Examining District Administrators’ Professional Development Decision-Making Processes Concerning New Special Education Teachers

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I would like to thank Dr. Whitten, Dr. Wallace, and Dr. Geier for being authentic examples of passionate leaders in my field. I admire the relationships you have with your students and your diligent work to advance our profession. I am forever grateful to Dr. Whitten for continuing to challenge, encourage, and mentor me. Thank you for seeing potential in me and daring me to live up to it.

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Sarah J. Bacalia
New special education teachers face an abundance of challenges from day one that directly correlate to student outcomes (i.e. classroom management, instruction, curriculum, school culture and operations, test preparation and administration, state standards, parent relations, and interactions with other teachers). District administrators, (i.e. superintendents, assistant superintendents, curriculum and instruction directors, directors of student services, special education directors, and special education supervisors) play an important role in determining how to best use their districts' professional development time and resources to support new special education teachers as they work to continually improve student outcomes. Therefore, professional development should be a purposeful endeavor. To better understand this issue, this study explored the decision-making process of district administrators regarding three key aspects of professional development: planning, implementation, and evaluation. To gather data, district administrators who play a role in professional development decision-making, in Michigan’s top 25 traditional public-school districts, were surveyed. Five of the surveyed administrators were interviewed. Furthermore, district and state guiding documents were selected and analyzed. Descriptive survey data, transcribed interviews, and selected documents were analyzed. Through coding, theming, and triangulation, the results were then compared for points of convergence and divergence. Themes discovered in the data include: the impact of policy on
decision-making, the impact of accountability on decision-making, effective methods currently used, barriers to or supports for new teacher professional development, and effective evaluation practices regarding professional development. These findings are useful for identifying and understanding current practices and strategies for optimal planning, implementation, and evaluation of professional development for new special education teachers.
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ADA- Americans with Disabilities Act
AER-Annual Education Reports
CBM- Curriculum Based Measurement
CCSS- Common Core State Standards
CDE- California Department of Education
CEC-Council for Exceptional Children
CEBP-Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy
DIP-District Improvement Plan
EBD-Emotional Behavior Disorder
ESSA-Every Student Succeeds Act
LEA-Local Education Agency
LRE-Least Restrictive Environment
IEP-Individualized Education Program
IES-Institute for Education Sciences
IDP- Individual Development Plan
INTASC - Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium
ISD-Intermediate School District
DIBELS- Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills
ELA-English Language Arts
MAARSE- Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education
<table>
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<tr>
<td>MDE</td>
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<tr>
<td>MME</td>
<td>Michigan Merit Examination</td>
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<tr>
<td>M-STEP</td>
<td>Michigan Student Test of Education Progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>MTSS</td>
<td>Multi-Tiered Systems of Support</td>
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<tr>
<td>NWEA</td>
<td>Northwest Evaluation Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>OCR</td>
<td>Office of Civil Rights</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODR</td>
<td>Office discipline referral</td>
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<tr>
<td>PBIS</td>
<td>Positive Behavioral and Intervention Supports</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLC</td>
<td>Professional Learning Community</td>
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<td>RESA</td>
<td>Regional Education Service Agency</td>
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<td>RTI</td>
<td>Response to Intervention</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDL</td>
<td>Self-Directed Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWPBIS</td>
<td>School-Wide Positive Behavioral and Intervention Supports</td>
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<tr>
<td>TL</td>
<td>Transformative Learning</td>
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<td>UDL</td>
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

New special education teachers assume full pedagogical responsibilities from their first day on the job, as a result, they often juggle an overwhelming number of unfamiliar issues (Mizell, 2010; De Neve & Devos, 2017). Research indicates special educators face increasing or large caseloads, lack of clarity in their roles, lack of administrative support, excessive paperwork, feelings of isolation and loneliness, and minimal collaboration with colleagues (Albrecht, Johns, Mounsteven, & Olorunda, 2009; Cancio & Conderman, 2008; Futernick, 2007; Kaff, 2004; Katsiyannis, Zhang, & Conroy, 2003; Prather-Jones, 2011; Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005). Mizell (2010) highlights common issues new teachers face: classroom management, instruction, curriculum, school culture and operations, test preparation and administration, state standards, parent relations, and interactions with other teachers.

However, Wong, Ruble, McGrew, and Yu (2017) found when teachers were provided with enough instructional support to ensure high teaching quality and student engagement, as well as emotional support to monitor students’ long-term progress, they were more likely to experience reduced work-related stress. Additionally, Mizell (2010) explains student achievement increases when educators engage in effective professional development focused on skills needed to address students’ learning challenges. He defines professional development as opportunities for educators to gain knowledge and skills needed to more deeply develop effective teaching practices and address the issues identified. Mizell (2010) further explains professional development is the strategy school districts use to ensure educators continue to strengthen their practice throughout their career. Additionally, school systems use a variety of methods to
provide these learning opportunities. Well executed professional development can help districts retain new teachers and set them on the path to becoming effective educators (Mizell, 2010).

District administrators, such as superintendents, assistant superintendents, curriculum and instruction directors, directors of student services, special education directors, and special education supervisors play an important role in determining how to best use the districts' allocated professional development time and professional learning opportunities for new special education teachers. The decision-making process district administrators use to align professional development opportunities with district improvement goals and professional development methods is a challenging task (Perconti, 2010). Further, district administrators shoulder a large responsibility in determining professional development content, how professional development is implemented, and how professional development is evaluated (Perconti, 2010). District administrators are required to work within guidelines provided by federal, state, and district governing bodies (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2013; Mizell, 2010; Michigan Department of Education [MDE], 2011). Most states have laws requiring school districts to provide a minimum number of professional development hours or days. Michigan, for example, requires schools to schedule up to 38 hours of professional learning and count it as part of the required 1,098 hours of instructional time (MCL 388.1701, section 101(10)). Also, in Michigan, new teachers must complete 15 days of professional learning over three years, plus all teachers must complete five days each academic year (MCL 380.1526). Professional organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children and the Council of Chief State School Officers can be referred to for best practice protocol. Additionally, states may require periodic professional development as a condition for educators to renew their license. Again, looking to Michigan, 150 hours of education-related professional learning are required to
District administrators face many challenges in planning, implementing, and evaluating effective professional development for new special education teachers. New special education teachers demonstrate varying levels of skill and understanding. Therefore, examining how teacher needs are assessed is a first step in researching the decision-making process of administrators (Jenkins & Ornelles, 2009). Second, understanding how professional development methods are implemented is important for exploring administrator decision-making in the professional learning process (Mizell, 2010). Finally, identifying how administrators utilize effective tools for evaluating the professional development delivered to new special education teachers is key to understanding the decision-making process of district administrators (Guskey, 2016). There is a wide body of research to guide district administrators in assessing educator needs, implementing professional development, and evaluating professional development practices. However, little literature exists on how district administrators can make practical and effective decisions that align with current research regarding professional development specific to new special education teachers.

Research Purpose

The aim of this mixed methods study is to provide an in-depth understanding of the barriers district administrators experience in providing professional development to new special education teachers. Also, this study will focus on the in-depth description and analysis of
administrator decision-making. Finally, this study will examine the thought process and strategies used by current K-12 administrators in top districts to meet the needs of the district’s new special education teachers.

**Research Questions**

The research questions in this study are:

1) How do district administrators who are responsible for planning professional development determine the professional learning needs of their new special education teachers?

2) How do district administrators who are responsible for implementing professional development determine the most effective methods to be used with new special education teachers?

3) How do district administrators who are responsible for the evaluation of professional development ensure the implementation of an evaluation process is used with new special education teachers?

**Significance**

The audience for this study includes education policy makers, general and special education administrative leaders, and special education teachers. In addition, this mixed methods study provides information that will be informative to teacher training and educational leadership institutions as well as district administrators in their planning for in-service and other professional learning activities. Findings gathered from this study will be used to inform technical assistance provided to Michigan administrators. Findings will also be useful for school districts and administrators to consider when designing, delivering, and evaluating meaningful professional development activities for new special education teachers.
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 reflects components of the decision-making processes of district administrators concerning professional development for new special education teachers. My assumption is the decision-making processes are influenced by three major phases: planning (both in terms of needs as well as decisions that are made), implementing, and evaluating. When administrators plan, they understand the impact both administrators and teachers have on closing the general education and special education gaps. Administrators consider the needs of all learners, teachers, and practices which lead to school effectiveness. Additionally, when planning, administrators make practical decisions within policy and standards frameworks. Decisions are based on effective professional development methods which align with effective evaluation practices while also considering relationships, logistics, and resources. When implementing professional development, administrators rely upon peer-led, administrator-led and outside expert-led learning opportunities. Finally, administrators evaluate professional development and collect data to reflect different levels of evaluation. Levels administrators evaluate include: participant reactions; new knowledge, skills, or attitudes of participants; organizational characteristics necessary for success; impact on professional practice; impact on students; and use and dissemination of evaluation findings.
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for District Administrators’ Professional Development Decision-Making Processes Concerning New Special Education Teachers.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review includes an examination of the role teachers play in student success and the implications on student achievement when new teacher needs are met through meaningful professional development. This summary of the literature discusses (a) student achievement, (b) needs of new special education teachers, (c) policies and standards, (d) professional development methods, and (e) evaluating professional development. Student achievement is explored through the lens of teacher and administrator roles as gaps between general and special education achievement are highlighted. Specific needs of new special education teachers, such as legal responsibilities, Individualized Educational Program (IEP) development, issues surrounding Common Core State Standards, implementing and supporting a guaranteed and viable curriculum, selecting and implementing evidence-based academic interventions, utilizing data-based decision-making, collaborative problem solving, and effectively managing classroom behavior are investigated. Key policies and standards in the field of special education are highlighted through a discussion of federal laws, state policy and regulations, and standards put forth by professional organizations. Effective professional development methods such as professional learning communities, teacher coaching, video analysis, experimenting, doing, and reflecting are reviewed. Finally, models for evaluating professional development are explored.
Student Achievement

Public schools play an important role in American society. Leaders in Western society have long articulated the close tie between a strong public education system and democracy itself (Dewey, 1954; Glickman, 2003; Goodlad, 2001). The public education system supports the common good and serves as a gateway to, and potential equalizer for, economic and life success for millions of children, including those who are under-served (Blankstein, 2013). Students enter the classroom with a wide variety of abilities, social-emotional and behavioral factors, and academic readiness. Key players contributing to the success of each student as well as the public education system include policy makers, education researchers, district administrators, and classroom and special education teachers. Education research can serve as a catalyst for determining best practices in educating all children. In looking to the literature, key players can more confidently make decisions regarding which practices positively impact student success within our public education system and, therefore, strengthen our democracy.

Teachers’ Role in Student Achievement

Teachers, more so than administrators, parents, or the government, are cast as the primary actor responsible and accountable for education today (Smith & Kubacka, 2017). More specifically, teachers are commonly regarded as key players within schools, contributing to and shaping student development and learning (Jimerson & Haddock, 2015). In addition to these perceptions, there is a body of research literature which highlights the valuable role teachers can play in student achievement (Mizell, 2010; Stronge & Hindman, 2003). While specific studies highlight a variety of components that strengthen teacher impact (i.e. well-prepared from formal education training, teacher education coursework, subject matter expertise, fully certified in subject area, strong classroom management skills, and beliefs and confidence to teach), research
confirms the most important factor contributing to raising student achievement in school is the quality of teaching (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Glazerman, Protik, Teh, Bruch, & Max, 2013; Mizell, 2010; Stronge & Hindman, 2003; Sutherland, Lewis-Palmer, Stichter, & Morgan, 2008).

Evertson, Hawley, and Zlotnik (1985) reported a consistent positive effect of teachers' formal education training on student learning, with 11 of 13 studies showing greater effectiveness for fully prepared and certified vs. uncertified or provisionally certified teachers. Further, Darling-Hammond (2000) identified quality teaching as vital for student learning and explained among variables assessing teacher "quality," the percentage of teachers with full certification and a major in the field was a more powerful predictor of student achievement than teachers' education levels (e.g., master's degrees). Additionally, the effects of well-prepared teachers on student achievement can be stronger than the influences of student background factors, such as poverty, language background, and minority status (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Monk's (1994) study of student's mathematics and science achievement found teacher education coursework had a positive effect on student learning and was sometimes more influential than additional subject matter preparation.

Studies using value-added student achievement data have found student achievement gains are more influenced by a student’s assigned teacher than other factors like class size and class composition (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). Similarly, studies of teacher effects at the classroom level using the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System and a similar data base in Dallas, Texas, have found that differential teacher effectiveness is a strong determinant of differences in student learning, far outweighing the effects of differences in class size and
heterogeneity (Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997; Jordan, Mendro, & Weerasinghe, 1997).

Finally, research suggests that poorly or untrained teachers are more likely to use ineffective classroom management methods (Kaff, Zabel, & Milham, 2007). This has implications for academic instruction: time spent managing disruptive and distracting behaviors decreases the amount and quality of instructional time. In contrast, there is a significant association between strong classroom management skills and reductions in disruptive behaviors and improved student engagement (Reinke, Lewis-Palmer, & Merrell, 2008). Teachers’ beliefs and confidence to teach are key characteristics that predict teaching ability and student outcomes (Nespor, 1987; Eggn & Kauchak, 2006; Poulou, 2007). Therefore, the relation between students’ academic outcomes and the effectiveness of their teachers is well established.

Administrators’ Role in Student Achievement

In the last decade, policymakers and researchers have highlighted the central role of principals and administrators in improving student achievement and overall school effectiveness (Be´teille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012; Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012; Chiang, Lipscomb, & Gill, 2012; Coelli and Green, 2012; Dhuey and Smith, 2012; Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Guarino, Ghosh-Dastidar, & Brown, 2006; Grissom, Kalgorides, & Loeb, 2014; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Duke, 1999; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Specifically, administrators can support school effectiveness by providing (a) collaborative opportunities for teachers, (b) opportunities for teachers to align curriculum and instruction with CCSS, (c) strong foundational pillars concerning leadership in instructional and programmatic practices, and (d) development and evaluative opportunities for their staff (Alberti, 2013; Baird & Clark, 2018; Crockett, 2002;
McLaughlin, 2012). Therefore, improving student outcomes is a shared responsibility in which teachers and administrators both play a role.

In providing meaningful access to Common Core State Standards for all students, school leaders have been urged to support practices such as collaboration between special education and general education teachers (McLaughlin, 2012). Further, school leaders are charged to create collaboration and co-teaching opportunities so general and special education teachers might complement each other in areas of expertise. Alberti (2013) recommends co-teachers align curriculum and instruction with the “instructional shifts” of Common Core State Standards to ensure instruction is matched to the rigorous expectations of the new standards.

A central tenet of special education administration is providing and ensuring programming that makes a difference (Crockett, 2002). Crockett (2002) goes on to discuss special education administrators as instructional and programmatic leaders in implementing school reforms (i.e., Common Core) that impact special education teachers and students with disabilities. The foundational pillars undergirding these principles are:

(a) ethical practice that advocates for informed decisions and full educational opportunity;

(b) individual consideration that attends to exceptional need, requiring specialized instruction;

(c) equity under law that provides benefits through law and public policy;

(d) effective programming that produces positive student outcomes; and

(e) productive partnerships with families.

Finally, administrators play a role in student achievement through providing development and evaluative opportunities for staff, which can inform professional development. Leaders must
include strategies such as classroom observations and analyses of student achievement data to evaluate individual and system changes (Baird & Clark, 2018). Administrators play a direct and crucial role in decisions and access to the professional development a special education teacher receives (Baird & Clark, 2018).

**General Education and Special Education Gaps**

Outcome data demonstrates persistently wide academic achievement and graduation gaps between students with disabilities (65.5%) and their peers (84.1%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). These gaps matter because students who do not make it through high school earn substantially less in wages and have far greater rates of incarceration and drug abuse than do their peers (Blankstein, 2013). These gaps raise a red flag and cause researchers (i.e. Gage, Adamson, MacSuga-Gage, & Lewis, 2017; Henderson, Klein, Gonzalez, & Bradley, 2005) to question access for students with disabilities to highly effective classroom teachers.

Gage et al., (2017) discuss students’ access to highly qualified teachers as being especially problematic for students with emotional behavior disorders (EBD). Not only is there a national shortage of teachers of students with EBD (American Association for Employment in Education in the United States, 2008), but those who are in the field are more likely to have emergency or alternative certification and fewer years of teaching experience than other special education teachers (Gage et al., 2017). Results from a study by Gage et al., (2017) indicated teachers of students with EBD were statistically significantly younger than other special education teachers, had fewer years of teaching experience, and were less likely to be fully certified. Similar results were identified by Henderson et al., (2005), who found teachers of students with EBD were less likely to have a master’s degree, less likely to be fully certified for their main teaching assignment, and more likely to be emergency certified. Further, twice as
many teachers of students with EBD were credentialed through alternative certification programs than other special educators.

In conclusion, students with disabilities have extensively diverse learning, social-emotional, and behavioral needs. While many different roles within the public education system work to support and meet student needs, special education teachers and administrators are foundational in improving outcomes for students with disabilities. Effective teachers and administrators share the responsibility of meeting student needs while upholding legal policy and ethical standards. Educators can use professional development to support meaningful access to Common Core State Standards, build strong collaborative practices, meet individual learner needs, develop highly effective teachers, and close the academic gaps between students with disabilities and their peers.

**Needs of New Special Education Teachers**

The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) is a group offering a set of combined resources that both define and support ongoing teacher effectiveness to ensure students reach college and career ready standards (Jenkins & Ornelles, 2009). Further, InTASC suggests determining the needs of educators through survey research, the results of which can be used by administrators to guide their decisions when prioritizing areas for professional development. The InTASC principles serve as a solid base upon which to examine teachers’ perceptions of their knowledge and skills.

**Identifying Needs in New Special Education Teachers**

Policy makers have highlighted the impact of high-quality teachers on student performance in general as well as for specific groups of learners (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Specific characteristics of training and/or qualifications predicting highly effective and
qualified teachers have been difficult to define (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002). However, there is a set of studies that discuss identified needs in new special education teachers (e.g., Common Core State Standards, 2019; Flower, McKenna, Muething, Bryant, & Bryant, 2014; Jenkins & Ornelles, 2009; Lemons, Al Otaiba, Conway, & Mellado De La Cruz, 2016; Mitchell & Arnold, 2004; Murphy and Marshall, 2015; Steiner, 2018; Yell & Bateman, 2017; Zirkel, 2015). These studies highlight the need to support new special education teachers in understanding: (a) their legal responsibilities (Zirkel, 2015), (b) Individualized Educational Program development to support students’ free appropriate public education (Yell & Bateman, 2017), (c) their role in supporting students with disabilities in accessing Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standards, 2019), (d) best practices for implementing a guaranteed and viable curriculum (Steiner, 2018), (e) how to meet the academic needs of an increasingly diverse population of learners with special needs through evidence-based academic interventions (Lemons et al., 2016), (f) how to use data-based decision-making to guide instruction (Lemons et al., 2016), and (g) effectively managing their classrooms (Mitchell & Arnold, 2004).

**Legal Responsibilities**

Legislation, regulations, guidance, and other policy documents can be found on the U.S. Department of Education website. Major law and guidance topics are rooted in Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Special education litigation continues to be on the rise during recent decades, while general education litigation has remained relatively stable (Zirkel & Johnson, 2011).
Legal literacy for special education teachers specific to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) may mean the significant difference between preventative practice and losing litigation (Yell & Bateman, 2017; Zirkel, 2015). Case law indicates the scope and sequence of child find, special education eligibility, and free appropriate public education (FAPE) as three major pieces to the legal foundation of professional development for educators. Zirkel (2015) highlights that maintaining current legal literacy is challenging but useful within the larger context and primary purpose of achieving effective results for students with disabilities via communication and collaboration with parents.

In the compilation of court decisions under IDEA, Zirkel (2014) shows the bulk of litigation focuses on the central obligation for school districts to provide each eligible student with a “free appropriate public education” (FAPE). Under the IDEA, FAPE is defined as an educational program that is individualized to a specific child, that meets that child's unique needs, provides access to the general curriculum, meets the grade-level standards established by the state, and from which the child receives educational benefit. The litigation summarized by Zirkel (2014) represents a significant allocation of limited educational resources, with the consequences particularly costly where the court rules that the procedural errors amount to a denial of FAPE. Therefore, Zirkel (2017) emphasizes special education practitioners can benefit from knowing (a) which alleged procedural violations are most frequently subject to adjudication and, among them, (b) which cases courts conclude to be a denial of FAPE.

Additionally, Karanxha & Zirkel (2014) remind educators that parents of children with special needs continue to seek redress and remedy for the education of their children from the courts. This underscores the need in the field of special education for educational leaders and teachers who possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meet the needs of
children with disabilities. The continued growth in special education litigation is a signal for both school districts and parents to choose collaboration in providing the education students with disabilities need rather than engage in litigation.

**Individualized Education Program**

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is the cornerstone of a student’s educational program and the blueprint of a student’s FAPE (Yell & Bateman, 2017). It is a legal document which guides and directs the educational and behavioral intervention plan for a student with disabilities (Campbell-Whatley & Lyons, 2013). An IEP details the support and services a school will provide to meet the individual needs of a student. The purpose of an IEP is to dictate and monitor all aspects of the student’s special education program. IDEA (2004) provides procedures for developing students’ IEPs. Administrators and special education teachers must not only adhere to IDEA (2004) procedures when determining FAPE and developing IEPs, but must also consider implications from case law decisions (i.e. Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District).

Yell & Bateman (2017) summarize implications concerning educators in developing IEPs from the 2017 Supreme Court case, Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District. Endrew F. affirms parents play a key role and are essential team members, who must be involved in a meaningful way in the development of their child’s IEP. Assessments used in determining and monitoring IEPs must be relevant, meaningful, and address all of a student’s needs. Moreover, annual IEP goals should be ambitious, challenging, measurable, and assessed. Goals and programming must be designed to make appropriate progress in light of the student’s circumstances and must be clearly specified in a student’s IEP. Educators must monitor progress in a systematic manner and regularly report student progress to his or her parents’. When data
indicates a student is not progressing toward his or her goals, educators must make instructional changes. Professionals should justify the decisions they make on a student’s IEP regarding student progress.

Additionally, when looking to the Supreme Court’s Endrew F. decision, educators can find guidance surrounding the question of how much educational benefit public schools are required to provide to students with disabilities. The supreme court ruled that in developing IEPs, school districts must aim to enable students to make academic and functional progress in light of their circumstances. While this decision does not reject or overturn previous rulings, it does offer a clearer two-part test: (a) Has the school district complied with the procedures of the IDEA? (b) Is the IEP reasonably calculated to enable a child to make appropriate progress in light of a student’s circumstances?

**Common Core State Standards**

Students with disabilities eligible under the IDEA must be challenged to excel within the general curriculum and be prepared for success in their post-school lives, including college and/or careers (Common Core State Standards, 2019). The Common Core State Standards articulate rigorous grade-level expectations in the areas of mathematics and English language arts. These standards identify the knowledge and skills students need in order to be successful in college and careers. How these high standards are taught and assessed is of the utmost importance in reaching this racially, ethnically, socioeconomically, and ability-diverse group of students. In order for students with disabilities to meet high academic standards and to fully demonstrate their conceptual and procedural knowledge and skills in mathematics, reading, writing, speaking and listening (English language arts), their instruction must incorporate supports and accommodations, including (a) supports and related services designed to meet their
unique needs and enable their access to the general education curriculum (IDEA 34 CFR §300.34, 2004), and (b) an IEP, which includes annual goals aligned with and chosen to facilitate their attainment of grade-level academic standards.

Promoting a culture of high expectations for all students is a fundamental goal of the Common Core State Standards. In order to participate with success in the general curriculum, students with disabilities, as appropriate, may be provided additional supports and services, such as (a) instructional supports for learning based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning, which foster student engagement by presenting information in multiple ways and allowing for diverse avenues of action and expression, (b) instructional accommodations or changes in materials or procedures which do not change the standards but allow students to learn within the framework of the Common Core (Thompson, Morse, Sharpe & Hall, 2005), and (c) assistive technology devices and services to ensure access to the general education curriculum and the Common Core State Standards.

In light of providing meaningful access to the general curriculum and general context, Courtade & Browder (2011) state it is likely that no other expertise is more critical for special education teachers in the Common Core era than is the art and craft of designing a meaningful IEP. Along with understanding the differences between accommodations and modifications, McLaughlin (2012) suggested a six-step process to develop a Common Core State Standards-aligned IEP. The steps are as follows: (a) consider the student’s grade-level content standards, (b) examine collected data to determine students’ level of functioning in relation to the standards, (c) identify present levels of academic and functional performance, (d) develop measurable goals aligned with the grade-level standards, (e) assess and report progress, and (f) identify specially designed instruction that includes appropriate accommodations and modifications necessary to
access the general curriculum and make progress. Moreover, assessing students’ current knowledge and skills related to grade-level Common Core State Standards and comparing them to grade-level Common Core State Standards expectations enables educators to design goals that “fill in the gap” (CDE, 2014a).

Collaboration and joint responsibility for student achievement as implementation of evidence-based practices are recommended to ensure students with disabilities receive appropriate Common Core State Standards instruction (Graham & Harris, 2013; McLaughlin, 2012). While collaboration between general education and special education teachers is nothing new to the field, it could be argued this practice is more urgent due to the sweeping change in standards-based instruction that applies to all students (Van Boxtel, 2017). Additionally, in terms of capacity building and shared responsibility of student achievement, the provision of professional development opportunities and ensuring an in-depth understanding of the standards are also suggested by experts in special education and educational leadership research and practice (Graham & Harris, 2013; Haagar & Vaughn, 2013; McLaughlin, 2012; Powell et al., 2013). Finally, Nadelson and colleagues (2014) found professional development hours are correlated with Common Core State Standards knowledge and that K–12 teachers are more likely to turn to their districts and district leaders for sources of Common Core State Standards information than they are to colleges of education.

**Implementing and Supporting a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum**

Professional learning is essential for implementing curricula (Steiner, 2018). Providing high-quality instructional materials to teachers can make a real difference in student outcomes. However, quality materials are not enough. Matching quality curriculum with professional learning for implementation is essential. Research suggests over half of the possible impact of
shifting to a stronger curriculum is lost if the transition does not include a shift in teacher practice that specifically supports the new materials (Taylor, Getty, Kowalski, Wilson, Carlson, & Van Scotter, 2015). Steiner (2018) explains that a clear inference can be made regarding professional development guiding teachers to optimize their use of new curricula. This must be an essential part of any instructional material-oriented school-level transition. Because changing curricula is not uncommon, teachers need opportunities to learn curriculum implementation skills, so they can become proficient users of the curriculum materials provided by their districts or schools.

**Evidence-Based Academic Interventions**

Special education teachers need expertise in selecting and applying evidence-based academic interventions (Lemons et al., 2016). The IDEA requires teachers to use evidence-based practices (20 U.S.C. § 6301[9]; 20 U.S.C. § 1401 [c][5][E] and [F]). Based on these federal policies, the federal government’s research arm, Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and special education’s professional organization, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) developed guidelines for determining whether or not a practice is evidence-based (CEC, 2015; Coalition for Evidence-Based Policy, CEBP, 2003). These guidelines, however, may be difficult for practitioners to interpret, as they are similar but not identical (Odom, Brantlinger, Gersten, Horner, Thompson, & Harris, 2005). These requirements for using evidence-based practices often lead to a myriad of questions for teachers about which programs, practices, strategies, and materials to use with their students.

