in professional development for school leaders as well as opportunities to improve professional development for school leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Literature defines “effective professional development” for school leaders as learning that allows school leaders to obtain and apply practical skills in daily practice to improve outcomes for the district, school, and its stakeholders (Paulus et al., 2020). Literature stressed that effective professional development is relevant when it aligns with the real-world needs and values of the district, school, and leader (Hildreth et. al, 2018). Plus, effectiveness hinges on the ability of professional development sessions to be sustained overtime and the ability of leaders to actively engage through processes like action research, mentoring and coaching, collaboration, feedback, and reflection (Bates & Morgan, 2018; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Daniels et al., 2019). Interviews and focus group participants echoed aspects of the literature’s definition: school leaders in

Virginia prefer professional development that allows them to learn job-specific skills and strategies that can be implemented to improve outcomes for all stakeholders and sessions in which they are actively engaged, particularly when there are opportunities for hands-on work, collaboration, and mentorship. School leaders stressed, though, the importance of time, indicating not only that there is a need for sustained exposure to needed content and skills practice, but also recognition of tasks and stakeholders competing for school leaders' attention and limiting their capacity to engage in professional learning.

Literature, survey data, interview participants, and focus group participants indicated that the content for professional development fell into two primary categories: training for organizational management and compliance versus professional development to address emerging needs within the school. Training for organizational management and compliance include topics like discipline, resource distribution, policy implementation, and civil rights and special education law. These topics were deemed “training” rather than professional development because, typically, the school leader received updated information or guidelines for practice, but no real skill development was gained from the session. Professional development to address emerging needs in the school, by contrast, required school leaders to identify a relevant need in the school community, learn skills to address that need, and apply those skills in the learning environment. The timing of this audit — Summer 2020 through Spring 2021 — saw increased needs in school with virtual learning, equitable practices, and social-emotional support as Virginia, like all of America, faced the COVID-19 pandemic and calls for social justice after the untimely and unnecessary deaths of black Americans. As a result, survey, interview, and focus group data indicated that emerging content topics for school leader professional

development include topics like instructional strategies for virtual learning, social-emotional learning (SEL), trauma-informed care, and culturally responsive teaching.

Literature and collected data suggest that school leaders crave more support to help them navigate these emerging needs in their schools. School leaders indicated that professional development is most readily available for teachers, and often, leaders are expected to have answers to school and stakeholder needs, even without opportunities to learn from experts or colleagues (Hammond et al., 2017). Literature argues that there are three barriers to providing effective professional development to school leaders: structural barriers like funding, time, and size of the district; psychological barriers like being unwilling to engage in professional learning; and social barriers like a failure to be vulnerable and open to feedback (Cadero-Smith, 2020; Lasater, 2016; Nir, 2008). Sitting school leaders reiterated some of the barriers identified in the literature while also expressing their desire for greater availability of resources that respect their time commitments, their practitioner focus, and their desire to impact student outcomes.

Survey data indicated that most school divisions in Virginia do allocate money for school leaders to receive professional development, but just over 21% of divisions who responded do not. The divisions where funding is not allocated for school leaders' professional development all serve fewer than 11,000 students and a significant population of economically disadvantaged students. Interview and focus group participants indicated that funding can be an issue, particularly for smaller divisions as illustrated by the survey data. Participants in interviews and focus groups indicated that time is an issue for engaging in professional development as school leaders must not only have time to attend a session but also need time to reflect and then implement what they learned in the school setting. Further, they acknowledged that school leaders' day-to-day tasks paired with unexpected stakeholder needs limit their ability to step out

of the building or to turn off their radios to be fully present in a professional development session. This tendency to be stretched thin is, again, particularly an issue for smaller divisions where leaders are expected to fulfill more duties as part of their job role.

