A STUDY OF TWO SCHOOL DISTRICTS' PRACTICES IN PROVIDING

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR PRINCIPALS

By

MELLODY MATTHES

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    The members of the committee appointed to examine the dissertation of MELLODY MATTHES find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted

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Abstract

By Mellody Matthes, Ed.D.
Washington State University
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Chair: Paul Goldman

This study sought to understand how district office administration supports principal professional development. Principal leadership matters in improving student achievement, but the responsibility for a principals' achievement also rests with district leadership. A case study, interview-based methodology with data collected from written materials, professional plans, and programs were used to explore the actions of two school district offices as they provided professional development to their principals. Major findings in this study were that the professional development activities that district administration provided aligned to best practices identified in the literature, including the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium standards. The commonalities of the professional development for principals include setting a widely shared vision for learning, providing a professional culture and collaborative relationships, providing feedback on performance with formal and informal assessment, and focusing on aligned curriculum and teaching strategies. The practices of district-level administration in providing professional development for principals were similar in both districts and included book studies, meetings, and an induction mentorship program. The findings indicate that district-level administration emphasized the need to provide professional development that engages principals in job-embedded activities focused on teaching and learning, which are aligned with the district improvement needs. District administration did not spend the same effort in providing professional development that focused on principal leadership skills.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study describes how two school district central office administrations provide professional development to improve the capacity and performance of their principals. The role of the principal has reached a new height of demand and complexity since standards and accountability have become the expectation in public education (Waters, & Marzano, 2003). Many factors contribute to the performance of principals' instructional leadership. Supervision, focus on data based on instructional decision making, curriculum alignment, all of these elements feed into what instructional leadership is (David & Shields, 2001). Little is known of the role of district-office administrators in providing job-embedded professional development for principals. As the Wallace foundation notes in its 2007 publication *A Bridge to School Reform*,

> Until very recently, in fact, there was only a scant evidence about what good leadership actually looks like in schools, districts and states…and what the best ways to evaluate the behaviors and performance of school leaders so that effective practices are documented and rewarded, and ineffective ones are remedied. (p. 5).

In an effort to explore the role of district administration in providing professional development to its principals, the research in this study was primarily based on interviews of district-level administrators and principals. The first chapter presents the background of the study, specifies the problem to be researched, identifies the significance, and presents an overview of methodology used in this study.

Definition of Terms

Throughout the literature, staff development and professional development are often used synonymously, for the purpose of this study the term "professional development" will be used only for those activities that focus on individuals, in this case practicing principals in their

district and school context. Professional development is long-term, planned, and job embedded. It has a focus on student achievement, supportive reflective practices, and provides opportunities to work, discuss, and solve problems with peers. Professional development has an emphasis on critical reflection, not traditional practice. Activities that reflect the principles of effective professional development include journal keeping, peer study groups, support networks, portfolios, team training for school improvement, and personal professional-development plans (Educational Research Series, 1999). According to Elmore (2000), effective principal development should provide principals with substantive research on teaching and learning, take place in the principals' home school, focus on solving real problems, and include networks of principals who serve as "critical friends." Hirsh (2004) concluded that educators perceive professional development to be effective if it is seen as part of the school improvement process. As noted in *Breaking Ranks* (1996), teachers, administrators, and other educators who are a part of a district regard their own learning as integral to their professional role.

Instructional leadership is a concept that dates from the 1980s. Smith and Andrews (1989) characterized the strong instructional leader as one who gives curriculum and instruction the highest priority, rallies and mobilizes resources to enable the accomplishment of those goals, and creates a climate of high expectations for high academic achievement and respect for all students. Such leaders are dedicated to school and school district goals and are directly involved in instructional policy through communication, staff development, establishing incentives for use of new instructional strategies, and displaying knowledge of curricular materials. They monitor student progress and teacher effectiveness and consult effectively with faculty and other groups to make decisions. There is consensus that the work of the principal must be transformational in nature. To create empowering conditions in schools by expanding the leadership team or creating

what Elmore (2000) referred to as distributed leadership. The principal of today needs expertise in instructional strategies, and use of data to target professional development to help teachers assist all students in reaching high standards. The instructional leader challenges staff members to examine traditional assumptions about teaching and help provide opportunities for them to share information and work together to plan curriculum and instruction. Although the current views of the principal differ to some degree there is a clear departure from the view of principals as managers. The pathway to instructional leadership requires training in instruction and assessment with high-level leadership skills. These skills are complex, varied, and difficult to develop in principals.

Background of the Study

During the late 20th century, principal preparation programs emphasized leadership, collaboration, and problem-solving skills as well as basic competence in school law, budget, and supervision. Internships supported the learning and socialization process for aspiring principals. Few candidates received advanced training in curriculum, instruction, and assessment as prevailing assumptions stipulated that most classroom teachers had these skills and, that, as successful teachers, principal trainees had already demonstrated their competence in these areas. Some programs provided intensive training that focused on social justice and multicultural issues, but these were the minority, today's building principal is accountable to establish a school culture that supports teacher leadership and shared decision making (Marzano, 2003).

There has been an evolution in university principal-training programs over the past years with more attention to curriculum, instructional and assessment. However, there are many administrators who finished their training in the "leadership era." The knowledge based deemed essential for educational leaders trained during this time centered around management concepts,

such as planning, organizing, financing supervising, budgeting, scheduling, and so on, and than on the development of relationships, creating caring environments within schools that promote student learning. During the last five years, training programs have being driven to change by the need for sophisticated understanding of teaching, learning and assessment *(Breaking Ranks,* 1996). There is an increasing shift to cohort based, concept driven and practitioners as part of class sessions and discussions. Internships provide intensive experience at the school site.

States have also established principal professional standards such as with the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). At the time of this study, 27 states require additional certificates. For example, Oregon has a "standard certificate" based on further university coursework. A continued evolution of professional development is occurring. State level initiatives have been implementing performance based residency and professional certificates since 2000, when the state board of education established requirements/benchmarks for teacher professional certificate programs, it simultaneously enacted identical rules for administrators. The standards were developed by the ISLLC and were adopted by Washington in 2002 revised in 2006 and most recently in 2008. When the state board of education established requirements/benchmarks for teacher professional certificate programs, it simultaneously enacted identical rules for administrators. The standards were created with input from a work group comprised of principals, state and university administrators. These state lead initiatives guide higher education into developing professional certificate requirements. The certificate requirements include job-embedded learning through the development of a professional growth plan that requires evidence that the standards have been met. At the onset another component of the standards was the formation of a professional growth team to provide guidance. Although this component became a concern, due to possible evaluation and professional-development

conflicts, and was dropped from the professional growth plan. The professional certificate program is highly individualized and assessment is made through a survey taken by the candidate and teachers, it is aligned with the ISLLC standards (Washington School Research Center, 2006). While certificate programs attempt to offer collaboration with districts, few allow district priorities to set the curricular agenda. In a report prepared by OSPI to the Professional Educator Standards Board (July, 2006), a recommendation was made to "modify the current professional certificate benchmarks to better reflect the districts role in school improvement." Instructional improvement depends on actions at the district-level as well as the school level. The district office can support these initiatives by providing a common vision and goals for improving student achievement through better educational leadership (ISLLC, 2008) Professional development for principals is more important than ever.

Problem Statement

While universities and school districts have devoted substantial effort to principal preparation programs, the same effort and thought has not gone into continuing development for practicing principals. Preparation programs for principals' have focused on management and leadership skills over the past 2 decades. However, more recently they have been driven by the need for sophisticated understanding of teaching, learning and assessment. State requirements for on-going principal certification are not as explicit as teacher programs. While there is a lot of exposure for principals in what skills are needed, it is not systemically brought into the worksite of principals. Issues related to the professional development of school administrators are rooted in preparation programs that have been highly criticized in recent years. These programs have the same weaknesses found in university programs: the lack of hands-on application, failure to

link content to practice, and too much emphasis on professor's personal experiences (Glass, 2000).

The continuing education of school administrators is reported to be even in worse shape than the initial preparation programs (Hallinger & Murphy, 1991). Many districts now have robust professional-development programs for principals. Some larger districts have taken charge of ongoing principal professional development, giving it the same emphasis traditionally provided to teaching staff professional development. However, there is limited current research that focuses specifically on district-office practices related to professional development for principals. Researchers have identified the school superintendent as key to establishing: long-lasting, effective systematic change patterns and processes (Bredeson, 1996; Petersen, 1999) in contrast, the role of the district-level administrators remains vague with data from a small number of studies pointing to much we do not know about these roles.

District learning activities, if they have been provided for principals at all, use a "one-size-fits-all" approach, commonly referred to as "staff development." Staff development is usually delivered to large or small groups. Much of the time the focus is on conveying information that; alerts principals to new rules and requirements, new curriculum materials, alternative scheduling, or a new method of reporting student achievement, heralded as catalysts for the improvement of the school and district. This strategy of staff development can be characterized as one-shot, prescriptive programs, brimming with attention-getting ideas and activities, which *might* be potentially helpful if they were integrated and were followed-up with other activities. Such programs rarely bring about change because they do not target individual change in perspective, motivation, and skills. Attending to individuals may be the most effective way to change an organization. In fact, it can be argued that organizations do not change; only

individuals change (National Staff Development Council, 1995). Fullan (2002) argued that only when enough people in the organization change can the organization be transformed. In some places, staff development did shift into recursive, individually focused learning (Belzer & St. Clair 2003; Jackson, 2000).

Early in the Comprehensive School Reform movement, reform models bypassed the role of the district office believing it was more efficient to work directly with individual schools. In fact many reformers believed district offices were among the major causes of the problems with schooling (Corcoran & Lawrence, 2003; MacIver & Farley, 2003). In the 1970s and early 1980s the research on the role of the district office was supportive of the innovations begin implemented. (Anderson, 2003; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstron, 2004). In the mid-1980s and early 1990s research on the role of the district office was built upon effective schools research. Researchers debated the role of the district office during this period. Today there is a revived interest with regard to the role of the district office in educational change and reform. During the past few years the district office has moved from being perceived as a bureaucratic backwater of educational policy to being seen as potential sites and sources of educational reform (Hightower, Knapp, March & McLaughlin, 2002). Research today must draw attention to the complex set of district office strategies contributing to the conditions that facilitate or impede the improvement of principal instructional leadership. There is substantial literature on the instructional leadership component of principals' work and what principals should do to reform schools (Borba, 2003 Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2006; Elmore, 2000; Marzano, 2003), but it does not suggest how they will learn to do these things. This research explored district initiatives that take charge of principal professional development and align it with the district's goals and mission, teaching and learning, supervision, and ISLLC standards.

Importance of the Study

In this era of high accountability for districts and schools, district-level administrators are faced with the challenge of designing professional-development programs that meet the research findings to train building principals in instruction and assessment. As noted by Copeland and Knapp (2006), despite 2 decades of state and federal education policy instituting learning standards and accountability measures and advocating for high quality equitable education for all students, the quality of educational leadership is neither uniformly high nor focused to a great extent on learning. We need leadership from the District administration to form a well-functioning system of support for strong, learning focused leadership in schools. Researchers have identified the school Superintendent as key to establishing long lasting, effective systematic change patterns and process (Bredson, 1996; Petersen,1999), yet much of the basic research on characteristics of effective schools ignored the role of the district or identified districts as partly to blame for allowing ineffective schools to exist (Edmonds, 1979). The district office has not been portrayed in a favorable picture. They are often described as providing a plethora of uncoordinated and often contradictory directives, muddling through bureaucracy, and inefficiencies. The pressure of school reform has elevated the importance of the district office in providing professional development to building level leadership. It is clear that district-level administration has the advantage of knowing their local context and having a sense of the strengths and weaknesses of administrators, which gave them the opportunity to individualize professional-development efforts. Little systematic study has been done on the in-service education needs of school leaders or more specifically the role of the district-level administration in providing professional development to its building leaders. Daresh and Playko (2001) stated that "it takes hard work to learn the art, science, and craft of educational administration, and it

takes a similar amount of hard work to keep the needed leadership skills well tuned over time"
(p. xi). The time is now to explore and understand the role of the district office in providing on-
going, job embedded, professional development to principals.

One of the most important changes over the past decade is that it is widely accepted that
educational leadership is crucial to improving student performance. It is also clear that good
teachers are drawn to good leaders. The question is no longer whether principals and other
educational leaders matter but how can we best help to develop and support them throughout
their career. We assume that school leadership is important, but know relatively little about how
leadership can be supported or strengthened. It is to these ends that this research is dedicated.
This study explored two urban school districts that have risen to this challenge. They have
demonstrated the same characteristics as successful districts noted in other studies and have
focused activities to provide professional development to principals.

Overview of the Methodology

Two districts were selected. At each site participants were broken into two subgroups:
district-level administration and building principals. Participants were chosen based on their
willingness to volunteer their knowledge, perspectives and practices of principal professional
development. Seven participants from each district were interviewed individually. Qualitative
data was collected to create an understanding of their perspectives of professional-development
practices in the district where they work. Semi-structured interview technique was used, so that
the response may be explored with each participant. In order to confirm perceptions and
behaviors the researcher triangulated interviewer responses (Patton, 2002).

To assure the research design and the information gleaned is trustworthy, the inquiry
strived to address issues of quality. One such framework to do this is one suggested by Mills

(2003) adapted from work by Guba in 1981. This consideration of quality included issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. To meet these criteria, this model considered the actual setting to discover how districts efforts to provide support are matched to principals reported needs for support. Multiple methods were used (reviewing documents and interviewing) to help improve credibility. Additional, documents were used, although the research recognized that they may not be complete or accurate. Further assurances of quality were established by conducting checks with interview participants to test conclusions drawn by the researcher. The methodology of this study is fully discussed in chapter 3.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher makes the assumption that there is enough literature on principal preparation and what is important in principal preparation programs to ground the study. The literature review crosses the large amount of literature on professional development and what principals need to know and what they need to do. Professional learning research is consistent with adult learning theory so the researcher is not trying to take it as a starting point. Instead of a focus on Universities and/or State led conferences and workshops, the framework of study is on-going principal development, in a local context of what two districts are doing to provide for their principals' professional growth and development needs.

It is understood districts can and do emphasis principal professional development with characteristics that have more similarities than differences of what they do for teacher professional development. Districts have internally developed principal development programs that have enough action to them that they are able to be studied, with specific activities that they can be looked at carefully by the researcher.

Another constraint is found within the consideration of sample size. The sample size did not allow the information gathered to be generalized to other districts. Since the inquiry is bound by context, and it will be used to inform the field about the nature of a specific response to staff development needs, careful detailed description of the sample is imperative. Since the inquiry involved personal data and personal views of the districts efforts to support principals, confidentiality was a high priority. District-level administration and principal participation was secured through the district leadership; however, all interviewees were allowed to decline participation in the interviews at anytime. Pseudonyms and numeric coding was used to ensure confidentiality of interview participants' identities. The limitations are discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

Chapter 2: District Office Practices of Providing Professional Development for Principals

Review of the Literature

While principal-training programs began drawing attention in research literature in the 1990s and into the 21st century, there has been little research, published or unpublished, on post service principal professional development. "Standard" or "continuing" principal certificate programs exist in most states but have not attracted the attention of researchers, similarly, district-based postservice principal training, much less common, has not been addressed by university-based educational leadership scholars. A search of the ERIC Database for the 1995-2007 periods, using "principal professional development" as a search term in Keyword and Abstract returned only 5 citations, 4 of which were documents rather than published articles. A comparable search of *Dissertation Abstracts* for the same year returned 12 citations. Of these 12, five were quantitative survey methodology, with the purpose of determining what principals perceive as valuable professional-development topics. None focused on who provides the professional development. Half of these studies from this search also suggested further research is needed to gather information on professional-development activities.

Consequently, there is no obvious specific research tradition from which to draw a literature review. I have chosen to address this challenge by incorporating four related strands of theory and research: (a) changing role of the principal and the ISLLC standards, (b) professional-development theory, (c) professional development for teachers, and (d) the district-office role in professional development. These sources will provide guidance, if not a robust foundation, for a study of how districts provide ongoing professional-development training for their principals.

Changing Role of the Principal and the ISLLC Standards

Today's principal is faced with the complex task of creating a school-wide vision, being an instructional leader, planning for effective professional development to guide teachers, handling discipline, attending events, and all the other minute details that come with supervising a school (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). In the past decade schools and administrators have been encouraged to move beyond building management and provide guidance and leadership for instruction and change in an environment of standards and accountability. In their studies on the role of the principal, Farkas, Johnson, Duffer, Foleno, and Foley (2001) and Haar, (2004) reported the qualities once required of principals have changed; they are now expected to demonstrate a range of skills that encompass management and facilitation of budget processes, human resources, public relations, and strategic change.

Schools need principals who have the knowledge, skills, and confidence to lead their schools. Research increasingly confirms that the key to school improvement and student achievement is for school leaders to focus on the academic program and on the assessment of data and professional development for teachers (Copeland & Knapp, 2006; Hoy & Hoy, 2002). Principals work with teachers to strengthen skills; they collect and analyze data and use data in ways that fuel excellence. It is clear that principals today also serve as leaders for student learning. They are responsible to know academic content and pedagogical techniques. The new principal succeeds only to the extent that he or she empowers teachers and students to succeed. (Lashway, 2002). There is much consensus on what principals should do but, how to do it and how to learn to do it is less clear.

The principal is central to shaping the direction and climate of the school. Fortunately for the educational leadership profession, the ISLLC has established a widely accepted set of competencies and standards for principals and principal training and ongoing professional development. These standards, established in 1996, now frame certificate requirements in (as of 2008) 40 states:

1. Setting a widely shared vision for learning;

2. Developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth;

3. Ensuring effective management of the organization operation and resources for a safe efficient and effective learning environment;

4. Collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs and mobilizing community resources;

5. Acting with integrity fairness and in an ethical manner; and

6. Understanding responding to and influencing the political social legal and cultural context.

These standards explicitly provide a guideline for initial learning, are increasingly used for principal evaluation in addition the ISLLC standards generate a template for principals' continued learning and professional development. For purposes of this research, it is noteworthy that, in addition to being individual goals, the standards can serve as district or school priorities. However, meeting the expectations implied by the ISLLC standards is much more difficult and complex than the reform rhetoric suggests.

