

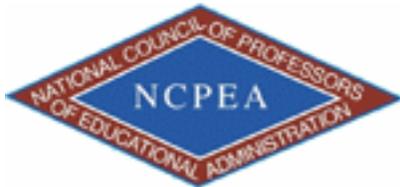
IDENTIFYING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS*

Gene Spanneut
James Tobin
Steven Ayers

This work is produced by The Connexions Project and licensed under the
Creative Commons Attribution License †

Abstract

Superintendents of schools face increased leadership demands from diverse constituents, challenges due to current economic and political conditions, and opportunities posed by evolving trends and reforms. Superintendents are in the key position to make systemic school improvements a major priority, to allocate resources to promote the importance and implementation of those improvements, and to direct and support what principals need to do to keep instructional leadership in clear focus and at the top of their agendas. To better fulfill such responsibilities, superintendents must purposefully choose to remain current with existing demands and to address future needs. This article presents the results of a preliminary study on superintendents' self-identification of professional development needs based on recognized leadership standards and the preferences of those superintendents for professional development delivery methods.



NOTE: This manuscript has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of education administration. In addition to publication in the Connexions Content Commons, this module is published in the *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*,¹ Volume 6, Number 3 (July - September, 2011), ISSN 2155-9635. Formatted and edited in Connexions by Theodore Creighton and Brad Bizzell, Virginia Tech and Janet Tareilo, Stephen F. Austin State University.

*Version 1.3: Jul 11, 2011 12:17 pm GMT-5

†<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>

¹<http://www.ncpeapublications.org>

1 Sumario en español

Los supervisores de escuelas encaran demandas aumentadas de liderazgo de componentes diversos, los desafíos debido a corrientes condiciones, y debido a las oportunidades económicas y políticas colocadas evolucionando tendencias y reformas. Los supervisores están en el puesto clave de hacer mejoras sistémicas de escuela una prioridad mayor, para asignar recursos para promover la importancia y la implementación de esas mejoras, y para dirigir y apoyar lo que directores deben hacer para mantener liderazgo instruccional en el foco claro y a la cabeza de sus órdenes del día. Cumplir mejor tales responsabilidades, los supervisores deben escoger resueltamente quedarse corriente con demandas existentes y para dirigir futuras necesidades. Este artículo presenta los resultados de un estudio preliminar en la auto-identificación de supervisores de necesidades profesionales de desarrollo se basaron en estándares reconocidos de liderazgo y las preferencias de esos supervisores para métodos profesionales de entrega de desarrollo.

NOTE: Esta es una traducción por computadora de la página web original. Se suministra como información general y no debe considerarse completa ni exacta.

2 Introduction

Superintendents of schools are expected to efficiently manage school system operations while thriving as “strong instructional leaders, conversant with information about educational best practice, and the process of change” (Maxfield, Wells, Keane, & Klocko, 2008, p. 13). In both instances, they are increasingly confronted by stakeholders’ demands to do more in their positions as school system leaders, and to do it better (Helsing, Howell, Kegan, & Lahey, 2008).

The growing expectations of what superintendents should accomplish in their jobs are paralleled by the necessity of being able to function in and respond to evolving, complex, and often tenuous environments (Lewis, Rice, & Rice, 2011). Superintendents’ duties require them to understand and respond appropriately therein to the demands of current conditions. They also are responsible for recognizing and comprehending the potential challenges and opportunities of emerging educational reforms and continually developing trends in teaching, learning, and leadership.

Superintendents must understand what they need to do as leaders and how to adjust the manner in which they perform as leaders to promote the likelihood for bringing about improved school system-wide educational outcomes in all areas. If they are to survive and be successful leaders, superintendents must first be able to recognize the extent of their leadership knowledge and the limitations of their leadership abilities and skills. Then, they must know how to identify their specific areas of need and how to purposefully address them through opportunities for leadership growth and development.

