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A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF DISTRICT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
PRACTICES USING THE STANDARDS ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

Scott R. Carlson

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
Doctor of Education
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Document Origination Statement for Digital Commons @ NLU

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

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

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

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

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

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A THREE-PART DISSERTATION:

A PROGRAM EVALUATION OF DISTRICT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PRACTICES
USING THE STANDARDS ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

A CHANGE PLAN FOR DISTRICT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING
AND TEACHER COLLABORATION IN THE AREA OF
ELEMENTARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS INSTRUCTION

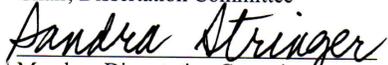
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DISTRICT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

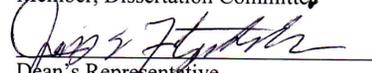
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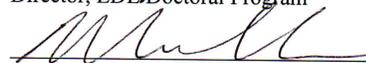
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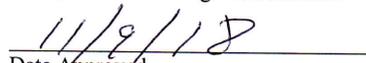

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ABSTRACT

This paper details an evaluation of the Shermerville School District's professional learning program for the purpose of understanding the major patterns and important nuances that give shape to staff development. The perceptions of teaching staff were compared to Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (2011) using the Standards Assessment Inventory-2. The research design followed a single-case study approach with a combination of survey and focus group methodologies. The goal was to determine to what extent the teaching staff perceive the impact of district professional development on their professional learning community. Teachers were also asked how we might strengthen our current learning designs. This evaluation looked for ways to begin the process of evaluating the real impact of professional development. Results were consistent with large-scale studies and reports by advocacy groups. Our teachers desire a greater voice in the planning and evaluation of their professional learning. Recommendations point to a cycle of continuous improvement with a professional learning plan that is guided by student results.

PREFACE

This program evaluation was inspired by my involvement in the school district's staff development committee. Board policy requires the district to form a representative group of teaching staff and administrators for the purpose of planning, implementing, and evaluating our professional development efforts. This is a challenging endeavor for any team. However, continuous improvement may just be the life-blood of a learning institution. If we expect our students to reach their potential growth targets, educators must also engage in a cycle of planning, execution, and reflection. The workplace and our students will enter is constantly changing. We have to evolve to meet those demands.

I strongly believe our professional learning designs must be developed in a collaborative manner – all teachers should have a voice at the table. This is an essential element of transformational learning and must be present for any organization that wishes to build the human and social capacity of its workforce. The culture and trust within our school buildings is largely dependent upon how the staff development committee operates. This fact was highlighted during my recent participation in contract negotiations.

Finally, I have my own professional learning to be a significant source of satisfaction and renewal. I entered the teaching profession as a school psychologist. Later, I took on the coordination of special education services. In order to transition to building leadership, I had to immerse myself in district-led professional learning within the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. My collaboration with talented and passionate educators has pushed me forward and kept me highly engaged in this profession. I want this same opportunity for all teaching staff under my supervision.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the sacrifices my family made in pursuit of this doctoral degree, specifically my wife. She is my coach, mentor, and biggest fan. I love you. There were many nights and weekends spent at the public library or secluded in the guest room. I could never have achieved my goal without support and encouragement from Tammy, Kyle, and Luke.

Thank you to Dr. Brian Wegley and the support of our administrative team. Thank you for investing in my professional development. It is a privilege to work for a school district that is committed to the continuous improvement of staff and the success of all children.

Thank you to my dissertation chair, Dr. Harrington Gibson, for all the meetings, virtual conferences, and thoughtful feedback. You made me a stronger writer and helped me to become a more critical thinker. I would also like to thank Dr. Sandra Stringer for her insights and perspectives.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the support and encouragement I received from my classmates. In particular, I am grateful for my friendship with Andy and Lauren. I've got your back!

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my boys,

Kyle Richard

and Luke Scott.

I am proud of you and I look forward to seeing you grow into
curious, passionate, life-long learners.

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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

At the core of any successful organization is a mindset of growth and risk-taking. Just as we consider the mindset of students in our schools, we must also recognize the mindset of adults in our organization and the brain-based learning experiences they need (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999, ch. 8; Dweck, 2006; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Kegan, 2000; Sousa, 2006). Given that “teacher quality is the single most powerful influence on student achievement” (Darling-Hammond, Chung-Wei, & Adamson, 2010, p. 10), it is vitally important that we search for ways to provide professional learning experiences that are sustained, connected to instructional practice, and promote collaboration. The purpose of professional learning is to increase the effectiveness of educators in our organizations, build capacity for emerging programs, and raise the achievement for all students. It is important that we respect the limited time of educators for professional learning and plan highly effective experiences. Unfortunately, there is little agreement among professional development researchers on the specific criteria for “effectiveness” (Guskey, 2003).

In 1994, the National Staff Development Council (now Learning Forward) developed their first set of Standards for Professional Development. These standards were intended to define the relationship between professional learning and its effects on educator practice and student learning. The Standards for Professional Learning (2011) are currently in their third edition. There are now seven standards organized around three broad areas of focus: Context, process, and content. Learning Communities, Leadership, and Resource standards make up the essential components of effective learning. Process

is divided into standards for Data, Learning Design, and Implementation. Outcomes represent the sole standard for content.

I evaluated the professional learning program in the Shermerville School District for the purpose of identifying areas of strength and areas that could be improved. The perceptions of Shermerville teaching staff were compared to the Professional Learning Standards, an external standard of desirability. By gathering data on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of professional learning in my district, my research informs a cycle of reflection or continuous improvement (Patton, 2008). Ultimately, this process will guide the work of the district's staff development committee and provide a strong vehicle for teacher voice. We know there is diversity in the adult learners of our organization. They have different developmental capacities for learning (Drago-Severson, 2009) and need different experiences to support their transformational growth.

Also, I am intrigued with the power of relationships between teachers and where they obtain their knowledge – social capital versus individual human capital (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Leana, 2011). We know teaching staff will experience different learning opportunities in different ways. It is important to consider structures for adult growth or transformational learning (Drago-Severson, 2008; Hord & Tobia, 2012). I want this program evaluation to begin a district conversation around which professional learning activities and structures are most likely to foster peer-driven change for the benefit of students. I am interested in learning how we can create structures that lead to teachers purposely directing their professional learning and contributing to the growth of their colleagues (Calvert, 2016; David, 2009).

Rationale

As a building principal in Shermerville School District, I share a deep commitment to the professional learning of our teachers. The district has used a variety of outside providers/consultants, instructional coaches, district curriculum committees, and demonstration lessons to drive instructional initiatives. While significant growth has been realized, our teachers' knowledge base, confidence, and skill vary from classroom to classroom. For this inquiry, I was interested in examining which characteristics of our district's professional learning practices are perceived to be of greatest benefit to the teaching staff.

Also, there have been some complaints from teaching staff with the volume and pace of curriculum change. As a building principal and member of the staff development committee, I frequently here negative feedback with the planning and frequency of professional development days. I am interested in better understanding these complaints and the source of this emotion. This program evaluation could open up a valuable vehicle for communication and understanding between the teaching staff and district administration.

The parent community often questions the amount of time devoted to our teachers' professional learning. Institute days (student non-attendance days) were added to the school calendar. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of substitute teachers used to cover classrooms for professional learning activities occurring during the school day (e.g., demonstration lessons, peer learning labs). As a steward of taxpayer money, I felt the responsibility to justify the time and resources devoted to professional

learning in my district. The students and larger community demand that we are maximizing the value of teachers' absence from the classroom.

Goals

My school district has a staff development committee composed of central office administrators, teaching staff, and building principals from each of the three school buildings. This program evaluation served as a process evaluation (Patton, 2008) for the purpose of understanding the significant patterns and important nuances that give shape to professional learning in our district. By involving the staff development committee in the analysis of the evaluation findings, I raised the awareness of the Standards for Professional Learning (2011) and empowered the teaching staff to take a more active role in shaping their professional development. I want to provide the teaching staff with a stronger voice on the design and evaluation of their own professional learning.

By applying the Standards for Professional Learning, our district can increase the quality and results of professional learning. If specific professional learning activities or characteristics are found to have a greater influence on teachers' instructional practice, we can focus efforts and resources on those areas. Protocols for considering ways a school district might address needs identified through the Standards Assessment Inventory and the role of central office staff in building the capacity of schools in designing, managing, and implementing improvement efforts have been developed (Green & Allen, 2015; Roy, 2010).

Research Questions

As mentioned above, Shermerville School District has invested considerable financial and human capital into the professional development of its teaching staff. The educators in my school district have successfully navigated a significant number of curriculum initiatives and reforms in the past 5-7 years. I trace this success back to the quality of our teaching staff, the vision of our Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, engagement of our staff development committee, instructional coaching, and our professional learning activities. To sustain this growth, the school district will benefit from seeing an overall picture of the professional learning practices that exist. This process evaluation may serve as the foundation for crafting a plan for continuous improvement of professional learning in the district.

To guide this program evaluation, I asked one primary question: What are teachers' perceptions of professional learning and how do they align to the Standards for Professional Learning? Over the course of this investigation, I was also interested in these related questions:

- To what extent do teachers in our school district perceive that their professional development impacts their school as a professional learning community?
- How can we strengthen our current professional learning designs?
- How can our school district begin the process of evaluating the true impact of professional development?

SECTION TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In this section, I examine research related to the professional learning of teachers. My literature review begins with the generally agreed-upon factors found in effective professional development. I present theories of adult learning and growth. Next, the Standards for Professional Learning are summarized. Finally, I introduce the general concept of learning communities. This review establishes some key terms and definitions related to my research questions. It also provides a theoretical framework for designing high quality professional learning experiences in my school district.

Teachers and administrators often feel they are living in a state of perpetual change given the frequent reforms coming from the federal, state, and district level (e.g., No Child Left Behind, Common Core State Standards, Performance Evaluation Reform Act, Every Student Succeeds Act). As these reforms reach the school building, training or professional development in curricula and pedagogy is provided to teachers. Unfortunately, nearly half of all teachers in the United States report dissatisfaction with their opportunities for professional development (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). The training is often episodic in nature, as there are significant limits to the amount of time available for teachers to engage in focused, ongoing forms of professional learning during the work week (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; MetLife, 2013). It also tends to be top-down and follows a workshop design that involves the presentation of theory, expert demonstration, and sometimes feedback from trainers to participants on how they performed a new skill or strategy (Showers, Joyce, & Bennett, 1987).

