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Exploring the Ultimate Role of Central Office in the Design, Implementation, and Evaluation of Professional Development: A Comparative Case Study

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EXPLORING THE ULTIMATE ROLE OF CENTRAL OFFICE IN THE DESIGN, IMPLEMENTATION, AND EVALUATION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY

by

Sarah Elizabeth Johnson

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of The Graduate College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology Advisor: Patricia Reeves, Ed.D.

Western Michigan University
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Sarah Elizabeth Johnson
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It Takes a District

We know that teachers are crucial to the success of our students; as are parents, support staff, peer groups, administrators, and, essentially, anyone else who comes into contact with the daily lives of students (Sparks, 2000). It takes a great many things to develop an organization that is truly successful; one in which students are truly inspired to learn and to achieve their highest potential. It takes an administrative team that is dedicated to success for all students; parents who are willing to work in partnership with teachers and students; and teachers who are willing to stop at nothing less than the best (DuFour, 2002).

It takes, also, teachers who are willing to learn and grow professionally so that they may provide the best possible instruction for their students and an administration that is dedicated to the facilitation of this process (DuFour, 2004). For professional learning and growth to thrive at a building level, resources, support, and encouragement need to come from central office and the board of education. For learning and growth of teachers to translate into increased success for students, there needs to be an unwavering focus and
priority set on student learning (McREL, 2007). In other words: it takes a district... and nothing less.

Overview

Professional development is reaching a new plateau in education. From earlier legislations such as the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA) of 1965 and *A Nation at Risk* (1983), to today's *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2002, national initiatives and legislative decisions have undoubtedly played a significant role in the variety and quality of professional development offered to educators. Particularly, with the institution of the NCLB and the new *Michigan Merit Curriculum* (MMC) of 2006, school districts are moving quickly to ensure that all teachers are highly qualified and to hold educators to a higher standard of performance.

To match those higher standards of professional performance articulated through student results, states are responding with reworked systems of professional teacher preparation standards (Flanagan, 2007). To complete the circle of linking higher expectations for teacher impact, higher standards of professional preparation, initial teacher preparation, and continuing education are all coming under greater scrutiny. This scrutiny raises the question of what we can expect from higher education professional
preparation programs, and what remains to be accomplished over a teacher’s career through professional development.

Michigan State Superintendent Michael Flanagan (2007) calls the preparation and professional development of teachers “vital” to the implementation of the new Michigan Merit Curriculum (MMC). Mr. Flanagan also defined one of (the State’s) main objectives as staffing schools with “high quality teachers under the direction of administrators who are committed to instructional excellence” (Flanagan, 2007, p. 2). To raise the State superintendent’s words to policy level impact, the Michigan Department of Education has developed a strategic plan for professional development designed to provide “leadership and support” for high-quality teaching.

Recognizing that there is a connection between significant content-knowledge of the teacher and high-quality professional practice, many districts are beginning to look for quality professional development rather than simply the most cost-effective events as a means for improving teacher quality. This study attempts to identify some factors of quality professional development, and looks at the role of the central office in the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development at the district level. Of particular interest for this study is an examination of how districts set priorities, make decisions about professional development, how they carry
out those decisions, how the teachers experience those decisions, and how
districts evaluate the impact of those decisions.

This study explored professional development, including further
exploration of any possible connections between student achievement and
professional development or teacher learning, the effectiveness of
professional development, barriers to professional development, and the
central office role in the design, implementation, and evaluation of
professional development. Through this study process, participants had the
opportunity to reflect upon and react to early findings made during the study.
Participants’ reactions further informed the study and directed further lines of
questioning.

Context of Study

The context for this study is influenced by the current emphasis on
standards-based reform in K-12 education giving rise to the expansion and
increased attention to accountability measures. Within this context, there is
recognition that professional development must play a key role in helping
achieve a “sharp departure from past practice” (Sparks, 2002, p. 1-2) in order
to realize universal student proficiency with a rigorous set of core curriculum
standards and expectations.
In this age of standards-based reform, accountability measures are on the rise. Consequently, an appreciation for the central role of professional development is also on the rise, as well as the recognition that we must initiate a paradigm shift (Sparks, 2002, p. 1-2). NCLB encourages raising the stakes for professional development; thus, changing the focus to high-quality, content-based professional development and reinforcing the contention that teacher content-knowledge and expertise are directly related to student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1998), and recognizing the value of professional development as an avenue to enhance teacher knowledge.

Defining the Michigan Context

Michigan School Improvement Framework (2006) has defined professional development as “a process designed to enhance or improve specific professional competencies or the overall competence of a teacher” (p. 18).

Each year, schools and districts review policies and practices to consider ways to improve and enhance student achievement. This process, commonly referred to as the school improvement process, is deeply embedded in building, district and state planning and accountability systems, and has become an integral and necessary part of school and system reform. While this type of planning has existed
for many years, recent state and federal mandates including annual
testing directives and increased accountability have intensified the
importance of this process and its outcomes. (p. 2)

The Framework, comprised of five strands for focused school
improvement, also includes standards and benchmarks that are used to guide
revisions to Michigan’s Education Yes! accreditation performance indicators.
The Education Yes! report card for Michigan Schools is Michigan’s response to
the accountability requirements imposed by NCLB for local education
associations (LEA’s).

Many districts in the state also receive federal funding from the Title II
Grant Program. Federal Entitlement programs, or Formula Funds, are non-
competitive funds allocated on the basis of student enrollment. The U.S.
Department of Education distributes these funds to State Education Agencies
(SEA) that, in turn, distribute the funds to Local Education Agencies (LEA) or
school districts. Local school districts must allocate the funds to qualifying
school campuses based upon student enrollment. The goal is to raise the
academic achievement of all students by helping schools and school districts
improve teacher and principal quality and ensure that all teachers are highly
qualified.
Formula funds are calculated for each school district based upon the percentage of Economically Disadvantaged students. These grants are given to districts that exhibit low socio-economic characteristics. They are aimed at improving teacher quality in order to meet the challenging needs of the students that they are teaching.

The state of Michigan currently mandates five days of professional development for each teacher, with additional time required for new teachers. There are two references in the Michigan School Code under the Revised School Code Act 451 (1976) that specify requirements for the professional development of teachers. Section 1526 states:

For the first 3 years of his or her employment in classroom teaching, a teacher shall be assigned by the school in which he or she teaches to 1 or more master teachers, or college professors or retired master teachers, who shall act as a mentor or mentors to the teacher. During the 3-year period, the teacher shall also receive intensive professional development induction into teaching, based on a professional development plan that is consistent with the requirements of Section 3a of article II of Act No. 4 of the Public Acts of the Extra Session of 1937, being Section 38.83a of the Michigan Compiled Laws, including classroom management and instructional delivery. During the 3 year
period, the intensive professional development induction into teaching shall consist of at least 15 days of professional development, the experiencing of effective practices in university-linked professional development schools, and regional seminars conducted by master teachers and other mentors.

Additionally, the school code states in Section 1527 that:

The board of each school district, intermediate school district, or public school academy shall provide: at least 1 day of teacher professional development in the 1997-98 school year, at least 2 days of teacher professional development in the 1998-99 school year, at least 3 days of teacher professional development in the 1999-2000 school year, at least 4 days of teacher professional development in the 2000-2001 school year, at least 5 days of teacher professional development in the 2001-2002 school year, and each school year after the 2001-2002 school year. Professional development days provided under this Section shall not be counted toward the professional development required under Section 1526.

In his work on learning communities, DuFour (2004) defines the central mission of educators as not just to ensure that students are taught, but to ensure that they actually are learning. This simple shift in perspective
and thought (from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning) contends DuFour, "has profound implications" for education.

**Defining the Current Reality**

To better understand the need for professional development, it is necessary to understand the current state of affairs. Sparks (2002) explains that the current reality is vastly different from the vision of "effective" professional development that many educators strive for (p. 2.3). He lists several identifying factors: (a) too many students do not learn at high levels; (b) students do not always have competent, caring teachers; (c) most professional development activities do not necessarily focus on teachers' content knowledge, instructional skills, or other classroom-related knowledge and skills; (d) most staff development activities leave teacher knowledge and skills "untouched"; (e) and for many teachers, staff development is "demeaning and mind-numbing," and set in a passive environment (Sparks, 2002, pp. 2.3, 2.4).

Researchers have also indicated that professional development for teachers is often "fragmented and incoherent" (Sparks, 2001; Fullan, 2001). Sparks found that the current state of professional development "lacks intellectual rigor, fails to build on existing knowledge and skills, and does little to assist them with the day-to-day challenges of improving student learning"
Fullan (1993) concurs and argues that schools are lacking the motivation to become true learning communities. He calls it one of “life’s great ironies” that schools are in the business of teaching and learning, yet they are seemingly unable to learn from each other. This study explores this contention, and seeks to understand the possible administrative role in this trend. Elmore (2002) and Sparks agree that what we know about quality professional development is, too often, not what is actually put into practice. “In fact, many districts do not even have an overall strategy for school improvement. Instead, districts tend to see professional development as a specialized activity within a bureaucratic structure” (Elmore, 2002, p. 10).

Barth (2001) argues that the educational system is dying a “slow death,” and notes that the source of this demise lies in the fact that our at-risk students are being educated by “at-risk” educators who often rescue struggling students rather than attempting to make personal change (p. 24). According to Barth (2001), relationships among educators in the school environment are often either “independent and isolated, or adversarial and competitive” (p. 157), and teachers seem to “lack the personal, interpersonal, and group skills essential to the successful exercise of leadership and to working together” (p. 95). McGhan (2001) defines the current reality as “ambivalent,” and credits a fundamental “lack of trust” in teachers by society.
“It is no surprise that people who are treated like children will begin to act like children and will become dependent and in need of ‘fatherly’ advice” (p. 724). This study attempts to explore the ways in which administrators interact with teachers to ensure the best school culture for empowerment and collaborative learning.

As a rule, researchers have had difficulty determining the effectiveness of professional development. D’Amico, Gatti, Harwell, and Stein (2000) recognized that it is difficult to connect professional development to student achievement. Yet, Ball and Darling-Hammond (1998) claim that there is, in fact, a relationship between these elements. “Teachers who know a lot about teaching and learning, and who work in environments which allow them to know their students well are the critical elements of successful learning” (Ball & Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 1). Sparks (2002) notes three things that we do know about teaching and learning: quality teaching makes a difference in student learning; the professional learning of teachers and principals is a central factor in determining the quality of teaching; and district structures play a critical role in the quality of professional learning (p. 1.1).

Sparks (2002) further reiterates the importance of focused and intentional efforts to offer quality teacher learning opportunities. “Quality teaching in all classrooms and skillful leadership in all schools will not occur
by accident... Unfortunately, the professional learning opportunities for most teachers are woefully inadequate to meet the demands of today's classrooms” (pp. 1-2).

Elmore (2003) poses the question, “Can people in school be held accountable for their effects on student learning if they haven’t been provided the opportunity to acquire the new knowledge and skill necessary to produce performance that is expected of them”? The answer to this rhetorical question is obvious; no, they cannot. If educators are to be held responsible for their effects on student learning, and they should be, we must offer them the opportunity, not only to be successful, but to excel at what they do. In the process, we may find ourselves allowing them to take calculated risks; and to, consequently, learn through minor setbacks which may occur along the way.

So, we are left to ask ourselves, “What is the difference in the ideal that has been suggested by so many researchers and the current reality?” And also, “Why is the reality not closer to the ideal?” This study further explored the role of central office in professional development by tying in many different variables noted in the review of literature. These variables included the relationship between student learning and the teacher learning that takes place during a professional development activity, as well as, the
factors that may make professional development effective or ineffective. This study also examined barriers of professional development, the implications of administrative choices on the effectiveness and value of the overall professional development process, and the many external demands that districts face.

*Defining the Need for Professional Development*

Ball and Darling-Hammond (1998) postulate that nothing can make up for the inadequacies of a teacher who is unable to master the curriculum, consequently reinforcing the need for professional development. They also offer a connection between professional development and student achievement--a feat difficult for researchers to accomplish, as a general rule. "Teachers who have spent more time studying teaching are more effective overall, and strikingly so in developing higher-order thinking skills and in meeting the needs of diverse students" (Ball & Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 4).

Harwell (2000) found that there is an inherent need for professional development, and suggested its link between teacher learning and, subsequently, student learning and achievement. Harwell further notes that, Advocates of strong and continuous professional development suggest that, done well, it will improve teachers’ skills, confidence and
knowledge, thereby developing the capacity of school to deliver quality instruction. Better instruction will lead to more (ideally all) students achieving high academic standards. (p. 1)

Problem Statement

Researchers have been studying for years to find ways to identify the elements of effective professional development design at the school and district levels. While some theories have been presented (e.g. NPEAT, 2003), there still remain many questions to be answered. Because researchers have recognized that external demands plague all organizations, one realm of questioning in the research relates to how schools and administrators manage their organization in the midst of multiple external demands (Coburn, 2004). Specifically, how do they manage the planning and delivery of professional development programs for teachers? Mid-sized districts, in particular, have multiple external demands and challenges to student achievement with fewer personnel to respond. Some may speculate that impact of demands for external accountability is increased for smaller and mid-sized districts because the districts do not have the central office personnel to support professional development design, implementation, and evaluation exclusively.
By contrast, mid-sized districts are contexts within which coherence may be more easily achieved because the number of schools, administrators, and other personnel is greatly reduced as compared to the larger urban and suburban districts. Also, smaller and mid-sized districts tend to be culturally tight (Biddle, 2001) and, thus, more ready to coalesce around a common vision or set of goals. Coburn (2004) defines the "coherence" that districts are looking for as "a process, which involves schools and school district central offices working together to craft or continually negotiate the fit between external demands and schools' own goals and strategies" (pp.16-17). The importance of coherence is clearly understood in relationship to shaping a common focus and working toward common goals. Coherence is also linked with the quality of professional development (Sparks, 2002) and, in turn, quality professional development has been linked with improved student outcomes (Harwell, 2000).

If providing teachers with high quality, coherent professional development over time helps a school district achieve stronger student outcomes, it is important to understand how districts achieve and sustain a coherent high quality professional development system for teachers in spite of competing demands and challenges with both external and internal pressures. For smaller and mid-sized districts, the per student revenue
received through federal formula grants for school improvement (Title II) is often significantly less than their higher poverty urban neighbors. Yet, many smaller and mid-sized districts are home to significant levels of hidden poverty (Biddle, 2001). Smaller districts can be more remote from universities and other sources of professional training and development, and smaller and mid-sized districts can have few internal resources upon which they can draw to create high quality professional development opportunities for their teachers.

We know that smaller and mid-sized districts with fewer personnel and, often, fewer ancillary resources have particular challenges implementing state and federal mandates (Berends, 2002). Often mid-sized districts rely on intermediate or regional educational service agencies to supplement the services and programs they can provide internally, but they usually do so with some loss of coherence to their internal goals and priorities. We also know that smaller size and more intimate culture can be an asset when shaping a common focus and coherent responses to that focus. This focus applies to student as well, where teachers have the opportunity to know and care about all students. This can help create the right conditions to shape professional learning goals that align with the district’s goals and priorities. What we do not know is how smaller and mid-sized districts capitalize on their
opportunities to shape coherence and leverage their limited resources for
developing and sustaining an internal system of high quality professional
development.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to provide a rich description of two mid-sized districts with similar small town demographics and, at least, a decade of history of making professional development for teachers a high priority. By using multiple qualitative methods within a case study framework, this study was able to analyze the conditions, strategies, and motivations that led each district to create and sustain a multi-faceted, yet coherent, system of professional development experiences for teachers.

This study examined the role of administrative actions and decision-making on the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development within the districts. It also offered participants the opportunity to review and inform their own understanding of the professional development processes that unfolded in their districts.

Because the districts had already shown initiative in the evaluation of their professional development practices, this study only further informed district policymakers. But, the experience of reflecting on and drawing conclusions about their own professional development experiences allowed
study participants to draw their own conclusions about their district’s system of professional development.

Educators and citizens alike recognize the unilateral goal of ensuring that no child is “left behind” in these districts, a sentiment that was also shared by President Bush during the inception of the NCLB legislation.

The quality of our public schools directly affects us all as parents, as students, and as citizens. Yet too many children in America are segregated by low expectations, illiteracy, and self-doubt. In a constantly changing world that is demanding increasingly complex skills from its workforce, children are literally being left behind.

(President George W. Bush, 2001)

This study looked at how two small to mid-sized districts translated broad recognition for the importance of professional development into a district of professional learning for their own staff. This comparative case study explored how district level conditions were involved in shaping and sustaining a significant professional development commitment. Specifically, this study sought to identify patterns and commonalities in the roles of the central office and staff in the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development through the perspectives and “lived experiences” of both administrators and teachers.
Research Questions

This study attempted to better understand how professional development is carried out from the perspective of how the central office is involved with building level staff and administration in shaping the design, implementation, and evaluation of district professional development. More specifically, the study explored the differences and similarities in the central office role in mediating the state policy on professional development and the state policy frame for school improvement, called the Michigan School Improvement Framework. Furthermore, the study sought to determine how the participants carry out the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development in relationship to the Michigan School Improvement Framework as described by central office administrators, building level school improvement teams, and teachers. For example, what is the underlying belief system that governs the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development, and how are these interpreted by building level teams and teaching staff?

This study examined how the operational decisions, experiences, and underlying culture and belief systems played out in two school districts attempting to design and implement professional development that will help
schools raise student achievement and comply with the requirements of the Michigan School Improvement Framework and NCLB.

Specifically, questions addressed in this study are:

1. How do school administrators and staff describe the forces that shape professional development in their schools and districts?
   a. How do the participants design professional development?
   b. How do the participants implement professional development?
   c. How do the participants evaluate professional development?

2. How do teachers experience and respond to district or school planned professional development?
   a. How do teachers interpret the priorities that shape professional development in their schools?
   b. How do teachers describe their experiences in district sponsored professional development?
   c. How do teachers describe the link between their professional development experiences and their classroom practices?
      i. How do these descriptions and the connections to classroom practice compare or contrast in different districts where there are different approaches to
professional development decision-making and programming?

ii. Does teacher involvement in decision making and professional development programming link to teacher practice, according to teachers?

3. Where do teachers and administrators see opportunity to strengthen their professional development processes, systems, and experiences?

Significance

The significance of this study is three-fold. First, this study informed the participating districts by giving them a larger picture and analysis of their professional development policies and implementation. In the qualitative tradition of participatory action research, participants have had the opportunity to outline future professional development practice, reform, and policies.

Second, this study may inform other districts of similar size, capacity and comparable external demands, about their approaches to professional development. There is very little known about how districts are actually working through the delivery of effective professional development in spite of numerous external demands. This study attempted to add to the body of knowledge about how comparable districts may organize and implement their
professional development policies and processes in spite of unavoidable external demands and competition for limited resources.

Third, smaller and mid-sized districts do not usually have central office personnel dedicated just to professional development. They do not have abundant funding, and are limited in resources and personnel; therefore, other districts with similar demographics will likely benefit from learning about how these districts work through challenges and external demands that affect professional development programming in spite of such limited resources.

Rationale

Recent studies have time after time found that teacher “expertise” is the one “most important determinant” of student success, reaffirming the theory that strong, knowledgeable, high-performing teachers produce strong, knowledgeable, high-performing students (Darling-Hammond, 1998). We are left to ask ourselves, however, “In order to produce such students, how can we best produce these strong, knowledgeable, high-performing teachers?” The answer is clear: professional development. This study explores the manner in which the design and implementation of professional development takes place, and how teachers respond to professional development experiences.
We know that there is a lot of variability in how districts address the best practices for professional development and their compliance with state and national mandates like The Michigan School Improvement Framework (2006) and NCLB (2002). However, there is very little known about how local education agencies are working through the design, implementation and evaluation of effective professional development, in light of numerous external demands and challenges to student achievement.

To review, districts of more modest size and means often do not have central office departments devoted to professional development. They do not have abundant funding or resources, and they are more limited in the area of personnel than are larger districts that often have more financial resources. This study attempts to explain how districts of modest size and means, with similar challenges to student achievement and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), and with similar external demands, seek to implement best practice in the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development. The specific focus of this study was the administrative implications of this process; specifically, it focused on how central office interacts with teachers and principals in shaping and sustaining a coherent professional development system. Information gathered from this study may inform districts of similar
demographics of how they can work through the process of design, implementation and evaluation of professional development.

*Finding Value in Professional Development*

John Wooden (1998), long-time championship basketball coach for UCLA, is known for saying, "Never mistake activity for achievement." These sentiments could never ring more true than they do in education today where educators, in fact, often seem to mistake activity for achievement. Teachers can attend professional development year after year, and make the assumption that they are "achieving" success or learning or changing when, in reality, they are often simply going through the motions of unfocused, unintentional, generalized activity (Collins, 1999; Guskey, 2000). Researchers imply that educators do not value the opportunity that professional development time and resources have the potential to offer (Guskey, 2003).

Many researchers have defined the value of professional development in terms of student achievement and standards (Ball & Darling-Hammond, 1998), while Berliner and Fenstermacher (1985) determined value based on the impact of societal changes. They noted that, longitudinally, professional development is effective if it not only changes practice, but also creates lasting changes in students. Berliner and Fenstermacher (1985) have suggested that these changes should, in turn, positively impact society.
Other researchers have measured professional development effectiveness in terms of how professional development meets goals that are set by the organization. Collins (1997) provides a needs-analysis to ensure that "effective" professional development meets individual goals. Still, Fullan (2000) defines its value on the basis of successful reform, while practitioners often define value based on teacher satisfaction. DuFour (2000) examines professional development through the lens of a learning community, thus determining its value from a completely different perspective.

Furthermore, Fullan (2003) argues that the delivery of professional development plays a key role in its perceived value by suggesting that information only becomes knowledge when interaction takes place, and that wisdom is only produced through sustained interaction. Steve Kukic (2006) suggests that social competence must be addressed during professional development as a variable that is directly connected to academic improvements, giving the value of professional development yet another lens.

With so many different ways to define the value of professional development, this study explored how both central office and school level staff and administrators define, for themselves, the value of professional development in terms of all of these: effectiveness, student achievement, school improvement, teacher satisfaction, learning communities, social
competence and reform. This study also remained open to any other definitions of value that the participants may have uncovered, with a specific focus on the role of administration in all of these.

Study Methodology

This study will use the qualitative tradition of a comparative case study to develop rich descriptions of how two different school districts of similar size and demographics shaped their professional development system for teachers. Within the case study methodology, this study also employs aspects of phenomenology to get at study participants’ lived experiences. It also employs participatory action research in order to allow study participants to make use of what they learn about their shared experiences, and to inform their future professional development in terms of the design, implementation and evaluation.

Organization of Dissertation

The first chapter gives the statement of the problem, context, significance, and an overview of the study which I am proposing. The second chapter follows with a review of the literature, which identifies what we already know about topics that relate to professional development such as instructional practice, the relationships between teacher learning and student achievement, school reform, barriers to professional development,
administrative influences, and funding. The third chapter provides an explanation of the methodology for the study, discusses the sampling, data collection, and analysis procedures followed in conducting the study. Chapter four discusses and explains the study of results, while chapter five concludes with an interpretation of the findings, as well as recommendations for future practice and Implications for further study based on the study findings.
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The strict accountability of the highly qualified criteria, as imposed by NCLB, often leaves teachers feeling overwhelmed, yet individually responsible for their own improvement. Dilworth (1995) has contended that the overwhelming responsibilities of today’s educators leave teachers feeling utterly exhausted and even inadequate, citing massive responsibilities which include everything from content knowledge, application of knowledge, assessment, and analysis of both student work and their own work, with very little time available to accomplish all of these within.

Judith Renyi (2001) conducted a study which explored the conditions necessary for teachers to infuse staff development learning into their daily work. She found that the national expectations for teacher quality were ever-expansive. Yet, relevant quality opportunities for growth and development of teacher “quality,” she said, were difficult to find.

Today teachers are expected to keep abreast of new knowledge, individualize instruction for a diverse population of students, help all students achieve high standards, introduce new technologies into the
classroom, become expert in student growth and development, help manage the school, and reach out to parents and community.

America’s teachers are striving to do all this and more, but they find themselves pressed for time and opportunities to learn. (p. xiii)

Thus, we can clearly see the need for professional development in light of the expectation of so many areas of expertise. It is no wonder that teachers feel inundated and in need of support.

**What We Know**

In order to best understand how administrative decisions relate to teaching and learning, and ultimately to professional development, it is necessary to clearly understand what we already know. Ball and Darling-Hammond (1998) offer several assumptions that can be made when defining the responsibility of professional development: (a) teachers’ prior beliefs and experiences affect what they learn; (b) learning to teach to the new standards takes time and is not easy; (c) content knowledge is key to learning how to teach subject matter so that students understand it; (d) knowledge of children, their ideas, and their ways of thinking is crucial to teaching for understanding; and (e) opportunities for analysis and reflection are central to learning to teach (p. 16).
How Does the Research Define Professional Development?

There is growing evidence that student performance is affected by high-quality professional development opportunities (Cohen & Hill, 2002). Fullan (2001) defines professional development as what “administrative leaders do when they are doing their jobs, not a specialized function that some people in the organization do and others do not” (pp. 175-176). Thus, reiterating the contention that professional development is a responsibility of the entire educational system if it is to be implemented effectively.

According to researchers, professional development can take many forms. Sparks (2002) found that there are even many forms of professional development that are not often considered to be professional development. He argues that the engagement of teachers in “continuous improvement of their teaching” and instructional approaches is one of the most powerful forms of professional development (p. 10.4). Furthermore, he notes that one of the most “direct ways to improve teaching is to have teachers continuously work with others to improve the quality of their lessons and examine student work to determine whether those lessons are assisting all students to achieve at high levels” (p. 10-4). This idea that professional development must be
job-embedded and specific to individuals' needs has been echoed by researchers across the spectrum of education.

As the researcher, I addressed these diverse definitions of professional development by creating lines of questioning that addressed a variety of types of professional development, rather than limiting the questions to those about conventional professional development sessions, in order to fully understand the function of administration in the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development.

Wood and McQuarrie (1999) define job-embedded learning as "the result of educators sharing what they have learned from their teaching experiences, reflecting on specific work experiences to uncover new understanding" (p. 10). Reflection has been identified by researchers as one of the most necessary components of effective professional development, and will be explored in greater detail later in the chapter. Suggestions given by Wood and McQuarrie for reflective professional development include study groups, action research projects, and reflective logs.

Another common thread in the research finds that collaboration is a vital component of professional development. Sharon Kruse (1999) takes this notion a step further by defining three characteristics of collaboration: cooperation, collegiality, and collaboration. Yet, researchers have
continuously revealed that while these have been proven to be components of effective professional development, they are not a part of the “current reality” (Barth, 2001; Elmore, 2002; Sparks, 2002). This study will further explore that current reality and make connections between the professional development being offered and teaching practice.

Finally, it is important to mention when reviewing the research that pertains to professional development, there exists an overwhelming need for professional development for new teachers. This need has developed after a rapid increase in the number of first-year teachers who do not return for a second year (Mandel, 2006). While most districts have some kind of a mentoring program in place, these programs vary in quality and most often do not meet the needs of new teachers who “have one basic goal in mind—survival” (Mandel, p. 66). Therefore, researchers say, it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development for all teachers. This study explored the ways in which central office evaluates professional development to monitor its effectiveness.

*Change, School Reform, and Professional Development*

It is clear that the objective of professional development activities is to produce change. Typically, this means change in instruction or teacher quality. Legislators and district officials often think of professional
development as the avenue by which this change will occur. But, educational reform has undergone decades of scrutiny and criticism. Marzano (2003) has credited the realm of criticism that was sparked by the launch of Sputnik in 1957, as having the most impact on education, because it promoted American citizens to immediately question the rigidity and capability of our nation’s schools.

Some researchers have speculated that the push for quality professional development and strict accountability brought on by NCLB will prove to be one of the first reform efforts to significantly impact teaching practice. Hirsch and Sparks (2000) indicate that despite decades of reform efforts since A Nation at Risk, which focused on overcoming deficits in student knowledge, few, if any, have actually attempted to change classroom practice. “These reforms... all have largely left the classroom untouched... Supporters of these plans postulate that schools and teachers already know what to do but simply need to work harder and demand more from students” (Hirsch & Sparks, 2000, p. 1). This study examined the ways in which districts design, implement, and evaluate professional development in light of reform efforts that are currently in place.

Researchers have offered a great many suggestions for how to produce the greatest amount of change through professional development.
The first suggestion agreed upon by researchers is that system-level changes must occur before individual teacher changes can occur (Fullan 2000, Sparks 2002, and Senge, 1990). Richard Elmore (2002) echoes Fullan and Sparks, but found that such an organization rarely exists in present educational settings. He noted that consistency in the communication of goals, as well as goals that are individualized to teacher needs, are prerequisites for professional development. "Such an organization would only require teachers to learn new skills and knowledge if it were prepared to support their practice of these skills in real classrooms" (p. 25).