3 Continuing Leadership Development

Practicing superintendents, especially those with longer tenure in the position who graduated years ago from leadership programs, were not always fully prepared for the work they needed to do (Reeves & Berry, 2009). Academic institutions responsible for the preparation of new administrators, however, acknowledged the ever increasing demands school leaders were required to address and responded by revising their programs to provide more comprehensive and relevant leadership skills, competencies, and experiences (Orr, 2006).

The revision of educational leadership programs by colleges and universities was also influenced by the prominence of recognized program standards and performance standards. Program standards, such as the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) Program Standards, served to “guide [the] planning, implementing, and accrediting of administrator preparation programs” (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, n. d., p.1). Performance standards, such as the Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008, established leadership “performance expectations [to] facilitate curriculum development, candidate assessment, and accountability” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 11).

Leadership standards were referred to as “the heart of 21st-century school leadership, as they inform what school leaders should know and be able to do” (Green, 2010, p. 9). School leaders were described as needing

3.1

to be future-focused, able to develop, communicate, and implement a shared vision . . . [to] be purpose and value-driven and able to lead instructional change . . . [to] understand self and others [and be] knowledgeable of the complexities of school organizational life. The ISLLC Standards which have these behaviors embedded in them should be exhibited by 21st-century school leaders. (Green, 2010, p. 9).

Research over a decade ago showed that superintendents, new as well as veteran, desired continuing, post-collegiate professional development to help them “effectively deal with the demands and complexities of the job” (Holloway, 2001, p. 85). The same applied with respect to superintendents’ needs for on-going ways to gain insights about and to receive training in emerging leadership trends, practices, and reform initiatives (Wong & Nicotera, 2007).

Compared to the literature and research about the professional development of teachers, less information existed about school leaders’ professional development (Firestone, Hayes, Robinson, & Shalaby, 2008). Most of what was available in that regard pertained largely to the roles and responsibilities of principals (Chapman, 2005; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008).

Information in the literature and research was less prevalent regarding superintendents’ professional development. Some recognition was given, however, that superintendents’ professional development should be based on “a coherent model that is grounded in national standards” (Holloway, 2001, p. 85). The limited amount of existing data indicated the content of superintendents’ professional development was largely generalized “rather than aligned with specific needs of superintendents or district problems, [was] rarely standards based, and employ[ed] questionable pedagogical practices [that were] short term, trainer focused, and context free” (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005, p. 13).

Some instances were documented over the years about the availability of organized professional development for superintendents through leadership networks, partnerships, and professional organizations (Hardy, 2004; Kronley & Handley, 2001; Orr, 2007). Many organized professional development programs, however, were not readily available in all areas of the country or were often referred to as “fleeting, one-shot experiences” (The Wallace Foundation, 2009, p. 2).

4 Statement of the Problem

Professional development can help superintendents stay current with changing conditions and demands and prepare them for what lies ahead. To do both, however, opportunities for superintendents’ professional development should be on-going (Green, 2010).

There has been a lack of information from the research regarding how administrators - including superintendents - “continue their professional learning over the course of their careers” (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 67). Prior to engaging in such activities, however, the areas in which professional development is needed and/or desired must be identified (Lunenburg and Ornstein, 2008). There has also been a scarcity of information about how superintendents do that and how they determine their preferences for professional development delivery methods to meet their needs.

Participating in professional development activities derived from their self-identified needs should enhance the likelihood for superintendents to more successfully accomplish what they do and enhance how they behave as leaders (Mizell, 2010). Using recognized leadership standards as a framework from which to identify superintendents’ needs serves two purposes. First, the standards help clarify the needs because they are succinctly worded in terms of common leadership knowledge and skill areas that can be assessed. Second, because the standards are written in common leadership terms, superintendents can seek colleagues with similar needs who may be interested in sharing professional development activities.

Are superintendents able to use recognized leadership standards as a framework from which to self-identify their professional development needs? Are superintendents able to identify their preferences for methods of professional development delivery? Are there any commonalities among the self-identified professional development needs of superintendents in a given geographic region? Are there any commonalities among the preferences for professional development delivery methods of superintendents in a given geographic region?