Interview and focus group participants echoed the literature by identifying mindset as a barrier to professional development. School leaders indicated that there are times when they are unwilling to engage in professional learning, often because they do not feel the content aligns to their needs as practitioners or because they feel the content is recycled information that has been relabeled or renamed. School leaders want voice in their professional learning opportunities to improve buy-in and overcome these psychological and social barriers.

A factor impacting buy-in to professional development for school leaders is the provider of the learning opportunity. Survey data indicated that respondents from school divisions in Virginia tended to use division-created, internal professional development more frequently than external providers. Interview and focus group participants indicated that internal professional development is usually aligned with the values and needs of the division and school, making it more relevant for the leader. Even so, survey data also showed that more than half of respondents indicated that they had used colleges and/or universities as an external provider for professional development multiple times in the past year. There was discrepancy, though, about how respondents perceived the effectiveness of professional development provided by colleges and/or universities; while a little more than half of respondents believed this professional development to be “effective,” the other half were split with some claiming the sessions were “very effective” and the other half claiming the sessions were “somewhat effective.” Participants in interviews and focus groups illustrated this split with some pointing out that external providers like colleges and/or universities are not living the experience of the school, and therefore, lack credibility while

other leaders felt that information from colleges and/or universities was more credible based on research and vetting.

School leaders need content that is engaging, collaborative, and practitioner focused. Leaders are asking for mentorship and connection to other leaders. They want opportunities to learn strategies and skills that can be implemented to address relevant needs for themselves and their schools. Even though they desire more professional development that meets the growing needs of their school, school leaders also need learning opportunities that meet their time constraints, that will be financially supported by their division, and that target their needs. Therefore, providers like Virginia Commonwealth University can acknowledge these requests and develop solutions that meet the growing needs of school leaders in Virginia and beyond; Table 5 below illustrates recommendations for providers based on findings from the audit of professional development provided to school leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Table 5

Main Findings from the Audit of Professional Development for School Leaders with Recommendations for Virginia Commonwealth University’s School of Education

Main Finding	Recommendation
School leaders have inconsistent access to effective professional development.	<p>Be cognizant of the perception that college programs are theory heavy, and ensure professional development sessions apply theory to practice.</p> <p>Complete a document review of local school divisions' strategic plans to better understand targeted areas for growth, and therefore, opportunities for professional development that will reinforce divisions' goals.</p>
Providing professional development that is relevant to leaders’ daily work will only be effective if the session’s delivery method actively	Create professional development sessions and series as opposed to full degree programs that meet targeted needs.

<p>engages school leaders in the learning opportunity. Sustained professional development on relevant topics creates long-term learning that benefits the leader, school, and division.</p>	<p>Offer teaching methodologies that incorporate hands-on, PBL, and collaboration. Use real-world scenarios and problem solving to engage participants.</p>
<p>Mentoring and coaching is desired by school leaders, particularly for 0–3-year administrators, because it organically addresses real-world needs and offers on-going opportunity for collaboration, feedback, and reflection.</p>	<p>Create a clinical faculty opportunity for administrators to support mentorship for school leaders.</p> <p>Develop a strategic and targeted mentor program for first year, sitting principals. VCU can use existing technology platforms to remove funding and geographical barriers and utilize sitting and retired leaders across divisions and the Commonwealth of Virginia.</p>
<p>Leaders value professional development content that addresses specific needs for the stakeholders they serve. School leaders desire continuous opportunities for professional development on instruction that improves outcomes for all students, social-emotional learning, and equity.</p>	<p>A document review of local divisions' strategic plans can not only ensure leaders have access to consistent professional development, but also ensure sessions are aligned to division and leader values and needs.</p> <p>Provide a webinar series of professional development focused on how to build collaboration and community among principals during difficult and unprecedented events, as well as how to incorporate these strategies into their strategic and crisis management plans.</p> <p>Incorporate the use of micro credentialing to provide focused content and provide verifiable skill recognition to leaders.</p>
<p>While many school divisions in Virginia allocate funding specifically for leader development, funding continues to be a barrier for smaller divisions and individual leaders.</p>	<p>While individual leaders are the end user, recognize that funding is usually controlled at the division level and marketing available program to the division is important.</p> <p>Identify available grants, discounts, or shared expenses across divisions.</p> <p>Small divisions need creative ways of sharing costs of external professional development. Consider ways to engage and support smaller, rural divisions.</p>

Consider adjusting cost for participation in virtual professional development to acknowledge disparities in funding for different divisions.