Unfortunately, many schools lack the organizational capacity to foster adult learning or professional growth. Efforts to develop new skills, practices, or beliefs in teachers is seen as disconnected and episodic (Darling-Hammond, 2013). This can lead to confusion, fatigue and even cynicism for some teachers. As Richard Elmore (1996) stated,

changing teaching practice even for committed teachers, takes a long time, and several cycles of trial and error; teachers have to feel that there is some compelling reason for them to practice differently, with the best direct evidence being that students learn better; and teachers need feedback from sources they trust about whether students are actually learning what they are taught. (p. 24)

The terms of professional development, staff development, and professional learning are often used interchangeably in the educational research literature. However, the different terms connote subtle differences in meaning and practice. Lieberman and Miller (2014) described how the professional development of teachers has evolved from a training model to professional learning as "growth-in-practice." The training model seen in one-size-fits-all workshops or group demonstrations (Murnane & Willett, 2011) has evolved into more job-embedded learning models that take individual teacher context into account. Teachers are working more collaboratively, pursuing shared inquiry and action research (Lieberman & Miller, 2007; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Talbert, 2010).

Effective Professional Learning

While there is no single definition or recipe for effective professional learning, there is consensus around the general success factors. Successful professional learning has more to do with process and less to do with the content. It includes the application of learning theory, the careful selection of learning designs, and the promotion of active engagement strategies (Drago-Severson, Roy, & von Frank, 2015). Linda Darling-

Hammond's (2013) review of national surveys and empirical studies on professional development identified factors as particularly important when planning for adult learning (pp. 102-107; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). First, professional learning is most effective when it is intensive, ongoing, and connected to teachers' practice. It is helpful to have a focus on the teaching and learning of specific academic content and connected to other school initiatives. Finally, strong networks of teachers enhance their professional learning when there is a focus on collaboration and professional relationships. I expand upon these factors below.

Ongoing Learning

While it seems common-sense, there is long-standing research to support that professional learning activities carried out over long periods of time lead to higher rates of teacher implementation and higher gains in student learning (Banilower, Heck, & Weiss, 2007; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Weiss & Pasley, 2006). These ongoing, intensive learning designs include a variety of learning activities that may include demonstration, modeling, book study, student data analysis, and student work analysis. These activities allow for the transfer of specific skills and strategies to the classroom. Follow-up activities with peer coaches or other colleagues allow for deeper learning and higher rates of long-term implementation (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Joyce & Calhoun, 2010, 2016).

Joyce and Calhoun's (2010, 2016) research on professional learning effects illustrates the importance of strategically conducting different learning activities over time. Results of their meta-analysis are displayed below in figure 1. Minimal impact in teacher knowledge or practice was observed with the study of rationale alone (i.e., typical

teacher workshop). Similarly, there was minimal short-term or long-term impact found from the study of rationale or theory plus demonstration. When professional learning designs included rationale, plus demonstrations, plus the planning of units/lessons, a significant increase in short-term implementation effects was observed. Teachers demonstrated new knowledge and learning immediately in their classrooms. However, the long-term implementation of this learning fell to the same rates observed in the previous learning designs. Short-term and long-term implementation rates above 90% were observed only when the learning included all of the above activities plus ongoing peer coaching.

Table 1

Joyce and Calhoun's Training Components

Training Element	Effects on Short-Term Use (% of Participants)	Effects on Long-Term Use (% of Participants)
Study of Rationale	5-10%	5-10%
Rationale + Demonstrations	5-20%	5-10%
Rationale + Demonstrations + Planning of Units and Lessons	80-90%	5-10%
All of the Above + Peer Coaching	90%	90%

Connected Learning

While professional learning around instructional techniques or the management of student learning is valuable, research has shown the importance of focusing on the development of pedagogical content knowledge (Bausmith & Barry, 2011; Van Driel & Barry, 2012). Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (2011) reflect the importance of content-specific professional learning. The Outcome standard places

particular emphasis on student learning outcomes by suggesting that they "serve as the core content for educator professional learning to support effective implementation and results" (p. 50). Learning communities offer context-specific and subject-specific opportunities for teachers to grow in their mastery of the subject matter they teach. As a collaborative group, teachers can share in their understanding of the subject matter and explore how to deliver it to their students' best. The Learning Community standard (2011) also emphasizes the alignment of school system vision and goals, which often involve content-specific benchmarks or student outcomes. Just as Guskey (1986) established long ago, changes in teacher behavior follow the development of content knowledge in the area they teach.

Teacher Relationships

Carrie Leana (2011) has argued that educational reform should not be focused solely on the hiring, supervision, and development of highly skilled individuals. Her studies in large urban school districts have suggested a focus on the development of supportive and positive relationships between teachers is a far more effective approach to realizing positive changes in student learning. Other researchers have found a connection between the level of teacher relationships or social capital and measures of reform implementation, student achievement, and parent satisfaction (Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). Given the value of teacher relationships built around common professional inquiry, it seems obvious that effective professional learning would be conducted largely within a framework of collaborative teacher teams. This broader topic of social capital and the ways teachers interact with one another is expanded under the section on Learning Communities.

A recent meta-analysis of the professional development research results of randomized control trials (Desimone & Garet, 2015) offers three major insights on effective professional development. These insights compliment the success factors detailed above. First, the research suggests that changing procedural classroom behavior is easier than improving teacher content knowledge or complex instructional approaches. Next, teachers respond to professional development opportunities in a wide variety of ways based upon their prior knowledge, experiences, and attitude. Third, leadership plays an important role in supporting and encouraging teachers to implement the ideas and strategies gained from their professional development. These insights underscore the complexity of planning and designing professional learning activities. They also suggest that providing transparency – i.e., building shared expectations around the learning objectives is critical for adult learners.

Adult Growth and Professional Learning

We understand the importance of differentiating instruction for the students in our classrooms. Effective teachers actively seek information about their students as learners. They draw connections between content areas and consider the cognitive structures necessary for learning. Classroom routines and procedures are designed to maximize the amount of time spent in teaching and learning. Assessments are designed to track student understanding and inform future teaching decisions. These very same components of effective instruction (Danielson, 2011) apply to adult learners.

Constructive-Developmental Theory

Robert Kegan (1994, 2000) has offered a constructive-developmental theory of adult development as another way for educators to understand how adults continually

work to make sense of their experiences and how this sense of the world can change and grow more complex over time. He suggests that adult learning follows three distinct stages of knowing: Instrumental, socializing, and a self-authoring. It is important to note that these developmental stages of knowing should not be confused with intelligence. Adults can progress through the stages and reach more sophisticated ways of knowing.

In the instrumental learning stage, adults seek specific answers, clear procedures or concrete steps. The study of best practice research on a specific topic area or lectures from a content expert are examples of learning activities at this stage. The socializing stage of learning builds on the practice-related knowledge of teachers. Socializing learning emphasizes the work of teams, the synthesis of different perspectives, and the sacrifice of individual interest for the benefit of the group. This stage of learning is most closely related to the concept of learning communities and may be encouraged in organizations with higher levels of social capital. Adults who have achieved a certain level of self-awareness or strong beliefs or opinions demonstrate a self-authoring way of knowing. These individuals are able to take in new information and align that with their strongly established vision or judgements.

Transformative Learning Theory

According to John Dirkx's review (1998), Transformative Learning Theory is another important contribution to the body of literature on adult learning. Since the 1970s there have been 4 major strands or thinkers that have contributed to this theory. John Mezirow (1991, 1997, 2008) may be the most well-known and connected to the theory. Mezirow argues that adult meaning structure is made up of a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions taken from daily life experiences. Adults can change or transform their

meaning-making primarily through the process of personal experience and critical self-reflection.

Much of adult learning can be broken down into instrumental and transformative experiences. Instrumental learning suggests the transmission of knowledge from one adult with expertise to another adult. It likely involves procedural knowledge and facts. Whereas, transformative learning is a more sophisticated act of self-individualization or empowerment. Dirkx (1998) believes transformative learning is more commonly found in our daily lives and less commonly experienced in the professional learning of educators. While Dirkx is critical that Transformative Learning Theory has yet to produce specific, concrete teaching approaches, it does offer a powerful mindset or a way of being. It honors adults as individuals in the active construction and development of themselves as educators.

Transformative Learning Model

Eleanor Drago-Severson (2008) has defined adult growth as "increases in our cognitive, affective (emotional), interpersonal and intrapersonal capacities that enable us to manage better the complex demands of teaching, learning, leadership, and life" (p. 60). She offers a model of adult learning practices based on research and adult learning theory, including the work of Robert Kegan (1994, 2004). Drago-Severson's (2009) model is organized by four pillars or practices designed to support the transformational learning and development of teachers at all three of Kegan's developmental learning stages. They include working in teams, providing leadership roles to teachers, opportunities for collegial inquiry (e.g., discussion and reflection), and mentoring

experiences. These practices offer school administrators with concrete ideas for providing differentiated professional learning experiences to their instructional staff.

Drago-Severson (2009) includes the practice of teaming or strategically designing opportunities for groups of teachers to collaborate as a pillar practice for professional learning. She argues that this practice respects the developmental diversity of adult learners by providing both support and challenge. Teaming offers teachers the opportunity to give and receive feedback on their professional practice, share their craft with peers, and collaborate on shared goals and responsibilities. Some common examples of teaming include curriculum development/discussion, analysis of student work or common assessments, critical friends group, book studies, and action research.

Providing leadership roles is another pillar practice for professional learning. As Drago-Severson (2009) and others (Fairman & Mackenzie, 2015) explain, teacher leadership is closely connected to the pillar practice of teaming. By mindfully placing teachers in positions of leadership or decision-making, you can encourage the growth of adults at any developmental level. The literature on positive school culture and school improvement include frequent references to shared or distributed leadership (Bond, 2015; Fullan, 2005; Lambert, 2002). By providing teachers with the skills and training to serve as instructional leaders, leaders can increase the overall capacity of the collective capacity of their schools (Danielson, 2016).

Drago-Severson (2009) defines the pillar practice of collegial inquiry as reflection through writing, dialogue, conflict resolution, and decision making (p. 153). The goals of this reflective practice are to explore the beliefs and assumptions that guide teaching behaviors, refine the craft of teaching, and ultimately increase in student learning (York-

Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2006). This type of reflective practice requires a culture of trust and skills with critical dialogue and professional collaboration (Ritchhart, 2015).

Mentoring and coaching represent Drago-Severson's (2009) fourth pillar of practice. Mentoring is an opportunity for teachers to broaden their perspectives, explore their beliefs, values, and assumptions with another colleague. Carolyn Klinge (2015) has suggested the successful mentor-mentee relationship is rooted in transformational theory and is an important component of any learning organization. The mentoring relationship may take the form of coaching a newly hired teacher on the climate and culture of the building. The relationship can focus on providing specific feedback around the application of new technologies or instructional strategies. Mentors may be assigned to a struggling teacher or an educator that changes job roles. Ingersoll and Strong (2011) reviewed the research base and found empirical evidence connecting formal mentoring to positive outcomes such as teacher satisfaction, commitment, retention, effective classroom management strategies, and student achievement.

Desimone et al. (2014) found evidence to suggest that informal mentoring may also play an important role or complimentary role to formal mentoring. They found teachers are more likely to seek out support for social-emotional needs from an informal mentor that is not providing evaluative feedback. Formal and informal mentoring may also serve to strengthen the social capital within a school (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013; Leana, 2011).