While change involves a number of variables for an educational system, reform expert, Michael Fullan (2001) suggests that one of the most critical steps in the change process is allowing participants to "grieve" for past practices. When referencing the feelings of anxiety and loss that are often involved in the change process, Fullan addresses the importance of emphasizing the "human dimension," calling educational change "technically simple and socially complex" (p. 69).

In conjunction with the reform suggestions made by Fullan, Pascale (2001) Millemann, and Giojahave made several suggestions for successful reform efforts:
(a) Establish a compelling goal that draws the organization out of its comfort zone; (b) change the conversation (particularly about aspirations and beliefs); (c) involve the right people in the conversation (anyone who can thwart the change effort and leave no trace of his or her resistance must be included); (d) insist on uncompromising straight talk to “foster relentless discomfort and fuel disequilibrium”; (e) Increase discomfort through well-documented facts about the adaptive challenge, creating a sense of urgency about the importance of a “discontinuous shift” to force people out of their comfort zone; and (f) generate and disseminate ideas that lead to breakthroughs in thinking and behavior. (Sparks, 2002, p. 12.2)

Another common thread in the discussion about change and reform efforts is the idea of a “moral purpose.” Fullan (2001) referred to teachers as “moral change agents” and believed that the moral purpose of schools is to “make a difference in the lives of students and that making a difference is literally to make changes that matter” (p. 16).

Fullan (2001) argues that “... society will be stronger if education serves to enable people to work together to achieve higher purposes that serve both the individual and collective good” (p. 271). Pascale (1998) elaborated on this theory by comparing the change process to a “sandwich”
in which consensus and pressure act as the "bread" that sandwiches change
to enable it to flourish. Both Fullan (1993) and Pascale insist that conflict is
also necessary for change to occur.

Sparks (2002) reminds us that by allowing people to participate in
changes to things that are significant to them, people will feel most "alive and
committed" (p. 14-2). He summarizes his suggestions for implementing
change in three broad recommendations: (a) "amplify positive deviance" in
schools by allowing teachers to discover positive practices for themselves; (b)
create mental models and "results-oriented beliefs" by offering time for
reflection, observation and conversation; and (c) create a "social movement"
that changes established institutions (pp. 14-3 to 14-9).

In conclusion, Tom Gregory (2001) sums up the barriers to change
quite nicely: "Most of the real obstacles to change in education are not 'out
there' but inside us" (p. 580). Gregory found that intrinsic motivation is
critical to successful reform. This study seeks to understand the ways in
which administrators foster this intrinsic motivation in their buildings and
districts, and support the changes necessary to improve teacher quality
through professional development.
Evaluation of Professional Development

Collins (1999) defines the evaluation of professional development as “determining the potential value of a program or activity, keeping the professional development activity on track as teachers work through it, and assessing its impact on teachers, students, and the school after teachers have had adequate time to implement new practices” (p. 111).

Because the ultimate goal of any professional development activity in education is to increase student success and achievement, it is necessary to review what the literature says about the connections between professional development and achievement. This study attempts to identify the role of central office in the implementation of state school improvement policy, which has identified indirect existing or implied relationships between professional development and student achievement. This study also reviews relationships between professional development and instruction, relationships between teacher learning and student learning, and the role that central office administration plays in all of these.

Professional Development and Student Achievement

Researchers have been studying the relationships between teaching and learning for centuries, but continue to find it difficult to connect professional development to student achievement (Harwell, 2000). Recent
studies, however, have become very specific to the study of learning itself. "Teachers who know a lot about teaching and learning, and who work in environments which allow them to know their students well are the critical elements of successful learning" (Ball & Darling-Hammond, 1998, p. 1).

Design and Implementation of Professional Development

Because the design and implementation of professional development are so closely connected, it is necessary to discuss several elements of the literature which may be relevant to both the design and implementation. Arguably one of the most important of these is the model of professional development that policymakers and administrators choose to apply. Collins (1999) identified 5 models of professional development, and outlined the strengths in each.

Professional Development Models

Still, we are left to ask ourselves, "What specifically makes professional development effective? What makes it ineffective?" In response to these questions, Guskey (2002) refers to the need for "collection and analysis of the five critical levels of information." These levels include: (a) Participants' Reactions; (b) Participants' Learning; (c) Organization Support and Change; (d) Participants' Use of New Knowledge and Skills; (e) Student Learning Outcomes. He described the process for "working backwards" from "the
student learning outcomes that you want to achieve" (Level 5) and through each successive level to "what set of experiences will enable participants to acquire the needed knowledge and skills" (Level 1).

The National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (NPEAT 2003) developed research-based principles of effective professional development which are crucial to the success of the organization.

(a) The content of professional development focuses on what students are to learn and how to address the different problems students may have in learning the material; (b) Professional development should be based on analyses of the differences between actual student performance, and goals and standards for student learning; (c) Professional development should involve teachers in identifying what they need to learn and in developing the learning experiences in which they will be involved; (d) Professional development should be primarily school-based and built into the day-to-day work of teaching; (e) Most professional development should be organized around collaborative problem solving; (f) Professional development should be continuous and ongoing, involving follow-up and support for further learning— including support from sources external to the school that can provide necessary resources and new perspectives; (g) Professional
development should incorporate evaluation of multiple sources of information on outcomes for students and the instruction and other processes involved in implementing lessons learned through professional development; (h) Professional development should provide opportunities to understand the theory underlying the knowledge and skills being learned; (i) Professional development should be connected to a comprehensive change process focused on improving student learning. (NPEAT 2003)

These suggestions are extensive and inherent to improving teacher skills. Improved teacher skills, as well as confidence and knowledge gained by these improved skills, lead to better instruction and, in turn, higher achieving students (D'Amico, Gatti, Harwell, and Stein, 2000). This study explored the effects of professional development on both teacher learning and practice, and also explored the connections between professional development, as it is implemented by central office, on student learning and achievement in two PreK-12 districts.

A final thread in the discussion of administrative leadership in professional development is worth noting. Fullan (2001) explains that “it’s about instruction and only instruction.” In other words, it is crucial when planning, researching, and facilitating professional development for leaders to
remain focused on what is really important; and what is really important is students. For this study, I explored the teaching and learning of teachers as students, as found in professional development.

Understanding Adult Learners

Before we can really explore the evaluation of professional development, we must review what the literature tells us about adult learners. Malcolm Knowles (1970) was one of the first experts in adult education, but researchers ever since have echoed his findings. Research has shown that adult learners learn more effectively when their learning is related to solving a job-related problem (Snyder, 1993) and they are allowed to collaborate with colleagues to solve this problem (Collins, 1998), and when they are involved in the selection of the content of the development activity (Little, 1993). Another strain of research has consistently indicated that implementation is most successful when support is provided after the initial training (Collins, 1998).

Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) have summarized a set of assumptions about how adult teachers learn. Such assumptions include an identified interest, a specific outlined plan, designed and completed learning activities, and evaluation or assessment of the activity (Loucks-Horsley, 1989).
Professional Learning Communities and Professional Development

DuFour (2004) suggests that educators must continually ask themselves three critical questions which identify what we, as educators, want students to learn, how we will know they have learned, and what we will do in the event that a student experiences difficulty. This, argues DuFour, will allow us to not only focus on teaching and learning collectively, but will also help us hold ourselves accountable for the results we are hoping to achieve.

Many other researchers (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Burns, 1976; Bush, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Schmoker, 1996), DuFour (2004) have also stressed the importance of collaboration that is imbedded into the culture of an organization. DuFour (2004) insists that a focus on results is key. Teacher conversations must quickly move beyond “What are we expected to teach?” to “How will we know when each student has learned?” (p. 15)

This study explored the ways in which central office administrators work to maintain this focus on results through the design, implementation and evaluation of their district’s professional development processes, as well as teachers’ perceptions of all of these. Through participatory action
research, this study offered participants the opportunity to outline changes in future practice.

Muhammed (2007) examined the idea of learning communities further by dissecting the definition of a professional that is given by DuFour (2004). DuFour refers to a professional as someone with “expertise” or specialization, as well as someone who expects to “remain current” in the ever-evolving knowledge base of education. Muhammed refers to the first part of the definition as having “credentials” or specific qualifications, while “the second part of the definition identifies the key concept of growth... It is each educator’s responsibility to stay connected with research that stimulates thought and provides findings that enhance educational practice” (Muhammed, 2007, p. 14).

The Role of Goals in Professional Development

Another common theme in the research about effective professional development practice is the need for focused and intentional goals to drive the improvement and professional development practice. This focus on goals coincides with the move of the educational profession to a research and evidence based professional practice (Marzano, 2003; Fleischman, 2006). In their report, Leading Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do, The National Association for Elementary School Principals
focused on the need for clear goals in the school improvement process, while Elmore (2000) advocated for goals “that give direction and meaning to learning and collegiality” (p. 16).

Fullan (2001) and Schmoker (1996) have also addressed the importance of goals in their research. Fullan found that professional development suffers too often from “fragmentation and incoherence,” while Schmoker goes so far as to say that collaboration without clear goals is often “futile” and makes it “impossible to measure progress” (p. 21). Schmoker also notes the importance of goals in creating a purpose for teamwork, contending that they provide the focus necessary for effective interaction.

If we wish to have energized employees who are steadily progressing toward the ultimate, long-term goal of providing a better, richer education for our students, then every member of every school should be working together in teams, not token or merely social teams, but goal-oriented units. (p. 21)

Schmoker further argues that using data to determine such goals can help focus and target the goals. According to Schmoker, data can also be a powerful tool for facing some of the other challenges in the school improvement process. Specifically, it can “substantiate theories, inform decision, impel action, marshal support, thwart misconceptions and
unwarranted optimism, maintain focus and goal-orientation, and capture and sustain collective energy and momentum” (p. 42). In other words, data help us answer the question of what to do next.

Emily Calhoun (Sparks 1999) takes the concept of goals in professional learning one step further by insisting that goals must not only exist in the planning and facilitation of professional development, but must also be calculated and focused enough to demonstrate high expectations for students (p. 56). Sparks echoes this belief by sharing that the most powerful professional development opportunities match intended learning outcomes for students with the desired instructional practices for teachers (p. 9.5). By setting such measurable, focused and intentional goals, professional development policymakers are able to not only better individualize professional development, but also to better measure its effectiveness and, in turn, its impact on student learning. This study has determined the role of central office administrators in the goal setting process within the participant districts, and the way in which teachers perceive this process.

Collins (1999) elaborates on the need for goals in professional development; he argues that goals need to be data-driven. “Comparisons of baseline data and ‘post-test’ data should be used to draw conclusions about the effects of any innovations” (Collins, 1999, p. 10).
Finally, DuFour (2004) offers “three critical questions” leaders and teachers should ask during the development and implementation of any professional development activity in order to sustain focus on the objective at hand: What do we want students to learn?; How will we know they are learning it?; And how will we help students who have a difficult time learning it? These questions, as posed by DuFour, are a reminder of the importance of maintaining a constant focus; not allowing participants to get caught up in discussion or contemplation of issues and circumstances that are beyond the scope of the organization’s control. John Vail, reform coach for the Michigan Integrated Learning and Behavior Support Initiative (MiBLSi), supports this theory and describes his strategy for keeping groups focused on the task at hand.

I always suggest that staff take a moment to “mourn”- for students’ home lives or for their unfortunate circumstances, or for the unfortunate circumstances of the staff in terms of funding or resources or the make-up of their classes. After this, we can let those things go and focus on the things that we can change. (Vail, 2006)

To review, we have identified research-based factors necessary for adult learning to occur, and have discussed the importance of goal-setting in the professional development process. We have also looked at several
models of “effective professional development.” But, what is effective professional development? And how does administration evaluate for the effectiveness of the professional development processes that are in place?

**Effective Professional Development**

In addition to the different types of professional development, researchers have identified numerous common components of what they consider to be effective professional development. Susan Loucks-Horsley (Sparks, 1997) and Sparks echo researchers’ suggestions that professional development should focus on increasing teachers’ content knowledge. Loucks-Horsley states that

> Pedagogical content knowledge is more than knowing content or how to teach in a generic way. It’s understanding what aspects of the content students can learn at a particular developmental stage, how to represent it to them, and how to lead them into different conceptual understandings... knowing the content is not enough. (p. 20)

Sparks (1997) reiterates these points by explaining that “Ideally, as teachers continue to study their content they also will be experiencing what it is like to be a learner of these disciplines” (p. 10-4). Teachers, he says, will “learn the content deeply, learn how to think and act like practitioners of that
discipline, and simultaneously acquire instructional strategies for teaching their students” (p. 10-4).

In spite of these findings, we know that the majority of professional development opportunities for teachers continue to be presented using the most cost-effective methods such as large lectures which encompass all district staff, rather than the most effective, which consist of smaller scale, individualized, interactive and reflective processes- a glaring contradiction to best practice. This study explored the decision-making processes in the participant districts that drive current professional development practice.

More commonly, researchers are referring to professional development as a “reform” movement in today’s educational system rather than a series of obligations to which districts are required to comply. Sparks argues that this realm of thought is a step in the right direction, and he gives examples of some effective “reform type” activities such as: (a) teacher study groups; (b) teacher collaboratives, networks, or committees; (c) mentoring, internships, and (d) resource centers (p. 1-2). In a recent U.S. Department of Education Study (2000), researchers reported that “reform-type” professional development is proportionately more effective than professional development opportunities which do not meet these criteria.
Sparks (2002) calls for a focus on content knowledge, opportunities for practice and reflection, sustainability over time, job embedded activities, and a foundation on collegiality and collaboration as all being instrumental to effective practice. The National Association for Elementary School Principals (2000) and Richard DuFour (2000) also note that the most powerful forms of professional development are job-embedded and take place in a collaborative culture, along with the Education Commission of the States (2000) which states that school cultures that are collaborative and reserve time for reflection create a "collective focus on students and a shared responsibility for student learning" (p. 18). These findings simply echo the traditional educational leadership theory, which also supports such notions as collegiality, collaboration, reflection, and learning communities (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Burns, 1976; Bush, 2003).

We know, then, that research has proven many forms of professional development to be effective. We also know that what has proven to be effective is not always what is put into practice. What we do not know, however, is why these things are not commonly found in practice; what effect current practices have on teachers' perceptions of professional development; what role administrators play in this perception; and what the perceived effects on student learning and achievement, our premier responsibility as
educators, are. This study attempts to fill some of these gaps, and also explores relationships between the decisions made at the central office level and teacher practice.

**Systems Thinking and Professional Development**

With the drive for more "highly qualified" educators and the demand for increased achievement from students, teachers are often found responsible for their own professional development. However, Fullan (1999) suggests that an innovation “won’t go anywhere” unless the school culture is set up in a way that people can solve problems and work together. “School Improvement happens when a school develops a professional learning community that focuses on student work and changes teaching” (Fullan, 1999, p.24).

Theorists believe that everything within an educational organization is interconnected. With this in mind, Fullan (1993) offers eight “lessons” for his new “paradigm of change.” Among these, he talks about the belief that individualism and collectivism must have equal power. Senge (1990) states that, “systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things” (p. 69). In accordance with the belief that changes made to any part of the system directly affect the whole system, we, as educators, must let go of the many things within our schools...
that we cannot control. We must, instead, grasp hold of the things that are within our power to change; things that are limiting our forward progress. Professional development is the avenue through which this “forward progress” is achieved.

Bruce King and Fred Newmann (2000) attribute this “systems thinking” approach to leadership for the success of high-functioning learning communities. Systems thinking within any learning community is important because, according to King and Newmann, issues such as assignment of students, standards for curriculum and assessment, teacher certification, hiring and promotion, and professional development are all affected by policies and programs at the state and district levels. In my research, I attempted to better understand the systems that affect policymaking and the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development in the participant districts.

The suggestions for a systems approach to organizational leadership and professional development are also reflected in researchers’ emphasis on the necessity of a strong “learning community.” DuFour (1998) defines a learning community as one that uses formative assessments to specifically evaluate student progress, and one in which there remains a “commitment to learning for all” (p. 41). Margaret Wheatley (2002) notes that an important
factor in creating a learning community is to provide time for teachers to collaborate during the school day. “If we want our world to be different our first act needs to be reclaiming time to think” (Wheatley, 2002, p.99).

Reflection is one of the most-effective and, yet, most often forgotten forms of professional development (Barth, 2001; Guskey, 2003; Wheatley, 2002).

Tony Byrk (1998) adds to the body of research on learning communities by also noting the importance of a collaborative culture, and linking such a culture to successful reform efforts.

In schools making systemic changes, structures are established which create opportunities for such (collaborative) interactions to occur. As teachers develop a broader say in school decision-making, they also may begin to experiment with new roles, including working collaboratively. This restructuring of teachers’ work signifies a broadening professional community where teachers feel more comfortable exchanging ideas, and where a collective sense of responsibility for student development is likely to emerge. (p. 128)

Barth (2001) adds another interesting strand to the research. He believes that the relationships modeled by adults in the school building have more impact on the quality and character of the school and on student learning than any other factor. “Among adult relationships in schools, that
between the teacher and principal is decisive. I have found no characteristic of a good school more pervasive than healthy teacher-principal relationships” (p. 105). Finally, Bonstingl (2001) adds, “The best results come from working collaboratively, rather than from the imposition of a culture based on command, compliance, and control” (p. 10).

Many researchers have echoed this notion of a strong culture as an integral factor in the success of school improvement and professional development attempts. In fact, Sparks (2002) has outlined a comparison between beliefs in a system that will either “impede” or “promote” success in schools. As an example, he compares the following statements: He refers to the statement that “Teachers know how to teach to high standards; they simply have to be induced to do so” as an “impeding” belief, while the statement, “Teachers are not withholding their best efforts. In most cases they simply do not know how to do what they are being asked to do” (p. 13.6) is referred to as a “promoting” belief. These accounts reinforce the idea introduced by researchers (Wheatley, 2002) that successful school improvement and professional development can only occur after beliefs are acknowledged and, if necessary, changed. This study seeks to understand ways in which central office administrators facilitate the acknowledgement and changing of beliefs.
The Role of Central Office in Professional Development

Also imperative to reform is administrative commitment and foresight. The role of administration in the leadership of an organization is best described by John Wooden (1998).

Without organization and leadership toward a realistic goal, there is no chance of realizing more than a small percentage of your full potential. Every effort should be made, in the proper manner and keeping everything in the proper perspective, toward the maximum development of both the individual and the group as a whole. (p. 84)

In other words, it is the responsibility of leaders to keep policymakers and professional development planners focused on the task at hand. Young and Castetter (2004) also emphasize the importance of sustaining a proper focus, and maintain that this responsibility is the primary charge of the administration. Complimenting the previous discussions about “system-level” changes and whole-organization reform, many researchers have found that administrators are crucial to the success of any reform effort, but especially to those affecting school improvement and professional development.

Sparks (2002) explains that the role of the building principal in achieving high-levels of learning for all students is exhaustive.
(It) requires principals who are consensus builders, strong instructional leaders, and skillful in forming and sustaining the professional learning communities... It also requires that principals distribute leadership among teachers who then perform key roles in the school improvement process. (pp. 7-1, 7-2)

In addition to principal leadership, Sparks (2002) contends that schools cannot be "places in which all students learn and perform at high levels unless teachers assume critical leadership responsibilities outside their classrooms" (p. 8-5). However, he admits that such teacher leadership, as well as quality teaching, cannot occur without "skillful leadership" (2002, p. 11-4). This study explored the ways in which administrators in the participant districts foster teacher leadership as it relates to professional development and its design, implementation and evaluation.

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) lists standards for district leaders to adhere to when designing professional development. Among these, it is the responsibility of district leaders to: facilitate a vision of shared learning; sustain an instructional program conducive to shared learning; and ensure a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Furthermore, DuFour (2000) reiterates that professional development must be a priority for superintendents and other district leaders, and stresses
the importance of creating a collaborative culture in order to sustain professional learning. "(Leaders) must identify and implement specific, strategic interventions that help teachers work together rather than alone" (p. 20).

Roland Barth (2001) defines such skillful leadership by stating that, "An influential principal has the courage to stand alone. She has commitment, above all else, to doing what is best for children despite the dictates of others. She challenges assumptions and traditions and helps others do so as well" (p. 139).

Barth (2001) continues his insistence on the importance of building leadership by calling for a "new conception of the school principal... one based on a skilled, passionate, moral commitment to students’ and teachers’ learning- and to the leader’s own learning" (p. 141). Sparks (2002) echoes this call for strong leadership.

If educational leaders believe things cannot be improved or that they lack the ability to produce improvements, they will not create action plans and expend effort to do that which is viewed impossible. Educators’ mental models and belief in their ability to affect change serve either as serious impediments to change or as strong forces that affect improvement. (p. 13.4)
Collins (1999) further elaborates on the role of administration in professional development. He outlines several suggestions for building level principals and professional development coordinators. Such suggestions include “showing up” yourself to show support and commitment, familiarity with the topic, and active participation (p. 89).

Strong leadership, as crucial as it may be to the school improvement process, is not enough. Organizations must operate within a research-based effective professional development model in order to have truly successful reform movements. This point, and others relevant to the implementation of professional development, is important to reflect on when first considering the design of professional development.

Funding Professional Development

Governor Jennifer Granholm (2007) calls the investments we make in the professional development of teachers “critical”, and goes on to say that this “necessary investment in professional development and other critical aspects of education in our state is threatened by an unprecedented budget crisis” (Granholm, 2007, p. 2). Currently, the state of Michigan mandates that teachers receive at least 5 full days of professional development each year.
One of the roles of central office administration in professional development is to allocate funding for professional development. While this responsibility may be logistical in nature, some researchers say that it is crucial to the success of professional development reform efforts. Such strict accountability (as that which is imposed by NCLB) often leaves teachers feeling overwhelmed at being held individually responsible for their own improvement. Dilworth (1995) explains that the responsibility for professional development-- and, often, its funding-- adds to an already tremendous workload given to educators.

Today's teachers are expected to have a firm grasp on the content of the courses that they teach, the capability to apply this knowledge in a classroom setting, the skills to devise appropriate learning tools, the ability to make informed assessments of students' work, and the inclination to analyze student's work, and the inclination to analyze their own work as well as the work of others in the school environment. (p. 6)

Craft and Bollington (1996) emphasize that while, "the responsibility for decision making about curriculum and assessment has become increasingly centralized... there has been a simultaneous shift of the funding
and responsibility for professional development of teachers on to schools and on to the individuals within them” (p. 7).

Susan Loucks-Horsley (2003) calls continuously shrinking resources a sign of the times.

Nowhere is it felt more keenly that when the public (often through the eyes of the school board members) scrutinizes an education budget. What stays and what goes is based on what it values. Keeping time and funding for professional development in the budget requires public support. (p. 107)

Thomas Guskey (2003) feels that professional development cannot be effective until funding for professional development is a line item in school budgets. Loucks-Horsley agrees by stating that funding is necessary because “one teacher at a time” professional development is both ideal and expensive (p. 170). Because of this, she suggests that Local Education Associations (LEAs) must secure long-term funding and support.

Guskey (2003) speculates that the reason behind the lack of funding for professional development is due to its lack of value among educators. While some districts do receive title II funding to allow for quality professional learning opportunities, many educators to not place the appropriate emphasis on professional learning.
Educators themselves frequently regard professional development as having little or no impact on their day-to-day responsibilities. Some even view it as a waste of professional time. They participate in professional development primarily because of contractual obligations, but often see it as something they must “get out of the way” so that they can get back to the important work of educating students. It is little wonder that when faced with budgetary constraints, one of the first items considered for reduction typically is funding for professional development. (p. 4)

DuFour (2004), however, argues that funding does not have to impact professional development as drastically as some may expect, and makes reference to several schools who were able to make radical changes with very little funding.

This is the stuff of excellent, ever-improving organizations. But note as well that these schools made astonishing progress with existing amounts of time and funding. They did not wait for someone from outside to give them the magic formula, the perfect formula, or more resources. These schools found a way. They worked with what they had while inventing, innovating, and adjusting their way toward excellence”. (p. xv)
Tallerico (2005) echoes the sentiments of DuFour (2004), and offers five strategies for making the most out of professional development resources, given limited funding. “Focus on fewer school improvement goals so that efforts do not become fragmented and link external funds to those goals; serve fewer teachers; advocate assertively within your own district; and use existing time wisely” (p. 113).

Maybe Hirsch (1997), Sparks (1997) and DuFour (2000) are right; maybe funding is not the determining factor in the effectiveness of professional development and, in turn, in the improvement of teacher quality and increased student achievement. Perhaps educators simply need to make a commitment to a more focused and intentional instructional practice. On the other hand, maybe Guskey and Loucks-Horsley were correct in theorizing that funding for professional development is a necessity, and that continuous, effective, ongoing school improvement cannot happen without it. This study seeks to understand the role of central office in the decision-making processes that drive professional development funding, and how these relate to teachers’ perceptions of the effectiveness of professional development.

Regardless of which theory educators consider, it is clear that the need for student achievement is at the heart of educational debate across the nation. We have assumed that improved teacher quality and instructional
practice are linked directly to student results and, certainly, professional
development is one avenue educators are taking to produce such favorable
results. The assumption that the administrative role in this effectiveness
could be of vital importance is at the heart of this study.

Teaching and Learning

Collins (1999) outlines many connections between teacher and student
learning, and claims that collaboration is key to the connection to student
learning. Such collaboration, however, cannot occur unless colleagues share
the responsibility for major tasks, and supporting each other (Collins, 1999, p.
8). Other researchers have also identified criteria that they believe are
indicators of increases in student achievement. For example, Little (1996)
believes that the responsibility for student learning should be shared among
colleagues; Calhoun and Allen (1996) support this belief in saying that actions
and changes that impact student learning are dependent upon “collective
inquiry” into student learning. In other words, the action plan for
professional development and school improvement should be a collaborative
effort among staff (Joyce & Showers, 1995; Showers, Murphy & Joyce, 1996).

Wiggins and McTighe (2006) emphasize the importance of developing
a structured approach to learning where the learning community ensures
collectively that professional development is in alignment with the school’s
mission. "Leaders need to create job requirements that make learning about learning mandatory" (p. 26).

Another pertinent observation in the relationships between teaching and learning was made by Marilyn Cochran-Smith (2006). "Teaching does not simply involve transmitting bits of information, and learning does not simply consist of receiving information that can be tested" (p. 25). In other words, teaching and learning should be seen as one interactive process and not separate entities. This united process should instead include the teaching and learning of teachers through the professional development process. Some researchers scoff at the ironies between these comparisons, noting that we are institutions of teaching and learning, yet these seem to be the least of our strengths when it comes to the teaching and learning of teachers (Fullan, 2001). For this study, I have tried to identify the relationship between teaching and learning, both at the student level and the staff level, and the implications that central office may have on both of these.

Kennedy (2006) also recognizes the importance of the teaching and learning process by recognizing that there are outside factors that are often detrimental to instruction. For example, according to Kennedy, the constant interruptions of the everyday classroom, extreme temperatures and other extraneous circumstances create continuous anxiety for many teachers.
Unfortunately, many professional development exercises do not address the “ordinary problems” that all teachers encounter. Kennedy also suggests that these problems are especially pertinent to the success (or failure) of newer teachers who are trying to develop strategies for managing classrooms, constantly changing schedules, and various working conditions. Instead, she suggests, professional development must address these issues first, because without effective strategies in place, the quality of instruction is irrelevant.

This strand in the research follows years of trying to find connections between professional development and student achievement. Laine, St John and Ward (1999) point out that it is difficult to make concrete connections between professional development and student achievement because of the difficulty in making links between the two in ways that are actually measurable. Researchers have, however, identified several links based on assumptions about what we know about the two. Both the National Education Goals Panel (NEPG, 2000) and the National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century (2000) agree that better teaching is dependent upon continuing professional development, and that effective teachers help students to meet higher academic standards. The Learning First Alliance (2000) echoes these statements, adding that student achievement is increased when everyone who is involved with
student learning is involved in professional development during the work day or through process-oriented workshops such as guided observations and teacher research groups.

Sparks (2002) believes that low expectations for student performance are proportionate to low quality professional development, while high expectations tend to improve not only professional development, but leadership, curriculum, assessment and other areas of school function. Sparks also contends that student achievement cannot occur unless teachers overcome barriers to professional development and become teacher leaders outside of the responsibilities of the classroom (p. 8-5).

Doug Reeves (2000) refers to the growing body of research that looked for links between student demographics and student achievement when he states that variables such as poverty and ethnicity are not the primary variables related to student achievement. Instead, he cites teaching and leadership variables as the “power” variables when it comes to student achievement. “In other words, when the adults in the system start to take responsibility for their role in educational accountability, it becomes much more difficult to blame children and parents for poor student achievement” (Reeves, 2000, p. 26).
Similarly, a study by Harold Wenglinsky (2000) found that students out-performed their peer groups by almost a full grade level when their teachers had received professional development in working with special populations. Interestingly, the study found that teachers who received training in higher-order thinking skills out-performed peer groups by nearly 40 percent of a grade level.