Superintendents' self-identification of professional development needs based on recognized leadership standards should be explored. Identifying superintendents' preferences for professional development delivery methods to address their needs should also be investigated.

5 Purpose of the Study

This study was designed as a preliminary examination of the self-identified professional development needs of a population of public school district superintendents of schools (superintendents) in a geographically identified region of New York State. The study was used as a base for the development of a wider investigation of similar information from a larger population of superintendents in other regions of New York State and throughout the state. The preliminary study was made in conjunction with a comparable study of the self-identified professional development needs of a population of public school district building-level principals in the same geographic region.

The superintendents were asked to complete a needs assessment to identify their levels of need for their personal professional development for each of the 31 functions contained within the six Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 (ISLLC Standards). The needs assessment also asked the superintendents to consider eight different professional development delivery methods and to identify for each of them their level of preference for its use as a way to address their identified professional development needs. Information was also sought from the superintendents about their districts' enrollments and five items of personal information.

This preliminary study provided the participating superintendents and the researchers with data about the extent to which professional development needs based on the ISLLC Standards were shared among the respondents. The results supply information for use in developing regionally shared professional development activities for the superintendents. The ability to develop those activities should be enhanced because the superintendents' identified needs were based on the same standards.

The results also provide information about commonalities among the superintendents' rankings of various professional development delivery methods. Awareness of that information should facilitate the ability to design the content and offer the delivery of professional development activities to superintendents through methods that are known to them and that are aligned with their preferences.

The means used to obtain the results of the study may provide superintendents in other Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) regions with ways to identify their own professional development needs as well as their preferred professional development delivery methods.

The districts' enrollments and the superintendents' personal information from the study provide a baseline for comparisons and statistical analyses with similar data to be collected from larger populations of superintendents. The superintendents' levels of need for professional development based on the ISLLC Standards and their preferences for delivery methods also give a baseline for comparisons to be made with the same type of data from the parallel study of public school district building-level principals in the same geographic region.

All superintendents – new and veteran – face myriad increasing leadership demands from diverse constituents, challenges due to current conditions, and opportunities posed by evolving trends and developing reforms. Superintendents are the most familiar with such dynamics and the impacts they have on their respective jobs and abilities. Superintendents are in the best position to identify the areas in which they need professional development to augment their leadership knowledge and skills. Accordingly, they should be provided with well-reasoned ways to identify their specific professional development needs and delivery preferences to optimize their abilities to more ably fulfill their duties and responsibilities. Doing so is essential because the superintendent's job of "leading an educational organization demands a lifetime of learning [and] requires professional development over the course of a career" (Reeves & Berry, 2009, p. 9).

6 Method

The population in the study consisted of 66 superintendents of 66 public school systems located within part of the western-central region of New York State. The geographically identified region of New York State used for this study consisted of four contiguous BOCES supervisory districts. The four BOCES supervisory districts contained within them all of the 66 public school systems in the study. Organized under section 1950 of New York Education Law, BOCES “is a voluntary, cooperative association of school districts in a geographic area that share planning, services, and programs to provide educational and support activities more economically, efficiently, and equitably than could be provided by an individual district” (New York State School Boards Association and the New York State Bar Association, 2010, p. 123). Because the BOCES supervisory districts were already recognized as units of public school systems, they were used to identify the region for this study rather than trying to identify some other groupings.

An anonymous needs assessment was distributed in the late fall of 2010 to each of the 66 superintendents through their respective Regional District Superintendents (i.e., the four superintendents of the four BOCES). Approximately two weeks later, follow-up reminders were sent to all of the superintendents via email messages. The needs assessment was adapted from that used by Salazar (2001). Salazar’s (2001) needs assessment was found to be valid and reliable following field testing, a pilot study, and subsequent revisions.

First, the needs assessment distributed in the late fall of 2010 sought information from each of the superintendents about the student enrollments of their school districts and about five categories of personal information: gender, age, highest earned degree, years of experience as an administrator, and years in their current position.