Much has been written about principal leadership and the desired qualities of such school leaders to meet the complex demands of navigating reform in conventional structures. Fullan (2001) identified five leadership abilities and three leadership attitudes essential to ensuring results. Haberman (1999) identified 13 personal qualities that differentiate an effective urban administrator from a less than effective administrator. Copeland and Knapp` (2006) identified a framework of five areas in *Leading for Learning* that leaders need to address for a focus on learning. In a study of elementary school leadership in Chicago, Sebring and Bryk (2001) found three common elements among the principals of productive schools. Furthermore, leadership tends to be identified by a long list of personal characteristics that very few individuals possess. These include the ability to persevere, to motivate people, and to remain passionate, purposeful, and hopeful. These characteristics require tremendous emotional resources as well as broad-based knowledge and deft ability to navigate change (Fullan, 2002).

Hollander (1978) observed that "leadership is a process of influence between a leader and those who are followers" (p. 1). According to research conducted by Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004), different forms of leadership are described in the literature using adjectives such as "instructional," "participative," "democratic," "transformational," "moral" and "strategic" (p. 4). However, according to the authors, no matter which descriptor is used, there are two essential objectives critical to any organization's effectiveness: helping the organization set a defensible set of directions and influencing members to move in those directions. Leithwood and Reihl (2003) concluded that school leadership has significant effects on students' learning second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum and teachers' instruction. They also concluded that the effects of leadership appeared to be mostly indirect.

Leaders influenced students' learning by helping to promote a vision and goal, and by ensuring the resources and processes were in place to enable teachers as well. The role of the principal is complex, whether it is in the theoretical world of what ought to be or whether it is in the day-to-day reality of leading a school. The principal is directly involved in every aspect of the schools' operation and is thus the primary figure in determining the school's quality and character.

Our conceptualization of the work of the principal has shifted, but changes in the nature of principal preparation programs inevitably lags behind. There is evidence that a number of programs have shifted the conceptualization, the knowledge based and nature of their programs. Universities have added practitioners as part of class sessions and discussions using broad-based activities to bring real-life experiences into the classroom and preparation outside the conventional classroom setting (Bratlien & Walters, 1999). Programs across the country are experimenting with a more integrated approach. One such program was sponsored by the Danforth Foundation. This program was restructured to be concept driven (culture, empowerment, etc.) cohort based, carefully mentored, and with a year-long, full-time, intensive experience at the school site. A contributing factor of the success of the Danforth program was that selection criteria were used to select candidates for the program. Some state departments are emphasizing the acquisition of competencies, instead of a collection of courses such as the new ISLLC performance assessment mentioned previously. To answer the research findings on educational leadership, there is a departure from teaching top-down leadership and encouragement of distributive leadership methods. Themes of social justice and equity provide a new anchor for the preparation of principals. There is no doubt that the programs served quite well those administrators who maintain a traditional approach to leadership; preparation

programs continue to be redesigned to reflect what we know about the changes in principal leadership (University of Washington, Danforth Program). At this point, we have virtually no knowledge, or even information, on whether or how these evolving conceptualizations of principal training or of principals' work has been applied the post service of principals.

Professional Development Theory

For decades teachers have had a state requirement to continue their professional development. Initially they were required to take additional classes of their choosing to receive additional higher educational credits, or to gather clock hours from attendance at conferences or workshops. These credits alone fulfilled the additional accreditation needed for a lifetime certificate to teach. The need for continuing professional development for teachers has emerged during the last two decades. State and district leadership found that there was a need to provide training in both instructional strategies and to align curriculum and assessments. The new student assessments and state reform required teachers to look at what they were teaching, why and how they were teaching. Similarly, principal professional development for continuing education required additional higher educational credits or clock hours from documented attendance at conferences or workshops to maintain principal certification. New ISLLC standards now guide what principals need to be able to do and know and are being applied to certification requirements.

A considerable body of research now exists which examines the characteristics of effective staff development programs. Professional development comes in many forms. It can take place in the workplace or in some other environment, it can be voluntary or required, it can be offered by an organization or sought independently by an individual. Sparks and Loucks-

Horsley (1990) in their extensive review of research suggest that five types of staff development models are used for teachers:

1. Individually guided-individuals identify, plan and pursue activities they believe will support their own learning.

2. Observation/assessment. Teachers are observed directly and given objective data and feedback about their classroom performance.

3. Involvement in a development/improvement process. Teachers develop curriculum, design programs, or become involved in school improvement processes.

4. Training. Teachers engage in individual or group instruction in which they acquire knowledge or skills.

5. Inquiry. Teachers identify and collect data in an area of interest, analyze and interpret the data, and apply their findings to their own practice.

Of these five models, the most widely studied and researched is training. Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1990) cite a number of studies in which training programs have been tied to improvements in particular types of student performance. However, location, time and costs are often barriers to participation (Smith & Hoefer, 2002). The relevance of content and follow-up support for transfer of learning are other hindrances. Trainings may be a useful way to provide information and raise awareness of issues, but changes in behavior and practice require longer-term approaches (Kutner, 1997).

Guskey (2003) compared 13 lists of the characteristics of effective professional development finding that they were derived in very different ways, used different criteria to determine "effectiveness," and varied widely in characteristics identified. Guskey outlined five critical elements for evaluation professional development: (a) participant reactions, (b)

participant learning, (c) organizational support and change, (d) participant use of new knowledge and skills, and (d) student learning outcomes. Although it is generally assumed there is a strong and direct relationship between professional development and improvements in student learning efforts to clarify that relationship have met with little success.

According to research of the National Staff Development Council, high quality professional-development programs: (a) focus on student learning and specific problems practitioners face, (b) reinforce and sustain group work and collaboration among teachers, principals, and district personnel, (c) link directly with day-to-day work in real schools and classrooms. (d) sustain a consistency of focus over time, and (e) use feedback from teaching and learning to inform program development and evaluation.

Most lists for education programs stress collegiality and collaboration but collaborative efforts must be structured and purposeful to improve learning. Lambert (1998) argued that leadership is about learning together and constructing meaning and knowledge collectively and collaboratively. It involves opportunities to surface and mediate perceptions, values, beliefs, information, and assumptions through continuing conversations, to inquire about and generate ideas together. Resnick and Hall (1998) explained further that an educational system that is a learning organization treats the upgrading of instructional competencies as a key part of professionalism. It should be structured to inspire—and, when necessary, require—continuous learning on the part of everyone in the system, from teachers to senior administrators. Fink and Resnick (2001) asserted that professional development is not separate from administrative duties and responsibilities; rather, it should be considered the centerpiece of exercising effective leadership that is committed to improving student learning. This research and recommendations are consistent with research for staff development with the ISLLC standards.

According to the ISLLC's (2006) "Proposition for Quality Professional Development of School Leaders," Professional development for school leaders has the strongest impact when it:

1. Validates teaching and learning as the central activities of the school,

2. Engages all school leaders in well-planned, integrated, career-long learning to improve student achievement,

3. Promotes collaboration to achieve organizational goals while meeting individual needs,

4. Models effective learning processes, and incorporates measures of accountability that direct attention to valued learning outcomes.

To create a comprehensive professional-development program for principals it is helpful to explore the characteristics of adult learning. Many professional-development researchers attempt to incorporate the basic understanding of adult learning and adult development, although most do not delve deeply into the field. This literature review is grounded in the research on professional development and not adult learning, although this research attempts to be consistent with the general principals of adult learning (Berman & McLaughlin, 1975; Knowles, 1998; Sparks & Loucks-Horsley, 1990).

The field of adult learning addresses the problems individuals face when, once they have established themselves personally and professionally, they attempt to change the direction of their lives, or at least the work they do in their lives. It is a special problem when, as with established school principals, individuals already know how to do their jobs and have been successful at it. Power relations add to the complexity when the district office develops a training program that may imply principals have not been successful. This is a new phenomenon for administrators, although it is a common practice for teachers and for leaders in the private sector

to regularly go through intensive, often individualized, training and career development programs. As the district office offers professional development to its principals, having knowledge of the obstacles of teaching to adult learners will enhance the chances of the success of the program.

Learning and its implications for teaching have been studied extensively over the past decade or so. In reviewing the literature on adult learning, common descriptors of adult learners emerge. It is recognized that adults have accumulated a foundation of life experiences and knowledge. For learning to occur, they need to connect the new learning to this knowledge/experience base. Adults are goal oriented. They see a reason for learning something. Adult learners have demonstrated a need for autonomy and self-direction; their teachers actively involve them in the learning process and serve as facilitators for them. Specifically, they get participants' perspectives about what topics to cover and let them work on projects that reflect their interests. They should allow the participants to assume responsibility for presentations and group leadership. Furthermore, adults are practical and will focus on the aspects of a lesson most useful to them and those seen as an integral part of their work. Information from the literature about motivating adults to learn, supplements knowledge about learning and the adult learner. The literature identifies major motivational factors that exert maximum influence at particular times in a learning sequence. Generally speaking, motivation is provided through internal or external sources. Adults are found to be motivated through the internal need of social relationships, to meet a need for associations and friendships, or for personal advancement to secure professional advancement. A recognized external motivator is the need to fulfill the expectations or recommendations for someone with formal authority. Additionally,

escape/stimulation or to provide a break in the routine of home or work motivates the adult learner.

At the appropriate time in the development of the adult learner, motivation may be established through cognitive interest, to learn for the sake of learning (Knowles, 1998). Learning occurs within each individual as a continual process throughout life. Learning results from stimulation of the senses. In some people, one sense is used more than others to learn or recall information. Additional variables to adult learning include personal characteristics such as age, life/developmental phases, and situational characteristics such as full-time learning, voluntary and/or the administration of the learning. People learn at different speeds, so it is natural for them to be anxious or nervous when faced with a learning situation. Adult learning theory should be taken into consideration when professional development is designed.

Professional Development for Principals

Principals are held accountable for improvement in student achievement regardless of their training and experience. How they stay current and continually enhance their leadership skill is key to meeting the increasing demands on them. It is clear that principals today know academic content and pedagogical techniques: they rally students, parents, teachers and community around the common goal of raising student performance. In order to accomplish this task, they work with teachers to strengthen skills. They collect and analyze and use data. To meet these demands, principals need to be continually taught the necessary skills and knowledge through professional development.

The need of professional development for principals emerged in a study conducted by the Educational Research Service (2000), which found that principals repeatedly express a desire to

augment their expertise and personal skills, but also found the current professional-development activities at their schools lacking. Efforts to revitalize principals' practice generally employ one of three methods: (a) the redesign of administrator preservice programs, (b) the use of in-service professional-development programs, or (c) the redesign of the induction and assessment process at the district level (Daresh & Playko, 2001).

Workshops are a common method of delivering professional development to practicing principals. As an advantage, workshops can accommodate large numbers of people. However, location, time, and costs are often barriers to participation. (Smith & Hoefer, 2002) The relevance of content and follow-up support for transfer of learning is another hindrances. Workshops may be most effective for certain learning styles when sessions are based on learners' assessed needs and when attention is given to such elements as modeling, practice, feedback, and coaching (Sherman & Kutner, 1998). Single workshops may be a useful way to provide information and raise awareness of issues, but changes in behavior and practice require a longer-term approach (Kutner et al., 1997).

District Office Role in Professional Development

There is an increasing body of literature that highlights the importance of district leadership in improving instruction. Waters and Marzano (2006) conducted a large study on the influence of school district leaders and student achievement. The study was a meta-analysis which involved 2,817 districts and the achievement scores of 3.4 million students (Waters & Marzano, 2006). They found that district-level leadership does matter. A statistical correlation of .24 between district leadership and student achievement was established. McREL researchers also identified five district-level leadership responsibilities that have a statistically significant

correlation with average student academic achievement. All five of these responsibilities relate to setting and keeping districts focused on teaching and learning goals. Principal leadership matters in improving student achievement, but the responsibility for a principal's achievement increasingly rests with district leadership. District-office administrators are attempting to provide leadership by developing programs and activities designed to assist principals in instructional leadership. They are taking the lead in developing the capacity of teachers and more recently principals. As noted in *Breaking Ranks* (1996), teachers, administrators and other educators who are part of a district, regard their own learning as integral to their professional role. In this era of high accountability for districts and schools, district central office administrators are faced with the challenge of designing professional-development programs to extend their support to principals currently on staff.

District-level leadership is best positioned to establish vision, external authority, and structure to support individual learning goals for principals. Districts remain the legal and fiscal agents that oversee and guide schools. In many ways, districts are the major source of capacity building for school structures, providing, and controlling access to professional development, curriculum and instructional ideas. Massell (2000) conducted a study of 57 schools, which sought to find district-office strategies that build capacity for instructional improvement. Primarily based on observations and interviews with teachers, principals and district-office staff the researchers presented three strategies most common among the districts studied: (a) increasing professional knowledge and skills, (b) strengthening and aligning instructional guidance, and (c) using data to guide instructional improvements. They also recognized that the factors do not operate in isolation. Rather they are based on district organizing principals, these principals that give the strategies their meaning. At the same time the researchers did not

evaluate the effectiveness or impact of the strategies. A district's actions can create positive conditions for principals and remove barriers that impede the efforts of school level leaders to meet the demands of leading schools in urban environments. Waters and Marzano (2006) noted that it is districts, not schools, that create district-wide priorities and expectations, and districts make significant choices about the resources available for professional development

Cotton (2003) made a connection with overall effectiveness and a district with strong instructionally focused leadership from the superintendent and his/her administrative team. He found there was an emphasis on student achievement and improvement in teaching and learning, establishment of goals, the hiring process emphasized district needs and a monitoring of site practices to district goals through school visits and alignment of resources for professional development.

The literature review deduces that district leadership has an influence in student achievement. Problematic to research is the variables in any school environment; what is a priority in one school is not necessarily the same for another. Murphy and Hallinger (1988) cautioned there is no single recipe for district practices that will yield effective results in terms of equitable student achievement. There seems to be no one effective practice, although continuous learning is essential for building leaders. Recent case studies of high performing and improving school districts in the United States often portrayed districts' reform activities partly as a response to fragmentation and lack of coherence in program delivery. Similarly there are varied titles and job descriptions given to people who perform instructional and supervisory functions at the district office. Hall and Hord's (1987) exploratory study uncovered a lack of consistency across districts in their use of job titles and job descriptions. Districts used the same titles (e.g., director, consultant, and supervisor) in unique ways. Those who seek district-office positions are

attracted to the challenge and the freedom of pursuing their own interests, setting their own schedules, and to the possibilities created by collaborative work with principals and teachers for consultative work (Blumberg, 1984).

Discussion on the district's role in principal professional development is further complicated by a lack of consensus on the language for representing district actions. Little distinction is made between general concepts, concrete actions, and formal policies. This literature review identifies district "strategies" as a cover term. Evidence suggests that successful school districts use a large repertoire of strategies to support school improvement. But again, there is little distinction for specific district strategies to assist principals in their role as instructional leaders. The researcher reviewed several important studies to identify the common strategies of successful district actions identified through the literature review which include:

1. Providing a vision and focus of expectations.

2. Facilitation of a professional culture and collaborative relationships.

3. Providing feedback on performance including evaluation.

4. Focus on aligned curriculum and teaching strategies.

These district strategies may be an oversimplification as there are many variables that can ultimately affect professional development in its many forms. The strategies do not take into account the ability of individuals in their critical roles and factors influencing relationships. In addition, schools are complex systems and exist in a broader system which includes the community.

Providing a Vision and Focus of Expectations

Districts improve instruction by providing vision*.* Rosenholtz (1991) drew a direct relationship between principals and uncertainty. The more certain principals seem able to galvanize their faculties for specific, goal-directed endeavors, increasing clarity about what to pursue. Principals with a high level of uncertainty tended to be unwilling to focus, support, and implement policy coordination. If district-office staff set expectations for the schools, principals will respond to expectations, and if they are encouraged, they will seek help from those who supervise them. Waters and Marzano (2006) studied leadership behaviors associated with second order change. They found that a strong district presence manifested in the vision and actions of multi-stakeholders (e.g., district officials, teacher union, and principals) played a significant role in the implementation of reform. District support included setting and communicating the vision, protecting funding, providing guidance, facilitating, public recognition of school level progress, and assisting schools with processes for monitoring and reflection on progress. Additionally, Fullan (1991) cited actions required specifically of district-level administrators for effective change. He noted that district staff test the need for and priority of a change and determine the potential appropriateness of a particular innovation for addressing the need.

David and Shields (2001) used a multicase design with interviews as the method for data collection to track over 4 years the progress of the reform efforts of seven urban districts. They documented district wide changes in instruction where district-level leaders had communicated a clear set of expectations for instruction through curriculum adoptions or other curricular frameworks. The district supported their expectations with intensive professional development focused on teaching specific content (reading or mathematics) and ongoing school-based assistance. In fact the only reform effort across the districts that clear produced student

achievement gains in their study had well defined instructional expectations supported by professional development.

Facilitation of a Professional Culture and Collaborative Relationships

Most school administrators currently have focused skills on how to inspire and empower others, work collectively, listen and communicate effectively, or transform the school into a learning community (Ramsey, 1999). The direction now is to take these skills and link them to instruction. District leadership needs to take time to provide an opportunity for principals to have a voice in the processes. Shared expertise is the driver of instructional change. Collaboration is the key to developing and sustaining goal consensus, shared belief, and commitment to reform. The relationship between district leaders and school principals helps build a foundation to better understand and provide support for the individual school focus, student learning needs, and staff and leadership development needs. Ackerman, Donaldson, and van der Bogert (1996) contended, "For the three of us, no other learning medium has match the colleague-critic conversation for deepening our understanding of leadership and our capacities to lead in our own schools" (p. 9).

This interaction also provides ongoing monitoring of achievement goals and provides a continuous feedback loop to help district leaders make decisions based on multiple sources of evidence. Togneri and Anderson (2003) conducted a cross-case investigation of five high-poverty districts from five states; they associate more successful districts with positive relations and collaboration between school boards and superintendents and between teacher unions and district officials. In these districts, coherence was built by linking learning standards, grade level, and school system expectations for teaching and learning, along with professional development, and implementing multiple-measure accountability systems.