<p>School divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia tend to use a combination of providers of professional development.</p>	<p>VCU can increase communication strategies. Continue distribution of professional development opportunities to divisions but develop methods of communication to individual leaders as well. Ensure ongoing communication to graduates to invite them to continue professional growth post-graduation.</p>
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<p>COVID-19 and calls for social justice in America impacted not only content needs for school leader professional development but also how practitioners are engaging in these learning opportunities.</p>	<p>Capitalize on the increased use of video conferencing platforms to reach more leaders, particularly those in small, rural divisions. Consider adjusting cost for participation in virtual professional development to acknowledge disparities in funding for different divisions.</p> <p>Be cognizant of hiring practices to ensure professional development addressing equity and diversity is presented by individuals with diverse experiences and backgrounds.</p> <p>Promote anti-racism content and inclusion for all marginalized groups.</p>
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Develop and Provide Effective Professional Development for School Leaders

Literature defined effective professional development as content and actions that ensure the applicability of new skills, the opportunity to actively use those skills, and align implementation of skills with research-based standards (Paulus et al., 2020). Researchers expanded the definition to include active collaboration with mentoring and coaching. School leaders noted their access to effective professional development was inconsistent, often because the session did not align with the values or needs of the division, school, or leader. Also, leaders indicated they did not feel they could immediately implement what they learned to improve outcomes for themselves, their school, or their division.

Colleges and/or universities, as external providers of professional development for school leaders, should be cognizant that leaders' experience indicates sessions are often too theory-heavy without application to practice. School leaders desire actionable, practitioner-based content that can be utilized immediately. Therefore, providers should ensure professional development sessions not only introduce theory but also embed time for leaders to identify where and how theory can be applied to practice.

Providers can conduct a document review of school divisions' strategic plans to identify professional development needs. By gathering information from the divisions' coordinator of professional development, providers can better understand the strategic plan of Virginia's school divisions and identify gaps in professional learning currently provided. Plus, providers will be able to identify professional development needs that align with division values; alignment with strategic planning and goals was identified by school leaders as an effective means of creating relevance and buy-in for participants in professional development sessions. Understanding the strategic plans of individual divisions allows providers to identify any school leader needs that division level leaders may not currently recognize as well as school leader needs that are not addressed by available professional development.

Consider Delivery Method and Sustainability of Professional Development for School Leaders

Having acknowledged the need for application-based, relevant professional learning content, attention must also be given to the delivery method of the professional learning as well as the frequency with which leaders will be able to engage in the learning. The audit of professional development indicated that school leaders prefer opportunities to actively engage in the learning process, yet leaders specifically indicated that the professional development they

received was lecture-based or a one-sided argument presented by the provider. School leaders also indicated that one-time sessions were less effective for sustained learning. Instead, they prefer on-going professional development opportunities.

Providers can create professional development sessions or learning series as opposed to a degree or certificate program or other large-scale content delivery methods. The use of micro-credentialing or small-scale evidence-based assessments of competencies that demonstrate mastery, offer leaders the opportunity to focus content and abilities around specific topics. Because school leaders noted that time was a critical factor in effectiveness, this approach provides targeted learning opportunities that can occur on a smaller scale while still meeting relevant needs and providing opportunity for sustained learning. Therefore, leaders can absorb information quickly and implement immediately while also allowing leaders the opportunity to demonstrate mastery.