Nonetheless, the outcome of these decisions is critical: The selection of programs and practices teachers use is one of the most important factors in student achievement (CEBP, 2003). Therefore, educators need efficient ways to determine which available tools are based on high-
quality research and most likely will impact critical student outcomes (Stanovich & Stanovich, 2003). Whereas educational researchers and teacher educators develop, evaluate, and disseminate evidence-based practices, teachers are primarily responsible for the delivery of instructions; they are where the “rubber meets the road,” and where most difficulties occur in the implementation of evidence-based practice (Kretlow & Blatz, 2011).

Teachers report positive attitudes about research, but it appears few actually use evidence-based practices in the classroom (Burns & Ysseldyke, 2009; Williams & Coles, 2007). Although complex factors impact the research-to-practice gap, teachers have reported two barriers to using educational research: lack of time to search and lack of access to sources (Williams & Coles, 2007). In the same study, many teachers also reported not feeling confident finding research information independently. Given the critical role of the teacher in selecting evidence-based practices, they must know how to locate information about evidence-based practices, as well as how to strengthen their use of any program or practice in the classroom.

The key concepts in understanding the term “evidence-based practice” are type and magnitude of the research (Odom et al., 2005). Type of research refers to the systematic way researchers apply an intervention and measure its effectiveness. IES (CEBP, 2003) and CEC (2008) agree the type of research must be quantitative, must show a clear cause-and-effect relationship with improved outcomes, and use a control or comparison group. Because of the small numbers and heterogeneous setting in special education, control/comparison groups are not always feasible; therefore, CEC also recognized evidence derived from smaller numbers of students, if the studies are sufficiently replicated (Horner, Carr, Halle, McGee, Odom, & Wolery, 2005). Magnitude refers to the amount of studies that show a strong, positive cause-and-effect relationship between an intervention and improved academic or behavioral outcomes. Magnitude
is evaluated through research synthesis, by examining the effects of a collection of studies that leads to consensus about the effectiveness of a particular program, practice, or set of practices (Kretlow & Blatz, 2011).

Additional challenges for teachers in using evidence-based interventions is to find practices and programs that suit their students or evaluate practices/programs readily available to them (Kretlow & Blatz, 2011). Teachers face the challenges of implementing the practice in a way that leads to maximum achievement gains for students. Kretlow & Blatz (2011) encourage educators to access evidence-based practices, be careful with fidelity, and check student progress. In accessing evidence-based practices, educators can look to the organizations and web sites listed in Table 1. Kretlow & Blatz (2011), also encourage educators to gain access to evidence-based interventions through The IRIS Center for Training Enhancements and the Florida Center for Reading Research.

Table 1

*Websites for Information on Evidence-Based Practices*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Web Site</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Every Student Succeeds Act Key Resources</td>
<td><a href="https://www.air.org/resource/essa-key-resources-selecting-right-evidence-based-practices">https://www.air.org/resource/essa-key-resources-selecting-right-evidence-based-practices</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Evidence Encyclopedia</td>
<td><a href="https://www.bestevidence.org/">https://www.bestevidence.org/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promising Practice Network on Children, Families, and Communities</td>
<td><a href="http://www.promisingpractices.net/">http://www.promisingpractices.net/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further challenges for classroom teachers, noted by Kretlow and Blatz (2011) include implementing evidence-based practices with fidelity which leads to maximum achievement gains for students. Fidelity is the key to maximizing student achievement (Furtak, Ruiz-Primo, Shemwell, Ayala, Brandon, Shavelson, & Yin, 2008). Kretlow & Blatz (2011) warn educators must be careful with fidelity components within an evidence-based practice. They encourage teachers to follow the instructions in teaching and program manuals or research procedures as prescribed. Accurate adherence to details when applying instruction make a practice or program effective.

Finally, checking student progress to inform teacher practice is essential. Curriculum-Based Measurement (CBM) is easy to implement and highly effective for informing teachers about the effectiveness of the instruction (Stecker, Lembke, & Foegen, 2008). CBM is an assessment that educators use to determine how students are progressing in basic academic areas such as math, reading, writing, and spelling. CBM provides current, week-by-week information on student progress. CBM also monitors the success of the instruction. If a child’s performance is not meeting expectations, the teacher then changes the way they are teaching to find the type and amount of instruction needed to make sufficient progress toward meeting the academic goals. When CBM is used, each child is tested each week. The tests generally last from one to five minutes. The teacher counts the number of correct and incorrect responses made in the time allotted to find the child’s score. Scores are recorded on a graph and compared to the expected performance on the content for that year. The graph provides a way to see quickly how the child’s performance compares to expectations. After the scores are entered on the graphs, the teacher decides whether to continue instruction in the same way, or to change it.
Data-Based Decision-Making

Successful implementation of Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) requires schools to implement a continuum of systematic, coordinated, evidence-based practices targeted to being responsive to the varying intensity of needs students have related to their academic and social emotional/behavioral development (Harn, Chard, Biancarosa, & Kame‘enui, 2011; Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010). This inherently preventive approach is built upon the understanding that we can do more to prevent students from developing intractable academic and behavioral difficulties while students are in early elementary grades than attempting remediation efforts later in schooling (Bradley, Danielson, & Doolittle, 2005; Torgeson, 2000). While MTSS was initially developed and implemented in relation to Response to Intervention (RTI) and focused on improving reading outcomes, Positive Behavioral and Intervention Supports (PBIS) uses similar features and components to promote social development and prevent the development of significant challenging behavior with great success (Bradshaw, Mitch, & Leaf, 2010; Horner, Sugai, & Anderson, 2010; Simonsen & Sugai, 2013). PBIS is an evidence-based, tiered framework for improving and integrating behavioral data, systems, and practices affecting student outcomes. While there is a call for the integration of academic and behavioral MTSS due to the known interaction of academic and behavioral issues in many students who struggle (McIntosh, Horner, Chard, Boland, & Good, 2006), in general most schools are operating these schoolwide efforts independently (McIntosh, Goodman, & Bohanan, 2010).

The common features to implementing RTI and PBIS include the following: (a) coordination of schoolwide prevention efforts and systems, (b) universal screening and progress monitoring, (c) selection and use of evidence-based practices, (d) professional development that targets evidence-based practice, (e) evaluating outcomes using data-based decision-making, and
(f) leadership commitment from administrators and school-based teams that supports school-wide implementation (Kame’enui, Good, & Harn, 2005; Sugai & Horner, 2006). Both PBIS and RTI collect data regularly to identify students early on that are at risk for later challenges. For RTI, formative evaluation measures such as the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) (Good & Kaminski, 2006) or AIMSWeb (Shinn, 2002) have developed technically adequate measures to screen all students quarterly as well as progress monitoring tools for monitoring students learning in response to intervention efforts. For PBIS, the most commonly used measure is office discipline referrals (ODRs) to identify students who are displaying inappropriate behaviors at an alarming rate (Sugai & Horner, 2006). Both approaches advocate schools implement practices that have established research demonstrating their efficacy. This requires schools to ensure adequate professional development is provided to all staff in order to deliver these practices as intended to maximize student outcomes (Harn, Basaraba, Chard, & Fritz, 2015). To ensure these coordinated efforts continue to meet the needs of all students, both approaches also heavily emphasize evaluating outcomes using data-based decision-making procedures within a given school year, as well as to annually review to plan and prioritize efforts to ensure continuous improvement. Both approaches also require significant commitment from leaders, teachers, and specialists to implement the schoolwide approach, coordinate efforts, and maximize resources.

**Classroom and Behavior Management**

Often teachers feel they have inadequate skills to manage a classroom (Mitchell & Arnold, 2004). Problematic student behavior is a daily struggle for many classroom teachers across the United States (Chaffee, Briesch, Johnson, & Volpe, 2017). Over 40% of teachers participating in the Schools and Staffing Survey indicated they felt “not at all prepared” or “only
somewhat prepared” to handle behavioral issues in the classroom (Greenberg, Putnam, & Walsh, 2014), despite the fact classroom management has been reported to be the top concern of teachers (The New Teacher Project, 2013). The consequences of this problem become more apparent as more schools adopt a multi-tier model of service delivery (i.e., Multi-Tiered Systems of Support) which assumes effective implementation of universal behavioral supports at its foundation (Chaffee et al., 2017). In adopting a multi-tiered framework, teachers are charged with greater responsibility for the implementation of behavioral interventions (Chaffee et al., 2017).

Also highlighted in the literature is evidence that students experience positive outcomes when teachers implement evidence-based classroom management practices (Simonsen, Fairbanks, Briesch, Myers, & Sugai, 2008). Unfortunately, teachers routinely cite classroom management as an area in which they need support, as classroom management is largely ignored during pre- and in-service professional development (Begeny & Martens, 2006; Freeman, Simonsen, Briere, & MacSuga-Gage, 2014; Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010). This lack of support contributes to the high rate of teacher attrition; nearly half of teachers leave the field within their first five years of teaching, and teachers who leave due to job dissatisfaction identify problems with student discipline and motivation as contributing factors (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

In a recent survey, 97% of teachers reported concerns with disruptive or acting out behaviors, however, only 56% had heard of “evidence-based practices,” and 21% reported having no or minimal training in behavioral interventions (Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Puri, & Goel, 2011). Consequently, researchers have consistently demonstrated that teachers implement evidence-based classroom management practices at lower levels than recommended (e.g.,
Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013; Scott, Alter, & Hirn, 2011). As a result, many students receive instruction from teachers who struggle with classroom management.

Previous research suggests Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) can reduce student disciplinary office referrals and out-of-school suspensions, especially when implemented with fidelity (Houchens, Zhang, Davis, Niu, Chon, & Miller, 2017). Teachers in PBIS schools reported higher levels of student and faculty understanding of behavioral expectations and a stronger atmosphere of professional trust and respect. Houchens et al., (2017), analysis, for example, revealed student academic outcomes were significantly higher at high- and medium-fidelity PBIS schools than low-fidelity PBIS schools. Additionally, teachers working in schools implementing School-Wide Positive Behavioral and Intervention Supports (SWPBIS) reported a stronger sense of shared expectations for student conduct among both teachers and students (Lewis & Sugai, 1999; Sugai & Horner, 2002). This suggests that as schools improve their implementation of SWPBIS, teacher perceptions of many aspects of student behavior management steadily improve. A practical implication is that school administrators considering adoption of SWPBIS, or currently involved in implementation, should recognize fidelity of program implementation can make a significant difference in outcomes (Childs, Kincaid, & George, 2010). The literature clearly identifies effective classroom and behavior management as a critical component for providing support for new special education teachers (Flower et al., 2014).

**Policies and Standards**

A body of literature and resources showcase the governing bodies that provide policy and standards for professional development within local school districts. District administrators must be familiar with federal laws and regulations such as Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA),
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Administrators and educators must also adhere to policies set by the state department of education. Additional state laws, policy, and guidance documents provide information to help educators interpret and implement the law. Beyond policy, professional organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), and Learning Forward have established standards specifying what all teachers need to know and do to effectively teach students with disabilities. Administrators must consider these standards in their professional development planning (Jenkins & Ornelles, 2009). Jenkins and Ornelles (2009) state it is critical that administrators plan for and provide consistent and ongoing support through in-service training. Further, INTASC suggests determining the needs of educators through survey research, the results of which can be used by administrators to guide their decisions when prioritizing areas for professional development. INTASC principles serve as a solid base upon which to examine teachers’ perceptions of their knowledge and skills. While teacher participation in professional development activities is in some cases compulsory and in others voluntary, teachers must acquire the necessary professional development hours to maintain licensure. At the same time, teachers often pursue professional development as an initiative for increasing their professional skills and meeting challenges in the classroom.

Federal Laws and Regulations

**Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).** Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) is the nation’s main education law for all public schools. The law works to hold schools accountable for how students learn and achieve, as well as provide an equal opportunity for students who receive special education services. The main purpose of ESSA is to make sure public schools provide a quality education for all students (Lee, 2018). ESSA gives states an increased say in
how schools account for student achievement, including the achievement of students with IEPs. Under ESSA, states decide the education plans for their schools within a framework provided by the federal government. The plan must include a description of the following: (a) academic standards, (b) annual testing, (c) school accountability, (d) goals for academic achievement, (e) plans for supporting and improving struggling schools, and (f) state and local report cards.

Under ESSA, each state sets its own general education standards and coursework for schools (Lee, 2018). States must have “challenging” academic standards in reading, math, and science. This means a state’s curriculum must prepare students to succeed in college and in a career. Also, states must apply these standards to all students, including those with learning and thinking differences. Under ESSA, states must test students. However, the number and kinds of tests depend on the grade level of the child. Also, states must provide accommodations on these tests and list them in students’ IEPs or 504 plans. ESSA requires states to hold schools accountable for how students achieve. This means each state is responsible for having a plan in place and must use evidence-based teaching and approaches.

Lee (2018) explains schools continue to have the flexibility to teach students in different ways. In fact, school innovations can help students with learning and thinking differences. For example, ESSA supports Universal Design for Learning (UDL). This is an approach that offers students many ways to learn the same material. UDL isn’t just helpful for students in special education. It allows all students to use different methods to show what they know giving them an equal chance to succeed in school. ESSA also encourages states to expand personalized learning.

Further, ESSA defines professional development as activities which are: (a) an integral part of school and local education agency strategies for providing educators (including teachers, principals, other school leaders, specialized instructional support personnel, paraprofessionals,
and, as applicable, early childhood educators) with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in the core academic subjects and to meet challenging State academic standards; and (b) are sustained (not stand-alone, one day, and short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data driven, classroom-focused....”

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).** The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) enforces several Federal civil rights laws that prohibit discrimination in programs or activities that receive federal funds from the Department of Education. Among other things, these laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability. These laws extend to all state education agencies including elementary and secondary school systems that receive U.S. Department of Education funds. OCR also has responsibilities under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (prohibiting disability discrimination by public entities, whether or not they receive federal financial assistance).

The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (Amendments Act), effective January 1, 2009, amends the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) and includes a conforming amendment to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act) that affects the meaning of the term disability in Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504). Section 504 is an anti-discrimination, civil rights statute which requires the needs of students with disabilities to be met as adequately as the needs of their non-disabled peers. The Act explains a qualified individual with a disability must not, “solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” [29 U.S.C. §794(a), 34 C.F.R. §104.4(a)]. The Amendments Act retains the definition of disability under Section 504 and the ADA but emphasizes the definition should be broadly interpreted. The
Amendments Act directs the ameliorating effects of mitigating not be considered in determining whether an individual has a disability. It also expands the scope of "major life activities" by providing a non-exhaustive list of general activities and a non-exhaustive list of major bodily functions. The act clarifies an impairment that is episodic or in remission is a disability if it would substantially limit a major life activity when active. Finally, the Act clarifies the meaning of a person "regarded as" having a disability, are not entitled to reasonable accommodations or reasonable modifications.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).** Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) is the federal law that defines and regulates special education. The law requires public schools to provide special education services to children who meet certain criteria. To qualify for special education services, a student must: (a) have a documented disability covered by IDEA, and (b) need special education in order to access the general education curriculum (IDEA, 2004). School districts have a process in place to determine which students are eligible for special education. This process involves a comprehensive evaluation that looks at the way each child thinks as well as other aspects of child development.

IDEA was first passed in 1975 and was called the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. The primary purposes of IDEA are: (a) to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to children with disabilities and (b) to give parents or legal guardians a voice in their child’s education. IDEA requires schools to find and evaluate students suspected of having disabilities, at no cost to families. This is called Child Find. Once children are found to have a qualifying disability, schools must provide them with special education and related services to meet their unique needs. The goal is to help students make progress in school.
Students eligible for special education under IDEA must have a disability that falls under one of the 13 categories IDEA covers. They are: (a) autism, (b) deaf-blindness, (c) deafness, (d) emotional disturbance, (e) hearing impairment, (f) intellectual disability, (g) multiple disabilities, (h) orthopedic impairment, (i) other health impairment (j) specific learning disability, (k) speech or language impairment, (l) traumatic brain injury, or (m) visual impairment, including blindness. To be eligible, a student must have a disability and, as a result of that disability, need special education to make progress in school (Lee, 2019). After a special education evaluation, schools hold an eligibility meeting to decide if the child qualifies for special education. If the child qualifies, the team works to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which is a legal document spelling out a child’s educational goals and the services and support the school will provide.

An IEP is created by members of a multidisciplinary team including, but not limited to, the student, parent(s), general education teacher(s), special education teacher(s), and administrator(s) (Yell, 2015). IEPs must include: the student’s present levels of educational performance; measurable goals based on present levels of educational performance and the specific needs of the student; a plan for progress monitoring; determination of the extent to which the student will not participate with nondisabled peers; when, where, and how services will be provided; and any special factors the team considered and addressed depending on the student’s needs. Often the special education teacher becomes the case manager who oversees the special education processes and verifies that IEP services are implemented in compliance with federal, state, and district regulations.
Michigan Department of Education

The Tenth Amendment limits the federal government’s role in education by stating, “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people” (U.S. Const. amend. X). Because public education is not mentioned as a federal power, historically it has been delegated to the local and state governments. While the federal government does influence education by allotting funding to districts that follow certain guidelines, a very small percentage of federal funding is spent on education. Most of that federal funding goes toward programs for children with disabilities. Therefore, states are primarily responsible for the maintenance and operation of public schools.

The Michigan Department of Education provides laws and rules through the Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education (MARSE) and the Michigan School Code-PA 451 of 1976. Policy and guidance documents provide information to help interpret and implement education law, including laws surrounding the professional development of Michigan teachers. State law determines what counts as professional development for educators. For example, Michigan Compiled Law (CPL) Sections 380.1526-1527 require district staff to design professional development activities that: (a) serve the purpose of increasing student learning, (b) align with the school improvement plan, (c) are planned, ongoing, and intensive, and (d) are supported some way by the school or school district, such as through released time or cost.

The same law requires school districts to provide at least five days of teacher professional development per school year. A mentor must be provided for teachers during their first three years of teaching, meaning that “mentoring” falls under the legislative definition of professional development within the state of Michigan (see act 451-1976). These teachers must also receive “intensive professional development induction” through observation of experienced teachers,
participation in regional workshops and seminars conducted by mentors and master teachers. CPL Section 380.1525 requires professional development activities pertain to instructional improvement and student learning of core curriculum objectives that can be assessed through Michigan Student Test of Education Progress (M-STEP), Michigan Merit Examination, and other criteria referenced assessments. Local Education Agencies (LEAs) must meet these requirements to qualify for state and federal funding such as Title II of ESSA.

**Professional Organizations**

Professional organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, and Learning Forward also serve as key influencers on new special education teacher development. These organizations support new special education teachers and administrators through educational research and professional standards which guide best practices.

**Council for Exceptional Children.** The Council for Exceptional Children is a professional association of educators dedicated to advancing the success of children with exceptionalities. They strive to accomplish their mission through advocacy, standards, and professional development. The CEC provides six standards regarding professional development of special education professionals (Council for Exceptional Children, 2015).

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<th>Professional Development Standard</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3.1</strong> Maintain a personalized professional development plan designed to advance their knowledge and skills, including cultural competence, systematically in order to maintain a high level of competence.</td>
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<td><strong>3.2</strong> Maintain current knowledge of procedures, policies, and laws relevant to practice.</td>
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Table 2 - Continued

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<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Engage in the objective and systematic evaluation of themselves, colleagues, services, and programs for the purpose of continuous improvement of professional performance.</td>
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<td>3.4</td>
<td>Advocate that the employing agency provide adequate resources for effective schoolwide professional development as well as individual professional development plans.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Participate in systematic supervised field experiences for candidates in preparation programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>Participate as mentors to other special educators, as appropriate.</td>
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Recently, Bullock (2018), the CEC Director of Education and Professional Standards posed the question, “What do special education practitioners want to learn and how do they want to learn it?”. This question led to the development of the CEC Professional Development Needs Assessment Survey. The survey was sent to nearly 50,000 individuals, and 1,541 questionnaires were completed. The majority of respondents to the survey were female (90%), experienced educators and administrators. Of the teachers who responded, the majority of respondents had been teaching for more than 20 years.

When asked about a preference between face-to-face and online courses, nearly 40% of respondents expressed a preference for in-person activities or activities blending in-person and online learning formats. The primary reason cited for this preference was the type of interactions afforded by in-person instruction. A smaller but still meaningful proportion (nearly a quarter of respondents) preferred online-only experiences. For these respondents, learning at their own pace, saving on travel expenses, and spending less time out of the classroom were the primary reasons behind that choice.
When asked who typically pays for registration and travel to professional development courses, 33.8% said their school, district, or organization paid, whereas 30.7% paid all the costs themselves. Others reported shared cost arrangements or other options.

When asked to indicate the most challenging concepts that consistently face special education teachers (what keeps them up at night), the largest group of respondents (58.3%) selected “developing meaningful behavior intervention plans.” Other prioritized topic areas included specially designed instruction (51.9%) and developing and documenting student plans (48.1%). A topic appeared consistently among the open-ended question responses “working collaboratively with families” or “dealing with parents and other figures outside the student–teacher relationship.”

Administrators were asked to name professional development topics consistently requested by their teachers. Some of the common themes were as follows:

(a) Assistive technology,

(b) Behavior management,

(c) Differentiated instruction, and

(d) Training to address specific needs (autism spectrum disorder, depression, motivation issues, etc.).

**Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium.** The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) is a consortium of state education agencies and national educational organizations dedicated to the reform the preparation, licensing, and on-going professional development of teachers. Created in 1987, INTASC's primary constituency is state education agencies responsible for teacher licensing, program approval, and professional development. Its work is guided by one basic premise: An effective
teacher must be able to integrate content knowledge with the specific strengths and needs of students to assure that all students learn and perform at high levels.

The mission of INTASC is to provide a forum for its member states to learn about and collaborate in the development of: (a) compatible educational policy on teaching among the states, (b) new accountability requirements for teacher preparation programs, (c) new techniques to assess the performance of teachers for licensing and evaluation, and (d) new programs to enhance the professional development of teachers.

INTASC believes that all education policy should be driven by what educators want P-12 students to know and be able to do. Thus, all aspects of a state’s education system should be aligned with and organized to achieve the state’s policy as embodied in its P-12 student standards. This includes its teacher licensing system. Teacher licensing standards are the state’s policy for what all teachers must know and be able to do in order to effectively help all students achieve the P-12 student standards. The teacher licensing standards become the driving force behind how a state’s teacher licensing system (program approval, licensing assessments, professional development) is organized and implemented. INTASC highlights that a state’s process for approving teacher preparation programs should be designed to verify that a program is aligned with the teacher licensing standards and provides opportunities for candidates to meet the standards. The state licensing assessments should verify that an individual teacher candidate has the knowledge and skills outlined in the licensing standards. The state’s professional development requirements for re-licensing should document that in-service practicing teachers are receiving professional development that is aligned with and helping them reach the licensing standards.
INTASC works to develop model policy that states can use as a resource as they work to align their own teacher licensing systems. INTASC hosts an annual professional development academy to help states develop capacity to implement a standards-based licensing system by teaching individuals to score INTASC portfolios, to serve as mentors for beginning teachers, and to reform teacher preparation programs so that they incorporate the model standards. They also provide ongoing technical assistance to states as they implement standards-based licensing systems. Finally, they commission papers on the legal implications of a standards-based teacher licensing system, and on assessment instruments for teacher licensing.

INTASC’s role is one of consensus building among the state and not decision-making. All authority for state policy resides within each state’s governance structure. The INTASC standards are “model” standards and intended to be a resource that all states can use to develop their own state standards. INTASC encourages states to take the model standards and discuss and debate them among their own stakeholders to come up with their own language. INTASC’s hope is that states will agree with and honor the values in the model standards, and in this way move educators toward consensus and compatible educational policies around what good teaching looks like and how it can be assessed.

Since 1998, INTASC has conducted a series of professional development academies in conjunction with the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) and Alverno College. They are designed to meet the needs of K-12 teachers, teacher educators, and policy makers who are interested in improving teacher preparation, beginning teacher induction, and district-wide mentoring programs through a standards-based approach. Experienced academy facilitators provide participants with ideas and strategies for improving teacher preparation, for assessing beginning teachers through the use of performance assessment,
and for supporting teachers and improving their classroom instruction. INTASC hosted a set of academies in 2004 called Building Effective Standards-Based Teacher Mentoring and Induction Programs. Participants developed a deep understanding of the INTASC Core Principles and how they can be used to build quality mentoring and induction programs through gathering evidence about teaching, conferring with beginning teachers about their teaching, and by recommending professional development interventions that will bring about improvement in the teaching knowledge and skill of beginning educators. Academy participants examined and explored the components of effective mentoring and induction programs including: (a) characteristics of effective mentoring, (b) how to align your approach to mentoring to the beginning teacher’s needs, (c) focus on K-12 students' learning, (d) techniques for gathering data to analyze teaching, (e) facilitating beginning teacher professional development, and (f) the critical issues your induction and mentoring program must address.

**Learning Forward Standards.** Learning Forward is a leading professional organization whose mission is to build the capacity of leaders to establish and sustain highly effective professional learning. Learning Forward establishes standards and examines evidence to strengthen and document the impact of professional learning. Further, Learning Forward advocates policies and practices that strengthen the field of professional learning. Their set of standards for professional learning should be referenced when planning, implementing, and evaluating professional development. The standards include: (a) Learning Communities, (b) Resources, (c) Learning Designs, (d) Outcomes, (e) Leadership, (f) Data, and (g) Implementation. The standards outline characteristics of professional learning leading to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results.
Table 3

Standards for Professional Learning

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<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Communities</td>
<td>Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.</td>
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<td>Leadership</td>
<td>Leadership requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Resources requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data</td>
<td>Data requires a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning Designs</td>
<td>Learning Designs integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Implementation applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Outcomes aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.</td>
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Professional Development Methods

There are pressing, practical reasons for exploring professional development methods. Estimates in the USA suggest that around 5–10% of teacher time can be spent on professional development activities (Gulamhussein, 2013). Additionally, recent reviews by The Center for Public Education suggest that as much as 7.6% of total budgets in some USA districts are spent on professional development (Gulamhussein, 2013). There are pressing scientific, policy, economic, and pedagogical reasons for undertaking thorough reviews of the effectiveness of professional development on student learning outcomes. Most contemporary evaluations of teaching and education systems place teachers at the center of any attempt to produce positive change in student learning outcomes (Hattie 2009, 2015).
John Hattie (2009) synthesized over 800 meta-analyses on what affects student achievement. He focused on six areas contributing to student learning: student, home, school, curricula, teacher, and teaching and learning approaches. Hattie ranked all these influences on attainment using Cohen’s effect sizes. The average effect size for teacher professional development on student learning was derived from five meta-analyses based on a total of 537 studies in the domain of teacher professional development. The effect size was reported as .62 and was ranked 19 out of 138 ranked effects across all studies of achievement. The adage of professional development as a waste of time can be remedied when professional development includes an emphasis on teacher learning and enhancing the core purpose of student learning (Baird & Clark, 2018).

Nonetheless, the key question often becomes whether professional development plays a cascading causal role that may cause change in teachers’ actions, which in turn can cause growth in student learning outcomes. Answers to this question affect methods of professional development. Evidence from systematic empirical reviews of well-designed intervention studies potentially provides answers to such questions. Some such reviews suggest where energetic efforts at change are undertaken and their impact on students measured, the most productive are those that facilitate teacher change in the classroom rather than, for example, focusing on technologies, providing indirect support for a focus on change in teacher activity as the best source of change in student learning (Slavin, 2008).