Second, the needs assessment asked each of the superintendents to use a four-point Likert-type scale to select their level of need for their own personal professional development for each of the 31 functions reflected in the six ISLLC Standards. The four levels were: 1 = Not a Need, 2 = Low Need, 3 = Moderate Need, or 4 = High Need.

Third, the needs assessment asked each of the superintendents to use a four-point Likert-type scale to select their level of preference for each of eight different professional development delivery methods. The four levels were: 1 = Not a Preference, 2 = Low Preference, 3 = Moderate Preference, or 4 = High Preference.

Of the 66 needs assessments distributed, 60, or 90.9%, were returned.

7 Data Analysis

7.1 School District Enrollment Information

The data in Table 1 below show the total number of superintendents in the study that provided responses for the enrollments of their school districts.

The superintendents in the study were asked to select which one of the following five ranges contained the enrollment of their respective school districts: 1-999, 1000-1999, 2000-2999, 3000-3999, or 4000 or greater (4,000+). Each of those numbers is also shown expressed as a percent of the total number of responses received in the study for district enrollments.

District Enrollments

Enrollment	No. of Responses	Percent
1-999	21	35.0
1,000-1,999	23	38.3
2,000-2,999	6	10.0
3,000-3,999	3	5.0
4,000+	7	11.7
Total	60	100.0

Table 1

Participating superintendents worked in various sized school districts throughout the region studied. Slightly more than 73% of them reported working in districts with less than 2000 students. While this was a majority of the superintendents surveyed, it should be noted that ten of the districts each had student enrollments exceeding 3,000 students (one, in fact, had more than 12,000 students).

7.2 School Superintendent Personal Information

The data in table 2 show the total number of superintendents in the study that provided responses for each of the following five categories of personal information: gender, age, highest earned degree, years of experience as an administrator, and years of experience in their current position. Each of those numbers is also shown expressed as a percent of the total number of responses received in the study for each category.

Personal Information

Personal Information Categories	No. of Responses	Percent
Gender:		
Female	19	31.7
Male	41	68.3
Total	60	100.0
Age:		
<30	0	0
30-39	4	6.7
40-49	13	21.7
50-59	37	61.7
60+	6	10.0
Total	60	100.0
Highest Earned Degree:		
Master's	2	3.3
Certificate of Advanced Study	43	71.7
Doctorate	15	25.0
<i>continued on next page</i>		

Total	60	100.0
Years as Administrator:		
1-5	1	1.7
6-10	8	13.3
11-15	17	28.3
16-20	12	20.0
20+	21	35.0
No response	1	1.7
Total	60	100.0
Years in Current Position:		
1-5	38	63.3
6-10	13	21.7
11-15	5	8.3
16-20	2	3.3
20+	0	0
No response	2	3.3
Total	60	100.0

Table 2

7.3 Superintendents’ Self-Identified Needs for Professional Development Based on the ISLLC Standards

The six ISLLC Standards represented “the knowledge and skills that should be mastered in order to achieve a level of proficiency in a particular area” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 20). The 31 knowledge and skill functions (functions) represented “the action or actions for which a person . . . is responsible” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 20). Appendix A² contains a complete listing of the wording for each of the six standards and the 31 functions.

Table 3 shows the top-ranked functions that were selected as levels of “High Need” for professional development by 25% or more of the respondents (column 4). Table 3 also shows each of those same top-ranked “High Need” functions that when combined with respondents who selected them as “Moderate Need” accounted for 70% or more of the responses.

The Top-Ranked Functions

1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>continued on next page</i>					

²See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m38487/latest/Appendix A.pdf>>

Function	ISLLC Standard	High Rank	High Need	High Need Percent	Moderate Need + High Need Rank	Moderate Need + High Need Percent
10. Develop assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress	II	5		33.3	1	81.6
24. Ensure a system of accountability for every student's academic success	V	1		39.0	2	81.4
30. Act to influence local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning	VI	2		36.7	3	80.0
14. Monitor and evaluate the impact of the instructional program	II	2		36.7	4	78.4
7. Create a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular program	II	4		35.0	5	78.3
<i>continued on next page</i>						