Comparable results have been found in studies linking teacher learning and quality of instruction. The National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future defines effective teachers as those who “know their subject matter so thoroughly that they can present it in a challenging, clear, and compelling way” (p. 6).

Diana Rigden (2000) supports this contention calling the relationship between teachers’ content knowledge and the quality of their instruction “strong and reliable.” “Teachers with a deep conceptual understanding of their subject ask a greater number of high-level questions, encourage students to apply and transfer knowledge, help students see and understand relationships between and among ideas and concepts, and make other choices in their instruction that engage students and challenge them to learn” (p. 1).
Bruce Joyce (Sparks, 1998) agrees and adds that improvement will not only occur, but will occur very quickly if it is going to happen through the use of clear and focused goals. Richard Elmore (2002) believes that improvement in instructional practice will require beliefs, norms, and values to be changed before changing actual instructional practice, eluding to the idea that educators need to take an entire "systems" approach to professional development reform. This study explores the role of central office in developing a "systems" approach to professional development, and the implications that this has on teaching practice.

_Remembering the Current Reality_

While the need for evaluation of educational programs is evident, research unfortunately finds that educational programs and policies are rarely subject to any type of rigorous evaluation (Fleischman, 2006). Here is what we do know about how professional development is evaluated. Sparks (2002) suggests that test scores are but one measure of success and encourages educators to find other measures which do not require months of waiting for test results (p. 11-6). Klillion and Hirsch (2001) echo these sentiments. "Measurements that would help gauge staff development include reviews of staff development programs, guides to using data, case studies,
and new forms of evaluations better designed to reflect the impact of staff development” (p. 38).

Speck (2002) makes comparisons between different professional development methodologies, and shares her suggestions for effectiveness. She also offers evaluators of current professional development some poignant questions to ask during the evaluation of a particular professional development model, such as: To provide the best teaching and learning opportunities for the achievement of all students, what are the essential questions we must ask about professional development practices?; How will schools and districts design professional development opportunities and policies that create, shape and sustain the culture of a learning community focused on student achievement?; and, What professional development designs and tools will focus a learning community on student achievement? (p. 5).

Thomas (2000) not only recommends standards for professional development, but gives expected outcomes. These outcomes relate to the research on the development of goals in effective professional development, as well as to the evaluation of professional development. Little (1993) suggests that there are still other ways to evaluate a teacher’s learning experience. “One test of teachers’ professional development is its capacity to
equip teachers individually and collectively to act as shapers, promoters, and well-informed critics of reform” (Little, 1993, p. 130).

As some of the barriers to effective professional development are identified later in the chapter, we find some researchers see funding as a potential barrier. Fleischman makes an important point by noting that research-based practices in professional development are often not implemented with integrity due to these limited resources and a lack of support. He attributes these difficulties to such things as “dense, scientific” language and unappealing formats, which encourage policymakers to cut corners. Thus, it is crucial that programs are evaluated regularly and thoroughly. This study seeks to understand the way the districts evaluate professional development, and the ways in which these evaluations may impact the design and implementation of professional development in the participant districts.

Coinciding with the belief that evaluation of professional development is critical to its success, I find it necessary to discuss the evaluation of teachers as well. Research indicates a new trend in teacher evaluation which poses evaluation as professional development, as well as of professional development.
Evaluation as Professional Development

For years, the complaint has been heard among teachers that their professional evaluations have simply been a “hoop” that administration has jumped through; a process where administrators have merely “gone through the motions” of filling out the necessary checklist every three to five years, and nothing more (Guskey, 2003).

One principal in Visalia, California is making every effort to change this practice. Upon recognizing that his teachers were not evaluated in such a way that really helped them to become more reflective and “improve professional practice”, James Bushman (2006) developed and implemented a “collegial walk-through model” where teachers were evaluated by their peers. Through a process of observation, discussion and reflection, Bushman’s school was able to transform the evaluation process from a time of judgment to a time of reflection and inquiry which quickly began to manufacture results.

Intrator and Kunzman (2006) also recognize the need for reflection in professional development, and support a “multi-level” model of teacher training which encompasses psychotherapeutic components in order to incorporate a focus on “purpose, passion, and hope” into professional development through a process they call “core reflection”. They explain that
“the idea behind core reflection is that a teacher’s core personality- including his or her identity and mission- profoundly influences the way a teacher practices” (p. 40). These practices have proven to give teachers not only the skills necessary to impact students, but also coaching and mentoring strategies to use when interacting with colleagues. Kouzes and Posner (2003) and Ball and Darling-Hammond (1998) also emphasize the importance of what they call “emotional intelligence” for teachers and leaders, and insist that these must be a part of the evaluation process. We know that teachers need to be fluent in the content that they are teaching; we also know that there are countless other factors that make students responsive to a teacher’s instruction, and it is crucial that we keep all of these in mind (Ball, 1996).

Goldstein and Noguera (2006) offer a similar model of evaluation called the “Peer Assisted Review (PAR)” in response to complaints of a “transparent” evaluation system that did not allow opportunities for growth to veteran teachers. During the PAR process, teachers and coaches sit down in a panel discussion to develop individualized and specific strategies for each teacher’s professional growth. Again, the reflection initiated by this processes coincides with what researchers have deemed to be effective time and again (Guskey, 2003; Marzano, 2003; Sparks, 2000, DuFour, 2004; DuFour 1998).
Another criticism of the traditional teacher evaluation process is that principals lack the content knowledge to accurately and consistently critique teachers’ instruction (Goldstein and Noguera, 2006). Both models address this concern and allow principals to conduct evaluations with integrity, but also to truly ensure that the evaluation process is an opportunity for growth for all involved. Such opportunities for growth align with the aforementioned models of effective professional development which have been outlined by Sparks (1995), Guskey (2000), and Wood &McQuarrie (1999). This study seeks to better understand the teacher evaluation processes in the participant districts, and explores the ways in which the administration may or may not use these processes to design or implement professional development.

In review, we have learned that researchers collectively agree on several key factors: goals are crucial to effective professional development; effective professional development must be job-embedded and on-going; and there are several premises which imply the importance of teacher learning and its relationship to student achievement, including the contention that teacher content-knowledge increases student achievement. There remain, however, several barriers to effective professional development. This study explored these barriers and also examined ways in which administrators take
these into consideration during the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development.

**Barriers to Effective Professional Development**

While outlining the criteria for effective professional development, researchers have also identified some common barriers. Raack (2000) recognizes the difficulty behind convincing a board and/or administration to fund professional development, and states that identifying expected accomplishments is a necessity for creating a strategic plan. Many researchers agree, but the research on the implications of funding on professional development is contradictory, and will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

Michael Fullan (1991) asserts that the greatest problem faced by school districts and schools is neither funding, nor the resistance to innovation, but the “fragmentation, overload, and incoherence resulting from the uncritical acceptance of too many different innovations” (p. 197). Teachers, in fact have expressed frustration at the multitudes of new innovations which are thrust at them on a regular basis (Dilworth, 1995).

Collins (1999) feels that these are certainly barriers, but does not want readers to underestimate the value of time in professional development. Time, contends Collins, is a barrier to the effectiveness of professional development.
development. He suggests that educators add time to regular schedules, reorganize existing schedules, or simply look at new ways to add time for professional development to the daily routine of educators. More specifically, Raywid (1993) identifies some guidelines for allocating such time, suggesting that activities be held when teachers are "fresh and capable of active participation," uninterrupted, during the school year, and balanced between regular school days and non-contact days.

On a different note, Margaret Wheatley (2002) contends that participants' denial of crucial personal biases and assumptions are a critical barrier to effective professional development. She reminds reformers of the importance of self-awareness when instituting change, noting the necessity of identifying your beliefs and assumptions before setting your goals (p. 18). Sparks (2002) claims that those "habits of thought and behavior" are even more detrimental at times than such crucial barriers as time and money (p. 13-1). In the end, researchers have found that human behavior has a greater effect on the effectiveness of professional development than any of the other factors. For this study, the researcher attempts to identify such factors as personal biases, habits of thought, and assumptions during the participant interview and observations, and to determine the ways in which
these may relate to the underlying belief systems that affect the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development.

Turchi, Johnson, Owens, and Montgomery (2002) emphasize the strong role that organizational capacity can play in a district’s ability to facilitate and offer professional development activities. They also recognize, however, that such factors as socioeconomic status can become barriers, regardless of the dedication and qualifications of teachers, due to the decreased “capacity” of the organization.

Well-meaning and dedicated educators in the lower (socioeconomic) schools see their socioeconomic setting as a barrier to achieving the standards; and although they saw the attention of the state as a positive step toward supporting their clients, they generally viewed the state’s accountability system as more of a stick than a carrot in their everyday working lives. (p. 7)

The Specific Role of Central Office in Policy Implementation

Researchers Cynthia Coburn (2005, 2006), and Meredith Honig (2003, 2006) have completed comprehensive studies on the role of central office administrators in the implementation of policy. Coburn (2006) contends that “policy problems do not exist as a social fact awaiting discovery. Rather, these problems are socially constructed as policymakers and constituents
identify and interpret some aspect of the social world as problematic” (p. 343). In other words, the idea that professional development policy is ineffective or in need of reform has come from countless teachers, administrators, and policymakers who have identified the area as an area in need of change.

Honig (2003) speaks even more specifically to central office administrators. She acknowledges that several studies have looked extensively at teachers and building level administration such as principals, but is particularly interested in the study of central office administrators whereas their role in policy implementation is concerned. While a large body of her research in this area focuses on the role of central office and their relationships and partnerships with community agencies, some connections can be made to the specific role of central office in policy implementation whereas professional development is concerned: (a) Honig (2006) suggests that central offices need to shift from traditional “top-down” approaches where policy is concerned, and, instead, draw on the relationships with constituents to create policy collaboratively (p. 357); (b) and that collaboration for the development and implementation of any policy must include and support community partnerships (p. 357-383). This study further
explores the role of central office in professional development policymaking within the participant districts.

Coburn (2005) echoes this body of research by looking specifically at the roles of “non system actors” in the relationship between policy and practice. “Although policy studies have investigated the role of such organizations in the policy-making process, their role in policy implementation in general and the relationship between state policy and teachers classrooms more specifically has rarely been explored systemically” (p. 23).

Kauchak, Eggen and Burbank (2005) contend that central office “plays a crucial role in implementing a district’s curricular and instructional goals” (p. 215). Grove (2002) uses a metaphor of a skeleton in the human body to further explain this crucial role, referring to the functions of the central office as “hidden but essential” (p. 215).

Grove’s (2002) premise is that central office staff are often working behind the scenes, but that without them little would be accomplished in the educational organization. She explains that we often hear about the work of teachers and principals, but the work that central office staff members do, essential as it may be, is left in the background. “Despite the lack of attention to their role, the contributions of central office staff members are crucial to the strength of a school system” (Grove, 2002, p. 216).
Such contributions, according to Grove (2002), range from the communication of the message and vision of the district, to fostering and nurturing leadership among teachers and principals, to orientation of new teachers, and maintaining a district-wide focus on priorities. Central office staff members, she states, require exorbitant amounts of time and effort in order to "provide the service and expertise to the schools so that they can fulfill their missions without distraction" (p. 217).

Lastly, Grove (2002) concludes her thoughts with the statement that if central office staff are doing their jobs well, "their efforts go unnoticed or at least without credit" providing the "invisible... support and consistency necessary for a high-quality instructional program" (p.218).

**Michigan School Improvement Framework**

In December, 2005, the Michigan State Board of Education approved the *Michigan School Improvement Framework* (MSIF) with intentions to provide support for the development, review and revision of school improvement plans in Michigan schools. It was also developed with an objective to aid organizations in their compliance with NCLB (2002) and *Education YES!* (2002).

Strand III of the Framework identifies professional learning as a promoter of lifelong learning and achievement in students. For this study, I
have utilized the MSIF (2005) as the structure under which the participant districts operate and receive significant support services.

To provide schools and districts with a comprehensive framework based on current research and best practice, the Michigan Department of Education in conjunction with school improvement specialists and educators across the state, developed the Michigan School Improvement Framework. This framework can be individualized and used in multiple ways to develop, support and enhance school improvement plans. For example, the framework can be used to guide the development of a school improvement plan. It can also be used by buildings and districts to review and enhance existing improvement plans to reveal where plans match or differ from state-of-the-art school improvement practice. In addition, this framework can be used during a peer-assessment exchange with a similar school which could lead to mutual problem solving. (2006, p. 2)

Conclusion

We know what makes professional development effective and what experts suggest constitutes professional development. What we do not know is how districts with competing demands and external challenges are undertaking the process of professional development or, more specifically,
the role that central office administration truly plays in this process in light of all of the underlying belief systems and competing perspectives that emerge within and across district schools.

This study explores the ways in which central office administrators engage with their constituents, including the non-system actors, teachers, and students, to develop and implement professional development policy and practice. The study further looks at how central office administrators reconcile their broader district perspective with the unique needs of teachers and administrators in the schools, and the connections that this may or may not have with how they shape professional development policy. Finally, this study looks at the ways in which professional development processes, policies, and practices are evaluated, implemented, and perceived by teachers.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Overview of Research Design

This study was conducted through the qualitative tradition of a comparative case study, utilizing both elements of phenomenology and participatory action research. It attempted to understand the systems, processes and shared experiences regarding professional development in two districts. It investigated the role that central office administration plays in professional development and how central office navigates the various challenges to teaching practice and its influence on student achievement. The study looked for factors that serve as barriers to professional development and explored the role of administrators in the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development in the midst of multiple external demands. Finally, this study explored how teachers experience and respond to professional development, with specific focus on how teachers interpret the priorities that shape professional development in their schools, and how they describe their experiences. This comparative case study further examines how teachers describe the link between their professional development experiences and their classroom practices and how
teachers describe the role of central office administration in shaping their professional development experiences.

The researcher sought to discover how these descriptions from the participants, and the connections to classroom practice, compare or contrast in the two different districts where there are different approaches to professional development decision making and programming, teacher involvement in decision making, and making connections between professional development programming and teacher practice. This study also looked for the underlying cultural and belief systems which shape professional development in the participant districts.

Overview of Qualitative Methods

The decision to use a qualitative approach was based largely upon consideration of the research problem and the personal experience of the researcher. Participants were asked to give thoughtful and open-ended responses to interview questions, a characteristic which also lends itself well to the qualitative approach (Creswell, 2003). According to Creswell, there are three considerations in matching a research design to a problem: the audience, the problem, and the personal experience of the researcher. Qualitative research involves the in-depth studying of a small number of subjects in order to develop patterns and to understand meanings.
Qualitative research is an “inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Creswell, 2003, p. 15). In other words, qualitative researchers tell a story (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002).

A comparative case study was used to determine the lived experiences of teachers and administrators in two districts. Creswell (2003) defines a case study as one which explores a program, or individuals, in depth by collecting detailed information. This study explored the experiences lived in two public school districts as they pertain to professional development. The researcher compared findings learned from each district, and shared any findings and recommendations with all participants.

In order to identify and understand the underlying systems and beliefs that surround professional development in the participant districts, the researcher chose to employ strategies from the phenomenological tradition. Rudestam and Newton (2001) tell us that “phenomenology attempts to get underneath how people describe their experience to the structures that underlie consciousness, that is, to the essential nature of ideas” (p. 38). Creswell (2003) describes phenomenological research as that in which the
researcher identifies the “essence” of human experiences as the participants would describe them through extensive and prolonged engagement. In fact, Creswell refers to the phenomenological approach as a philosophy, not just a method, where the researcher must “bracket” her own experiences in order to truly understand the “lived experiences” of the participants (p. 15).

This study seeks to understand the true experiences of the participants. Because participants could not be observed directly, focus group interviews served as the main instrumentation for this study in order to explore experiences from the perspectives of the individuals who are actually living the professional development experience in the two participant districts. Creswell describes many advantages to interviewing participants as a means of instrumentation. For example, interviewees can provide a historical perspective that the researcher may not otherwise see. Creswell says that this approach is especially beneficial when the participants cannot be observed directly. (Creswell, 2003, p. 186) In other words, this portion of the study will determine “what is” in the districts.

This comparative case study also undertakes some characteristics of a participatory action research study. Participatory action research is characterized by Hatch (2002) as having identified the need for a change in practice, reflection upon the problem, development and implementation of a
change and, finally, evaluation of its effectiveness (p. 31). Greenwood and Levin (1998) define action research as “a form of research that generates knowledge claims for the express purpose of taking action to promote social change and social analysis” (p.6).

Participatory action research is defined as an action research study wherein the participants help to create the recommendations for future practice (Rudestam & Newton, 1998). This study involves components of participatory action research in that recommendations for future practice and change have been determined by participants and group members through “participatory problem solving” (Rudestam and Newton, 2001, p. 49-50). While this study did not previously identify an existing problem, recommendations for further research and implications for future practice were developed based on findings during this study, and may suggest future action to be taken by the participant districts. In other words, this portion of the study determines what “could be.”

This study attempted to find the meaning, structure and lived experiences of both teachers and central office administrators and their facilitation of professional development experiences in their districts. This comparative case study used the constructionist paradigm, with elements of a phenomenological approach, which asks, “What is the meaning, structure,
and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?" (Patton, 2002, p. 104). I explored these districts and their professional development models.

Rudestam and Newton (2001) describe two important components of action research. One of these components involves "broad participation" of the participants in the research process. Another key component of action research is that it "generates action" that ideally would result in significant change for the stakeholders (p. 49). This study employed a constructivist approach through participatory action research strategies to co-construct, with participants, recommendations for future evolution of their district professional development programs.

**Data Collection Methods, Procedures, and Instrumentation**

This comparative case study first used a phenomenological approach to discover the systems and processes at work in the cases and how people were experiencing those systems and processes. The researcher conducted one focus group interview with a building level team that is comprised of teachers who are representative of K-12 teachers. I then interviewed K-12 and central office administrators from each district in the same format, and made comparisons and drew conclusions based on each of these. This study involved 12 to 15 participants from each district.
The second phase of this study took on components of a participatory action research study in that participants identified areas for growth, and then developed an action plan for how to move forward. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) describe action research as being organized into a “cycle of identifying a problem through careful observation, reflecting on the dimensions of the problem, designing a change that addresses the problem, implementing the change, and assessing its effectiveness through careful observation” (Hatch, 2001).

Although this study does not facilitate the implementation and assessment of effectiveness of these, which are described by Hatch (2001) as being the third and fourth steps in the action research process, I expect that the districts will move forward with these steps of the process.

**Instrumentation**

I chose focus groups that include a broad representation of district stakeholders in order to allow for many different types of data which, in turn, lend themselves well to many different types of data interpretation. This has allowed me to gain as much information as possible within the boundaries of the study. For example, teachers and administrators from all K-12 instructional levels were invited to participate, allowing for expansive representation and input.
An open-ended interview approach was utilized during all interactions with participants in order to gain an understanding of their true and lived experiences. The researcher maintained a focus on the research questions, while allowing participants the opportunity to share openly and to create new lines of questioning where relevant to the study. Patton (2001) emphasizes that a "qualitative design needs to remain sufficiently open and flexible to permit exploration of whatever the phenomenon under study offers for inquiry. Qualitative designs continue to be emergent even after data collection begins" (p. 255). The focus group format allows this to happen, but also allows for interactions that are key to both understanding the lived experiences that are consistent with the phenomenological approach, and the development of recommendations for future practice that define a participatory action research study.

I engaged in discussion with constituents during the focus group, carefully observing interactions between them to determine any underlying issues or belief systems. I followed that activity with some individual informal interviews to clarify for understanding. Hatch (2002) describes informal interviews, as "sidebars" which require the interviewer to engage the participants in reflective conversation "about the action" of the research, which is dependent upon quality relationships between the researcher and
the participant. Hatch feels that these "sidebars" are crucial to the success of the study, stating that, "establishing relationships that facilitate comfortable and productive sidebars is important, and relationships will grow and change depending on how researchers behave during informal interview opportunities" (p. 107).

In this case, I asked questions which were specific to the individual and his or her professional development experiences. For example, in two instances, participants were unable to attend group interviews because of last minute emergencies. Basic questions were sent to these participants, along with the summary of group discussions, at which point participants responded via phone and email to make any additions to the findings. Depending on the findings and the knowledge and interpretations gained through the focus group interviews, I conducted minimal additional informal follow-up conversations in order to inform my interpretations and conclusions.

**Timeline**

Initial focus groups took place during the middle of the 2008/09 school year. The second focus group, as well as any informal follow-up interviews, took place shortly afterwards during the months of January and February, 2009. Final member-checking and co-construction occurred during the
middle of February, 2009, and analysis and recommendations were finalized at this time, as consistent with the participatory action research tradition.

*Rationale for Sampling*

An inherent barrier to the credibility of qualitative findings is the suspicion that the researcher has shaped the results according to her predispositions or biases (Patton, 2002). I have chosen to study two districts that have a certain amount of capacity in size and are able to conduct a fair amount of professional development in house, yet who are small enough to use resources for professional development and school improvement at the Intermediate School District level. The districts that I chose to study have an enrollment of between 2,700 and 3,200 students, and are similar in district structure.

Sparks (2002) indicates that smaller, more localized studies may be more important than larger ones when attempting to determine the value of professional development. He explains, “What matters most in the quality of professional learning are the tens of thousands of decisions made each year on local schools and district offices about school improvement and staff development that collectively determine the effectiveness of those efforts” (p. 11-6).
Sparks (2002) also makes reference to a study done by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), *Evaluating Staff Development: Determining the Impact*, where the author (Mizell, 2000) reinforces this notion that smaller-scale studies are, perhaps, more effective. One reason for this, says Mizell (2000), is that when staff development is evaluated at a state or national level, practices are often "superficial, wasteful, ineffective, disingenuous, perhaps fraudulent, and even harmful, but continue unchallenged day after day, year after year" (p. 11-6).

Sparks (2002) insists that local studies of professional development practice are more important and valuable than large-scale "definitive" research in defining the overall value of professional development (p. 11-6). "Local evaluation studies, particularly those that take the form of action research or similar processes generated by teachers, promote teachers' sense of efficacy because they reveal the day-to-day effects of new practices on student learning and performance on tasks teachers value" (Sparks, 2002, p. 13-8).

Using a criterion sampling technique and an open-ended approach, I chose to interview participants in this manner to gather multiple perspectives on the design, implementation, evaluation, and underlying systems that effect professional development in the participant districts. Interview questions, for
the purposes of this study, included open-ended questions. As consistent with the suggestions made by Rudestam and Newton (2001), the researcher formulated some of the questions in advance of the interview, with the option of altering them as the interview progresses as it seemed to be appropriate. Appendix A includes the initial base focus group questions for phase 1.

Because the review of literature has identified multiple different types of experiences as professional development, the study includes questions about various arenas within the realm of professional development, in addition to the more typical experiences. Some questions explored interpretations of coaching opportunities, grade level teaming meetings, school improvement team meetings, professional development planning meetings, and mentoring events to gain a truer understanding of their perspectives.

The Human and Organization Development Program of the Fielding Institute (HOD) (1998) suggests that action research must include such steps as forming inferences based on the data, connecting these inferences to actions that may achieve the desired goal, and continued retesting. During the interview process, I conducted member-checking with the participants to ensure that I was gathering the correct perspective. To do this, I formatted the interview as follows.
After some opening discussion about the study and introductions, I posed 10-12 questions to the group, one at a time. After each question, participants discussed perceptions of the particular question and then shared out. To determine trends, the researcher utilized a modified Delphi technique, or q-sort, to determine which perceptions are most representative of the group. During this process, we also clarified findings from the participants, thus member-checking as the interview progressed.

“Co-construction” is the “member-checking” process where the researcher ensures the accuracy of the data interpretations thus far in the study. This approach aligns with the constructivists’ approach, which allows for, and in fact, encourages feedback and input from participants about the interpretations of the data, as well as, input on new lines of questioning which may be helpful to the study (Hatch, 2002).

Following the building level interviews, I used a focus group interview to explore the perspectives of K-12 and central office administrators within the district. The basic questions for the interviews were the same as those used for the first interview. But, consistent with the constructivists’ paradigm, questions for this interview were also constructed based in part on information gathered by the building level focus group. Then, during this process, I member-checked as I did during the first focus group interview.
Focus groups are set up to encourage contributions and conversation among participants, which will allow for in depth exploration of a topic. They can generate a vast amount of information in a short period of time, as compared to observations and individual interviews (Hatch, 2002). These first focus group interviews were comprised of questions which allowed me to construct baseline data about the participants, inform them about the study, and form initial relationships with and among the group.

Following the initial interviews, I brought both focus groups together to conduct a final interview of stakeholders in which I co-constructed my interpretation of the first group interviews, as well as any information gained thus far, and asked further questions based on the information gathered. This portion of the interview process also allowed me to work with participants to form recommendations for future practice. To do this, we reviewed the information gathered through the first interviews, discussed its analysis, and asked participants to project opportunities to strengthen professional development in the districts. In other words, I asked participants “what could be?”

I continued to co-construct interpretations and data, and draw final conclusions about the data gathered throughout the following weeks. I asked for feedback from participants about my interpretations, which is consistent
with the constructivists' paradigm (Hatch, 2002). This feedback was gathered through informal conversations, email, and telephone conversations. Together, we developed recommendations for future practice and implications for further research.

Some minimal follow-up conversation between the researcher and participants took place via email or telephone communication, in order to best respect the conveniences of the participants, who may have found it difficult to meet with the researcher in person. This was particularly the case when the researcher simply needed to make a minor clarification or to transmit information; or when the participant felt the need to contact the researcher and felt that one of these methods was most suitable.

**Context and Background for Comparative Case Study**

The idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select the information that will best help the researcher to understand the problem. This may include the study of persons, documents, or visual materials (Creswell, p. 185). Furthermore, criterion sampling, as defined by Rudestam and Newton (2001), involves the selection of participants who match or closely match the identified criterion, both exclusionary and inclusionary. For the purposes of this study the criterion selected were as follows: (a) each district is a smaller to mid-sized district to allow for a more localized study;
(b) each district experiences similar demands, capacity and resources; (c) each district operates under the support of a different Intermediate School District (ISD) in order to allow for the triangulation of data; (d) each district employs a unique, but effective approach to professional development.

Districts were chosen based on some key differences for the sake of comparison: (a) District A allows teachers to select a certain number of hours (the equivalent of 2 days in District B) of choice professional development; (b) the calendars for professional development are different in each district; and (c) each of the districts has unique programming to offer area districts in the realm of school improvement and professional development.

Phenomenological research requires the researcher to identify participants who are experiencing the same thing (Rudestam & Newton, 2001). For this comparative case study, participants were linked by the professional development experiences in their prospective districts. Districts were chosen for this study based on similar external demands, capacity, and resources. For example, each of the districts is able to utilize a fair amount of professional development offered at the ISD level. Each district is located in a different ISD so that the researcher can compare the supports offered from each of the different ISDs in addition to the services offered within the district, and explore the changes in teacher practice that may result.
While participant districts face similar challenges, they also have unique experiences to offer area districts in relationship to professional development and school improvement. This study explored how administrators and teachers in these districts incorporated these resources when making professional development programming decisions.

District A

The first public school district, which serves approximately 2700 students, is a mid-sized rural school district in Southwest Michigan. This district has a comprehensive professional development program which focuses on building professional confidence and student success through a process of training, coaching, feedback, and reflection. Districts throughout Southwestern Michigan have chosen to send their teachers to this district’s core Professional development classes for intensive training in the best practices of instructional skills, cooperative learning, and mentor training.

District A also offers a wide menu of “choice professional development” courses, whose focuses include action research, cooperative learning, instructional skills, leadership training, and curriculum.

In light of the recent declining employment opportunities, the district is seeing a decline of student enrollment. Because of this, it has been forced to make budget cuts which have impacted programming, resources available,
and staffing at the very least. Other challenges for the district include pressure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the accountability guidelines set by NCLB (2002), high stakes testing which influences enrollment, area schools of choice, and increased unemployment and poverty.

In spite of these crises and difficult times, the district is dedicated to excellence in education for all of its students, and believes in continuous school improvement. The district is searching for ways to improve professional practice so that they can best service their children and community. Thus, District A is continuously examining their professional development policies and opportunities, as they recognize that professional development is one avenue which may be able to impact instructional practice.

District B

The second district that I have chosen to study is very similar to District A. Also located in Southwest Michigan, it services approximately 3000 students and includes a Michigan School Readiness preschool, four elementary schools, one middle school, an adult education program, and a high school. District B has also seen the effect of declining employment within the community. Other challenges for District B include those which are similar
to those faced by District A, such as pressure to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the accountability guidelines set by NCLB (2002), high stakes testing which influences enrollment, area schools of choice, and increased unemployment and poverty.