Providers of professional development should be cognizant of instructional best practices in the K-12 school setting and seek to model these best practices in their professional development sessions. Incorporate teaching methodologies that include hands-on experiential learning, project-based learning, and active collaboration. School leaders were quick to mention the overwhelming success garnered from talking to other leaders in other schools and divisions. Through collaboration, leaders have an opportunity to network and experience a sense of community while also gathering strategies from other practitioners that may be applicable and beneficial in their own school.

Provide Opportunities for Leadership Mentoring and Coaching

Mentoring and coaching connects experienced leaders with beginning leaders. Through mentorship, the mentee can observe modeled behaviors of the mentor and learn from the

experience of a seasoned administrator. When the mentor and mentee work alongside one another, the mentee receives professional development that is immediately job-embedded and relevant, and through conversations about their experiences, both mentor and mentee have opportunity for feedback and reflection. School leaders share that most divisions in Virginia do not have mentorship programs even though leaders desire mentorship, especially in early years of leadership.

Currently, clinical faculty programs exist to support teachers. Providers can create a clinical faculty opportunity for school leaders that supports mentorship. This professor of practice model would identify seasoned professionals in Virginia's schools, including retired administrators and leaders. As part of a larger program of offerings, mentoring from experienced professionals can offer organic modeling and experience that is unparalleled in current leadership programs.

Providers can also create a focused first-year mentor program for sitting school principals. Utilizing video conferencing technology, both mentors and mentees can connect with seasoned administrators, giving access to knowledge and advising for new leaders across Virginia, regardless of region or division size.

Provide Targeted Content to Support Equitable Outcomes for All Students

Though school leaders will continue to need training on organizational management and compliance issues, professional development should be focused on topics that directly support students. Specifically, school leaders desire continuous opportunities for professional development on instruction that improves outcomes for all students, social-emotional learning, and equity.

As previously recommended, providers can complete a document review of division's strategic plans to better understand divisions' goals for professional development and school leaders' individual needs for professional growth. With this information, providers can create and implement professional development that supports divisions' strategic plan while also ensuring individual school leaders have opportunities that meet their specific, individual needs. In doing so, providers communicate to participants that they value the end user and recognize that relevance impacts their engagement in professional learning.

Providers have an opportunity to review needs that emerged due to both the COVID-19 pandemic and recent calls for social justice and to create content that specifically addresses leadership needs during crisis situations. These needs can be addressed through face-to-face sessions as well as in virtual synchronous or asynchronous settings. Providers can develop webinar series, an on-demand library, or similar artifacts that focus on building collaboration and community among principals during difficult and unprecedented events while maintaining focus on strategic goals and student outcomes.

Seek to Eliminate Funding as a Barrier to Professional Development for School Leaders

Most of the school divisions identified in the audit admitted to allocation of funding specifically for school leaders that was unique and distinct from teacher development. Researchers were unable to identify a common source for funding across the state and were not able to determine the makeup of spending between external and internal providers. However, researchers were able to identify disparities of funding between smaller and larger divisions. Additionally, it was generally accepted that funding decisions are made at the division level and not with each individual school.

Efforts should be made by providers to ensure all divisions can access effective professional development for school leaders. Identify available grants, provide discounts, or seek to share expenses across divisions. Divisions are not always aware of the ways in which professional development can be funded. An opportunity exists for the providers of content to identify additional funding sources and market those sources to the divisions.

For smaller school divisions and divisions serving significant numbers of economically disadvantaged students, providers can offer creative ways to share or reduce costs of structured content. This could include sharing of costs across divisions, discounts based on attendance levels, utilizing technological advancements, or engaging the Department of Education to offer state-wide purchases. Providers can also consider adjusting cost for participation in virtual professional development as opposed to in-person sessions.

Increase Communication of Professional Development Opportunities

Researchers identified multiple providers of content being used across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Most school divisions utilize a combination of providers, including division-created programming and sessions from external providers like colleges and/or universities or professional organizations. External providers can leverage their expertise, though, by improving communication strategies with school divisions and Virginia leaders as individuals.