31. Assess, analyze, and anticipate emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt leadership strategies	VI	10	25.4	6	74.6
20. Collect and analyze data and information pertinent to the educational environment	IV	8	28.8	7	72.9
12. Maximize time spent on quality instruction	II	7	30.5	7	72.9
8. Create a personalized and motivating learning environment for students	II	9	27.6	9	72.4
4. Promote continuous and sustainable improvement	I	5	33.3	10	71.6

Table 3

The first column in Table 3 identifies the number and the wording of each of the top-ranked functions while the second column identifies which of the six ISLLC Standards contains that function. For example, the first function listed, number 10, “Develop assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress,” is contained within ISLLC Standard II, “An educational leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional development.” (Appendix A lists the six standards and the 31 functions)

The third column in Table 3 shows the rank order of each of the top-ranked functions in terms of its selection as a level of “High Need.” The fourth column identifies the percentage of respondents who identified that function as an area of high need. The fifth column shows the rank order of each of the same top-ranked functions when “High Need” selections were combined with “Moderate Need” selections. The last column shows the percentage of respondents who identified that function as an area of moderate or high need. For example, Function 24 was contained within ISLLC Standard V, was the first-ranked “High Need” function, and was selected by 39.0% of the respondents. Function number 24 was also the second-ranked function when the “High Need” responses were combined with the “Moderate Need” responses; together, function number 24 was selected by 81.4% of the respondents.

As another example, function number 10 was contained in ISLLC Standard II, was the fifth-ranked “High Need” function, and was selected by 33.3% of the respondents. However, when the “High Need” responses

and the “Moderate Need” responses for function number 10 were combined, the result shows that function number 10 was the first-ranked response having been selected by 81.6% of the respondents.

Of the top-ranked functions shown in Table 3, five (numbers 10, 14, 7, 12, and 8 respectively) were contained in ISLLC Standard II: “An educational leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.”

Function numbers 30 and 31 were the only others of the top-ranked functions that were contained within a single ISLLC Standard: ISLLC Standard VI, “An educational leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.”

Table 4 shows the only two of the 31 functions that were selected by 70% or more of the respondents when “Moderate Need” responses were combined with “High Need” responses but that were selected by fewer than 25% of the respondents as “High Need.”

Moderate and High Need Combined

1	2	3	4	5	6	
Function	ISLLC Standard	High Rank	High Need	High Need Percent	Moderate Need + High Need Rank	Moderate Need + High Need Percent
13. Promote the use of the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning	II	17		18.3	6	76.7
11. Develop the instructional and leadership capacity of staff	II	13		23.3	12	70.0

Table 4

7.4 Preferred Delivery Methods for Superintendents’ Professional Development

The superintendents in the study were each asked to use a four-point Likert-type scale to select their levels of preference for each of eight different professional development delivery methods. As the data in Table 5 show, 32.2% of the responding superintendents selected small study groups as the delivery method with the highest preference (column 5). This was followed by 28.3% of the superintendents reporting they preferred to receive their professional development via a workshop format. Mentor/Coaching (23.3%) was the next closest method with a high preference.

Preferred Delivery Methods

1	2	3	4	5	6
Delivery Method	Not a Preference No. of Responses and Percent	Low Preference No. of Responses and Percent	Moderate Preference No. of Responses and Percent	High Preference No. of Responses and Percent	Moderate and High Combined No. of Responses and Percent
Workshop	2 - 3.3%	9 - 15.0%	32 - 53.3%	17 - 28.3%	49 - 81.6%
Small Study Group	0 - 0%	11 - 18.6%	29 - 49.2%	19 - 32.2%	48 - 81.4%
Mentoring/Coaching	8.3%	16 - 26.7%	25 - 41.7%	14 - 23.3%	39 - 65.0%
State and/or National Conference	4 - 6.7%	18 - 30.0%	34 - 56.7%	4 - 6.7%	38 - 63.4%
Self-Paced On-Line	15 - 25.0%	19 - 31.7%	18 - 30.0%	8 - 13.3%	26 - 43.3%
University Coursework: part in-person, part on-line	15 - 25.0%	23 - 38.3%	14 - 23.3%	8 - 13.3%	26 - 36.6%
University Coursework: presented regionally	15 - 25.0%	25 - 41.7%	11 - 18.3%	9 - 15.0%	20 - 33.3%
University Coursework: on campus	19 - 31.7%	26 - 43.3%	13 - 21.7%	2 - 3.3%	15 - 25.0%