Active Engagement

The active engagement or motivation of adult learners must be taken into account when designing professional learning experiences for teachers. Drago-Severson (2015) has made several suggestions when planning and promoting the active engagement of teachers. Adults should be given a choice in their learning and opportunities to collaborate with peers. Just as the process, product, and content are differentiated for student learning (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006), these frames can be applied to the learning designs of teachers. It may also be helpful to establish group norms for shared inquiry or collaboration. Facilitators of professional learning are most effective when they model genuine listening and respect the questions or contributions of the teachers they engage. Learning designs such as practice teaching, collaborative planning, and the analysis of student works samples have shown higher rates of active engagement (Garet et al., 2001).

Standards-Based Professional Learning

In 2011, Learning Forward (previously the National Staff Development Council) published its third iteration of the Standards for Professional Learning. These standards were developed based on a large body of research and input from over 40 different professional education organizations. Collectively, the Standards consist of seven characteristics that lead to effective professional learning practices, resulting in greater educator expertise, which ultimately leads to improved student outcomes. According to Learning Forward (2014), the standards "are not a prescription for how education leaders and public officials should address all the challenges related to improving the performance of educators and their students. Instead, the standards focus on one critical

issue – professional learning" (paragraph 1). Furthermore, the "use of the standards to plan, facilitate, and evaluate professional learning promises to heighten the quality of educator learning" (paragraph 3). The seven standards, summarized below, are meant to work in synergy with one another (Learning Forward, 2011).

- Learning Communities Standard: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.
- Leadership Standard: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.
- Resources Standard: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.
- Data Standard: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.
- Learning Designs Standard: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.
- Implementation Standard: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and

sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.

- Outcomes Standard: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

Educators and school leaders can use the standards to advocate for high-quality professional growth and facilitate the conditions needed for effective adult learning. Eric Celeste (2016) has described the relationship between professional learning and student results:

1. When professional learning is standards-based, it has greater potential to change what educators know, are able to do, and believe.
2. When educators' knowledge, skills, and dispositions change, they have a broader repertoire of effective strategies to use to adapt their practices to meet performance expectations and student learning needs.
3. When educator practice improves, students have a greater likelihood of achieving results.
4. When student results improve, the cycle repeats for continuous improvement.
(p. 12)

Learning Communities

The norms and values found within the bureaucracy of school districts and those found within high functioning communities of learning can differ (Lieberman & Miller, 2014). These differences are exposed as teachers and leaders navigate change. School districts tend to impose change upon teachers. State mandates, new legislation or district-level curriculum review cycles often set the timing, pace, and content of that change. An emphasis is placed on teacher accountability and measurement. Whereas, communities of professional learning assume shared responsibility for changes in teaching practices and

student outcomes. As Talbert (2010) explained, teachers must learn to live simultaneously within these two different cultures.

In addition to the competing cultures described above, teachers face significant logistical challenges to sustain their professional learning and continuously refine their craft. Given the numerous demands on teachers, there often is limited time for teachers to collaborate or pursue a line of inquiry about their practice. Few schools build time into the weekly schedule for teachers to team. When there is time allotted, administrative requests or topics can dominate the agenda. Finally, teachers may be uncomfortable with taking their teaching public. New experiences and forms of teacher interaction are necessary to participate fully in shared learning and development (Lieberman & Miller, 2013).

Elmore (1996) and others (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Drago-Severson, 2012; Drago-Severson, Maslin-Ostrowski, & Hoffman, 2013; Fogarty & Pete, 2009; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013) have advocated for organizational structures that take into account adult learning theory, foster teacher collaboration, and promote ways to think about collaborative inquiry. Professional learning communities are a popular model to structure teacher collaboration, build school culture, and increase student achievement (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005; Vesco, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

Attributes of Learning Communities

Learning communities have been broadly described as "ongoing groups of teachers who meet regularly for the purpose of increasing their learning and that of their students" (Lieberman & Miller, 2008, p. 2). They are also described as "collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals linked to the

purpose of learning for all" (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2013). Talbert (2010) identified certain conditions or attributes that were necessary for this type of learning to occur. Teacher teams require agreed-upon norms of collaboration. The focus of the collaboration is on students with shared accountability for student growth. Finally, teachers should have a wide range of materials and resources available to support their learning.

Learning communities often follow protocols to engage in collaborative discussion and inquiry. Donohoo (2013) offers one such structure. Teachers begin by developing a theory of action or a hypothesis of how changes in their instruction will impact student learning. Next, teacher teams identify sources of new knowledge or skill and implement specific instructional practices. Third, student work or data is examined to identify themes and determine the effectiveness of their instruction. The final step includes documenting and sharing the results of their learning.

Another important attribute of professional learning communities is a focus on results or measuring progress toward specific goals aligned with school and district initiatives. The use of common formative assessments by teams of teachers is one method for measuring learning and goal attainment (DuFour et al., 2013). Regardless of the tools and methods used to collect data, all learning community models include a commitment to a cycle of continuous improvement similar to the figure below (Hirsh, Psencik, & Brown, 2014).

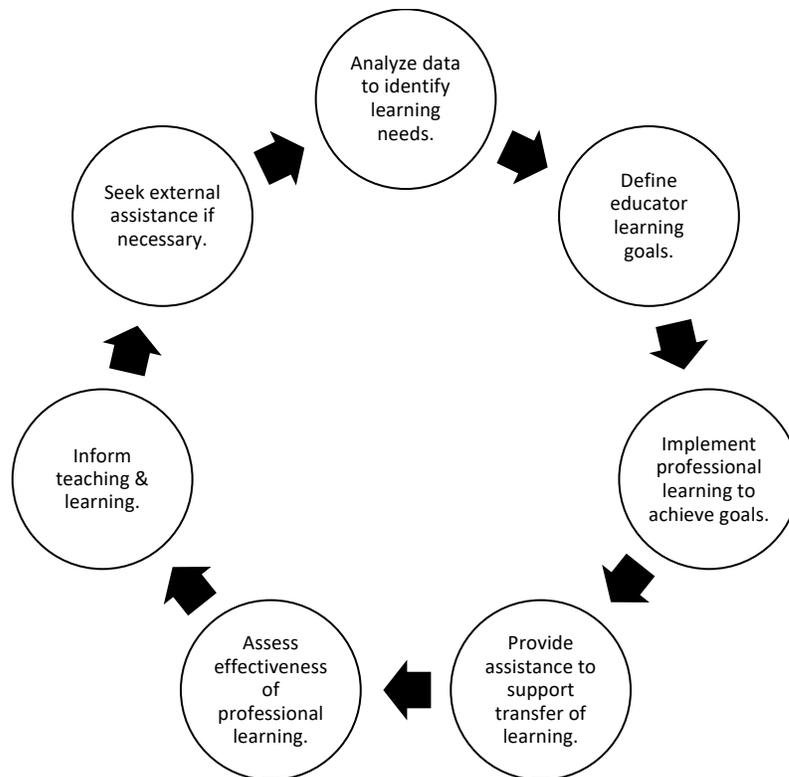


Figure 1. Cycle of Continuous Improvement

Leading Learning

In Michael Fullan’s (2014) book, *The Principal*, the dual roles of management and instructional leadership are once again examined. Surveying the current research on building leadership, he restates the importance of principals serving as leaders of learning. He presents the work of Viviane Robinson (2011) as evidence that the promotion of teacher learning and development produces an effect size on student achievement that is higher than any other leadership domain. Likewise, Sun and Leithwood (2012) found that principals focused on the development of teacher knowledge, skills, and motivation produced the highest student achievement results.

Systems and policies are needed at the district level to encourage the collective leadership of teachers at the school level. Hord and Hirsh (2009) suggest some

approaches building leaders can take to shape strong learning communities. These include sharing an expectation for continuous learning and promoting distributed leadership or self-governance. Student data should be provided to teachers in a format that is readily accessible and understandable. Protocols and structures can be introduced to guide teachers in their dialogue and decision-making.

Conclusion

The ongoing professional learning and development of teachers are considered to be an essential component of any school organization. This chapter presented the general success factors found in the professional learning literature. These factors include learning designs that are ongoing, connected to content, and built within a network of teacher relationships or learning communities. The Constructive-Developmental Theory (Kegan, 1994; 2000), Transformative Learning Theory (John Mezirow, 1985, 1997), and the Transformational Learning Model (Drago-Severson, 2008) offer another lens to understand how adults change and grow over time. The Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) provide a roadmap to plan and evaluate professional learning. Ultimately, any efforts to enhance the learning of teachers will translate to increased student outcomes.

SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

This program evaluation assumes a utilization-focused perspective (Patton, 2008). Given my desire to understand how teaching staff perceives professional learning in the Shermerville School District and the contextual conditions involved in this unit of analysis, my research design follows a single-case study approach based upon a constructivist paradigm (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). A combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies is chosen for the purpose of enhancing the credibility of my findings (Yin, 2009, ch. 2). The use of multiple sources of evidence is intended to increase the construct validity through triangulation of survey and interview data. This triangulation provides a more robust view of the teacher perceptions (Patton, 2002).

Participants

Below is a description of the participants from Shermerville School District. I explain how participants were recruited for both the survey and the focus group interviews. Descriptive statistics are given to address how representative the sample was of the district teaching staff as a whole.

Survey

The Standards Assessment Inventory-2 was sent electronically to all certified staff in the Shermerville School District to increase the utility of the program evaluation. Since all staff is actively involved in the district's professional learning activities, it was deemed important to sample as many of them as possible (Patton, 2008). Thirty-nine content area teachers, 11 support teachers, and 14 special area teachers across the one middle school building and two elementary school buildings in the district completed the survey. This

sample represented 53% of the total certified staff (120) in the district. Sixty-nine percent of survey respondents identified as elementary teaching staff. Thirty-one percent of survey respondents identified as middle school teaching staff. The well-being of research participants was taken into account. I sent an email explaining the purpose and scope of this program evaluation to all district teaching staff. They were provided with informed consent, assured that their responses would be kept confidential, and given the choice of participating. Once informed consent was obtained, a link to the online survey became available. A sample of that administration email can be found in Appendix A.

Focus Group Interviews

In a separate qualitative data collection process, focus group participants were invited from each of the three school buildings. The reader can find a sample of that invitation email in Appendix C. The groups were limited to six teachers and ran for approximately 45 minutes. There is consensus within the qualitative research body that these are optimal conditions for focus group interviews (Crabtree & Miller, 1999, ch. 6). My sampling logic could be categorized as maximum variation or critical case sampling. It was intended to document diverse perspectives on professional learning and identify important patterns across grade levels and school buildings within the district. This approach was taken to increase the applicability or extrapolation of my findings (Patton, 1990, 2008). The two elementary focus groups each consisted of six staff members (two primary grade teachers, two intermediate grade teachers, one student services teacher, and one specials teacher). The middle school focus group consisted of six staff members (two 6th grade teachers, one 7th grade teacher, two 8th grade teachers, one special services teacher). Informed consent was obtained and teachers were given assurances that

their identities would be protected. Focus group members were also told the interviews would be recorded and given the option to decline participation. A protocol with ground rules can be found in Appendix D.