The district has a comprehensive instructional technology program with a goal of developing users with a high degree of technology literacy, and well as supporting instruction by fostering "interactive, collaborative, and innovative" teaching and learning. Some of the district focuses include curriculum integration, higher level thinking skills and student achievement, and career preparation. District B is also seeking to improve professional development practice, and recognizes the need to put students first at all times. They recognize that professional development is an avenue for improving such practice, and welcome opportunities to evaluate and improve their practice.

Professional Development Policy

Currently District A's professional development policies require that teachers complete a certain number days of professional development which are mandated by the district. In recent years, these activities have consisted of multi-district presentations, building school improvement work, and curriculum review. Teachers are also required to choose 12 hours of
professional development on their own, which is consistent with the research that suggests professional development needs to be individualized (DuFour, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Fullan, 2002; Guskey, 2003). While feedback about the current policy has been positive, the district is continuously looking at ways to improve professional practice in hopes of becoming one of the premier districts in the area.

District B does not allow teachers to select choice professional development time, but asks for teacher input when making decisions about this time. They are actively evaluating their current format, and recognize the need for professional development that is individualized and specific to the needs of their teachers in order for it to be most effective, and to have the most impact on teaching practice (Guskey, 2003; DuFour, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1998; and Fullan, 2002). Like District A, the feedback about current policy from District B has been positive, but they are still looking for ways to improve practice.

*School Improvement Connections and Support*

Each of the participant districts recognize the need for on-going school improvement, and know that it is vital for the professional development policies and school improvement process to be directly related in order to ensure that they have a positive effect on teacher quality and, ultimately,
student achievement. Because they are each located in Southwestern Michigan, they each operate under the Michigan School Improvement Framework.

**Study Participants, Sampling Procedures, and Access**

Utilizing one focus group interview for each district, I explored professional development from the perspective of teams that are representative of teachers from a variety of grade levels, seeking to better understand teachers’ perceptions about the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development in the district, and the ways in which central office administration influences this perception. During this process, I took particular note of the underlying belief systems that shape professional development in the districts in order to gain a true understanding of the systems in place.

I followed this session with interviews of teams of administrators who are currently employed in the two in PreK-12 public school districts that I have chosen for this study. I used a focus group format, much like the one used to interview building level teams, to interview the central office and building level administrators who play a role in professional development, as identified by the superintendents.
I obtained access by first asking for written permission to conduct my study from the districts’ superintendents. I gained building access by obtaining permission from the central office administration and building principals. I interviewed teams in the district administration buildings during or after school, depending on the availability of the participants. This allowed the interviews to take place in the natural environment of the participants, where they were most likely to feel comfortable and at ease.

I conducted a one to two-hour focus group interview with each group of stakeholders, and followed-up with informal individual interviews following the sessions. For these interviews, I formulated open-ended questions like those that are commonly found in a true qualitative study, especially under the constructivists’ paradigm. I addressed the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development as a whole, and let the interviews and observations take the study where it may. I asked participants to describe the current reality and the structures that are in place, and then asked them to expound on their responses by asking why they feel things exist the way that they do. This is consistent with the constructivists’ paradigm where multiple realities exist, and the participant and the researcher work together and discuss the data in order to co-construct an agreed upon reality (Hatch,
2000), as well as the phenomenological approach, which seeks to determine the true “lived experiences” of the participants.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

My assumptions as the researcher align with those made by other researchers. Like Sparks, (1995, 1997, 1998, 2002, 2005), I believe that quality teaching is proportionate to student learning. Teachers can improve their practice through professional learning and development, and the professional learning of teachers is a determining factor in the quality of teaching. I also share the assumption that district structures and administrators play a critical role in determining the quality of the professional learning that takes place.

Because I chose the districts in which to perform my study, I must list this as a delimitation of the study because it defines limits of the study prior to its beginning (Creswell, 2002). I also recognize that smaller, more localized studies bring less direct knowledge to the overall body of research about professional development if local district structures play a “critical role” in determining quality; it stands to reason that studies should be done at the local level. “Local evaluation studies, particularly those that take the form of action research or similar processes generated by teachers, promote teachers’ sense of efficacy because they reveal the day-to-day effects of new practices
Another delimitation is that all participants are agreeing to participate within the requested timeline of the study. For example, because of the structure of a focus group, all participants had to agree on a meeting time, which may have been limiting to some participants.

Because the establishment of credibility is crucial to the success of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2003), I understood the responsibility of establishing credibility and relationships with my participant group in order to ensure the honesty and integrity of their responses. I worked to develop relationships with my participants, and provided them with as much information as possible about the study. I recognized the importance of being vigilant in my attention to detail and interactions with participants, in order to ensure the captivity of details that may otherwise be taken for granted by an “insider” such as myself in the field of education (Hatch, 2002).

I also recognized that the participants were participating in the study of their own free will, and that those interviews may have proven somewhat time-consuming for participants. Therefore, I made every effort to conduct interviews in the school setting of the participants, in order to maximize convenience for the participant group. The proximity of the interviews also
allowed me to “co-construct” my interpretations of the data, in accordance with the constructivist paradigm (Hatch, 2002). The fact that participants agreed to participate within a particular time frame was an additional delimitation to the study.

Another significant limitation was the fact that participants in this study are all employed in the participant districts. Therefore, generalizations may or may not be made pertaining to other educators, districts, or organizations throughout the state or region. Findings, however, identified suggestions for further research which could potentially be relevant to other areas of educational research. They may also be used to inform the district and, if needed, implicate change in their professional development practice. The researcher recognized these biases, and made every effort to acknowledge further assumptions and prejudices as the study progressed.

The final limitation was that the selection of districts was based on the certain criteria rather than a random selection. The criteria used for selection revolved around size and capacity, current professional development support, and the presence of external demands.

Creswell supports this idea of careful and intentional selection of participants, sharing that the “idea behind qualitative research is to
purposefully select participants or sites...that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (Creswell, 2003, p. 185).

**Intended Use of Data**

Data was used to inform the districts, and made generalizations which can be shared with other districts who are similar demographically and who face similar challenges and external demands. These similar districts may be able to make connections to how the participant districts are designing, implementing, and evaluating professional development, in spite of the many factors that influence decision-making, particularly at the administrative level. Findings may inform the general body of knowledge on professional development, but participants may have also benefited from their participation in the study. For example, they were given time to reflect upon their own professional development experiences, and on their own implications on the overall professional development process in the district. Ball and Darling-Hammond (1998) agree that “opportunities for analysis and reflection are central to learning to teach” (p. 16). Like an action research study, the findings from this case study developed generalizations which may inform other venues (Hatch, 2002). They were also used to make recommendations for future practice and for further research, with the final
intention, of course, that findings from this study are used to positively impact the lives and educational opportunities of children.

Data Collection and Analysis

Through an interpretive analysis, I found recurring themes among administrators' descriptions of their role in professional development in their districts. I offered several interpretations of these themes, while forming certain assumptions about the qualities of professional development, and making connections to the experiences shared by teachers in the participant districts, and to the current literature.

Using the constructivists' paradigm, I utilized the data gathered from focus groups to better understand the relationships between professional development, administrative decision-making, and teachers' perceptions of professional development. This understanding, then, relates to the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development as it relates to the ultimate goals of student achievement, teacher learning, and instructional practice.

Through an interpretive analysis, I found recurring themes within administrators' and teachers' descriptions of their roles in professional development in their districts. I offered several interpretations of these themes, while forming certain assumptions about the qualities of professional
development, and making connections to the experiences shared by teachers in the participant districts, and to the current literature. I also examined data from documents such as school improvement plans, and district professional development policies.

I analyzed data collected from interviews and the observation of participants during this process. Hatch (2002) defines constructivism as a world where, “multiple realities exist that are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points” (p. 15). In other words, everyone has a different perspective or outlook on what is happening around them. So, during research, the researcher learns about the different perspectives and works with the participants to “construct” an agreed-upon reality. My study followed the constructivist paradigm because I allowed my participants to create the reality of their own professional development experiences through open-ended questioning, and I also followed each interview with an informal discussion about what I learned from them to ensure that I was sharing their true perspectives. This approach is consistent with the phenomenological approach which strives to understanding the realities of the participants. I analyzed data from the perspective of each participant group, looked for
commonalities among them, and cross-referenced findings in order to draw conclusions and make connections.

Validation of Data

Opponents of qualitative research have argued that its validity is easily compromised. The difficulty of conveying accurate descriptions, the opportunity for personal bias of the researcher, and the potential for the interviewer to cause the participant to withhold data are three concerns discussed by researchers (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2000). Through the process of co-construction, as outlined in the constructivist model, researchers and participants share the responsibility of interpretation, and depend heavily on trusting relationships to ensure the accuracy of these interpretations (Creswell, 2003; Hatch, 2002). The researcher provided participants with regular feedback in the form of written interpretations, and informal "sidebars" in order to further protect the validity of this study. Focus group interviews included representatives from each elementary, middle school and high school settings. A few informal interviews were conducted with participants after the sessions to clarify findings and co-construct data as needed, but most of the member-checking occurred during the session.
Overall Analysis

I analyzed data gathered during the focus groups, and included the participants in the analysis of data collected during each focus group interview. This collaborative analysis guided further interview questions and data collection for the remainder of the study, which is once again consistent with the constructivist paradigm's phenomenological approach and the co-construction of data and its analyses.

For this study, I began my analysis by using the typological model and a post-hoc analysis. I read my data in search of themes, or "typologies", which seem to be common or reoccurring within my interviews and observations. Then, after identifying common themes, I moved into more of an interpretive analysis so that I could explore these themes and make interpretations about them. For example, I looked for the major components of the underlying belief systems that exist within the district, and identified those that present themselves most often during the data collection process. I then continued with my analysis by interpreting these common themes and drawing conclusions based on all sources of data.

In terms of the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development, I searched for the existence of key components to successful design, implementation, and evaluation, and determined whether or not
these were present in the participant districts. I determined what the underlying belief systems were by asking questions such as, "What are the policies in place in your district?", "How is professional development policy developed in your district?", and "Why is it done this way?"

I also reviewed documents produced by the district and the building level teams such as the building school improvement plans and policy documents regarding professional development. Hatch (2002) defines the interpretive analysis as "making sense of social situations by generating explanations about what's going on within them" (p. 183). I cross-referenced the themes found in my data with those found in my review of the literature to help develop generalizations, explanations, and interpretations.

_Human Subjects Review Board_

The researcher has complied with the requirements of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) standards by obtaining the written consent of all participants. As in all research, there may have been unforeseen risks to the participant. Participants were assured that if, at any time, they felt uncomfortable or anxiety ridden, the interviewee would be excused. The participant reserved the right to stop the interview at any time. All names and identity information are kept confidential in this study. The participants are known as "A, B, C, D, E, and F, etc.", and data is kept in a
locked cabinet during research, and for 5 years after. Participants were given the right to refuse to answer any or all questions, or to participate in this study at any time without prejudice or penalty.

Data gathered from this study will be used to further the body of research on professional development, as well as to inform the district of principals’ perceptions of their role in the design, implementation and evaluation of the professional development offered within the organization. While implications for further study and recommendations for future practice will be made to the district, participants may also have benefited from their involvement in the study. For example, they were given time to reflect upon their own professional development experiences, and to identify factors that make professional development experiences more or less productive. Such revelations will likely guide their own decision-making about participation in future professional development activities. Also, knowing that reflection is key to the success of the teaching and learning process (Ball & Darling-Hammond, 1998), participation will also allow teachers to reflect on the effects, if any, of specific professional development on their instruction and professional practice.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter will present the findings and results of the analysis of data collected through a comparative case study of two school districts in Southwest Michigan. These districts had similar characteristics in terms of enrollment, capacity, and external demands, with specific focus on the design, implementation and evaluation of their professional development systems. This qualitative study describes the processes, systems, and underlying beliefs from the perspectives of teachers and administrators within the two districts through the phenomenological traditions of inductive and interpretive analysis.

The first portion of this chapter gives the reader a context and background for the study, which is followed by a narrative summary of the discussions held within the participant districts, as well as a discussion of the emergent themes that were found within these data. Data was collected, sorted, coded, and co-constructed with participants through a process of typological and interpretive analysis. The presentation of findings is related to the themes and trends that were found within the data.
Research Questions

The research questions that this case study attempted to answer are:

1. How do school administrators and staff describe the forces that shape professional development in their schools and districts?
   a. How do the participants design professional development?
   b. How do the participants implement professional development?
   c. How do the participants evaluate professional development?

2. How do teachers experience and respond to district or school planned professional development?
   a. How do teachers interpret the priorities that shape professional development in their schools?
   b. How do teachers describe their experiences in district sponsored professional development?
   c. How do teachers describe the link between their professional development experiences and their classroom practices?
      i. How do these descriptions and the connections to classroom practice compare or contrast in different districts where there are different approaches to professional development decision-making and programming?
ii. Does teacher involvement in decision making and professional development programming link to teacher practice, according to teachers?

3. Where do teachers and administrators see opportunity to strengthen their professional development processes, systems, and experiences?

The participants in this comparative case study offered multiple perceptions about professional development in their districts. They discussed the relationships between professional development and instructional practice, the impacts of professional development, strengths and challenges, as well as the relationships between professional development and school improvement. Ultimately, they shared their perceptions about the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development in their districts.

Context of Study

This study was conducted in two mid-sized districts in Southwest Michigan with similar capacity and external demands. Both districts had an enrollment between 2,700 and 3,200 students, and received some level of support for professional development systems from their Intermediate School District (ISD). They are also facing similar external demands such as declining employment opportunities and a difficult economy, which results in reduced funding for the districts. Additionally, both districts are operating
under the consistent statewide expectations as outlined in the Michigan School Improvement Framework (2006).

Districts were also chosen for two key differences: both districts structure professional development differently, and they both operate under the support of two different ISDs. This study sought to determine the processes, systems and underlying beliefs that govern the professional development systems in these districts, in spite of these external demands, differing structures, different levels of ISD support, and limited capacity.

**District A**

This section will review the findings related specifically to District A. Later in the chapter, the researcher will make connections between the two participant districts, the research questions, and the comparison of the data.

**Historical perspective.** By using the qualitative approach of conducting focus group interviews, I was able to determine the underlying historical perspective of the participants, a perspective that I may not have been able to gain via other data collection methods (Rudestam and Newton, 2001). In District A, professional development systems have historically been driven solely by central office. Consistent with educational trends at the time, these decisions were directives given by the superintendent or assistant superintendent, and were most directly related to state mandates, trends in
education, and inspirational guest speakers. There was very little, if any, teacher input into these processes, and events were often unrelated to each other. Professional learning sessions were not specific to individual levels or areas of instruction, and there was little or no follow-up for any professional development in the district. There was minimal evaluation of professional development events and processes, if any, and seldom were experiences linked to change in instructional practice or student achievement.

The literature review in chapter two illustrated numerous characteristics of high quality professional development, such as professional learning that is job-embedded, on-going, specific to individual needs and data driven (Collins, 1999; Guskey, 2001). The following section illustrates the changes that have been made in the professional development systems in District A over the last several years. It illustrates the perspectives of teachers and administrators within the district, and how they have undergone the process of evaluating and adjusting their professional learning systems to reflect these characteristics of best practice.

Overview of participant perceptions. There is growing evidence that student performance is affected by high-quality professional development opportunities (Cohen & Hill, 2002). Fullan (2001) defines professional development as what “administrative leaders do when they are doing their
jobs, not a specialized function that some people in the organization do and others do not” (pp. 175-176). Participants in District A included teachers and administrators from the elementary, middle school and high school levels, as well as central office administrators. They offered multiple perceptions of what professional development systems look like in their districts. The following slides (Figures 1-9) illustrate the most general of those perceptions.

Three words that come to mind when you think of PD:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Ahead of the times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After school</td>
<td>Flexible</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potentially disappointing</td>
<td>Required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Depending on the results</td>
<td>Vital</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Dependent upon follow-up</td>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional growth</td>
<td>Choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good when specific to instructional level; applicable</td>
<td>Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>Survival</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating</td>
<td>Teacher input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejuvenating</td>
<td>Results-oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrating</td>
<td>Building generalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Context is important</td>
<td>Administrator-focused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continuous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unfocused</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Best practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reactive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Three words that come to mind when you think of PD?

Research question number one asked how participants design, implement, and evaluate professional development in their districts. In
Figure 1, teachers’ and administrators’ initial perceptions of professional development are summarized and compared. This initial perception gave the researcher a “snapshot” view of teacher and administrative perceptions that was likely not yet influenced by the researcher or other participants. This created opportunities for probing questions later in the interview process.

Research question number two asked how teachers experience and respond to professional development. In figures 2 to 4, the perceptions of teachers and administrators are outlined. Specifically, participants’ perceptions of the district’s strengths, aspects that stand out to participants, and changes that teachers have made as a result of professional development are spelled out from both the perspective of the teacher and the administrators. Figure 6 goes one step further to identify the barriers to professional development, as noted by participants in District A. The discussion of Phase II will outline how districts chose to address barriers and challenges later in the chapter.
### What are the strengths?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Instructional specialist</td>
<td>• Teachers on same pg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Coaching opportunities</td>
<td>• Room for growth for teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Choice PD</td>
<td>• Improved tech literacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher participation</td>
<td>• Improved focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• New teacher training</td>
<td>• Teacher leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Common thread/vocabulary</td>
<td>• Presentation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• KRESA opportunities</td>
<td>• Common vocabulary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: What are the strengths?

### What aspects of professional development stand out?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Growth in content knowledge</td>
<td>• Opportunities for teacher growth/skill growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Time and resources are allotted for collaboration</td>
<td>• Quality presentation/best practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• District commitment to teaching reading in upper grades</td>
<td>• Other districts look to us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Follow through stands out</td>
<td>• Flexibility of systems in place allow teacher driven focus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3: What aspects stand out?

120
What changes do you feel you have made as a result?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• District commitment led to increased accountability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More leadership roles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Applications to individual classrooms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reflection is KEY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Focus is maintained</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased awareness of the “Big Picture”</td>
<td>• Higher level of collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Truer reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Improved (intentional purposeful) instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Curriculum, instruction and assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Vertical alignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More tier 2 and 3 interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• District PD team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4: What changes do you feel you have made as a result?

Figure 5 gives a more specific interpretation of research question number one, as it relates to professional development design. Figures 7 and 8 address the evaluation of the professional development systems that are in place, as well as the ways in which teacher evaluation is tied to the professional development process. The reader will recall that in chapter two, the researcher defined evaluation in two different contexts: the evaluation of professional development and evaluation for professional development. Figure 8 illustrates the ways in which evaluation of teachers is tied to the professional development structures that are in place in the district. Both of
these references to evaluation and professional development will become more relevant in the recommendations portion of chapter five.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>•District PD committee</td>
<td>•Very teacher driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>•Teachers can be as involved as they want to be in this process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5: Who is involved in the design of Professional Development?
What are the barriers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Time for sharing, implementation and/or</td>
<td>• No control over teacher choices for PD (e.g. currently, teachers can take</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reflection</td>
<td>the same PD over and over; choices do not have to be tied to school improvement)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ambiguous language of the contract (e.g.</td>
<td>• Lack of common understanding of: What is PD?; what counts for choice PD?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what is PD?)</td>
<td>• Some trust issues (e.g. some teachers feel admin does not trust “professionalism”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interpretation of state policies on choice PD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6: What are the barriers?

How is teacher evaluation tied to the PD process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Not tied directly</td>
<td>• Standards tied to balanced literacy model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Goal-setting</td>
<td>• Walkthroughs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Walkthroughs</td>
<td>• Evaluation tool is related to new teacher training content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PD evaluations</td>
<td>• PD Team evaluates systems each year as per suggestions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Unsure of evaluation procedures for “system” as a whole</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: How is teacher evaluation tied to the PD process?
How is professional development evaluated?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• PD committee</td>
<td>• PD committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• PD evals</td>
<td>• Teacher suggestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Session evals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8: How is professional development evaluated?

The second phase of this study asked participants to identify areas for growth. The summary of what teachers and administrators would change if they could is outlined in Figure 9. These are further explored later in the chapter where the districts' next steps and action planning templates are discussed. These were also used by the researcher to determine recommendations to the participant districts.
What would you change if you could?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• more time for reflection</td>
<td>• a sense of eagerness about professional growth (among everyone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• opportunity for the mentor/mentees to see each other teach</td>
<td>• to the school improvement goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• early dismissal</td>
<td>• school improvement being the driving force behind “EVERYTHING we do”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Relevant content-related choices</td>
<td>• More effectively use the framework (Michigan School Improvement Framework)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Online learning component</td>
<td>• school improvement process needs to be teacher directed as well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• flexibility in WHEN PD is offered</td>
<td>• Clarify contract language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inquiry from admin re: PD needs</td>
<td>• More ISD support (core content offerings, inquiry into specific needs, hands-on collaboration)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clarify contract language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 9: What would you change if you could?

*What does professional development look like in the district?* The district schedules five professional development days per year for all teaching staff, starting off with two pre service days. The first half of the opening day is organized by the district. The afternoon of the opening day, and all of day two are organized by the buildings, as are two additional half days later in the year, for a total of two and a half building days. In addition, there are two “choice” professional development days scheduled throughout the year (12 hours total), which is consistent with the research that suggests professional
development needs to be individualized (DuFour, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Fullan, 2002; Guskey, 2003).

This structure is consistent with what experts recommend for professional development, in the sense that it is specific to individual teacher needs (Elmore, 2002; Fullan 2000; MSIF, 2006; Sparks 200; and Senge, 1990). Richard Elmore (2002) found that such an organization rarely exists in present educational settings. He noted that consistency in the communication of goals, as well as goals that are individualized to teacher needs, are prerequisites for professional development. “Such an organization would only require teachers to learn new skills and knowledge if it were prepared to support their practice of these skills in real classrooms” (p. 25).

The choice hours are described by participants as being more non-traditional; they must meet the state guidelines for professional development to count, but are not formatted in the traditional setting where all district stakeholders are learning the same thing at the same time. In fact, often colleagues present this information to each other. Teachers are a part of the district’s choice professional development committee, which reviews proposals for professional development sessions. Proposals are not denied (but may ask for more clarification or specification), so that they are relevant for the most participants possible. Also, given a request through a proposal,
the administration will often ask an outside expert to come in and present material that is directed toward an area of need that has been identified by teachers.

This idea of choice professional development is indicative of a national awareness of the need for more individualized professional learning opportunities for teachers. It is very teacher-focused, and can be completed in the summer, or during evening hours. These sessions last a total of six hours, and are split into two separate three hour sessions. According to teachers and administrators, there are lots of opportunities for teachers to increase instructional skills and educational technology capabilities, yet teachers expressed concern that the sessions offered are “often very specific or very broad” (to encompass a lot of people). “Sometimes it is directed toward an individual grade level or department, depending on who is presenting the information, and then it is a lot less relevant for the rest of us” (Participant C, teacher).

The district professional development committee, which is facilitated by the instructional specialist, is made up of teachers who volunteer to be on the committee, as well as a broad representation of administrators. Proposals for choice professional development go through this committee, and this committee also evaluates the professional development system at
the end of the year through a discussion of suggestions and feedback that
have been given. The role of teachers in this process is voluntary in the
sense that they “can be as involved as they want to be in this process; if they
care about it, they will be involved... At some point, someone has to make
the decisions”. (Participant B, teacher)

Participants also shared that they have staff meetings that are relevant
to curriculum, department meetings that look at instruction, and constructed
dialogues that can be considered professional development. For example,
the elementary staff has grade level meetings once every other month in the
evening, which focus on curriculum. The middle school has Professional
Learning Communities (PLCs) which meet at least once per week for about 45
minutes. Sometimes these are just organizational and dealing with logistics,
and other times they “are really looking at data”, according to participants.
The high school has department meetings two times per month, which often
focus on data analysis over the state tests and released items. These
examples are consistent with the theories that researchers have presented
that effective professional development must be job-embedded. Wood and
McQuarrie (1999) define job-embedded learning as “the result of educators
sharing what they have learned from their teaching experiences, reflecting on
specific work experiences to uncover new understanding” (p. 10).
While all of these support the standards set by the Michigan School Improvement Framework (2006) in terms of community learning environments, high school participants admitted that all school improvement and professional development at their level is really driven by the North Central Accreditation (NCA) and AdvancED accreditation processes. The framework of these accreditation processes provides coherence and a common vision that experts agree are crucial to a district's success. Coburn (2004) defines the "coherence" that districts are looking for as "a process, which involves schools and school district central offices working together to craft or continually negotiate the fit between external demands and schools' own goals and strategies" (pp.16-17). The importance of coherence is clearly understood in relationship to shaping a common focus and working toward common goals. Coherence is also linked with the quality of professional development (Sparks, 2002) and, in turn, quality professional development has been linked with improved student outcomes (Harwell, 2000). When asked, "What do you do with the data?" participants shared many uses for data throughout their professional learning processes. "At the middle school level, we look at weaknesses that we are seeing in students from student assessments. The process is usually teacher-dictated, while administration requires us to set goals for the year". (Participant B)
During elementary grade level meetings, the focus is not necessarily on data. Instead, data analysis happens at staff meetings or during building professional development days as dictated by teachers and administrators. The high school department meetings include some data analysis as well. For example, they will use data from previous assessments and compare previous assessments to progress of current students, in which case they may find holes in the curriculum or the assessment process. Teachers also monitor trends longitudinally during this process. All of these processes support the need for data-driven instruction and the type of data-driven professional learning that has been identified by experts and researchers (MSIF, 2006; Marzano, 2002).

Other opportunities for professional learning as identified by participants in District A include: coaching, book studies at staff meetings, observations of other teachers, and outside conferences. There are grant opportunities for professional development that may interest particular teachers, as well as partnerships with area organizations, such as The Kellogg Biological Institute. This partnership, for example, allows teachers the chance to broaden content knowledge and lesson ideas. The district also participates in partnerships with the pre-service teaching program at Western Michigan University.
These opportunities hold a great deal of value in the eyes of participants, and the passion about the use of and effectiveness of these programs was evident throughout the discussions with participants. "Taking an intern and working with emerging teachers creates opportunities for dialogue with the mentee and forces the mentor teacher to reflect upon current practice of both the intern and themselves". (Participant B, teacher)

Another participant shared that, "The process of helping another teacher through the reflection and then the act of changing practice based on that reflection allows for self-reflection that can be valuable as well". (Participant A, teacher)

Teachers spoke with excitement and authenticity as they related how these opportunities have helped them to grow as professionals and educators, admitting that not all educators are as fortunate to have such an array of experiences to support their professional growth.

District A also has a very comprehensive mentoring program. Research indicates that there is a rapid increase in the number of first-year teachers who do not return for a second year (Mandel, 2006). While most districts have some kind of a mentoring program in place, they vary in quality and most often do not meet the needs of new teachers who "have one basic goal in mind- survival" (Mandel, p. 66).
In District A, there is a two-day training that takes place in the summer, as well as five formal days throughout the year to train mentors, during which time mentors are given homework assignments to check for understanding of the processes and expectations. Participants spoke very highly of this program, which has been widely recognized and is nationally renowned for its rigor and intensity (Reeves, 2005). Teachers and administrators indicated that “there is follow-through with the program, including observations and checklist sheets to be handed in to the instructor of the class” (Participant C, teacher).

The mentor and mentee meet every week to collaborate, reflect and discuss progress, challenges, and next steps. Mentors meet monthly to discuss, troubleshoot, and collaborate. Some discussions during these meetings may include what kinds of questions to ask mentees and how to establish constructive relationships with mentees. These meetings were perceived by all participants as being a valuable and crucial component of the program. Experts agree that the establishment, and support, of systems for collaborative relationships and focused observations are crucial, contending that these structures allow time for valuable reflection on professional practice (Barth, 2001; Guskey, 2003; Wheatley, 2002).
In order to be a part of the mentor program, mentors are suggested by the building principals, and the mentor coordinator makes the final call on who participates. As much as possible, the mentor is in the same building as the mentee to allow for collaboration, observation and convenience of meeting times. It was noted by both administrators and teachers that the program is not as successful when participants are not in the same building. Participants implied that without this consistency, time for that much-needed reflection and collaboration is very limited.

A complimentary component of District A’s mentoring program is the district’s new teacher induction program. The district’s new teacher induction program requires all new teachers, whether new to teaching, or veteran new hires, to attend two district classes in their first two years in the district. The first, Instructional Skills, consists of five days/six sessions (two in the summer, two release days, and two after school sessions). There are also two classroom observations. The second course, Cooperative Learning, consists of four days/five sessions (two summer days, one release day, two after school Sessions). There are also two classroom observations.

The goal of these classes is to help to build “a community of reflective learners and positive relationships,” as well as to increase teachers’ skills. NPEAT (2003) suggests that quality professional development “focuses on
what students are to learn and how to address the different problems
students may have in learning the material,” which is what these courses are
designed to do. The two classes account for nine of the 15 days required by
the state for new teachers within the first three years of teaching. The
remaining days are scheduled between the teacher and the principal, and are
tailored to meet the pedagogical and content needs of the new teacher.