It is also worth noting that the Michigan Department of Education cites Learning Forward in describing professional learning as a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement (MDE, 2011). MDE encourages a paradigm shift in the way that schools approach professional
learning, moving away from the old concept of professional development and embracing the concept of professional learning. Research-based methods for affecting teacher change which leads to a positive change in student learning outcomes include:

(a) Professional Learning Communities,
(b) Teacher Coaching,
(c) Video Analysis, and
(d) Experimenting, Doing, and Reflecting.

Effective Methods

Without the outcomes provided by research, there is little justification or motivation for teachers to continue professional development beyond mandates (Baird & Clark, 2018). Sadly, when research is conducted, it rarely goes beyond teacher reaction (Guskey 2003, Guskey and Yoon 2009, Webster-Wright 2009). Teacher learning and implementation is at the heart of professional development (Baird & Clark, 2018). If teachers do not implement their learning, it is as if they did not learn anything at all.

Effective professional development models adhere to recommendations from leading scholars in the field and provide quantitative evidence of the impact on student learning. Baird and Clark (2018), for example, discuss professional development models in which teachers take ownership of their learning by being actively involved in planning and implementing sessions. They highlight the effectiveness of professional development strategies by measuring teacher behavior in the classroom and student learning outcomes. They also suggest professional development, which is embedded in the school day, sustained for several years, and focused on curriculum implementation with consistent connections to instructional strategies to gain positive student learning outcomes (Desimone, 2009; Kervin, 2007; King, 2014; Webster-Wright, 2009).
Further, research suggests adult learners need to have new learning situated in the context and connected to previous learning (Knowles, 1990; Taylor, 2008; Trotter, 2006). Finally, active reflection must be included in meaningful professional development models (Knowles, 1990; Taylor, 2008; Trotter, 2006).

When considering professional development for educators, research indicates adult learning theories should be considered. Studies discussing the effectiveness of professional development methods (e.g., De Neve & Devos, 2017; Fine and Kossack, 2002; Koc, Peker, & Osmanoglu, 2009; Nagro & Cornelius, 2013; Snoeyink, 2010; Soini, Pietarinen, & Pyhältö, 2016; Vernon-Feagans, Kainz, Amendum, Ginsberg, Wood, & Bock, 2012) include:

(a) teacher coaching,

(b) professional learning communities (PLCs),

(c) video analysis, and

(d) experimenting hands-on with teaching methods.

Coaching, which includes gaining knowledge of teaching strategies, opportunity to apply the strategies, and self-reflection upon implementation of the strategies has been shown to be effective for improving student outcomes (Fine & Kossack, 2002; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2012). PLCs can enhance beginning teachers’ professional learning (De Neve & Devos, 2017). Video analysis is effective when teachers are video-recorded while teaching, the video is viewed to reflect or analyze, and teachers make changes in their instruction to enhance student learning (Nagro & Cornelius, 2013). A number of studies have reported that video-based teacher professional development is beneficial (Koc et al., 2010). Finally, professional learning in which teachers are able to develop skills and knowledge in contextually based situations is suggested within the literature. Research on in-service teacher learning show teachers learn by
experimenting with teaching methods, by doing and reflecting on their experiences, both individually and with colleagues (Soini et al., 2016).

**Adult Learning Theory**

In considering professional development for teachers, there is no single theory of learning that can be applied to all adults. Three major adult learning theories are applicable to on-going professional development include (a) andragogy, (b) self-directed learning, and (c) transformational learning.

Andragogy, or the art and science of helping adults learn, assumes adult learners (a) move from dependency to increasing self-directedness as they mature and can direct their own learning, (b) draw on their life experiences to aid learning, (c) are ready to learn when they assume new social or life roles, (d) are problem-centered and want to apply new learning immediately, and (e) are motivated to learn by internal, rather than external factors.

A second adult learning theory is self-directed learning (SDL). SDL is a process in which individuals independently take initiative carrying out, and evaluating their own learning experiences (Knowles, 1975). SDL is an informal process that primarily takes place outside the classroom. What qualifies learning as “self-directed” is who (the learner) makes decisions about content, methods, resources, and evaluation of the learning. Individuals take responsibility for their own learning process by determining their needs, setting goals, identifying resources, implementing a plan to meet their goals, and evaluating the outcomes.

A final adult learning theory discussed in the literature is Transformative Learning (TL). TL is often described as learning that changes the way individuals think about themselves and their world and involves a shift of consciousness. Mezirow (2000), explains TL as a rational process. As individuals reflect on and discuss their assumptions about the world, they often
experience a shift in their frame of reference or world view. For this to happen, individuals engaging in reflective discourse need to challenge each other’s assumptions and encourage group members to consider various perspectives. It is essential that participants engaging in reflective discourse have complete and accurate information about the topic for discussion, be free from bias, and meet in an environment of acceptance, empathy, and trust.

**Professional Learning Communities**

The professional learning community (PLC) framework shows clear agreement on the philosophy and structure in place for successful professional development (Blankstein, 2013; DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008; Hord, 2008). Ideally the structure of a PLC is a small group of teachers with a common student outcome or content focus, that come together to form a collegial action research-orientated group, focused on improving outcomes for students (DuFour et al., 2008). Key components needed for successful implementation of PLCs include:

(a) shared beliefs, values and mission,

(b) shared and supported leadership,

(c) supportive conditions,

(d) caring and respect among members, and

(e) collective learning with intentional sustained focus on student needs

More recently, Blankstein (2013), expanded on these core elements to include the importance of promoting culture within and outside school, gaining active engagement from families and community, and building sustainable leadership. This type of professional development is aligned to transformational learning theory in that teachers are empowered to take ownership to identify and solve problems to impact their teaching and outcomes for their
students (Knowles, 1990; Taylor, 2008; Trotter, 2006). As Blankstein (2013) points out, leadership is important for supporting professional learning communities.

A professional learning community is a group of educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators (DuFour, 2004). Research suggests PLCs can increase student learning and reduce achievement gaps (Woodland, 2016). They also can create a culture of collaborative inquiry and improvement, expand leadership capacity, and increase teacher effectiveness and satisfaction (Hord & Hirsh, 2009; Woodland, 2016). PLCs can realize their potential if they apply the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to succeed together.

Key conditions for optimizing success include:

(a) active leadership,

(b) teacher commitment,

(c) trust between teachers and leaders as well as trust amongst teachers,

(d) protected collaborative time,

(e) time to learn, and

(f) some structure specifying roles, agendas, and notes (DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, 2008).

The professional learning community model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure they learn (DuFour, 2004). As the school moves forward, every professional in the building must
engage with colleagues in the ongoing exploration of four crucial questions that drive the work of those within a professional learning community (DuFour, 2004):

(a) What do we want each student to learn?

(b) How will we know when each student has learned it?

(c) How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

(d) How can we enrich and extend their learning when they already know it?

Teacher Coaching

Coaching is a key job-embedded professional learning strategy grounded in day-to-day teaching practice, addressing immediate problems of practice, and targeting instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning (Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, & Killion, 2010). Further, coaching is an essential feature of professional development training that facilitates teachers’ ability to translate knowledge and skills into actual classroom practice (Kraft, Blazar, Hogan, 2016). Kraft., et al. (2016) described the coaching process as discussions with teachers about classroom practice in a way that it:

(a) Individualizes: Coaching sessions are one-on-one,

(b) Is intensive: Coaches and teachers interact at least every couple of weeks,

(c) Sustains: Teachers receive coaching over extended periods of time,

(d) Is context-specific: Teachers are coached on the practices within the context of their own classroom.

Coaching can be described as any approach in which coaches or peers observe teaching instruction and provide feedback to help teachers improve. It is important to note a distinction between coaching and other professional development strategies that might be more short-term and generalized. Coaching is often one element of a larger professional learning strategy.
Researchers note the need for teacher professional development is growing as states adopt new content standards, requiring teachers to integrate higher-order thinking skills and social-emotional learning into their curriculum and instruction to meet demands for increased student achievement (Croft et al., 2010; Kraft et al., 2016). Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning indicates coaching impacts teacher knowledge and behavior, which in turn impacts students’ academic and social and emotional outcomes (Learning Forward, 2011). Best practices for coaching include:

(a) Cognitive coaching-Pairing coaching with group training or masters’ level courses with the aim of building content knowledge along with or before coaching (Fine & Kossack, 2002; Kraft et al., 2016; Vernon-Feagans et al., 2010, 2012, 2013, 2015).

(b) Quality over quantity-The number of hours of coaching represented in the literature varied from 10-60 hours per year. Therefore, there is no clear evidence that more hours of coaching were associated with larger impacts. However, the quality and focus of the coaching may be more important than the actual number of contact hours (Croft et al., 2010).

(c) Small coaching programs-Programs with lower coach to teacher ratios demonstrated better student outcomes (Croft et al., 2010).

(d) Involving multiple types of coaches-Multiple people can provide coaching, including administrators, master teachers, external experts, and others (Kraft et al., 2016).

Research on coaching indicates both general and content-specific coaching have a positive and significant effect on student achievement (Kraft et al., 2016). The effects of coaching are greater than previous studies of other school-based improvement strategies, including teacher preservice training, merit-based pay, and extended learning time for students. Coaching either
alone or in conjunction with other forms of professional learning, has a significant effect on teaching practice and student achievement. When designing, planning, implementing, and evaluating coaching programs, Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning (2011) provide guidance.

**Video Analysis**

Video analysis is commonly included in teacher development targeting both teacher thinking, and teacher practice, intended to improve learning opportunities for students (Nagro & Cornelius, 2013). Positive research findings support video analysis as a teacher development tool. While the term for video analysis has changed overtime, it can essentially be explained in three steps: First, a teacher is videotaped while teaching; next, the teacher watches the video to reflect on and analyze what occurred; and last, the teacher makes changes that promote student learning.

Consistent findings suggest video analysis can lead to greater self-evaluation accuracy (Sharpe, Spies, Newman, & Spickelmier-Vallin, 1996), improved reflection techniques (Harford & MacRuairc, 2008; Stockero, 2008), and better practices in the classroom (Fukkink & Tavecchio, 2010). Teachers who participated in video analysis expressed support because they gained a deeper appreciation for their specific students’ educational needs (Borko, Jacobs, Eiteljorg, & Pittman 2008), a greater sense of ownership and empowerment (Wright, 2010), and felt the process was dynamic and authentic (Beck, King, & Marshall, 2002). Tripp and Rich (2012) used qualitative research methods to better understand the ways in which video analysis helped teachers change their teaching practices and concluded: (a) teachers focused on key aspects of their practice, (b) gained new perspectives, (c) trusted the feedback they received, (d) felt accountable, (e) remembered changes to implement, and (f) saw their own progress.
Video analysis can be used to address both internal changes in teacher reflection and external changes in teacher practice. Researchers have demonstrated positive internal changes in teacher thinking, questioning, perceptions, and reflections, which became more accurate and more thorough as a result of participating in video analysis (Ellett & Smith, 1975; Saunders, Nielson, Gall, & Smith, 1975; van Es & Sherin, 2010). External changes demonstrated through research have included improved teacher-student interactions (Fukkink & Tavecchio, 2010; Pianta, Mashburn, Downer, Hamre, & Justice, 2008) and increased implementation of desired teacher behaviors such as positive reinforcement (Sharpe et al., 1996), checking for comprehension (Peterson, 1973), and soliciting higher level student thinking (van Es & Sherin, 2010).

**Experimenting, Doing, and Reflecting**

In addition to formal professional development programs, teachers can also learn without any organized structure within the everyday practices of their work (Kwakman, 2003; Lohman, 2006; Lohman and Woolf, 2001). The classroom provides a primary arena for teacher learning (Sykes and Darling-Hammond, 1999; Van Eekelen, Vermunt, and Boshuizen, 2006). However, teachers’ active efforts to learn within the classroom cannot be taken for granted (Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Teacher learning and student learning are tightly intertwined in many ways (Sykes & Darling-Hammond, 1999). Teachers may provide more efficient classroom learning environment for their students by acting as examples of proficient learners, however they have to learn how to learn first (Bruce, Esmonde, Ross, Dookie, & Beatty, 2010; Hagger, Burn, Mutton, & Brindley, 2008). There are, for instance, indications that pre-service teachers who have no experience in collaborative learning strategies, such as seeking and giving support, are less likely to promote
these skills in students (Edwards, 2007; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011). The classroom provides a central context for teacher learning at work (Korthagen, 2010; Lohman and Woolf 2001; Van Eekelen et al., 2006). However, teachers’ workplace learning is often considered to be incidental, unplanned and reactive (Eraut, 2004; Kwakman, 2003). Moreover, teacher learning is not only about transforming practices and adopting new ideas, it may also strengthen existing beliefs and tacit knowledge that may be more or less functional (Cranton and King, 2003; van Driel, Beijaard, and Verloop, 2001; Toom, 2006). Teachers can, however, learn to carry out intentional and active learning in the classroom (Hoekstra, Korthagen, Brekelmans, Beijaard, & Imants, 2009; Kwakman, 2003; Meirink, Meijer, and Verloop, 2007).

Research on in-service teacher learning shows teachers learn by experimenting with teaching methods, by doing and by reflecting on their experiences, both individually and with colleagues (Hoekstra, Beijaard, Brekelmans, & Korthagen, 2007; Lairiala, 1998; Meirink, Meijer, and Verloop, 2007; Meirink, Meijer, and Verloop, 2009). Furthermore, reflection in action has been reported to be one of the main strategies for in-service teacher learning (Brookfield, 1995; Lohman and Woolf, 2001). However, there is evidence that to be effective, reflection should be accompanied by other learning strategies, such as updating theoretical knowledge and collaboration (Timperley et al., 2007; de Vries, Jansen, and van de Grift, 2013). Accordingly, mere reflection does not guarantee change in either teacher action or beliefs or transfer of insights between working contexts (Akkerman and Bakker, 2011).

**Professional Development Evaluation**

Little literature surrounding the evaluation of professional development exists (Baird & Clark, 2018). Pedder and Opfer (2010), explain assessments of professional development activities are infrequent and rarely published. Additionally, little is known about the impact of
professional development on student outcomes because the effect of professional development on students is rarely evaluated (Allen & Nimon, 2007; Guskey, 2002).

**Effective Professional Development Evaluation Models**

Guskey’s (2005) framework provides a simplified practitioner-minded model grounded in systems thinking, measuring participation reaction through organizational support and student outcomes. Other frameworks worthy of consideration include Desimone (2009) and King (2014). In seeking to evaluate effective professional development changing teacher beliefs, instructional practice, and student outcomes, there is a need to include all levels of Guskey’s (2005) framework, consider the organization as a system, and recognize that teachers are learners too. Desimone (2009) and King (2014) speak to this as well. While the Desimone (2009) and King (2014) frameworks are grounded in systems thinking, they are more complex in their levels of evaluation. Therefore, in some cases, these models would be too exhaustive for a district to implement without support from outside consultants (Baird & Clark, 2018). Nonetheless, each of these frameworks are explicit about the complexity of multiple components of adult learning throughout the organizational system and how the components all work together.

In recent years, the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT; 2016) introduced a six-level model of evaluating professional development and technical assistance that has been adopted by state special education agencies in many U.S. states and territories, built from the previous NTACT evaluation model. This model is grounded in Guskey’s (2000) five-level model for evaluating professional development, Fetterman’s (2001) model of empowerment evaluation, and Patton’s (2008) model of utilization-focused evaluation. Their model adds a sixth level to determine how professionals are using their evaluation results to make program improvements.
Guskey’s Five Level Evaluation Model

Research, summarized in Table 3, highlights effective professional learning evaluation. The literature shows that evaluation requires consideration of five critical stages or levels of information (Guskey, 2000, 2002a, 2002b, 2005, 2016). Each level of evaluation contains its’ own focus, considers specific people and documents in evaluation, and can use specific types of data collection. The first level of evaluation assesses participants’ reactions to the professional learning experience. Level two focuses on measuring the new knowledge, skills, and perhaps attitudes or dispositions that participants gain. Level three examines the organizational characteristics and attributes necessary for success. At level four, the primary question is: Did the new knowledge and skills that participants learned make a difference in their professional practice? Gathering relevant data at this level of evaluation rests in specifying clear indicators of both the degree and quality of implementation. Guskey (2002b) notes that enough time must pass to allow participants to adapt the new ideas and practices to their settings. Because implementation is often a gradual and uneven process, evaluators may need to gather measures of progress at several time intervals. Finally, level five evaluation addresses the bottom line in education: What was the impact on students? The particular student learning outcomes of interest will depend, of course, on the goals of that specific professional learning endeavor.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Evaluation Focus</th>
<th>People/Items Assessed</th>
<th>Type of Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Participant reactions to professional development experience</td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>Questionnaires Online surveys</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 4 - Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>New knowledge, skills, or attitudes of participants</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Oral personal reflections</th>
<th>Written personal reflections</th>
<th>Portfolios</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational characteristics necessary for success</td>
<td>Participants, Leaders, Documents</td>
<td>Analyzing school records</td>
<td>Examining minutes from follow-up meetings</td>
<td>Questionnaires focused on original efforts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact on professional practice</td>
<td>Participants, Leaders, Documents</td>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>Structured interviews with participants and leaders</td>
<td>Direct observations by trained observers or digital recordings (Data is collected at intervals over time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>Impact on students</td>
<td>Participants, Leaders, Documents, Students</td>
<td>Dependent on goal of professional development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**National Technical Assistance Center on Transition Evaluation Model**

NTACT reminds professional development evaluators and educators valuable reasons why evaluation is important. They highlight the passage of several important legislative acts within the field of special education that have been assigned with the tasks of evaluating both the in-school and post-school outcomes of students with disabilities, as well as the special education programs that serve them (NTACT; 2016). Further, NTACT explains that evaluation of services is multi-faceted, multi-leveled, and includes multiple stakeholders. They promote fully investigating the phenomena of successful capacity building and program improvement through a rigorous and systematic process through a multi-level model of evaluation. They have found that teams most successful in applying data-based decision-making for program improvement
apply the NTACT model. This model focuses on six levels of assessment that represent both formative and summative evaluation.

Similar to Guskey’s model, the first level evaluates the participant’s reactions to professional development, technical assistance, or coaching. The focus at this level of evaluation is content, delivery, and context. This very basic level of evaluation data is easy to gather through surveys or checklists using Likert-like questions, and in some cases, open-ended questions to gather participant demographics and perceptions. The second level focuses on participant learning and provides a means to measure “the relationship between what was intended and what was achieved” (Guskey, 2000, p. 122). Level three shifts its focus from participants to the organization. Once participants are given learning opportunities, it is critical the organization has the right policies and procedures in place and is ready to support that learning and change if needed. At the fourth level, they evaluate the fidelity to which participants are implementing their new knowledge and skills. Evaluation at this level is a foundational cornerstone of understanding outcomes. Level five addresses short-term, in-school and long-term, post-school student outcomes. Level six examines (a) the dissemination of evaluation findings and (b) the extent to which findings are used to improve transition education and services.

**Summary of the Literature**

In summary, public schools play an important role in American society. Key players in our educational system can turn to education research for determining best practices in educating all children. The literature highlights administrators and teachers as playing a central role in improving student achievement and overall school effectiveness through various avenues including participation in meaningful professional development. There are clear and continuous
gaps between general education and special education academic achievement and graduation, which indicates special education teachers have unmet instructional needs.

Research literature points to several known areas of need for new special education teachers in which administrators should be aware of when considering professional development topics. The identified needs include (a) understanding legal responsibilities, (b) developing IEPs, (c) aligning goals, teaching, and assessing to Common Core State Standards, (d) implementing and supporting a guaranteed and viable curriculum, (e) selecting and applying evidence-based academic interventions, (f) implementing a multi-tiered system of support through data-based decision-making, and (g) acquiring classroom and behavior management skills. Additionally, administrators must be familiar and ready to support new special educators in implementing federal laws and regulations such as ESSA, ADA, and IDEA. State laws, policy, and guidance documents should also be looked to in when administrators work to support new special education teachers. Professional organizations put forth standards and supporting documents which can be used in designing professional development as well.

The literature indicates practical reasons for exploring and evaluating professional development methods. A great deal of teacher time and education dollars are spent on professional development. Administrators can look to effective professional development methods such as participation in professional learning communities, teacher coaching, video analysis, and experimenting, doing, and reflecting to support new special education teachers. Administrators must consider adult learning theory as they make decisions surrounding professional development. Finally, there is little literature surrounding the evaluation of professional development. However, administrators can look to models from Guskey and
NTACT to evaluate professional development opportunities offered to new special education teachers.

In this mixed methods study, the decision-making process regarding four key aspects of professional development will be explored: (a) assessment of teacher understanding, (b) governing body policies and guidelines, (c) implementation of professional development, and (d) evaluation of professional development. District administrators will be surveyed to identify quantitative data that highlights current practices and trends. The lived-experiences of five district administrators, responsible for professional development while working in one of the top 25 school districts in Michigan will be studied to gain insight into how teacher needs are assessed in accordance with governing body guidelines and identifying gaps in teacher knowledge. The decision-making regarding professional development methods that administrators use will be examined. Finally, how administrators make decisions in evaluating district professional development opportunities will be explored. Looking closely at how administrators take key resources from the literature and make decisions for professional development opportunities to support new special education teachers will add to the current research literature.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Methodology Rationale

It was essential to position this study of district administrators within the context of mixed methods research. Convergent mixed methods are a form of mixed methods design in which the researcher converges or merges quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this design, the researcher collects both forms of data at roughly the same time and then integrates the information in the interpretation of the overall results. Contradictions or incongruent findings are explained or further probed in this design. When a researcher wants to both generalize the findings of a population as well as develop a detailed view of the meaning of a phenomenon or concept for individuals, a mixed methods design is most appropriate.

Quantitative Survey Research

Certain types of social research problems call for specific approaches (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For example, when the problem calls for the identification of factors that influence an outcome, quantitative research is appropriate. Survey research provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It is an efficient method for systematically collecting data from a broad spectrum of individuals and educational settings. Survey research uses questionnaires for data collection with the intent of generalizing from a sample to a population (Fowler, 2008).
Qualitative Case Study

As Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest, qualitative research is appropriate for research questions and purposes in which the lived experiences of individuals are explored. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlight that engaging in qualitative research in a naturalistic setting with evolving and emergent design, in which the researcher acts as the primary instrument of investigation, can help discover how district administrators make decisions. Conversely, they explain that quantitative research relies on experimental study to achieve prediction, control, and hypothesis testing. Because this research has focused on understanding a decision-making process, not predicting or controlling a process, quantitative research alone does not suit this study. However, investigating the cases in a systematic manner was still important (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The qualitative research process cannot and should not control or manipulate what is being studied. Instead, a discovery-oriented process in which findings were not predetermined was appropriate.

Because this study aimed to provide in-depth understanding of how district administrators make decisions regarding professional development for new special education teachers, the most appropriate qualitative approach to implement was a case study. Merriam and Tisdell, 2016, state that “a case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 97).

Yin (1994) defines a case study as, " ... an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 16). In applying Yin’s (1994) definition, three main components appropriately aligned with this study. First, this study investigated a phenomenon through an in-depth process. Second, this study focused on
administrators as they make professional development decisions in their real-life contexts. Third, the phenomenon and context in this study were not clearly evident. Further, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) point out that other types of qualitative research are defined by the focus of the study, not the unit of analysis. They explain that it is the unit of analysis—the bounded system—that defines the case, which suited this research project.

**Mixed Methods Research**

Therefore, mixed methods research was used in order to build concepts and hypotheses through what was inductively learned in the field (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, understanding how administrators interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlight, aligned with the characteristics of qualitative research. Through the use of interviews and documents, this work brought to surface the essence of a lived experience. A rich description of the research process and findings was then written. In conducting the qualitative research phase, this study aimed to explore, explain, and understand the phenomena of district administrators’ decision-making process.

**Population, Sampling, Participants, Access, and Site Selection**

**Population**

While this study explored decision-making of district administrators, it is acknowledged that the roles of administrators working within districts vary greatly. The population for this study was educational administrators who work within a school district. Specifically, the district administrators responsible for the planning, implementing, and/or evaluating professional development for new special education teachers.
Sampling Strategy and Numbers

The sample selection in this case study was nonrandom, purposeful, and small (Merriam & Tisdell 2016). Criterion sampling, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), was used by deciding crucial attributes, then finding people or sites that met those criteria. The selection criteria for this study was narrowed to include district administrators that play a role in making decisions regarding professional development for new special education teachers. Those who met the selection criteria were entered into the sample.

Recruiting subjects took place by first identifying Michigan’s top 25 school districts as reported by Niche. Niche is a private company that rigorously cleans and analyzes large data sets and combines comprehensive report cards, rankings, and reviews with community feedback to create annual rankings that highlight the best schools and districts. Within the top 25 school districts, district administrators who play a role in professional development decision-making were selected and invited to participate in an online survey. Purposive sampling was conducted to select five district administrators to participate in interviews who indicated interest through the online survey.

Subject Recruitment

During the 2019-2020 academic year, Sarah Bacalia, student investigator and Dr. Elizabeth Whitten, primary investigator sent an email to potential gatekeepers and candidates which explained the purpose of the study and offered them the opportunity to participate. The invitation emphasized that responses to survey and interview questions were confidential and participation in the study was voluntary. Anonymous online survey consent forms were presented via email along with the online survey. Participants were also invited to participate in
an interview and would be provided an opportunity to volunteer and share their contact information with researchers.

When administrators participated in the interview, the researcher reviewed the informed consent form with them, emphasizing that participation was voluntary, and that the participant could terminate the interview at any time. The researcher gained administrators’ signatures on the informed consent form if they were willing to continue. The interviewer typed transcripts of the interviews and conducted random member checks. The interviewees were able to decide if they want to add information or clarify responses.

**Data Collection**

**Collecting Data**

For this study, the population was educational administrators who work within a school district. The population also plays a role in professional development decision-making. Specifically, the education administrators play a role in the planning, implementing, or evaluating professional development for new special education teachers. Therefore, the population represented in this study are district educational administrators who play a role in professional development decision-making. Criterion sampling, as described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), was used by deciding crucial attributes, then finding people or sites meeting those criteria. The selection criteria for this study was narrowed to include district administrators who play a role in making decisions regarding professional development for new special education teachers. Those who meet the selection criteria were entered into the sample. The study was further limited to administrators who work within Michigan’s top 25 school districts as defined by Niche. These individuals were contacted and selected out of familiarity and convenience through what Creswell and Poth (2018) discuss as gatekeepers who help gain the confidence of
the participants. Some were also contacted via email or personal phone calls. Data was collected using online surveys, interviews, and document analysis.

**Online Survey Data Collection**

The online survey was created and shared through Qualtrics (see Appendix C for survey questions). After participant agreement was indicated, the online survey was provided for participants. The time and location of survey completion suited the comfort and convenience of the interviewees. The participants answered survey questions regarding their demographics, district demographics, their role within their district regarding professional development of new special education teachers, professional development planning, professional development implementation, and professional development evaluation.

**Interview Data Collection**

Face-to-face interviews with five administrators included in the sample population were conducted, either in person or through Zoom. Interviews suited the comfort and convenience of the interviewees. An email was sent about a week before the scheduled interview with an informed consent, one-page reference about the study and the research questions, and link to the Zoom meeting. A couple of days before the interview, the interview questions and the Zoom meeting link were emailed to interviewees. A phone, as well as Zoom, was used to audio record the interviews and equipment was checked before each interview. The researcher kept track of time and worked to limit the interviews to no more than 90 minutes to respect the interviewees time. All interviews in this study lasted 20-45 minutes. Descriptive questions were used initially in the interviews. The interview started with the easiest, least threatening questions and built up to more sensitive questions. Interviews followed Patton’s (2015) suggestion of including questions that ask about participant experience and behavior, opinions and values, feelings,
knowledge, senses, and background or demographic. A semi-structured interview protocol was used (see Appendix B). Interviews were transcribed verbatim using Otter and memos were written after each interview. Additionally, the researcher reflected on the interviews over the course of the study to determine or make sure that, as Guest and colleagues (2012) state, the right questions were asked in the right way.