Table 5

When the Moderate Preference and High Preference responses were combined (column 6 in Table 5), the top two preferred methods remained the same. However, the order of preference was reversed; that is, the workshop format (81.6%) was slightly ahead of the small study group format (81.4%). Mentor/Coaching remained as the third-ranked High Preference delivery method at 23.3% (column 5) and at 65.0% in column 6 showing Moderate Preference combined with High Preference.

The State and/or National conference delivery method was the fourth most preferred when Moderate Preference and High Preference were combined (63.4%). All of the other delivery methods identified in column 6 for Moderate and High Preference combined were at or in excess of 25%. However, other than the top three delivery methods identified in column 5 as High Preference, none of the other five methods were preferred by greater than 15% of the superintendents. In all instances, there appeared to be little interest in university coursework as a delivery method.

8 Discussion

The high response rate (90.9%) indicated the participating superintendents were very interested in identifying their levels of need for their own professional development based on the 31 functions of the six ISLLC Standards. The high response rate also indicated the superintendents were interested in identifying their preferences for methods of delivering professional development.

The data in column 4 of Table 3 show there was substantial agreement among the respondents in terms of areas of high need for their professional development. Ten of the 31 functions were identified as areas of high need for professional development by 25% or more of the respondents. When the respondents' selections for moderate need were combined with their selections for high need, the same ten functions were selected by 70% or more of the responding superintendents.

Five of the ten top-ranked functions identified in Table 3 were contained within ISLLC Standard II, "An educational leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth." The two functions identified in Table 4 were also contained within ISLLC Standard II. This information indicated high interest among the respondents for professional development pertaining directly to instruction; specifically in areas of developing assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress, monitoring and evaluating the impact of instructional programs, creating a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular program, maximizing time spent on quality instruction, and creating a personalized and motivating learning environment for students.

Of the remaining six of the ten top-ranked functions, only two were contained within the same ISLLC Standard. These were contained in ISLLC Standard VI, "An educational leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal and cultural context." This indicated the responding superintendents were also interested in professional development related to influencing local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning and in areas of assessing, analyzing, and anticipating emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt leadership strategies.

There was also agreement among the respondents regarding their top-ranked preferences for professional development delivery methods. The same three methods (workshops, small study groups, and mentoring/coaching) were identified when ranked as high preference as well as when ranked as moderate preference and high preference combined. Compared to the other five delivery methods, the three top-ranked selections are aligned with networking and with face-to-face formats. Also, the three top-ranked methods would appear to provide more direct involvement by the superintendents in their professional development activities than the other methods. That is, workshop, small study group, and mentoring/coaching delivery methods should offer and provide participation that is more active, interpersonal, and collegial than the other methods.

With the possible exception of professional development via a self-paced on-line format, the workshop, small study group, and mentoring/coaching delivery methods are more informal in nature than the other methods. The three can also be more readily offered on "home ground" as opposed to traveling to state and/or national conferences or attending professional development activities in more formal settings, such as at a college or a university.

The focus of the present study was limited to identifying the professional development needs of superintendents based on recognized leadership standards and their preferences for delivery methods. One of the next pursuits will be to use that data to determine the specific professional development content the superintendents desire. Such an approach may help to minimize the potential for professional development content that is "general rather than aligned with specific needs of superintendents or district problems, is rarely standards based, and employs questionable pedagogical practices [that are] short term, trainer focused, and context free" (Hoyle, Bjork, Collier, & Glass, 2005, p. 13).