Teachers who are advancing to the Masters +15 slot on the pay scale
are also required to take a course called “Advanced Instructional Skills”
before they are permitted to move up; graduate credit is also available for
this course. Teachers and administrators, alike, spoke with great pride about
these programs, and listed numerous benefits, ranging from common
language and opportunities for reflection, to the support of individual
teachers’ needs.

District A also offers a literacy coaching program to assist teachers
with literacy instruction and data analysis. Literacy Coaches are available
through the district to support the newly adopted Balanced Literacy Model.
Through this program, there is a list of services available to teachers, and
teachers are able to ask for specific services as needed. These services are
specific to building and individual teacher needs as identified by student
achievement data, and can include modeling instructional strategies, support
for interventions, and data analysis. Some buildings rotate coaches/services, and others use coaches to facilitate professional learning at staff meetings by offering mini-lessons.

Throughout all of these strategies, the district makes a conscious effort to adhere to the standards set by the National Staff Development Council. This adherence to the standards was noted by participants several times throughout the data collection process. Revised most recently in 2001, these standards include both content and context standards, as well as standards for the professional development process itself. In order to give the reader a context within which to understand these standards, they are illustrated in table 1. The district's focus on building learning communities, supporting adult learning and collaboration, preparation of teachers, and deepening content knowledge would support the presence of this alignment. The focus on this alignment is also notable in the discussion of emergent themes within the data and next steps for the districts, to be discussed later in this chapter.
Table 1: NSDC’s Standards for Staff Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff development that improves the learning of all students:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the school and district. (<a href="http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm">Learning Communities</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Requires skillful school and district leaders who guide continuous instructional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>improvement. (<a href="http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm">Leadership</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Requires resources to support adult learning and collaboration. (<a href="http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm">Resources</a>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff development that improves the learning of all students:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>progress, and help sustain continuous improvement. (<a href="http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm">Data-Driven</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uses multiple sources of information to guide improvement and demonstrate its impact. (<a href="http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm">Evaluation</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prepares educators to apply research to decision making. (<a href="http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm">Research-Based</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Uses learning strategies appropriate to the intended goal. (<a href="http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm">Design</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Applies knowledge about human learning and change. (<a href="http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm">Learning</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provides educators with the knowledge and skills to collaborate. (<a href="http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm">Collaboration</a>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff development that improves the learning of all students:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>achievement. (<a href="http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm">Equity</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deepens educators’ content knowledge, provides them with research-based instructional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strategies to assist students in meeting rigorous academic standards, and prepares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>them to use various types of classroom assessments appropriately. (<a href="http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm">Quality Teaching</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provides educators with knowledge and skills to involve families and other stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appropriately. (<a href="http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm">Family Involvement</a>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How do participants describe professional development? Participants in the district describe the professional development systems as “administrator focused” in the sense that the administrators give a general direction based on state or national requirements, and the building decides how to focus through the school improvement teams. Professional Learning Communities are part of the elementary and middle school buildings which allow upper and lower elementary to meet together and collaborate, and different departments to do the same. During these, teachers will often discover areas in which they need additional training and support. The administrator will then fine-tune the focus, and facilitate the process for moving forward. “There is really a good balance between teacher-driven and the administrator focus in the identification of professional development needs” (Participant H, central office).

DuFour (2004) suggests that educators must continually ask themselves three critical questions which identify: what we, as educators, want students to learn; how we will know they have learned; and what we will do in the event that a student experiences difficulty. This, argues DuFour, will allow us to not only focus on teaching and learning collectively, but will also help us hold ourselves accountable for the results we are hoping to achieve. District A has worked very hard to establish this type of a culture
and expectation for collaborative learning. According to participants, 80% of the choice professional development offerings in the district are teacher-suggested and/or teacher-delivered. “We also offer “ad hoc” professional development as teachers discover instructional needs throughout the year. We will often pull in some subs for specific training needs that are generated by teachers” (Participant G, principal).

This idea of balance between teacher and administrator decision-making is what many experts call “collaborative decision-making” (2001; Elmore, 2002; Sparks, 2002). This method allows teachers to share a sense of ownership in the direction that the organization is moving. Teachers shared the importance of collaboration and follow up, stating that instances when time and resources have been allotted for collaboration across the district and grade levels, as well as time for implementation and follow up, have been “life changing”. One example shared was when all of the upper elementary teachers met to plan with a consultant from out of district. They were, then, given time to come back together after a period of implementation to reflect on progress, challenges and successes. “It felt like the district was really committing to something” (Participant F, teacher).

“Whenever there is follow-through, it makes a huge difference; e.g. when things that we started are still being threaded throughout what we are
doing during the year, it shows administrative investment, and encourages us to stay focused” (Participant D, teacher).

A central office participant shared the perception that there is a focused effort to provide the quality experiences in the professional learning environment, just as the district would expect teachers to be offering students in the classroom setting. In reference to this idea of differentiated instruction, Gregory and Chapman (2007) agree that not all learners respond equally to the same information or structure of delivery. “We sometimes put (learners) through the same hoops, even though we know that it is not making a difference for all of them” (p. 1). Teachers in District A expressed often that they felt fortunate to have multiple opportunities to chose from, and that the structure of delivery was varied to meet the needs of the various learning styles amongst the staff.

We have lots of opportunities to improve teachers’ skills. We have such quality presentation; we practice what we preach in the sense that we do not offer professional development that does not use best practices of instructional skills, etc. There is no ‘sit and lecture’. Teachers take these strategies back to classrooms as well to use with their students. (Participant J, central office)
Participants also expressed a great deal of pride in the systems that they have in place, along with a desire to continue to “set the bar high” for their own staff, as well as for surrounding districts. It was exciting to hear this sense of pride emulate throughout the data collection process. “Other districts look to us for ideas. (Our instructional specialist) consults to others in order to help them duplicate district programs. That is really something special and exciting about what we do here” (Participant J, central office).

How has your professional development program evolved to where it is today? Participants spoke with enthusiasm as they shared the ways in which the programs and systems in place in District A have evolved over the years. Professional development used to be set up where we would jump from one thing to another. Now, it is focused and we keep coming back to the same thing, which creates more investment from everyone. We are asking questions like, “how has this affected my students,” and really have a life-long learning attitude; you cannot be stagnant anymore. (Participant C, teacher)

Other participants continued that, “It is making me a better teacher, so that my students are better learners” (Participant A). Previously, teachers and administrators felt that professional development was fragmented and that nothing tied together from one activity to the next. Now, they feel that there
is a definitive level of follow-through, commitment, time, and consistency.

"The current system actively produces change, where the previous system did not" (Participant C, teacher).

There was a definite awareness throughout the data collection process of the need for teacher growth and continuous learning in order to support the anticipated growth in student achievement and learning. According to researchers, this is one of the most vital components of effective professional development. In fact, Sparks (2002) argues that the engagement of teachers in "continuous improvement of their teaching" and instructional approaches is one of the most powerful forms of professional development (p. 10.4).

Often, teachers and administrators in District A made reference to "the way it used to be," contending that current systems were much more effective in producing "real change" and increased student achievement. When asked what the catalysts for such significant change were in the district, the addition of computers to classrooms was noted as a milestone in the evolution of the current processes. Because teachers were required to use them, this forced teachers to ask for training specific to computers, "and it spread from there." The accountability of the MEAP and NCLB were also noted as catalysts for the current systems. This was where principals started to say to staff, "Professional development needs to be more specific to our
needs. We were accountable, so we needed training to get there”
(Participant E, teacher).

Participants also recognized the development of quality leadership within the district, and feel strongly that the “building of the vision” comes from the principal, as well as the ability to get the staff to buy in to the vision. Fullan (2001) explains that “it’s about instruction and only instruction.” In other words, it is crucial when planning, researching, and facilitating professional development for leaders to remain focused on what is really important; and what is really important is students. All participants recognized the strategic visioning implemented by a former superintendent in the district as the “spark” for looking at professional development systems. “When the state changed the laws to include choice professional development, it opened the door for us to look at things differently” (Participant J, central office).

*How has professional development influenced the district?* Some of the structural changes that were referenced in the previous section produced notable changes for the district. Beginning in approximately 2003, the curriculum was retooled and the “Balanced Literacy Program” was adopted and developed in District A. The program, which has three components that include reading, writing, and word study, has allowed the district to provide...
increased focus on results. Participants recognized that there was an increase in individual independence in the area of reading, which in turn developed an increased awareness of fluency and comprehension data. "There began to be an overall elevation of scores, and now, 6th grade teachers never say 'What did those elementary teachers do?' because there is just not that gap in the alignment like there used to be" (Participant J, central office).

Participants also shared the thought that the level of commitment by the district led to higher expectations and accountability. "My role as a leader has shifted to where I feel I have something that I can impart on others" (Participant B, teacher).

In the classroom, teachers have tried to carry out the philosophy that the district has embraced for professional development. "I find that if I am focusing for a longer period of time on something, or throughout the year, it produces better results. That is something that I can impart on my kids" (Participant D, teacher).

Professional development experiences have also helped teachers to keep focused and remain aware of the "big picture." They shared that "if it is fragmented, there will be NO real change. With a constant awareness of the bigger picture, I can see how it all fits together and am much more effective"
Other influences of the professional learning systems in the district felt by the participants were the feeling that the district has a higher level of collaboration, and that there is "true reflection across the grade levels."

We have seen improved instruction; It is more intentional and purposeful and there is a notable growth in academic progress. It has truly changed curriculum, instruction and assessment (Participant K, central office).

There is also a more "open door" for observations across staff/grade levels, which enhances the vertical alignment, according to participants.

The level of instruction is paying off in dividends. We see more tier-two and tier-three interventions through our adherence to the RTI model, and we are lucky to have identified and worked to keep the resources that we have in literacy and math, particularly support personnel. Programs would not be possible without the support personnel to help implement programming (Participant J, central office).

Professional learning is not just reserved for teachers in District A. The district is involved in regional, state, and national level organizations to ensure "an awareness of "what is out there". District administrators serve in
state and national capacity to keep aware of best practices and current research, and bring back new information and strategies to the district, as well as to other organizations in the area through consultation and presentations at conferences.

*Strengths of the current systems.* There were several components of the professional development systems in District A that participants identified as "strengths." One of the primary strengths that was identified by both groups of stakeholders was the availability of the instructional specialist. This person not only coordinates professional development for the district, but also teaches the instructional skills courses for new and master teachers. She also consults for area districts to support similar processes and experiences for other educators. "We have one person who oversees and heads the committee, which provides consistency throughout the district" (Participant C, teacher).

The instructional skills and cooperative learning classes were also viewed as a huge strength to the district. These "provide lots of new tools, commonality throughout the district, and consistent language for new teachers" (Participant D, teacher). The program is based on four major principles:
(a) New teachers reach their potential as quickly as possible to ensure student success; (b) New teachers become aware of teaching and learning expectations for curriculum, positive school culture, a wide variety of instructional tools, and professional responsibilities; (c) New teachers use a variety of assessment tools and reporting procedures; and (D) the staff will become a community of reflective adult learners. (Wilson O'Leary, 2005, p. 4-5)

Teachers have indicated that they feel very much valued by these courses, in that the district has made such a conscious effort to attract and retain high-quality educators. The courses are viewed as a “common thread” throughout the district that colleagues can draw upon as needed, as it is said to “set people up for success.” Teachers and administrators also noted that the courses “weed out” those who may have “chosen the wrong field”. “They realize this very quickly when taking the instructional skills and cooperative learning classes, that this is just not the right career for them” (Participant E, teacher).

This sense of wanting to retain the highest quality teachers was brought about when the district realized (in the late 1990’s) that a growing majority of its staff was new. They realized the need “to invest time and resources into new teacher induction and training”, and at the same time...
"wanted to strengthen the leadership skills of experienced staff" (Reeves, 2005). Given this training model, there exists a definite sense that teachers are on the same page throughout the district.

According to both teachers and administrators, the program is useful for principals because they recognize that all teachers have received the same training, and they can better support struggling teachers with strategies that are aligned with the skills covered in the program. With the new teacher induction program, all teachers hear the same message, creating a common vocabulary throughout the district. The skills that teachers learn "stick around," and include such things as management, goals, presentation techniques, consistency and leadership principles. "It is easier to evaluate teachers because the skills and vocabulary have already been taught; all you have to do is hold teachers accountable" (Participant J, central office).

The choice professional development that happens in the district is also viewed as a strength, because it is curtailed to what teachers need. NPEAT (2003) supports the idea that teachers should be involved in the processes of developing their improvement plans. "Professional development should involve teachers in identifying what they need to learn and in developing the learning experiences in which they will be involved" (NPEAT, 2003).
Teachers appreciate the opportunity to write proposals which are accepted by the committee as choice professional development offerings. They can then find things that are relevant to their own instruction and curriculum with the choice professional development offerings. Yet, it was mentioned as a challenge from both administrators and teachers that with the current choice PD system, there is no way for principals to require that teachers focus their professional development for those two days on specific individual targets.

Another strength of the program was that the program allows teachers to receive quality professional development services without traveling out of the district. The district will often bring professional development to the district if teachers express a need, and teachers are appreciative of the opportunity to choose what they need in order to ensure relevancy and alignment with areas identified for personal and professional growth.

In addition to the availability of a wide range of choices, there is a high level of quality in the professional development offerings throughout the district. The district trains not only for content, but also for presentation skills to ensure quality delivery. Fullan (2003) argues that the delivery of professional development plays a key role in its perceived value by
suggesting that information only becomes knowledge when interaction takes place, and that wisdom is only produced through sustained interaction.

There are also opportunities for professional development through the Intermediate School District (ISD), which offers them the opportunity to attend with more colleagues and the chance to network and collaborate with those who are in, and out of, district. There is a perception that professional development experiences offer teachers ways to get better and improve, and that the skills learned in professional development experiences are carried into instructional practice. By allowing teachers to present information to their colleagues, there is the perceived belief among participants that teacher leaders have emerged through the process, either to become leaders within the district, or building principals. They have become staff developers, department chairs, and principals, or have moved to other districts to serve in leadership roles there.

*Where do teachers and administrators see opportunity to strengthen their professional development processes, systems, and experiences?*

Participants were able to identify some noteworthy challenges to professional learning within their district. One of the first, and most often, to come up was the perception that the ambiguous language of the contract and the interpretation of the state documents that govern professional development
activities (e.g. what "counts and doesn’t count" for professional development) has been a frustration. "We haven’t really clarified what professional development is, and that is sometimes frustrating" (Participant E, teacher).

Along the same lines, there is the perception among teachers that those who are “following the rules” are sometimes disadvantaged in the sense that colleagues receive credit for things that these teachers do not. In other words, other districts may have a different interpretation of the standards and expectations that are set forth by the Michigan School Improvement Framework. That said, participants conveyed significant pride in the quality of their professional development systems, interpretation of the standards, and the way in which courses are implemented and delivered.

We hold ourselves to a higher standard and we are proud of that. We are “inflexible” in the sense that we do not want to accept things just because others do. For example, we know that general communication is necessary, but it’s not always true professional development (Participant G, principal).

Teachers had some similar concerns, and felt that decisions were dependent on both the teacher and the building leadership.

Some teachers, for example, will take the professional development just because they want to increase skills and knowledge. On the same
note, some principals will identify skill and or sessions that may be beneficial to teachers and “encourage” them to take specific courses. Others will just allow teachers to take whatever they want (Participant C, teacher).

One possible solution to this problem may already be in the works, as the recently approved teacher contract (January, 2009) changes the terms from "Choice Professional Development" to "School Improvement Professional Development". While implementation details have not been spelled out by the administration and association, it should help ensure that professional development is tied to specific school goals. The contract requires 12 hours of PD sessions (which represents two work days) as arranged by the building school improvement team and based upon the building and district school improvement plan, approved by the building principal, and scheduled outside the normal work hours/days. This may help to ensure the common understanding and common language that participants expressed interest in throughout the data collection process.

Several unique concerns were expressed by specials teachers, who participate in fine arts meetings and department meetings at the district level, but feel that they spend a lot of time re-writing the curriculum. There was the statement that these meetings are very hard to schedule around the
various schedules of K-12 teachers. They also feel that they spend considerable time re-writing the curriculum to compensate for schedule changes that may be caused by snow days, assemblies, and other school events. They would like to have more time to ensure the alignment given these pieces.

Generally, all teachers shared this frustration with the amount of time allocated for follow-up, reflection and implementation, as well as general professional development sessions at the district level that are not always relevant. Sparks (2002) realizes the importance of reflection that is aligned with professional learning, and calls for the creation of mental models and "results-oriented beliefs" by offering time for reflection, observation and conversation. For example, one participant said that, "One struggle with outside events (or any) is that after attending an event, there is little to no time to share with colleagues, reflect upon or implement what you have learned. There is often no processing time for professional development events" (Participant B, teacher).

It depends on the context; whether or not it is relevant to what you are doing. It can be rejuvenating when it is relevant, but it is a lot of work! I get frustrated when people tell ME how It is relevant to MY
work; I should be able to decide whether it is relevant or not, and why or how. (Participant E, teacher)

Another participant shared that "it is often ambiguous and there is not much clarity when they try to cover too many disciplines at once with one activity, the way that it fits in to what I or we are doing can be ambiguous" (Participant D, teacher).

Time was mentioned again and again throughout our discussions as a major barrier to the professional development process. Teachers felt that there is little time given to write a proposal for presentation. While they may have a specific interest or skill set, they do not have the time to write the proposal and implement it. One participant said, "I know what I need; I just don't have the time (to formally ask for it)." Dilworth (1995) has contended that the overwhelming responsibilities of today's educators leave teachers feeling utterly exhausted and even inadequate, citing massive responsibilities which include everything from content knowledge, application of knowledge, assessment, and analysis of both student work and their own work, with very little time available to accomplish all of these within. Participants echoed these concerns, and felt powerless to change the amount of time available for reflection and implementation of things that they learn in professional development.
Administrators felt that professional development is “unfocused” in the sense that administrators can’t mandate which choices teachers choose to take, unless the teacher is on a plan of assistance. This is a concern because they would like to be able to ensure that all experiences are tied to the identified school improvement needs and goals. With the current system, there is no flexibility allowing principals to focus professional development efforts to specific choices.

Choices are not always related to the instruction, or to the areas identified as being in need of improvement for a specific teacher or group of teachers, yet we as administrators cannot require that they be related under the current set of specifications. (Participant J, central office)

What changes would you make to your professional development systems if you could? Teachers unanimously felt the need for more time for reflection. “I would like to be able to go to one session, and use the additional six hours to implement and reflect upon what I learned. You know, to ask ‘How am I doing?’” (Participant C, teacher). While reflection is a component widely recognized by experts and researchers (Fullan, 2001; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Barth 2001), districts unanimously struggle to find a
system to allow for enough thoughtful reflection about professional practice, and implementation of new skills.

Teachers would also like the opportunity for the mentor/mentees to see each other teach on a more regular basis, in order to get more insight out of these partnerships. They understand the power in collaboration, and recognize this piece as a strength of their current systems, but would ideally like to have more time for collaboration to be incorporated into their daily practice. Teachers would also like to see an early dismissal on Wednesdays for professional development, and would hope that topics during that time would not be limited "to a fixed" subject, but rather to be used for whatever is needed. Or, this time could be used for additional follow-up or reflection on something that they have already attended. Both of these strategies would allow professional learning that is more continuous and ongoing and, therefore, more effective (Sparks, 2002).

Another thought shared by teachers was that they would like to somehow change the level or variety of sessions being offered to be even more relevant to all teachers.

Choices are sometimes so narrow that there isn't something relevant. At the same time, they are sometimes so broad that they do not relate
directly to anything. Teachers sometimes just end up choosing from “what is left” because they run out of time. (Participant D, teacher)

One proposed solution to this concern was a desire for an online learning component to meet the needs of time schedules. Carol Morgan (2007) suggests that teachers have the opportunity to engage in several social networks, and that most of these can be accomplished both in person and online. Networking in the form of social networks, discussion rooms, and forums, can provide a valuable resource for reflection and discussion that is available to teachers “whenever they need it, day or night” (Morgan, 2007, p. 61).

Many universities offer online professional development. Why wouldn’t we? It may be more relevant if you are able to work on one topic throughout the course of the year online. Teachers could use BLOGS as a way to collaborate, or we could even combine with other districts and use/share professional development, like SKYPE to collaborate for content specific information with other districts. (Participant B, teacher)

There is a strong desire among teachers and administrators in District A for more content-specific professional development. Teachers feel like the district does a great job of offering professional development to improve
instructional skills, but that there is a need for content-related learning. As content and state expectations change, this type of professional development would help teachers “keep up” with current content and expectations. The administrators in the participant groups shared some of the same concerns, and would like to be able to ensure that the professional development that people offer and choose is tied to the school improvement goals in each building.

We need staff engagement and buy-in to the idea of school improvement being the driving force behind EVERYTHING we do. Also, we need to more effectively use the framework (Michigan School Improvement Framework) and have more teacher input on the indicators so that we can more effectively relate professional development to school improvement, and to communicate that relationship more to all staff. (Participant K, central office)

One possible solution to this problem would be changing the term “choice” professional development in the contract language to “school improvement.” This would help to ensure that teachers are relating the professional development choices that they make to a specific school improvement goal, and would help to move towards a school improvement process that was more teacher directed in the sense that teachers come to
administrators with the framework/indicators identified for improvement, as well as a plan for how to attack the areas of need that are identified.

Administration also felt that the ISD needs to make several changes. Some of these included more professional development for teachers in the core content areas, more collaboration with the districts on a more “hands on” level, and more inquiry into the specific needs of districts. “They tell us what we need, instead of asking” (Participant K, central office).

**Next steps (Phase II).** This study employed a constructivists’ approach through participatory action research strategies to co-construct, with participants, recommendations for future evolution of their district professional development programs. Participatory action research is characterized by Hatch (2002) as having identified the need for a change in practice, reflection upon the problem, development and implementation of a change and, finally, evaluation of its effectiveness (p. 31). Phase II of this study asked teachers and administrators to come together and identify areas for growth. Throughout this process, stakeholders reviewed the perceptions shared in Phase I, and clarified interpretations during co-construction. They then identified suggestions for “next steps” for their organization. Table 2 summarizes the action plan that participants used to formulate next steps.
Table 2: Professional Development Vision For Success Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development</th>
<th>Vision for Success Template</th>
<th>Evaluation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is it that you want to be able to do?</td>
<td>How will you know when you get there?</td>
<td>How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your systems?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List the three things that your group chose as priorities from your list of possible changes.</td>
<td>What will it look like?</td>
<td>What will people be doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What will people be doing?</td>
<td>What will you be &quot;producing&quot;?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>How will you evaluate the effectiveness of your systems?</td>
<td>When? How?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal:</th>
<th>Vision:</th>
<th>Evaluation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Modify the structure of PD (to allow for reflection, collaboration, additional types of PD opportunities, and alternative timeframes)</td>
<td>Online sharing with colleagues (Interstate, Intrastate)?</td>
<td>Is there a structure in place?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time for reflection. Collaboration as professional development?</td>
<td>How are teachers using that time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College courses?</td>
<td>What changes are happening as a result of that structure?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delayed start option?</td>
<td>Is there an accountability system in place for teachers?</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal:</th>
<th>Vision:</th>
<th>Evaluation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Universal definition for professional development (contract language)</td>
<td>Contract specific</td>
<td>New language in contract language:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tied to school improvement</td>
<td>Communicated to all in clear, specific terms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicated to all in clear, specific terms</td>
<td>Connected to School Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identified by teachers</td>
<td>Tied to an accountability measure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal:</th>
<th>Vision:</th>
<th>Evaluation:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. School Improvement embedded in all professional development</td>
<td>More support from ISD</td>
<td>Teachers involved in the identification of indicators to work on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Content-specific PD</td>
<td>All PD activities tied to building or district goals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tied to Michigan School Improvement Framework</td>
<td>School Improvement meetings driven by professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identified by teachers</td>
<td>Action plan created by teachers?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Action plan created by teachers</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Participants in District A identified four specific next steps:

1. Identify common language to be used throughout the district when referencing professional development, including a clear definition of the requirements of the state of Michigan.
a. What is professional development?

b. How do we interpret the requirements that are handed down by the State of Michigan relevant to the hours accepted for choice professional development?

2. Develop a solid connection between school improvement and professional development, and create a system for communication and accountability of that definition to teachers.

a. Involve everyone in the school improvement process, and communicate the relationship between school improvement and professional development.

b. Tie professional development experiences to school improvement goals and indicators as identified by the Michigan School Improvement Framework.

c. Create district (teacher and administrator) buy-in so that teachers and administrators are using the Framework to specifically identify areas for growth, and tying choice professional development to those identified areas.
3. Develop other ways to integrate content-specific professional development options.
   a. Look into online learning options.
      i. Who would offer these?
      ii. How would they be monitored?
      iii. Who would pay for them?
   b. Communicate need for content-specific professional development to the ISD.
   c. Look into the possibility of counting college courses for choice professional development.

4. Look at alternative structures for professional development that would allow time for reflections and implementation of strategies that are learned. Possible solutions may be:
   a. Delayed start option
   b. Time for independent reflection counting as professional development

The rationales for these steps were multifaceted. In reference to the need for a common understanding of the term “professional development”, one participant remarked that,
Sometimes it seems like the ambiguity of that language just gets in the way of what we are really trying to do here... we need to just be able to focus on what we want to learn, and we can't because we have to make sure that it counts. (Participant A)

This district is moving forward in solidifying the common definition of what is “counted” for professional development by clarifying contract language. One caution identified with this process of moving forward with the district’s professional development systems was that they would like to make a conscious effort to “balance freedom and focus.”

What we do not want, is for systems to become too spread out or fragmented. We want to make sure that, for example, if we allow one hour sessions, online learning (where only one or two people may be participating), and independent reflection, that it does not take away from common experiences and common direction that we are trying to maintain (Participant L, principal).

Considering the want for communication and buy-in (to the need for a connection between school improvement and professional development), participants repeatedly demonstrated the understanding that professional development was necessary to change instructional practice. NPEAT (2003) would support this decision to solidify connections between school
improvement and professional development. "Professional development should be connected to a comprehensive change process focused on improving student learning" (NPEAT 2003). One participant was very frustrated with the level of motivation (or lack thereof) among some teachers who have not been accountable to themselves for ensuring that their choices are related to school improvement.

Some of my colleagues... have gone to the same professional development 5 or 6 times, because they don't want to do anything else, and they just don't care. They are just trying to get their hours in. And then they sit there and talk and are disruptive the whole time, so that those of us who ARE there to learn and become better teachers can't hear what it going on. That is so frustrating!

(Participant B, teacher)

Finally, participants in District A chose to look at different structures for professional development to allow time for additional reflection opportunities, as well as different formats to complete professional development within, such as weekend courses or online learning systems. This suggestion was made because teachers feel that it is often difficult to stay after school for three hours, and that they are not necessarily able to take courses that they want or need due to scheduling conflicts.
The other component of this particular step included looking at opportunities for additional reflection time. Research tells us that reflection is one of the most crucial means that an educator can make use of in order to achieve personal growth (Ball & Darling-Hammond, 1998).

I would love to have the chance to go to a six hour session, and then have the other 6 hours to just reflect on my own and work on implementation of the skills that I have learned. That feels like it would be the best use of my time, and give the most benefit to my students. (Participant C, teacher)

Observations of the researcher. There were several things that stood out to me through the lens of the researcher during the data collection process. For example, the participant groups had very similar perceptions given that they were viewing the systems from differing perspectives. They make a conscious effort to have innovative systems in place, and are proud of the level of teacher driven professional learning and buy-in. There is a definite common language in place, and this was evident because common terms and vocabulary were used by all participants throughout the process.

Central office administration is largely responsible for the creation, communication and nurturing of this shared vision and common language, through the facilitation and availability of the Instructional Skills and
Collaborative Learning courses. The knowledge and expertise brought to the district by the central office administrators were not only evident in the Teacher Induction and Mentoring programs, but also in the focus on curriculum, instruction and assessment that is fine-tuned by this staff’s participation in several national professional associations.

The collaborative leadership style of this district’s central office administrators also allows teachers to showcase strengths for others through its innovative approach to professional development, creating a culture of collaborative learning and reflection. All the while, they promoted a sense of pride and positive energy. The district seems to have a shared awareness of the importance of strong leadership, as one teacher put it, “All of this is dependent upon good leadership. Without good leadership and a strong vision, it is hard to be motivated. Leadership is critical.”

There were, however, some gaps in the data collected in this district. As the researcher, I was looking for systems that governed the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development systems. One thing that I think is noteworthy is that during our discussions of evaluation, both teachers and administrators felt that they have positive systems in place that are impacting students. They did not, however, give clear formal
descriptions of how data is collected to determine the effectiveness of the systems in place.