Data Gathering Techniques

I measured the alignment of professional learning practices in the Shermerville School District to Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the district and the participants involved. I collected teachers' perceptions of professional learning to identify the degrees of success and challenges we face and to educate our district committee on the relationship of the standards to improvements in teacher effectiveness and student achievement. The district's staff development committee were the intended users of this evaluation.

Survey

The SAI2 is a validated tool that measures teachers' perceptions to provide data on the quality of professional learning at both the school and district level. The survey has undergone a redesign to align to the third iteration of Learning Forward's Standards of Professional Learning (Denmark & Weaver, 2012). The 50-item, web-enabled survey assesses the presence of behaviors associated with the seven Standards for Professional Learning. It employs a Likert scale of 1-5, with five suggesting greater observance of the Standards for Professional Learning from the perspective of the respondent. The survey produces numerical average response values for each question, grouped by standard. There are 7-8 questions per standard and it takes between 15-20 minutes to complete. Also, the survey collected some demographic data (staff role, years of experience, years

at current school). A complete list of questions, grouped by standard can be found in Appendix B.

Focus Group Interviews

Following the analysis of survey results, I conducted three focus group interviews with representatives from each of the three school buildings in my district. Teachers were recruited based on their grade-level and content area. There was an effort to capture a representative sampling of teacher perceptions and opinions within the district.

Questions were designed to elicit perceptions of the successes and challenges of planning professional development at the district level. I wanted to avoid making the focus group participants feel uncomfortable or “tested” on the Standards of Professional Learning. The purpose of the focus group interviews was to add depth to the quantitative survey data. While the interviews allowed for an open discussion of similarities and differences among participant experiences, they followed a semi-structured protocol with questions aligned to the seven Standards. A final open-ended question was designed to elicit general commentary on the subject and to generate new areas of inquiry (Crabtree & Miller, 1999; Schattner, Shmerling, & Murphy, 1993). For a complete list of interview questions, see Appendix E.

Data Analysis Techniques

The quantitative and qualitative data gathered in this research project was analyzed using two different techniques. Survey data was analyzed using statistical methods. Focus group transcripts were analyzed using a template or code manual. I describe these techniques in greater detail below. By combining the two sources of data, I hope to provide a more complete picture of teacher perception of professional learning.

Survey

Descriptive statistical methods were used to analyze the responses to the Standards Assessment Inventory-2. These methods include measures of central tendency and dispersion. The numerical average response value for each question was grouped by standard and frequency counts were determined for each of the 50 individual questions on the survey. Ultimately, the average rating for each of the seven standards covered in the survey was determined at both the school and district level.

Focus Group Interviews

Audio recordings of the three focus group interviews were transcribed. An interview protocol sheet was used to collect observations of nonverbal behavior, questions for follow-up and more immediate coding ideas for later analysis. The interview transcripts were analyzed with a deductive process using a template or code manual as described by Crabtree and Miller (1999, ch. 9). Interview responses were coded and organized in relation to the seven Standards of Professional Learning. For example, each question was written to align with one of the standards. Responses were coded based on which standard they were responding to, such as Learning Communities (LC), Learning Design (LD), etc. Next, a process of paraphrasing or summarizing the focus group transcripts by grouping key points made by the participants in response to the interview questions. For data management purposes, interview responses were sorted by code with direct quotations in a spreadsheet format. With the focus group response data classified, the teacher narrative was used to provide greater detail and context to the quantitative survey results. The code manual is included in Appendix F.

A second stage of analysis was conducted to cluster the themes previously found in the coded transcripts around Drago-Severson's (2009) pillar practices of transformational learning shared in my review of the literature. This process borrowed aspects of Crabtree and Miller's (1999) corroboration of data (p. 170) and Boyatzis (1998) thematic analysis. The pillar practices represented the first order themes, followed by clustered themes taken from the first coding exercise. Drago-Severson's (2009) framework of effective learning practices provided a way to legitimize the response themes found in the qualitative data. Furthermore, it assisted with the interpretation of the data and helped to identify further data needed to evolve professional learning in the Shermerville School District. See Appendix G for the table of clustered themes in relation to three of the pillar practices: Teaming, providing leadership roles, and collegial inquiry.

SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Overview

I report the findings of the quantitative and qualitative techniques used in this mixed-methods, single-case study in this section. As described in Section Three, data was collected in two phases. I begin with findings and interpretations from the Standards Assessment Inventory. Results from the focus group interviews follow.

Survey Findings and Interpretations

The first phase of this program evaluation occurred in the summer of 2016 with the administration of the Standards Assessment Inventory (see Appendix B) to certified teaching staff in Shermerville School District. The survey was given to address the research question posed in Section One - What are teachers' perceptions of professional learning and how do they align to the Standards for Professional Learning? The survey collected staff perceptions of professional learning and how closely these perceptions adhered to the best practice standards developed by Learning Forward (2011). I group survey questions according to the seven standards: Learning Communities, Leadership, Resources, Data, Learning Designs, Implementation, and Outcomes. A brief description of these standards was provided in Section Two.

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for each of the survey subscales. I report the average response value, median response value, standard deviation, and inter quartile range. The survey's 5-point scale has a range of 1 to 5 (1 = Never, 2 = Seldom, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Frequently, and 5 = Always). The inter quartile range was calculated as a measure of dispersion to help interpret this ordinal data. Relatively smaller inter quartile ranges indicate consensus. Inversely, larger ranges indicate that opinion is polarized or

mixed. Also, respondents had the option of selecting "Don't Know" for each question. The reader will find a table with the average response value and inter quartile range for each survey question in Appendix H.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for SAI Survey Subscales

Subscale	N	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Inter Quartile Range
Outcomes	64	3.94	4	1.21	2.00
Implementation	63	3.93	4	1.62	2.00
Learning Designs	64	3.45	3	1.24	1.00
Data	64	3.63	4	1.70	1.00
Resources	64	3.78	4	1.24	2.00
Leadership	64	4.16	4	0.94	1.00
Learning Communities	64	3.62	4	1.38	1.00

A median of 4 or "Frequently" was found for all subscales except Learning Designs. Four of the seven subscales produced an inter quartile range of 1.00, indicating consensus. The three subscales with inter quartile ranges of 2.00 and a few specific questions with high rates of "Don't Know" suggest a few areas with dissonance of opinion. I explore these instances below.

The subscale means ranged from 3.45 to 4.16. The Leadership subscale represented the highest average response value and the only subscale mean greater than 4 or "Frequently" (M= 4.16, Mdn=4, IQR=1.00). The Learning Design subscale represented the lowest average response value (M=3.45, Mdn=3, IQR=1.00) and the only

subscale with a median of 3 or "Sometimes." Denmark and Weaver (2012) found this same pattern in their psychometric evaluation of the Standards Assessment Inventory.

Within the Leadership Standard subscale, a question asking if leaders advocate for resources to support professional learning received the highest average score (M=4.38, Mdn=4, IQR=1.00). Nearly half of the respondents indicated "Always." Another 37% responded "Frequently." A question asking if school leaders regard professional learning as a top priority earned the second highest average response value (M=4.30, Mdn=4, IQR=1.00) with 43% responding "Always" and 44% responding "Frequently." These findings suggest that teachers perceive strong administrative support or attention for professional learning within the Shermerville School District. They understand the professional development of teachers is central to the District's mission of educating all students in our community.

The Outcomes subscale produced the second highest average response rate (M=3.94, Mdn=4, IQR=2.00). Nearly 90% of respondents replied "Frequently" or "Always" to a question asking if staff members are held to high standards to increase student learning. There was also a strong response to a question asking if professional learning was focused on the curriculum and how students learn. Teaching staff largely agreed that their professional learning contributes to student achievement. However, there was some difference of opinion on how supported they were to develop new learning and then expand and deepen that learning over time (IQR=2.00). Over a third of respondents indicated "Sometimes" to "Never." This finding suggests that some teaching staff do not see how their current learning activities build upon previous learning. They may not have

an understanding of how their learning fits into multi-year school or district improvement plans.

The Resource subscale contained three questions with average response values over 4. Ninety percent of respondents answered "Frequently" or "Always" to a question asking if the application of new skills with students is regarded as an important aspect of their learning (M=4.39). The same number of respondents believe they have access to a variety of technology resources to support their learning (M=4.38). Eighty percent of respondents feel professional learning is available to them at various times, such as job-embedded experiences, before or after school, and over the summer (M=4.19). On the other hand, lower average response values were found for questions asking if teachers contribute to how professional learning resources are allocated (M=3.12) and if there are open discussions of learning expenses in the district (M=3.07).

The average response values for the seven questions within the Learning Communities subscale ranged from 3.05 to 4.08. Seventy-two percent of respondents answered "Frequently" or "Always" (M=4.08) to a question asking if the school system has policies and procedures to support a vision for learning communities in the schools. There was a similar response to a question asking if the responsibility for improving student learning is shared by all staff members, district personnel, families, and community members (M=3.94). While the majority of staff may feel there is a commitment to professional learning, there was some difference of opinion on whether concrete structures are in place to support a cycle of continuous improvement, data analysis, and collaborative study. Thirty-one percent answered "Frequently" or "Always" to a question asking if learning communities meet several times per week to collaborate

on how to improve student learning (M=3.05, IQR=2.00). Meanwhile, twenty-five percent answered "Never" or "Seldom." Another 10% answered, "Don't Know." This dispersion may indicate differences in practice across teacher teams. It may also point to some misunderstandings about the nature of learning communities.

A question within the Learning Design subscale asking if teachers' input is taken into consideration when planning school-wide professional learning received the lowest average score (M=3.21, Mdn=3, IQR=1.00). Forty-two percent answered "Sometimes." Another 19% answered "Seldom" or "Never." The next lowest score came from a question asking if teachers are responsible for selecting professional learning activities (M=3.26, Mdn=3, IQR=1.00). Thirty-eight percent indicated "Sometimes," and another 19% responded "Seldom" or "Never." These results suggest that some teaching staff may feel their learning characteristics or preferences are not always considered in the design of professional learning activities. There may also be groups of teachers who are not as engaged in the design of their learning as they could be.

Respondents had the opportunity to select "Don't Know" to each of the survey questions. There was an average of 5 "Don't Know" responses per question and a range of 0 to 29. The Data subscale had an average of 12 "Don't Know" responses per question. Nearly half of respondents didn't know if their school determines how to assess the effectiveness of professional learning experiences ahead of implementation. A quarter of staff indicated that they didn't know if data is used to monitor the effectiveness of professional learning in their school. Within the Implementation subscale, nearly a third of respondents indicated "Don't Know" to a question asking if their school has a consistent professional learning plan in place. Another quarter didn't know if there was an

alignment between schools goals and the professional learning plan. The high numbers of "Don't Know" within these two subscales suggest a lack of awareness or understanding about the district's vision or plan for professional learning. It may also suggest that the professional learning plan has not been effectively communicated to teaching staff.