As with other educators, the major purpose of professional development for superintendents is to present on-going opportunities to "learn new skills, acquire new knowledge, and develop new attitudes" (Kowalski, Lasley, & Mahoney, 2008, p. 230). The intended outcomes of professional development opportunities based on the superintendents' self-identified areas of need are to increase their capabilities to more effectively lead their school systems, especially in the areas of teaching and learning. Research has confirmed that the quality of those three areas and the quality of instructional leadership are directly related to and are the most significant factors for continually improving the levels of student achievement (Mizell, 2010).

Superintendents are in unique positions to underscore and to support through their actions the importance of professional leadership development for other district-level and building-level leaders (Teitel, 2006). Their abilities in that regard are crucial because, as the chief instructional leaders of their school systems, "superintendents must be models of continuous professional learning" (Sparks, 2002, p. 5). By modeling

the importance of and participation in on-going professional leadership development, superintendents send powerful messages to their principals. Prime among them is that the continuing growth of principals as building-level instructional leaders is “a fundamental ingredient of successful school improvement” (Nicholson, Harris-John, & Schimmel, 2005, p. 19).

9 Limitations of the Study

The present study was preliminary in nature. It sought and examined a limited amount of self-reported information from a small population of public school superintendents in a geographically identified region of New York State. The superintendents were asked to identify (a) brief demographic information, (b) their professional development needs, (b) their preferences for professional development delivery methods. Since the study was limited to one region, the results are not intended to be generalized to other parts of New York State, let alone to other areas of the country.

Another recognized limitation of the present study was that it did not seek information from the respondents about their number of years of service as superintendents of schools prior to the number of years as superintendents in their current positions. The present study also did not ask the respondents about the nature or the duration of their other administrative positions prior to becoming superintendents.

The format of the present study involved the superintendents self-reporting their professional development needs and their preferences for its delivery. Although the use of such techniques has been recognized in some instances as being “vulnerable to self-report bias in which [the respondents] may report results that are self-serving” (Goldring, Huff, Spillane, & Barnes, 2009, p. 206), the intent of the present study was to seek exactly that type of result.

10 Conclusion

The 31 functions contained within the six ISLLC Standards were used by the participating superintendents to identify their perceived levels of need for professional development. The 31 functions provided common descriptors for the superintendents’ consideration. The six ISLLC Standards and the 31 functions have been regarded as important because they “set parameters for developing professional development and evaluation systems that can readily facilitate performance growth of all education leaders” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 16).

The present study was paralleled by another preliminary investigation of similar data regarding the self-identified professional development needs of public school principals in the same geographically identified region. Because both of those studies were preliminary in nature and confined to a particular region, their results can not be able to be generalized to other settings. However, the results of both studies can be used to prepare more comprehensive investigations and analyses of the professional development needs and the preferred delivery methods identified by the principals and by the superintendents of public school districts throughout other regions of New York State. In particular, such research could examine if there are regional and state-wide commonalities and differences between and among:

- what superintendents identify
- what principals identify
- what superintendents identify compared and contrasted with what principals identify
- the levels of self-identified professional development needs and the preferences for delivery methods with the variables of age, gender, district enrollment, years of experience, and degree status for superintendents, for principals, and between superintendents and principals
- how superintendents and principals are currently addressing their professional needs.

While principals are central for leading instructional improvements at school building levels, the instructional leadership of superintendents is essential for those improvements to occur throughout their school systems. Superintendents are in the key position to make systemic instructional improvement a major priority, to allocate resources to promote its progress and importance, and to direct and support what principals need to

do to keep instructional leadership at the top of their agendas. To better and more ably fulfill such significant responsibilities, superintendents must purposefully choose to remain up-to-date with current conditions and to recognize the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead. Superintendents can enhance their potential for successfully doing so by investing in personal, on-going professional development based on their self-identified levels of needs that are framed within recognized leadership standards.