The NSDC, whose standards the district works hard to adhere to, suggest that effective professional development be data-driven in the sense that it "uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement". According to the Council, effective professional development also uses "multiple sources of information to guide improvement and demonstrate its impact". Teachers and administrators in the district gave the perception that the systems in place are very successful, and indeed, they appear to be. However, without relevant data to support these systems, it is difficult to pinpoint areas for specific growth to allow the district to become even more ground-breaking in their design. While attention to the evaluation systems was not given in the next steps that were identified by the district, more attention to this subject will be given by the researcher in chapter five.

Another component that will be addressed in chapter five by the researcher is the absence of formal systems to tie teacher evaluation to professional development experiences. Research suggests that this method of intertwining teacher evaluation and professional learning is one of the most powerful opportunities for teacher growth. Additionally, Goldstein and
Noguera (2006) suggest that educators need to take a more “thoughtful approach to teacher evaluation” by connecting professional evaluations to professional development. Goldstein and Noguera (2006) offer a model of evaluation called the “Peer Assisted Review (PAR)” in response to complaints of a “transparent” evaluation system that did not allow opportunities for growth to veteran teachers. During the PAR process, teachers and coaches sit down in a panel discussion to develop individualized and specific strategies for each teacher’s professional growth. Again, the reflection initiated by this processes coincides with what researchers have deemed to be effective time and again (Guskey, 2003; Marzano, 2003; Sparks, 2000, DuFour, 2004; DuFour 1998).

Participants in District A are proud of the systems they have in place, and with good reason. Consistent with the recommendations made by experts, they have created systems that are embedded, on-going, and self reflective. Professional learning is truly at the heart of District A.

District B

This section will review the findings related specifically to District B. Later in the chapter, the researcher will make connections between the two participant districts, the research questions, and the comparison of the data.
Historical perspective. Historically speaking, professional development systems in District B were also driven solely by central office. The superintendent and assistant superintendent determined the direction for professional development, which was also related to state mandates, trends in education, and inspirational guest speakers, the common structure for many professional development systems in that era.

Contrary to what we now know as the best practices that have been noted in the literature, there was very little, if any, teacher input into these processes, and events were primarily unrelated to each other. The literature illustrates numerous characteristics of effective professional development (Collins, 1999; Guskey, 2001), such as professional learning that is job-embedded, on-going, specific to individual needs, and data driven.

Consistent with trends in professional development at the time, initiatives were not specific to individual levels or areas of instruction, and there was little or no follow-up for any professional development in the district. There was minimal evaluation of professional development events and processes, if any, and seldom were experiences linked to change in instructional practice or student achievement. The following section illustrates the changes that have been made in the professional development systems in District B over the last several years, and the perspectives of
teachers and administrators within the district. Specific focus is given to the processes they have undergone to evaluate and adjust their professional learning systems to reflect these characteristics of best practice.

Overview of participant perceptions. Participants in District B included teachers and administrators from the elementary, middle school, high school, and adult education levels, as well as central office administrators. They offered multiple perceptions of what professional development systems look like in their districts, and the following slides (Figures 10-18) illustrate the most general of those perceptions.

Research question number one asks how participants design, implement, and evaluate professional development in their districts. In Figure 10, teachers' and administrators' initial perceptions of professional development are summarized and compared. Like in District A, these initial perceptions were used to inform the researcher, by creating perspective and initiating further lines of questioning (see Appendix A).
Three words that come to mind when you think of PD:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Student Achievement</td>
<td>• Student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collaboration</td>
<td>• Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Common language</td>
<td>• Teacher training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• About kids</td>
<td>• School improvement teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Hard work</td>
<td>• Useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Building needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Content area goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Data driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• AYP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10: Three words that come to mind when you think of PD?

Research question number two asks how teachers experience and respond to professional development. In figures 11-13, the perceptions of teachers and administrators are outlined. Specifically, participants' perceptions of the district's strengths, aspects that stand out to participants and changes that teachers have made as a result of professional development are spelled out from both the perspective of the teacher and the administrators.

170
### What are the strengths?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Common Language</td>
<td>• Teacher Driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Common Focus</td>
<td>• MIBLISI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Inclusive of everyone</td>
<td>• Data Driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Active involvement</td>
<td>• PD committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11: What are the strengths?

### What aspects of professional development stand out?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Lots of data analysis</td>
<td>• Building buy-in to the idea that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Progressive PD</td>
<td>improvement=student achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Data-driven</td>
<td>• Teachers make sure it is run well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Up to date on research</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Collaborative process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12: What aspects stand out?

171
What changes do you feel you have made as a result?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Expanded awareness of where kids need to be</td>
<td>• Driven by teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Camaraderie</td>
<td>• Trust between teachers and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More focused (specific strategies)</td>
<td>administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Narrow focus</td>
<td>• USING data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Better reporting to parents</td>
<td>• Common threads throughout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Change happens as a result of PD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 13: What changes do you feel you have made as a result?

Figure 14 relates to professional development design, while figures 15 and 16 address the barriers to, and evaluation of, the professional development systems that are in place. Figure 17 shows the ways in which teacher evaluation is tied to the professional development process, similar to Figure 8 earlier in the chapter.

All of these findings respond to questions postulated by the researcher in terms of (research question number two) how teachers and administrators shape the priorities surrounding their professional learning systems in their district. These have also informed the recommendations of the researcher in chapter five.
### Who is involved in the design of Professional Development?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• School improvement committees</td>
<td>• Teachers generate suggestions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Principal participates through support; teacher driven</td>
<td>• School improvement committees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• State mandates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Direction from admin; plan from teachers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 14: Who is involved in the design of Professional Development?

### What are the barriers?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Time; both for PD and in-between PD</td>
<td>• Secondary: new state mandates and requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Money</td>
<td>• Accountability changes focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• No contract</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Finding activities that are relevant to all, particularly at HS where it is more departmentalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Report cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Money</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 15: What are the barriers?
### How is teacher evaluation tied to the PD process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • Contract language  
  • PD can be focused to identified goal areas  
  • Principals are more knowledgeable about details of initiatives and can evaluate accordingly  
  • Not tied directly | • PD days have evaluation  
  • Contract language  
  • IDP plans for teachers  
  • Not tied directly |

Figure 16: How is teacher evaluation tied to the PD process?

### How is professional development evaluated?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| • PD evaluation forms  
  • If there are complaints it doesn’t usually happen again | • PD evaluation forms  
  • Informal discussion |

Figure 17: How is professional development evaluated?
As mentioned earlier during the description of charts for District A, the second phase of this study asked participants to identify areas for growth. The summary of what teachers and administrators in District B would change if they could is outlined in Figure 18. These will also be further explored later in the chapter where the districts’ next steps and action planning templates are discussed. These areas of growth were also used by the researcher to determine recommendations to the participant districts.

### What would you change if you could?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Administrators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Delayed start to allocate more time for PD and collaborative learning</td>
<td>• Delayed start to allocate more time for PD and collaborative learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Better utilize experts and resources within the district</td>
<td>• Shared planning time for teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Continued collaboration and alignment across buildings</td>
<td>• Administrative sensitivity to what it is like to “be on the front lines”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More consistency on district-wide teams</td>
<td>• District-wide support of the idea that teachers need to be driving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Increased communication across grade levels and buildings</td>
<td>improvement efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More support for teachers with new assignments</td>
<td>• Inclusion of ALL staff (parapros, specials teachers, itinerant staff)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More time to share ideas</td>
<td>• Educate the school board about importance of PD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 18: What would you change if you could?
What does professional development look like in the district? District B offers several different options for professional learning. They begin their year with district and building-wide professional development days in which all staff participate. Similar to the structure of District A, these days include designated professional development that happens two days prior to school starting, and are often developed by building school improvement teams that design and implement professional development. All professional development is school or district driven.

District B has a new teacher academy that is directed by a consultant through their ISD, as well as a Principal’s Academy that keeps administrators abreast of current legislation and curriculum information that is handed down from the state. The new teacher academy was developed in consultation with experts from another district, and through the ISD. Teachers meet after school with a consultant to discuss progress, focus, and challenges. District B’s program for new teacher induction has been modeled after that in District A. Like District A, District B also shares a focus on creating a community of reflection and collaboration, and the New Teachers’ Academy is just one way of getting there.

Also like District A, the new teachers’ first year is where they take the instructional skills course, and the second year consists of cooperative
learning training with the consultant. Focuses of these courses include creating skills for teachers to use in the classroom while implementing instruction, and strategies for collaborating with peers. NPEAT (2003) states that “Professional development should incorporate evaluation of multiple sources of information on outcomes for students and the instruction and other processes involved in implementing lessons learned through professional development”. This is consistent with the courses offered in District A, which is also consistent with the definition of learning communities in the MSIF. The consultant also trains the administrative team on professional development and administrative responsibilities.

Along with the New Teacher Academy, District B’s mentoring program was identified by participants as another relevant component of its professional development process. The mentoring program aligns new teachers with mentors for the first three years. There is a onetime training for mentors; afterward they participate with their mentees at the ISD a few times throughout the year to ensure a common direction and consistent vocabulary.

Through this process, there is a checklist in the teacher contract that outlines what the new teachers must accomplish with the mentoring program each year. The checklist includes such things as observations, mentor
training, and evaluations, and specifies the format and timeline within which all of these items should occur. The district has also established that, whenever possible, the mentor teacher is in the same building. The mentor and mentee meet with each other and observe each other, and there are opportunities for the new teacher to observe other teachers in the same grade level as needed.

One focus for the program is initiation to the standards-based report card, which is often "overwhelming for new staff." New, more experienced mentors have been able to help newer teachers understand the philosophies and processes behind using this report card, so that teachers are prepared not only to assess students more effectively, but also to report out most effectively to parents. It was evident when talking to them that teachers feel very strongly about the mentor program and say that it has been crucial to their success in the classroom. It has also helped new mentees in becoming part of the school community. "I really just do not know how I would have been as successful without it" (Participant I, teacher).

Through the district's mentoring program, mentors are assigned to all new teachers. Through this process, the mentor is with a mentee for four years. The district and union outline steps to be completed for each year. Some of the components of this process include classroom visitation and
specified monthly topics for discussion and focus. The program, which was developed by a regional expert, is available through the ISD, and offers many opportunities for support.

One challenge of the mentor program is that seasoned teachers are occasionally frustrated with mentees because they find it difficult to take direction or to ask for help. However, both teachers and administrators noted how much this program helped to form these and other leadership skills among those who participate. Occasionally mentors have to be changed because of either impeding friendships or personality conflicts, which may make it difficult for either the mentee to take direction from the mentor, or for the mentor to engage in difficult conversations with the mentee. This careful attention to mentor assignments is something that many districts do not engage in, yet research would suggest that it is critical. Intrator and Kunzman (2006) recognize the need for mentor-like reflection in professional development, and support a "multi-level" model of teacher training which encompasses psychotherapeutic components in order to incorporate a focus on "purpose, passion, and hope" into professional development through a process they call "core reflection". They explain that "the idea behind core reflection is that a teacher's core personality- including his or her identity and mission- profoundly influences the way a teacher practices" (p. 40). These
practices have proven to give teachers not only the skills necessary to impact students, but also coaching and mentoring strategies to use when interacting with colleagues.

Other professional learning opportunities in District B include ISD teacher trainings, grade level meetings, department meetings, building-led trainings, and data review sessions. They also engage in other sessions during staff meetings which may include book studies, reflections on professional development experiences, guest speakers, and teacher mini-trainings. One thing that is unique to District B is that they also have allotted time for para-professional training, secretarial training, and playground supervisor training. Research on Professional Learning Communities indicates that professional development should include all stakeholders in order for the vision to be reached. DuFour and Eaker (1998) contend that in order for a school to reach their vision, they must have “a clear sense of the goals it is trying to accomplish, the characteristics of the school it seeks to become, and the contributions that the various stakeholders in the district must make in order to transform ideals into reality” (p. 290). District B exemplifies this philosophy, and includes stakeholders in building-led trainings and data review sessions. Para-professional training consists of two to four days throughout the year, and focuses on reading instruction. Para-professionals
are also required to attend district professional development days, which helps to establish a sense of teamwork and ownership to the processes. Similarly, secretarial training happens through the technology department regarding new healthcare systems, etc., while playground supervisors and school nurses receive training for first aide.

Overseeing it all, there is a professional development team that meets two or three times per year, which is led by the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. This committee is responsible for helping to translate the mandates and requirements handed down by the state into a vision for the district to follow. These also formulate the specific action plan for implementation and the ways in which each building will attack the task uniquely (as identified by building data). Participants felt strongly that this committee provides common language, focus, and direction for the district. This common direction is often mandated by goals, EdYES, and other accountability measures handed down at the state level, while the administration fine-tunes the focus and the polished vision for how the district will attack the problem. Teachers provide a significant voice in the decision-making processes for school improvement and professional development, both on this committee and in other leadership roles throughout the district.
Teachers also participate in grade level meetings that happen a few times per year. During this time, teachers review data, and solidify common direction. The meetings are facilitated by administrators, but driven by teacher input, reflection and leadership. Sparks (2002) reminds us that by allowing people to participate in changes to things that are significant to them, people will feel most "alive and committed" (p. 14-2). By creating a structure that allows for such embedded teacher leadership, District B has created ownership and buy-in from teachers that few districts see, allowing them to facilitate such effective processes that are led by teachers.

The ISD supports District B in various different ways. NPEAT (2003) suggests that, "professional development should be continuous and ongoing, involving follow-up and support for further learning- including support from sources external to the school that can provide necessary resources and new perspectives". One of the many ways in which the district is supported is through the Can-Do network, which works with teachers in specific content areas.

The Can-Do Networks are structured professional learning communities focusing on the development of advanced skills in the specific content area and grade level for which the session is designated. Teachers are provided the opportunity to network and
share information and resources. Updates on state and local initiatives for the given area are presented and discussed. On-line resources are shared and ways to integrate these resources into the curriculum are discussed.

(http://www.sjcisd.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=instructionalLeadership.canDoNetworks)

Through this process, teachers have the chance to collaborate county-wide and get information that is coming from the state and the county level. For each subject (math and ELA), there are two sessions per year. For example, math, writing instructional strategies, and ELA sessions are all facilitated by a consultant through the ISD. Currently, the math network is covering interpretation of state benchmarks and power standards, while the ELA network is focusing on writing instructional strategies. The ISD also supports the district’s professional learning by offering consultants to work with teachers and administrators. They provide services relevant to the needs of the district and, according to participants, are “very connected to what we are trying to do here”.

School Improvement teams at the building level lead all professional development. Each building looks different in terms of school improvement, based on different needs and different data, as well as strengths of the
leadership teams. Suggestions and ideas come from teachers through the process of school improvement, and then the administrators support the processes and plans that they develop. While the state mandates new requirements and the district is required to respond, specific direction comes from administration, and the specific action plan comes from teachers. Depending on the level (elementary, middle school, or high school) teachers may, or may not, be more independent in this process. "Building teams really bring ideas to us. They plan it and implement it, and then they even evaluate it through the grade level meeting process and redirect instruction as necessary" (Participant B, principal).

The same is true at secondary level, according to participants, but teachers do not necessarily redirect as needed and there is not the same follow-up from meeting to meeting. They are working on aligning this process more with the format developed at the elementary level, but admit that challenges from the state often hold them back from achieving this goal. Secondary teachers across the state are echoing these concerns, given the overwhelming nature of the new Michigan Merit Curriculum and the new graduation requirements.

Another key component of the processes for professional development in District B is their teacher-led staff meetings. Building-led staff meetings
are an ideal place for professional learning to happen because they are embedded into the daily workings of the organization (Sparks, 2002). During these, teachers also have the opportunity to share ideas, lessons, and information from conferences. Staff meetings also include book studies, reflections on previous professional development experiences, guest speakers, and teacher mini trainings that are lead by teachers, and based on strengths and teachers' needs within the buildings.

For one of the elementary buildings, professional development is driven by a model that is defined by Michigan’s Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative (MiBLSi). MiBLSi is an initiative through the Michigan Department of Education’s Office of Special Education and Early Intervention Services working in collaboration with the Office of School Improvement that incorporates behavior and academic goals as equal components in the learning process.

The program does this by providing professional development that supports school leadership teams: (a) Monitor student reading and behavior performance; (b) Access dynamic data collection systems that provide staff with performance indicators in reading and behavior that are accurate and timely – for example, the School Wide Information System (SWIS™) and the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy
Skills (DIBELS™); (c) Make decisions based on data; (d) Develop and implement reading and behavior interventions using student performance indicators; (e) Evaluate intervention effectiveness through ongoing data collection and progress monitoring to improve reading success; (f) Develop schoolwide instructional and intervention supports; (g) Use research-based interventions connected to the five essential components of a comprehensive reading program: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension; (h) Improve behavioral success; (i) Reduce behavior problems through Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support; (j) Establish a continuum of prevention and support across different levels of student need; (k) and network with others (MiBLSi, 2009).

District B's MiBLSi team meets every Wednesday, and the reports that they use and develop drive professional development based on what the leadership team determines. For example, after data review, they are able to identify specific areas of need. The MiBLSi format requires them to formally review data on a regular basis (three times per year) and to formalize their action plan that will indicate: what plan of action they are to take, who will implement the plan, and the timeline within which the plan will be completed.
At the high school level, school improvement teams are NCA driven, and focus mostly on acclimating teachers to the new Michigan Merit Curriculum and its requirements. Most goals and topics for professional development are related to recent Quality Assurance Reviews (QARs). These guide the school improvement and professional development, as well as familiarizing staff with the new requirements that are handed down from the state level, such as the new Michigan Merit Curriculum and new graduation requirements.

The district also has summer offerings that are available (through the district or county) for purposes such as curriculum work, extension opportunities, and other focuses. Teachers and administrators both feel that their systems are data-driven and “very progressive,” and feel that the district is good about keeping up with the research. There is a common belief that systems are teacher-driven from the bottom up.

A sense of credibility has been established that makes things run much more smoothly than they had in the past. There is a collective awareness by administrators and teachers that it has to be teacher-led in order for student achievement to happen. (Participant D, principal) Teachers share the same level of excitement about the processes. “Overall we are pretty happy. We are excited to come to professional development,
and we can’t wait to see how the efforts we are putting into everything are impacting kids. It’s exciting!” (Participant G, teacher)

**How has your professional development program evolved to where it is today?** Participants from both groups identified that, at both the elementary and secondary levels, teachers moved from one-time events with no follow-through to events that are “truly meaningful and linked to professional development”. According to participants, the district has also moved from a system of unfocused and fragmented efforts, to providing teachers with professional learning that is more connected, focused, intentional, and all-encompassing. For example, from the Adult Education perspective, participants shared that teachers used to feel “that professional development did not concern them, while now there is an obvious serious level of commitment and dedication” (Participant F, principal).

Collectively, all participants agree that professional development used to be driven by central office; now, it is driven by buildings. Through school improvements teams, department meetings, and data review that has been embedded into the everyday systems, the elementary schools have taken it one step further and feel that they have reached a level where professional development is driven (planned, implemented) by teachers.
Moreover, there is a collaborative effort at the elementary level to plan and implement professional development; whereas, it used to be all mandated and designed by administration. Now it is a collective effort and that gives teachers more buy-in, ownership, and motivation, according to participants.

In addition to the accountability levels that were created by NCLB and EdYES requirements, participants noted some considerable “turning points” in their professional learning processes. Participants agreed that the emphasis really started to change “a few years back” when people were invited to work in the summer, with a stipend, on a professional development committee. The committee, developed and led by a former assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, “met and read articles; learning together as a collaborative group. She created a vision that we could all buy into” (Participant C, principal).

Teachers took ownership of what they wanted to see happen and it became not about teachers anymore, but about student. It was not teacher training anymore, and there was a sense of accountability for what happened. Teachers became accountable to not only administrators, but to themselves, students and other teachers. (Participant B, principal)
Experts agree that staff buy-in and support is one of the hardest pieces of the puzzle to solidify when developing a system of ongoing learning and reflection in a district. Participants feel strongly that there is now building buy-in and that the buy-in has lead to improved student achievement. "Teachers really get into it. They make sure that it is run and run well. It has become “our school” not “my school” (Participant A, principal).

Speaking specifically about the secondary level, participants shared an awareness of true change.

Staff used to take the book or folder for whatever topic they were talking about and file it on the shelf and never look at it again until they threw it out ten years later. Professional development is truly becoming meaningful and is linked to data. We know that it has to be teacher-led in order for it to affect student achievement... we are still getting there, but we are getting there. (Participant E, principal)

Participants at the elementary level shared a very similar perception when reflecting upon the evolution of professional development processes within the district.

Before, we looked at a lot of data, but it was just to sit and listen. Now, we are actually involved in the analysis and it is very “kid-
-driven”. It used to be principal driven; now it is teacher driven.

(Participant H, teacher)

Furthermore, when reflecting upon the effects of these changes, one participant had this to say:

I’m sure that it was challenging for principals to give up some of the control, but now we have this really trusting and collaborative relationship. It is so much better. Now, we all have to share both the control AND the responsibility for the outcome of what we are doing.

(Participant G, teacher)

This sense of accomplishment was shared by teachers and administrators alike. Throughout discussions, they exhibited a true understanding of the importance of the changes that they have made, and of the necessity for a high level of teacher involvement in order to make these processes successful (Sparks, 2002).

There is building level buy-in to the idea that improvement leads to increased student achievement. Teachers are seeing results. Because of this, they really get into it, and they make sure it is run and run well

(Participant C, principal).
How does professional development influence the district? Participants identified many influences of the current professional development systems as they are in place now. Not only are teachers and administrators using what they have available in the realm of data, but there is a strong sense that teaching is tied more to data than ever before. Specifically, participants identified school improvement meetings as the arena for most of the data review. Some of the changes at the elementary level included using data at grade level meetings to re-direct instruction, ensuring that all professional development is tied together by data, and allowing the opportunity for alignment in the sense that every professional development activity relates to the next; there is evidence of change happening.

It really is all driven by teachers. There is a level of trust that has been developed between the teachers and the administrators, and teachers are really at a point where they are using what they have. Everything is tied to data- and they talk about it. (Participant C, principal)

Another point that is relevant to mention is the shift in focus because of the declining availability of finances within the district. Participants explained that professional development has to be more focused as they attempt to use resources more cautiously.
It can't be just about anything... it has to be focused and specifically related to a goal or content area. It also needs to be closer to home because we can't pay for them to travel as far anymore, and we have to utilize resources and "experts" within the district more. (Participant D, principal)

Furthermore, participants feel that they have “an expanded awareness of where kids need to be. There is a sense of camaraderie with the whole building, through the successes and the struggles” (Participant B, principal). They have developed a more thematic model of instruction in order to more effectively integrate across content areas and use resources more effectively. They are more focused in the sense that they utilize specific strategies to be used with certain kids, instead of a more general approach to instruction. As a result of this shift, teachers also feel that they are more effectively able to communicate with parents because they are able to share more specific and relevant information. “Before, there was professional development, but no change associated with it, and no accountability. Now, there is collaborative teacher ownership: there is accountability to administration and to each other” (Participant A, principal).
**Strengths of the current systems.** Participants were able to identify several strengths in the current systems. One of which was the understanding and presence of a common language throughout the district, as well as a common focus. In support of this, all teachers are required to be on a professional development committee at the building level, which allows for inclusion of all staff, making sure that everyone is actively involved and that it is a very teacher-driven process. The agendas for meetings and trainings are all designed by teachers, and are specific to building or departmental needs. The development of this level of teacher ownership and empowerment is unique, and to be commended.

There is also a large professional development committee that completes the ED Yes reporting requirements. This committee also discusses the connections between school improvement and professional development, ensuring that the professional learning opportunities offered are aligned with the needs and deficits that are identified through the school improvement framework. Throughout this process, it was noted that members of the committee show active concern and participation, and are very highly motivated, which is different from the circumstances only a few years ago.
Where do teachers and administrators see the opportunity to strengthen their professional development processes, systems, and experiences? The obvious challenges that presented themselves within both groups were the shortages of time and money. Participants from both groups agreed that there is little time for collaboration and reflection, and that this would be a likely next step for the district.

We would like to see a two-hour delay once per month, or some other way to add more time that is specifically allocated for professional development. Too much time passes in between professional development activities, without enough reflection or accountability.

(Participant H, teacher)

Communication was another area that was identified as needing growth. Specifically, participants would like to increase communication between buildings and across the levels. This would add to the support needed when teachers changed assignments, as well as allowing for an increased knowledge and awareness of the vertical alignment within the district.

We would like to have more time to utilize the resources and experts that we have right here within the district, and for the elementaries to be on the same page. Right now, everything is different by different
buildings. It would also be nice to have consistency among the team members for district professional development and school improvement. There is especially a lot of change over happening at the secondary level, and it is difficult to move in a common direction when the people involved are constantly changing. They are not at the level we are. (Participant G, teacher)

Participants at the secondary level indicated a need for growth in the area of data usage. The high school, according to participants, is heading in the direction of data-driven professional development but has also been met with many challenges this year with the new Michigan Merit Curriculum and graduation requirements.

Success at that level is measured so much by meeting AYP, that is where the focus is, as well as on meeting the needs of at-risk kids. Change is the biggest hurdle... there needs to be more of a focus on data, and teachers would like to develop some common local assessments, but it is like changing your pants while you are jogging. (Participant D, principal)

An additional challenge for the district revolves around the fact that the district has been without a contract for teachers which, according to
participants, causes several political concerns, including a lack of enthusiasm and motivation.

You find that you have some teachers who just refuse to participate, and you know that it is because of the contract. Then, there are others who feel that the contract is secondary and their main concern is to teach these children, and those are the people who will do whatever it takes. (Participant C, principal)

At the high school level, coming up with something that is relevant to everyone is a challenge when success is measured by AYP and MEAP. Similarly, report cards have been a huge challenge for the elementary level, and participants indicated that there were actually teachers who chose to leave the district because the new reporting system required so much change. One of the next steps that participants identified will be to ensure that they are providing opportunities for all staff to participate in, and benefit from, including specials teachers, para-professionals, and itinerant staff. They also spoke a great deal about the need for more time to collaborate and reflect. For example, there was discussion that a delayed start option may provide the structure for more time and focus to professional development within the constraints of the current resources. They felt that it would be
great to offer some sort of shared planning time for teachers, rather than the small "snippets" of time that they currently have.

I would love to see us try something out of the box like a delayed start where we bring teachers in every other Wednesday in the morning to create more time for professional growth. I would also love to see us find a way to develop shared planning time; right now, there are just small snippets of time that teachers have to meet and take care of small things. I would love to give them bigger chunks of time on a more regular basis. (Participant C, principal)

Administrators recognize the need for change, and also recognize that they need to be more sensitive to the "workers on the front lines". They realize that the changes they are looking for can't happen overnight; in order to happen, they agree, it will require cooperation from all levels. The high school participants, for example, are really trying to make that shift of understanding that the department chairs and school improvement team are the ones who are leading that process and making those decisions. They are still working to establish the sense of credibility that has been established at the elementary level. "It is really happening... we are in the midst, but it is happening. It is teacher-driven and tied to data. The high school has further to go than elementary, but it really is happening" (Participant C, principal).
Next steps (Phase II). Phase II of this study asked teachers and administrators to come together and identify areas for growth. Throughout this process, stakeholders reviewed the perceptions shared in Phase I, and clarified interpretations during co-construction. They then identified suggestions for “next steps” for their organization, summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Professional Development Vision For Success Template

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development Vision for Success Template</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal:</strong> Finding Common Planning Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is it that you want to be able to do?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• List the three things that your group chose as priorities from your list of possible changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How will you know when you get there?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What will it look like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What will people be doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What will you be “producing”?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Significant time weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Blocks?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Daily?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 2.5 times/week?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Is there a system in place?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How are teachers using that time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What changes are happening as a result of that time?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Goal:** Sharing resources within the district (e.g., using resident experts) |
| **What is it that you want to be able to do?**   |
| • Meetings run by own people                     |
| • PD by own staff                                |
| **How will you know when you get there?**       |
| **Evaluation:**                                  |
| • Residential experts facilitating PD            |
| • Active search by administrators for internal resources |

| **Goal:** Sharing resources between buildings    |
| **What is it that you want to be able to do?**   |
| • Training, collaborating                        |
| • Staff meeting agendas                          |
| • School improvement strategies                  |
| **How will you know when you get there?**       |
| **Evaluation:**                                  |
| • Regular time for collaboration among elementary buildings |
| • Consistency of school improvement goals/strategies |

| **Goal:** Sharing between elementary and secondary levels |
| **What is it that you want to be able to do?**   |
| • Alignment of curriculum                        |
| • Involvement of all staff (at all three levels)  |
| **How will you know when you get there?**       |
| **Evaluation:**                                  |
| • Common meeting times                           |
| • Consistent staff participation?                |
| • Accountability for participation?             |
Participants in District B identified two specific next steps:

1. Develop a structure in which teachers could have more time for collaboration and reflection. Some options to explore included:
   a. Delayed start on a regular basis to allow for consistent time for professional development and where one session is in close proximity to the next.
      i. How do other districts do this successfully?
      ii. How do you “sell” a delayed start to a community?
   b. Studying the specials schedule to see if there are options for restructuring that would allow for a more regular common plan time.