Focus Group Interview Findings and Interpretations

The second phase of this program evaluation was conducted in the Fall of 2016. A total of three focus group interviews were conducted, one for each building in the district. The groups were comprised of a representative sample of the district's teaching faculty. The interview questions (see Appendix E) were aligned to the seven Professional Learning Standards (Learning Forward, 2011): Learning Communities, Leadership, Resources, Data, Learning Designs, Implementation and Outcomes. As described in the methodology section, I organized focus group transcripts through the development of a code manual that took into consideration the teacher response patterns. Two or more themes emerged under each standard. For a full listing of these themes and representative quotes, the reader is referred to Appendix F.

Learning Communities

Teachers were asked how the district professional development activities impact their school's professional learning communities. Two themes emerged from the data: Teachers desire (1) more structured time to collaborate in small teams and (2) greater focus or alignment in their professional learning activities. Several teachers questioned if formal learning communities existed in their buildings. Others were confused about the definition and purpose of a smaller learning community. Most identified their grade level team or a department peer as their "learning community." All respondents expressed a

desire to take the knowledge and skills presented in district professional development activities down to a smaller level. They asked for more opportunities to implement new practices and refine their craft in small, homogenous teams at the building level. Also discussed - collaborative strategies such as peer observation, co-planning, and lesson study.

A few teacher responses included a wish for a common focus or greater alignment in their professional learning activities. One teacher remembered a particularly successful learning experience, "...it was more meaningful. Everyone was doing the same thing. We were having great discussions and it was focused on a single topic." I connect this teacher's request for a focus to the second step in the Cycle of Continuous Improvement (see Figure 1) - identify student and aligned educator goals. Teachers are searching for an explicit connection between their learning and their student needs. We return to this topic of goal-setting and focus in the Data Standard section.

Leadership

Consistent with the survey results, the focus group participants expressed a general appreciation with the administration's advocacy and support for teacher growth and development. When asked what actions the building principals could take to increase teacher leadership and their capacity for professional learning, three common themes emerged from the data. Teachers suggested (1) principals spend more time in the classrooms, (2) administration should continue to seek teacher input on professional learning needs, and (3) principals must be careful to promote teacher cooperation, not competition. One teacher stated

The first biggest step is for principals to be in classrooms enough to know how they run and to be able to appreciate each teacher's individual strengths... basically, every teacher can somewhat be a lab teacher because we all have strengths that we can share with one another.

Teachers are suggesting principals can facilitate more peer-to-peer learning, pairing educators based on instructional strengths or areas of instructional interest.

Teachers simply wanted to be asked for their input and opinion about their learning needs. The annual district staff development survey was acknowledged and appreciated. Two of the focus group conversations then turned to more of the emotional aspects surrounding this general topic. One teacher explained, "Just asking what it is we need and making us feel comfortable being vulnerable would be conducive to teacher leadership and growth."

Also, a few teachers felt principals could build capacity by encouraging collaboration, and protecting against competition. One classroom teacher suggested that building leaders need to, "be very cognizant of the social structures and interactions that are happening with teachers... deal with things plainly to allow for the more cooperative side of teacher culture to flourish instead of a competitive cycle..."

Resources

I asked the focus groups what resources are needed to improve professional development in the district. Once again, the participants voiced a general appreciation for the importance and support that district administration has placed on the professional growth of the teaching staff. Teachers recognize that their skills have improved over the years, given the school district's significant investments. Two general themes emerged from the discussions: Teachers want (1) more time allocated for collaboration and a (2)

clear determination of learning priorities. The issue of time came up repeatedly in all three focus groups. While there was some debate over the need for more time or whether the time just needed to be used more efficiently, all focus groups expressed a desire for more collaboration with job-alike peers. One teacher explained,

I think time is always of essence. We all want to do so much, and there is just never enough time. You want to be able to plan with a team or do that in advance and then really follow through and meet again. Sometimes, it feels like you're on a treadmill and running and you can't stop to think. So, I think time to think with other people is the biggest and most important resource.

In all three focus groups, teachers raised the idea of learning priorities within their discussion of resources. Teachers wanted to know the administration's priorities for their professional learning. Also, several teachers expressed a desire to remain on a particular topic or domain for longer periods of time. One elementary teacher shared,

There is a disconnect and it (district PD) seems disjointed. We don't know what we're going to be diving into. It would be great to learn something and then come back and get the benefit of everybody's experience with it. Dig a little deeper with it instead of being more on the surface level.

Teachers returned to the discussion of a district professional learning plan and opportunities to sustain learning over time again in response to the Learning Design, Implementation and Outcome questions.

Data

I asked the focus groups how the district's professional development supports their school improvement goals and how student learning data is used to guide their professional development activities. Three themes emerged from the teacher discussion. Teachers do not see a connection between their (1) school improvement plan and their professional learning, or (2) student data and their professional learning. Teachers

expressed a desire to (3) become more skilled in using student data to assess the implementation of their professional learning. All three focus groups admitted that they lacked knowledge of their respective school's improvement plans. One teacher shared her opinion of school improvement plans and professional development,

I don't think they are very well connected right now. I think it would be nice to have goals that were more teacher driven... what do we all want to get better as a staff? Really focus on that and then getting PD to go along with that.

Another teacher added, "Our need for learning targets, goals, and big picture is even stronger than it is for the students."

When I asked the focus groups how student data was used to guide their professional learning, many teachers voiced confusion. A few asked for more information on which student data was driving their professional development activities. One teacher offered,

People are just unaware of what's driving PD, and so because of that, the average person walks into a session and doesn't see the connectedness of what they're talking about and learning that day and how it's applied to our students, our school, our demographic.

A teacher in another building asked,

If something is supposed to be data-driven, that should be articulated... this is the reason we're having this PD because there was this concern, or this came up, or we see this trend, and this is why we're doing this.

Learning Design

I asked the focus groups if they felt teacher input was taken into consideration when planning district-wide professional learning. As a follow-up to this question, teachers were asked what the district could do to promote greater engagement in professional development initiatives. Four themes emerged from this discussion.

Teachers asked for a (1) more significant role in selecting and constructing professional learning activities. There is a clear preference for more (2) differentiated learning activities and (3) job-embedded structures. Finally, teachers requested (4) an overall plan or long-term vision for the district professional development activities.

The student service staff members in two of the three focus groups expressed appreciation for the significant input they had in selecting the topics and constructing the nature of their learning for the district PD half-days (theme 1). One learning specialist explained, “We planned the whole year... targeted towards those skills that we all came to say we needed help with.” Another student services member shared, “Our district is good about finding things if we ask for them... we have a lot of upcoming training through (the special education cooperative).”

As stated above, the general education staff did not share this feeling. In all three focus groups, general education teachers asked for more input on the design of their learning. One teacher explained, “I think there is a good intention to make teachers feel like they are heard... but pretending that teachers have a lot of input is frustrating.” Another teacher offered, “in terms of structure and delivery, that is where we are locked out as learners, as participants, and as teacher leaders.” Despite the district’s annual professional development feedback survey and the regular meetings of the staff development committee, teachers do not perceive that their input is used in much of the district-led professional learning.

A second theme found in all three focus groups was the need for differentiated learning activities. One teacher explained,

We are all at different places, and because of that, the same PD can be overwhelming to one person, can be exciting to somebody else, and confusing to another... when the PD is blanket, that might be one of the reasons it never feels really good.

The teacher comments clustered around this theme of differentiation stressed the importance of considering our teaching staff's diverse learning preferences and ways of knowing. There was some overlap between this request for differentiation and a preference for more job-embedded learning.

Teachers shared a feeling that authentic learning and growth cannot be confined to institute days or school improvement half-days. Learning occurs every day, over time, and within the context of the classroom environment. An intermediate classroom teacher stated, "We need more support in the classroom. I think there can be a misunderstanding of how it's actually going to be implemented and where we are as a group of teachers and individuals in our professional practice." Another teacher requested, "A coach or somebody that could be in all of our classrooms and helping... that's one of us as well. That's not like an outsider, but it's one of us." It is clear that teachers have appreciated the recent shifts toward job-embedded learning made by the school district. They would like more of these opportunities and would welcome working with an instructional coach on topics they deemed important to their craft.

Similar to the request for greater focus and alignment in response to the Learning Communities question and the need for learning priorities in response to the Resource question, teachers expressed a need for a professional learning plan. They want to see how their learning is connected to the school district's curriculum review cycle and strategic plan. One primary teacher asked, "I do feel like we have a lot of new things

going on... what is the goal for the year and what is the focus?" Another teacher offered, "If there was an overall goal for the (learning) topic, it would be easier for people to come up with some things."

Implementation and Outcomes

Two themes emerged under the Implementation and Outcomes Standard questions: Teachers recognized that (1) we are growing our practice and (2) asked for more opportunities to sustain their learning over time. Teachers were appreciative of the professional development they have received on a wide range of topics and instructional practices. One veteran of the district stated,

When all is said and done, I think over the course of ten years... it has made me a better teacher... the staff development committee's heart is in the right place, and the district's final goal for us is in the right place, but I think we can improve.

The focus group participants also acknowledged the complexity and difficulty of designing learning for a wide variety of needs in our district. As one teacher offered, "I think the staff development committee has got to be the hardest committee because you can't please everyone." Another teacher summarized, "I think when you're a high performing district, you have high performing teachers. You have teachers who want to improve and do well."

Many teachers voiced challenges in sustaining their learning over time. Several described a "spiral approach" that included a variety of learning experiences and designs. They asked for fewer and more clearly defined learning goals. A middle school teacher suggested, "I think you need to spiral it, keep coming back to it. You can't just leave it hanging there and then move onto something else." Similarly, an elementary school

teacher suggested that we should "not jump from one thing to another like a flea on a hot brick."

Final Themes

As described in Section Three, I conducted a second interpretive process with the focus group data set. The first analysis of coded data organized response themes according to the framework of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (2014). These findings were used to answer the primary research question: What are teachers' perceptions of professional learning and how do they align to the Standards? The second analysis of coded data clustered focus group response themes according to Drago-Severson's Pillar Practices for Growth (2009). Three of her 4 pillar practices were used to organize response themes in this iteration: Teaming, providing leadership roles, and collegial inquiry. As a result, three final themes emerged to inform the related research questions: (1) Our teachers are asking for opportunities to collaborate for the purpose of improving student achievement (DuFour, 2007; DuFour & Eaker, 1998; McAdams, 2007). (2) We need a vehicle for teachers to provide greater input into the district's professional learning goals and to assess our progress toward established goals. Finally, (3) there needs to be time for all teachers to meet regularly to dialogue and reflect on their instructional craft. Job-embedded forms of professional learning will support teachers as they manage change and complexity.