**Document Data Collection**

Document analysis of written and digital materials relevant to the study were examined. Coding and theming documents took place and memos were written after each document was analyzed. Triangulation by using multiple sources of data and multiple data collection methods supported the ability to confirm emerging findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

**Trustworthiness in Collecting Data**

In regard to trustworthiness, Merriam and Tisdell (2016), discuss advantages of the human instrument in qualitative research. They highlight that people are able to immediately respond and adapt, understand nonverbal as well as verbal communication, process information immediately, clarify and summarize material, check with respondents, and explore unusual or unintuitive responses. However, the human instrument has shortcomings and biases that can have an impact on the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Rather than trying to eliminate these biases, it was important to identify, monitor, and make clear how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data. This study used three main trustworthiness strategies during data collection to monitor and strengthen the trustworthiness of this research.

First, an audit trail was used throughout the study to strengthen confirmability and make it possible to track the logic that was used to interpret collected data (Martins, 2015). This is a detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study.
(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It includes a description of processes that explain how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Further, Mertens (2015) discusses a case study protocol that details each step in the research process as a strategy to strengthen the dependability of a study. Therefore, keeping an audit trail allowed the researcher to document specific components of data collection methods. For example, the researcher recorded and reflected on how participants were selected, how interview questions were perceived, and reflected on the interview process for each participant. Finally, an audit trail allowed the researcher to document the relevance of the documents selected for analysis as well as describe the documents themselves.

Second, member checks were conducted to strengthen the credibility of this research. Member checks involved checking with stakeholders in the research to seek verification with the respondent groups about the constructions that were developing as a result of data being collected and analyzed (Mertens, 2015). Member checks in this study occurred in both formal and informal ways. Opportunities were provided for participants to review and confirm the accuracy of interview transcripts.

Finally, triangulating data collection strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of this study. Triangulation means using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, triangulation occurs when researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, or theories to provide corroborating evidence for validating the accuracy of their study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Documented data triangulation strengthens credibility and trustworthiness.
Instrumentation

Three main data collection methods were employed in this study (a) surveys, (b) interviews, and (c) document analysis. Surveys were conducted in order to quantitatively analyze patterns and themes found within district administrators from Michigan’s top 25 school districts. Surveys were administered using a Qualtrics surveys that was emailed to potential participants. Throughout the development and testing of the survey, feedback from other researchers and leaders in the field of special education was gathered and applied to maximize usability. Survey results were used to make generalizations about the population and allow the researcher to make inferences about the opinions of professional development leaders within Michigan’s top 25 school districts.

Additionally, interviews were conducted with five district administrators within the survey sample population. The researcher then reflected on the interviews over the course of the study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlight that interviewing is a collection strategy designed to gather data that specifically address the research questions. This concept focused the interview questions in this study. Further, they encourage person-to-person interviews in which one person elicits information from another or interviews in which two people have a "conversation with a purpose" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 108). A semi-structured interview guide included a mix of more and less structured questions that reflect the research questions. Questions, however, required specific data from all respondents. The researcher used an interview guide in which a list of questions and issues was referred to. The researcher scripted interview wording and order, but as the primary instrument of collection, it was important that the researcher be granted some freedom within the interview setting. For example, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) express, researchers must “expand their understanding through nonverbal as well as verbal
communication, process information immediately, clarify and summarize material, check with respondents, and explore unusual or unintuitive participant responses” (p. 16). The researcher audio recorded and transcribed the interview data verbatim, as well as took notes during the interview.

Guest and colleagues (2012) provide a list of key concepts for collecting in-depth interviews. First, the researcher demonstrated strong skills in establishing rapport. The interviews suited the comfort and convenience of the interviewees. The researcher used a phone as well as Zoom to audio and video record the interviews. Equipment was checked before each interview. The researcher kept track of time and worked to limit the interview to no more than 90-minute sessions to respect the interviewees time. Descriptive questions were used initially in the interviews. The researcher started with easiest, least threatening questions and built up to more sensitive questions. Interviews followed what Patton (2015) suggests by including questions that ask about participant experience and behavior, opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, senses, and background or demographic. Guiding the conversation while appropriately probing was the researcher’s aim.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlight that interviewing is a data collection strategy designed to gather data that specifically address the research questions. This concept helped focus the interview questions in this study. A semi-structured interview guide included a mix of more and less structured questions that reflected the research questions. Questions, however, required specific data from the interviewee. An interview guide in which a list of questions and issues to be explored was referred to. Wording was scripted and ordered, but as the primary instrument of collection, it was important that I granted myself some freedom within the interview setting. For example, as Merriam and Tisdell (2016) express, I needed to “expand my
understanding through nonverbal as well as verbal communication, process information immediately, clarify and summarize material, check with respondents, and explore unusual or unintuitive participant responses” (p. 16). I audio recorded and transcribed the interview data verbatim, as well as took notes during the interview.

Guest et al. (2012) provide a list of key concepts for conducting in-depth interviews that I referred to when conducting interviews. I demonstrated strong skills in establishing rapport. The interview suited the comfort and convenience of the interviewee. I used my phone and Zoom to audio record the interview and I was sure to check my equipment beforehand. I kept track of time and limited the interview to a 90-minute session to respect the interviewee’s time.

Finally, document analysis of written and digital materials relevant to the study was examined. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that document is an umbrella term to refer to a wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study. In considering what documents to analyze, the researcher ensured the documents aligned with the research questions. Memo-ing as discussed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), in which the researcher writes down ideas as data are collected, took place. In these memos, researcher ideas worked to formulate the process that was seen and to sketch out the flow of the process. Document analysis was then conducted on specific district and state documents that align with the research questions. Triangulation by using multiple sources of data and multiple data collection methods supported the ability to confirm emerging findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that document is an umbrella term to refer to a wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study. Bowen (2009) further explains that the qualitative researcher is expected to draw upon multiple (at least two) sources of evidence; that is, to seek convergence and corroboration through the use of different data
sources and methods. Memo-ing as discussed by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), in which the researcher writes down ideas as data are collected, was a strategy used in this research. In these memos, ideas attempted to formulate the process that the researcher saw and to sketch out the flow of this process. Document analysis was conducted on Michigan Compiled Law excerpts (MCL 380.1527, MCL 380.1526, and MCL 380.1249), Michigan Department of Education (MDE) Professional Learning Policy, MDE Progressing to the Professional Teaching Certificate (How to Page), MDE Successful Teaching (How to Page), MDE Professional Development for New Teachers (How to Page), District Annual Education Reports, District Improvement Plans, District Professional Development Plan, Graduate Skills and Attributes Document, Key Components of Classroom Environment Document, Mission and Vision Document, Collective Bargaining Agreement, and Teacher Evaluation Procedures.

In considering what documents to analyze, I ensured that the documents aligned with the research questions. It was also important to remember that the process of collecting data from documents is similar to an interview, but in this case, the interviewee is the document (Whitt, 1992). Questions that I posed to the documents included (Fetterman, 1989; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Whitt & Kuh, 1991):

- What is the title of the document?
- For what purpose and by whom was it produced?
- What information does the document contain?
- What themes or patterns (relevant to the research questions) can be gleaned from that information?
- What is the significance of the document for the study?
- What further questions does the document generate?
• In what ways is the document consistent or inconsistent with other sources of information about the setting?

**Location of Data Collection**

Data collection took place through an online survey as well as through face-to-face interviews either in person or via Zoom. Survey data was completed in a location that suited the comfort and convenience of the interviewees. Interview locations also suited the comfort and convenience of the interviewees. Interviews were conducted in a quiet, distraction free, professional environment such as a conference room within the interviewees’ districts.

**Timeline**

Data collection took place through the fall and early winter of 2019. Data collection began with reaching out to district superintendents to determine which administrators best fit the sampling criteria. District administrators responsible for professional development were then contacted and provided a link to the online survey. District administrators who volunteered to be interviewed as well as administrators who the researcher invited, participated in face-to-face interviews. Administrators were asked to share documents that were referenced in the interviews or documents that provide guidance to them in their decision-making. The researcher then selected the documents for analysis. The dates and order of these events are presented below in Table 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 2019</td>
<td>Contact Superintendents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September 2019</td>
<td>Contact and Survey District Administrators Responsible for Professional Development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey Analysis

Descriptive survey data was determined and reported. The researcher coded open ended survey questions. The results were compared. Points of convergence and divergence were identified. The points of convergence were treated as indications of validity. Points of divergence were considered threats to the validity of both quantitative and qualitative data sets. The researcher worked to provide potential explanations for points of divergence.

Interview Analysis

After transcribing the audio recorded participant interviews verbatim, the researcher used software (NVIVO) to implement In Vivo Coding along with Process and Simultaneous Coding. In Vivo Coding has also been labeled “literal coding,” “verbatim coding,” “inductive coding,” and “natural coding” (Saldaña, 2013). In this coding process, codes are words or short phrases from the actual language found in the qualitative data record, “the terms used by [participants] themselves” (Strauss, 1987, p. 33). In Vivo Coding is particularly appropriate for studies in which a researcher wants to prioritize and honor the participant’s voice but can also be used with other coding methods (Saldaña, 2013). The researcher maintained a list of codes created along with their definitions or descriptions (Saldaña, 2013). Before moving on to the second cycle of coding, the researcher wrote memos to reflect upon each datum by responding to the following prompts: (a) What surprised me? (to track assumptions), (b) What intrigued me? (to track
positionality), and (c) What disturbed me? (to track the tensions within researcher values, attitudes, and belief systems).

After first cycle coding, two transitional processes were conducted. First, the researcher themed the process codes into longer-phrased themes. Saldaña (2013) refers to this as theming the data. He explains that theming allows researchers to draw out the essence of codes by elaborating on their meaning. He recommends adding the verbs “is” or “means” after the phenomenon under investigation. Second, “shop-talking” through this study helped the researcher verbally articulate “what’s going on” with the data and analysis (Saldaña, 2013). The researcher then began the second cycle of coding.

The primary goal of second cycle coding was to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, and conceptual organization from the first cycle codes. First cycle codes were reorganized and reconfigured to develop a smaller and more select list of broader categories, themes, concepts, and/or assertions (Saldaña, 2013). Pattern Coding was used as the second cycle method. Pattern Coding is a way of grouping summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts (Saldaña 2013). Pattern Codes are explanatory or inferential codes that identify an emergent theme. They pull together a lot of material from first cycle coding into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

After second cycle coding, strategies for focusing, theorizing, ordering, and writing up the data in this study were applied. To focus the data, the researcher extracted the most meaningful quotes and passages from the interview transcripts and memos (Saldaña, 2013). Next, the researcher themed the data. A theme is an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means (Saldaña, 2013). Rubin and Rubin (2012) explain that themes are statements that summarize what is going on, explain what is happening,
or suggest why something is done the way it is. Through this process, the researcher aimed to capture the district administration decision-making phenomenon (van Manen, 1990).

Data analysis for this study was done manually and through NVIVO software. Basit (2003) compared personal experiences between manual and electronic coding and concluded that, “the choice will be dependent on the size of the project, the funds and time available, and the inclination and expertise of the researcher” (p. 143). Due to the small sample population, the researcher self-transcribed using Otter and manually coded the collected data using NVIVO.

**Document Analysis**

Selected documents from the state education website as well as from the district websites and administrators were analyzed. A member check with participants and stakeholders regarding appropriate documents to select for analysis was conducted. Simultaneous Coding applies two or more codes within a single datum (Saldaña, 2013). This coding is appropriate as all documents were coded as “GUIDING” documents, meaning many items in the documents provided guidance as well as represented other processes. Additionally, Saldaña (2013), explains that Process Coding is not necessarily a specific method that should be used as the sole coding approach to data, though it can be with small-scale projects. The researcher maintained a list of codes created along with their definitions or descriptions (Saldaña, 2013). Memos reflecting upon each datum were written by responding to the following questions: (a) What surprised me? (to track assumptions), (b) What intrigued me? (to track positionality), and (c) What disturbed me? (to track the tensions within values, attitude, and belief systems).

Next, rephrasing the process codes into longer-phrased themes took place. Saldaña (2013) refers to this as theming the data. He explains that theming allows researchers to draw out
the essence of codes by elaborating on their meaning. He recommends adding the verbs “is” or “means” after the phenomenon under investigation. Second, “shop-talking” through this study helped the researcher verbally articulate “what’s going on” with the data and analysis (Saldaña, 2013). Next, the second cycle of coding began.

After second cycle coding, strategies for focusing, theorizing, ordering, and writing up the data in this study were applied. To focus the data, the researcher extracted the most meaningful quotes and passages from the documents and memos (Saldaña, 2013). Next, the researcher themed the data. Data analysis for this study was done manually using NVIVO software.

Survey, interview, and document analysis data were collected and analyzed separately. The results were then compared for points of convergence and divergence. The points of convergence were treated as indications of validity for both data sets. Points of divergence were considered threats to the validity of both quantitative and qualitative data sets.

**Trustworthiness**

In regard to trustworthiness, Merriam and Tisdell (2016), discuss advantages of the human instrument in qualitative research. They highlight people who are able to immediately respond and adapt, understand nonverbal as well as verbal communication, process information immediately, clarify and summarize material, check with respondents, and explore unusual or unintuitive responses. However, the human instrument has shortcomings and biases that can have an impact on the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Rather than trying to eliminate these biases, it is important to identify, monitor, and make clear how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data. This study used three main trustworthiness strategies during data collection and analysis to monitor and strengthen the trustworthiness of this research.
First, an audit trail was used throughout the study to strengthen confirmability and make it possible to track the logic that was used to interpret collected data (Mertens, 2015). This was a detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It included a description of processes that explained how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Mertens (2015) explains using a case study protocol that details each step in the research process as a strategy to strengthen the dependability of a study. Richards (2015) advises researchers to record and reflect on experiences, which was done multiple times throughout data collection and analysis. Therefore, keeping an audit trail allowed me to document specific components of data collection methods and record meaning and patterns often (Stake, 1995). For example, I recorded and reflected on how participants were selected, how interview questions were perceived, the interview process for the participants, and what patterns emerged throughout the interviews that also surfaced in document analysis and survey responses.

Second, member checks were conducted to strengthen the credibility of this research. Member checks involved checking with stakeholders in the research to seek verification with the respondents about the constructions that were developing as a result of data being collected (Mertens, 2015). Member checks in this study occurred in both formal and informal ways. Throughout the member checking process, members made suggestions as to sources of data (Stake, 1995). My aim was to provide opportunities for participants to review and confirm the accuracy of the interview transcript. In conducting member checks, I considered who to check with, how to check with them, and when to conduct member checks.

Finally, triangulating data collection strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of this study. Triangulation means using multiple sources of data and multiple data collection
methods to confirm emerging findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In data source triangulation, I looked to see if the case remained the same at other times, and other spaces, or as persons interacted differently (Stake, 1995). In other words, triangulation occurred as I made use of multiple and different sources, methods, and theories to provide corroborating evidence for validating the accuracy of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Documentation of data triangulation was presented to strengthen credibility and trustworthiness.

**Researcher Positionality**

As briefly discussed in my conceptual framework, my interest in the phenomenon in this study has been developed through various professional interactions that are rooted in my personal experiences. My professional experience in special education began as an undergraduate student studying special education and working as a paraprofessional in a self-contained special education school. Although I had a great realization of the overwhelming amount of information I needed to learn, professional development was not something that I really understood as a means to continual learning. Later, as a young special education teacher, I was excited to attend professional development meetings because I was ready to learn more about my specific setting and begin working with a specific team of educators. I quickly learned that I had limited options in my professional development experiences as there were predetermined professional development requirements for new special education teachers in my building. I encountered issues of power, as I did not feel I had a say in how I spent my required professional development time. I found some professional development experiences to be very meaningful and applicable, while others left me wondering why I was required to attend particular meetings. Looking back now, I did not give this dynamic much thought because I had
much work to do as a new teacher. I did not think about or question the professional
development experiences assigned to me.

I stepped out of my teaching position for a time to stay home with my children. During
this season, because I missed being in the classroom and I saw many needs in the classrooms in
which my children were students, I volunteered quite a bit of my time. Being in a position of a
parent helper in general and special education classrooms, gave me insight into how teachers
other than myself or the teachers that I had professional relationships with, viewed professional
development. I found myself often working in the classrooms of new teachers and was able to
hear their exhaustion in attending “another meeting.” These new teachers shared some of the
specifics of their mandated new teacher professional development sessions, which sadly,
sounded like they did not fit the new teachers’ needs. So, while these teachers were being sent to
plenty of professional development opportunities, they were still left searching for support in
areas in which they felt they were lacking.

Years later, as I began pursuing a higher degree in special education administration, I
began to think more about the purpose of professional development and how I would like to use
it to meaningfully support teachers and paraprofessionals. Taking graduate courses alongside
educators from different districts allowed me to hear their perspectives on professional
development and learn how other buildings and districts were implementing ongoing teacher
education. During this time, I also worked on a federal educational leadership grant that worked
to establish a leadership pipeline within multiple struggling school districts. Most of the time that
we spent with grant participants was in a professional development setting, outside of their
school day. We were very purposeful to work with participants to support the skills they needed
to reach the goals of the grant. However, this experience prompted me to think more deeply
about other professional development experiences that our participants took part in, how their administrators designed and implemented professional development, and how professional development through their districts as well as through our grant would be evaluated.

Throughout my pursuit of a higher degree, I have participated in multiple internships. Because my focus is on administration, I have had the opportunity to complete an internship with an elementary principal, a director of special education who serves three different school districts, and a professor in special education that oversees undergraduate internships. A reoccurring topic in each of these experiences was professional development and ongoing learning. In these experiences, I felt as if I was looking at professional development through a different lens than I had viewed it as a classroom teacher. Instead of just showing up to an assigned meeting, I was helping run the meetings. I was forced to think about the justification of each professional development experience and feel the weight of using each minute wisely. I also was able to more closely see that developing professional development for a team of educators is not an easy task. While I was working with three different mentors in three different settings, I was able to gain a glimpse of their decision-making processes related to professional development. However, because I was not deeply rooted in any of the settings and the internships were limited to about 15 weeks, I did not fully grasp how decisions were made over time and within an administrative team.

Currently, I am in the final stages of completing my doctoral degree and I will soon be able to apply what I have learned to a special education administration position. Because I am passionate about teacher education and engaging in lifelong learning, I see myself in a position in which I will play a role in an organization’s professional development planning, implementation, and evaluation. I feel that I can read and learn what the literature says about educator standards,
methods of professional development, and evaluation of professional development. However, in order to navigate the responsibility of effectively preparing and providing ongoing support to special educators, taking an in-depth look at how administrators make decisions regarding professional development will not only deepen my understanding, but it shed light on this process for other educational professionals as well.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

This chapter describes the results of a mixed methods study focused on the decision-making process of district administrators regarding professional development for new special education teachers. More specifically, the aim was to gain a deeper understanding to the research questions:

1) **How do district administrators who are responsible for planning professional development determine the professional learning needs of their new special education teachers?**

2) **How do district administrators who are responsible for implementing professional development determine the most effective methods to be used with new special education teachers?**

3) **How do district administrators who are responsible for the evaluation of professional development ensure the implementation of an evaluation process is used with new special education teachers?**

This mixed methods study showed three major findings in regard to these research questions. First, administrators determine professional learning needs of new special education teachers by (a) looking to policies and guidelines, (b) gathering feedback, and (c) reviewing data sources. Second, district administrators determine the most effective methods of professional development for new special education teachers by (a) determining preferred methods of professional development and (b) balancing outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences. Finally, district administrators ensure the implementation of an evaluation process is used with new special education teachers by (a) considering
accountability measures and (b) supporting leveled evaluation efforts. These findings matter because they raise questions concerning current policy and what it holds districts accountable for in terms of developing a professional staff. The findings also shed light on the lived-experience of district administrators who are striving to balance meeting accountability measures while also differentiating professional development content to build a strong staff and ultimately improve outcomes for all students. Findings also highlight the importance of collecting meaningful feedback from stakeholders. Finally, findings suggest a need for continually evaluating the effectiveness of professional development. Three main methods of data collection were conducted. In analyzing data from the online survey, district administrator interviews, and document analysis of state and local district guiding documents, points of convergence and divergence were found.

**Demographics of Survey Participants**

The population for this study was educational administrators who work within a school district. Specifically, the district administrators responsible for the planning, implementation, or evaluation of professional development for new special education teachers were recruited. The selection criteria for this study was narrowed to include district administrators who play a role in making decisions regarding professional development for new special education teachers. Those who meet the selection criteria were entered into the sample.

Recruiting subjects took place by first identifying Michigan’s top 25 school districts as reported by Niche. Niche is a private company that rigorously cleans and analyzes large data sets and combines comprehensive report cards, rankings, and reviews with community feedback to create annual rankings that highlight the best schools and districts. Within the top 25 school districts, district administrators that play a role in professional development decision-making
were selected and invited to participate in an online survey. In total, 23 district administrators participated in the survey and 19 districts were represented.

Characteristics of survey participants were gathered. All participants were district administrators who play a role in professional development within the top 25 school districts in Michigan. The tables below list the variables: (a) gender and age; (b) educational attainment, years of experience in education, years of administrative experience, and job title; (c) level of involvement with planning, implementing, and/or evaluating professional development; and (d) district type, percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch, number of teaching staff, and number of students.

Table 6

Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants (N=23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-35</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 or greater</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over 90% of survey participants were females and while all of the participants were at least 25 years of age, 96% of participants were over the age of 36 (See Table 6).

Table 7 shows each of the 23 survey participants had either a master’s degree (30%), a specialist’s degree (61%), or a doctorate (9%). All participants had at least 11 years of
educational experience, 39% had 16-20 years of experience in education, and 52% has at least 21 years of experience in education. As previously stated, all participants work in district administrative positions; 30% had 0-5 years of district administrative experience, 13% had 6-10 years of experience, 26% had 11-15 years, 17% had 16-20 years, and 13% had 21 years or more of district administrative experience. Participants worked in various administrative positions, however most worked as Directors of Special Education (65%), Supervisors of Special Education (13%), or Directors of Student Services (9%). Therefore, all participants earned either a master’s degree or above, most had at least 16 years of experience working in education (91%), most had 15 years or less of district administrative experience (69%), and most work as a Director of Special Education, Supervisor of Special Education, or Director of Student Services (87%).

Table 7

Professional Demographics of Survey Participants (N=23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highest Level of Educational Attainment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Educational Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 or greater</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7 - Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience in District Administration</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 or greater</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superintendent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Superintendent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Special Education</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Student Services</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor of Special Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8

*Level of Involvement in Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating PD (N=23)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of Involvement in Planning PD</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1=minimally, 5=highly)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8 - Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Involvement in <strong>Implementing PD</strong></th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>9%</th>
<th>35%</th>
<th>9%</th>
<th>9%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1=minimally, 5=highly)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Involvement in <strong>Evaluating PD</strong></th>
<th>5</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>35%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>13%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1=minimally, 5=highly)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On a scale of one to five, (one being minimally involved and five being highly involved), about 95% of participants reported a level three or above when self-rating their level of involvement in planning professional development, about 83% reported a level three or above when self-rating their level of involvement in implementing professional development, and about 78% of participants scored themselves at a level three or above when self-rating their level of involvement in evaluating professional development (See Table 8).
Table 9

*District Demographics (N=19)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>District Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Town</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburb</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Free or Reduced Lunch</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%-20%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21%-40%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41%-60%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61% or greater</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Number of Teachers in the District</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-100</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-150</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151-200</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>201-250</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>251-300</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>301-350</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>350 or greater</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9 - Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students in the District</th>
<th>0-1,500</th>
<th>1,501-3,000</th>
<th>3,001-6,000</th>
<th>6,001-9,000</th>
<th>9,001-12,000</th>
<th>12,001 or greater</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provides a framework which is composed of four basic types of locales (Rural, Town, Suburban, and City). The NCES relies on standard urban and rural definitions developed by the U.S. Census Bureau. These terms were provided as options for survey participants to indicate which category best described the territory in which their district is located. Rural can be defined as a non-place territory within or not within a metropolitan area and defined as rural by the Census Bureau. None of the districts represented in this survey were located in a census-defined rural territory (Rural). About 17% of the districts represented in this survey were located inside an urban cluster (Town). Districts located outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area (Suburban), represented 61% of survey responses. Nearly 22% of districts represented in the survey were located in a territory inside an urbanized area inside a principal city (City). Additionally, nearly 69% of the districts employed more than 250 teachers and 70% of the districts serve between 3,000 and 9,000 students. Table 9 also highlights 96% of districts represented in this survey had 40% or less students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Therefore, most districts in this study were suburban...
districts (61%), which employ more than 250 teachers (69%), and serve 3,000-9,000 students (70%), in areas in which 40% or less qualify for free and reduced lunch.

**Interviewees**

Purposive sampling was conducted to select five district administrators to participate in face to face interviews. When completing the on-line survey, administrators were given the option to participate in a face-to-face interview. Administrators recruited for the interviews either indicated interest through the online survey, were referred by colleagues, or provided insightful responses on the short answer survey questions. Five administrators from the top 25 schools in Michigan were interviewed for the purpose of this study. Interviewee demographics were considered in the selection process. Table 10 provides a summary of interviewee demographics. After interviews were completed, transcripts of the interview were sent to the interviewees as a member check to allow participants to decide if they wanted to add information or clarify responses. Interview transcripts were analyzed to identify commonalities and differences among interviewee responses to interview questions.

Table 10

*Demographic Characteristics of Interviewees (N=5)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10 - Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Level of Educational Attainment</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Educational Experience</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 or greater</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience in District Administration</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 or greater</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director of Special Education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Involvement in Planning PD (1=minimally, 5=highly)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 10 - Continued

| Level of Involvement in Implementing PD |  |  |
| (1=minimally, 5=highly) |  |  |
| 5 | 3 | 60% |
| 4 | 1 | 20% |
| 1 | 1 | 20% |

| Level of Involvement in Evaluating PD |  |  |
| (1=minimally, 5=highly) |  |  |
| 5 | 2 | 40% |
| 4 | 2 | 40% |
| 1 | 1 | 20% |

| District Type |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| Town | 1 | 20% |
| City | 4 | 80% |

| Free or Reduced Lunch |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| 0%-20% | 2 | 40% |
| 21%-40% | 3 | 60% |

| Number of Teachers in the District |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| 101-150 | 1 | 20% |
| 151-200 | 2 | 40% |
| 350 or greater | 2 | 40% |

| Number of Students in the District |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| 1,501-3,000 | 1 | 20% |
Table 10 - Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enrollment Range</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3,001-6,000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6,001-9,000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12,001 or greater</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Document Analysis

Each of the interviewees provided documentation from their districts which supported their decision-making processes regarding professional development for new special education teachers. Documents were analyzed to substantiate the interviewee responses and to examine district and state content to answer research questions. A list of analyzed documents is provided in Table 11.