2. Develop a plan to more efficiently share resources within and across the district.
   a. Sharing school improvement agendas at the elementary so that one team is not “reinventing the wheel”.
   b. Improving district alignment to allow for more regular communication.
   c. Improving participation at the secondary (high school and middle school) level to increase fidelity of implementation of the systems that are put in place.
The rationales for choosing these steps are best described by the participants. In reference to step number one regarding finding additional time, one participant stated that, “We just have to find a way to do this. What are other districts doing? Somebody has got to have something that we can use.” In reference to the second step for improvement, another participant shared her frustrations:

It is like we don’t even know what other buildings are doing sometimes! I mean, what if they are doing something really great that we could use? It would be great if we could share agendas for staff meetings or school improvement meetings. (Participant J, teacher)

*Observations of the researcher.* There were several things that stood out to me as the researcher through the data collection process. For example, like in District A, the participant groups had very similar perceptions given that they were viewing the systems in place from different perspectives. They felt fortunate to have a very high level of support from the ISD for various programs, and had established a system of teacher buy-in, leadership, and support. There is a defined common language in place, and this was evident because common terms and vocabulary were used by all participants throughout the process.
These traits were undoubtedly fostered by the collaborative leadership style of the central office administration, who understands the importance of empowering building principals and teachers to determine their own specific goals, direction and action planning. Yet, they still hold buildings accountable for creating and following through on action plans to address those needs.

Like in District A, both teachers and administrators in District B felt that they have positive systems in place that are impacting students, yet they also neglected to give clear formal descriptions of how data is collected to determine the effectiveness of the systems in place. Steps for using student data to "determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement", as recommended by NSDC (2001), were taken into careful consideration when developing recommendations by the researcher, as this was not already identified as an area of need by the district.

Also, similar to District A, there appeared to be a weaker connection between formal evaluation systems and professional learning for teachers. Recommendations will follow. District B truly boasts a collaborative learning environment where stakeholders' interests and needs are identified, shaped and coalesced to align with the vision and direction that is created by central office.
Additional Sources Of Data

In order to gain a true understanding of the systems in place and to establish the triangulation of data in each of the participant districts, the researcher also reviewed documents and artifacts from both districts, which included district and building level school improvement plans, as well as documentation of mentoring programs and new teacher training programs.

Creswell (2003) suggests that the selection of additional data sources be purposeful and intentional. In this case, the researcher selected documents that would further identify the processes and policies surrounding the different professional learning systems in place in the districts. After initial interviews and learning about the structures of professional learning within the districts, school improvement plans, and teacher induction and mentoring policies were reviewed and used to support the themes addressed in the analysis of data, as well as the recommendations of the researcher.

According to Creswell (2003) there are multiple advantages to be found in reviewing these types of data. For example, these data allow the researcher to “obtain the language and words of participants” at a time that is convenient to the researcher, and to represent data that are meaningful enough that “participants have given attention to compiling” them (p. 187).
In all of these documents, there is documented awareness of quality professional learning communities with a focus on student achievement. There is importance given to improving teacher content knowledge and instruction, and to ensuring a collaborative system where the participant districts empower all staff to become involved in the school improvement process.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, I began with a typological analysis, searching for themes within my data from phase I of my data collection. I first gathered data into an outline format, and sent it to participants for further co-construction. Once clarifications were made, I combined each group of participants into one outline, separating perspectives by color.

During Phase II of my study, I shared the two perspectives with the entire group of participants. At which point, we clarified further and developed common perspectives through discussion and questioning. Once common perceptions were developed, the group was asked to identify opportunities for growth, and prioritize in small groups. We then shared out to the whole group, and through a process of discussion and inquiry, identified commonly agreed upon next steps for the district. These steps were
then summarized by the researcher and sent back to the group for co-construction.

After an interpretive analysis that included the researchers perceptions of the underlying systems and beliefs, and their influences on the systems in place, final analysis, and findings were sent to the participant groups for co-construction, in order to ensure for accurate interpretation of the data. This interpretive analysis will provide depth to the typological analysis that was used to gather emergent themes within the data.

**Interpretation of Data**

As mentioned previously, a typological analysis was first used in this study to determine emergent themes within the data, which are identified and explained in the following section. During this, an interpretive analysis was used to find meaning from the lived experiences and perceptions relayed by the participants. Throughout this process, pieces of the data were put together in a meaningful relationship to construct explanations to help the reader best understand what is happening within the data (Hatch 2002).

**Emergent Themes**

There were several themes that emerged as consistent elements of reflection between both participant districts. The following pages identify
those themes that were prominent in both districts, and interpret their meaning.

*Structure of the districts.* Structure of professional development within the two districts was different. Whereas one district allowed teachers to choose professional development sessions; and the other did not. Table 4 summarizes these findings.

Table 4: Structure of the Districts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District A</th>
<th>District B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Choice PD</td>
<td>• Teacher Driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher-presented</td>
<td>• Building-wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Teacher-Driven</td>
<td>• Building-led</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both districts had an obvious commitment to the idea that professional development should be teacher-driven. While one district approached this goal by allowing teachers to choose specific professional development, the
other met this standard by allowing teachers to drive the planning and implementation of professional development. The result for both districts was a widespread change in practice, leading to improved instruction and increased student achievement, according to participants.

By choosing interviews as means of data collection, I was able to gain a historical perspective that I would not have otherwise been able to see (Creswell, 2003). Participants in both districts often talked about and made reference to the fact that their professional development systems had undergone significant reform, and both groups felt very content with the direction their districts were headed in. In both districts, the researcher observed a sense of forward progress and momentum by exploring that historical perspective.

Collaboration and reflection. Another theme that presented itself throughout the data collection process was the awareness of a need for time for teachers to collaborate with other teachers, and to reflect on their practice. DuFour (2004) stresses the importance of collaboration that is imbedded into the culture of an organization. He insists that a focus on results is key. Teacher conversations must quickly move beyond “What are we expected to teach?” to “How will we know when each student has learned?” (DuFour, 2004, p. 15).
Furthermore, Schmoker goes so far as to say that collaboration without clear goals is often "futile" and makes it "impossible to measure progress" (p. 21). He also discusses the importance of goals in creating a purpose for teamwork, contending that they provide the focus necessary for effective interaction. Collaboration was a common theme throughout the discussions with both districts, and Table 5 summarizes the ways in which districts facilitated a collaborative learning environment.

Table 5: Collaboration and Reflection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>District A</th>
<th>District B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>District PD team</td>
<td>District PD team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>Building-wide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grade/dept meetings</td>
<td>Grade Level Meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Staff meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MiBLiSi Meetings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When I have time to sit down and say, “What am I doing well?”, or “What do I need to change?”, I can see results with my kids... I can be a better teacher for my kids. But when I don’t have that time, I just keep doing the same thing I did yesterday. It is so important, but it is so hard to work into my day... by the time you use the bathroom and make a phone call, check your email, your planning time is done. And I am tired after school, or I have to get home to my own kids. If they don’t give us time to do it, it is just not going to happen on a regular basis (Participant J, teacher).

The feelings expressed by Participant J were realized throughout the data collection processes, and in both districts. Administrators were also very aware of the necessity of time for teachers.

They are tired... they work very, very hard, and if we don’t give them the time to do what they need to do, we can’t expect real change to happen. But at the same time, with fewer and fewer resources at our disposal and funding that is constantly cut by the state, how can we do it? (Participant E, principal)
Connections to the school improvement process. Emily Calhoun (Sparks 1999) insists that goals must not only exist in the planning and facilitation of professional development, but must also be calculated and focused enough to demonstrate high expectations for students. Sparks echoes this belief by sharing that the most powerful professional development opportunities match intended learning outcomes for students with the desired instructional practices for teachers (p. 9.5). By setting such measurable, focused and intentional goals, professional development policymakers are able to not only better individualize professional development, but also to better measure its effectiveness and, in turn, its impact on student learning. Table 6 illustrates the differing levels of connection between the school improvement professional development processes in the participant districts.
Table 6: Connections to the School Improvement Process

The Michigan School Improvement Framework has developed a “blueprint” in order to aid districts in making these connections between school improvement and professional development.

Since the passage of Public Act 25 in 1990, Michigan schools and districts have been required to develop 3-5 year school improvement plans. Schools and districts use these plans as a blueprint to establish goals and objectives that will guide teaching for learning, resource allocation, staff development, data management and assessment.
They also use it to measure their ability to meet the goals and objectives established in the plan. (2006, p. 2)

Both districts provided evidence during teacher interviews and in the study of external documents of a focus on student learning. In reference to this connection between school improvement and professional development, NPEAT (2003) suggests that “professional development should be connected to a comprehensive change process focused on improving student learning”.

This need for goals that are specific to school improvement efforts was reoccurring throughout this study, especially as the relationship between school improvement and professional development. Fullan (1999) explains the need for a connection between school improvement and professional development by saying that, “school improvement happens when a school develops a professional learning community that focuses on student work and changes teaching” (p.24). The researcher makes recommendations for how districts can further enhance the development of such data-driven goals and connections to the evaluation of professional development in chapter five. 

While there were differences in how the districts viewed and structured that relationship, both expressed awareness that professional development should ignite change in practice, which, in turn, ideally results in school improvement. Participant H (teacher) relayed that, “true change is
happening... it never happened before because we never tied everything together like we do now, and we can see the changes happening. It is exciting!"

**ISD support.** While the levels and quality of ISD support in both districts seemed to vary, both districts recognized the value in having "outside" support for instructional improvements, sharing of knowledge and networking, and for collaboration with other districts. One participant in particular suggested the need for additional support in the sense that "we need more hands-on involvement from them. And we need them to ask us what we need instead of telling us." Table 7 illustrates these findings.

Table 7: ISD Support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISD Support</th>
<th>District A</th>
<th>District B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>District A</strong></td>
<td>- Courses offered by ISD where teachers can go to ISD and attend</td>
<td>- Embedded support systems from ISD and ongoing connectedness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Fragmented, not ongoing or embedded</td>
<td>- Support is specific to needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- &quot;Tell&quot; not &quot;ask&quot; what needs are</td>
<td>- Support for teachers, mentors/mentees, administrators, and central office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Needs to be more content-specific, relevant to new trends/mandates in</td>
<td>- Content-specific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Challenges.** There were several themes that were consistent with both districts in terms of challenges. The most obvious to the researcher was the presence of political issues and difficulties related to the lack of a contract. In both districts, there were teachers who chose not to participate in the study due to the district not having a contract. There were also frustrations voiced by all parties about the difficulty in getting teachers to participate beyond contractual requirements in professional learning opportunities. Table 8 illustrates these findings.

**Table 8: Challenges**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>District A</th>
<th>District B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contract</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For PD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of ISD support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Language</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Staff motivation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For PD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For reflection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For collaboration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Structure (special schedule)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both districts also shared similar financial concerns. Not only were there fewer opportunities available than in the past, but there were fewer resources to support classroom resources needed for implementation of activities and ideas gained after attending professional development. Even down to a personal level, participants had more strict schedules in their personal lives due to financial hardships, which limited availability for professional learning outside of the regular work day.

Time was also cited repeatedly as, perhaps, the most inherent barrier to professional learning. Researchers would support the need for time, stating that “teachers who have spent more time studying teaching are more effective overall, and strikingly so in developing higher-order thinking skills and in meeting the needs of diverse students” (Ball & Darling-Hammond, 1998 p. 4).

Participants in both districts felt constraints due to lack of time for collaboration and communication with other colleagues, reflection on personal practice, and implementation of new strategies. One participant summed it up for all of the participants in the study:

I can go to a great professional development session and learn a hundred strategies to improve my instruction. But if I want to implement any of that in the classroom, I have to do the planning on
my own personal time. I also have to do the reflection on my own time in order to evaluate how well I am doing... I do all of this with no collaboration from my colleagues or other experts in the district, because schedules don’t give us collaborative planning time. At the same time, I really don’t even have tons of personal time to dedicate to that, because my husband is working two jobs to make ends meet, and I am at home with the kids. So when can I do it? It is so frustrating! (Participant E)

Teacher induction and mentoring programs. Both District A and District B have comprehensive mentoring and teacher induction programs, which were viewed by all participants as strengths of their professional development programs in each of their respective districts. Table 9 illustrates a comparison of these findings.
Wayne, Youngs, and Fleischman (2005) contend that all new teachers have a lot to learn.

No new teacher can be wholly prepared for the first day of school. In assuming responsibility for the success of their students, new teachers must quickly learn how to assess students' knowledge, plan the curriculum, set expectations for classroom behavior, and build relationships with parents—all while designing and delivering daily lessons. Whether they enter teaching through an emergency-certification route or after university coursework and student teaching,
all new teachers have a lot to learn. (Wayne, Youngs and Fleischman, 2005, p. 76)

Wilson O’Leary (2009), defines a mentor as “an experienced teacher who agrees to take a pro-active role in the three years induction process of a new teacher by providing positive support, information, resources, coaching, problem solving, observation, feedback, and modeling” (2009, p.2). All of these are characteristics that are found within the mentoring programs of both District A and B. In both districts, the mentoring and teacher induction programs are intertwined, making the professional development experiences offered by these job embedded and ongoing, two characteristics of professional development that are repeated throughout the literature (Guskey, 2001; Collins, 1999).

Teachers and administrators were incredibly supportive of the mentoring programs and felt that they were critical, not only to the success of their new teachers, but to the retention of teachers in the district. Common language was something that came up many times throughout the course of our discussions. This was an important piece for several reasons. First of all, constituents felt that by relaying information in terms of this common language, all stakeholders had a much more consistent level of
understanding because they perceived things through the lens of this common language.

Secondly, the common language and consistency of training is something that other districts who do not have this type of mentoring and induction program cannot guarantee. In cases where teachers have received training from multiple different higher learning institutions, the skills, instructional language, and strategies for student learning, with which teachers approach their careers, will likely contain multiple levels of understanding, and with multiple perspectives of how to approach instruction. With comprehensive mentoring and teacher induction programs like those in Districts A and B, which are aligned with the standards for professional learning in Strand III of the Michigan School Improvement Framework (2006), teachers begin their careers on more of the “same page” as other teachers in the district, new teachers and veterans alike.

**Differences**

Through the interview process, I was also able to gain an awareness of the underlying systems and beliefs that are in place in both districts, and noted some key differences between the two. These differences are summarized in table 10.
District B had an obvious connection between school improvement and professional development. School improvement processes are embedded, and professional development goals and activities are developed out of the school improvement goals, which are developed through careful reflection upon data. In talking with participants, there is a common language and a common understanding of the relationship between the two processes, and an acceptance of the idea that one process drives the other and vice versa.

While District A has not yet established this relationship, it was something that was immediately identified as a need for improvement and, in
fact, was identified as a next step in phase II of this study. I expect that some of this disconnect will be resolved with the establishment of common definitions of what professional development entails in the district, and that this definition will help to clarify and communicate the relationship between school improvement and professional development.

Another difference that I feel is worth mentioning is in the level of involvement of staff at all levels throughout the district. District A had representation in the study from each level during both phases of this study, while District B did not. During the data collection process, District A seemed to have a very consistent vision, regardless of instructional level, and a clear understanding of the needs of the district, as well as a perception that was consistent with those at other levels.

In District B, however, it was noted several times that there was not the level of awareness or buy-in to the common vision at the middle and high school levels, and this was evident during the data collection process. At the same time, District B is very aware of this disconnect and identified the improvement of communication and vertical alignment as a next step during Phase II of this study.
Summary

The purpose of this comparative case study was to describe the processes by which participants in two districts approached professional development. Specifically, I wanted to determine the ways in which districts designed, implemented and evaluated professional development, and the role that central office plays in this process.

The first research question that was addressed in this study explored the systems for the evaluation of professional development. In chapter two, the review of the literature distinguishes between two contexts for evaluation within the study: the evaluation of, and for, professional development.

Table 11: The Role of Evaluation in Professional Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of Evaluation:</th>
<th>District A</th>
<th>District B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Evaluation OF Professional Development| • District PD committee  
• Session evaluations  
• Teacher feedback as suggested  
• Annual committee review | • District PD committee  
• Session evaluations  
• Teacher feedback as suggested  
Annual committee review |
| Evaluation FOR Professional Development| • Walkthrough Checklists  
• Contract language | • Minimal contract language regarding state requirements for PD |
Table 11 illustrates the current role of evaluation in each of the districts, and in each of these contexts, while recommendations from the researcher to further enhance this role will follow in chapter five.

In summary, the following pages contain several tables to help the reader see the connections between the findings and the research questions. Table 12 summarizes perceptions of participants in terms of research question number one. It should be noted during discussion of the findings related to research question number one that the researcher was able to gain very little information to support the existence of evaluative systems that were supported by relevant data in either district.
Table 12: Connecting the Findings to Research Question Number One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connecting the Findings to Research Question Number One</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. How do school administrators and staff describe the forces that shape professional development in their schools and districts?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. How do the participants design professional development?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. How do the participants implement professional development?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. How do the participants evaluate professional development?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial Perceptions of PD:</th>
<th>District A:</th>
<th>District B:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work (After school)</td>
<td>Survival</td>
<td>Student Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potentially disappointing</td>
<td>Teacher Input</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional growth</td>
<td>Results-oriented</td>
<td>Common language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good if applicable</td>
<td>Building generated</td>
<td>About kids</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiring</td>
<td>Administrator-focused</td>
<td>Hard work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivating</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejuvenating</td>
<td>Reflective</td>
<td>Teacher training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustrating</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>School improvement teams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahead of the times</td>
<td>Unfocused</td>
<td>Useful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible</td>
<td>Best practice</td>
<td>Effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive</td>
<td>Interactive</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice</td>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>Building needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Data-driven</td>
<td>Content area goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- District PD structures:  
  - Choice PD  
  - Teacher-presented  
  - Teacher-driven  
  - Grade level meetings  
  - Staff meetings  
  - PLCs  

- Strengths of PD systems:  
  - Instructional Specialist  
  - Teacher participation  
  - Common vocabulary  
  - Ongoing nature  
  - Teacher preparation/No teacher induction programs  
  - Mentoring program  
  - Teacher Leadership  
  - Presentation Skills  

- Evaluation of professional development:  
  - District PD committee  
  - Session evaluations  
  - Feedback through informal teacher suggestion  

- District PD structures:  
  - Teacher-driven  
  - Building-wise  
  - Building-led  
  - Grade level meetings  
  - Staff meetings  
  - PLCs  

- Strengths of PD systems:  
  - Mentoring Program  
  - Teacher-driven  
  - Data-driven  
  - District PD committee  
  - Common language  
  - Common Focus  

- Evaluation of professional development:  
  - District PD committee  
  - Session evaluations  

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Schmoker (1996) argues that using data to determine goals can help focus and target the goals. According to Schmoker, data can also be a powerful tool for facing some of the other challenges in the school improvement process. Specifically, it can "substantiate theories, inform decision, impel action, marshal support, thwart misconceptions and unwarranted optimism, maintain focus and goal-orientation, and capture and sustain collective energy and momentum" (p. 42). In other words, data helps us answer the question of what to do next.

Tables 12-14 provide an overview of the relationships between the initial research questions and the summary of findings. The first research question, as illustrated in table 12, asked participants to describe how professional development is designed, implemented and evaluated in their districts. These questions were answered by the sharing of initial perceptions, as well as the explanation of district structures, strengths and evaluative systems.

Table 13 follows with participant’s perceptions of the forces that determine priorities for the districts in terms of professional development, to answer research question number two. This question also asked teachers and administrators to discuss the ways in which professional development may have influenced changes in instructional practice. While participants at
all levels referenced classroom practice and changes that may be occurring, there are not specific structures in place in either district to hold teachers accountable for their implementation of strategies learned through professional development. This will also be addressed by the researcher in further detail in chapter five.
Table 13: Connecting the Findings to Research Question Number Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District A:</th>
<th>District B:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aspects that stand out:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Aspects that stand out:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Content growth</td>
<td>o Lots of data analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Time for collaboration</td>
<td>o Progressive PD systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o District-wide commitment</td>
<td>o Up to date on research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Quality presentation</td>
<td>o Collaborative process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Flexible systems</td>
<td>o Building and teacher buy-in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Sharing with other districts</td>
<td>o Student achievement focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Collaboration and Reflection:</td>
<td>o Teacher-facilitated process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Mentoring program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Teacher induction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o PLCs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ISD Support:</strong></td>
<td><strong>ISD Support:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Fragmented</td>
<td>o Content specific support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Directed by ISD instead of districts</td>
<td>o Hands-on, embedded support for all staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Changes resulting from professional development:</strong></td>
<td>(teacher, admin)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Increased teacher accountability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o More teacher leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Application to Individual classroom</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Maintained focus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Truer reflection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Vertical alignment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connections to school improvement</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Minimal connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Central office facilitated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Data driven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration and Reflection:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Grade level meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Staff meetings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o PD days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ISD Support:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Content specific support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Hands-on, embedded support for all staff</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(teacher, admin)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Changes resulting from professional development:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Expanded awareness of what kids need</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Increased focus; specific strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Better reporting systems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Trust between teachers and admin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o USING data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Actual change is evident</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connections to school improvement</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o PD aligns to school improvement process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and is data-driven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Collaborative discussions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 14: Connecting the Findings to Research Question Number Three

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connecting the Findings to Research Question Number Three</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where do teachers and administrators see opportunity to strengthen their professional development processes, systems, and experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>District A:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Challenges:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Time and money for:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o Professional learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Contract language is ambiguous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of ISD support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Next Steps:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Develop a structure in which teachers could have more time for collaboration and reflection. Some options to explore included:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Delayed start on a regular basis to allow for consistent time for professional development and where one session is in close proximity to the next.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. How do other districts do this successfully?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ii. How do you &quot;sell&quot; a delayed start to a community?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Studying the special schedule to see if there are options for restructuring that would allow for a more regular common plan time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Develop a plan to more efficiently share resources within and across the district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Sharing school improvement agendas at the elementary so that one team is not &quot;reinventing the wheel&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Improving district alignment to allow for more regular communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Improving participation at the secondary (high school and middle school) level to increase fidelity of implementation of the systems that are put in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Studying the special schedule to see if there are options for restructuring that would allow for a more regular common plan time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Develop a plan to more efficiently share resources within and across the district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sharing school improvement agendas at the elementary so that one team is not &quot;reinventing the wheel&quot;.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Improving district alignment to allow for more regular communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Improving participation at the secondary (high school and middle school) level to increase fidelity of implementation of the systems that are put in place.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research question number three asked teachers and administrators to identify areas for growth. Through a tradition of participatory action research, these areas were addressed in the identification of “next steps” by participants, which are outlined in table 14.

Throughout the data collection, co-construction, and process of data analysis, both districts took the opportunity to identify and explore the systems in place for professional development, as well as strengths, challenges, opportunities for growth and next steps for their organization. While an underlying focus has been to determine the structures for the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development, a primary focus throughout this study has been to determine the ultimate role of central office in all of these. Table 15 summarizes the exploration of this role.
Table 15: The Role of Central Office in Professional Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of Central Office in the:</th>
<th>District A</th>
<th>District B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Design of Professional Development | • Instructional Specialist oversees PD for the district  
• Instructional Specialist facilitates PD committee which approves choice PD  
• Central Office Administrators plan PD for district and building days that are relevant based on data, school improvement, or other district initiatives | • Central Office oversees PD for the district  
• Asst Supt facilitates PD committee, as well as district-wide school improvement committee which leads to district PD  
• Central Office Administrators plan PD for district and building days that are relevant based on data, school improvement, or other district initiatives and state level mandates |
| Implementation of Professional Development | • Instructional Specialist facilitates Teacher Induction and Mentoring Programs  
• Central Office Administrators oversee the implementation and ask for feedback regularly about systems that are in place  
• Central Office admin engages in PD as well through professional organizations | • Central Office coordinates Teacher Induction and Mentoring Programs through the ISD  
• Central Office Administrators oversee the implementation and ask for feedback regularly about systems that are in place  
• Central Office admin engages in PD as well through professional organizations, as well as ISD facilitated content updates and networking sessions. |
| Evaluation of Professional Development | • District PD committee evaluates PD systems annually and makes changes accordingly. | • District PD committee evaluates PD systems annually |
To interpret and expand upon this role further, central office administrators in both districts have shown a very high level of commitment to professional development by creating innovative systems, and by continuing to allocate time, money and resources for professional development. They have listened intently to teachers’ perceptions and opinions, taking them into consideration during the discussion of multiple possible scenarios for the improvement of professional development. Throughout all of this, they were open, approachable, and genuine in their efforts to reflect and collaborate with all staff. As a result, an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect was evident throughout the study.

This chapter presented these findings, as well as interpretations of the data by the participants and the researcher, and emergent themes were discovered and reported. In chapter five, the researcher will identify further recommendations for district growth, as well as opportunities for further research.
CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Elmore (2003) poses the question, “Can people in school be held accountable for their effects on student learning if they haven’t been provided the opportunity to acquire the new knowledge and skill necessary to produce performance that is expected of them?” The answer is, of course, no, they cannot.

This comparative case study has explored the traditions, systems, and underlying beliefs that govern professional development in two districts. Understanding that professional learning is a primary avenue for instructional improvement and changes in instructional practice (DuFour & Eaker, 1998), and that these changes in instructional practice are the primary means for increasing levels of student achievement (Ball & Darling-Hammond, 1998), I chose to explore the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development in two districts, with specific attention to the role that central office plays in all of these.
The final chapter of this dissertation will outline the overview of this study, including a restatement of the problem, review of the methodology, synopsis of the findings and discussion, recommendations for the participants, and implications for further research. The chapter will conclude with my own personal reflections as the qualitative researcher on this project.

Overview of Study

This study was conducted through the qualitative tradition of a comparative case study, utilizing both elements of phenomenology and participatory action research. It attempted to understand the systems, processes and shared experiences regarding professional development in two districts. As the researcher, I gained an understanding of how teachers experience and respond to professional development, with specific focus on: how teachers and administrators interpret the priorities that shape professional development in their schools; how they describe their experiences; and how they perceive the influences of professional development on changes to instructional practice.

Through a process of focus group interviews, co-construction, and triangulation of data through the review of additional documents, this comparative case study investigated professional development systems in the participant districts. Further exploration included topics such as: the
connections between student achievement or teacher learning; the effectiveness of professional development; barriers to professional development; and the central office role in the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development.

This study also undertook some traditions of participatory action research in the sense that it allowed participants to identify opportunities to strengthen professional development systems, and to prioritize “next steps.” After gathering initial data from the focus groups in Phase I of the study, I asked myself as the researcher questions such as, “What is truly happening in these districts?”, “Why are they successful?”, and “What is contributing to the contentment of participants with the processes and systems that are in place?”

During phase II, initial findings were shared, along with my interpretations of those. Out of these, participants identified next steps and formulated action plans for how to specifically address the steps that they had identified.

Summary of Findings

Through a process of collaborative data collection, interpretation, and reflection, both districts in this study were able to gain heightened awareness of the professional development systems that are in place in their districts.
Participants were also able to engage in a collaborative process to identify opportunities for growth, and to formulate an action plan for the implementation of “next steps” within their organizations.

The following emergent themes were identified in chapter four: structure of the districts; collaboration and reflection; connections to the school improvement process; ISD support; challenges; teacher induction and mentoring programs; and key differences. Tables 12-14 gave an overview of how these themes connected to the research questions. While tables 4-11 summarized the emergent themes in each of the districts, the following sections will elaborate on the researcher’s interpretations of these themes and make connections to the recommendations that will follow.

Structure of the Districts

As indicated in table 12, research question number one asked participants to describe the structures in place for professional development. While both districts have structured professional development differently, both have designed and implemented professional development successfully within their respective structures.

District A has implemented a structure in which teachers have a great deal of choice in their own individual professional development. By offering this choice professional development, they have empowered teachers to have
control over the content of the professional learning that they undergo. Teachers have received this empowerment very well, and exhibited an established sense of ownership over the professional learning process. Teachers take personal responsibility and ownership of their own learning, and hold themselves accountable on a number of levels for the implementation of the pedagogical strategies that they learn. Missing from District A, however, was a formal structure for accountability of implementation, which will be addressed by the researcher later in the recommendations.

District B does not have a “choice” professional development structure in place. Instead, professional learning is approached at more of a building level, whereas buildings identify areas of need collectively and approach professional learning as a “learning community” rather than as individuals.