Improving schools requires that everyone in the organization lead and take responsibility within their sphere of influence. There are certain roles within the organization that are well positioned for leading instruction and change: district-office administrators responsible for supervising schools, principals, and school leadership teams, and school-based professional-development providers. These groups are positioned in the organization to be able to lead others in thinking differently about implementing improvement strategies. Their leadership is both symbolic, because those in the organization watch what they do as well as what they say, and practical, because they lead everyday (New Horizons for Learning, 2003).

Providing Feedback on Performance: Formal and Informal Assessment

A change in the way feedback and evaluation are done is one example of a structure that can support principals and create greater satisfaction in the quality of the principals' force in the district and potentially increase rates of retention. In addition to providing ongoing support for continuous improvement, evaluation and feedback can also provide districts with information to guide professional-development efforts for administrators. District structures can include ways in which feedback and evaluation are used to support the professional development of principals leaders (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, 2003; Lambert, 1998; Reeves, 2004; Sparks & Louscks-Horsley, 1990), and the ways in which the district creates a culture of continuous improvement (Resnick & Hall, 1998) and autonomy with flexible decision-making (Hill, 2002; NASBE, 1999; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003).

Murphy and Hallinger (1988), in a study of "instructionally effective school districts" in California, selected because of their effectiveness in increasing student achievement, found

evidence of common strategic elements in the way these district managed themselves. From their data, they describe 17 themes categorized in four areas: (a) conditions, (b) climate factors, (c) characteristics of curriculum and instruction, and (d) organizational dynamics. District-office staff were active in the supervision, evaluation and mentoring of principals. Also important for successful reform was the district's ability to remove inadequate teachers from a school. Further, they stated that factors such as paying particular attention to curriculum and instruction as well as emphasizing inspection and outcomes are part of the reason that these schools are more instructionally effective. The researchers were optimistic about their preliminary findings, yet they also recognized that much more investigation was needed. They also concluded that it is unlikely that a single formula will result in instructionally effective schools.

McCarthy and Celio (2001) and Fouts, Stuen, Anderson, Borba (2003) and Parnell (2000) found that principals of highly successful schools identified the importance of staffing policies and the failure to deal with the teachers as a limiting factor for school reform success. Successful school districts have found ways to deal with these personnel issues, while schools in other districts are limited by lack of district action and support.

The clinical supervision model developed by Cogan (1961) and refined by Bellon (1982) is an example of an evaluation process that promotes professional development. The clinical supervision model promotes dialogue and reflection. It can serve as the cornerstone of a peer-observation model for one-on-one professional development and is an important skill for principals' instructional leadership

Casey and Donaldson (2001) cited the case of California's Pajaro Valley Unified School District as an example of prime district led professional development. The program sets a

common vision for principals through its "Professional Standards for Administrators," which establishes clear goals for principals. Their administrative "Cycle of Inquiry," includes self assessment, personal and site goal setting, professional development and evaluation. This offers the principal the opportunity to self-reflect and to meet with his or her supervisor and peer/mentor partner. The districts' "Professional Communities Team" then takes this information and provides the kinds of training and growth opportunities the principals perceive they need.

Focus on Aligned Curriculum and Teaching Strategies

Lack of consistency in curriculum hinders sharing of experiences and fragments district professional-development efforts. District offices are responsible for facilitating a district-wide focus on student achievement and the quality of instruction, through the development/adoption of district-wide curricula and approaches to instruction, and the alignment of curriculum teaching and learning materials and assessment to relevant standards. Current characteristics of effective districts establish greater coherence in curriculum content, materials, and to a certain extent delivery across the system. The alignment also mirrors the curriculum expected by state assessment standards. This can mean providing more support to understanding and use of state curriculum guidelines and/or developing assessments to match state designed benchmarks. Successful districts demand evidence of student achievement. Additional major common focus is on gathering and interpreting student assessment data, developing multimeasure accountability systems, and the system-wide use of data to inform practice and implemented to hold schools and district leaders accountable for results and to monitor progress (Borba, 2003)

Through research there is a clearer understanding of what principals need to do and how best to support them in those processes. Principals are required to be able to guide staff in a

critical way, to analyze data and to determine the methods to facilitate student achievement. They are required to be leaders and enablers of school-level change and facilitate professional culture and collaborative relationships. They are required to do all of this with very little support and minimal opportunities for professional development; district-office staff are positioned to support professional-development activities for principals.

Summary

The demands of day-to-day building administration, coupled with changes in accountability under the federal legislation of No Child Left Behind and state-level assessments, has caused a shift in the required instructional leadership skills of principals. Federal law requires low-performing districts to develop plans to address the professional-development needs of their teachers and principals and allocate not less than 10% of Title I funds to improve professional-development practices. States should use these plans to ensure districts develop systematic strategies for instructional improvement that includes high quality professional development for practicing principals. Such a process can encourage districts to use professional-development models that build principal capacity. This affects the need to have opportunities for effective ongoing, job-embedded professional development.

A considerable body of research exists which examines the characteristics of effective professional-development programs for teachers. Effective professional development addresses the needs of adult learners and that what is learned optimally meets the individual's leadership needs and developmental stage. Studies corroborate that the best type of professional development is long term, planned, job embedded, promotes collaboration, models effectively learning processes, validates teaching and learning as the central activities of the school

(Educational Research Services, 2000). It is impossible to improve practice without access to high quality coaching (Alvarado, 1999).

Taken as a whole the examples of principal professional development as described in the literature review continue to be system focused in nature, on "how to" implement either government policies designed to achieve district-wide goals or school goals and objectives derived from those policies. There is a fine line between professional development that emphasizes what the educational system requires of leaders and what practicing principals ethical and morale values require of themselves and their colleagues. Often the imperatives of the educational system are met at the expense of individual needs of leadership**.**

All districts share the challenges of implementing high standards and raising achievement levels for students. Attention has been focused on individual schools and/or teacher strategies, but the district office can be a key element of support. District-office staff can play an important role in providing professional development to their principals: to better equip them to meet the demands of their changing role. Numerous studies cite common characteristics of effective districts, and there is a growing recognition that district-level administration is being challenged to become more involved in seeking ways to provide a system of professional development for principals.

Rarely have district offices provided effective professional development to their principals. The internal structures or processes used by districts have not focused on principals' needs as they encompass the role of instructional leaders. There is no doubt that much is already being done by district-office staff in successful districts around the country to provide professional-development opportunities for principals. But are these activities meeting the needs of their practicing principals? There is little research to suggest that developing principals'

instructional leadership skills are being enhanced through these professional-development activities.

Several studies have been conducted which tie the superintendents' actions to student achievement. The studies have reviewed behaviors, management styles, beliefs and activities of superintendents. Research findings over the past 25 years most concisely indicate that district leadership does matter for student achievement. In Waters and Marzano's (2006) study, superintendents set nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction and monitored those goals. They aligned resources to support goals for learning. They also develop professional-learning communities, Glickman (2002) described elements of the professional community which include the attitudes of staff toward the state reform efforts and standards based instruction, the presence of a shared vision, and a belief that teachers are learners. Using the identified strategies for effective professional development as a guide, this study seeks to understand how and what activities district-level administration utilize to influence the professional development of principals.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This study sought to investigate what support the district-level administration provides to principals in order for them to manage the instruction of students effectively and to establish learning environment in a standards-based reform setting. The research is primarily descriptive, and presents, interprets, and analyzes the practices of district-level administration and the perceived success of and conditions created for professional development of building principals in two school districts in the Pacific Northwest. The study relies on the strategies typically used in case studies of organizational issues in education.

Because the study relies primarily on interviews, it focuses on the perceptions of both district administrators and principals of what professional-development activities offered and why, and on whether or they are seen as effective. The research strategy also allows for an examination of principals' level of engagement in the professional development process. In the process, the research also looks more generally at the district administration relationships, behaviors, and activities. Consideration of the specific settings and situations of both districts helped form an interpretation of the professional-development activities provided and why and how they are selected.

Multicase-study research methods have been used to study district level practices and issues. For example, Tongeri and Anderson (2003) conducted several single case studies of successful districts. Emphasis in these case studies was on the districts' role in creating the conditions for success. Rosenholtz's (1991) study of eight elementary school districts in Tennessee analyzed the effects of district-level practices by interviewing superintendents and high-ranking district-office staff members. Multiple cases allow greater opportunity to compare

and contrast districts and to develop broader generalizations within the limitations of qualitative research**. (**Coleman & LaRocque, 1990)

According to Creswell (2003), phenomenological research is a process in which the researcher identifies the "essence" of human experience concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in a study. "Letting the participant tell us what we need to know rather than ask(ing) them what we think, a priori, we would like to know" (Polio, 1994, p. 4). The purpose is to study the phenomenon itself, not to develop generalizations, but to determine and describe what principal staff development initiated by school district offices might look like in practice. Because not much is known about staff development practices for principals provided by the district office, open-ended interviews seemed to be an appropriate methodological approach. Open-ended interviews hopefully allow interviewees to answer from their own frame of reference, and provide him or her with an opportunity to freely express their thoughts about their own professional development and the role of the district office in it. Open-ended questioning is driven by the research question not the interview question.

As the study evolved, the researcher hoped to explore specific themes in the literature, for example collaboration, for continuous learning (Copeland & Knapp, 2006), focus on teaching and learning, self-reflective opportunities for feedback (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Waters & Marzano, 2006), principals having a voice in the process (Graves, 2004), and a focus on standards (Borba, 2003). At the same time, she intended to allow research participants to respond to questions in a fashion that framed the study from the point of view of the situation itself rather than strictly that of the researcher.

Site Selection

The nature of this study did not lend itself to traditional sampling or random selection of school districts as research sites. The initial task was to identify districts for which there was reason to believe they provided symbolic and material resources for focused principal professional development. Thus, the following three criteria were employed:

1. Those districts which are located in the Northwest on the I-5 corridor. While this obviously served the purposes of investigator access, it also represented districts that operate within a context familiar to the researcher and one in her networks could provide information about suitable districts and assist in gaining entrée.

2. The district selected has a district office administration that has an advertised intent to provide forms of professional development for principals, and an administration that is large enough to devote time and resources to the professional development of principals employed by the district. While explicit size ranges did both limit the search process, the hope was to find districts of 10,000 or more students.

3. Be a successful school district as measured by state and national criteria and have implemented strategies of professional development for principals as recognized by the literature review.

The researcher began searching for districts that met the established criteria through inquiry of professionals in the field of education, including state and regional association leaders and university professors, who might have recognized through their professional activities, districts that had exemplary growth in student achievement and demonstrated an emphasis on activities supporting principal professional development. From the short list of potential districts, two stood out. Initial inquiries discerned that both districts appeared to have been purposeful in

their focus and actions to provide staff time and resources with district-office staff that are committed to their emerging role in providing professional development to principals. The two districts chosen for this study have a high level of commitment for continued professional growth and are near where the researcher lives.

Gaining access to the suggested districts could have been a challenge but in several districts chosen the researcher had a connection with a member of the district-level administration. Initially, the researcher had an informal conversation with a member of the district-level administration to discuss the commitment and efforts of the district in providing professional development to principals. This led the researcher to examine scores in student achievement data to look for positive growth. In one recommended district, the administrator who provided entrée and the Superintendent both resigned, for this reason that district was not selected. Once the districts were selected, the researcher made a formal application for research access to each district's review panel.

The site selection process created the limitations associated with convenience sampling. In such sampling the researcher selects participants because they are willing and able to be studied. Thus, the researcher cannot say with confidence that individuals, or in this case school districts, are representative of the broader population of American school districts of a certain size. However the sample did provide useful information for addressing questions and for reaching some tentative conclusions that could frame subsequent research.

The data collection and analysis attempted to do what Bryman (2004) called uncovering the underlying structures of talk and as such with the achievement of order through interaction. Dependability and integrity of the data collected becomes more important than that ability to generalize which is always difficult when individuals or organizations are not representative of a

population. Dependability was established by using the various data gathered to develop a fuller picture of the condition of the principals' needs for support to be instructional leaders and the responsive actions of district-level staff.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through open-ended interviews with district and building administrators. The interview method was similar to that used in the Washington School Research Center study (2003) which provided an understanding of whether the districts' efforts to provide support and development are seen as contributing to the principal's sense of efficacy as an instructional leader.

General questions (see below for specifics) addressed the resource structure for professional development, skill building, and the balance between evaluation and support. Two follow-up interviews were conducted as necessary to clarify intent or to ask questions in regard to emerging themes.

To assist in the data gathering, each interview question was tested and refined prior to implementation. The researcher used sample questions to conduct interviews with two principals and one district office administrator that she had a collegial relationship. After the interview the researcher discussed the responses and gather input into the refinement of the questions in an effort to best solicit relevant responses. The interview instrument was developed in a different district, not part of the study but involved in some of the same efforts. The pretesting of these questions helped align specific questions to broader research questions and previous literature. Redundancies were eliminated and unrelated questions were deleted (Appendix A and B). However, the researcher designed the questions as starting points, allowing interviewees to frame responses in their own words.

Individual interviews were conducted with seven administrators from each district, lasting between 60 and 90 minutes, on the school site, recorded and transcribed for the purpose of analysis. Each individual was interviewed at least once. In addition to the principals themselves, participants also included district office leaders in key decision roles with specific responsibilities related to building principal leadership. Considering the size of the districts selected the superintendent was not directly involved in providing the professional development activities to principals but for the purpose of this research is still considered to be a part of the district office administration. Originally, the first participant interviewed in each district was to be the superintendent who would recommend other potential interviewees. However, it turned out that the first interviewee was a district office administrator who identified other potential administrators who might volunteer to be interviewed as part of this study. Each participant signed a consent form to participate in the interviews and to be recorded. Note that, in order to protect confidentiality, specific interviewees are not always cited to pseudonym.

These interviews considered what principals report as their greatest challenges to align with the strategies identified in the literature review and the ISLLC standards along with whether the district is able to address these challenges actively through providing professional-development activities. These interviews provided insight into whether or not the districts efforts to provide support through professional development activities were seen as contributing to the ability of the principals to act as instructional leaders and change agents. The open-ended questions focused on professional-development activities provided by the district office to principals. Questions also gave respondents the opportunity to provide enough information so that inferences might be made about whether the district efforts were aligned at all with

strategies identified in the literature review and the ISLLC standards. The list of questions the researcher used as prompts for discussion are as follows:

1. Tell me about your district. What are some of the unique characteristics?

2. What sort of supports do you provide to principals to effectively meet the challenges/demand of leading their school? How do you know? How do you respond?

3. How are decisions made about levels of support for building principals?

4. How do you communicate in the district with principals about important issues?

5. How do groups inside or outside the district affect the principals' ability to make decisions?

6. What measures of accountability are in place?

7. What else should I know about the district and its efforts to offer professional development to its principals?

The researcher encouraged the participants to talk in the area of interest and then probed more deeply, picking up on the topics and issues the respondent initiated. Follow-up interview questions were used with the participants to gather additional insight into questions that emerged through the coding of the transcriptions.

While data collection was conducted in present time, the descriptions of the districts go back to the period when participants recognized that district leaders intended to provide professional development for principals through district office efforts. As with most districts, data were available on through public information on schools, achievement levels on state and national tests, staffing history for principals and district office, and district organizational structure. These documents served to enrich the interviews by providing a source of data to interpret what has been described.

Data Analysis

Throughout the data collection, during the time tapes are being transcribed and through the coding process, the researcher engaged in a process of writing theoretical notes, diagramming ideas, and outlining ways to organize and make sense of discoveries, relying heavily on techniques described by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995). A researcher notebook was maintained in order to provide a log of emerging ideas and themes.

Category coding was based on general content gained in the literary review and the pilot testing of the interview tool. The coding remained consistent regardless of the data gathered. A subcoding was developed to allow for further disaggregating. This was used to organize the findings and examine the information as it relates to the larger questions posed. Using a process to track data and developing patterns ensures reliable data management (Merriam, 1998; Mills, 2003). Emerging themes were exposed by interviewing participants through cross-checking as conclusions were developed. For example, curriculum skills, instructional skills, and coaching skills might have emerged as categorical themes. Pattern matching logic was synthesized to create a series of decision-making points where district administrators determine what strategies will be implemented for professional development of building principals. Similar to the literature review of MacIver and Farley (2003), which identified themes critical to successful leadership, and the crucial role of the district office in school improvement, this research ultimately provided an explanation about the districts' efforts to support principals as instructional leaders.

Data triangulation occurred in several ways. First, because more than one person in the district was interviewed, some events noted by one respondent should be present in interviews with another respondent. This assisted in confirming specific actions by individuals and possible

shared perspectives. In order to further triangulate, both quantitative and qualitative sources of information were considered to understand the current conditions and structures in the district to support their principals as effective instructional leaders. Murphy and Hallinger (1988) used a similar methodology for collecting data for their study of districts in California. Data were collected from interviews and analysis of selected documents. Results of their study previously noted in the literature review revealed characteristics found in instructionally effective districts.

Ethical Considerations

In qualitative inquiries the researcher must be aware of personal bias or misconceptions that could interfere with the data collection. The interviewer must establish an ethical framework for a professional relationship and a strict code of confidentiality, omitting names and not probing further when given information related to individual staff in order to keep the data as objective as possible. The researcher must also work to establish a trusting relationship with those being interviewed, while still warning the participants about the possible risks of participation; it is possible that the data collected will reveal more than they had intended (Merriam, 1998). The interviewer must carefully consider how the perceptions of district-level support could create uncomfortable differences between staff. It is important to keep the purpose of the research in mind: to provide an understanding of the conditions and programs of the district-office staff that help principals be effective instructional leaders. Vague or misleading questions were refined to ensure clarity and focus.

In terms of bias, the researcher needed to be careful in regard to potential bias first as an administrator in a district office and second as a past principal. It was hoped that this bias was lessened by the researcher consciously setting aside any preconceived notations about how professional development "should" work, in order to hear and truly understand interviewee

perceptions. The investigator's bias or misconceptions could interfere with the data gathering process, just as it might interfere in the analysis of data. As the researcher sorted through the data gathered, it became imperative to determine what is meaningful and what is trivial (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). These determinations were made by the researcher, and undoubtedly affected the way in which data was analyzed and results were reported. Bias was kept in check through an articulated conceptual framework and a through understanding of the research in the field of study (Mills, 2003). It is suggested by Patton (2002) that the interviewer establishes an ethical framework for holding their bias in check, for establishing a warm, professional rapport, and for responding to the emotions that may arise during an interview. The researcher developed protocol to establish conformability in data gathering and reporting.