11 References

- Chapman, J. D. (2005). *Recruitment, retention, and development of school principals*. Paris, France: The International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP), and Brussels, Belgium: The International Academy of Education (IEA).
- Council of Chief State School Officers. (2008, May). *Educational leadership policy standards: ISLLC 2008*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Firestone, W. A., Hayes, B. F., Robinson, M. N., & Shalaby, C. (2008). Professional development for instruction and student learning? A new state policy for administrators. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 7*, 119-153.
- Green, R. L. (2010). *The four dimensions of principal leadership: A Framework for leading 21st century schools*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Goldring, E., Huff, J., Spillane, J. P., & Barnes, C. (2009). Measuring the learning-centered leadership expertise of school principals. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 8*, 197-228.
- Hardy, L. (2004). Career chargers. *The American School Board Journal, 191*(11), 34-36.
- Helsing, D., Howell, A., Kegan, R., & Lahey, L. (2008). Putting the “development” in professional development: Understanding and overturning educational leaders’ immunities to change. *Harvard Educational Review, 78*(3), 437-465.
- Holloway, J. H. (2001). Setting standards for the school superintendent. *Educational Leadership, 58*(5), 84-85.
- Hoyle, J. R., Bjork, L. G., Collier, V., & Glass, T. (2005). *The superintendent as CEO: Standards-based performance*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Kowalski, T. J., Lasley, II, T. J., & Mahoney, J. W. (2008). *Data-driven decisions in school leadership: Best practices for school improvement*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Kronley, R. A., & Handley, C. (2001). *Inspiring leadership: A philanthropic Partnership for Professional Development of Superintendents. A report on a BellSouth Foundations Special Initiative*. Atlanta, GA: BellSouth Foundation, Inc.
- Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S. & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. Minneapolis, MN: The University of Minnesota Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, and Toronto, Ontario, Canada: The University of Toronto Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Lewis, T., Rice, M., & Rice Jr., R. (2011, February 12). *Superintendents’ Beliefs and Behaviors Regarding Instructional Leadership Standards Reform*. Retrieved March 4, 2011, from the Connexions Web site: <http://cnx.org/content/m36715/1.3/>
- Lunenburg, F. C. & Ornstein, A. C. (2008). *Educational administration: Concepts and practices (5th ed.)*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Maxfield, C., Wells, C., Keane, W., & Klocko, B. (2008, November 12). *The Role of Superintendents in Supporting Teacher Leadership*. Retrieved March 4, 2011, from the Connexions Web site: <http://cnx.org/content/m18262/1.1>
- Mizell, H. (2010). *Why professional development matters*. Oxford, OH: Leaning Forward.
- National Policy Board for Educational Administration. (n. d.). *Major projects*. Retrieved March 24, 2011, from <http://www.npbea.org/projects.php>
- New York State School Boards Association and the New York State Bar Association. *School law (33rd edition)*. (2010). Latham, NY: New York State School Boards Association.
- Nicholson, B., Harris-John, M., & Schimmel, C. J. (2005). *Professional development for principals in the accountability era*. Charleston, WV: Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) at Edvantia.

- Orr, M. T. (2006). Mapping innovation in leadership preparation in our nation's schools of education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 87(7), 492-499.
- Orr, M. T. (2007). Learning advanced leadership: Findings from a leadership development programme [sic] for new superintendents. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 35(3), 327-347.
- Reeves, P., & Berry, J. (2009, July 9). *Preparing, Developing, and Credentialing K-12 School Leaders: Continuous Learning for Professional Roles*. Retrieved March 2, 2011, from the Connexions Web site: <http://cnx.org/content/m18260/1.2/>
- Salazar, P. (2001). *The professional development needs of high school principals for school improvement* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3049552).
- The Wallace Foundation. (2009). *Leading for change: New training opportunities for education's executives*. New York: Author.
- Teitel, L. (2005). Supporting school system leaders: The state of effective training programs for school superintendents. *Working Papers Center for Public Leadership*. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 66-78.
- Wong, K. K., & Nicotera, A. (2007). *Successful schools and educational accountability: Concepts and skills to meet leadership challenges*. Boston: Pearson.

11.1 Appendix A

[Click Here to View the Six ISLLC Standards and the 31 Functions³](#)

³See the file at <<http://cnx.org/content/m38487/latest/Appendix A.pdf>>