In both cases, teachers have a strong voice in the format and content of professional learning that is available to them, and this has allowed for an obvious level of teacher buy-in and support of the processes and systems that are in place. As noted in earlier chapters, teacher buy-in and support is one of the most difficult obstacles to overcome, yet Districts A and B have both developed structures in which these are expected, nurtured, and
embraced. Because of these positive aspects, the momentum for professional learning is flourishing in both districts.

Collaboration and Reflection

Collaboration is noted throughout the review of the literature as being one of the most effective means in the creation of successful professional learning communities (DuFour, 1998; Fullan, 2001; and Guskey, 2000). The levels of collaboration and reflection in both districts was explored and analyzed throughout the data collection process. As noted in chapter four, both districts have established systems of collaboration and reflection which add to the success of their overall professional learning systems.

The structures that the participant districts have established for communication, collaboration and reflection are to be celebrated. Even so, both districts recognized a need for additional collaboration and referenced this need in their “next steps”.

District B has highly established systems for collaboration through the MiBLSi structure, and through the collaborative school improvement processes that are in place in each of the buildings. There is evident teacher buy-in to the process in the sense that every staff member is included on a committee, and that staff meetings, staff development sessions, grade level meetings and outside professional development opportunities are all linked to
this process. Through this high level of collaboration, teachers are forced to collaborate and communicate on a regular basis in order to maintain the sense of continuity that was referred to so often in the data collection process. This sense of continuity appears to the researcher to be the component that allows teachers and administrators in District B to collaborate so effectively, and to ensure the alignment of all professional learning opportunities for both teachers and administrators.

In District A, there is also a great deal of collaboration in the sense that they have an established grade level meeting structure at the elementary level, and are beginning to establish Professional Learning Communities at both the middle school and elementary school levels. Through these meetings, teachers in District A are able to identify areas in need of growth, and to collaborate on the implementation of new initiatives.

By structuring systems for collaboration into their daily lives in Districts A and B, teachers and administrators have shown a clear sense of alignment in relationship to perceptions of the current systems, as well as areas that are identified for growth. The fact that teachers and administrators in both districts shared such similarities in their perceptions of the professional development systems, proved that there is a definite existence of
collaboration and communication between the two groups of stakeholders, and spoke to the evident alignment of philosophies and a common focus.

District A also showed notable alignment in the areas that were identified as being in need of improvement and growth, which also can be attributed to the level of reflection that is in place in the district. District A also had several evaluative systems that are in place to determine the effectiveness of professional development processes, such as evaluation of individual sessions through a formal evaluation, and a yearly review of the processes and systems that are in place. Without this level of reflection, collaboration is wasted. Research would suggest, however, that more focused and intentional reflection is necessary to most effectively evaluate professional learning systems (Guskey, 2001), which will be addressed by the researcher in the recommendations.

All of these aspects have allowed participants in both districts to share a common vision for the direction that they are taking to create systems for increased student learning in their districts, and for this, they are to be applauded. On the same note, however, in District B there was an implied weakness of alignment, continuity, and participation from secondary staff members. For example, there was minimal participation from both the middle school and high school levels in the focus group interviews. This was
discussed throughout the data collection process. One principal explained that secondary staff are “completely overwhelmed” with new requirements for curriculum and graduation, which have bombarded all high schools in the state. The desire to create more consistent participation amongst staff (at all levels) was also identified as a next step in phase II of this study where the district would like to explore strategies for balancing state and federal mandates with the everyday responsibilities of teaching and learning.

The similar concerns that were shared by participants in District B implored the researcher to further question and explore this phenomena, which was the motivation behind the recommendations for future research later in this chapter.

*Connections to the School Improvement Process*

Knowing that professional development is a means by which the school improvement processes happen in educational organizations, it was necessary to spend time exploring the ways in which professional learning and school improvement are related in each of the districts. Table 14 illustrates the different levels of connection to school improvement in the participant districts.

District B showed continuous connections between school improvement and professional development throughout the data collection.
process. Many times, it was as though the terms were interchangeable throughout the discussion, indicating the establishment of a close relationship between the two. In this district, professional learning is truly driven by the school improvement process in such a way that areas for growth were determined by close and careful review of the data, analysis of its connections to student achievement, and the development of goals for future practice. These goals are then addressed through the building-led professional development opportunities in the form of staff meetings, grade level meetings, and content specific opportunities.

While District A did not show this level of connection between school improvement and professional development, it was immediately identified as an area in need of growth in phase I of the interview process. This awareness of “next steps” for the district is evidence of the evaluative systems that are in place, and of the level of reflection that takes place.

Professional development is the driving force behind school improvement. Because they are aware of this relationship, the Michigan Department of Education established the standards and criteria for professional learning within the Michigan School Improvement framework (2006). District A is well aware of the need to improve systems to facilitate a stronger connection in this area, and is developing a comprehensive action
plan for how to make this connection a reality. The researcher will make even further recommendations in this area, asking districts to develop structures that tie these school improvement efforts directly to professional development, and to the specific student achievement data that they are addressing.

The level of teacher leadership in these processes, while taking on a different look in both districts, is inherent to the success of the systems that are in place. In both districts teachers are considered to be the “experts” who are working most directly with students, and are therefore empowered to take the lead in establishing professional learning that is most relevant to them. While administrators provide the focus and support, teachers are allowed to identify individual needs, whether at the personal or building level, and are given the flexibility to create the action plans that will help them be most successful. In meeting the needs of their students. This type of central office level support is outstanding in both of the participant districts.

School improvement is the means by which schools review data related to student achievement, and then identify next steps for how to improve these systems. Professional development is often the means by which these next steps become a reality. The awareness of the importance
of these processes was evident in both districts, and has been exemplified in
the systems and structures that are in place, particularly, in District B.

**Teacher Induction and Mentoring Programs**

The statistics surrounding teacher retention are astounding (Reeves, 2005). As a direct response to these, District A developed a very
comprehensive new teacher induction program, which also includes a broad
mentoring program for new teachers, as well as for, those who have been
assigned to new levels.

These programs, which have been employed very similarly in both
District A and District B, were cited repeatedly throughout the data collection
process as having an incredible amount of value for both teachers and
administrators. Not only do these programs provide a common language
from which teachers and administrators can work, but they outline a very
specific skill set for all teachers, which has been research-based and proven
to be successful. When trying to create a district-wide alignment, a common
vocabulary regarding instruction and student learning has allowed these
districts to concentrate on the specific strategies that will enhance student
learning in their districts, as well as allowing evaluation systems to be
relevant to specific teachers' instructional skills.
Without question, these courses have created a sense of consistency, common vision, clarity of expectation, and focused direction around which to establish goals and next steps in both districts. This sense of common ground has been a vital component of their success, and should be regarded as one of the most compelling indicators of teacher success and retention in each of the participant districts.

**ISD Support**

One of the things that is identified in the Michigan School Improvement Framework as being crucial to the success of districts’ school improvement efforts, is the level of outside support and resources for districts. Throughout the data collection process, there was a notable connection between the level of ISD support and the success of systems that are in place.

District B showed the presence of a great deal of relevant support from the ISD in the form of opportunities to improve content knowledge, networking with other educators, consultants to support individualized district goals, and high quality sessions for teachers containing relevant content to individual teacher instruction.

One of the factors for identification of participant districts in this study was the capacity of the district. In mid-sized and smaller districts, limits on
professional learning are more prevalent due to the diminished level of resources that the district has to allocate for each realm of operation. This is where the ISD has the potential to make a marked difference in the capacity for improvement in each district. District A does not have this level of depth in the support that is given by the ISD, and therefore, is forced to function primarily within the boundaries of its own resources. This may well be the primary factor that is influencing the disconnect between school improvement and professional learning in District A, whereas District B has been able to utilize the resources from the ISD to establish uninterrupted systems with fewer gaps in its aspiration for continuous school improvement.

Challenges

Time, money and contract language were three challenges which seem to be most widespread in each of the participant districts, and were consistently mentioned by all participant groups throughout the data collection process. A prominent awareness of all of these was evident in the plans for next steps, as well as the district action plans that were established during phase II of the research.

It should be noted that participants at all levels approached phase II of this study with excitement and seriousness. The dedication to continuous improvement was evident, even in districts with such high-quality systems
already in place. Despite challenges that will undoubtedly be difficult to overcome, participants were positive and full of momentum as they discussed plans for how to identify and attack specific areas in need of growth and improvement. This level of dedication and commitment to improvement is, in the opinion of the researcher, the single most contributing factor to both the current success of the participant districts, and also to their eminent continued success and the leadership of their peers.

**Recommendations**

While this study represents only a snapshot of the systems in place in these districts, this researcher would like to make the following recommendations based on the information gathered in this study. This study would suggest that, while both districts had many valid and innovative systems in place, District B does not have concrete systems in place for the effective evaluation of their professional development systems. Collins (1999) defines the evaluation of professional development as “determining the potential value of a program or activity, keeping the professional development activity on track as teachers work through it, and assessing its impact on teachers, students, and the school after teachers have had adequate time to implement new practices” (p. 111). While the researcher
has recognized that there are some evaluative systems in place, there is also room for growth to make these systems more effective.

Guskey (2002, 2003) would contend that without extensive evaluation of professional learning systems, the professional development that educational organizations spend precious time, energy, and resources to facilitate are wasted. Furthermore, the National Partnership for Excellence and Accountability in Teaching (NPEAT 2003) offers research-based principles of effective professional development, which are crucial to the success of the organization. While District A had an evaluative system in place for its professional development systems through their district-wide professional development committee, those processes need to be more focused, intentional, and embedded throughout the daily workings of the district. In both District A and District B, they must be supported by data.

Given this information, this researcher’s recommendation would be that the districts make a focused effort to ensure that systems have a specific, focused and regular evaluation process that is clearly defined, and driven by relevant student achievement data. It is the opinion of this researcher that the implementation of an explicit structure for the evaluation of professional development systems will allow for even further innovations.
and growth than those which are already experienced in these superior districts.

In tying these together, the researcher also recommends that specific student achievement data be tied to the structures that evaluate the effectiveness of professional development in both districts. While assumptions were made by participants in both districts that student achievement had increased, formal structures are not in place to evaluate these based on data related to either student achievement or changes in instructional practice. Ultimately, the purpose of professional development is to improve student achievement. Without systems to support a direct correlation between professional learning experiences and student achievement data, it is impossible to fully and effectively evaluate professional learning systems.

This study has revolved around the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional development. Discussions held within the data-collection process generated considerable thoughts about the design and implementation of professional development, yet there was very little discussion about the evaluation of professional development. Teachers in both districts were relatively unaware of how professional development systems are evaluated. The only discussion revolved around the informal
evaluation work done by the professional development committee at the
district level each year. Administrators had similar perceptions, feeling that
the primary mode of evaluation was within the committee setting on an
annual basis.

To address these gaps, the researcher has created a table that outlines
specific strategies and responsibilities for teachers, principals, and central
office staff in the development and implementation of these evaluative
systems (see table 16). Notable in table 16, is the suggestion that specific
and relevant data be tied more directly to the evaluative processes by central
office and building level administrators. As mentioned in the summary of
findings in chapter four, there was little reference made to the role of data in
professional development evaluation. Yet we know that the single most
inherent indicator of effective professional development is correlating
increased student achievement (Glickman, 2001).
Table 16: Recommendations for Implementation of Evaluative Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations for Implementation of Evaluative Procedures:</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Central Office Administrators</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Design an action plan after each professional development activity to outline specific strategies for implementation, including a timeline. (See example action plan in appendix 2).</td>
<td>1. Collect and be aware of teacher action plans to develop awareness of teacher strategies for improvement so that you can make specific observations during walkthroughs and formal evaluations.</td>
<td>1. Collect data from principals to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development based on individual professional development experiences and changes in student achievement that may correlate with those.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Document changes in instructional practice as a result of professional development to cross-check with the tracking of student data.</td>
<td>2. Reflect collaboratively with each teacher following professional development to: check for progress on action plans, collaborate about instructional strategies, share challenges and successes, and offer specific support.</td>
<td>2. Summarize teacher action plans and cross-check with student data.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Track student achievement data after the implementation of strategies learned during professional development through formative assessments to monitor progress.</td>
<td>3. Add a component on formal evaluation tools for discussion of Professional development and how it has specifically been used by the teacher to change instructional practice.</td>
<td>3. Cross check data related to different professional development offerings with different strategies for implementation as identified within teacher action plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4. In cases where new instructional strategies have proven to be successful catalysts for student achievement, allow opportunities for &quot;experts&quot; to share with other staff in order to further enhance the Professional Learning Communities that are already in place.</td>
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</table>
Specific recommendations for creating structures to generate, collect, and analyze more relevant data (in order to more effectively evaluate professional development systems) are outlined in table 17. A sample reflection log for teachers' reflection groups is located in appendix C.

Table 17: Recommendations for Implementation of Data-based Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Central Office Administrators</th>
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</table>
| 1. Participate in reflection groups after each (3 hour choice PD or common PD Day) for one hour. During this time, teachers will share instructional strategies, successes and challenges, as well as student results. | 1. Ensure active participation and engagement in professional development experiences of ALL staff by relating professional development as part of the formal evaluation process.  
   a. Walkthroughs  
   b. Formal evaluations  
   c. Celebrations of success | 1. Restructure Professional development hours to include 1 hour of structured reflection time (teacher reflection groups) for each 3 hours of professional development. This will require teachers to collaborate and reflect upon implementation of learned instructional strategies, as well as share challenges and successes. This would create a total of 3 hours of reflection for every 9 hours of professional development. |
| 2. Complete feedback form from reflection group to track your progress with the implementation of the strategies you have learned (appendix 3). | 2. Develop a system for the evaluation of professional development systems that establishes a correlation of data between increased student achievement as it relates to changes in practice resulting from professional development experiences. |  |
| 3. Complete an implementation log (see sample in appendix 4) to track data regarding implementation of strategies, and to cross-check with records of student achievement. | 3. Collect and analyze data received from the components of student achievement in figure 3 and report this to staff at least twice annually. |  |
Furthermore, this study suggests that there is little connection made between the professional development of individual teachers and the professional evaluative systems that are in place in the districts. One of the most common complaints of teachers is that evaluation processes within their districts are irrelevant to their daily practice and professional growth (Brushman, 2006). As the researcher, I would recommend that both districts employ more focus on tying teacher evaluation directly to the professional development processes. Some suggestions, as noted in tables 16 and 17, are that principals create formal components related to professional development on evaluation forms, and that they engage in regular collaborative conversations about the implications of teachers’ individual professional development experiences.

While both districts have identified particular ways in which evaluation of newer teachers may be tied to professional development, there was very little connection made to that process for teachers who were not new to the district.

It is not tied directly. Some of the goal setting for non-tenured teachers ties it in, and some of the checklists from professional development are related to the principal walkthroughs. But there is
not really any conversation about how any of it is tied to our evaluation. (Participant J)

This quote is particularly relevant to support the researcher’s recommendation that evaluative systems be redefined in order to create a more accurate awareness of teachers’ instructional competency levels and levels of content knowledge. This has led to the recommendation for the creation of enhanced formal evaluative processes, which are aligned with the professional development processes that are in place.

Administrators in both districts had similar perceptions, feeling that there were “standards of evaluation” with expectations that teachers make changes to their practice, but have no formal processes in place to make this happen. District A employs building walkthroughs and a checklist that are associated with them which provide a “clarity of purpose” by offering direction and focuses that are relevant to each building’s specific needs. The evaluation tool has categories and criteria that are directly related to the instructional skills classes, including how to teach in a block, management, and collaboration. They also offer an evaluation of the professional development system each year by the professional development team, and a survey to evaluate each individual session.” We pay attention to what people
say and ask for. The suggestion box is always out” (Participant K, central office).

The researcher recognizes this effort for focused evaluation, and offers suggestions for strengthening these systems in tables 16 and 17, and well as in the following next steps. The following is a summary of the next steps for tying teacher evaluation and professional development together in District A:

Teachers:

1. Complete action plans during each professional development session; outlining systems for implementation of strategies and collection of data to track student achievement (see sample action plan in appendix B).

2. Complete implementation log during process of strategy implementation (see sample in appendix D).

3. Participate in reflection groups with others who attended your session in order to collaborate, share successes and challenges, and reflect upon the implementation of strategies through the completion of a reflection log (see sample reflection log in appendix C).

4. When you are successful, share with others!
Principals:

1. Include discussion of individual teachers' professional development choices in evaluative conversations throughout the year, both on a formal and informal basis (e.g. walkthrough feedback, observation feedback, and formal evaluations).
   a. Become aware of teacher action plans to monitor specific strategies and offer specific support.
   b. Establish regular collaboration at least once with each teacher who attends a professional development session to discuss:
      i. Strategies
      ii. Successes
      iii. Challenges
      iv. Student data
      v. Other support needed

2. Review areas of need as identified by walkthrough feedback forms, observation feedback forms, and formal evaluations to identify areas for need in the realm of professional development, and encourage participation in sessions that will benefit individual teachers.

3. Continue to tie professional development to school improvement, fostering a learning environment where teachers are the guiding forces
in the establishment of data-based goals and the development of action plans.

4. Continue to research alternative structures (e.g. delayed start and special schedules) in other districts to find possible alternatives for increased collaboration and common plan time for teachers. Some professional development time can be counted towards instructional hours to support this type of a strategy.

5. Encourage teachers to share their successes!

Central Office:

1. Finalize negotiations with the association to determine an agreed-upon definition of professional development in your district.

2. Continue to formalize the structures and processes by which professional development systems are evaluated through the addition of a component of the formal evaluation tool that specifies reflection on professional development.

3. Restructure professional development hours to allow for teacher reflection groups; one hour for (at least) every 3 hours of professional development.

4. Collect, analyze and communicate student achievement data as it relates to professional development.
5. Track data via action plans, sign in sheets, reflection logs, and implementation logs, to determine trends in the data related to student achievement and effective professional development.

6. Encourage teachers to share their successes!

District B, on the other hand, has many connections in place between school improvement and professional development, but does not have quite as many connections in place between evaluation and the individual professional development that teachers receive. While they have Individual session evaluations and contract language similar to District A, teachers and administrators agree that they do not have formal systems in place to link individual teachers' evaluations to the professional learning that they are experiencing.

We encourage that staff focus on a need area or content area when setting yearly goals; this was handed down to us from (the superintendent). He encouraged that we base goals on data or best practices or writing, which is a goal for our district. In the end, it is probably not really tied to professional development (Participant A).

A summary of the next steps for tying teacher evaluation and professional development together in District B follows:
Teachers:

1. Complete action plans during each professional development session; outlining systems for implementation of strategies and collection of data to track student achievement (see sample action plan in appendix B).

2. Complete implementation log during process of strategy implementation (see sample in appendix D).

3. Participate in reflection groups with others who attended your session in order to collaborate, share successes and challenges, and reflect upon the implementation of strategies through the completion of a reflection log (see sample reflection log in appendix C).

4. When you are successful, share with others!

Principals:

1. Facilitate discussion with your colleagues in order to begin deeper communication and collaboration of resources between buildings.

2. Continue to research alternative structures (e.g. delayed start and special schedules) in other districts to find possible alternatives for increased collaboration and common plan time for teachers. Some professional development time can be counted towards instructional hours to support this type of a strategy.
3. Include discussion of individual teachers’ professional development choices in evaluative conversations throughout the year, both on a formal and informal basis (e.g. walkthrough feedback, observation feedback, and formal evaluations).

   a. Become aware of teacher action plans to monitor specific strategies and offer specific support.

   b. Establish regular collaboration at least once with each teacher who attends a professional development session to discuss:

      i. Strategies

      ii. Successes

      iii. Challenges

      iv. Student data

      v. Other support needed

4. Review areas of need as identified by walkthrough feedback forms, observation feedback forms, and formal evaluations to identify areas for need in the realm of professional development, and encourage participation in sessions that will benefit individual teachers.

5. Encourage teachers to share their successes!
Central Office:

1. Continue to formalize the structures and processes by which professional development systems are evaluated through the addition of a component of the formal evaluation tool that specifies reflection on professional development.

2. Restructure professional development hours to allow for teacher reflection groups; one hour for every three hours (or day) of professional development.

3. Collect, analyze and communicate student achievement data as it relates to professional development in order to better evaluate professional development systems.

4. Track data via action plans, sign in sheets, reflection logs, and implementation logs, to determine trends in the data related to student achievement and effective professional development.

5. Encourage teachers to share their successes! These are also supported by the professional development action plan in appendix B and the teacher reflection guide in appendix C.

One final recommendation for both participant districts in this study is to ensure the collection of relevant data to support each phase in the continuum of increased student achievement. A diagram that illustrates the
types of data that central office administrators may want to collect to support the evaluation of professional development systems is shown in Figure 19. Suggestions for how to structure the collection of these types of data can be found in tables 16 and 17, as well as the appendices.
Figure 19: Diagram of Professional Development, data and student achievement
Directions for Future Research

While a single comparative case study cannot provide representation for the whole of educational systems, the findings from this case study developed generalizations that may inform other venues (Hatch, 2002). This researcher would like to make the following recommendations for further research.

This study would suggest that there is a need for more exploration of the evaluation of professional development systems and, specifically, how they allocate resources to meet the demands of decreasing time and financial support. As discussed in chapter one, professional development is reaching a new plateau in education. National initiatives and legislative decisions have undoubtedly played a significant role in the variety and quality of professional development offered to educators. Particularly, with the institution of the NCLB and the new *Michigan Merit Curriculum* (MMC) of 2006, school districts are moving quickly to ensure that all teachers are highly qualified and are holding educators to a higher standard of performance.

To match those higher standards, districts are examining their professional learning systems and searching for more efficient ways to improve teacher quality and, ultimately, levels of student achievement. To link higher expectations for teacher impact to higher standards of
professional preparation, the question of what teachers can expect from professional learning systems is under scrutiny, and teachers are crying out for solutions and support in achieving the seemingly unattainable task of what remains to be accomplished over their careers. They are finding this solution in professional development.

Throughout the processes involved in this study, I have identified four questions, which warrant further research:

1. How do other districts evaluate professional development systems?
   a. What are the formal structures in place to allow this process to happen?
   b. Who is involved in this process?
   c. How do districts make changes based on these processes?

2. How do districts tie their formal evaluation processes to individual teachers' professional learning?
   a. How are teachers held accountable for what they have learned?
   b. How do districts support the implementation of these?

3. How do other districts allocate time for collaboration and reflection?
   a. How do they structure their school day and calendar?
   b. How do they engage community support of these structures?
c. What are the accountability systems in place to support these processes?

4. How do districts create continuity of involvement throughout the district, in spite of different levels of accountability from the state?
   a. How do they institutionalize systems in order to ensure involvement of a broad representation of stakeholders in improvement efforts?
   b. How do they create a shared vision for school improvement and professional development that is aligned and shared vertically throughout the district?
   c. How do they create systems in which state and federal mandates are broken down into more easily digested pieces in order to ensure compliance of these mandates, while still allowing districts to maintain structures of collaborative and continuous improvement throughout the district?

Final Reflections of the Researcher and Restatement of Research Questions

This study began with the intent to answer the following research questions:

1. How do school administrators and staff describe the forces that shape professional development in their schools and districts?
a. How do the participants design professional development?

b. How do the participants implement professional development?

c. How do the participants evaluate professional development?

2. How do teachers experience and respond to district or school planned professional development?

a. How do teachers interpret the priorities that shape professional development in their schools?

b. How do teachers describe their experiences in district sponsored professional development?

c. How do teachers describe the link between their professional development experiences and their classroom practices?

i. How do these descriptions and the connections to classroom practice compare or contrast in different districts where there are different approaches to professional development decision-making and programming?

ii. Does teacher involvement in decision making and professional development programming link to teacher practice, according to teachers?
3. Where do teachers and administrators see opportunity to strengthen their professional development processes, systems, and experiences?

In examining these, it is the conclusion of this researcher that the participants in this study have innovative, ever-developing, student-centered systems in place. They have demonstrated not only a commitment to professional excellence, but to improving instruction for teachers in order to provide the best possible learning experiences for their students. It has been an honor to work with these districts, and to have the opportunity to explore the vast learning systems that they encompass. Through this process, like the participants, I had the opportunity to reflect upon and identify improvements to be made in my own professional practice.

The Central Office Role in Professional Development

Ultimately, it was my goal, as the researcher, to determine the role of central office administration in the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development. Upon examination of systems that are in place in these districts, it is my absolute opinion that central office administrators are crucial to the success of professional learning systems, on a myriad of levels.

Some may argue that central office administrators are the furthest removed from involvement in professional development, or imply that their roles are limited (Bolman and Deal, 2002). To those, I would disagree...
fervently. It has been my observation, in fact, that central office administrators have the opportunity to design a structure in which teachers are the driving force behind their own professional learning, and where student achievement is viewed as not only a goal to be achieved, but an objective that is at the forefront of all improvement efforts. This is certainly the case in the districts which I had the good fortune to conduct my research.

Through a tradition of collaborative leadership, empowerment, and foresight, these individuals have created an environment where teachers felt comfortable to sit in the same room with administrators and share suggestions and concerns honestly and openly; a culture where all participants felt their opinions and concerns hold value in the eyes of those who encompass the "power" to make structural decisions, and where students are at the forefront of all decision making; an atmosphere where change is truly transpiring.

Grove (2002) refers to central office administrators as the "skeleton" around which these systems and structures are built. Central office administrators in Districts A and B epitomize this theory. Participants in both districts made reference to the role of central office administrators as having been the initial catalyst for change. This change represents itself in the development of the systems that are currently in place, as well as for the
facilitation of structures and systems that define teacher learning and professional development on a daily basis. For this, they are to be commended.

Society is changing. The world, for which we are preparing our students, has changed. In light of these changes, education as we know it must change. For this to happen, it takes a great many things. We must create innovative learning institutions where students are truly inspired to learn and to achieve their highest potential. We must develop administrators who are dedicated to the success of all students; who truly perceive their primary role to be supporting teachers to become the best possible teachers that they can be. We must create opportunities to include parents to work in partnership with teachers and students. We must have teachers who are willing to stop at nothing less than the best; who are willing to learn and grow professionally so that they may provide the best possible instruction for their students; and where students are at the forefront of every decision, the design of every lesson, and the topic of every conversation. In other words; it takes a district, a village, a nation... and nothing less.
REFERENCES


Berends, M. (2002). *Facing the challenges of whole-school reform: new american schools after a decade.* Santa Monica, CA: Rand


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Appendix A

Phase I Interview Protocol
1. How are you all surviving the last days of school?

2. Please introduce yourself and tell what your job is here in your district.

3. Please complete this phrase: Professional development is...

4. These are some of the things that I heard... (Repeat perceptions of professional development).

5. What types of professional development does your district offer?
   a. Are there non-traditional methods of professional development in place?
   b. What type of mentoring program do you have?

6. What aspects of your professional development experiences stand out for you?

7. How have your experiences affected you?

8. What changes have you made as a result of your experiences?

9. What role does administration play in the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development?

10. What role do teachers play in the design, implementation and evaluation of professional development?

11. What would you consider to be barriers to professional development in your district?

12. How is teacher evaluation tied to the professional development process?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Some additional probing questions included:

1. How do you use data?

2. What do you do with the data that you collect?

3. Why do you feel that there is such a focus on contractual issues, and how is that related to professional development?

4. Why do you feel that the connections to the school improvement process are so important?

5. What do you think were the defining moments that allowed your district to move from where it was in terms of professional development to where it is now?

6. What would an online learning system look like in your district?

7. How would you structure a delayed start?

   a. What would some of your concerns be?

   b. How do you think teachers would feel about this?
Appendix B

Sample Professional Development Action Plan
### Professional Development Action Plan for Teachers

**Professional Development Activity:**

**Main Topics Discussed:**
- 
- 
- 

**Essential Questions to ask Yourself:**

1. What is it that you want students to know and be able to do?
2. How will you know when they get there?
3. What things will you do for students who have already met this objective?

**Steps for Planning:**
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- 

**Steps for Implementation:**
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- 

**Steps for Evaluation:**
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What is your timeline for implementation?
Appendix C

Sample Reflection Plan
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflection Plan for Teachers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activity:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategies Implemented:</td>
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<td>Successes:</td>
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<td>Challenges:</td>
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<td>Additional Support or PD needed:</td>
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<tr>
<td>What have I taken away from this and how will I implement it?</td>
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Appendix D

Sample Implementation Log
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<tr>
<th>Teacher Implementation Log</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategies:</td>
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<td>Week 1:</td>
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<td>Week 2:</td>
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<td>Week 4:</td>
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<td>Week 5:</td>
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<td>Week 6:</td>
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Appendix E

Human Subjects International Review Board Materials
Date: June 5, 2008

To: Patricia Reeves, Principal Investigator
   Sarah Johnson, Student Investigator for dissertation

From: Amy Naugle, Ph.D., Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 08-06-01

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled “Exploring the Ultimate Role of the Central Office in the Design, Implementation, and Evaluation of Professional Development: A Comparative Case Study” has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: June 5, 2009