Limitations

Sample size is a limitation of this study as it does not allow the information gathered to be generalized to all urban districts. With this in mind, the purpose of the study is to inform school district-level leaders of what staff development practices are being used by district-office staff and what principals' view as the effective support they need in developing their abilities to meet the demands of their jobs.

Summary

The preceding information has the methods used in this study of the practices of district-level administration in providing professional development to practicing principals. Having explored various considerations in regard to site selection, participants, data collection analysis the role of the researcher and ethics, the next chapters provide a description of the context of the district(s) studied, a description of the participants, perceptions of the relationship of the district-level administration and the specific activities provided by district administrations for

professional development for principals. After that, an analysis of the findings and some

conclusions and recommendations will be presented.

Chapter 4: Findings:

This chapter describes the two school districts researched. They are presented as two separate case studies, starting with Greenhill School District, each case study is presented in three sections, beginning with the district context including interviewee profiles. The next section presents the specific activities provided for principal professional development: meetings, professional-development funds, book studies and mentoring programs. The final section presents the perceptions of district administration and of principals of the professional-development activities as they align with the common strategies of successful district actions identified through the literature review: (a) providing a vision and focus of expectations, (b) facilitation of a professional culture and collaborative relationships, (c) providing feedback on performance including evaluation, (d) focus on aligned curriculum and teaching strategies. Greenhill School District findings will be presented first followed by Blue Mountain School District.

School District Context

Greenhill District is located in a midsize urban area in the Northwest. The metropolitan area is separated into three school districts and two municipalities, yet it is still effectively one city. More than 14% of families with children under 18 are below the poverty line. During the time of this study Greenhill District had a student population of 11,000. Enrollment had a slight incline since 2002 when there were 10,000 students. The overall number of students enrolled in free and reduced lunch programs had increased 19% over the last 10 years and 4% alone in the last year. The total percentage of students on free and reduced lunch was near 33%. Growth in student enrollment was projected for the coming years. Ethnicity of students was 75% White and 18% Hispanic. The number of Hispanic background had doubled over the past 5 years.

Achievement scores were on the rise, not only in the entire district, but also in ethnic and socioeconomic subgroups. The report card issued by the state for each school and district, demonstrated that from 2002 to 2006, the schools in Greenhill District rated exceptional and strong has increased from eight to 14 out of 18 schools. Based on student achievement data there was evidence of continued growth.

Greenhill Administrators

Table 1

Interviewee Profile

Administrator	Years in administration	Years in current position
Superintendent Jill Johnson	23 years	4 years
Elementary Principal Jeff Jackson	18 years	6 years
Elementary Principal, Carrie Calbot	34 years	9 years
Elementary Principal, Sally Knowlton	17 years	6 years
High School Principal, Jerry Randall	10 years	5 years
District Administrator, Tom Hitachi	5 years	3 years
District Administrator, Ken Flack	14 years	6 years

At the time of this interview Jill Johnson was in her fifth year as Superintendent of Greenhill School District. She began her career in education in the 1970, when she was a special education teacher in the Greenhill schools. She was later a Director and Deputy Superintendent of a district similar in size and demographics to Greenhill. Prior to taking this position she was in

charge of a University principal professional-development program for 6 years. She had experience with professional development. She was able to tie this experience to her position as Superintendent. "The previous Superintendent was not real good, just not an instructional leader, she worked with what she had and made it her own" (Former University Colleague). The Superintendent has created a focus on professional development and learning; she makes things transparent. She works hard to get the leadership team to process things to come to a group decision. Her administrative colleagues perceived her as a process person, focusing on sharing a deeper understanding of the reason why particular activities in the district occur. In 2005, she received the Leading into Leadership award, which is given to an individual who demonstrates a positive, sustained influence on the lives and learning achievement of children.

During her first year the superintendent in Greenhill District had championed a "quality educational model." The foundation of the model was based on data collection, with the purpose of developing strategies to improve results for the sake of the children. The quality education model serves as a lens in which the district measures its success. The highlights of the 2005-06 achievements include the following:

1. Launched a K-5 and 6-12 literacy initiatives.

2. Increased professional development for certificated and classified staff.

3. Established a day for the Gift of Literacy

4. Expanding after school programs and opportunities for students beyond the classroom.

5. Continue to get support for a one-to one laptop initiative.

6. Extended positive behavior support to all schools.

7. Supported school-based family centers.

8. Made health care available to all students in the district.

9. Created community and business partnerships.

10. Increase use of instructional technology.

11. Provided a tool to deliver assessments data to the desktop of every teacher.

12. Promoted cultural competency training throughout the district.

13. Implemented a long-term facilities plan.

14. Supported a student advisory committee

The quality education model continues to serve as the vision for the district and the measurement for success. In 2006-07, the district passed a bond measure which replaces two elementary school and money for district-wide upgrades. An Arts based high school funded by state grant money, designed to have a curriculum that emphasizes the Arts opened its doors in 2007. Most recently the schools district and communities agencies partnership are working on securing funding for a new health and social services center. Jill was herself a poor reader when she was a child, and is famous for reminding her staff that "leaders are readers" Literacy remains the "gateway skill" and a continued focus for struggling readers and increased student success. The district now has literacy support specialists for each school and a new reading curriculum has been adopted in the elementary schools and a 300 person strong community partnership to give an hour a week to read with students.

In Greenhill the Superintendent provided purpose to and direction for the reform efforts. With the deeply held belief that District-level administrators would collaborate with each other and with principals. She established district goals providing direction to the instructional practice work of both the district office and the school administration that were responsible for improving student achievement. The principals in Greenhill District are enthusiastic about the changes since

Jill became Superintendent. The administrators interviewed described powerful collegial relationship with each other. They vary in their years of experience in the district but appear united under the visionary leadership of Jill. Each can articulate a deep understanding and clarity related to student achievement. One principal expressed the following:

> There's a lot of learning between Jill's leadership and the District administration. Jill's a strong leader and has her ears to the ground and her eyes on some things so she brings things to our attention that are worthwhile. We've had a tremendous focus of professional development and learning in all areas; there have been numerous opportunities. She is systematic and it goes across all areas. It's just been Jill's philosophy, and it just permeates and there's an attention to putting resources to making that happen.

A district administrator also described Jill's leadership, "What I've noticed, and this is just from watching the Superintendent, is that, if you want to build trust somewhere it's real simple, you be visible, you be available, and you communicate. If you do those three things, trust emerges. She takes it seriously and she's just out there and she's always available and she's communicating all the time."

More recently in 2007-2008, Jill received the Oregon Commission for Women First Citizen Award for recognition for what chamber members said is; her deep commitment to the community. This included not just her work in education but a long list of volunteer activities. This first woman to head the district after 4 years remains in a honeymoon period (Board Member). During her "360-degree evaluation" in which employees and select community members—typically people who have been involved on district committees could offer anonymous feedback on-line. In 2007-2008, the biggest response ever received and the most positive, of the 400 respondents, 94% agreed that Jill is a visionary leader 99 % found her

accessible and 99%believe she'd been the force behind the districts stepped-up focus on literacy. "When a community trusts their superintendent, they trust their school district" (Board member). She continues to work in a collaborative style and focus on excellence.

In Greenhill District, I interviewed two elementary principals, one middle school, one high school principal, and three district-office administrators. The principals are profiled and presented by their grade level, starting with elementary, and conclude with the profiles of the three district-office administrators who were responsible for some aspect of principal professional development. As a whole the administration at both the building and district level are invested in the district and improvement process. They described the interactions with each other, as far as professional development goes, as collaborative. Principals commented on the strong support they felt from the district-office administration and that they recognized their role as instructional leaders. The decision-making process with regard to principal professional development in Greenhill is, for the most part, a collaborative process balanced with authoritative decisions—when these were necessary. One element was consistent across all interviewees and observed: the leadership provided by the Superintendent was pivotal in fostering collaboration and providing a vision for the district.

Alice Minos was the principal of Lincoln Elementary School; she had been in this role for 3 years. She had been in education for 23 years total, holding a variety of administrative and teaching roles. Prior to this position she was an alternative education assistant district administrator. She had supervised the alternative programs for this district. The elementary school where she is currently the principal has 450 students with a 62% free and reduced lunch population and a constantly changing demographic. She had hired six new teachers to the

building. Alice felt she was at the initial stages of her administrative career. She perceives herself as service oriented.

"I like to build relationships with staff and then I like collaborating. I have a hard time delegating some things, but my strengths are to work really close with staff and I have a very strong curriculum and instructional background. I feel as if we are behind the teachers in having professional-development opportunities." She sees her biggest challenge as student achievement. She is involved with the district. She has served on various committees including the literacy adoption committee.

Jeff Jackson was principal of Washington Elementary School. He had been at his current school for 6 years. He had been in this district for 12 years as an elementary principal. He described his leadership style as empathetic. He felt his greatest strength was in having an open understanding of family challenges and connecting with the families. His building is in the urban core, with 400 students and a seventy 70% free and reduce lunch. He stated that his teachers demand collaboration in decision-making.

Carrie Calbot had been principal of Harding Elementary School for 9 years in this district. She had a total of 34 years in education. She had 17 years as an administrator and 12 years as a teacher. She felt that relational trust is essential to leadership and focused her effort to be out in classrooms to develop this. She defined herself as student focused. She attended national conferences as professional development and perceived that these conferences match her needs. She perceived a need for differentiation of instruction. Her elementary school has eight children with autism; the district provided structured learning support for her and the staff.

Sally Knowlton served 5 years as a middle school teacher, 6 years as a curriculum specialist and has now been principal of Roosevelt Elementary School, in Greenhill, for 6 years.

There were 380 students attending the school. There were 5% of students in ESL programs. The school did not receive Title I federal funds. Over the last 3 years state academic achievement scores had declined from 95% in 2005–2006 in reading to 89% in 2006-2007, Mathematics went from 94% to 80%, although writing scores increased from 24% to 55%. These scores were still higher than the state averages. The school on statewide assessment results was rated as strong and exceptional. The staff years of experience average is 13. She had a concern that the district was not meeting the needs of diverse learners. She goes where she can find the professional development she needs

High school principal, Gerald Randall grew up in Greenhill. He was a special education case manager and Assistant Principal for 5 years. He has been Hamilton High School principal for 5 years. He perceives that he had learned the role of principal in a "trial by fire" fashion. He has learned the management aspect of a high school principal and understands the importance of relationships. He met with district-office administrators at least weekly informally. There were 1,400 students enrolled in this high school. Eight percent are in ESL programs. Fourteen years of experience is average for this building. Student achievement scores on state tests had risen over the last 2 years.

Tom Hitachi was in his third year in the district, prior to this he was a principal for 5 years, and he also was a teacher. He has written and published books on leadership and school improvement. He was recruited to this position by the Superintendent. When asked about his role as a district administrator in providing professional development to principals he said,

> I think the role of district-level administration is to inspire principals learning, because if
> they are learners at the building level, their school will keep getting better, and keep
> challenging them to learn more, bringing them new ideas, bringing them data, and

training them to look at their own data, to own their data. We have two data rules that we teach them. Rule number one is essentially, you are what your record says you are. In other words, your data is what it is. Use what you have, that's the first rule. The second rule is, get what you need. We try to teach them that, we bring data to them all the time in terms of behavior; attendance, referrals, school culture, academics. Test scores articulate curriculum and we want to train them to use that data to make improvements.

Another district administrator interviewed was Ken Flack; he grew-up as a child in Greenhill. He spent 9 years as an Assistant Principal, five years as a Principal, and 6 years in district-level administration. He believes his role is all about relationships. He is retiring at the end of the school year. He is a "go to guy" for principals. He perceives his role with principals as the guy that "pulls them out of hot water." He believes that principals are not really held accountable for student achievement. Ken has been in his current position for 4 years. He was a teacher for 13 years. He perceives his role as providing support to principals, not control of principals, because the district administration does not mandate. He believes what principals need is time with their staff, for good instruction to happen principals and teachers need to know what it looks like. He liked national conferences and thinks keynote speakers plant the seeds for principals learning. He believed that training and support changes behavior.

Professional Development Activities in Greenhill District

The District goals and the Quality School Model reflect the major initiatives for the district as a whole and for administrators. Under Superintendent Jill Johnson's' leadership the district-office administrators used a multifaceted approach to principal professional development, combining different tactics based on the need or circumstances. At times the approach was top-

down while at other times it was collaborative. Professional-development activities for principals in the Greenhill School District took place on five fronts: (a) district initiated meetings, (b) professional-development funds, (c) books studies, (d) emerging administrator mentoring, and (e) evaluations. Greenhill is a high achieving district with a moderately diverse population. The district has strong leadership and principals share a vision of teaching and learning. The Superintendent is the major driver to communication and guides the vision of the district. The next section describes the events and activities for each of the strategies that the district office engaged in during the period of the study.

District Initiated Meetings.

During the time of this study, Greenhill District held meetings regularly for various purposes of principal staff development. Table 2 indicates the major professional-development activities of these meetings. In total, principals met with district-level administration an average of 81 hours a year for the purpose of staff development.

Table 2

Meeting Schedule

Meeting title	Time 81 meeting hours a year	Agenda	Attendees
Retreat — principal in-service	7 hours	Instructional leadership and vision for the year	District cabinet and principals
Leadership team meeting	Weekly 2 hours	Director sets agenda operational issues, policy, training on district focus	Elementary and secondary and director
School improvement meeting	3 times a year 24 hours total	Principals set agenda Orientation in August professional-learning communities, walk through model,	Principals, district-level administration in secondary and elementary groups
Administrative team meeting	17 days late start	District provided training in instructional leadership	Principals, district-level administration, expectation to teach lesson to teachers
Superintendent leadership cabinet	Rotating basis weekly meeting	Superintendent sets agenda. Collaborate on district initiatives	Core cabinet: directors, curriculum, human resources, assessment, 1ne principal
Additional meetings as needed	Time for a specific topic	District finance, teacher evaluation model	Variable

To start off the school year, principals had an in-service provided by district administration. At the time of this study the August meeting outcomes that were expressed clearly focused on teaching and learning. Outcomes for the day were (a) provide some new ideas/concepts to help stimulate change, (b) provide time/resources for professional-development

planning, (c) provide time/support to ask questions and analyze school data, (d) first exposure to the new teacher evaluation system. This day of activities provided a deeper understanding to best practices of high achieving school as guided by the current research, and next steps for the remainder of the year.

Principals had weekly secondary and elementary meetings for 1 to 2 hours in length; these were called "leadership team meetings." In these meetings a district administrator sets the agenda, the first half hour or so focused on operational issues. These meetings are utilized to bring everyone along on policy issues. The remaining time in these meetings was set aside to have training and/or conversations on the district focus, such as literacy practices, or to discuss current issues in the district.

Another scheduled meeting was the "school improvement meetings." The agenda was established by the principals and facilitated by a district-office administrator. School improvement meetings were held two or three times a year approximately 24 hours total time annually. The first meeting of the year was for 2 or 3 days in August. One of the meetings was focused on professional-learning communities and what they are. Principals who knew about professional-learning communities were asked to speak to the group. Principals were given time in like-groups, based on school size, grade level and student demographics, to discuss what their perceptions were of professional-learning communities. This was viewed as a collaborative time by the principals and as a core of professional development by both district-office staff and principals. An additional topic for the school improvement meetings was the "walk through model." This was a training that came from an out-of-district facilitator. As a follow-up, district-level administration looked into ways to create a specific standard feedback form to apply to the "walkthroughs."

Once a month, there is was "administrative team meetings." This was when the district provided formal training for principals in instructional leadership skills. The training was presented to provide practical information that the principals could use immediately. It was presented as a model staff development activity for principals to teach instructional techniques to their building staff. These meetings/trainings had a single topic. The trainings are outlined in a notebook which principals can draw from at anytime. District office does not mandate that the principals instruct their staff using the model provided, because it is recognized that each building may have a little different need, although all teachers receive the district-level training and are expected to utilize the newly learned skills. The skills are taught to teachers during 17 days of late start, by either district-office staff or principals. For the 2008-09, principals had been asked to organize their teacher informative observations around the literacy trainings and to provide data on teachers' practices before, during, and after the training of the instructional strategies.

Principals, on a rotating basis, are asked to attend the weekly cabinet level "superintendent leadership meeting." When principals attend, they are asked to speak about their buildings' progress and activities. Principal participation in the meetings was viewed by district-level administration as an opportunity for principals to collaborate on district initiatives and to share building activities.

Additional meetings were based on district need. Committee members would work on a specific topic. For example, a "finance committee" was formed to work on staffing issues and met once a week until the committee charge was complete. Another example was the literacy committee; this group selected the new reading curriculum. Another example of committee work

is the development of a "state of the art" teacher's evaluation model; this particular committee took about a year and a half developing the evaluation tool in collaboration with teachers and principals alike. The product from this committee defined for every principal and teacher what excellent teaching and learning looks like. Principals were instructed on what to look for and what to document in informal observations. "This is a nonnegotiable, the more we train them on how to use it, helps them improve instruction in the classroom" (District Administrator).

Professional Development Funds

The district office set aside money for professional-development activities. Principals would apply to use the money for such things as school-wide strategies in technology training, the development of a positive behavioral support model, and release time for classified or certificated staff. One principal referred to this as a "district grant." All principals who had applied had received the funds requested. The district was viewed by the principals as providing the resources they request. An additional $4,000 is given annually to each principal for professional development, this money is used for attendance at National and State level conferences, and workshops provided by the ESD. The district provides the resources to release teacher leaders from buildings for leadership workshops. There are dozens of state level professional-development opportunities for principals to choose from, a District administrator describes the funds as follows:

> We have essentially an innovation account so people that want to innovate or do
>
> professional development, either for themselves as principals or for their staff, they can
>
> apply and be able to do things. Either have people come in or go out. We allow choice
>
> then we also have some structured things that we want them to learn. So we've got kind

of a two edged thing where we've got the professional-development curriculum and then we have choices, things that they own.