Table 11

List of Documents Analyzed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Document</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michigan Compiled Law excerpts (MCL 380.1527, MCL 380.1526, and MCL 380.1249)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDE Professional Learning Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDE Progressing to the Professional Teaching Certificate (How to Page)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDE Successful Teaching (How to Page)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDE Professional Development for New Teachers (How to Page)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Annual Education Reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Improvement Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Professional Development Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Skills and Attributes Document</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11 - Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key Components of Classroom Environment Document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission and Vision Document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Bargaining Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Evaluation Procedures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Question 1

How do district administrators who are responsible for planning professional development determine the professional learning needs of their new special education teachers?

RQ1) Quantitative Data Analysis

When asked to indicate the top three professional development topics they viewed as essential for developing new special education teachers, administrators most frequently indicated data-based decision-making (29%), classroom management (22%), parent relations (13%), instruction (13%), school culture (9%), and curriculum (7%) as essential topics for new special education teachers. Five administrators referenced behavior management, collaborative teaching, and IEP compliance/law as “other” essential topics. It should be noted that while test preparation/administration and state standards were listed as options in the survey, no administrators identified these topics in their top three essential topics for developing new special education teachers.

Table 12

Top PD Topics Viewed as Essential for New Special Education Teachers (N=23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data-based decision-making</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom management</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12 - Continued

Parent relations 9 13%
Instruction 9 13%
School culture 6 9%
Curriculum 5 7%
Other
  Collaborative teaching
  IEP compliance/law
  Behavior management
  Working with challenging behaviors
  Behavior

Administrators were asked to identify policies they look to in planning professional development for new special education teachers. District-allocated professional development time (28%), district improvement plans (23%), and new teacher professional development requirements (22%) were most frequently selected.

Table 13

Top Policies Administrators Look to in Planning PD for New Special Education Teachers (N=23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District-Allocated PD Time</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Improvement Plan</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Teacher PD Requirements</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Budget</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDE Professional Learning Policy (2011)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Other
  Identified staff or department needs
  ISD topics                                           | 7         | 10%     |
Administrators were asked to indicate what guides they look to in planning professional development time and topics for new special education teachers. Administrators highlighted principal feedback (20%), district-made teacher surveys (19%), and other methods of teacher feedback such as teacher voiced areas of need and feedback gathered in informal meetings (16%) as influences which guide their professional development planning.

Table 14

*Top Guides Administrators Look to in Planning PD Time and Topics for New Special Education Teachers (N=23)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Guide</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Feedback</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District-Made Teacher Survey</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Methods of Teacher Feedback</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Minds in Education</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Evaluation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Teacher Induction Checklists</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations from PD Experts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback from 1:1 meetings, staff feedback, specific teacher needs, informal meetings ISD guidance/topics, county or neighboring district needs Compliance trainings, changes in SPED law/compliance Department meeting feedback, teacher leader feedback District initiatives, district vision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Administrators look to both quantitative and qualitative data to determine needs of new special education teachers. Further, administrators reported a willingness to consider formal reporting measures as well as informal reporting measures in assessing teacher needs. For
example, quantitative data such as student achievement data, state achievement data, and national achievement data was recorded 43% of the time, while qualitative data such as teacher reported needs, IEP reviews, observations, and district and school culture data were reported 42% of the time. Table 18 also highlights formal reporting measures such as student achievement data, state achievement data, national achievement data, IEP data, attendance data, behavior data, evaluations, and Performance Plan indicators. Informal reporting measures administrators reported include teacher reported needs, district administrator feedback, department chair feedback, and informal observations.

Table 15

*Data Sources Administrators Look to in Assessing Needs of New Special Education Teachers (N=23)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What data do you look to when assessing new special education teacher needs?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher reported needs/interviews</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student achievement data</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State achievement data</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IEP data/ educational benefit reviews</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National achievement data</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student products or needs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal observations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District and school culture</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDEA Part B State Performance Plan indicators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints/litigation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department chair feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District administrator feedback</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Administrators most frequently reported decisions surrounding professional development were made collaboratively amongst district staff teams (48%), collaboratively amongst teams representing teachers, building leaders, and district leaders (35%), or collaboratively amongst building leader teams (17%).

Table 16

How District Decisions are Made (N=23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decisions regarding professional development in my district are primarily made…</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaboratively amongst district staff teams</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboratively amongst teams representing teachers, building leaders, and district leaders</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboratively amongst building leader teams</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When asked to identify major barriers in planning professional development for new special education teachers, administrators most frequently indicated time (33%), money (22%), and differentiation (18%). While time represented 33% of the answers given, it is important to note that all 23 administrators surveyed stated time as a major barrier. Other barriers worth noting included a lack of provision of support structures, substitute teacher coverage, and determining professional development priorities.

Table 17

Major Barriers in Planning PD (N=23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What three major barriers do you face in planning professional development for new special education teachers?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Money</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiating PD</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 17 - Continued

| Provision of support structures | 7 | 10% |
| Substitute teacher coverage | 5 | 7% |

Other
- Determining PD priorities | 2 | 3% |
- Lack of clearly articulated goals | 1 | 1% |
- Administrator time to plan | 1 | 1% |
- Time coordination of schedules | 1 | 1% |
- Determining teacher needs | 1 | 1% |
- None—we have a solid PD plan | 1 | 1% |

In planning professional development, the literature suggests administrators should consider adult learning theories to support meaningful learning opportunities. Collaborative learning was the most frequent adult learning theory principle identified in the survey (32%). Administrators also pointed to other important principles such as immediate application of learning (24%), hands-on practice (18%), self-directed learning (14%), voluntary engagement in learning (6%), and autonomy (6%).

Table 18

*Common Adult Learning Theory Principles (N=23)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicate the top three adult learning principles that are prioritized in district-offered professional development for new special education teachers.</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative learning</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate application of learning</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hands-on practice</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-directed learning</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary engagement in learning</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ1) Qualitative Data Analysis

Through qualitative survey responses from 23 administrators representing the top 25 school districts in Michigan, district administrators reported determining ideas for professional development topics for new special education teachers from both inside and outside the local school environment. Commonly stated areas included topics from the state; policy; an ISD or RESA; central office or district team input; principal feedback; teacher feedback; community feedback; trends in special education; direction from data; and feedback regarding student needs and outcomes. Two administrators summarized their experiences by stating:

**Summary 1)** Our ISD is very organized and up-to-date on research-based and evidence-based instruction and best practices. Each year, they promote and offer professional learning opportunities, and we routinely send staff to their trainings. Their trainings often include bringing experts in the field to us. Our ISD also creates professional learning groups (e.g., school psychologists, school social workers) and my staff attend them regularly as well. Our district has department leaders who meet with staff a number of times per year. From those professional learning and discussion times, the leaders may bring me ideas for professional development. Finally, I refer to our State Performance Plan (SPP) results and compliance indicators, specifically to our district's performance on those indicators, to help drive professional development planning.

**Summary 2)** We follow guidance from MDE in terms of compliance and mandates to ensure our new special education teachers have the necessary information and skills. We also access our RESA for resources and recommendations. There is also a lot of collaboration across districts within our RESA. Internally, we seek input/feedback from building administrators and teachers in regard to their needs and interests aligned with
our district BIG Rocks. We also utilize various staff members who have specific expertise. For example, our social workers and counselors, who have attended numerous trainings on trauma informed care, develop and present to staff to build capacity. We have monthly department meetings as well as building extended learning time each month. All PD is designed to connect with and support our district and school goals.

Table 19

How District Administrators Collect Ideas for PD (N=23)

When planning professional development for new special education teachers, in what ways do you draw ideas from inside and outside the school environment?

Direction from the state:
  – We follow guidance from MDE in terms of compliance and mandates to ensure our new special education teachers have the necessary information and skills required.
  – MIBLSI (Michigan’s Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative), MASP (Michigan After-School Partnership), MAASE (Michigan Association of Administrators of Special Education)
  – State and federal requirements

Direction from policy:
  – It is important for staff to have an understanding of the state policy and procedures.
  – Policy and procedure updates/changes
  – Attending IEP meetings and reviewing IEPs

Direction from an ISD or RESA:
  – Each year local directors work with the ISD to identify areas of need.
  – We access our RESA for resources and recommendations.
  – There is also a lot of collaboration across districts within our RESA.
  – ISD Feedback and direction
  – County mandates
  – Regional discussions with colleagues
  – County wide directors’ meetings
Central office or district teams:
- Internally, we seek input/feedback from building administrators and teachers in regard to their needs and interests aligned with our district BIG Rocks.
- Our teachers for special education are part of a "New Teacher Cohort" therefore all of their sessions are already mapped out. I spend one day with all new staff going over what special education looks like in our district.
- I have many conversations with stakeholders in the district to determine the best ways to support teachers.
- The district has a toolbox for on boarding staff.
- Ideas come from our school improvement plan.
- Department areas of focus and feedback from special education department chairs is important.
- We have monthly department meetings as well as building extended learning time each month. All PD is designed to connect with and support our district and school goals.
- District strategic plan

Principal feedback:
- I rely on building principals.
- Observations and feedback from within district buildings
- Feedback from administration
- Principal feedback
- Supervisor feedback
- Administration Feedback

Teacher feedback:
- I rely on teacher feedback.
- Observed or stated needs that are student or disability-specific.
- Feedback from teachers to gain a better understanding of the needs.
- Staff and teacher feedback
- Topics staff find at outside PD
- Input from existing staff

Community feedback:
- Parent feedback
- Community needs
- Parent meetings

Trends in special education:
- Trends identified in professional journals
- Research trends

Table 19 - Continued
**Direction from data:**
- Review of current data to determine needs
- Special education data

**Student needs and outcomes:**
- As much as possible, the connection between outcomes and classroom instruction is utilized to develop professional development.
- We must be responsive to the needs of our student population (i.e., increase of students with ASD requires START training).
- Currently enrolled student needs
- Identified student needs
- Build a continuum based on current students

District leaders reported they assess the needs of new special education teachers in a variety of ways. Many administrators use feedback or recommendations from teachers gained through conversations or surveys. Administrators assume new teachers need professional development regarding new laws or recommendations from the state. Repeatedly, administrators mentioned using data from student outcomes, data from previous years, or data from pilot studies within the district. Observations through rounding or learning walks was discussed as was feedback from professional learning communities, other administrators or building leaders such as department heads and principals, and parents. Teacher evaluations were also highlighted as a way to determine new special education teacher needs.

When analyzing local district documents, evidence of planning professional development in alignment with district goals was highlighted. Each local district has a District Improvement Plan (DIP). These plans are designed to provide schools and districts with a common planning template that addresses student learning and system needs that have been identified through comprehensive needs assessments. One DIP stated, “the goals and improvement plan are developed in the spring of each school year based on the data that is provided including: student/staff/parent survey responses, M-STEP, NWEA, MME, SAT and EXPLORE/PLAN
data, as well as local assessments such as end of-trimester summative exam scores and grade level assessments.” A specific emphasis on their at-risk populations to improve ELA skills by implementing instructional strategies across the curriculum as measured by state and local assessment including the 4 Cs Critical Thinking Rubric was documented. Their goal states 75% of All Students will increase student growth using effective critical thinking skills, with a focus on at-risk and special education students, in English Language Arts by a specified date as measured by local and nationally normed assessments, including the Ed Leader 21 Critical Thinking Rubric where its use is applicable, served as evidence of aligning teacher professional development with their DIP. For example, the document states, “we will continue with training and implementation of our Reading Recovery Program. Our Reading Recovery teacher works part day in Reading Recovery and the rest of the supporting students, staff and parents. This allows her to support the entire school population. The implementation of the Reading Recovery program is part of our entire literacy plan. Having a highly qualified teacher improves outcomes, especially for the bottom 30% of our population. We have an ongoing professional development cost of $1,500.”

Table 20

Assessing Needs of New Special Education Teachers (N=23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you assess the needs of new special education teachers?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher feedback or recommendations:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‒ I am very open to teachers bringing new ideas to consider.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‒ Needs are assessed by directly hearing from the teachers and building level staff. We seek out PD based upon their identified needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‒ Input from staff is helpful but really it is having standing meetings and asking where they are and what they need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‒ Teacher surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‒ Teacher feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20 - Continued
− Teacher voice
− Teacher requests

New laws or recommendations:
− New laws or policies
− Recommendations from our ISD and State
− Legal or state-driven compliance
− Compliance driven content per MDE
− Best teaching practices
− Information from ISD audits

Data:
− We use our previous year's data to determine the chosen focus area for the year.
− Oftentimes, buildings will pilot a new initiative, collect student data, and then we may train other building staff on that initiative if the data is positive. Within our district, we routinely look at our student achievement data as well to determine needs.
− Success of our students
− Individual district performance data
− Review of student data also drives PD needs

Observations:
− We use a protocol called 'rounding' to ask what is going well, areas when help is needed.
− Observational data from learning walks
− Working directly with the teacher
− My observations

Administrator or building leader feedback:
− Building leader feedback
− Feedback from the building principal and department heads
− Building administration input

Professional learning community feedback:
− Conversation/ meeting with staff
− PLC feedback

Teacher evaluations:
− Teacher evaluations
− Staff evaluations

Table 20 - Continued

Parent feedback:
In an effort to facilitate a type of member check within the survey, administrators were given an opportunity to openly comment and share additional thoughts. Table 21 lists additional comments that administrators provided. Themes of not having enough time or substitute teacher coverage to provide professional development during the school day was highlighted. Participant engagement and timeliness of professional development were also noted as key factors in planning. Some administrators suggested viewing professional development as an ongoing process, connected to district initiatives, identified gaps, general education, and curriculum. Finally, planning was discussed as a collaborative effort with a team of individuals sharing their viewpoints.

Table 21

*Additional Comments Regarding Planning PD (N=23)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are there any additional comments you would like to add regarding planning professional development?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD must be engaging and timely for staff to benefit from it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development should always be linked to student data. This should drive our decisions on identifying gap areas, then PD should be used to address these areas. PD cannot be a one and done. Instead, it needs to be ongoing and involve classroom observations in which teachers observe each other in practice, then come together to share what worked and what didn't. The environment should be designed for growth - concerning both the teachers instructionally and the students academically.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD is an ongoing, collaborative process that encompasses the needs of all teachers and is based on student needs. Our special services department works closely with our office of instruction when planning PD to ensure special education needs are addressed. The needs are also connected with general education, curriculum, district initiatives, etc.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21 - Continued
It is not enough to only provide PD during district time that is carved out of the school year schedule. With limited sub availability, it is very difficult to effectively deliver current, updated data throughout the school year.

I also take into account the building administrators’ viewpoints as well as my assistant superintendent’s viewpoints.

Qualitative data from combined responses of interviewees reflected four themes. Administrators determine professional learning needs of their new special education teachers by:

(a) considering state and local guidance for structuring and selecting topics for professional development, (b) assessing instructional, curricular, and cultural needs of their staff based on state and district data, (c) considering the unique learning needs of special educators, and (d) understanding the importance of differentiating professional development opportunities.

**Structuring and Selecting Topics for Professional Development**

A variety of guiding and influencing factors on structuring and selecting professional development topics surfaced during the interviews. Overall, administrators discussed three types of needs that guide or influence their decision-making when planning professional learning opportunities: (a) assumed needs based on best practices, (b) data-informed needs, and (c) feedback-informed needs. MDE Professional Learning Policy (2011) and local guiding documents were also analyzed for guiding and influencing factors administrators might look to in selecting topics.

Assumed needs reflected proactive trainings based on best practices that districts and administrators want new special education teachers to know from day one. Examples of assumed needs included a general understanding of federal and state policy specific to legal updates, least restrictive environment, individualized education programs, writing measurable student goals, and positive behavioral interventions and supports. Other assumed needs related specifically to teaching practices such as trainings connected to a specific curriculum, program, essential or
priority standards, or a teaching approach. Additionally, learning general systems or navigating software programs was mentioned as an assumed need in which special educators need an extra dose of support.

Data-informed needs reflect making professional learning decisions for staff based on student data, trends, and patterns. Examples of data-informed needs reflect both local needs as well as needs outside of the local district. Locally, data-informed needs might come to an administrator’s attention through math or ELA assessment data, District Improvement Plan data, or district goals data. Outside of the local district, data-informed needs might be addressed through professional networks, looking to model districts, or student outcome data on a broader scale.

Feedback-informed needs reflect feedback from staff regarding teaching practices and student needs. Examples of feedback-informed needs include trainings for staff to support topics such as mental health, resiliency, social thinking, or anxiety. A final topic that was mentioned in each interview was logistical feedback which seemed to greatly impact professional development for new special education teachers. Logistical topics include timing and time allocation for professional development, district and building calendars, community schedules, access to regular staff meetings, and opportunities for face-to-face staff conversations.

MDE Professional Learning Policy (2011) explains professional learning experiences range from awareness building to in-depth application of knowledge and skills. Each experience should include problem solving and reflection on the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process in order to improve student outcomes and job performance. Professional learning can occur in a variety of settings, including face-to-face sessions, online courses, and combinations thereof. It provides opportunities for professional discourse, analysis, application, and reflection.
It is relevant learning that is essential to ongoing improvements in professional practice and job effectiveness.

When reviewing documents from local districts, further evidence of feedback-informed needs regarding teaching practices and student needs were discovered. One district, for example, used the vision cast from their Portrait of a Graduate to align professional development. The Portrait of a Graduate identified the skills and attributes the district believed to be critical to ensuring students are future ready. This was built collaboratively by the district and community. It served as a guide for work and decision-making in all aspects of the organization. Within the Portrait, the 4C’s, Communication, Collaboration, Critical Thinking, and Creativity, were a focus of district work and were embedded in each of the specific branches and competencies within the Portrait. These were the primary skills the district strived to grow and build in their graduates.

Documents from another district expanded on the vision cast from their district Compass to align professional development. The Compass identified key components of classroom environments required to support 21st century teaching and learning: Pedagogy, Learning Spaces, Tech Integration, and Community. Within the Compass, 4C’s, Communication, Creativity and Innovation, Collaboration, and Critical Thinking and Problem Solving focused on and directly aligned to the Compass Connection Series. The series laid out the professional development plan at the district and building level as well as district provided professional development and “on your own” professional development. Each section of the series was developed through the Compass lens.
Assessing Needs Based on Data

Administrators interviewed in this study were driven by data. Therefore, when determining the professional learning needs of their new special education teachers, each administrator discussed looking to various forms of data to assess new teacher needs. An extensive list of topics and needs from the interviews was compiled. However, it is more meaningful to look at data sources that were discussed as key ways to determine needs.

Systematically, the five districts represented in the interviews had plans and programs in place to support assessing and meeting new teacher needs. These systems, consequently, provided data administrators found meaningful when assessing teacher needs. For example, each district had a new staff or new teacher intensive professional development induction into teaching plan, utilized mentors or coaches for their new teachers, and provided learning walks. Team department meetings or grade level meetings were discussed as sources for determining teacher needs as well. Student data such as universal screener data, progress monitoring data, and data from MISchooldata.org were frequently discussed as helpful measures in assessing teacher needs. MISchooldata.org is the state of Michigan’s official public portal for education data to help citizens, educators and policy makers make informed decisions that can lead to improved success for our students.

Teacher evaluation tools and professional goals were found to be means for some administrators to assess needs. Finally, some districts mentioned having review processes for student individual education programs which helped them gain a sense of trainings that were needed to support their new special education teachers. One district utilized a survey for new staff when determining professional development topics. Apart from district systems, administrators also collected data from building principals and conducted their own observations.
When analyzing documents from local districts, training staff to effectively use technology platforms for the purpose of data collection, data analysis, and data-based decision making was evident. Further, this type of training was prioritized within local guiding documents such as district improvement plans. For example, within a local district improvement plan, an action item was to send a team to be trained with Illuminate (a technology platform that provides resources and tools to support to empower educators to use data in a meaningful way). The team was to then train others within the district.

**Unique Learning Needs of Special Educators**

Responses from the interviews indicated administrators understand special educators have a unique set of learning needs. Administrators discussed ways in which they assess these unique needs. Primarily, they shared informal methods of assessment. When asked what formal tools they use to assess the unique learning needs of special educators, with the exception of an administrator mentioning a district survey, each interviewee expressed either being unaware of a formal evaluation tool or not utilizing a formal evaluation tool to assess the unique learning needs of their special educators:

**Example 1)** *I don't have a really formal process.*

**Example 2)** *I wouldn't say I necessarily utilize a checklist.*

**Example 3)** *We’re definitely not targeting or doing formal assessments on that. And maybe that's because we're small enough.*

**Example 4)** *We don't really have that need.*

**Example 5)** *Not that I’m aware of.*

**Example 6)** *...there's not really anything formal that we're utilizing.*
However, informal assessment of special educator needs was highlighted. For example, administrators discussed having internal, informal checklists in which they consider as they conduct informal walk-throughs, observations, or have conversations with new special education teachers. The idea of shared leadership and collaboration in conjunction with informal assessments surfaced in the interviews as well:

**Example 1)** *I have an amazing administrative team. So, we try to tag team. They’re in the buildings all the time. I’m not. So, we try to always look for classroom management, student behavior, we look for key instructional practices. Are you running small groups? Are you moving the kids? Is it at their level? Are you differentiating? We are paying attention to collegial and professional relationships. How do you interact at department meetings? How you interact in casual meetings? We pay close attention to their communication skills with parents. We look at how are they organized. Do they have organizational structures? Do I need to give them some of those? So, it's more of that kind of internal checklist. ”*

**Example 2)** *I think in our district, we probably have things that I think smaller districts don't. Like I have a behavior coordinator, I have five behavior techs. I have people who are out in the field, working with staff. So, when we go back to those observations, it's how we're able to draw out what PD we need to provide.”*

Administrators explained the importance of collecting feedback to assess unique learning needs. For example, when bringing in a new teacher right out of college, one administrator expressed an understanding that new teachers probably had some exposure to some best practices and strategies, but they might need to be connected to district systems to use their relatively new knowledge. Administrators also discussed collecting feedback from direct
conversations with new teachers, building principals, and “getting into the mix of what's happening and learning what their immediate needs are.”

During the interviews, administrators were quick to discuss their open, flexible responses to meet new special education teacher needs when they receive feedback:

**Example 1)** We kind of know what we need for them. But certainly, by all means, they can be contributors to their own learning. If they say, here's what we're finding or we're struggling…or building administrators can say, I'm noticing this in my new staff. Whether it's classroom management or ability to set boundaries with parents or something.

**Example 2)** So, for instance, I had two new special ed teachers. One was brand new out of school. The other one, his placement, it was a dramatic shift from where he was previously. I could tell that they were having some challenges figuring out just…it was a small group of students, but they had significant needs. And they all were on individualized schedules. I could tell they were having a hard time figuring out how to lead instruction and use instructional tools. So, I sent both of them out of the district to other locations that I knew had a lot of resources. I had them go on learning walks. I took one teacher and my assistant director took another. I said, pay attention to what you see and if you see something you want, let's take a look at it.

The value of filling unique learning needs through learning from other teachers was discussed by multiple administrators:

**Example 1)** So, we actually go in and observe others. We'll take a group of teachers like five or six teachers and go in and observe another teacher teaching.
**Example 2)** I really firmly believe it's best for teachers to learn from other teachers because they can actually see how it looks and how it's being played out. It'd be easy for me to say this is what people say to do, but when you can see it...So, I think that's really how I approach supporting special educators is getting them to go see what we're talking about in action.

**Differentiating Professional Development Opportunities**

Administrators discussed professional opportunities for all staff as well as differentiation of professional development opportunities. The interview responses highlighted administrator thoughts on which opportunities are appropriate for all educators or just select educator subgroups. Every administrator interviewed emphasized the importance of special educators being a part of all curriculum and instruction-focused professional development opportunities, alongside their general education peers:

**Example 1)** Well, I'll be honest with you, I don't like them [professional development opportunities] to vary too much, because really and truly, curriculum should be curriculum.

**Example 2)** So, we have all kinds of PD, but the first year for new teachers, really revolves around what we expect all of our teachers to do.

**Example 3)** So here, we do a really good job and all of my special educators are included and have opportunities to attend all of the other professional development.

**Example 4)** When we have district wide PDs, they're [new special education teachers] included in all of those and the department PD.

**Example 5)** So, what we try to do is like, for instance, the Lucy Calkins reading and writing, we sent everybody to that.
Further, one administrator noted that while special education teachers need to be involved in core curriculum and instructional professional development, they also need to be experts in specialized instruction:

*So, like 15 years ago, or so, we really had a push for all of our special educators to be part of the core. For instruction, they learned reading curriculum, the math curriculum, etc. They have to be experts on the curriculum work. They at least should know the scope and sequence at every grade level. And so, what we did is, to me, it feels like we kind of walked away from specialized instruction for special educators and asked them to participate in the general education learning. Which was very helpful to set expectations and help people understand what happens in a typical classroom. In the meantime, though, we've had our MTSS (multi-tiered systems of support) come alive, I would say. We're looking at, okay, now what is specialized instruction? All of the good things that we had in special education that we were utilizing now needs to be built within the system. So now, we have core content experts. We have our systems utilizing our special education, either instructional strategies or tips or tricks. So, now we're looking at what specialized instruction looks like and how do we build professional learning opportunities for our special education staff, so that they can take it to the next level. The progression over the years, you know, really needed to occur. Now, I feel like we're kind of back in the same spot. Now we have to come back and give special educators more professional development. And it's all good, but it's just a unique problem.*

A similar thought, reflecting differentiation in professional development was echoed by other administrators:
Example 1) I think that the general education professional development is really more focused on specific content area, where I think our special education professional development is very focused on instructional strategies.

Example 2) I think you just go back to your data [to differentiate]. If I noticed that there's a deficit area in a building, then I'm going to make sure everybody gets support in that. But there may be only one teacher.

Example 3) I work with all our curriculum directors. So, we work together. And that's one of the questions that we all say when we're talking about a series of PDs that might be coming out. Who is the target audience who is expected to do that? Is it nice to know? How does that all fit together?

Example 4) We sent everybody to that [professional development], and then we came back and as a special ed department, we started a conversation. As teacher consultants, what will this look like for you and implementation. If you're in a classroom more, I think I can support in this way. For resource room, you're going to be doing more pull out. What's that going to look like for you? For my self-contained classrooms, this doesn't really apply to us, we can't really access this tool. But what else do we have that can get to the same content standards as that?

Example 5) Can we pull a subgroup [of teachers] because we want to start building a vision for something? It doesn't necessarily take all the stakeholders in the room. It just takes certain representatives, so you can build that out. ”

Example 6) And then we take it to a different level, looking at the uniqueness of each individual. It really varies depending on what an educator tells us they need.
Beyond curriculum and instruction professional development, a common theme surfaced of a need for professional development focusing on positive behavioral interventions and supports, social emotional learning, co-teaching, and individualized education program fidelity.

**Example 1)** *For PBIS and SEL, we have a lot going on right now. Addressing those needs based upon feedback from a variety of sources, both verbally and then looking at our data sources with seclusion and restraint, along with absences, suspensions and expulsions, and attendance rates now.*

**Example 2)** *[Teachers] are expressing that they're not ready for children who have behavioral issues and the significant behavioral issues that we're seeing in schools.*

**Example 3)** *I try to do, at the beginning of each year, I have like this little formula that I run through and remind the buildings [of IEP expectations]. So [special education teachers] remember what I need to be seeing. I spot check and if I have a building that is struggling, I'll print up like two or three IEPs and we review them together, so we can have them highlight the main components for the goals. I know they’ve got all those pieces and then see if they can backtrack. For example, if this is the goal, did you see it in the PLAAFP? Do you know what I mean, to kind of connect the dots?*

Cost and logistics also came into consideration when discussing differentiation of professional development opportunities.