Specifically, Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Education (VCU SOE) can increase communication of existing offerings, as well as any newly developed content sessions or series, to the appropriate division personnel as well as individual school leaders. Previous recommendations allow divisions and leaders to select focused content in smaller chunks and to prioritize on-demand offerings. VCU SOE is a powerhouse of knowledge and ability but school

leaders have not been targeted. The audit revealed that funding for leadership development is most often controlled at the division level, but it is the school leaders that have influence to request how that funding is spent. Marketing and communication should be addressed to the end user. Researchers also support the continued effort to market to VCU graduates and invite them to continue their learning. School leaders were able to identify VCU as a provider of content but could not elaborate on specific offerings other than degree and certificate programs.

Practice Equity with People and Programs

The current social state of America has not gone unnoticed by school divisions. COVID-19 and calls for social justice have impacted not only content needs for school leadership, but also how practitioners are engaging in those learning opportunities. Engagement through alternative means of delivery and technology has become a normal part of schools, and it should also be utilized by providers. Although researchers were not able to identify the specific makeup of providers in the Commonwealth, the need for continued change is apparent.

Providers can capitalize on video conferencing platforms to reach more leaders in small, rural divisions. Costs have been identified as a barrier for these school divisions, and the use of technology should allow for savings. Disparities in funding can be overcome with technology while also ensuring access to the same learning experiences across the state to all leaders.

School leaders have noted the importance of equity. Providers should be cognizant of hiring practices to ensure professional development content is prepared and presented by individuals who are representative of diverse backgrounds and experiences. Elevation of peoples previously ignored or distanced should be common practice. Further, providers have an opportunity, and a duty, to model anti-racism content when developing professional development sessions, series, and other learning materials.

Timeline for Implementation of Recommendations

To address the recommendations detailed above, VCU SOE can address recommendations as action steps that need immediate attention and action steps that can occur over a longer period of time.

Immediate action steps are outlined in Table 6 below. Immediate action steps include reviewing and revamping currently available professional development, providing greater access to professional development, addressing barriers to funding, increasing communication efforts, and being purposeful with efforts to promote anti-racism and equity in presented content and in hiring practices. Also, VCU SOE should begin a document review of local school divisions' strategic plans to prepare for long-term action steps.

Table 6

Immediate Action Steps to Address Recommendations to Provide Effective Professional Development to School Leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia

#	Immediate Action Step
1	Review and revamp available professional development sessions to ensure theoretical concepts are actively applied to real-world practice. Ensure hands-on teaching methodologies are utilized to actively engage leaders in problem solving opportunities and opportunities are sustained over time.
2	Capitalize on the increased use of video conferencing platforms to reach more leaders, particularly those in small, rural divisions.
3	Begin working on a document review of local school divisions' strategic plans in order to prioritize professional development content for creation and delivery.
4	Address funding barriers by considering adjustment of cost for participation in virtual professional development and identifying available grants, discounts, or shared expenses across divisions.
5	Increase communication of available professional development to include both divisions, individual leaders, and alumni. Include information to address funding barriers in communication of available professional development sessions.
6	Continue to promote anti-racism content and inclusion for all marginalized groups while marketing available professional development to address leaders' interest in equity, social-emotional learning, and outcomes for all students.
7	Be cognizant of hiring practices to ensure professional development addressing equity and diversity is presented by individuals with diverse experiences and backgrounds.

Researchers recommend that immediate action steps occur between March 2021 and June 2021 to ensure VCU SOE is an effective professional development provider for school leaders seeking professional learning in the summer of 2021.

Long-term action steps are outlined in Table 7 below. Long-term action steps address opportunities for VCU SOE to develop new professional development series beyond traditional degree programs, as well as pursue opportunities like webinars and/or micro credentialing. Long-term action steps continue to address the need for content focused on equity, social-emotional learning, and improved outcomes for all students. Finally, long-term action steps give special attention to the need for mentorship and coaching and reassert the importance of attention to funding and access barriers for smaller, more rural divisions.