Another principal, described professional development as the time "when what is offered is enlightening, has a personal interest, and is a personal choice." He perceived his major source of professional development coming from attending National and State level conferences, which the district pays for. He says he set personal goals and then goes out on his own and gets what he needs in professional development utilizing the funds provided by the district.

Book Studies

The Superintendent encourages her leadership team to read books together, to build collegiality and to learn more about creating effective organizations. Both district-office staff and building principals participated in book studies. These were self-organized groups that met on their own time, some met in the evenings and some for morning breakfast, to discuss a book that they had read. Administrators selected the books to share and the district purchases them. The selection of books varied from business and school focused practices, to information on professional-learning communities and leadership methodology. A member of the group volunteered to facilitate the discussion. These book studies were perceived by principals as, an opportunity to have valuable discussions related to their needs. "This is a collegial opportunity where principals volunteer to participate" (Principal). The focus of district-office professional development that principals enjoyed most is the collegial, collaborative time centered on book shares. "It is a great opportunity to get together and talk although it could have been better focused" (Principal). The book study groups met about 10 times a year. The agenda for each meeting was built by the small group. Principals see that one of their greatest challenges is to provide empathy and understanding of the difficulties the families served, due to their economic

status. The district supports them in this challenge by providing resources and a book study on poverty.

Emerging Administrators

The district also had created a program for "emerging leaders." District-office administrators met several times a year with these young leaders to discuss themes of quality school improvement and leadership. Those with administrative credentials were asked to fill-in for principals who were out of their building. Some of the "emerging leaders" were in credential programs and some of them were just interested, or have been identified by their principals as having leadership qualities. There were about 20 participants this year.

Evaluation Activities

The district was working on a new model for principal evaluation which will be similar to the teachers' evaluation model; based on standards with performance targets, there is a tremendous amount of detail in the forms and documented clarity of expectations. The evaluation model for teachers was an early focus for principal professional development. The use of the model for teacher evaluation was a mandate by the district; all principals were trained in the use of the model and use it to determine quality teaching. The model was initiated as a response to state level mandates.

During this study, building principals were held accountable to turn in two or three goals and at the end of the year complete a self-evaluation. Building principals were also held accountable to a "school improvement vision," a meaningful goal stated in measurable terms including strategies to meet that goal. Building principals were also asked to complete a "360 degree" survey. This is a survey given to staff, parents and students. The feedback was collected and shared with district-office cabinet administrators.

Greenhill School District Best Practices Findings

In Greenhill District, professional development for principals started with a shift in conversations from management to instructional leadership. At the time of this study the Superintendent had been in her fourth year in the District. This Superintendent, during her first year, started a comprehensive survey on staff development needs. The survey was given by the district-level administration to teachers, classified personnel, and administrators. The results of this survey generated lively discussion, and the staff development model for principals and teachers was designed to address the needs identified. Initially, guest presenters from outside of the organization gave training, presented various models and facilitated conversations on the perceived needs of the district. These facilitators clarified the need for a change in practice. The Superintendent reorganized the organizational staffing at the district office and created a new professional-development director position and recreated a position into Student Achievement Leader position. Next, Superintendent Jill Johnson decided that the district needed a framework for to organize the needs of the district.

A task force included community members, all different levels of administration and teachers looked at current data, all aspects of the district were examined. The focus of the district was articulated clearly on the gateway skill: literacy. The task force determined a mission, a vision and three or four goals for the district and published the results this became the districts' School Quality Education Model (SQEM). Not only was this an articulation of the districts mission but $100,000 was available annually to principals to access for building initiatives for school improvement in these areas, called by one district administrator as an "innovation

account" so people can get professional development for themselves as principals or for their staffs. Principals perceive that they were engaged in making literacy a focus for the district. Most principal professional development at the time of this study was provided by district-office internal resources with the purpose of providing principals the tools to be instructional leaders, with a focus on literacy. In Greenhill District, there was a shift back to the adjective of instructional leadership. The principals insisted on a change, and the data illuminated a push towards literacy. SQEM served as the umbrella under which the reforms efforts took place. This defined the beginning of purposeful decisions made be the district office to provide professional-development activities for principals and teachers.

A combination of district-level administrators provided professional development to principals on key issues in buildings, for example providing training on decision-making techniques, and creating a system-wide commitment to teaching and learning. Professional development for principals was about the teachers. It was about providing professional development to principals so they could be instructional leaders for their teachers. "Professional development should have an instructional focus and help to keep us current with educational trends." Principals want to learn ways to lead staff, to give direction. Principals currently perceive the need for math professional development, because they are changing math so drastically. "If I am going to be an instructional leader in my building I feel like I ought to know what's going on. So I know what the strands of math are and what strategies my teachers need in order to deliver instruction in the most meaningful way." A district-office staff member interviewed also remarked "the role of the district office is to inspire our principals learning and to challenge them to learn more.

Clearly school districts are complex organizations, where in reality strategies integrate overlap and intersect. District-level leadership activities for professional development weave in and out of the strategies identified for effective schools. The final section of this chapter presents the perceptions of district-level administration and of building principals of principal professional-development activities as they align with the common strategies of successful district actions identified through the literature review: (a) providing a vision and focus of expectations, (b) facilitation of a professional culture and collaborative relationships, (c) providing feedback on performance including evaluation, (d) Focus on aligned curriculum and teaching strategies. Is Greenhill professional development a best practice?

Providing a Vision and Focus of Expectations

By the very nature of her position the articulated goals supported by the Superintendent trigger changes in the efforts of district-office administration. Principals in turn, were also clear about the districts focus on literacy and viewed their Superintendent as an instructional leader. Initially, Superintendent Jill made some very visible personnel decisions in the process of moving the district to a clear focus on student achievement by designing a new district cabinet which included a student achievement leader and a professional-development director.

The district goal documents were written annually by the Superintendent. The documents included a review of the SQEM and the Superintendents annual review. All building administrators recognized a connection between district goals and building goals. "We make a very concerted effort to have our goals align with things that Jill had articulated" (Building Principal). Each school turns in a school improvement vision, which is action oriented, it is a

meaningful goal stated in measurable terms and then the strategies to implement. Greenhill school district has been purposeful in their focus and actions to provide time and resources to work with the district-level administration that is committed to their emerging role in providing professional development to principals. Principal professional development is perceived as part of the talk in this district. It's a balance of time and resources.

Superintendent, Jill's work to focus the district on the SQEM particularly in literacy is evident. Focus on student learning and student achievement is also consistent with research by David and Shields (2001) and Waters and Marzano (2006). According to Walters and Marzano, nonnegotiable goals for student achievement by superintendents do impact student achievement are consistent with the practices of the superintendent in Greenhill. A Principal supported the articulation of a vision by saying,

> I would say the underlying sort of direction is around literacy. Because it is such an emphasis in our district, and it's a conversation in every staff meeting and in every administrative meeting even at the board level, I would say my guess is probably 80% of more of most buildings collaborative time focuses on literacy. Their vision and mission statement for us is to move forward and really have the goal for student achievement. Along with all students achieving, that we are really focused on literacy and we are really focus on it, bringing in our community and being collaborative not only within our organization but within our communities larger membership.

Administrators easily describe the superintendents' vision and can identify how she articulated her vision: "She is out in classrooms once or twice a week; she even shadowed a student for a day. She is adored by administrators and they would do anything for her because

she is so humble yet so bright she works hard. It's so affirming she's a wonderful leader" (Principal).

Facilitation of a Professional Culture and Collaborative Relationship

There was an intimacy of district-office administrators in their relationship with principals. They were moving away from the emphasis on directives and bureaucratic practices by visiting schools and becoming deeply immersed in instruction to ensure that every school principal develops a technical consciousness of the elements of quality instruction. One principal describe the district administration as "phenomenal, our best resource for professional development is just right down at the district office. The relationship was often described as "collegial," But it appeared to go beyond that as one interview after another spoke of the "friendship" they have with each other.

District-office leadership is recognized by principals as consistent, balanced, and credible. The district office was described as "supportive" "providing information on legal issues, personnel, and discipline and policy issues." District administration is described as the "go to" people, and the ones with "the area expertise." "They show how to get through the maze of paper." The district office see themselves as supportive, "we really try to listen to them, we value their input, we ask for it all of the time." One principal expressed frustration with the district office "It's like, we adjust what we do based on what they say. "Sometimes the District office determines where we are heading; it feels like we start down a path and sometimes we don't have the training or the background information before we are trying to put it out there." Collaborative time is viewed as "very important." by principals. The district-level administration supports principals in collaboration on key issues in buildings, providing training on decision-

making techniques, and creating a system-wide commitment to teaching and learning. Principals would like to see additional collaboration time with their peers. As one principal explained,

> Collaborative time with my peers might be a lacking areas. I know the district offers us to come to principal meetings. But it often doesn't happy or it isn't, it's challenging because everyone might bring something different to share. I think I would like to have more to do with my personal growth rather than the team and school growth. I think that those have to go hand in hand. I know that the door would be open and somebody would be there to help me. If the district provided something for us, it's generally we all do it. It's often times that information we all need or reaffirms what we are already doing or it reminds us what we need to be doing.

Another principal commented, that the district-level administration has an attitude of support and makes him feel valued as a principal he expressed it this way,

> The executive directors know my passion for assessment for learning strategies. They get input from us. I think what they see is buildings moving in certain directions and so they're very supportive in the work that is going on. It is very evident. The entire teaching and learning committee from the district office is coming to my building tomorrow. They are incredibly approachable.

Informal relationships in this district had added a foundation in creating the commitment principals have to the district. Some principals got together informally for coffee and just to talk a few times a year. Principals got together and had coffee for an hour before Wednesday morning meetings. Sometime its social talk sometimes it's in-house conversation. One of the principals described the relationship with district administrators by saying,

Some of the best professional development that's out there is the collaboration time that colleagues have together where they push each others thinking. I do feel like there's more support there it's more of a sense of we're all in this together, rather than, this is the problem and how are you guys going to solve it, there is a lot of support and I really feel like I can call on Teaching and Learning and time and say I need more data. Help me understand the data. I can call ELL people, Special Education., it feels really small that we know who is responsible for what and we can go to them without having to wiggle through a chain of command.

The elementary director has changed frequently in the past few years, but the district has always found someone that is a good listener and a good advocate for us. "When there is a problem, that's the person that I go to." They have hired really good people to mentor us and be the middle man for us and that kind of thing. With emotional support or scheduling support or let me sit down besides you and we can work this out together. I guess the principal group is the same thing that I feel with the teachers; if we have to move somewhere I figure out what their issues are and their needs and help show them why this movement is going to be good for them. I think the district does the same thing for the principals. The Superintendent collaborated with the teachers union and community members to provide more time for collaborative activities. She negotiated 17 Wednesdays a school year so building staff could work together with district-office staff. This time is set aside to work on literacy.

Providing Feedback on Performance Including Evaluation

State law requires each district to develop a system of evaluating teacher performance in collaboration with their local Association. In the fall of 2005 at the request of the Superintendent, A team of teachers and administrators came together to study teaching and learning. Over the course of the year they designed and evaluation system for teachers that combines the latest knowledge about teaching standards. The teacher evaluation model has 15 teaching standards and each standard has a performance target that is clearly articulated. It was implemented district-wide in the fall of 2007. This same effort was going just beginning with the principal evaluation model. At the time of this study they had narrowed down, through research, 14 principal standards. One area being the importance of shared leadership versus controlled management. A district administrator discussed the different continuums of leadership as we talked about evaluations, by saying,

> This is a continuous area of concern for district-level administration. It is turning over the ownership so people can get outcomes, allowing people choice. This is a core philosophy for the district and it comes from Deming's work on continuous improvement. The people closest to the work know the most about the work. The district office provides a lot of opportunities for principals to go out there and improve their skills. Our job in the district office is to support the principals in reaching their school goals. If you meet the needs of the individual the collective whole is going to improve as

"I don't think a lot of people really want to know exactly how they are doing. I think we all like to operate in that kind of void ignorance. Jill brought the nuts and bolts; we had to meet our goals" (Principal). Greenhill at the time of this study was also initiating a collaborative focus on implementation of "walkthroughs" by providing training to give specific feedback on

standards. At the elementary level this activity was applied to literacy and at the secondary level it was more general. Even though "walkthroughs" are not evaluative there must be support from teachers and unions to come through classrooms more often. This also demonstrates the trusting relationship the teachers' union had with the superintendent and district administration.

Principals also recognize that differentiation of their individual needs was visible by the support offered. The executive directors met with principals on a weekly regular basis and are familiar with the different strengths and weaknesses of each principal. Each provides coaching to the individual administrator. They also met twice a year with each principal for the specific purpose of visiting each principal for an hour and asking what's working. "I think the best thing that they do for us is they let us determine our needs within the building. I think high expectations are number one and there are high expectations at the district level and at building level." So there is support there, to understand what the difficulties are in the building and greasing the skids to know whether it's emotionally or whatever to help it move along" (Principal). Each of the district administrators interviewed stated the principals' success is vital to the schools' success and saw the primary responsibility of district administration as ensuring the principal has the necessary resources to be successful.

Support on terms of feedback or individualized training through the specific evaluation system does not appear to have any discernable meaning. As Doug Reeves (2004) explained in his work on principal evaluation and accountability feedback focused on the role of adults to improve student achievement and serves to provide accurate examples of positive performance and provides a constructive framework to create jointly upon improvement goals. To ensure the district priority to support principals to become effective instructional leaders, a system of clear performance targets, ongoing feedback in moving towards these targets, and individualized

mentoring to support development of specific areas of need must be established as part of the culture. A building principal articulates the formal evaluation system with dismay,

> I would say that evaluation is kind of a weak area. We are evaluated and we are to have two to three goals a year. We write up our goals we share them with our curriculum directors He visits with us, not very often, and then at the end we do a self-reflection we talk about it. What would make it more helpful or productive to me, would be if it looks more like the model I have with my staff, where I go into their rooms. So if somebody came into my building and sat down and just have informal conversations with me about what is going on, I think problematically it that, since I've bee administrating there's been one person in this role and they are the curriculum director the expulsion hearing officer they're a variety of thing I couldn't even tell you the whole gamut of all their jobs. And they evaluate all principals K-12, so that means they have 23 administrators they are evaluating. So I think that's why it has gotten to a place of it being a paper trail and not something more meaningful.

Greenhill District administration has recognized this disconnect with the principals evaluation system and at the time of this study was developing standards for principal evaluation.

Focus on Aligned Curriculum and Teaching Strategies.

NCLB requires districts to assess student progress on how well they were mastering state level standards. Greenhill school district articulated a focus on increasing student achievement in literacy and then provided financial support to that goal by completing a new reading adoption. This served as the foundation for professional-development activities in literacy for both building administrators and teachers. The district office offers professional development to administrators

so they can be better informed to make a decision on whether or not a particular initiative is direction they want to focus on in their building. Principals reported that learning about the curriculum and best teaching practices produced positive outcomes for the district and perceived a benefit from the teaching and curriculum centered focus of district-office administrators. First, principals felt that their understanding provided a more rigorous and consistent expectations across the district. Secondly, increasing their knowledge of curriculum and teaching strategies gave building leaders an opportunity to engage teachers in dialogue about common clear expectations. Principals see the challenge to stay current with trends in education including curriculum. "I am just looking for ways to lead my staff." Professional development for principals is about the teachers. It is about providing professional development to principals so they can be instructional leaders for their teachers. Although one principal commented that he does not see a need for curriculum professional development, "good teaching is good teaching" it does not change with the curriculum. .In contrast a principal states, "I think they are doing a very good job in training administrators to truly understand it so they know how to move their staff forward as well as training large numbers of teachers in the same techniques" (Principal).

A district administrator explains the focus of data this way,

> We try to inspire principal learning. We bring them data. Try to teach them that they are their data, to use what they have and we give it to them. Sometimes they may not realize they need it, but I think, we've really been data driven with them all the time. In some of them, it's been harder for them to grasp than others, but I think they're all getting to the point where they are starting to make decisions based on data. . . .I think that helping principals become strong leaders is everybody's job in the district. We cannot rely on one person for professional development. If any training is going to be provided to principals

it is helping us with that part of your job that I think is the most important so we can get

the most our of our teachers and help everybody grow and develop to be the strongest

teacher they can be.

Throughout these interviews understanding data was identified as a need in the District.

The district-office administration is responsible for the management of the data. Reports were

often presented in both generalizations and individual building sites. "We train our principals

how to use data, so that they in turn will make decisions based on data" (District Administrator).

Principals believed they spend a lot of time looking at data. The data was collected and presented

to principals by district-level administration. For example a use of data was connected to the

district's attention to literacy. Mastery in Motion records and Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early

Literacy Skills data were used to assess individual student achievement and behavior data.

Principals maintained that district-wide there had been a consistent thread of examining student

achievement data and then looking at the associated instructional practice, specifically in terms

of literacy. Principals stated that this was the best access they have had to implement activities

based on data. District-office administrators used data to change instructional practices and

increase student achievement. "There has been a focus to define what good teaching is and

establish standards for teachers' professional development provided by the district office. They

are data driven, it is connected to the district goals and improvement plans" (Principal). Another

example of a data system that has been implemented is the School-Wide Information System

(SWIS) which is an electronic student information system which stores student behavioral data."

The district office perceives that all curriculum professional development should have a focus on

teaching and learning.

Blue Mountain School District

This section presents the research findings from my second case study, based on interview data and document analysis, it describes Blue Mountain School District's practices in providing professional development to principals in three sections, beginning with the district context including interviewee profiles. The next sections present the specific activities provided for principal professional development: meetings, professional-development funds, book studies and mentoring programs. The final section presents the findings as articulated by district-level administration and building principals of the professional-development activities provided for principals as they align with the common strategies of successful district actions identified through the literature review: (a) providing a vision and focus of expectations, (b) facilitation of a professional culture and collaborative relationships, (c) providing feedback on performance including evaluation, (d) Focus on aligned curriculum and teaching strategies.

School District Context

Blue Mountain District served about 14,000 students with 900 teachers. Total enrollment in the district was nearly 3% higher than last year and about 2% higher than the year before. The jump in enrollment came after 6 years when enrollment growth averaged less than 1% per year. Blue Mountain District had 11 elementary schools, 4 middle schools and 3 high schools. The schools were nearing capacity and forecasts indicated that enrollment would continue to increase in the years ahead. In 1999 district student enrollment was at 13,200 with a steady increase to 14,200 students in 2008, resulting in bulging elementary buildings with overcrowding and the need to find ways to relocate students.