**Example 1)** *But if it's special ed specific, I have to be the one that seeks all of that out and I usually do that with our late start Wednesdays.*

**Example 2)** *Next month, we're sending two teachers to Teachers College, which I'm excited about. It will be [for professional development] targeting struggling readers and*
kids with IEPs. So that will be really helpful. I'm pretty excited that we're able to offer that opportunity. It's costing me kind of a fortune, but that's all right.

Finally, the expectation that special educators lead the way as experts in the field was discussed.

We've really started a special ed department which invites general education teachers in. For example, we're running a social thinking professional development this week. The morning session is kind of social thinking 101 and it is predominantly general education. We try to do a lot of that. That anxiety training, I mentioned, was predominantly general education teachers.

**RQ1) Divergence and Convergence**

The combined results of quantitative and qualitative data indicate administrators responsible for planning professional development look to (a) policies and guidelines from district-allocated professional development time, district improvement plans, and new teacher professional development requirements; (b) district feedback from principals, district-made teacher surveys, and teacher feedback; and (c) data sources such as teacher reported needs, student achievement data, and state achievement data to determine the professional learning needs of the new special education teachers. Data analysis showed decisions were made predominantly through collaboration amongst district staff teams. Major barriers such as time, money, and differentiating professional development were highlighted in both quantitative and qualitative findings. Adult learning theories such as collaborative learning, immediate application of learning, and self-directed learning were noted within the findings. Prioritized professional development topics included data-based decision-making, classroom management, and instruction.
Slight divergence of themes arose in the data as qualitative measures indicated a stronger connection to ISDs or RESAs in supporting new special education teacher professional development topics. Also, interviewees frequently discussed keeping new special education teachers up to date on laws, state recommendations, information from professional networks, and lessons learned from model school districts. Qualitative data was saturated with statements highlighting the tight connection between determining learning needs of new special education teachers and informal feedback and observations. Administrators expressed heavy reliance upon teacher feedback, mentor feedback, and informal data gathered through walk throughs, observations, and conversations to assist them in decision-making regarding professional learning needs for their new special education teachers.

Finally, divergence was noted when analyzing MDE Professional Learning Policy (2011). This policy acknowledged the wide range of topics that may be discovered through professional development. Additionally, the policy requires problem solving and reflection on the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process in order to improve student outcomes and job performance. While themes of problem solving were evident in the interviews, clear statements describing reflection on the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process in order to improve student outcomes, was more implied rather than clearly described within the interviews.

**Research Question 2**

*How do district administrators who are responsible for implementing professional development determine the most effective methods to be used with new special education teachers?*
RQ2) Quantitative Data Analysis

Administrators were asked to indicate the top three methods of professional development they viewed to be most impactful. Each of the 23 participants selected three methods, for a total of 69 responses. Table 22 shows administrators indicated professional learning communities (30%), continuous professional development (28%), professional conferences (15%), presentations from experts in the field (10%), video analysis (6%), traditional professional development (4%), web-based or online learning (2%), and book studies (2%) as the most impactful methods. Other methods mentioned were coaching, peer mentorship, and traditional professional development targeted toward special education teachers (2% respectively). It should be noted that just two surveys did not indicate professional learning communities as a top method of impactful professional development and just three surveys did not indicate continuous professional development as a top method. Professional learning communities were defined as, “small groups of educators who meet regularly to share expertise, analyze data, and work collaboratively to generate ideas for improving student learning outcomes.” Continuous professional development was defined as, “the process of tracking and documenting the skills, knowledge, and experience that you gain both formally and informally as you work, beyond any initial training.”

Table 22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Professional learning communities</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous professional development</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional conferences</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Administrators were asked to rate, on a scale from one to five (one being not very likely and five being highly likely), how likely they are to encourage, facilitate, or approve specific types of professional development opportunities. The three most frequently rated “highly likely” opportunities included: (a) structured professional development days within each school (e.g. staff training day) (13 “highly likely” responses), (b) release time from class (e.g. time away from classroom duties to plan, work with colleagues, or attend training) (10 “highly likely” responses), and (c) collaborative lesson preparation time (e.g. designated free period) (9 “highly likely” responses). Structured professional development days outside of the district (e.g. one-day course) was also frequently indicated (See Table 23).

Table 22 - Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development Type</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Likelihood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presentations from experts in the field</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video analysis</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional professional development</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web-based or online learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer mentorship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional PD targeted to special education teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Structured professional development days outside of the district (e.g. one-day course) was also frequently indicated (See Table 23).
Table 23

*Likelihood of Administrators to Encourage, Facilitate, or Approve Various PD Opportunities (N=23)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PD Opportunity</th>
<th>Not Very Likely</th>
<th>Highly Likely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structured professional development days within each school</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. staff training day)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Release time from class (e.g. time away from classroom duties to</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>plan, work with colleagues, or attend training)</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaborative lesson preparation time (e.g. designated free</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>period)</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structured professional development days outside of the district</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. one-day course)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unstructured meeting time with leaders to discuss concerns</strong></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>face-to-face within each school</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unstructured meeting time to share ideas with colleagues</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>face-to-face outside of the school</strong></td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening to a guest visitor during a professional development</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>day or staff meeting</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unstructured professional development days within the district</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. planning day with colleagues from other schools)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unstructured meeting time to share ideas with colleagues</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>face-to-face outside of the school</strong></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Listening to a guest visitor during a professional development</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>day or staff meeting</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unstructured professional development days within the district</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. planning day with colleagues from other schools)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The most common professional development formats used for professional development in the top 25 districts in Michigan included face-to-face meetings (30%), collaborative sharing (24%), and practice-focused formats (15%). Administrators also mentioned personalized formats (11%), traditional formats (7%), inquiry-based formats (5%), on-line formats (5%), and community-oriented formats (3%).

Table 24

*Common Professional Development Formats (N=23)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicate the three most common formats used for professional development within your district.</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face meetings</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative sharing</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice-focused</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personalized</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional (e.g. externally-designed, non-participatory)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry-based</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-line networks (e.g. webinars, modules, tutorials)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community-oriented</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Just one additional comment regarding implementing professional development was provided. Avoiding the “sit ‘n git” model and moving more toward staff involvement was highlighted.
Table 25

Additional Comments Regarding Implementing PD (N=23)

Are there any additional comments you would like to add regarding implementing professional development?

We have gotten away from the "sit ‘n git" model and have moved more toward staff involvement in the planning, delivery, and participation within PD sessions. We try to have staff actively engaged, sharing experiences and information, and practicing strategies or concepts as much as possible.

RQ2) Qualitative Data Analysis

District Administrator Familiarity with Specific Professional Development Methods

Throughout the interviews, district administrators who are responsible for implementing professional development shared a wide variety of professional development methods in which they were familiar. Mainly, these methods fell into three categories: peer-led methods, administrator-led methods, and outside expert-led methods.

Administrators highlighted peer-led methods which included colleague to colleague learning, professional discussion following a protocol, EdCamps or symposiums, learning walks, mentoring or coaching, professional learning communities, and independent studies.

Symposiums were described by one administrator as, “teacher-led professional development where everyone can sign up. You can run like an hour session. In my previous district, we did it twice, and you got to sign up for three sessions, so three one-hour sessions, and they were teacher led.” Learning walks were described as opportunities to visit other districts or shadow other teachers. Mentors and coaches were discussed in every interview. Professional learning communities are small groups of educators who meet regularly to share expertise, analyze data, and work collaboratively to generate ideas for improving student learning outcomes.

Additionally, in reviewing state and district documents, evidence to support professionally developing staff through professional learning communities and mentoring was
evident. For example, in an Annual Education Report, one district explained, “Our school improvement plan is focused on writing, reading, school climate, and we have made a commitment to PLC’s in order bring a culture of collaboration to our school, allow us to identify the areas of need for our students, and intervene with those students not achieving at desired levels in order to close our gaps in student achievement.”

Evidence to support mentoring was highlighted in a district Collective Bargaining Agreement. In this document, the non-negotiables surrounding assigning mentors were explained, demonstrating that the practice of mentoring is a core practice within the district. The Collective Bargaining Agreement stated the following: (a) the district assigns mentors, (b) each mentor is paid a stipend, (c) each mentor is assigned one mentee, (d) the mentor assignment is typically contracted for one year, (e) mentors and mentees keep a log of their activities per a provided district protocol, (f) mentors must provide mentees with at least 15 hours of mentor time, which is outside of the mentor’s regularly scheduled work time, (g) the log is completed and forwarded to the Assistant Superintendent, Secondary Instruction or Assistant Superintendent, Elementary Instruction at Central Office. The log will be used to validate mentor session time, (h) mentors and mentees are surveyed at the end of the year based on defined mentoring duties, (i) mentors work with mentees in a variety of ways on a variety of issues, (j) the goal is to help the mentee improve his or her craft and attain/maintain effective performance, and (k) issues that mentors and mentees might address include any of the following: daily routines in school, preparing lessons using district approved curriculum, meeting standards, interpreting M-STEP/MME or other student growth or proficiency data, classroom assignment, preparing substitute teacher folders, procedures for field trips, building protocols and procedures, where to access technology help, how to access e-mail and voice mail messages,
parent meetings, classroom management, student records, where to find resources for the classroom, IEP issues, school committees, and/or how to get involved in extra-curricular events.

The agreement goes on to discuss mentor expectations by explaining the mentor is always available to the mentee. The mentor frequently initiates contact with the mentee. Regular mentor sessions are planned. The mentor frequently leads the mentee into discovering possible solutions to problems on his or her own through asking questions and making suggestions. Occasionally, the mentor includes reference to how he or she would handle the situation. The mentor frequently takes the opportunity to ask reflective questions of the mentee. The mentor utilizes reflective questioning skills to invite the mentee to look at his or her teaching practices with an eye for improvement. The mentor models The Learning Cycle. The mentor is sensitive to and closely adheres to the “Firewall” between mentoring and evaluation. Topics and discussion from mentoring sessions are not shared with other staff or administration. Classroom observation notes made by the mentor become the sole property of the mentee following reflective conferences. The mentor engages in observing the mentee’s classroom on several occasions. The mentor provides positive peer coaching feedback that is specific, and evidence based in a timely manner. The feedback is designed to increase the mentee’s teaching skills by reinforcing “Best Practices” that are observed. Feedback also includes reflective questions centered on areas for improvement. The mentor encourages the mentee to try new things, expand his or her teaching skills and become actively involved with students, parents and staff. The mentor models a positive attitude toward the school, the district, and the community at large. The encouragement to succeed is genuine. The mentor demonstrates an in depth understanding of content pedagogy and student standards. The mentor actively interprets how the content can be put into practice in the classroom using effective pedagogy for all students. The mentor frequently utilizes
experience. The mentor can effectively manage and monitor student learning for ALL students, can systematically organize lessons and frequently offer assistance. Mentoring will occur in a variety of formal and informal settings. Mentors and the mentees will create a schedule of formal mentoring sessions. At a minimum, monthly individual mentoring sessions should be scheduled. Time should be set aside for these more formal sessions. Formal mentoring time can be scheduled before or after school. Mentors and mentees can also decide to meet on the weekend or in the evening. Mentors can and should meet with the mentee on an informal basis to review lessons, talk about problems that have just arisen, etc. These conversations will often take place in the hall, at the copy machine, during lunch, etc. Upon request, mentors shall be provided with release time to conduct two classroom observations of his/her mentee. This time shall be mutually scheduled by the mentor, mentee and building principal based upon the availability of guest teacher coverage or other suitable coverage for the mentor’s classroom/assignment. Any additional release time for the mentor and/or release time for the mentee is subject to approval by the building principal. Mentors and mentees can earn up to fifteen hours of professional development for the mentoring activity. Generic mentoring sessions shall be created for 1st and 2nd semester on the district’s professional development tracking system. These sessions shall appear on the professional development calendar. Each of these generic mentoring sessions is for seven and one-half hours of professional development credit. Mentors and mentees shall register for these generic sessions instead of submitting special requests. Mentor payment will be validated based on the mentoring log that is submitted by the mentor. The provisions within this Article may be altered upon mutual agreement by both parties (Collective Bargaining Agreement).
Administrator-led professional development was discussed primarily as learning taking place through data review or through on-going meetings. For example, one district discussed using a collaborative learning cycle during their data review days. Another administrator highlighted:

I like to take instructional strategies that I wanted to see in the classroom and build my professional development. I embed those instructional strategies within my presentation. Embedding what you want them to know… I think it’s important to model for people and for them to understand that you have a good understanding of what it is you’re expecting. They always say walk the talk…

Additionally, the same administrator explained the importance of implementing Universal Design for Learning strategies when developing any professional development.

Outside expert-led methods included professional conferences, bringing experts into the district, webinars or hybrid methods, and workshops. When administrators mentioned conferences, they spoke of sending teams of professionals to conferences, conferences that professional organizations put on, and conferences that colleges or universities developed. Typically, these were multi-day conferences. Administrators also discussed bringing outside experts into the district. Three administrators discussed bringing in outside experts from the ISD or RESA. These opportunities were shorter in length than the professional conferences. Typically, when outside experts came to the districts, it was for a half or single day professional development experience. Webinars are online learning experiences and were mentioned by multiple administrators as being convenient and sought after by many teachers. Hybrid methods were described by one administrator as, “webinars where they gave web activities or additional readings.”
District Administrator-Preferred Methods of Professional Development

While district administrators expressed knowledge of many methods of professional development. A number of preferred methods surfaced through the interviews. Again, administrator responses fell into the three main categories of peer-led methods, administrator-led methods, and outside expert-led methods.

Peer-led methods were discussed most often in the interviews as preferred professional development. Examples of peer-led learning included colleague to colleague learning, professional discussions, EdCamps or symposiums, learning walks, visiting other districts, and independent studies. One administrator expressed, “I love when I can feature one of my staff members as the expert!” Another spoke to learning walks by stating, “I didn’t do learning walks as a teacher, but in some of my roles, I was out and about, and I could see what other people were doing. So, I didn’t experience learning walks, but I think I would have really liked that as a teacher.” A third administrator shared, “visiting other districts, I think can be really powerful.”

Outside expert-led methods administrators preferred included professional conferences, webinars, courses or trainings offered by colleges or universities, and bringing in outside experts from the ISD or RESA. Statements provided by administrators which expressed preference for specific methods included:

Example 1) Concordia College has offered some really nice things in July. They do a whole week worth of classes that are just a day, or some are two days, but I have sent staff to that. They’ve been really good.

Example 2) I also like physically going to conferences and being part of all of that good work and networking with other folks and knowing that we’re not the only district that’s going through something.
Example 3) *One method some of my staff likes more than me is the webinars or the podcasts. A lot of people can benefit, or they like those. I just, I prefer in-person stuff. I’ve done a couple webinars that have been somewhat beneficial.*

Example 4) *Our RESA is a connecting RESA and they run a lot of really good professional development. Their sessions tend to be half days or full days.*

Administrator-led professional development opportunities were highlighted by administrators. Administrators reported preference toward administrator-led professional development through the following methods: teaching instructional strategies, leading data review days, and leading focused data digs. One administrator expounded on her preference by stating, “For data digs, we have an instructional specialist as well as a Title I reading teacher, and we have an academic specialist that help them participate in professional development right at the building level, which I think is really powerful.”

In reviewing documents from local districts, preference for specific methods were found in District Improvement Plans (DIP) which highlighted professional development activities for all schools to attend. Administrator-led and Peer-led examples such as district in-services which included Listen/Learn/Collaborate, Plan It/Try It, and a Review/Reflect/Goal Set sessions were prioritized in the plan. Outside expert-led professional development was noted in the DIPs when all buildings were directed to attend multiple sessions at state-level conferences. An additional self-led professional development method was discovered in the DIPs. All staff were to participate in video analysis and self-reflection rubrics which aligned with specific district goals.

**Ways In Which District Administrators Learn Professional Development Methods**

District administrators reported learning about professional development methods via three primary avenues: from outside experts, from colleagues, and through personal experiences.
Learning through outside experts included administrators receiving training from researchers or experts in the field:

**Example 1)** *Rick DeFour is somebody that I’ve done a lot of work with in my previous district and this district has also adopted many of those things. We will get a lot of [training on] Fullan.*

**Example 2)** *Usually I’ll go to [neighboring ISDs] because they’ve got great PD. So, I’ll usually go on their website and look through their catalog to see if there’s something that’s applicable and get on some list serves.*

**Example 3)** *A lot of our work now has come through PLC work with DuFours – some of their protocols and methodologies.*

**Example 4)** *Taking the four-day adaptive schools training on how to create protocols or how to follow protocols to facilitate adult learning and adult problem solving...we’ve learned a lot about that.*

Evidence of outside-expert led professional development opportunities were also found in DIPs. For example, plans highlighted attending conferences which included keynote speakers and breakout sessions on current topics relevant to secondary educators and attending a conference in which specific focus on technology integration in the classroom will be met.

Working collaboratively with colleagues to learn about professional development methods was also highlighted by administrators in the interviews:

**Example 1)** *I think I have a great support network in the county from other directors, and I do my own research.*

**Example 2)** *My boss is really good. She’s wonderful and she’ll send stuff our way, like from EdLeader.*
Example 3) It seems the school improvement team now really knows how to look at data to stay in the thinking and gathering and wondering stage prior to making assumptions or predictions.

Finally, administrators discussed learning about professional development methods through personal experiences:

Example 1) When I think about how I learned about professional development methods...it’s really just about my own professional learning. Making sure that I stay connected at the county and state level with best practices. I think I probably was better at that when I was a building principal. I was a building principal for 16 years, so I still have a really strong network of gen ed administrators, which I think is really helpful.

Example 2) ...mostly just being part of [professional development] and participating in it.

Example 3) Attending conferences, seminars, webinars, and pushing or sharing out information in a variety of ways.

Most Frequently Used Methods of Professional Development

Administrators reported methods of professional development typically used in their districts include peer-led, administrator-led, and outside expert-led methods.

Peer-led professional development methods typically used according to district administrators included face-to-face coaching, learning walks, and teacher leader groups. One administrator expanded upon teacher leader groups by stating:

For the teacher leader group, they sign up to be part of the teacher leaders. They help drive [professional development], but administrators as well, set up a professional development framework for the year. We establish what is going to take place when,
what the build is going to be doing when, look at where are the open spots and where we could have guest people come in. So, we work to make that really cohesive.

Additionally, in reviewing district documents, evidence to support peer-led professional development was found in DIPs. For example, plans explained the process for creating and training building level teams to focus on a specific communication model. The DIPs highlighted that the method for developing staff in this model would be the train the trainer model which was to be facilitated by a previously trained instructor in all schools within the district. Further, teams were to review data about communication skills. Each building was to construct a team and use these members to build knowledge.

MDE Professional Learning Policy also highlights mentoring as a necessary practice for new teachers. Implementing a successful mentoring and induction program requires purposeful design by assessing and meeting identified needs within a local context. Once in place, effective mentor and induction programs require planned reflection, data gathering and analysis, and program revision to enhance positive results. Resources in effective mentor and induction programs should be invested for both short-term results and enhancing leadership capacity across roles at the local level to achieve long-term gains in educator effectiveness and student academic outcomes.

Administrator-led methods that were discussed as being typically used within districts included data review days, data digs, and professional development led by instructional designers. Outside expert-led professional development methods were most frequently stated in interviews:

**Example 1)** *We do bring in a lot of presenters and guest speakers and buildings pick some of those.*
Example 2) ... people do webinars and podcasts.

Example 3) We access the county and conferences.

Example 4) We go to a lot of conferences, a lot of I would say online and actually physically going to conferences, I’d say those are the two main methods.

Differentiation and Challenges in Implementing Professional Development

Throughout the interviews differentiating professional development as well as challenges to implementing professional development were discussed. Administrators described efforts to differentiate:

Example 1) If I find somebody who’s got a gap here, I’m just going to go out and look for PD to support them.

Example 2) It really just depends on the person’s needs and wants and desires.

Example 3) At the beginning of the year we create, as a district, probably close to 100 sessions that staff can attend, and then they get to pick when they want to go. That choice, the ability to dig into something that’s interesting to you, is important.

The main challenge that was discussed in determining the most effective methods to be used with new special education teachers was appropriately allocating funds. For example, one administrator expressed, “I really try hard to find money if they want to do something. If I can’t do it this year, then I tell them, you know what, I’ll put you at the top of the queue for next year.”

RQ2) Divergence and Convergence

In determining the most effective methods of professional development for new special education teachers, data from administrators surveyed and data from administrators interviewed converged on a number of points. For example, when administrators indicated their top three methods of professional development which they viewed to be most impactful, they selected (a)
professional learning communities, (b) continuous professional development, and (c) professional conferences. These responses surfaced in administrator interviews as well. For example, peer-led professional development such as learning walks, colleague to colleague discussions, and professional discussions using protocols reflect continuous professional development. Administrator-led professional development such as on-going data review and data digs align with survey responses that state professional learning communities are frequently used. Finally, outside expert-led professional development was also highlighted in interview responses through attending conferences and trainings provided by ISDs or RESAs.

When asked which opportunities they were most likely to encourage, facilitate, or approve, administrators surveyed most frequently reported (a) structured professional development days within each school, (b) release time from class, (c) collaborative lesson preparation time, and (d) structured professional development days outside of the district. This converged with what administrators reported in research interviews. Interview data showed administrators support structured professional development days within each district by facilitating professional development during meetings built into the school day for data review, data digs, and training on instructional strategies. Administrators facilitate release time from class through learning walks and face-to-face coaching. Finally, administrators discussed facilitating structured professional development days outside of the district by encouraging teachers to participate in webinars and send their staff to professional conferences.

A point of divergence was found in collaborative lesson preparation time. Nine survey participants indicated they were “highly likely” to encourage, facilitate, or approve lesson preparation time. However, this was not mentioned in any of the administrator interviews.
Research Question 3

How do district administrators who are responsible for the evaluation of professional development ensure the implementation of an evaluation process is used with new special education teachers?

RQ3) Quantitative Data Analysis

When considering accountability measures in evaluating professional development, administrators listed specific items or structures that they consider during the evaluation process. Many administrators listed MDE new teacher professional development requirements (21%), new teacher mentoring (19%), teacher goals (17%), and district improvement goals (15%). Other accountability sources mentioned included MDE professional development requirements for all teachers (10%) and teacher evaluation tools (6%). Less than 5% of the responses mentioned impact on student achievement (4%), learning targets explicitly taught (2%), the union (2%), compliance monitoring (2%), and school safety (2%) as accountability measures that were considered in evaluating professional development.

Table 26

Accountability Considerations in Evaluating PD (N=23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>List accountability measures that must be considered in evaluating professional development.</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MDE new teacher PD requirements</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New teacher mentoring</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher goals</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District improvement goals</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDE PD requirements for all teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher evaluation tools</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The next set of questions in the survey were structured to reflect Guskey’s model of professional development evaluation. The first level evaluates participants’ reactions to professional development, technical assistance, or coaching. The focus at this level of evaluation is content, delivery, and context. Administrators indicated their districts collect evaluation data that reflects participant reactions primarily through participant evaluations (50%) and on-line surveys (28%). Other ways included exit tickets (9%), face-to-face feedback (6%), and Google forms (6%). One administrator stated that she was not aware of any evaluation data that was collected at this level.

The second level of Guskey’s model focuses on participant learning and provides a means to measure “the relationship between what was intended and what was achieved” (Guskey, 2000, p. 122). Administrators surveyed indicated written personal reflections (34%), verbal personal reflections (31%), and portfolios (9%) as primary ways their districts collect evaluation data reflective of new knowledge, skills, or attitudes gained by professional development participants. Other ways of collecting level two evaluation data included exit tickets, Google forms or surveys (9%), feedback (3%), evaluations (3%), student data review (3%), and observation (3%).
Level three shifts focus from participants to the organization. Once participants are given learning opportunities, it is critical the organization has the right policies and procedures in place and is ready to support that learning and change if needed. When asked how their districts collect evaluation data reflective of organizational characteristics necessary for success, administrators primarily indicated questionnaires focused on original efforts (32%), analyze school records (24%), and examine minutes from follow-up meetings (20%). However, 16% of administrators were not sure about what data was collected to support level three evaluation.

At the fourth level, districts should evaluate the fidelity to which participants are implementing their new knowledge and skills. Evaluation at this level is a foundational cornerstone of understanding outcomes. Administrators were asked how their districts collect evaluation data reflective of the impact professional development has on professional practice. While 31% of administrators reported the use of direct observations by trained observers or digital recordings, 26% indicated questionnaires, and 20% indicated they data collected at intervals over time.

Level five of Guskey’s model addresses short-term, in-school and long-term, post-school student outcomes. When asked how their districts collect evaluation data reflective of the impact professional development has on student outcomes, it was clear that administrators refer to both quantitative and qualitative data. The most common response was district academic achievement data (29%). M-STEP data (15%) and analyzing school records (13%), as well as personal reflection (13%) and direct observations by trained observers or digital recordings (12%) were also reported.

Finally, level six examines the dissemination of evaluation findings and the extent to which findings are used to improve programs such as transition education and services. When
asked how district professionals use their evaluation results to make program improvements, administrator responses fell into three main themes. First, administrators reported evaluation results as being used to identify areas of need and conduct future planning. Second, administrators provided statements that reflected evaluation results being used to support a process of continual improvement. Finally, administrators reported that evaluation results are used to support the monitoring of systems. To see exact statements provided by administrators, refer to level six in Table 27.

Table 27

Data for Leveled Evaluation of PD (N=23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1 - How does the district collect evaluation data that reflects participant reactions to professional development experiences?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant evaluations</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Surveys</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit tickets</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Face-to-face feedback</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Google forms</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not aware of anything</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 2 - How does the district collect evaluation data reflective of new knowledge, skills, or attitudes gained by professional development participants?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Written personal reflections</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal personal reflections</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolios</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit tickets/Google forms/Online survey/survey</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student data review</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 27 - Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 3 - How does the district collect evaluation data reflective of organizational characteristics necessary for success?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires focused on original efforts</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze school records</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examine minutes from follow-up meetings</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 4 - How does the district collect evaluation data reflective of the impact professional development has on professional practice?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct observations by trained observers or digital recordings</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaires</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through data collected at intervals over time</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured interviews</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exit tickets or Google forms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal feedback</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 5 - How does the district collect evaluation data reflective of the impact professional development has on student outcomes?</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District academic achievement data</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M-STEP data</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze school records</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal reflection</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct observations by trained observers or digital recordings</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online survey</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured interviews</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 27 - Continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>4%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Level 6 - How do district professionals use their evaluation results to make program improvements?

**Evaluation results are used for reflection:**
- Data analysis and reflection

**Evaluation results are used to identify areas of need and conduct future planning:**
- Analyze and review data for future planning
- They identify any academic gaps or professional learning needs to create a plan for the future
- To guide future professional development planning
- The exit tickets as well as student data help guide decisions for planning future PD.
- Review and adjust based off consistent feedback
- Through progress monitoring and staff directed corrective action plans
- Use of google forms on PD helps direct future PD. Suggestions made are taken into consideration.

**Evaluation results are used to support a process of continual improvement:**
- Through a continuous loop of improvement, district level improvement team meetings, and MTSS data review
- Through the School Improvement Process
- Data days throughout the district, rich with MTSS, as we have a full-time coordinator in each building and curriculum chairs to support K-12 collaboration
- We have teacher coaches who provide district-wide PD on topics based on evaluation results but who also provide 1:1 teacher modeling, input and feedback.
- They have department meetings where they can review data and collaboratively plan based on results. They also use this time for development and implementation planning for new strategies/programming/concepts.