SECTION FIVE: JUDGMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Judgments

Results from the Standards Assessment Inventory and focus group interviews indicate the teaching staff of Shermerville School District understand that professional learning is a priority and a core component of the District’s mission. They believe the administration places a heavy emphasis on the growth and development of all staff and that their growth is connected to student outcomes. Teachers understand they are held to high standards to improve student achievement. However, there is a growing segment of the teaching staff that feel they lack a voice in the design and implementation of their learning. This lack of active engagement may prevent some teaching staff from achieving deeper learning and commitment to the implementation of new practices and skills. Our teachers are asking for the same type of learning that experts in the field have long been advocating (Calvert, 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; Drago-Severson, 2009; Jaquith, Mindich, Wei, Darling-Hammond, 2010; Mizell, 2012) – a systematic approach to job-embedded collaborative learning that includes them as authors and drivers of their own professional inquiry.

Survey and focus group responses connected to the Outcome Standard suggest that our teaching staff believes they have benefited from the professional development opportunities that the district has offered. They feel prepared to teach in the era of Common Core State Standards and have weathered the significant changes to curriculum and materials over the past five years. However, the staff is asking for a stronger vision and a strategic plan for professional learning. They do not see how their current learning

activities build upon previous learning or how it falls into the strategic priorities, school improvement plans, and curriculum review cycle for the district.

Learning Communities and Learning Design represent the two lowest subscales on the Standards Assessment Inventory. Consistent themes found within the three focus group interviews confirm these areas of relative weakness. Our teaching staff has expressed an apparent desire for collegial professional learning. They want to work together to examine their practice and confront challenges or problems they are facing with the implementation of new curriculum. This supports the establishment of professional learning communities (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour et al., 2005; Hirsh & Killion, 2008) and the structures needed for teachers to reflect and dialogue about their of instruction (Blase & Blase, 2001; DuFour et al., 2013; Guskey, 2004). Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) have referred to this type of teacher learning as "knowledge of practice."

The members of our district staff development committee would benefit greatly from developing some basic understanding of adult learning theory and different models of professional learning. There needs to be a discussion about how our teachers are at different developmental stages in their knowing and learning (Drago-Severson, 2009). With stronger schema, it is more likely they will design and advocate for more effective learning experiences. They will also be more likely to be active participants in the selection of learning designs, pushing their colleagues to a deeper state of reflection and learning. The selection of learning designs should consider all phases of the learning process: Knowledge and skill acquisition, application, reflection, refinement, assessment, and evaluation (Learning Forward, 2012, p. 34).

Recommendations

Our school district administration may want to consider aspects of change leadership theory when discussing these recommendations for professional learning. It is important for us to view the school district through a systems-thinking lens (Senge, 2014) and consider the various change levers in our organization. We also need to understand that our learning organization is constructed based on how we think and act with one another. We cannot become fixed on a single outcome or approach, but instead, consider what capacities are needed to sustain the changes to professional learning that we desire.

Tony Wagner et al. (2006) provide a practical tool for examining the different arenas of change and how we may "move toward a picture of success" shared by administration and teaching staff. He identifies three significant levers of change. These include data, accountability, and relationships. He also provides a way of breaking a change initiative into different phases: Preparing, envisioning, and enacting. Within the preparing phase, district committees may be able to use data from this program evaluation and subsequent professional learning needs assessments to build the rationale and generate motivation for change. This data could be used to create a robust professional learning plan for the school district. District leadership can establish systems of accountability within district committees and school improvement teams to monitor the impact of professional learning on student growth. Finally, the change lever of relationships could include the formation of professional learning communities.

Ronald Heifetz (2009) distinguishes between technical and adaptive change. In his book, *the Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, he provides strategies, tools, and checklists for leaders to see larger patterns within the organization and their unique role. Heifetz's

approach would suggest beginning with a systems-level look (step 1) at the various factors contributing to the successes and challenges of professional learning in our school district. We also need to ask if this is the right time to undertake a change initiative in the area of professional learning (step 2). There are undoubtedly other worthy projects that compete with our organization's time and energy. This program evaluation satisfies those first two steps. I present these findings and judgments to the administrative council and the staff development committee. It would be helpful to gain their reflections and questions.

The next two steps require the administration in Shermerville School District to assess their roles in designing and implementing professional learning. Once the administration has an understanding of their role, the problem can be framed for the larger organization. According to Heifetz et al. (2009), the final steps of effective organizational change are to hold steady, listen to others, remain focused on the long-term goal, and to keep that goal at the center of attention.

Staff Development Committee

Based on the results of the focus group interviews, I believe we should engage our teaching staff in more conversation about adult learning theory. The district's staff development committee should lead this conversation. The first step is building the committee's knowledge base on adult learning theory. It can also include familiarizing members with a model of continuous improvement (Hirsh et al., 2014) and the relationship between professional learning and student results (Celeste, 2016; Learning Forward, 2011). The staff development committee members have turned over in recent years, and this may be a good window of time to revisit some key ideas from thought

leaders such as Eleanor Drago-Severson, Thomas Guskey, Joellen Killion, and Jack Mezirow.

While student learning and adult learning share many of the same basic principles, there are some aspects that are unique to working with adults. For example, there is value in considering the developmental stages of adult learners in our organization or their various "ways of knowing" (Drago-Severson, 2009). By viewing learning designs with a developmental framework, we may be able to differentiate our professional learning better and place individuals in a position to grow into a more sophisticated developmental stage of knowing (e.g., instrumental to socializing, socializing to self-authoring).

Referring to prominent cognitive psychologists and their theories of adult learning, Joellen Killion (2008) distinguishes between instrumental learning and transformational or deep learning. She argues that much of the professional development done to teachers involves the transfer of information or procedural knowledge. Whereas, transformational learning results in changes to an individual's beliefs and behavioral practices. This is the type of change we hope for when designing high impact professional learning. Our staff development committee might benefit from considering learning as change when planning professional development activities. There may be some useful frameworks such as the KASAB Model (Killion, 2008) which focuses on learning around its intended outcome. KASAB stands for knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations.

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (Hall & Hord, 2000) is another useful framework that takes into account a variety of concerns that teachers may have with a

particular change initiative. This practical tool was developed for educational leaders by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. It could be used by our staff development committee to guide change in the organization. The model addresses common concerns ranging from a desire to simply obtain more information about an initiative to asking for opportunities to collaborate with colleagues to incorporate new learning into their instructional practice.

Professional Learning Plan

The findings of this program evaluation suggest our teaching staff consider many of the professional learning activities as isolated or disconnected events. They fail to see the larger plan or system for professional development delivered by the school district. For our professional learning to have a more significant impact on teaching behaviors, and subsequently student performance, we need short and long-term professional learning plans aligned to district priorities, curriculum review cycles, and school improvement plans.

Professional learning plans have been referred to as a navigation or guidance system that sets direction and provides progress indicators along the way (Killion, 2013). These plans provide clarity and focus for staff at all levels. This goes to prove the old adage, "If everything is important, then nothing is." The professional learning plan should include specific content, learning designs, resources, and procedures for evaluating effectiveness. The development of a plan begins with the analysis of student learning needs for the purpose of setting specific outcomes. Our school improvement teams can do this in coordination with the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. The district's staff development committee would then be responsible for investigating

professional learning programs and strategies to meet the identified school/district improvement goals. The staff development committee would also be responsible for monitoring the implementation and evaluating our professional learning efforts.

The results of this program evaluation are consistent with large-scale studies (Bill & Melinda Gates, 2014) and reports by advocacy groups (Calvert, 2016). Our teachers want a strong voice in the planning and evaluation of their professional learning. Teachers want to contribute to their growth and that of their colleagues. It is the job of our administration to provide the direction, supports, and structures for learning. We may need to look for more internal solutions to our problems of instructional practice. This means building our teachers' capacity through job-embedded forms of professional learning that involve learning in collaborative or constructivist ways. This shift may need to begin with mapping out the various learning communities in our district and how they are connected (i.e., administrative council, intermediate & primary teams, grade level teams, smaller professional learning communities).

Professional Learning Communities

When Richard DuFour (2004) addresses the principles behind professional learning communities, he often talks about a shift from schools that are focused on teaching to schools that are focused on learning. He argues that schools with a learning focus approach student growth in a systematic, timely, and directive manner. Our school district should consider creating structured opportunities for teachers to collaborate for the purpose of improving student achievement. We could use the principles or “big ideas” that DuFour and his colleagues have shared (DuFour, 2004, 2007; DuFour et al., 2013;

DuFour et al., 2005; McAdamis, 2007) to tailor a system that is unique to needs of our school district.

Schmoker (1996) argues that professional learning is most effective when it is data-driven and goal-oriented. Our school district may introduce learning communities by focusing on the skills our teachers need to engage in professional collaboration around student data (e.g., common performance assessments, standardized assessment, curriculum-based measurement, work products). With the recent addition of student growth plans to the appraisal process (Illinois State Board of Education, Performance Evaluation Reform Act of 2010), our teaching staff may be open to having dedicated time for collaborative learning and problem-solving. Our professional learning communities could be formed around grade-levels, topics found on the district professional learning plan, or other areas of teacher interest.

A protocol or structure, such as the Cycle of Continuous Improvement (summarized in Figure 1) could be used to direct the work of these smaller teams. Stephanie Hirsch and Tracy Crow (2017) offer a 5-stage learning team cycle that allows for structured collaboration around data. It begins with the study of student data and educator learning challenges for the purpose of setting both student and teacher learning goals. The team develops new knowledge and skills both individually and as a group. They implement their new learning in conjunction with assessment tools and classroom supports. Finally, the team monitors student and educator goals and makes adjustments to teacher practice.

Job-Embedded Learning

Research shows the most difficult step in professional learning is at the implementation or application phase (Joyce & Showers, 1982). It is not enough to have an outside expert present or even demonstrate a new instructional approach. There needs to be attention given to a gradual release of responsibility, feedback, and critical reflection. It is important to consider that teachers need an average of 20 different practice experiences before a new instructional skill or strategy is mastered (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Other studies have suggested that professional learning leading to teacher mastery could take between 50 to 80 hours of demonstration, practice, and feedback (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). The results of this program evaluation are consistent with this finding. Our teaching staff is asking for more support in the area of implementation. Specifically, teachers are requesting opportunities to extend their learning over time. They would like the administration to remain focused on a few specific areas of learning and provide more opportunities for collaboration, practice, and peer feedback.

There are some job-embedded learning vehicles that could address our need for ongoing support with the implementation of new learning. Our school district has a nascent lab classroom (studio classroom) initiative led by four teacher leaders (Margolis & Doring, 2012). These teachers have opened their classrooms to other teaching staff for the purpose of observing specific instructional strategies introduced by an outside reading consultant. We have incorporated a basic lesson study format of pre-observation discussion, observation, and post-observation reflection. However, similar to other “hybrid teacher leadership” opportunities (Margolis & Huggins, 2012), this initiative

suffers from a lack of clearly defined roles, student learning targets and educator learning goals. I believe our lab classrooms would benefit from a robust professional learning plan and additional staffing support.