When comparing test results with similar schools, 8 of the school districts, 11 elementary schools, and 3 of the 4 middle schools were among the top performing schools in the state. State

test scores were higher in six of the nine tests administered last spring and were above the state average in seven of the nine assessments. The biggest increase came in reading scores at the seventh grade, where the number of students meeting the state standard was up 17%. Math score rose by 8%. Test scores continued to show that Blue Mountain District children are performing higher than the average on basic math, reading and language skills.

The district is perceived as more of a top down style that works really well. The superintendent had five executive directors which are seemingly the people she listens to, along with the community. The cabinet and the superintendent set the tone for what the learning is going to be in the district. There is an executive director for secondary and an executive director for elementary. These two people are primarily responsible for supporting and supervising principals. The executive directors were viewed as a powerful advocate for the principals. One principal articulated the district organization by saying, "So if you don't have someone whose strong enough to speak for the elementary principals or secondary or whatever group, you're kind of without a voice in this district." Another principal talked about the district office, and the role they play in the district by articulating it this way,

> There is a three pronged group at the district office, it's the Assistant Superintendent working with the curriculum and instruction and professional development, the Executive Director of Elementary and the Executive Director of Secondary. These are the key pieces in the professional development for principals. They are part of this group that works on our general direction and then they meet weekly at elementary and secondary levels with the principals. How are things going? What do you need next? Walk me around the classroom and show me what you are proud of. So it's real hands on individual support to principals.

In Blue Mountain District, I interviewed 2 elementary principals, 1 middle school, and 3 district-office administrators. The principals are profiled and presented by their grade level, starting with elementary, and conclude with the profiles of the three district-office administrators who were responsible for some aspect of principal professional development. As a whole the administration at both the building and district level are invested in the district and improvement process. They described the interactions with each other as a collaborative as far as professional development goes. Principals commented on the strong support they felt from the district-office administration and that they recognized their role as instructional leaders. The decision-making process with regard to principal professional development in Blue Mountain is, for the most part, designed as a directive from the district administration. One element was consistent across all interviewees in Blue Mountain and observed: the leadership provided by the superintendent was pivotal in providing a vision for the district.

Blue Mountain Administration

Alicia Hamilton graduated from a local college and began her career first as a classroom teacher, then became an elementary school principal and prior to becoming Superintendent was the curriculum director in Blue Mountain School District and taught classes at the University. There was an interim Superintendent for 1 year in Blue Mountain before she took her first Superintendent position 4 years ago, in the same district. As part of her first year she restructured the district-level administration and hired both an elementary and secondary executive director position, she also added more district-level administration with the creation of director of student services position. Both the elementary and secondary executive director positions opened up when Alicia became Superintendent. She came in and restructured the district office and

reorganized to add staff and take some responsibilities off of the executive directors so they

could work along side of the principals and to provide more focus on teaching and learning.

Table 3

Interviewee Profile

Administrator	Years in Administration	Years in current position
Superintendent, Alice Hamilton	13 years	4 years
Elementary Principal, Vicki Morgan	15 years	12 years
Elementary Principal, Sally Shepard	35 years	11 years
Middle School Principal, Rosa Cleveland	7 years	4 years
District Administrator, Colleen Lane	13 years	5 years
District Administrator, Shauna Davis	6 years	1 year
District Administrator, Margaret O'Connell	16 years	4 years

She prioritizes communication with the local community; she had attended all types of

community meetings from the city chamber or building PTA's. Alicia is active in local

organizations such as the Library board, past chair of the YMCA, past chair of the Kids Matter

Vision Council at the time of this study she was campaign manager for the United Way of Ridge

County. She was also serving on the Junior Achievement board. She was on the campaign that worked with legislators to develop policy for early education. She was actively involved in proposing an aggressive bond measure to build a new elementary school renovate schools and purchase land for future growth totally over 100 million dollars, in 2008 the margin failed slightly.

Alicia is respected by staff. She has created a culture of high expectations with a focus on instruction. She has a clearly communicated direction. Principals are provided an in-house centralized professional-development model that starts with the Superintendent directive.

Vicki Morgan was an experienced principal; she had been an administrator in Blue Mountain District for 15 years, and for the last 12 years as principal at Spruce elementary school. Last year she received statewide recognition for her leadership. She perceives herself as a situational leader, with a clear focus on vision and goals. She says, "She has a plan of how to get there and is really driven in terms on bringing everybody on board and working together to get there." She perceives herself as collaborative and able to get better decisions when everybody is working together. The enrollment in the school has been on a continual rise for the last 5 years increasing by 250 students. Seven hundred students attend this elementary school in Blue Mountain District and the projected enrollment for the building next year is 860 students. The ethnic diversity is composed of 46% Caucasian and 21% Hispanic 18% Asian and 6 % African-American. Free and reduced lunch is at 57%; 28% are non-English speaking. She is the sole administrator in this large school. When positions are posted there are a lot of in-district transfer requests to Spruce elementary. The central focus at this elementary school is one what is best for children and learning. Academic and behavioral expectations are high. The school offers

extensive in-class support, summer programs and extended day learning opportunities for students who need extra academic assistance.

The building has a reputation for success. Demographically students tend to exceed expectations. Test scores have gained steadily. WASL math and writing scores have improved 3 years in a row and the school has received OSPI Academic Improvement awards in reading math and writing. They continue to meet Adequate Yearly Progress requirements established by the state and federal government. Consistently on the IOWA test students at this elementary school outperform how they would be expected to perform compared with similar demographics. Vicki engaged in discussion about her schools' success,

> We were consistently on of those top 10 schools where I think we get a lot out of our kids because our expectations are high. When I first came to this school, 12 years ago, there was a lot of talk about how you could only expect so much with our type of kids. They're low income and we can't expect them to do what these kids in the other schools that are much more privileged are able to do. I think we really turned that around and now we don't just believe, we know that our kids can learn as much if not more, than any other child. They just have untapped potential and it's our job to get them where they need to be.

Sally Shepard was an elementary building principal who had worked in Blue Mountain District for 35 years and was retiring this year. She has been principal of Elm elementary school for 11 years. Demographics of the building broke down as follows; 61% Caucasian 12.8% Hispanic 15% Asian 29% free and reduced lunch rate and 19% non-English speaking. She saw herself utilizing a collaborative leadership style. "Whenever I come to having to institute a change I always use the acronym "WITH;" what's in it for me. I've got to sell what's in it for

them or they're not going to change." When Sally started in school administration she saw her role as a manager, now she spends her time looking at change in the instruction and the pedagogy and the techniques of what's happening inside the classroom. Her goal was to empower each student to reach his or her maximum potential in all aspects of the school experience

Rosa Cleveland was a middle school principal. She had been an administrator for 7 years. Been a principal at Pine Middle School for 4 years, and 3 other years were in a different district all at the middle level. Pine middle school has 792 students Grade 6 through 8 the demographics include; 72% Caucasian 10% Asian 7% Hispanic. With a free and reduced lunch rate of 28%, and 4.4% non-English speaking. Currently, Rosa also teaches classes at the University level in Supervision and Instruction. She has a yearning to learn, a driving passion and commitment for the work. She loves the "*Moral Leadership*" by Sergiovani; she believes she has a servant leadership style and went on to articulate her leadership style.

I'm extremely collaborative with staff. I feel an incredible need to support them on their journey. Keeping current on best practices best research and then being able to support staff. I just want to become smarter about what I know is best supported by research. We always say if we know it is going to increase student achievement if you know that this is best supported by research and you show me that, I will find a way to make it happen. I think it is a travesty that principals are not taught good assessment strategies. 90% of my day is in the classrooms.

Colleen Lane held the position of executive director of elementary education in Blue Mountain District. She came to Blue Mountain District 5 years ago, to replace the person in the job, who then became superintendent. Prior to this Colleen was a high school principal. She

described her leadership style as a person who has a clear vision who works hard in the collaborative detailing of the vision and focusing the group to have a focused vision. She said she really does not care who gets the credit if it's moving us in the direction. She goes on to say, she is less collaborative in the actual direction but very collaborative in the implementation. She believed that the curriculum is becoming more intense, more vibrant. "We are asking kids to do much more and teachers have a live-in curriculum expert who feels supported and cared for in the principals."

Before becoming director of curriculum and professional development for Blue Mountain District, Shauna Davis previously was director of curriculum and assessment for a 5,000 student district for 6 years. Prior to this she was a teacher. She was responsible for curriculum adoptions and instruction and all the professional development for certificated staff in Blue Mountain District. She valued the role the principal has as instructional leader.

Margaret O'Connell has been the Executive Director of Secondary Education for 4 years. Prior to that, she was a middle school principal for 16 years. She also taught elementary school for 6 years. She describes her self as a "hands-on individual." This is her 43rd year in education, and she is retiring at the end of the 2008 school year. Her daily operational practice with the principals is mirrored by the executive director of elementary education. She is in every one of her secondary buildings once a week for an hour or two. She plans the visits every week on the same day; she will go on walkthroughs with principals. Because of this she feels closer to the classroom and proudly states, "I know 90% of all the secondary teachers by name." Margaret describes her relationship with the principals by saying,

> Sometimes we have business to do or I just listen to their angst. They may ask me
>
> specific questions. We have a book on each one of my schools and I'll usually take that

with me, then, if I have things that I need to talk about with them, then I'll bring it up. If they give me stuff and say, would you please take a look at this or do that. I take careful notes and then I get back to them. I send out a bulletin to Principals every Monday that has the nuts and bolts in it. It's my job to be their cheerleader their coach. It's my job to move them as far as I can in this direction. Honest courageous conversation. They know that I am there to help them. I have high expectation for the principals, I will not accept the status quo. I am trying to role model myself. I am a firm believe in lists. My number one priority is the principals. I have to make them look awesome.

Blue Mountain Professional Development Activities

Professional-development activities for principals in the Blue Mountain School District took shape through (a) district initiated meetings, (b) professional-development funds, (c) books studies, (d) emerging administrator mentoring, (e) evaluations. The next section describes the events and activities for each of the strategies that the district office engaged in during the period of the study.

Meetings. Blue Mountain District had an elaborate design for providing meeting time with administrators. These meetings were the primary vehicle of professional-development activities provided by the district-level administration with a concentration on teaching and learning

The school year began with the entire administrative team of about 90 administrators, including certificated and classified supervisors attending a retreat. The "all administrator" leadership retreat was held in August for 2 or 3 days where 90% of the agenda was for relationship building. These meetings were held three additional times a year, and all

administrators were required to attend regardless of the function of the program supervised such

as food service, maintenance or transportation. The purpose of these meetings was to provide a

time that all district administrators could come together as a community and be on the same page

and all see the collective vision of the district.

Table 4

Meeting Schedule

Meeting Title	Time 145 meeting hours a year	Agenda	Attendees
All administrator leadership retreat	Two or three days in August and an additional three times for 2 hours	Cabinet sets agenda relationship building see the collective vision of the district overall leadership training	All administrators approximately 90 attendees outside consultant sometimes
School improvement meeting	Once a month 2 hours	District office sets agenda Specific teaching and learning activities to identify what students are to learn	Variable Principals sometimes all or secondary and elementary or feeder pattern director of teaching and learning
Sectional meetings/job alike	Three hours once a month 55-day contract for district and 36 of those being studio work	District provided training in instructional leadership Lenses on learning elementary and research on best practices for secondary, Math Studio	Whole district building administrator Elementary outside consultant
ATI conference	Summer conference 3-day workshop	Professional learning communities attend Dufour conference	Core cabinet, Director of Human Resources, and Assessment, one principal and 30 building teachers
Early release Days	21 early release days 2 hours in length	Collaboratively planned principal and district office Building based professional learning with specific focus district annual goals	Principals district-level administration and all teachers

One district administrator described the activities of the 2007 retreat as setting the vision for the school year and for the district,

A big part of our scope and sequence of professional development is our retreat. We try to wean these ideas throughout the year. "*Good to Great"* by Jim Collins, is a book we read a long time ago, it continues to be a big thing. We're reading the "*Extraordinary Leader"* by Zanger and Folkman this summer. We also had Alison Olzendam from "Powerful Teaching and Learning" come and present the book in January. She gave an overview of the whole book and we're going to have principal teams working together in the spring to present for the retreat next year.

The "all administrator" meetings are part of the overall leadership development. Sometimes an outside consultant was asked to present for a couple of hours on a topic related to leadership and perceived leadership successes. Administrative meetings began at 2:00 p.m., and there was nothing stopping the clock from going until 8:00 p.m., but typically they were done by 5:30 p.m. The starting time is important to note, because the district-level administration had made it a priority to not have principals out of their buildings on a school day as much as possible.

Another type of meeting was designed specifically for building principals was called school improvement meetings. These occurred once a month and principals met with the director of teaching and learning for 2 hours. These Teaching and Learning meetings included time for specific professional-development activities. Sometime the participants are just elementary principals. Sometimes it is with the "feeder pattern," sometimes it's all building principals, it depends on the district-office curriculum department needs to share with building administrators.

The agenda was determined by the district office, and is perceived by principals as "telling us what they need." Or as another principals depicts it, "When it is a meeting provided by the teaching and learning group, it's the curriculum director and issues for the district." The time was typically framed in the organizational option of professional-learning communities. The focus for teaching and learning professional development is to identify what we are teaching students. How do we know what they're learning and what are we going to do if they are not learning? District-wide administration always asks three umbrella questions as a basis for thought:

1. Are we improving our understanding of effective instruction?

2. Are we improving our understanding of effective assessment practices?

3. Are we improving our understanding of effective intervention work?

Another part of the School Improvement meetings on the agenda is driven by issues that they have in common: a sharing of ideas about issues, problems or concerns. This portion of the meeting is viewed as a collaborative time by principals. Typically the meetings are part professional development and part nuts and bolts.

An additional meeting was the whole district building administrator days, where elementary principals or secondary principals, met at a school and had a common in-service. These sessions are planned and delivered by district-level administration or hired consultants for three hours once a month. This is called a "sectional meeting" or more commonly referred to as a "job alike." In Blue Mountain, these full-day sessions are for principals to research best practices of teaching and learning. These sessions focus on getting principals trained and provide intensive professional development. An example of an agenda for a day of Sectional meeting in 2008 includes: supporting generative leaning through de-privatizing our practices, and constructing

knowledge in mathematic classrooms through collaborative inquiry and a video study on focus questions.

Elementary principals had been attending *"Lenses on Learning"* to teach how to observe and what to look for, in a strong math classroom, where there is a real math community and kids are focused on learning. Principals are learning what they should expect to see in the classroom and how to help teachers get there. This was a supervision model which included 35 hours of professional development about how to supervise elementary teaching.

Another component of the "sectional meetings" for secondary principals and teachers is the math studio classroom. Ion this meeting, teachers and administrators observe a teacher that's been trained to use the "Lenses on Learning" methods. These teaching/observation sessions are facilitated by an outside consulting firm. The training itself includes principals begins with principals actually doing the math assignment their self as a student, and then watching a classroom. They learn by doing; they are to ask themselves, if this was a teacher in their school what questions could they ask to prompt deeper thinking. Secondary principals do best teaching practices research in mathematical education and then doing the studio classroom. The facilitator/coach works with all of principals and teachers as she/he teaches that one period. For example, the team all sat down and watched the student engagement in the math studio classroom as a focus for a Session 1 day. It is express as coaching the teachers and coaching the principals in observation skills and language.

The secondary principals had been involved with a consulting group from the Teachers development Group about Mathematics which had a 55-day contract with 36 of those being studio work. Within that is a 5-day course called "Best Practices in Mathematics" that principals are involved in and there's a 4-day course called "Principal Leadership Institute," which is all

about the effective math instruction. In each of Blue Mountain District's secondary schools, there's a "Math studio classroom" where the consult comes and works with a particular building coaches and the teachers. The studio days are offered to buildings. One teacher is a building studio teacher and the other five resident teachers from the building get to go and "fishbowl" the day: to sit and think about the math that this teacher is going to teach. It's a learning day for those teachers. The building team consists of the studio teacher, a math coach, and the principal, who is the lead. The principal takes the active role in meetings, readings and talk. The consultant group is 6 days in their school spread throughout the year and conducts six studios throughout the district. In some buildings it's the entire math department that's part of it. Principals can potentially be involved with about 25 to 27 days worth of professional development about Mathematics. This has all been done during their work day, from 2:00-5:00 p.m. One principal described the math studio in this way,

> So I sat down with this teacher and said okay I'm really going got talk about your lesson very differently than we have in the past. There's the teaching piece of it and their math piece of in. We're right on the edge of that springboard to take teachers into that deeper understanding of math and I think that's where the district is going to be going is giving us plenty of training for our teachers now that they have taught us what to look for and how to talk about it

> We have been meeting with a consultant from the University of Washington throughout the year. They have had at least 10 sessions with the presenter. Principals go in and actually do a math lesson so that we understand what it means to try and grapple with those math concepts. We practice solving math problems and dialogue about how the differences in your experiences influence how you solve the problem.

Principals are also required to attend with teachers, a 3-day workshop on assessment. The district sends teams of five teachers, with their principal, to an annual ATI conference or Professional-Learning Communities conference in the summer. Over the last few years, Blue Mountain District has sent 60-80 people to a summer assessment for learning conference in Portland. This is a major financial investment and a statement by the Superintendent that it is really important. There's been professional learning community work by Defour. Every principal was sent to a Dufour conference on professional-learning communities. There was an expectation that Blue Mountain was going to operate and function as a district as a professional learning community.

Additional meeting time for principals and teachers is accommodated with 21 early-release days, a portion of which are reserves for building based professional learning activities. They are spread out throughout the calendar. They are carefully planned in collaboration with the principals with specific intentional focus. These early release days follows district annual goals.

Professional Development Funds

Each principal in District was provided with $1,000 a year, to be used for activities that they selected. This money was mostly spent by principals on association membership dues and attending local ESD or regional meetings. Every third year the principals are also provided with an additional $1,500 to attend a national conference of their choice but it has to tie into the district goals. They are required to present to all of the administrators information from the conference. "The challenge is bottling-up that excitement and keep it focused on our efforts and

initiatives, sometimes it can distract us and we have to acknowledge that" (District Administrator).