Table 7

Long-term Action Steps to Address Recommendations to Provide Effective Professional Development to School Leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia

#	Long-term Action Step
1	Utilize document review to build new targeted professional development sessions aligned to division and leader values. Be cognizant of leaders' interest in content on equity, social-emotional learning, and outcomes for all students.
2	Develop professional development series as opposed to full degree programs. Consider webinars and micro credentialing as alternative methods of professional learning beyond live, in-person professional development sessions.
3	Develop clinical faculty opportunity to support mentorship for school leaders.
4	Develop a mentoring program to support first-year principals across the Commonwealth of Virginia using existing video conferencing platforms.
5	Continually think about funding and access as barriers to smaller, more rural divisions. Seek to provide live and virtual learning opportunities and to communicate supports for funding.

Researchers recommend that VCU SOE seek to accomplish long-term action steps as soon as possible with a deadline of the start of the 2022-2023 school year. Development of new programming is time intensive, but school leaders indicated a sense of urgency around these recommendations throughout this audit, indicating that swift action is both desired and needed.

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Appendix A

Data Collection Tools

Survey



VCU

School of Education

Audit of Professional Development for School Leaders
This survey should take 5-10 minutes to complete.

As part of a comprehensive audit of professional development for K-12 school leaders, our team of doctoral students in Educational Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University is collecting data from divisions across the Commonwealth of Virginia. We understand that you play a significant role in professional development in your division, and we are interested in your insight regarding professional learning provided for school leaders.

We invite you to complete the survey below. Our goal is to understand how your division uses major providers of professional development and seeks to fund professional development for school leaders. Further, we are interested in content topics covered in professional development for school leaders.

If you have questions about this survey, results, or our process, please send an email to Melisa Naumann at naumannmj@mymail.vcu.edu

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About You

* 1. In what school division do you serve?

*** 2. What is your primary role?**

- PD Coordinator
- Superintendent
- Assistant Superintendent
- Director, Coordinator, or Specialist
- Teacher
- Principal
- Staff

*** 3. How many years have you served in this role?**

- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 3-6 years
- More than 6 years

4. Is serving as the person responsible for leadership professional development in your division part of your job description or within the capacity of your role?

- Yes
- No

Counting the Sessions

5. Approximately how many times per year does your division provide professional development specifically for school leaders?

- Once per year
- Twice per year
- Three times per year
- Four times per year
- Monthly
- More than once per month

For questions 6-9, please choose the frequency that each type of professional development programming is used in your division.

Always = We only use this type of material in our sessions.

Sometimes = We have used this material type multiple times in the last school year.

Rarely = We have used this material type at least once in the last school year.

Never = We have not used this material type recently.

6. Indicate the frequency with which your division uses college/university programming to provide leadership professional development:

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

7. Indicate the frequency with which your division uses outside sources (state/federal entity, professional organization, commercial organization, military) to provide leadership professional development:

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

8. Indicate the frequency with which your division uses division-developed resources (including mentorship or coaching) to provide leadership professional development:

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

9. Indicate the frequency with which your division uses personally developed resources (including mentorship or coaching) to provide leadership professional development:

- Always
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never

Based on our review of relevant research, we define effective professional development as a program of instruction that:

- ensures educators understand the practical use of presented skills
- provides the opportunity to apply those skills in real-world scenarios
- aligns implementation of skills with research-based standards for educators
- ensures collaboration between practitioners utilizing mentorship, leading sessions, and/or the use of professional learning communities
- is relevant in nature and application to benefit the work of the practitioner.