As previously mentioned, our school district has relied heavily on professional development from outside literacy consultants and coaches. We may be ready to consider replacing these outside consultants with a district literacy coach. This instructional coach would help with the coordination of our lab classroom initiative and provide ongoing support with teacher implementation of new learning. Marsh, Bertrand, and Huguet's exploratory study (2015) on how instructional coaches and professional learning communities support teachers' use of data for instructional change may serve as a vision for the future of professional learning in the Shermerville School District. I believe we should consider a combination of professional learning communities, job-embedded learning, and a district literacy coach working under the guidance of a powerful professional learning plan.

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APPENDIX A: SAI ADMINISTRATION EMAIL

July 2016

Dear Educator:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my program evaluation by completing the Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI). I am using the SAI as one source of valuable data to help focus our planning for improving professional development. The online survey will take about 15-20 minutes to complete, and your responses are completely anonymous. The SAI may be accessed through End Date.

This email contains all the information required to login or register at the www.sai-learningforward.org website and begin completing your SAI. Follow the steps listed below and you will be ready to go in just a few minutes.

1. Visit <http://www.sai-learningforward.org> on your computer.
2. Click on the Register link.
3. Enter your school-specific token, which is ADD TOKEN HERE.
4. Enter your e-mail address or create a username. It is a good idea to record your username so you can remember it if you wish to return to the SAI at a later time.
5. Choose a password that must be entered twice in order to confirm. It is a good idea to record your password so you can remember it if you wish to return to the SAI at a later time.
6. Click on Continue to complete your registration and start the SAI Survey.
7. Locate the survey link under the heading Surveys, it will contain your school's name. Click this link to start.
8. If you are unable to complete the SAI in one session, you may click "Save" at any time to save your results and then return to the SAI at a later date.
9. Return to SAI by entering <http://www.sai-learningforward.org> again and entering your email address or user name and password. You will not need your token to log in again if you return to the SAI.

No one will be able to connect your password or username with your SAI answers. In case of difficulties, please feel free to contact me at scarlson@district30.org.

Thank you,
Scott Carlson
Principal, Willowbrook School
scarlson@district30.org
847-400-8803

APPENDIX B: STANDARDS ASSESSMENT INVENTORY (SAI-2)

Information About You

1. Role
 - a. Content Area Teacher
 - b. Support Teacher
 - c. Elective or Special Area Teacher
2. Experience Level as a Teacher
 - a. Less than 1 year
 - b. 1-4 years
 - c. 5-10 years
 - d. 11-16 years
 - e. 17-25 years
 - f. More than 25 years
3. Years at Current School
 - a. 0-1 years
 - b. 2-4 years
 - c. 5-9 years
 - d. 10-20 years
 - e. 21 or more years

Survey Questions Organized by Standard

Learning Communities

1. My school system has policies and procedures that support the vision for learning communities in schools.
2. Learning communities in my school meet several times per week to collaborate on how to improve student learning.
3. Learning community members in my school believe the responsibility to improve student learning is shared by all stakeholders, such as all staff members, district personnel, families, and community members.
4. In my school, some of the learning community members include non-staff

members, such as students, parents, community members.

5. My school's learning communities are structured for teachers to engage in the continuous improvement cycle (i.e., data analysis, planning, implementation, reflection, and evaluation).
6. In my school, learning community members demonstrate effective communication and relationship skills so that a high level of trust exists among the group.
7. All members of the learning communities in my school hold each other accountable to achieve the school's goals.

Leadership

8. My school's leaders provide teachers with equitable resources to support our individual and collaborative goals for professional learning.
9. My school's leaders are active participants with other staff members in the school's professional learning.
10. My school's leaders advocate for resources to fully support professional learning.
11. My school's leaders regard professional learning as a top priority for all staff.
12. My school's leaders cultivate a positive culture that embraces characteristics such as, collaboration, high expectations, respect, trust, and constructive feedback.
13. My school's leaders speak about the important relationship between improved student achievement and professional learning.
14. My school's leaders consider all staff members capable of being professional learning leaders.

Resources

15. Practicing and applying new skills with students in my classroom are regarded as important learning experiences in my school.
16. Teachers in my school are involved with monitoring the effectiveness of the professional learning resources.
17. Professional learning expenses, such as registration and consultant fees, staff, and

materials, are openly discussed in my school.

18. In my school, time is available for teachers during the school day for professional learning.
19. Teachers in my school are involved with the decision-making about how professional learning resources are allocated.
20. Professional learning is available to me at various times, such as job embedded experiences, before or after-school hours, and summer experiences.
21. Teachers in my school have access to various technology resources for professional learning.

Data

22. Some professional learning programs in my school, such as mentoring or coaching, are continuously evaluated to ensure quality results.
23. In my school, teachers have an opportunity to evaluate each professional learning experience to determine its value and impact on student learning.
24. In my school, various data such as teacher performance data, individual professional learning goals, and teacher perception data, are used to plan professional learning.
25. My school uses a variety of student achievement data to plan professional learning that focuses on school improvement.
26. In my school, teachers use what is learned from professional learning to adjust and inform teaching practices.
27. My school uses a variety of data to monitor the effectiveness of professional learning.
28. A variety of data are used to assess the effectiveness of my school's professional learning.
29. In my school, how to assess the effectiveness of the professional learning experience is determined before the professional learning plan is implemented.

Learning Designs

30. In my school, teachers' backgrounds, experience levels, and learning needs are considered when professional learning is planned and designed.
31. The use of technology is evident in my school's professional learning.
32. Teachers in my school are responsible for selecting professional learning to enhance skills that improve student learning.
33. Professional learning in my school includes various forms of support to apply new practices.
34. In my school, participation in online professional learning opportunities is considered as a way to connect with colleagues, and to learn from experts in education.
35. In my school, teachers have opportunities to observe each other as one type of job-embedded professional learning.
36. Teachers' input is taken into consideration when planning school-wide professional learning.

Implementation

37. A primary goal for professional learning in my school is to enhance teaching practices to improve student performance.
38. Teachers in my school receive on going support in various ways to improve teaching.
39. My school has a consistent professional learning plan in place for three to five years.
40. My school's professional learning plan is aligned to school goals.
41. In my school, teachers individually reflect about teaching practices and strategies.
42. Professional learning experiences planned at my school are based on research about effective school change.
43. In my school, teachers give frequent feedback to colleagues to refine the implementation of instructional strategies.

Outcomes

44. Professional learning at my school focuses on the curriculum and how students learn.
45. Professional learning in my school contributes to increased student achievement.
46. Professional learning experiences in my school connect with teacher performance standards (e.g., teacher preparation standards, licensing standards, etc.).
47. All professional staff members in my school are held to high standards to increase student learning.
48. In my school, professional learning supports teachers to develop new learning and then to expand and deepen that learning over time.
49. Student learning outcomes are used to determine my school's professional learning plan.
50. My professional learning this school year is connected to previous professional learning.

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP INVITATION EMAIL

Dear Teachers,

Your input is needed! I am conducting a program evaluation of our school district's professional learning program. You may remember completing the Standards Assessment Inventory – a survey of your perceptions about professional learning in our school district. I would like to add some additional qualitative data to provide greater context and depth to the survey results.

You are invited to participate in a focus group interview. It should last approximately 45 minutes. I am interested in documenting diverse perspectives on professional learning and identify important patterns across grade levels and school buildings within the district.

The elementary focus groups will consist of 6 staff members (2 primary grade teachers, 2 intermediate grade teachers, 1 student services teacher, and 1 specials teacher). The middle school focus group will consist of 7 staff members (2 sixth grade teachers, 2 seventh grade teachers, 2 eighth grade teachers, 1 student services teacher).

Please indicate your willingness to participate using this online form. If you are selected, I will provide you with an informed consent form and a meeting date/time. Please be assured that your identity and interview responses will remain anonymous. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your consideration,

Scott Carlson

Principal, Willowbrook School

scarlson@district30.org

847-400-8803

APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Introduction and Ground Rules

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me. The purpose of this focus group is to add context and detail to the aggregate results from the Standards Assessment Inventory. I hope to gain ideas for improving the planning, implementation, and evaluation of professional learning in the district. Before we begin, I would like to review a few ground rules for the discussion.

- a. I am going to ask you several questions; we do not have to go in any particular order but I do want everyone to take part in the discussion. I ask that only one person speak at a time.
- b. Feel free to treat this as a discussion and respond to what others are saying, whether you agree or disagree. I am interested in your opinions and whatever you have to say is fine. There are no right or wrong answers. I am just asking for your opinions based on your own personal experience. I am here to learn from you.
- c. Don't worry about having a different opinion than someone else.
- d. Do not feel that you need to answer every question.
- e. I am recording the discussion today and also taking notes because I don't want to miss any of your comments.
- f. I will treat your answers as confidential. I will not include your names or any other information that could identify you in any reports I write. I will destroy the notes and recordings after I complete my evaluation.
- g. Finally, this discussion is expected to take about 45 minutes. Does anyone have any questions before we start?

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

Questions Aligned to the Standards of Professional Learning

1. (Learning Communities) – Learning communities have been broadly described as “ongoing groups of teachers who meet regularly for the purpose of increasing their own learning and that of their students”. How do our district professional development activities impact your school’s professional learning communities?
2. (Leadership) – What are some actions that principals can take to increase teacher leadership and increase their capacity for professional learning?
3. (Resources) – What resources (e.g., time, materials, staff) are needed to improve professional development in the district?
4. (Data) – How does the district’s professional development support your school improvement goals?
5. (Data) – How is student learning data used to guide your professional learning?
6. (Learning Design) – Do you feel teacher input is taken into consideration when planning school-wide professional learning?
7. (Learning Design) – How can we engage more staff in the design of our district’s professional development?
8. (Implementation & Outcomes) – We have received professional development on a wide range of topics and instructional practices. What can be done to sustain professional learning over time and help teachers refine their instructional practice?
9. (Additional Question) Are there any other issues related to professional development in our district that we haven’t touched upon that you would like to discuss? Is there anything else that I should consider in my study of professional learning in our district?

APPENDIX F: CODE MANUAL

Standard 1: Learning Communities (LC)

Theme 1: Desire for more peer-to-peer support for learning.

Quote: “When we are introduced to concepts... take back to our grade level meetings and practice in our classrooms...”

Quote: “different cohorts of teachers get together and develop their practice in an ongoing way...”

Theme 2: Request for greater focus or alignment in professional learning.

Quote: “...it was more meaningful. Everyone was doing the same thing. We were having great discussions and it was focused on a single topic”.

Quote: “... everyone is focusing on that thing and working on it together”.

Standard 2: Leadership (LE)

Theme 1: Discover teacher strengths and needs.