Additional funds are spent by district-level administration to contract outside consultants to facilitate learning at a district level or building principals are provided funds to hire outside consultants for training. One principal responded to the offer by saying,

> I've attended ASCD conferences those have probably been the strongest conferences. For the money and the time involved I don't find that the most powerful professional development. The most valuable professional development is the things that I'm doing with my teachers. We have a building staff development committee and those of us who went to ATI lead the professional development in our building. We were the deliverers and practiced together. That's where I've learned the most, is when I'm learning with my teachers.

The district provides lucrative building budgets to principals to use at their discretion with approval from their supervisor. One principal commented that the turning point for her building staff was when she funded the "thoroughbred" teachers to attend a summer conference about assessment provided by Rick Stiggens. This assessment training became the stimulus for change in her building. The district now sends 60 to 80 teachers a year to the 4-day training.

Professional-development funds are also used in the summer institute for administrators and teachers. The District has a key note speaker usually a popular researcher, the summer of 2009 will have Doug Reeves or Marzano, and in 2008 the keynote speaker was Dillon William author of *Inside the Black Box.* Prior to that they had Ruby Payne speak. Blue Mountain District is part of the Washington Alliance for Better Schools and Boeing supports the districts' work with additional professional-development funds. Blue Mountain School District at the time of

this study had a 5.1% fund balance. Salary expenditures account for 81% of the districts operating budget.

Book Studies

The Superintendent selects annually the books the administrators are going to study and administrators know that the book they are reading for the retreat is the superintendent's direction; that's where her thinking is, reading the book is a directive. See Appendix 3 for a list of books studied in Blue Mountain School District. The executive director for secondary and/or elementary facilitates the book study. The process included participation in a collegial discussion and included self reflection. There was a collaborative agreement among participants about how the book study was going to be conducted. Often the director would set-up protocols or ways to debrief the chapter, but typically the format was for small group participation. There was active participation by the principals to share their own learning's from that particular reading. As one Principal explained,

> Each month we'll have a chapter, or talk about the strategies, how you would implement this in your own school. Do you have any evidence that this would work? You kind of think about those things, in between or at meetings. I could throw things out to building teachers, my professional development this month is focusing on this particular topic, what are your thoughts around this idea. We've been reading "*Sensible Math*," the way we do it everyone takes turns being the leader. We read a chapter a week and then whoever is the leader has to come up with a new way of following someone else's lead. It might be one technique one time and then a different one the next. You sit in teams of four I read you a line or two that I thought was particularly good. Then you tell me what

thoughts that brings to you and then I tell you why I chose it. Principals do this in the sectional meetings.

"It is very common in the district to see PLC's or book study teams sitting at Starbucks. Pull up to Starbucks at 7:00 in the morning, you'll see eight teachers sitting around the table with a book and their principal. That is not unusual to see at all. It's pretty amazing" (District Administrator).

District office is training principals on how to look for deepening understanding in math instruction and using the book study as a cornerstone professional-development activity. This year for elementary principals they have been focusing on mathematical thinking using "*Lenses on Learning,*" editors: Grant, Weinberg, Davidson, Nelson, Sassi, and Holland. This book study has prompted discussion around why student engagement is important. It has been associated with the district math initiative and the inquiry methodology. And the foundation for the Math studio work. Last year secondary did "*Lenses on Learning*" this year they are doing best practices, which is research in mathematical education and studio.

Emerging Administrators

Blue Mountain District has purposefully developed an induction program for new administrators and administrative interns. Each of the new principals is assigned to a mentor who has a similar position and similar school needs. This is more of an informal relationship so the new administrator has someone to talk with about what's coming up, what are some issues, as a new administrator, they might need to know about and how to handle them. In addition to the assignment of a mentor, there is required attendance for interns and new administrators in an induction program of eight sessions, 2 hours in length, with basic information on budgeting ,

hiring, ELRS and GLE's. Participants are given notebooks and handouts with opportunities to ask questions.

Evaluations

The evaluation system for principals is based on the requirements guided by state level regulations and was not seen as significant in providing meaningful feedback. As a formative assessment it is a standard process, they have goal conferences in September to set goals for the year. The executive directors gather data (student discipline data, graduation rate, attendance) weekly and then do a midyear evaluation. They are observed for formative assessment as they complete a variety of responsibilities: leading staff, meeting, doing walkthroughs, attending evening events. Formative assessment evaluations are seen as "a broad stroke picture of how to evaluate them" (District Administrator). As one Principal explained,

> I don't see the evaluation system as being professional development at least for me. The professional development comes along when I have an issue and I go ask for help. It's like right now professional development instead of that big umbrella. Executive Directors have a lot more to talk about because I have a real close relationship with them. By the time we get around to the evaluation those lessons have already come and gone over and learned, rather than here is an evaluation and here's an area we can all grow. The one on one professional development comes as the issues come up rather than the evaluation time line.

The teacher evaluation system is completed by principals following the state guidelines. Principals view this as a traditional practice, one principal commented that it's "probably an ineffective use of my time and theirs." and "not a real valuable process in itself." The same

comments were made about the principal evaluation process; it is a standard format that was described as "a beautiful document," "I feel honored and very valued."

Findings

As in the case study of Greenhill School District the findings are presented in alignment with the strategies of best practices for school Districts as identified in the literature review. This framework serves to guide and organize the data analysis. Do the professional activities provided by Blue Mountain district administrators exemplify best practice as identified in the research: (a) providing a vision and focus of expectations, (b) facilitation of a professional culture and collaborative relationships, (c) providing feedback on performance including evaluation, and (d) focus on aligned curriculum and teaching strategies.

Providing a Vision and Focus of Expectations

The literature review described a consistent emphasis on the importance of establishing a district vision as an essential component of effective schools. Academic achievement is always the highest priority in Blue Mountain District. Three important questions guide Blue Mountain District, they permeate a culture of collaboration where everyone is asked to take responsibility to move student learning forward toward district goals:

1. What do we teach and how?

2. How do we know if students have learned what we have taught them?

3. How do we intervene if students haven't learned something? (See Appendix A)

In 2007-2008 the common direction is Math. For the past 3 years it was reading and when the district provided staff development for principals and teachers it was all about reading. This year, and for next year as well, the focus will be on math. There is continuity about the

things that really matter and curriculum and instruction issues are key to the overall focus. The 2008-2009 priorities are all under the umbrella statement: "All students by name and need." This emphasis is on making addressing the need of diverse learners the priority for the year. One of the district administrators described the leadership of the Superintendent as follows,

Our superintendent has a beautiful combination of being absolutely clear on her focus points, which are student learning achievement and high expectations and relationships, which are her two main themes. She's very clear about that. She doesn't micromanage how it happens. She monitors but there is very much a sense of trust. The superintendent provides the direction otherwise each department would be off on its own agenda. She came with a teaching and learning attitude.

A key need is for administrators to be on the same page as teachers in terms of staff development. In past years, there was a disconnect between the two, where administrators would be sent off to workshops to learn certain things and teachers would be sent off to workshops to learn more about pedagogy and the things that we've done. Now there is a perception that they are working together and learning together, as articulated by a District Administrator,

I think we all need growth: being able to sit back and determine what's essential and what's not essential. Instructional leadership is a way of being. I think with the professional development they are beginning to identify the evidence you should see in kids when it is happening. It is a collective sense that we are all learners together. Professional development to me is opportunities to interact locally, regionally and nationally with other professionals in, perpetual learning. That is the most effective when it happens in my job at my work site. It is powerful stuff.

One of the district administrators' developed a model of the focus of the district. She describes it this way:

> Blue Mountain School District is about professional-learning communities. Three questions guide all of our work in a setting and culture of collaboration where everyone takes responsibility to move student learning forward toward district goals. This model is what we've have for the last couple of years. We developed in collaborative with principals. The columns are just to be able to say, with principals these are the parts of learning that we're absolutely supporting in every way possible. We know you have other priorities, that always happen, but these are where the district is moving. We're going to have focused support systems for you as we develop these areas.

Professional development is best if it is initiated by what teachers feel they need and what the district or the principal feels they need. There has to be a balance. It needs to be on-going, supported, based on good research; it should not be hit and miss. Has to be valued by all parties and seen value added to it. And then it needs to be evaluated, followed through. Did this really make a difference? Professional development needs to be authentic and meet the needs of groups or individuals.

Table 5

Guide for Learning

Question:	Question:	Question:
What do we teach and how?	How do we know if student shave learned what we have taught them?	How do we intervene if students haven't learned something? Students have learned it and are ready to move on?
Content, literacy, math science, social studies Grade level expectation our curriculum Power standard our priorities	Formative assessment everyday Summative snap shot in time Classroom based assessment	Based on assessment Select appropriate curriculum materials Select appropriate instructional practices. Address student barriers to success such as poverty or special needs
2008- 2009 priorities	2008 -2009- priority	2008-2009 priority
Mathematics Increase rigor Deepen comprehension Posted learning targets Increase student discourse	Assessment FOR learning	All students by name and need
Literacy Increase rigor Deepen comprehension Posted learning targets Increase student discourse	Formative assessments Common assessments to change instruction	Address needs of diverse learners especially ELL and Special Ed. Pyramid of interventions

Facilitation of a Professional Culture and Collaborative Relationships

Principals did not feel as if they had a strong voice in the district. The district leadership

is seen as top down style and that it has worked well in Blue Mountain district. The district office

has high expectations for us and there is continuity about the things that really matter, curriculum and instruction. The cabinet and the superintendent set the tone for what is going to be happening in the district. Blue Mountain adopted the PLC model for communication in 2006, and continues to remain focused with its use as a model for communication. The frame for all communication that is clearly adopted throughout the administration: (a) Are we improving our understanding of effective instruction? (b) Are we improving our understanding of effective assessment practice? (c) Are we improving our understanding of effective intervention work? These are referred to as the "umbrella statement" by one district-office administrator. It was collaboratively developed and guides the professional learning for the district. The district-office administration promoted collaborative work groups or learning communities that respected differences, activated and deepened commitment. One principal reflected on the relationship to district administration and said,

> A couple of years ago we adopted PLC community work and that's been one of the best things that we've done. We've always been a collaborative district but I think the focus of our work is so much clearer. In every team we're all working toward the some ends and know how each team is contributing toward these goals. I think that the clarity of our focus is what's has really helped us. Professional-learning communities are the vehicle for communication and dialogue around instruction and learning is what occurs with administrators with each other and with district-office administrators. It's as if they do not have anything else to talk about. They are eager to engage in the conversations and learning. Professional-learning communities answered the need for internal instruction and external organizational need.

I identified two principals whose application of specific desired leadership behaviors appeared to be a determining factor in the types of supports provided by the district office. One principal who demonstrated superior skills was denied the resources until other leadership in the district gained the same level of competency. To support their professional-development needs, principal's report relying on the personal relationships they have with district-level administration, with one another, and on the networks they have outside of the district.

Providing Feedback on Performance Including Evaluation

Evaluation is a term with which teachers and administrators are very familiar. It has become synonymous with the term *supervision*. The directors of secondary and elementary principals provide the key link to supervision and communication with the principals. They serve as the connection to communication with the superintendent and as a guiding mentor for individual principal needs. They planned weekly, hourly, individual meeting with each principal at their building. This is a very hands-on approach to developing a relationship of confidence and trust. During this time, the director and the principal may do a walk through or discuss a specific book they have been reading, or dealing with a building level crisis. The information gathered during these weekly activities is then shared at the cabinet meeting with the Superintendent. This method of leadership from the district office has created a close relationship with the principals. Both directors had moved away from bureaucratic practices by visiting schools and becoming deeply immersed in instruction. From their unique positions and roles they identified linkages, promoted partnerships, translated knowledge about reform and fostered collaborative relationships among schools and district administration.

Although the formative process of evaluation is completed in a traditional manner, with goal conferences and annual evaluations, the goals are created in a collaborative fashion and based on specific data for the school the close relationship and day to day knowledge that the Supervisor has with the principals. This tends to makes the process more meaningful. Principals perceive that they determine their own needs within the building. It's about the communication of high expectations and being connected enough to help set attainable measurable goals.

Focus on Aligned Curriculum and Teaching Strategies

Team walks were the first professional development for principals and was initiated by the Superintendent. The principals started going into classrooms with a focus on student learning. Then there was a focus on nine characteristics of high performing schools. Then came team walks, with the first intense work on literacy. A studio approach was used and a consultant agency was brought in to support the professional-development activities.

Data is very accessible in this district. It has been made available by a district-level director of assessment. He gives the principals data and shows them how to interpret it. The data drive the school decision making and instruction in classrooms. The assessment director works with a cadre of teachers and principals from all buildings. Teachers and principals all have what is called a "dashboard." Any kind of data that the district has is made readily available and easy to use for teachers and principals. For example, a building principal can ask for WASL data and have it broken down by teacher, by student, and see growth from year to year. Principals perceive this as a valuable form of professional development. The district also has a trimester assessment, which provided benchmark information about how kids are doing. "We have some

assessments that have been developed by the district that are very closely lined with our curriculum" (Principal).

The District office has changed over the years, they have really identified a set of best practice and they are sending entire teams of teachers and administrators from schools to workshops and seminars and conventions to hear first hand what the best practice are. District-level administration is perceived by principals as investing a lot to increase capacity for these new techniques and best practices, and they have been more concrete in identifying what those are. "It's critical that they know from the big picture what we're trying to accomplish and that we listen to their perspective." "They need to feel a sense of urgency. Need to know capacity for leadership what that looks like because they cannot do it alone." "I want to show them a road map. To actually show them the document, so they do not have to guess" (District-office administrator). One principal responded by stating,

My greatest professional development is the professional development I do with my teachers; it is by far what makes me stronger. I think my best professional development is attending ATI with my teachers and participating in this math studio work. Of all of the things that they are being asked to do for their professional development, I like to have my hands on. Being in the classrooms, just on an informal basis is the best professional development. It makes me understand the perspective of the teacher and that's truly what I care about. My job is to make sure that a lot of things don't go to district office. My job is also to make sure my teachers are well supported

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to explore district-office administration activities in providing professional development to practicing principals in two school districts. As an aid to the reader, this final chapter of the dissertation restates the research problem and reviews the major methods used in the study. The major sections of this chapter summarize the results and discuss their implications. The literature and evidence from this study revealed that the district Administration plays a significant yet overlooked role in principal leadership. This case study was designed to find (a) the district-office practices regarding professional development for principals, (b) the perceptions of both district-office administration and principals of the professional development offered, (c) how the professional development changed principal and district leadership practices. The research drew attention to the complexity of professional development. The findings from the literature review in this study confirm the presence of four major strategies: (a) providing a vision and focus of expectations, (b) facilitation of a professional culture and collaborative relationships, (c) providing feedback on performance including evaluation, (d) focus on aligned curriculum and teaching strategies.

The building principal has more accountability for student achievement than ever before. Today's principals are expected to be visionary, instructional leaders. The school district-level administration is poised to provide professional development to principals, to guide them in meeting the demands of higher levels of accountability. Research supports that Superintendents and district-level administration matter. The district-level administration is in a unique position to provide professional development to principals. This study seeks to understand what it is that

two school district Administrations do to support professional development for principals and what the perception of these activities is for those affected principals.

This study presents a holistic view of the role of two district-level administrations in providing professional development to principals. A detailed description of district administration and principal perceptions of professional-development activities and relationships is provided. The researcher looked at the practices of district administrators in providing principal professional development. No specified system exists for collecting data about the effectiveness and influence of district-office professional-development activities. The case studies relied chiefly on interviews and collection of district internal documents. Nonprobability, convenience sampling was utilized. The researcher contacted district-office administrators that supervised and/or contributed to principal professional development using the same process as mentioned in the methods section.

Summary of the Findings

District administrators are beginning to focus on principal professional development. Professional growth activities are required components of the principals' work. They are most often planned and developed by district administration in coordination with the Superintendent. This study proposed to shed some light on the role of district-level administration in creating opportunities for principals to increase their skills and knowledge. This chapter presents the findings beginning with a presentation of the findings as they align with the strategies identified in the literature review as best practices of the district administration. The chapter ends with a discussion of the implications for practice and suggestions for further research.

Understanding that the district office is in a position to provide leadership, may help others to develop strategies to meet the diverse needs of principals. The district-office leaders we

need to manage these efforts must be skilled at facilitation, consensus building and the ability to relate to the personal goals of a broad range of constituents. District actions matter. This study shows how districts create structures for professional development that extend beyond the meetings and into the culture of the entire district. The system of support should not assume what works for one will work for all but should instead be tuned in to capture the individual needs of building leaders. The activities conducted by the districts in this case study are doeable, affordable, and while cause and effect is difficult to ascertain, certainly don't compromise learning. Table 6 provides a summary of the activities that are conducted in each district of the study.