For questions 10-13, please rate the effectiveness of each institution type below that your division uses to provide professional development:

Effectiveness

10. Effectiveness of programming from a college/university

- NA
- Very effective
- Effective
- Somewhat effective
- Not effective

11. Effectiveness of programming from outside sources (other than college/university)

- NA
- Very effective
- Effective
- Somewhat effective
- Not effective

12. Effectiveness of programming from division-developed resources (includes mentorship or coaching driven by the division)

- NA
- Very effective
- Effective
- Somewhat effective
- Not effective

13. Effectiveness of programming from personally developed professional development (includes information mentorship or coaching)

- NA
- Very effective
- Effective
- Somewhat effective
- Not effective

14. Typically, what was the primary delivery method of professional development for school leaders?

- In-person, instructor led training
- Webinar or online training module
- Mentoring / Coaching
- Action Research

15. The engagement type(s) of the primary delivery method was:

- Lecture
- Participant collaboration
- Participants practice skills/engage or apply content

16. The duration type of the primary delivery method was:

- One session
- Two or more sessions

17. The setting(s) of the primary delivery method was:

- In-person
- Virtual
- Blended

Financing

18. In a typical school year, does your school division earmark funding specifically for professional development for school leaders beyond programs designed for teaching staff?

- Yes
- No

19. In a typical school year, order the most often used sources of funding for professional development for school leaders.

  Federal funding <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
  State funding <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
  Local funding <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
  Grants <input type="checkbox"/> N/A
  Donations or foundations <input type="checkbox"/> N/A

20. For a typical school year, pick a range of funding spent on school leader professional development in the 2019-2020 school year by division.

- 0-10,000
- 10,000-20,000
- 20,001-30,000
- 30,001-40,000
- 40,001-50,000
- 50,001-60,000
- 60,001-70,000
- 70,001-80,000
- 80,001-90,000
- 90,001-100,000
- More than 100,000

21. Generally, how has funding for school leader professional development changed over the previous five years?

- Increased
- Decreased
- No change

Content Topics

22. Please list the top 3-5 content topics covered in professional development provided to school leaders in your division.

**23. Have content topics for leadership professional developed changed over time?
How?**



Interview & Focus Group Questions

- Tell us the school division in which you serve, your role, and time in that role.
- What content has been covered in professional development for school leaders in your division? How, if at all, has that content changed over time?
- How you would define effective professional development for school leaders.
- What has been your experience with effective professional development for school leaders in your division?
 - Have you received professional development that was effective for you in your school division?
 - What content covered was particularly effective, and why?
- What do you identify as opportunities provided through professional development with external providers? Internal providers? What do you identify as challenges for each?
- What changes do you think are needed to improve the effectiveness of professional development for school leaders in your division?
- What do you see as obstacles or barriers for your school division to provide effective professional development for school leaders?

Appendix B

Table 1B

School Leaders' Experience Participating in Effective Professional Development in Their Division

Response	Frequency of Response	%
Yes	5	20%
No	7	28%
Inconsistently	11	44%
No Answer	2	8%

Note. 25 sitting school leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia provided responses in either a focus group or one-on-one interview.

Table 2B

Changes Needed to Provide Effective Professional Development for School Leaders

Needed Change	Frequency of Response	%
Align to leaders' values/needs	14	56%
Align to school and division values	10	40%
Create opportunities for mentoring and coaching	8	32%
Create opportunities that are sustained over time	8	32%
Create opportunities for collaboration	6	24%
Increase relevance or real-world application	4	16%
Plan for a manageable amount of time and content	4	16%
Protect time for professional development	4	16%
Align to needs of teachers	3	12%
Align to needs of students	2	8%
Create opportunities for "hands on" active engagement	2	8%
Ensure content is research-based or rooted in proven results	1	4%

Note. 25 sitting school leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia provided responses in either a focus group or one-on-one interview.