Quote: “The first biggest step is for principals to be in classrooms enough to know how they run and to be able to appreciate each teacher’s individual strengths... basically every teacher can somewhat be a lab teacher because we all have strengths that we can share with one another.”

Theme 2: Ask teachers for their learning needs.

Quote: “Just asking what it is we need and making us feel comfortable being vulnerable would be conducive to teacher leadership and growth.”

Theme 3: Encourage teacher cooperation versus competition.

Quote: “Be very cognizant of the social structures and interactions that are happening with teachers... deal with things plainly to allow for the more cooperative side of teacher culture to flourish instead of a competitive cycle...”

Standard 3: Resources (RE)

Theme 1: More time allocated for structured teacher collaboration.

Quote: “Time to think with other people is the biggest and most important resource”.

Quote: “A lot of times the PD is over... you don’t always come back and talk about what you learned... sit as a grade level or team and talk about it and how you are going to use it right after the fact.”

Theme 2: Consideration of learning priorities.

Quote: “Every staff development day seems to be a different topic...”

Quote: “Sometimes I feel like things are kind of scattered and you’re learning about this one time and then something else the next time...”

Standard 4: Data (DA)

Theme 1: Disconnect between student data and professional learning

Quote: “I am assuming there was a reason for the professional development, but we don’t know the data or the information.”

Quote: “If something is supposed to be data-driven, then it should be articulated... this the reason we are having this PD... we are seeing this trend and this is why we’re doing this.”

Theme 2: Disconnect between school improvement plans and professional learning.

Quote: “I don’t think they are very well connected right now. I think it would be nice to have goals that were more teacher driven... what do we all want to get better as a staff? Really focus on that and then getting PD to go along with that.

Quote: “What are our school improvement goals?”

Theme 3: Desire to become more skilled in using student data to assess the implementation of professional learning.

Quote: “Give me an idea of how it (NWEA MAP) works. It just seems artificial... How does this translate into this score?

Quote: “I put more on the nose to nose, eye ball to eye ball, what is going on in my classroom than I do on the data we are gathering.”

Standard 5: Learning Design (LD)

Theme 1: Desire for a larger role in selecting and constructing learning designs.

Quote: “I think there is a good intention to make teachers feel like they are heard... but pretending that teachers have a lot of input is frustrating.”

Quote: “... in terms of structure and delivery, that is where we are locked out as

learners, as participants, and as teacher leaders.”

Theme 2: Differentiated learning designs to meet the unique needs of learners.

Quote: “We are all at different places and because of that the same PD can be overwhelming to one person, can be exciting to somebody else, and confusing to another...”

Theme 3: Desire for more job-embedded learning.

Quote: “We need more support in the classroom. I think there can be a misunderstanding of how it’s actually going to be implemented and where we are as a group of teachers and individuals in our professional practice.”

Quote: “A coach or somebody that could be in all of our classrooms and helping and that's one of us as well. That's not like an outsider but it’s one of us”.

Theme 4: Desire for a professional learning focus or plan.

Quote: “I do feel like we have a lot of new things going on... what is the goal for the year and what is the focus?”

Quote: “If there was an overall goal for the topic, it would be easier for people to come up with some things.”

Standards 6 & 7: Implementation & Outcomes (IO)

Theme 1: Opportunities to sustain learning over time.

Quote: “I think you need to spiral it, keep coming back to it. You can’t just leave

it hanging there and then move onto something else.”

Quote: “Not jump from one thing to another like a flea on a hot brick.”

Theme 2: Recognition that we are growing our practice.

Quote: “When all is said and done... going through all this professional development has made me a better teacher.”

APPENDIX G: FINAL THEMES

Drago-Severson's Pillar Practices (2009)	Clustered Themes	Final Themes
<p>Teaming practices to promote learning through collaboration.</p>	<p>Theme LC1: Desire for more peer-to-peer support for learning.</p> <p>Theme LE3: Encourage teacher cooperation versus competition.</p> <p>Theme DA3: Desire to become more skilled in using student data to assess the implementation of professional learning.</p>	<p>Our teachers are asking for opportunities to collaborate for the purpose of improving student achievement.</p>
<p>Providing leadership roles to support transformational learning, build organizational and human capacity, and promote change.</p>	<p>Theme LC2: Request for greater focus or alignment in professional learning.</p> <p>Theme LD1: Desire for a larger role in selecting and constructing learning designs.</p> <p>Theme IO2: Recognition that we are growing our practice.</p>	<p>Our teachers want a vehicle to provide input on professional learning goals and to assess our progress toward established goals.</p>
<p>Collegial Inquiry practices that involve writing, dialogue, conflict resolution, and decision making.</p>	<p>Theme LE1: Discover teacher strengths and needs.</p> <p>Theme LE2: Ask teachers for their learning needs.</p> <p>Theme RE1: More time allocated for structured teacher collaboration.</p> <p>Theme LD2: Differentiated learning designs to meet the unique needs of learners.</p> <p>Theme LD3: Desire for more job-embedded learning.</p> <p>Theme IO1: Opportunities to sustain learning over time.</p>	<p>There needs to be time for all teachers to meet regularly to dialogue and reflect on their instructional craft. Job-embedded forms of professional learning will support teachers as they manage change and complexity.</p>

APPENDIX H: STANDARDS ASSESSMENT INVENTORY RESULTS

GROUPED BY STANDARD

Learning Communities Standard	Mean	IQR
1. My school system has policies and procedures that support the vision for learning communities in schools.	4.08	1.00
2. Learning communities in my school meet several times per week to collaborate on how to improve student learning.	3.05	2.00
3. Learning community members in my school believe the responsibility to improve student learning is shared by all stakeholders, such as all staff members, district personnel, families, and community members.	3.94	2.00
4. In my school, some of the learning community members include non-staff members, such as students, parents, community members.	3.29	1.50
5. My school's learning communities are structured for teachers to engage in the continuous improvement cycle (i.e., data analysis, planning, implementation, reflection, and evaluation).	3.55	1.00
6. In my school, learning community members demonstrate effective communication and relationship skills so that a high level of trust exists among the group.	3.72	1.00
7. All members of the learning communities in my school hold each other accountable to achieve the school's goals.	3.68	1.00
Average of the questions above.	3.62	1.00

Leadership Standard	Mean	IQR
8. My school's leaders provide teachers with equitable resources to support our individual and collaborative goals for professional learning.	4.19	1.00
9. My school's leaders are active participants with other staff members in the school's professional learning.	4.03	1.50

10. My school's leaders advocate for resources to fully support professional learning.	4.38	1.00
11. My school's leaders regard professional learning as a top priority for all staff.	4.30	1.00
12. My school's leaders cultivate a positive culture that embraces characteristics such as collaboration, high expectations, respect, trust, and constructive feedback.	4.13	1.25
13. My school's leaders speak about the important relationship between improved student achievement and professional learning.	4.08	2.00
14. My school's leaders consider all staff members capable of being professional learning leaders.	4.00	2.00
Average of the questions above.	4.16	1.00

Resources Standard	Mean	IQR
15. Practicing and applying new skills with students in my classroom are regarded as important learning experiences in my school.	4.39	1.00
16. Teachers in my school are involved with monitoring the effectiveness of the professional learning resources.	3.65	1.00
17. Professional learning expenses, such as registration and consultant fees, staff, and materials, are openly discussed in my school.	3.07	2.00
18. In my school, time is available for teachers during the school day for professional learning.	3.56	1.00
19. Teachers in my school are involved with the decision-making about how professional learning resources are allocated.	3.12	1.00
20. Professional learning is available to me at various times, such as job embedded experiences, before or after-school hours, and summer experiences.	4.19	1.00

21. Teachers in my school have access to various technology resources for professional learning.	4.38	1.00
Average of the questions above.	3.78	2.00

Data Standard	Mean	IQR
22. Some professional learning programs in my school, such as mentoring or coaching, are continuously evaluated to ensure quality results.	3.93	2.00
23. In my school, teachers have an opportunity to evaluate each professional learning experience to determine its value and impact on student learning.	4.02	2.00
24. In my school, various data such as teacher performance data, individual professional learning goals, and teacher perception data, are used to plan professional learning.	3.38	1.00
25. My school uses a variety of student achievement data to plan professional learning that focuses on school improvement.	3.63	1.00
26. In my school, teachers use what is learned from professional learning to adjust and inform teaching practices.	3.94	2.00
27. My school uses a variety of data to monitor the effectiveness of professional learning.	3.30	1.00
28. A variety of data are used to assess the effectiveness of my school's professional learning.	3.35	1.00
29. In my school, how to assess the effectiveness of the professional learning experience is determined before the professional learning plan is implemented.	3.14	1.00
Average of the questions above.	3.63	1.00

Learning Designs Standard	Mean	IQR
30. In my school, teachers' backgrounds, experience levels, and learning needs are considered when professional learning is planned and designed.	3.32	1.00
31. The use of technology is evident in my school's professional learning.	4.02	2.00
32. Teachers in my school are responsible for selecting professional learning to enhance skills that improve student learning.	3.26	1.00
33. Professional learning in my school includes various forms of support to apply new practices.	3.74	1.00
34. In my school, participation in online professional learning opportunities is considered as a way to connect with colleagues, and to learn from experts in education.	3.30	1.00
35. In my school, teachers have opportunities to observe each other as one type of job-embedded professional learning.	3.28	1.00
36. Teachers' input is taken into consideration when planning school-wide professional learning.	3.21	1.00
Average of the questions above.	3.45	1.00

Implementation	Mean	IQR
37. A primary goal for professional learning in my school is to enhance teaching practices to improve student performance.	4.35	1.00
38. Teachers in my school receive on-going support in various ways to improve teaching.	4.06	1.00
39. My school has a consistent professional learning plan in place for three to five years.	3.90	2.00
40. My school's professional learning plan is aligned to school goals.	4.13	1.00
41. In my school, teachers individually reflect about teaching practices and strategies.	4.11	1.00

42. Professional learning experiences planned at my school are based on research about effective school change.	3.92	1.00
43. In my school, teachers give frequent feedback to colleagues to refine the implementation of instructional strategies.	3.06	2.00
Average of the questions above.	3.93	2.00

Outcomes Standard	Mean	IQR
44. Professional learning at my school focuses on the curriculum and how students learn.	3.94	1.25
45. Professional learning in my school contributes to increased student achievement.	3.92	0.00
46. Professional learning experiences in my school connect with teacher performance standards (e.g., teacher preparation standards, licensing standards, etc.).	3.87	1.00
47. All professional staff members in my school are held to high standards to increase student learning.	4.48	1.00
48. In my school, professional learning supports teachers to develop new learning and then to expand and deepen that learning over time.	3.87	2.00
49. Student learning outcomes are used to determine my school's professional learning plan.	3.59	1.00
50. My professional learning this school year is connected to previous professional learning.	3.84	1.00
Average of the questions above.	3.94	2.00