**Evaluation results are used to support the monitoring of systems:**
- The district will conduct evaluations to ensure that fidelity of instruction is occurring, if it is and students are not progressing it becomes a question of are we programming appropriately for the child or children.
- Results are part of a larger system so if the system needs to be adjusted to meet student needs, we will do so. If evaluation results are unique to the teacher's program assignment, goals would be created to address such needs.
- At the special education level, information is brought to teams and adjustments made via professional teaming and agreement.
Table 27 - Continued

**Evaluation results are used for other purposes:**
- That varies a lot if the administration continues to support the effort in their buildings.
- I’m not sure that we do.

**RQ3) Qualitative Data Analysis**

When asked about professional development evaluation models their districts utilize, two administrators referred to their teacher evaluation models. However, one administrator acknowledged, “while it is not specifically a professional development evaluation model, it is central to our practices and guides our planning, development of district goals, and teacher goals.” Additionally, administrators highlighted being in the beginning stages of the evaluation process and supported this idea by listing surveys, questionnaires, Google forms, and exit tickets as models their districts utilize.

Table 28

*PD Models (N=23)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PD Models (N=23)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List any professional development evaluation models the district utilizes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys, questionnaires, Google form, or exit tickets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We use the 5D+ system for staff evaluations. This is a teaching and learning model that helps guide our PD planning and is used to assess growth in teaching staff related to specific areas of need under the 5 domains. While it is not specifically a professional development evaluation model, it is central to our practices and guides our planning, development of district goals, and teacher goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often times PD feedback will be given via questionnaire in our PD system, however this school year that feature has been turned off, so feedback will be up to the presenter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are in the beginning stages of revamping the evaluation process in our department.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additional comments offered regarding evaluating professional development focused on supporting evaluation through strong mentorship programs and evidence-based strategy implementation.

Table 29

*Additional Comments for Evaluating PD (N=23)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are there any additional comments you would like to add regarding evaluating professional development?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have a strong mentor/mentee program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence based strategies are shared with us to help develop best avenues of PD.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Accountability Measures Considered in Evaluating Professional Development**

When discussing accountability in professional development, administrators highlighted processes and systems in which both teachers and administrators play a role. Some administrators discussed necessary steps teachers follow before, during, and shortly after a professional development experience. For example, “submitting a request to attend any kind of professional development”, evaluating professional development opportunities “at the end so that we could have participants’ feedback, both positive as well as suggestions for the next time around”, and completing a “pre and post-test aligned to the learner objectives”. Further, statements administrators made regarding processes and systems in which teachers participate highlighted sharing out information and implementing new practices:

**Example 1)** *we require them to share out at a staff meeting*

**Example 2)** *[I ask] What did you learn? How was it beneficial?*

**Example 3)** *If it really was something that was just targeted to special ed, then we would have them just share, like at the building team meeting if it might not be as applicable to everybody. So that sharing piece of information I feel is crucial.*
Example 4) Having the expectations that what you’re learning should be seen, just like the students. You should be implementing all of that good work and all of those trainings that you’re seeing. Also, if I send somebody somewhere or if I send a group somewhere, then they are coming back and reporting what they’re learning. Really what is the best way of implementing what they’ve learned in the classroom and what’s worked and what hasn’t worked. And if it’s something that they feel passionate about, is that something that you feel we could share with others. I definitely have them always report back with what they’ve learned.

Administrators also highlighted their own role in the evaluation process. The main points administrators made focused on their role in teacher evaluations and their role in building systems. For example, many administrators mentioned teacher performance evaluations as a means for professional development accountability. System building was a strong component that surfaced when discussing accountability:

Example 1) [We need to] build a system than that is comprehensive and holds all of us accountable to what we said we were going to do for the year.

Example 2) Because we have what we call the profile of the graduate or learner profile, which we call our compass, that’s what we tie just about everything back to. All of those learner attributes that are in there are kind of what we are tying all of our district and school improvement towards. So, when students leave us, they’re going to have these eight attributes or skill sets. And really, when we establish our professional development framework for the year, since it’s teacher leaders from every building, and administrators from every building, we are all pretty cohesive, making sure it aligns to those big district goals.
Example 3) [We use a] PD management system, where we store stuff for accountability purposes. I do think that the built-in survey is helpful. I don’t think it gives us as much anecdotal information as we need and so that’s why I feel like people have probably gone to some of those different strategies (i.e., Exit Tickets, Google surveys) to collect more information.

Example 4) The formal coaching process I would say is something that we have implemented this year as well as having peer to peer conversation around videos they have taken of themselves implementing strategies.

Additionally, when analyzing Michigan Compiled Law, parameters surrounding teacher evaluations were noted. Specifically, districts are directed to use the evaluations, at a minimum, to inform decisions regarding teacher promotion, teacher retention, and development of teachers and school administrators, including providing relevant coaching, instruction support, or professional development. Similarly, when interviewed, one administrator discussed new teacher professional development requirements from MDE and the importance of using these requirements in aligning professional development opportunities for new teachers.

District administrators also shared strengths and weaknesses within their accountability processes:

Example 1) Because so much of [professional development choices] are teacher driven, we don’t really have a problem with accountability. Your people want it, so they’re getting on board with it, and they’re implementing. So, we don’t have too much of a problem with that.

Example 2) Professional development, I really think it’s so important, especially for our, for our newer staff. But even for our more seasoned staff to make sure that it’s relevant
and people find purpose in it. Because if you just create a session, and no one understands really the why behind it, it’s just a waste of money and time. If it’s not something you’re going to monitor or expect them to know, I think it really centers around expectations too. When you deliver something, we expect for you to change your teaching practices or for you to learn from this and employ some of these strategies within your classroom. We may not see the perfect model of what you saw today but we expect to start seeing pieces of that in your teaching.

**Example 3** I don’t think we do a good job with it. In fairness, I think when you’re finished with a professional development, you know, series or just a day collecting that feedback from staff to make sure that it was relevant and that they got something or felt like they grew from attending that professional development. But in terms of actually translating into the classroom, that really comes down to those observations by our principals and my coaching staff as well as my supervisors when they can get into the classrooms. I think probably, because we have, you know, 21 different buildings and I think I have 80 teaching staff...I think that becomes more challenging. Looking at the day I do think that those focus data meetings, though, that we have, because any professional development that we do should really translate into student performance, you know, increasing and so just kind of always making sure that we stay focused on what is that data telling us.

**Michigan Department of Education and Michigan Compiled Law.** In analyzing documents from MDE and MCL, a number of accountability items were found. MDE explains for the first three years of employment in classroom teaching, a new teacher shall 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. Also, during the three-year period, the intensive professional development induction into teaching shall consist of at least 15 days of professional development in which teachers experience effective practices in university-linked professional development schools, and regional seminars conducted by master teachers and other mentors. Further, the board of each district shall provide at least five days of teacher professional development each school year.

MDE also references the act of mentoring by stating for the first three years of employment in classroom teaching, a teacher shall be assigned by the school in which he or she teaches to one or more master teachers, or college professors or retired master teachers, who shall act as a mentor to the teacher. As part of the performance evaluation system, and in addition to the requirements of section MCL 380.1526, Act of 1976, a school district is encouraged to assign a mentor to each new teacher. Additionally, the district shall provide training to teachers on the evaluation tool used in performance evaluation.

**Professional Learning Policy.** Professional learning as defined by Learning Forward (formerly the National Staff Development Council) means a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement. This definition focuses on the staff that has the most direct impact on students and learning and is consistent with the emphasis of work funded and supported by the United States Department of Education. The Michigan Professional Learning Policy moves away from the use of single isolated events to programs that are “planned, coherent actions and support systems designed and implemented to develop educators’ knowledge, skills, attitudes, aspirations, and
behaviors to improve student achievement” (Killion, 2008, p. 213). The most effective programs engage participants in sustained, collaborative professional learning. A well-designed and administered program evaluation enables program managers and participants to make data-based decisions about the program and provide solid evidence of reasonable returns on a district’s or school’s investment. The goal of this policy is to support a professional learning system that engages people throughout the entire educational community in continuous learning and improvement.

Program evaluation is defined in Professional Learning Policy as a systematic, purposeful review and analysis of multiple sources of data to make informed decisions about the nature and impact of a program (Killion, 2008). Reasons given for conducting program evaluations include: (a) provide evidence of effectiveness and efficiency, (b) ensure that the time and investment spent were beneficial and not wasted, and (c) facilitate program improvements or decisions to scale up or discontinue the program (Archibald et al., 2011; Haslam, 2010; Killion, 2008).

The Professional Learning Policy goes on to explain districts and schools will benefit from having an evaluation plan—a design that details data collection, analysis, and reporting strategies. Such planning typically begins early as an important part of the overall planning of professional learning, and it reflects the professional learning as designed by the facilitators or designers. There is no one best approach to evaluation, however, there is general agreement that an effective program evaluation: (a) includes a variety of qualitative and quantitative measures, (b) aligns with stated goals found in individual, school and district improvement plans, (c) incorporates local periodic needs assessments, (d) is carried out at both the local and statewide levels, (e) takes into account the context in which professional learning is delivered, (f) investigates the process by which professional learning is delivered, (g) examines the content of
what professional learning delivers, (h) includes a cost-benefit analysis to determine to what extent the benefits of a program outweigh the costs, (i) engages all involved education stakeholders in some aspect of the evaluation process, (j) is itself routinely evaluated, and (k) disseminates interim or final findings with the expectation that they will be used in a timely manner for planning and decision-making (Haslam, 2010; Killion, 2008).

Further, evaluation plans are often organized around a set of broad questions. It is suggested by MDE that questions for a professional learning evaluation include the following:

1. In what ways have education stakeholders been affected by their participation in professional learning activities (on their knowledge, skills and dispositions)?
2. In what ways have students been affected by professional learning at the local level (learning, attitudes, behaviors, opportunities to learn)?
3. What is the nature and extent of implementation of the Michigan Professional Learning System at the local level?
4. What is the relationship of professional learning to individual, school and district improvement efforts?
5. What are the strengths and limitations of professional learning efforts? What is working and what is not?

These questions are answered through both formative and summative evaluations. Each promotes understanding in several important ways. Formative evaluation involves ongoing monitoring of the program as it is being implemented. It helps identify and assess participant satisfaction, whether participants have mastered the new knowledge and skills and whether both are being applied in the work place, whether the professional learning was implemented as planned and if midterm changes are necessary to achieve intended results. Summative evaluation
of the professional learning program determines whether the program achieved the intended outcomes, as reflected in various measures, including improved job performance and increased student learning; when appropriate, change in school organization and culture; and finally, program evaluation necessarily requires use of human and financial resources at the local and state level. To maximize use of resources - time, expertise, money - evaluation activities need to be prioritized, focusing on those activities that will best address individual, school and district improvement needs.

MDE Professional Learning Policy lays out accountability measures in discussing professional learning systems, educator evaluations, licensure renewal requirements, and teacher certification requirements in alignment with professional learning. The policy explains the design, development, and implementation of an effective professional learning system must:

- Build from learning goals and objectives established during pre-service preparation and developed throughout the educator’s career;
- Align with national and state standards and local school improvement plans to improve job performance and student growth and proficiency;
- Engage personnel in a process of continuous improvement in which evidence and data are used to assess needs, define learning goals, design learning opportunities, and evaluate the effectiveness of the professional learning in meeting identified learning goals;
- Facilitate sustained, collaborative, job embedded professional learning, including opportunities to participate in communities of practice;
- Provide continuous learning to support and sustain the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the work place;
• Provide increased opportunities among stakeholder organizations for collaboration and collective responsibility for the learning of children, youth, and adults; and

• Utilize and leverage the necessary resources for continuous professional learning, ensuring that local, state, and federal funds are aligned and in compliance with professional learning policy.

The policy also discusses Educator Evaluations Michigan law (380.1249), which requires “rigorous, transparent, and fair” annual performance evaluations for all teachers. The evaluations must include multiple rating categories for job performance, including data on student growth as a “significant factor.” These evaluations are intended to identify areas of development and improvement, including specific performance goals, for educators that should be addressed through professional learning. Evaluation outcomes, inclusive of the educator’s improvement through professional learning, are also a determining factor in licensure, certification, and the renewals. Professional learning opportunities and activities are tied to all educators’ evaluations.

Licensure renewal requirements professional learning is discussed in the policy as it plays a key role in Michigan’s new Three-Tiered Teacher Certification System. The purpose of Michigan’s three-tiered certification is to provide a continuum of teacher development beginning with the formal professional preparation program and continuing throughout the entire career of a teacher. The three-tiered certification system establishes a career ladder for teachers, so they can advance within the teaching profession. The new system moves away from basing certification solely on inputs such as degrees, college credits completed, and years of service to basing it on outcomes such as effective teaching performance and leadership. Currently, Michigan issues two levels of certificates: Provisional (the initial teaching certification based on completion of an approved preparation program) and Professional (the continuing teaching
certification based on completion of 18 semester hour credits since the issuance of the Provisional certificate). The three-tiered certification system will add a voluntary third level of certification, the Advanced Professional license, which requires the teacher to demonstrate proven performance as an effective teacher and the impact of that performance on student learning.

**Guiding Documents from Michigan’s Top 25 Districts.** Documents such as Annual Education Reports (AER) and Collective Bargaining Agreements from local districts in which administrators were interviewed, highlighted items concerning accountability. For example, one AER which contained information about student assessment, accountability, and teacher quality, explained, “We are still continuously working to improve in our instructional approach so that we can continue to see growth in student achievement.”

One district’s Collective Bargaining Agreement provided great detail on teacher evaluation and ways in which it works as a measure of accountability. The agreement stated:

The performance of all teachers, both probationary and tenure, shall be evaluated in writing annually. Evaluation of a teacher is an ongoing process conducted throughout the school year to assess the work performance of a teacher and enhance the educational process. The assessment of performance will be based on formal and informal observations, student growth data, appropriate input from others, and other reliable evidence that relates to performance. Anything contained within these administrative regulations notwithstanding, all evaluations of teachers shall be conducted pursuant to current state law. A general pre-evaluation informational meeting will be held with teachers, either individually or collectively, in each building at the start of each school year. All ancillary teachers not covered by the teacher tenure act shall be evaluated at
least once every school year. All probationary staff will have an Individual Development Plan (IDP). IDPs will be developed in consultation with the teacher. The IDPs shall not provide more than 180 calendar days to demonstrate progress, and shall include professional development, instructional support, and/or coaching. Development of the IDP should include a discussion as to what growth data will be used in the teacher’s evaluation. A mentor shall be provided for probationary teachers within their first three years of teaching.

A mid-year progress report is required for probationary teachers in their first year of the probationary period. The mid-year progress report shall meet the following requirements: (a) be based in part on student achievement, (b) be aligned with the IDP (i.e., progress on meeting the goals of the IDP should be addressed), (c) include specific performance goals for rest of year, and (d) include new or modified goals to the extent needed, as well as recommended training, to be developed in consultation with the teacher.

The Year-End Evaluation shall be based upon an assessment of factor in making the decision, and shall consist of the following: (a) evidence of student growth, which shall be the predominant factor in assessing the individual performance of an employee and (b) the teacher’s performance as measured by The Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument.

The Collective Bargaining Agreement also discussed classroom observations as they apply to all probationary teachers. It explained there shall be a minimum of three formal observations, with a reasonable period of time between the observations. Additional observations may be conducted, particularly where problems have been observed. A teacher may be observed
by an administrator with or without advance notice. If required by law, at least one observation shall be unscheduled. The formal observation shall include: (a) review of the teacher’s lesson plan, (b) review of the state and/or district curriculum standard being taught in the observed lesson, and (c) assessment of the observable domains using The Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument. Student growth and assessment data is also discussed in the agreement in terms of teacher evaluation. Data shall be weighted as a factor in the Year-End Evaluation according to applicable law. If the law does not specify a percentage, then the Superintendent shall determine the percentage factor for purposes of the Year-End Evaluation.

Finally, the Collective Bargaining Agreement provided expectations for professional development for teachers working in the district. Professional development in this district, according to the agreement, takes place through data team meetings, required professional development days, school year in-services and building meetings.

**Data Team Meetings.** In order to comply with the Public Act 306 of 2016 (MCL 380.1280f), all elementary teachers (K-5) will be required to participate in grade-level team meetings three times per year at the conclusion of each testing window. These data meetings should be conducted at an agreed upon time with the building literacy team. All elementary building literacy teams shall include grade level teachers, reading specialists, building principal and relevant special populations staff members. Acceptable meeting times are any non-instructional time periods (i.e. before or after school), including common preparation time. The purpose of these meetings will be to create a growth plan for students performing below grade level expectations.
**Professional Development Days.** Teachers shall be required to complete a minimum of thirty hours of professional development annually. It is understood and agreed that the minimal amount of required annual professional development shall be in accordance with applicable state law and regulations.

**In-service Training and Building Meetings.** Five half days per year may be allowed for in-service training, workshops, curriculum studies, etc., not including special days as listed in the calendar. The district shall make in-service training on special education issues available to teachers prior to the beginning of the school year. The Board shall provide in-service training and orientation for general education and special education teachers regarding practices to be used with students who are included in general education classes. The in-service training and orientation shall include, but is not limited to, a clarification of the teacher’s responsibilities as they relate to grading, instruction, and communication with parents and support personnel. Teachers shall be provided written guidelines as to the law, district policy, and appropriate persons to contact regarding inclusion and special education. General education teachers will be informed regarding the nature of a special education student’s disability placed in their classrooms.

**Data for District Evaluation of Professional Development**

Throughout the interviews, data collection for evaluation was discussed frequently. The purpose of data collection and what the data was reportedly used for did vary. Throughout analysis, the following themes surfaced: (a) data which reflects participant reactions to professional development experiences, (b) data which reflects new knowledge, skills, or attitudes gained by participants, (c) data which reflects organizational characteristics necessary...
for success, (d) data which reflects the impact professional development has on professional practice, and (e) how districts use their evaluation results to make program improvements.

Most often data reflective of participant reactions was collected and analyzed through survey data:

Example 1) A survey at the end so that we can have participants’ feedback, both positive as well as suggestions for the next time around.

Example 2) A Google survey went out afterwards to see how people felt it was.

Example 3) We do a lot of surveys. We will survey staff...Did you like the way we set up the PD this year as far as the structure of the symposium, release days, or half days? Did you like the content? What would you like to see more? How would you like to see it delivered?

Example 4) They would at least have a questionnaire. Was this helpful or? Are there better ways to deliver the message?

Example 5) There is a survey that is supposed to be filled out by every attendee. It was in our professional development management system that we use.

Exit tickets were also used for immediate feedback on participant reactions:

Example 1) We’ll do an exit ticket or afterwards, send a survey.

Example 2) Sometimes people will do those tickets out the door because they feel like that’s a little bit more immediate.

Personal follow ups were also discussed:

Example 1) Something I have found to be pretty helpful, is I always ask them, is there anything else you would like to say about this PD?
Next, participants discussed data from professional development experiences which was reflective of new knowledge, skills, or attitudes gained. This data was collected primarily through pre and post-tests aligned with learner objectives and shared reflections. Statements that highlighted data collection through shared reflections included:

**Example 1)** *I will then ask them to send me an email explaining what are the top three things you’re going to implement? Or that you took away from it? Or what are the top two things you’re going to implement or takeaway from? And then send me one thing that I can do better for you. Do I need to purchase something for you? Do you need to do another follow up? Can I send you someplace else?*

**Example 2)** *I ask them to share what did they learn? What was their big takeaway? What do they need now that they’ve received this training?*

Administrators touched on data which was reflective of organizational characteristics necessary for success.

**Example 1)** *We have a district survey that goes out that measures many of our systems. One of the systems would be professional development, but that would be a smaller piece in the whole system measurement.*

**Example 2)** *As an administrative team and a teacher leader team, we will go through all of that information and make adjustments for the following year. You can’t please everybody all the time, but we do our best to really take that feedback and apply it. When we see patterns or trends, we make adjustments.*

Discussions surrounding data which is reflective of the impact professional development has on professional practice took place in some interviews:
**Example 1)** We look at data. Our M-STEP said we better start looking at math. So, we are still looking at student data, right? Progression of data and student growth data. Thinking about some year one and year two PD that all the teachers are getting to them especially for instructional strategies and things of that nature.

**Example 2)** We use multi-tiered systems of support as our vehicle to move instruction. So, I would say that a way to determine implementation, to determine if practices are really happening in the classroom, that we have fidelity checklists. So, through our MTSS process, we’ve got a map. Sometimes the programs we utilize actually have their own fidelity. We do have that at the building level. At the district level, our MTSS coordinator works with all the building and MTSS point people. She teaches them how to complete the protocol, and then they do the building level. That data goes right back to the district leadership to MTSS. So that’s really how we determine PD in general.

Finally, evidence of districts using their evaluation results to make program improvements surfaced in interviews and in document reviews.

**Example 2)** I do think that the built-in survey in our professional development management system is helpful. I don’t think it gives us as much anecdotal information as we need and so that’s why I feel like people have probably gone to some of those different strategies to collect more information.

**Example 2)** We do a pretty comprehensive survey that gives us a big picture idea of where people are as it relates to climate and culture, as it relates to professional development, and those areas. Then we, as a cabinet team and as departments, will drill down and then start to talk about what are some of the needs that were identified from this?
**Example 3)** In a district Professional Development Plan document, the district communicated the following “Big Shifts to Meeting Schedule and PD in Response to Feedback”:

- Grow and synthesize important work, but not add items as a “new initiative(s)”
- Consolidate and/or streamline tasks and goals
- Create more time for building level work
- Respect differing needs regarding timing and location of PD
- Honor voice & choice for staff members in “On Your Own” PD with additional options
- Move Symposium to winter to lighten August “load”
- Balance obligations across months/year

**Guiding Documents from Michigan’s top 25 Districts.** A Collective Bargaining Agreement provided guidance on collecting data for evaluating professional development. It explained, in lieu of a sign-in validation for attendance, teachers are to complete an online survey through the district’s professional development management system after they have attended the professional development session. The survey will consist of the following response prompts:

- The intended outcomes, as described for this offering, were accomplished.
- The offering was organized so I had time to reflect on what I learned.
- The presenters modeled effective questioning strategies and facilitation techniques to enhance my learning of content and/or skills.
- The offering was organized so I had time to collaborate with colleagues and plan how to implement the new content and/or skills.
• I feel confident in my ability to implement the new knowledge or skills gained in this offering in my current position.

• Three specific ways I might implement the new knowledge or skills gained in my current position.

RQ3) Divergence and Convergence

A major point of convergence was found in analyzing how district administrators ensure the implementation of an evaluation process is used with new special education teachers. District administrators expressed a strong connection to accountability measures connected to state policy, district expectations, and teacher evaluation goals.

Accountability to state policy, district expectations, and teacher evaluation goals in quantitative data was found as administrators reported considering MDE new teacher professional development requirements, new teacher mentoring requirements, and specific teacher goals when determining accountability measures for professional development. These considerations were all discussed in further detail during administrator interviews. Qualitative data from administrator interviews showed specific considerations for accountability measures in evaluating professional development included (a) required steps teachers take before, during, and after professional development experiences, (b) district expectations for sharing out learned information and implementing new practices, (c) teacher evaluation goals, (d) following new teacher professional development requirements from MDE, and (e) aligning professional development opportunities for new teachers with MDE policy. Additionally, in analyzing documents such as excerpts from Michigan Complied Law, MDE Professional Learning Policy, and district collective bargaining agreements, accountability expectations were clearly discussed in terms of length of time new teachers must participate in intensive professional development,
types of professional development in which new teachers must participate, professional learning systems districts must establish, teacher evaluation requirements, licensure renewal requirements, and teacher certification requirements.

Additional points of convergence as well as points of divergence were found when analyzing data which reflected evaluating professional development on a six-level scale. The first level of evaluation reflects participant reactions to professional development experiences. Quantitative data showed administrators evaluate data from participant evaluations and online surveys. While qualitative data showed administrators evaluate data for level one evaluation from surveys, exit tickets, and personal follow up meetings. Level two evaluation reflects new knowledge, skills, or attitudes gained by participants from professional development. Quantitative data showed administrators evaluated level two data collected from written and verbal personal reflections. Similarly, qualitative data showed administrators evaluated data from shared reflections. However, qualitative responses also included evaluation data from pre and post-tests aligned with learner objectives were used in level two evaluation. Level three evaluation is reflective of organizational characteristics necessary for success. Quantitative data collected to evaluate level three showed administrators use questionnaires focused on original efforts as well as analyze school records. However, qualitative data showed administrators analyze survey data as an administrative team to discover patterns and trends while analyzing. Level four evaluation data reflects the impact professional development has on professional practice. Quantitative data showed administrators look to data gathered through direct observations by trained observers or digital recordings, questionnaires, and through data collected at intervals over time. Similarly, qualitative data showed administrators look to data from fidelity checks of programs. However, interviews highlighted student outcome data and
MTSS evaluation as being used in level four evaluation of professional development. Level five evaluation data is reflective of the impact professional development has on student outcomes. Quantitative data showed administrators use data collected from district achievement scores, M-STEP scores, personal reflections, and direct observations by trained observers. However, qualitative data showed administrators analyze survey data as departments or as administrative teams. Level six evaluation data reflects how districts use their evaluation data to make program improvements. Quantitative data showed administrators use evaluation results to identify areas of need and conduct future planning, support a process of continual improvement, and to support the monitoring of systems. Qualitative data showed administrators use evaluation results from built-in surveys within their professional development management system to identify areas of need as well as data from comprehensive surveys to identify areas of need. However, interviews found evaluation results are analyzed as departments or administrative teams. Supporting statements of analyzing how districts use their evaluation data to make program improvements were found in document analysis. For example, in an Annual Evaluation Report published by a local district, the idea of using multiple points of evaluation data to make program improvements was highlighted by the following statement:

The goals and improvement plan are developed in the spring of each school year based on the data that is provided including: student/staff/parent survey responses, M-STEP, NWEA, MME, SAT and EXPLORE/PLAN data, as well as local assessments such as end of-trimester summative exam scores and grade level assessments.
Table 30

*Divergence in Quantitative and Qualitative Responses Regarding Leveled Evaluation of PD*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level 1 - How does the district collect evaluation data that reflects participant reactions to professional development experiences?</th>
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</table>
| **Quantitative Responses from Administrators**  
  Participant evaluations  
  **Online surveys** |
| **Qualitative Responses from Administrators**  
  **Surveys**  
  Exit tickets  
  Personal follow up meetings |

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Level 2 - How does the district collect evaluation data reflective of new knowledge, skills, or attitudes gained by professional development participants?</th>
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</table>
| **Quantitative Responses from Administrators**  
  **Written personal reflections**  
  **Verbal personal reflections** |
| **Qualitative Responses from Administrators**  
  Pre and post-tests aligned with learner objectives  
  **Shared reflections** |

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<tr>
<th>Level 3 - How does the district collect evaluation data reflective of organizational characteristics necessary for success?</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| **Quantitative Responses from Administrators**  
  Questionnaires focused on original efforts  
  School records |
| **Qualitative Responses from Administrators**  
  Survey data is reviewed in administrative team  
  Patterns and trends |

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Level 4 - How does the district collect evaluation data reflective of the impact professional development has on professional practice?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Quantitative Responses from Administrators**  
  **Direct observations by trained observers or digital recordings**  
  Questionnaires  
  **Data collected at intervals over time** |
| **Qualitative Responses from Administrators**  
  Student outcome data  
  **Fidelity checking of programs**  
  MTSS evaluation |
Table 30 - Continued

Level 5 - How does the district collect evaluation data reflective of the impact professional development has on student outcomes?