Table 3B***Barriers to Providing Effective Professional Development for School Leaders***

Barrier	Frequency of Response	%
Time	20	80%
Money (Availability, allocation, and equitable distribution)	14	56%
Mindset (Buy-in, sustainability, & mental/emotional capacity)	13	52%
Division size	9	36%
Significant amount of content to cover	3	12%
Varying demographic needs in community	2	8%
Lack of human connection in virtual setting due to COVID-19	2	8%
Limited room capacity in virtual setting due to COVID-19	1	4%

Note. 25 sitting school leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia provided responses in either a focus group or one-on-one interview.

Table 4B***Content Changes over Time in Professional Development Provided to School Leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia***

Change	Frequency of Response	%
Change to address changes in needs/trends	20	27.03%
Change to instructional topics	15	20.27%
Irrelevant/No change	13	17.57%
Technology changes and adaptations	13	17.57%
Shift to address cultural competencies (equity, SEL, diversity)	12	16.22%
Alignment	3	4.05%
Change in meeting frequencies	3	4.05%
Smaller groups	3	4.05%
Coaching	2	2.70%
SIP	1	1.35%

Note. 82 different school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia provided a total 86 unique survey responses; of those 86 surveys, 74 responded to the question about professional development content changes over time for school leaders in the division.

Table 5B***Survey Response Rate by Region***

Region	Total # Responses	%
Region 1	9	60.00%
Region 2	8	53.33%
Region 3	8	47.06%
Region 4	14	73.68%
Region 5	14	70.00%
Region 6	11	73.33%
Region 7	10	52.63%
Region 8	8	66.67%
Total	82	62.10%

Note. Survey response averages are calculated using the total number of responses divided by the total number of divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia Superintendent's Regions.

Table 6B***Respondent Information: Years of Experience in Job and Job Description Regarding Responsibility for Professional Development***

Years of Experience in Job Role	Yes, job description includes responsibility for PD		No, job description includes responsibility for PD	
		%		%
Less than 1 year	10	11.63%	0	0.00%
1-3 years	24	27.91%	2	2.33%
3-6 years	27	31.40%	2	2.33%
More than 6 years	18	20.93%	3	3.49%
Total	79	91.86%	7	8.14%

Note. 82 different school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia provided a total 86 unique survey responses.

Table 7B***Survey Data: Frequency of Personally developed Programming like Mentorship/Coaching and Perceived Effectiveness of Personally developed Programming in Percentages***

Frequency of Division-developed Programming	Not Applicable	Very Effective	Effective	Somewhat Effective	Not Effective	Total
	# / %	# / %	# / %	# / %	# / %	# / %
Always	0 / 0%	8 / 42.11%	8 / 42.11%	3 / 15.79%	0 / 0%	19 / 22.09%
Sometimes	0 / 0%	14 / 25%	38 / 67.86%	4 / 7.14%	0 / 0%	56 / 65.12%
Rarely	0 / 0%	1 / 10%	4 / 40%	5 / 50%	0 / 0%	10 / 11.63%
Never	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	1 / 100%	0 / 0%	0 / 0%	1 / 1.16%

Note. 82 different school divisions in the Commonwealth of Virginia provided a total 86 unique survey responses. The following was used to define frequency: Always = We only use this type of material in our sessions. Sometimes = We have used this material type multiple times in the last school year. Rarely = We have used this material type at least once in the last school year. Never = We have not used this material type recently.

Table 8B***Providers of Professional Development for Sitting School Leaders***

Change	Frequency of Response	%
Internal: Division-developed PD	15	60%
External: PD from Professional Organization	9	36%
External: PD from College and/or University	6	24%
Train-the-trainer approach	6	24%
External: PD from Guest Speaker	3	12%
External: PD from Neighboring Division	1	4%

Note. 25 sitting school leaders in the Commonwealth of Virginia provided responses in either a focus group or one-on-one interview. Frequency indicates the sitting school leader references an example of this provider when discussing professional development experienced during their tenure.

Appendix C

Superintendent's Regions as Illustrated by the Virginia Department of Education