Table 6

Comparison of Activities

Activity	Greenhill District	Blue Mountain District
Meetings	81 hours total annual time	148 hours total annual time Longer sessions, district directed Focus on district goals
Book studies	Superintendent selects books. Executive director facilitates and set protocols for the discussion	Meet on own time District office and principals self organized
Professional-development funds	$1000 a year membership dues, every third year additional $1,500 for national conference	Funds are applied for training on school-wide strategies district application process. Additional $4000 dollars for memberships national and state level conferences
Emerging administrator training	New administrators are assigned a mentor in an informal relationship. Induction program includes eight, two hour sessions induction to the district policies and procedures	Meet several times a year to discuss leadership philosophy. 20 participants possible administrator candidates
Evaluation as professional development	Goal conferences, formal assessment process guided by state requirements. Meet weekly with supervisor for informal feedback	In process of developing a system based on standards, similar to teachers evaluation, with performance targets. Also use 360 survey

General themes emerged, providing insight into the professional-development activities. These two high performing districts promoted professional development for principals that aligned to the strategies identified through the literature review: (a) providing a vision and focus of expectations, (b) facilitation of a professional culture and collaborative relationships, (c)

providing feedback on performance including evaluation, (d) focus on aligned curriculum and teaching strategies. The ISLLC standards fall in close alignment with the strategies identified in the literature review except for "understanding responding to and influencing the political social legal and cultural context." The district administration shapes the leadership of principals through the professional-development activities they conduct, the behaviors they model and the relationships they promote (or do not promote). This study supports the premise that district administrators are critical players in the improvement process of a district and schools. In a context with ever increasing demands from local, state and federal agencies and constituencies, they broker knowledge, expertise, and resources across to principals and schools with diverse learners

Providing a Vision and Focus of Expectations

Several studies expressed the significant role the superintendent plays in leading educational reform (Leithwood et al., 2004). Not only did the level of the superintendent attentiveness to instruction indicate the level of its importance but the superintendent theory of action also developed the foundation for the theory of action of district-office staff. The opportunity to design and implement appropriate support structure increases when the Superintendent and district office develop a common understanding other districts' goals (Togneri & Anderson, 2003). Both Superintendents led by example, often choosing the "invisibility" of a play or movie director in order to allow the leadership and expertise of others to emerge as well. In one word, each superintendent empowered people, without divesting herself of the inherent authority of her position. This empowerment of district-office administration gave them the authority to lead without feeling restricted to ask for specific

guidance and clarification. They lead and supported principals in their individual instructional leadership style. David and Shields (2001) concluded that significant improvement in instruction did occur with active support and effective leadership from the district office. Although within the context of this study it is difficult to make the same correlation, state and federal assessments showed continued growth in student achievement.   District-level cabinet members inform and corroborate the needs of principals to the Superintendent. This is the method used to establish the focus of these professional-development activities. It appears that the Superintendents' agendas drive the activities of the district-level administration and in turn the building principals. The structures the districts have, establish a strong foundation for principal professional development, although increasing the opportunities for feedback, will be an important consideration for sustaining progress and moving forward. In addition to creating more opportunities for feedback, implementing the structures that will support further collaboration and risk-taking will ensure a focus on continuous improvement an individual accountability for student achievement. The learning community that currently exists is in beginning stages. Dufour (2006), in his study of three districts and the development of professional-learning communities, emphasizes that school cultural change will not occur without intentional leadership. Each of the districts studied used strategies to engage staff in leaning together, building shared knowledge. When principals were asked what supports would most benefit them in their efforts to be instructional leaders, the overwhelming response was time to support the professional development of their staff.

Each of these two districts had communicated a consistency of focus to develop high quality instruction. The district administration works to support the focus through a service orientation that places principals at the center of instructional improvement. This focus has translated into district-wide professional-development activities for principals. This emphasis

and professional-development focus on improving instruction helps principals understand what is expected and provides a schema of how to live up to the stated expectations. The district administrators and principals in these districts have the language of instructional leadership and the focus of supervising instructional practice firmly embedded in their practice. Research has repeated pointed to the presences of a clear and shared focus as a keystone for improving districts (Bora, 2003; Elmore, 2000; Forsyth, 2008; Waters & Marzano, 2006). District-level administration set expectations for the principals and used multiple methods of professional development to increase clarity of what to pursue. They developed long range and short term goals and set non-negotiable goals related to student achievement.

Facilitation of a professional culture and collaborative relationships. Beyond building consensus among stakeholders for a shared focus, larger districts face challenges in communicating that focus. The communication of this focus in these two districts began through a consensus building process initiated by the superintendent, included representative stakeholders. The superintendent was viewed as the torch bearer for the focus and vision. The message was clear and permeated the core of the actions taken to provide professional development to principals. The superintendent had worked to develop a close relationship with immediate cabinet members. Researchers have identified the school Superintendent as key to establishing long lasting effective systematic change (DuFour. 2006; Patterson, 1998). In interviews, principals repeatedly commented that the superintendent was the factor that shifted the focus onto student learning and teaching. The superintendent established a sense of urgency for accountability in student achievement. The principals interviewed, spoke of the high regard they had for the superintendent and the level of commitment she projected to the community and district for

student achievement results. Principals relayed that the superintendent has made support of school principals a district office priority. DuFour emphasized the creation of a district vision and setting nonnegotiable goals. In each of the districts studied the Superintendent was viewed as the catalyst behind this work.

This study also described how decisions were made for the focus of professional-development activities for principals through the collaborative focused leadership of the Superintendent. When district-level administration set expectations for the schools, principals responded to the expectations by seeking help from the same people who set the expectations. Principals feel supported with good working relationships between district leaders and principal colleagues. District-level administration communicated their priority responsibility was to meet principal needs. They motivate principals to accept the personal challenge of becoming better, to be the best they can be and accept nothing less of themselves than the best. The relationship among district-level administration and principals creates a "sense of belonging" that extends beyond the school district to the broader community. Many administrators had been in the same community and district for over 5 years. The relationships are instrumental in negating feelings of isolation between principals. Principals sense that the district has an investment in their success; this translates into the district culture of success for teachers and student learning. It is a district culture. Each principal interviewed said they felt comfortable talking to their colleagues or picking up the phone and calling someone at the district office for help when they needed it. These district-level administrators serve as the conduit for relationships and communication with the principal and the interactions exhibited interdependence, collaboration communication and reciprocity. As Elmore indicated in the literature the interactions of district administration were characterized by a distributive leadership perspective that focused on enhancing the skills and

knowledge of principals, on creating a common culture or expectations and on holding individuals accountable for their contribution. This demonstrates a movement of district-office administration away from a bureaucratic practice toward new emergent collaborative behaviors (Pajak, 1989). The data also indicate, in this study that the emotional intelligence of the leader or leaders (Goldman, 2001) is an important factor in the motivating individuals and group to tackle the challenges inherent in school improvement. The district administration had earned the trust and confidence of the principals.

Copeland and Knapp (2006) identified building professional-learning communities that value learning as the second of five components in Leading for Learning Framework. Successful leaders they said build work cultures where learning opportunities and mutual accountability for improving instruction is fostered. Essential tasks for building professional-learning communities include building trusting relationships which involved the leader modeling empathy and mutual respect. Building and district administrators articulated relationships as essential to professional development.

The principals conveyed a strong sense of trust to the Superintendent and district-level administration this was usually based on personal relationships, or the availability of resources and on centralized services they see benefit them directly. To trust fully the autonomy of the principal, district office relies on establishing relationships with the principals to understand their individual strengths and areas of needed growth. The two districts differ in their approach to leadership from the district administration. Blue Mountain was much more directive and controlled much of the professional-development time and specified the agenda. In Greenhill, the relationship was more collaborative and loosely structured. The principals took a more active role in establishing agendas and had more of a choice in the professional development that was

provided. In both districts, the superintendent put together a skilled team of district administrators who had the same mindset and are very interested in research supported instructional practices that increase student achievement.

Providing feedback on performance including evaluation. The research of Skrla, Scheurich, and Johnson (2000) reported that district-level leadership was responsible for developing internal accountability systems as well as plotting the course through external accountability demands. This necessitates the district administration bringing together what is required from external accountability measures with an internal system that guides staff at every turn level in terms or norms and expectation for teaching and learning (Togneri & Anderson, 2003).

The district goal documents were written annually by district administrators. The documents included for both districts a major instructional practice reform effort. Regardless of the exact phrasing the documents focused each year on improvement in teaching and learning and professional development.

All principals recognize some connection between building level and district goals. They reported on WASL data and the building goals were directly embedded annually into schools improvement plans. "It wasn't difficult to have the alignment because they were all based on data (Principal). Even with this in place a connection to district and building goals did not appear to align with the formal evaluation process. Data collection and dissemination of student data including specific curricular strand data analysis was integrated into the conversations about teaching and learning and use as a measurement for student learning accountability. It was not possible to draw a relationship of this data with a formal evaluation. Informal conversation and

professional-development activities with district administration aligned but beyond that the connection was lost.

Focus on aligned curriculum and teaching strategies. District-office leadership recognized that the establishment of a culture of adult learning, envisioned by Fullan (1991) required the kind of decision making and relationship building that fostered the sense that each school was a learning community within the larger learning community of the district. Leaders create focus on learning by persistently and publicly focusing their attention and that of others on learning and teaching Copeland and Knapp (2006). This study had a significant match of district support to principal identified need in the area of supervision of teaching strategies. Efforts to situate the district actions in the building with an emphasis on learning and teaching are similar to those seen in other large districts (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Resnick & Hall, 1998). Such an emphasis is theoretically designed to ensure the common vocabulary and shared language result in common practices aligned to the language. Supporting principals to be strong supervisors of instructional quality will better equip them to mentor teaching staff in instructional skills and techniques likely to increase student achievement. Principals and district administrators alike were clear of the districts focus on teaching and learning.

The emphasis on training principals on the techniques of walkthroughs and common standards for good teaching was designed to support their knowledge and skill, but does not necessarily take into account the preexisting skills and knowledge the principals possess already. It does not take into account the building staff conditions including staff knowledge and skills or levels of trust and readiness. Principals would like more opportunity to self-select activities. This indicates that the same training type and content may not be enough to meet individual needs of

the principals to act as instructional leaders. The districts concern around a principal's self-proclaimed knowledge and skill is dependent on the relationship the principal has with the direct supervisor. This solution may prove problematic for a district working to create a shared language and vision around powerful instruction. Currently there are no defined indicators or standards used within either district to monitor whether self-proclaimed knowledge and skill translate into actual practice. Even a large district does not have the resources necessary to manage such a high level of autonomy.

In addition, both districts had started to work with teachers who were interested in becoming future building principals. District administration meets with these administrative candidates to teach them district policies and to engage them in discussion about the role of instructional leader and to explore strategies to provide building level leadership.

The findings show that both districts made financial resources available to principals for professional development in this study. The district decision of fiscal support flows to buildings through grants and a specific dollar amount allocated to each principal. Principals were able to self-select attendance at conferences provided by State and local agencies. This was viewed by principals as supportive, yet district administration reported that when the funds were used to attend conferences it sometimes "distracted" principals from the district initiatives. The findings further show mixed results for if attendance at local, state or national conferences translated into actions at the building level.

Understanding responding to and influencing the political social legal and cultural context. This ISLLC standard was not clearly evident in either of the Districts researched in this study. Both Superintendents were credited for the skills and aptitude

for engaging the external environment. In interviews administrators in both districts reported they felt strong support form their communities. In Blue Mountain trust and support for the schools in the community was noticeably shaken as evident by a failing bond issue. In Blue Mountain, the superintendent was substantially involved in the procurement of a large financial commitment from neighboring big businesses. Both Superintendents were reported as highly visible in the community and were members of several organizations. Although the principals are held to a standard of engaging community members in student learning there was no training in this area provided by the district office. A principal in Greenhill commented that the superintendent would hear something from a community member and then he would have to explain the context of the statement. He felt somewhat irritated by the follow through of the superintendent and felt to some degree not supported because she would listen to the community member.

Implications for Practice

As districts review their own practices related in response to research, ISLLC standards, and state and federal reform the findings from this study offer suggestions for practice. The list of what activities a principal needs to have competence in is defined in the research, district-office administration is faced with increasing challenges as they assume responsibility for the success of building level leadership. The professional development the district administration provides and the perception of these activities by district administration and by principals can serve as a reflective tool for current district administrations. It is important to note, however, school districts are complex organizations where reform strategies and practices do not operate in isolation. Principals and district administration are compelled to work together in order to hit the illusive targets of federal and state reform.

The literature, as well as this study show that district administration need to be engaged in providing a vision. District administrators need to provide consistent direction and communication of their short and long term goals. They need to provide consistent direction and communicate their short and long-term plans to principals. Further, that the communication is two-way. Principals viewed the superintendent as instrumental in the vision of the district, and that their charisma and leadership ability served as motivation to be successful building and district leaders. The devil is in the detail, a cohesive system has to find a balance of district level directives with the needs of the principals' individual buildings to enact the vision, while ensuring all components meet the same criteria for evidence of progress. The use of such criteria will help improve the quality of feedback and its ability to provide support and detailed information for growth.

District Administrators should strive to find the right combination of pressure to improve along with meaningful support. The evaluation system can serve as a measureable tool for accountability. The vision of Greenhill School District to develop collaboratively with principals a system of measurable standards gives clarity to performance expectations and accountability. A contradiction exists between evaluation and supervision. Skill building and training are also part of the process to develop successful leaders. District office leaders must also use informal and formal data to identify the individual needs of principals. Participating in professional development activities collaborative can build trust and promotes a learning community. Coaching and assisting principals as they implement strategies is influenced by the level of trust. Effective professional development balances the formal evaluation process with informal

supervision. Each of the districts in this study had informal supervision models which supported the development of a learning community but the formal system lacked clarity and meaning. District leaders need to collect data from frequent observations of principals and their buildings. They need to act on the data they collect acknowledging serious problems when they first appear and acting rapidly to make adjustments to solve them then use the data to report formally on specific related standards.

Another proposition is that as leaders, district administration designs professional-development activities it needs to make principals feel supported and develop a district culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth. The development of professional-learning communities is the direction that current research and this study supports as a means to accomplish effective management of the organization and collaboration with faculty and community members. This practice would allow the district administration to gather input and advice from principals to help ensure that they support the opportunities offered to meet the needs of building leaders. The finding from this study show that district leaders benefit from hands on activities about instructional practices and in learning methods to build the capacity of teachers. The current focus on teaching and learning has not provided for any additional professional development in methods to influence the political social legal and cultural context as identified in the ISLLC standards. District administration is often criticized as impersonal bureaucrats, but district administration must find ways to work within the given system to influence principal instructional leadership than more consistent and comprehensive use of criteria to determine what these leadership behaviors involve must be developed. According to a study of 105 California superintendents' perceptions of factors that are associated with principal success and or failure: more than 65% indicated that when

principals fail, they listed poor interpersonal skills as a reason, the second highest reason was poor decision-making (Davis, 1997). Interestingly, there was no mention of knowledge of teaching and learning. Effective professional-development programs may help principals address these weaknesses.

Like many others, this case study further developed the premise that there is not a single strategy or practice that the district office can provide. However these findings support the that the Superintendent and the district administration is more influential with building leaders When they follow the strategies identified in the research and the ISLLC standards. Principals value the relationship they have with district administration.

Suggestion for Further Research

This study poses at least three implications for further research. First, the study suggests that district-office administration is providing a focus on professional-development activities. A limitation of this inquiry is the size of the sample. While the study provided a rich opportunity to probe into developing an understanding of the districts practices in providing professional development, there are limitations in terms of generalization. While effort was made in this study to ground each claim or idea into the research base, specifically speaking to the role and practices of district administrative support is small.

Second, though it is believed that district administration can make a difference in school leadership, this study, did not examine whether the principals instructional leadership abilities actually improved or changed as a result of the professional-development activities provided by the district administration. Further study will need to evaluate whether principals are acting as instructional leaders and their behavior is impacted by the professional-development activities provided. It is necessary to delve deeper to understand whether that generalized professional

development provided by district administration is leading to improved instructional leadership that in turn supports improved student learning by studying the specific principals, their leadership styles and their school contexts.

Finally, another area that was not studied was the competence of the district-level administration. The competence of the district-level administration was never questioned by the principals interviewed, but to support the expected knowledge and skill to be gained through the activities provided, there needs to be a high level of leadership skill by the district administration. District administration is an untapped resource to reforming schools and increasing student achievement. We need to further learn about the roles of district-level administrators and their relationship to principals. We need to first identify who these district-level administrators are and why they seek district-office positions. We need to know how their work gets defined and who defines it. In the same context, understanding how formal and informal opportunities for feedback can inform the professional-development process for principals. Looking more closely at the role of formal and informal networks is another aspect of this study that would merit future work. Specifically, does the existence of informal networks increase the ability to individualize the professional development and focus on the specific needs of the principal? Does the existence of informal networks increase feelings of safety to admit to what you do not know in front of your peers and your supervisor?

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APPENDIX A: DISTRICT OFFICE SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

District-office interviews conducted individually

1. Tell me about your district. What are some of the unique characteristics?

    History, Leadership, Program, Staff, Community, Students

2. What sort of supports do you provide to principals to effectively meet the challenges/demands of leading their school?

    How do you know?   How do you respond?

3. How are decisions made about levels of support for building principals?

    Training Compensation   Decision-making authority

4. How do you communicate in the district with principals about important issues?

    Level of engagement Visioning

5. How do groups inside or outside the district affect the principals' ability to make decisions?

    Instruction, Building programs, Hiring, Budget

6. What measures of accountability are in place?

7. What else should I know about the district and its efforts to offer professional development to its' principals?

APPENDIX B: PRINCIPAL SEMISTRUCTURE INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Principal Interviews conducted individually

1. Tell me about your school. What are some of the unique characteristics?
2. What are the special challenges/demands of leading this school?
3. What sort of supports do you receive to effectively meet the challenges/demands of leading this school?
4. Describe the districts' decision-making structure, both formally and informally
5. How would you describe the level of autonomy you have in making these decisions?
6. Describe the impact of the professional development provided to you from the district office. (level of engagement)
7. What measures of accountability are in place?
8. What else should I know about the support your district provides you as a principal?

APPENDIX C: BOOK STUDY READING LIST FOR BLUE MOUNTAIN DISTRICT

Books for all administrators on leadership

- *"Good to Great"* by Jim Collins – Has been a common ground of conversation in the district for the last 4 years. Mukilteo is a good school district — how do we become great?

- *"Mind Set"* by Carol Dweck — Growth mindset vs. fixed mindset

- *"You are the Message"* by Roger Ailes — As educators and as administrators we are always communicating. This book gives practical suggestions on how to be effective.

- *"Encouraging the Heart"* by Kouzes and Posner — recognizing and rewarding others

- *"Bringing Out the Best in Others"*by T. Connellan — Ideas for helping people create consistently high performance.

Books related to Professional-learning communities which was a big theme in the district for the last three years.

Books by DeFour:

- *"Getting Started"*

- *"Whatever It Takes"*

- *"PLCs at Work"*

- *"Learning by Doing"*

- *"On Common Ground"*

Books related to literacy

- **"**What Really Matters for Struggling Readers"* by Allington

- *"The Art of Teaching Reading"* by Lucy Calkin

- *"Reading with Meaning"* by Debbie Miller

- *"Guiding Readers and Writers"* by Fountas and Pinnell

Books related to math

Comprehending Mathematics by Arthur Hyde