Quantitative Responses from Administrators
- District achievement scores
- M-STEP data
- School records
- Direct observations by trained observers or digital recordings

Qualitative Responses from Administrators
- Survey data analyzed in departments or administrative teams

Level 6 - How do district professionals use their evaluation results to make program improvements?

Quantitative Responses from Administrators
  Evaluation results are used to identify areas of need and conduct future planning
  Evaluation results are used to support a process of continual improvement
  Evaluation results are used to support the monitoring of systems

Qualitative Responses from Administrators
  Evaluation results are analyzed as departments or as administrative teams
  Evaluation data from built-in surveys within professional development management system is used to identify areas of need
  Evaluation data from comprehensive surveys are used to identify areas of need

Points of convergence are bolded in the table.

Summary

First, quantitative and qualitative data collected for the purpose of this research suggests district administrators determine professional learning needs of new special education teachers by (a) looking to policies and guidelines, (b) gathering feedback, and (c) reviewing data sources. Policies and guidelines administrators look to when determining professional development needs include:

- district-allocated professional development time,
- district improvement plans,
- new teacher professional development requirements,
• updates on laws and state recommendations, and
• information from professional networks and lessons learned from model school districts.

Feedback administrators gather when determining professional development needs include:

• principal feedback,
• mentor feedback
• district-made teacher survey feedback,
• face-to-face teacher feedback,
• walk through feedback, and
• observation feedback.

Data sources administrators review when determining professional development needs include:

• student achievement data,
• state achievement data, and
• teacher reported data.

Planning decisions are made predominantly through collaboration amongst district staff teams. Barriers such as time, money, and differentiating professional development exist. Adult learning theories such as collaborative learning, immediate application of learning, and self-directed learning are used in developing new teachers.

Second, quantitative and qualitative data collected for the purpose of this research suggests district administrators determine the most effective methods of professional development for new special education teachers by (a) determining preferred methods of professional development and (b) balancing outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences. When implementing professional development for new
special education teachers, administrators prefer the following methods of professional development:

- professional learning communities,
- mentoring,
- continuous professional development, and
- professional conferences.

When implementing professional development for new special education teachers, administrators aim to balance professional development experiences to include:

- administrator-led professional development (i.e., data review, data digs, professional learning communities)
- peer-led professional development (i.e., learning walks, colleague to colleague discussions, and professional discussions using protocols), and
- outside expert-led professional development (i.e., conferences, trainings provided by ISDs or RESAs, and webinars).

Finally, quantitative and qualitative data collected for the purpose of this research suggests district administrators ensure the implementation of an evaluation process is used with new special education teachers by (a) considering accountability measures and (b) supporting leveled evaluation efforts. When ensuring the implementation of an evaluation process is used with new special education teachers, administrators consider accountability measures which include:

- state policy and guidance (i.e., Michigan Complied Law, MDE Professional Learning Policy, MDE new teacher professional development requirements, MDE new teacher mentoring requirements),
• district expectations (i.e., district collective bargaining agreements; required steps teachers take before, during, and after professional development experiences; district expectations for sharing out learned information and implementing new practices), and
• teacher evaluation goals (i.e., teacher evaluation requirements, specific teacher goals, licensure renewal requirements, and teacher certification requirements).

When ensuring the implementation of an evaluation process is used with new special education teachers, administrator engage in leveled evaluation efforts by:

• evaluating data from participant evaluations, online surveys, exit tickets, and personal follow up meetings;
• evaluating data from written and verbal personal reflections as well as data from pre and post-tests aligned with learner objectives;
• evaluating questionnaires focused on targeted efforts and analyze school records as an administrative team to discover patterns and trends;
• evaluating data collected at intervals over time gathered through direct observations by trained observers or digital recordings, questionnaires, fidelity checks of programs, student outcome data, and through MTSS evaluation;
• evaluating data collected from district achievement scores, M-STEP scores, personal reflections, and direct observations by trained observers which are analyze as departments or as administrative teams; and
• using their evaluation data with department or administrative teams to make program improvements, identify areas of need, conduct future planning, support a process of continual improvement, and support the monitoring of systems.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSION

Interpretation of Findings

Research Question 1

*How do district administrators who are responsible for planning professional development determine the professional learning needs of their new special education teachers?*

Analysis of data in this study found district administrators (a) determine professional learning needs of new special education teachers by looking to policies and guidelines, gathering feedback, and reviewing data sources; (b) make decisions predominantly through collaborative district staff teams; (c) experience major barriers regarding a lack of time and money; (d) experience challenges in differentiating professional development opportunities; (e) work to incorporate adult learning theories such as collaborative learning, immediate application of learning, and self-directed learning; and (f) prioritize professional development topics such as data-based decision-making, classroom management, and instruction.

Administrators determine professional learning needs of new special education teachers by looking to policies and guidelines, gathering feedback, and reviewing data sources. Specifically, administrators look to policies and guidelines such as district-allocated professional development time, district improvement plans, and new teacher professional development requirements. This study also found district administrators gather feedback from experts in the field, other local administrators, and current staff when planning professional development for new special education teachers. Mostly, feedback is gathered through district-made surveys, administrator observations, and conversations with staff. Additionally, this study found district administrators review data sources such as teacher reported needs, student achievement data, and
state achievement data to determine professional development needs of their new special education teachers.

In considering Guskey’s professional development evaluation model and NTACT’s evaluation model, administrators must not only focus on participants, but also on the organization. For example, once participants are given learning opportunities, it is critical the organization has the right policies and procedures in place and is ready to support that learning and change if needed (Guskey, 2000). Additionally, short-term, in-school and long-term, post-school student outcomes must be analyzed. Finally, NTACT emphasizes (a) the dissemination of evaluation findings and (b) the consideration of the extent to which findings are used for improvement. Interpretations from this study suggest nearly all administrative teams in the top 25 districts in Michigan (a) apply best practices to survey research when gathering feedback, (b) develop systems according to best practice research regarding conducting staff observations, (c) develop key strategies for engaging in meaningful conversations with their staff when gathering feedback, and (d) look to a wide variety of data sources when determining and planning the professional learning needs of new special education teachers. Additional interpretations from these findings suggest some, but not all, of the top 25 districts in Michigan (a) consider the impact of current professional development policies and guidelines on improving student outcomes and (b) prioritize alignment between evaluation findings of current practices with policy and guideline development.
### RQ1 List of Findings and Interpretations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Interpretations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrators determine professional learning needs of new special education teachers by looking to policies and guidelines, gathering feedback, and reviewing data sources.</td>
<td>District administrators apply best practices to survey research when gathering feedback. Administrative teams develop systems according to best practice research regarding gathering feedback through conducting staff observations.</td>
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<td>Administrators make decisions predominantly through collaborative district staff teams.</td>
<td>Administrative teams develop key strategies for engaging in meaningful conversations with their staff when gathering feedback.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administrators experience major barriers regarding a lack of time and money.</td>
<td>Administrative planning teams look to a wide variety of data sources when determining the professional learning needs of the new special education teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators experience challenges in differentiating professional development opportunities.</td>
<td>Administrative teams evaluate the impact of current professional development policies and guidelines on improving student outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators incorporate adult learning theories such as collaborative learning, immediate application of learning, and self-directed learning.</td>
<td>Administrative teams prioritize alignment between evaluation feedback regarding current practices with policy and guideline development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators prioritize professional development topics such as data-based decision-making, classroom management, and instruction.</td>
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### Research Question 2

*How do district administrators who are responsible for implementing professional development determine the most effective methods to be used with new special education teachers?*

Findings from this study show district administrators determine the most effective methods of professional development for new special education teachers by (a) determining preferred methods of professional development and (b) balancing outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences. When surveyed,
administrators selected (a) professional learning communities, (b) continuous professional development, and (c) professional conferences as the top three methods of professional development they viewed to be most impactful. Interview responses highlighted professional development opportunities which were led by outside experts, administrators, and peers. Outside expert-led professional development was highlighted through attending conferences and trainings provided by ISDs or RESAs. Administrator-led professional development such as ongoing data review and data digs aligned with survey responses that professional learning communities are frequently used. Finally, peer-led professional development such as learning walks, colleague to colleague discussions, and professional discussions using protocols reflect continuous professional development.

When asked which opportunities they were most likely to encourage, facilitate, or approve, administrators surveyed most frequently reported (a) structured professional development days within each school, (b) release time from class, (c) collaborative lesson preparation time, and (d) structured professional development days outside of the district. Similarly, interview data showed administrators support structured professional development days within each district by facilitating professional development during meetings built into the school day for data review, data digs, and training on instructional strategies. Administrators facilitate release time from class through learning walks and face-to-face coaching. Finally, administrators facilitate structured professional development days outside of the district by encouraging teachers to participate in webinars and send their staff to professional conferences. These findings align with research literature surrounding multi-component approaches which result in desired increases in teacher behaviors (Allen & Forman, 1984). Findings also support alignment with ESSA in regards to professional development activities which are: (a) an integral
part of school and local education agency strategies for providing educators with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in the core academic subjects and to meet challenging State academic standards; and (b) are sustained (not stand-alone, one day, and short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data driven, and classroom-focused.

Interpretations from these findings suggest administrators evaluate professional learning communities, continuous professional development opportunities, and professional conferences for impact on student outcomes and job performance. Second, administrators consider outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences as potential options for developing their new special education teachers. Finally, administrators evaluate outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences for impact on student outcomes and job performance. These interpretations align with research conducted by Baird and Clark (2018) who discuss professional development models in which teachers take ownership of their learning by being actively involved in planning and implementing sessions. Additionally, Baird and Clark (2018) highlight the effectiveness of professional development strategies by measuring teacher behavior in the classroom and student learning outcomes. Professional development research literature encourages professional development which is embedded in the school day, sustained for several years, and focused on curriculum implementation with consistent connections to instructional strategies to gain positive student learning outcomes (Desimone, 2009; Kervin, 2007; King, 2014; Webster-Wright, 2009).

Table 32

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Interpretations</th>
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<tr>
<td>Administrators determine preferred methods of professional development.</td>
<td>Administrators evaluate professional learning communities, continuous</td>
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</table>
Table 32 - Continued

| Administrators view professional learning communities, continuous professional development, and professional conferences as the top three most impactful methods of professional development. | Administrators consider outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences as potential options for developing their new special education teachers. |
| Administrators balance outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences. | Administrators evaluate outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences for impact on student outcomes and job performance. |
| Administrators are most likely to encourage, facilitate, or approve, (a) structured professional development days within each school, (b) release time from class, (c) collaborative lesson preparation time, and (d) structured professional development days outside of the district. | Administrators evaluate outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences for impact on student outcomes and job performance. |

Research Question 3

How do district administrators who are responsible for the evaluation of professional development ensure the implementation of an evaluation process is used with new special education teachers?

Findings from this study show administrators ensure the implementation of an evaluation process through teacher evaluations is used with new special education teachers. Administrators adhere to accountability measures such as state policy, district expectations, and teacher evaluation goals. When evaluating professional development for new special education teachers, administrators rely on surveys to collect data which reflects participant reactions to professional development experiences. Written, verbal, and shared personal reflection data is collected to evaluate new knowledge, skills, or attitudes gained by professional development participants. Points of convergence were not found in this study when looking for data collected to evaluate organizational characteristics necessary for success. Fidelity checks regarding specific programs, which include district observations by trained observers or digital recordings of instructional
practices reflect data collected to inform the impact of professional development on professional practice. Points of convergence were not found in terms of data collected to evaluate the impact professional development has on student outcomes. Finally, evaluation results such as professional development survey data and comprehensive survey data are used to identify areas of need and to conduct future planning.

Interpretations of these findings suggest administrators adhere to accountability measures. Second, district administrators rely upon teacher evaluation tools as a component of the professional development evaluation process. For example, administrators work with new special education teachers as they set annual professional goals in their evaluation plans as well as look to teacher evaluation goals and activities to understand how professional development works to support individual professional goals. Third, evaluation components which reflect participant reactions; new knowledge, skills or attitudes gained through professional development; and impact professional development has on professional practice, are collected and analyzed within local districts. However, final interpretations from this study support the existing body of research, which shows when professional development evaluation is conducted, it rarely goes beyond teacher reaction (Guskey, 2003; Guskey and Yoon, 2009; Webster-Wright, 2009). Therefore, interpretations from this study suggest evaluation components reflective of organizational characteristics necessary for success, impact on students, and identifying areas of need to conduct future planning are not consistently collected or analyzed within local districts.
Table 33

**RQ3 List of Findings and Interpretations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Findings</th>
<th>Interpretations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrators ensure the implementation of an evaluation process through teacher evaluations is used with new special education teachers.</td>
<td>Teacher evaluation tools can support an evaluation process of professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators adhere to accountability measures such as state policy, district expectations, and teacher evaluation goals.</td>
<td>Administrators adhere to accountability measures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys are used to collect data that reflects participant reactions to professional development experiences.</td>
<td>Evaluation components reflective of participant reactions; new knowledge, skills or attitudes; and impact on professional practice, are collected and analyzed within local districts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written, verbal, and shared personal reflection data are collected from professional development participants to evaluate new knowledge, skills, or attitudes gained by professional development participants.</td>
<td>Evaluation components reflective of organizational characteristics necessary for success, impact on student outcomes, and identifying areas of need to conduct future planning are not consistently collected or analyzed within local districts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Points of convergence were not found in terms of data collected to evaluate organizational characteristics necessary for success.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Fidelity checks regarding specific programs, which include district observations by trained observers or digital recordings of instructional practices reflect data collected to inform the impact of professional development on professional practice.</td>
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<td>Points of convergence were not found in terms of data collected to evaluate the impact professional development has on student outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluation results such as professional development survey data and comprehensive survey data are used to identify areas of need and to conduct future planning.</td>
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Implications for Practice

Limited literature exists on how district administrators can make practical and effective decisions aligned with current research regarding professional development specific to new special education teachers. This study was conducted to provide an in-depth understanding of the barriers district administrators experience in providing professional development to new special education teachers. This study focused on the in-depth description and analysis of administrator decision-making and the thought process and strategies used by current K-12 special education administrators in top districts to meet the needs of the district’s new special education teachers.

Previous research shows new special education teachers often juggle an overwhelming number of unfamiliar issues (De Neve & Devos, 2017; Mizell, 2010). Mizell (2010) suggests extra support be offered through professional development opportunities in which educators gain knowledge and skills needed to more deeply develop effective teaching practices and address identified issues. Implications from this study suggest new special education teachers communicate their perceived needs to their administrators through district-distributed surveys, written or verbal professional development feedback, and through written or face-to-face conversations. Also, when developing teacher evaluation goals, new special education teachers, alongside district administrators, consider their learning needs and how their evaluation goals can align with their perceived needs as well as district goals. When directing their own learning, new special education teachers consider outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences as potential options for effective professional development opportunities.

General and special education administrators have the opportunity to improve the quality and effectiveness of professional development provided to new special education teachers.
District administrators play an important role in determining how to best use allocated professional development time. Findings from this study show administrators adhere to accountability measures. District administrators are required to work within guidelines provided by federal, state, and district governing bodies (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2013; Michigan Department of Education [MDE], 2011; Mizell, 2010). District administrators are tasked with understanding the parameters in which they must work, assess the needs of special educators, implement appropriate professional learning opportunities, and evaluate the success of the implemented professional development.

The decision-making process district administrators use to align professional development opportunities with district improvement goals and professional development methods is a challenging task (Perconti, 2010). However, implications from this study suggest administrators work in collaborative teams when planning, implementing, and evaluating professional development. Administrative teams develop systems according to best practice research when surveying staff, conducting staff observations, engaging in conversations for the purpose of gathering feedback, and reviewing a wide variety of data sources. Data gathered for the purpose of this study indicates district administrators determine professional learning needs of new special education staff by looking to policies, gathering feedback, and reviewing data sources.

Districts in this study use a variety of methods to provide learning opportunities to new special education teachers. Well executed professional development can help districts retain new teachers and set them on the path to becoming effective educators (Mizell, 2010). Implications from this study suggest professional learning communities, collaborative learning experiences, and professional conferences are preferred methods of professional development. However,
administrators must continuously evaluate professional learning communities, continuous professional development opportunities, and professional conferences for impact on student outcomes and job performance. Findings from this study indicated administrators consider outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences as potential options for developing their new special education teachers. Again, administrators must evaluate outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences for impact on student outcomes and job performance.

Identifying how administrators utilize effective tools for evaluating the professional development provided to new special education teachers is key to understanding the decision-making process of district administrators (Guskey, 2016). Findings from this study suggest teacher evaluation tools can support an evaluation process of professional development. Districts studied in this research used survey data in evaluating professional development. Therefore, district administrators apply best practices to survey research when gathering and interpreting feedback. In evaluating professional development, evaluation components reflective of participant reactions; new knowledge, skills or attitudes; and impact on professional practice, are gathered and analyzed within local districts. However, evaluation components reflective of organizational characteristics necessary for success, impact on students, and identify areas of need to conduct future planning are not consistently gathered and analyzed within local districts. However, implications from this study suggest administrative teams prioritize alignment between evaluation findings of current practices with policy and guideline development.

Limitations

This research did not include site visits to confirm the validity, reliability, or accuracy of survey responses or descriptions of conditions provided by interviewees. Further, this research
does not establish an association between professional development and increases in student academic growth.

The sample population in this study represented limited diversity in individual demographics and district demographics. While learning from district administrators working in Michigan’s top 25 school districts is an appropriate approach, this significantly limited the level of administrator and district diversity. For example, of the 23 participants surveyed, all had earned either a master’s degree or above, most had at least 16 years of experience working in education (91%), most had 15 years or less of district administrative experience (69%), and most work as Directors of Special Education, Supervisors of Special Education, or Directors of Student Services (87%). None of the districts represented in this survey were located in a census-defined rural territory (Rural). Therefore, most districts in this study were suburban districts (61%), which employ more than 250 teachers (69%), and serve 3,000-9,000 students (70%), in areas in which 40% or less qualify for free and reduced lunch.

The sample population of interviewed administrators was also fairly limited in terms of demographic diversity. For example, 100% of participants were females, over the age of 36, with at least a master’s degree, and 16 years of educational experience. While the range of years in district administration was more evenly represented, every interviewee was working as a Director or Supervisor of Special Education.

Documents analyzed were not uniform in all districts. After each interview, administrators were asked for suggestions of documents that would help researchers gain deeper insight into their professional development planning, implementing, and evaluating. Administrators offered suggestions which were insightful, however, there may be potential for
deeper understanding in reviewing District Improvement Plans, Annual Education Reports, Collective Bargaining Agreements, and Teacher Evaluation Procedures from each district.

**Recommendations for Research**

Further research could include the following questions:

1) How do administrative decision-making processes differ regarding professional development for new special education teachers in the top 25 districts, the middle 25 districts, and the lowest 25 districts?

2) How do new special education teachers contribute to their professional learning planning, implementation, and evaluation?

3) How do professional development requirements for new teachers in Michigan compare to professional development requirements for new teachers in other states?

4) How do collaborative district administrative teams plan, implement, and evaluate professional development for new special education teachers?

5) How do administrators connect teacher evaluation to professional development evaluation?

**Summary**

According to this study, district administrators (a) determine professional learning needs of new special education teachers by looking to policies and guidelines, gathering feedback, and reviewing data sources; (b) make decisions predominantly through collaborative district staff teams; (c) experience major barriers regarding a lack of time and money; (d) experience challenges in differentiating professional development opportunities; (e) work to incorporate adult learning theories such as collaborative learning, immediate application of learning, and self-directed learning; and (f) prioritize professional development topics such as data-based
decision-making, classroom management, and instruction. Additional findings from this study show district administrators determine the most effective methods of professional development for new special education teachers by (a) determining preferred methods of professional development and (b) balancing outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences. Finally, findings from this study show administrators (a) ensure the implementation of an evaluation process through teacher evaluations is used with new special education teachers; (b) adhere to accountability measures such as state policy, district expectations, and teacher evaluation goals; (c) rely on surveys to collect data which reflects participant reactions to professional development experiences when evaluating professional development for new special education teachers; (d) collect written, verbal, and shared personal reflection data to evaluate new knowledge, skills, or attitudes gained by professional development participants; (e) do not consistently collect data to evaluate organizational characteristics necessary for success; (f) collect data through conducting fidelity checks to inform the impact of professional development on professional practice; (g) do not consistently collect data to evaluate the impact professional development has on student outcomes; and (h) use professional development survey data and comprehensive survey data to identify areas of need and to conduct future planning.

This study provides information for new special education teachers, district administrators, and policy makers as they consider planning, implementation, and evaluation of professional development. Interpretations from this study suggest administrative teams (a) evaluate the impact of current professional development policies and guidelines on improving student outcomes; (b) prioritize alignment between evaluation findings of current practices with policy and guideline development; (c) apply best practices to survey research when gathering
feedback; (d) develop systems according to best practice research regarding conducting staff observations; (e) develop key strategies for engaging in meaningful conversations with their staff when gathering feedback; and (f) look to a wide variety of data sources when determining the professional learning needs of new special education teachers. Additional interpretations from these findings suggest administrators (a) evaluate professional learning communities, continuous professional development opportunities, and professional conferences for impact on student outcomes and job performance; (b) consider outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences as potential options for developing new special education teachers; and (c) evaluate outside expert-led, administrator-led, and peer-led professional development experiences for impact on student outcomes and job performance. Finally, interpretations from this study suggest administrators (a) incorporate teacher evaluation tools within an evaluation process of professional development; (b) adhere to accountability measures; (c) evaluate components reflective of participant reactions; new knowledge, skills or attitudes; and impact on professional practice; and (d) evaluate components reflective of organizational characteristics necessary for success, impact on students, and identify areas of need to conduct future planning.
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Michigan Administrative Rule 390.1103


U.S. Const. amend. X.


Appendix A

HSIRB Approval

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Western Michigan University
Department of Special Education and Literacy Studies

Principal Investigator: Dr. Elizabeth Whitten
Student Investigator: Sarah Bacalia
Title of Study: Examining district administrators’ professional development decision-making processes concerning new special education teachers

STUDY SUMMARY: This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you decide whether you want to take part in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The purpose of the research is to: 1) provide an in-depth understanding of the barriers and supports district administrators experience in providing professional development to new special education teachers, 2) focus on the in-depth description and analysis of administrator decision making, and 3) examine the thought process and strategies used by current K-12 administrators to meet the needs of the new special education teachers. This study will also serve as Sarah Bacalia’s dissertation, research project for the requirements of the Doctor of Special Education Administration. If you take part in the research, you will be asked to complete a 30-minute Qualtrics online survey. The survey includes your demographic information, your district demographic information, sources that provide guidance to you in your role regarding professional development, and strategies you use in your role regarding professional development. At another time, you may be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview, either in person or through an online program such as Facetime, with the student researcher. The interview would be scheduled at your convenience and conducted in a setting that suits your comfort and convenience. The interview will go no longer than 90 minutes, including breaks. Your time in the study will take no more than 120 minutes. All participants will participate in a survey that will take approximately 30 minutes. Five participants will be selected for interviews that will take no more than 90 minutes. There are no foreseen risks to you while participating in this study beyond the loss of time. There are two potential benefits from participating in this study: you may experience satisfaction from contributing to the knowledge in this area and you may enjoy your experience of sharing your knowledge, being listened to, and reflecting on your practices. Your alternative to taking part in the research study is not to take part in it.

You are invited to participate in this research project titled, “Examining district administrators’ professional development decision-making processes concerning new special education teacher,” and the following information in this consent form will provide more detail about the research study. Please ask any questions if you need more clarification and to assist you in deciding if you wish to participate in the research study. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by agreeing to take part in this research or by signing this consent form. After all of your questions have been answered and the consent document reviewed, if you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form.
What are we trying to find in this study?
The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth understanding of the barriers and supports district administrators experience in providing professional development to new special education teachers. This study will focus on the in-depth description and analysis of administrator decision making. Finally, this study will examine the thought process and strategies used by current K-12 administrators to meet the needs of the new special education teachers.

Who can participate in this study?
This study is open to any educational administrators that work within one of Michigan’s top 25 school districts. Participants should also play a role in professional development decision making, specifically, in the planning, implementation, or evaluation of professional development for special education teachers.

Individuals who are not eligible for this study include special education teachers, building administrators that do not play a role in professional development, or district administrators that do not play a role in professional development.

Where will this study take place?
This study will take place through an online survey as well as through face-to-face interviews. Survey and interview data collection will be completed in a location that suits the comfort and convenience of the interviewees. The location can be an office, conference room, or any other private setting where the participant and researcher feel safe and comfortable.

What is the time commitment for participating in this study?
Participation in this study will require participants to set aside a total of 30-120 minutes across one to two sessions. All participants will participate in a survey that will take approximately 30 minutes. Five participants will be selected for interviews that will take no more than 90 minutes.

The time commitment includes:
- Five minutes to read the agreement statement and allow the participant time for questions (all participants)
- 30 minutes to complete the online survey (all participants)
- 90 minutes to read aloud the informed consent and complete the face to face interview (5 participants will be selected)

What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?
After agreement is indicated, you will be asked to complete a 30-minute Qualtrics online survey. The survey includes your demographic information, your district demographic information, sources that provide guidance to you in your role regarding professional development, and strategies you use in your role regarding professional development. Professional development is defined by Mizell (2010) as “opportunities for educators to gain knowledge and skills needed to more deeply develop effective teaching practices,” and “the strategy schools and school districts use to ensure that educators continue to strengthen their practice throughout their career.”
At another time, you may be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview, either in person or through an online program such as Facetime, with the student researcher. The interview would be scheduled at your convenience and conducted in a setting that suits your comfort and convenience. The interview will go no longer than 90 minutes, including breaks.

**What information is being measured during the study?**

The information that is to be measured in the study will include these instruments:

- Survey
- Interview
- Document Analysis

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**

There are no foreseen risks to you while participating in this study beyond the loss of time. You may experience stress from being away from your immediate work or in an interview setting for up to 90 minutes. Planned breaks are provided throughout the interview and you may indicate if and when you need a break.

**What are the benefits of participating in this study?**

There are two potential benefits from participating in this study. First, you may experience satisfaction from contributing to the knowledge in this area. Second, you may enjoy your experience of sharing your knowledge, being listened to, and reflecting on your practices.

There are two potential long-term benefits of this research. First, your part in this research may provide a better understanding of meaningful ways that top districts make decisions regarding professional development. Second, it may provide specific information that influences policy makers surrounding the topic of professional development.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**

There are no monetary costs associated with participating in this study. The only foreseen cost is the amount of time (30-120 minutes) being asked to participate in the study.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**

The principal investigator and the student researcher will have access to the data collected for this study. Demographic information will be collected after agreement is indicated. Demographic information to be recorded will include gender, age, race, job title, and years of experience in education. All survey and interview data will be de-identified.

All coding and analysis will be stored on a password protected folder and, on a password protected computer. All consent forms will be kept in a locked drawer in the Special Education Department at Western Michigan University. The data obtained will be kept for at least three
years after the completion of this study and will be stored in a password-protected computer folder, on a password-protected computer after the completion of the study. The student researcher will create backup copies of computer files on an external hard drive, stored in a locked drawer in the Special Education Department at Western Michigan University.

**What will happen to my information collected for this research after the study is over?**
After information that could identify you has been removed, de-identified information for this research may be used by or distributed to investigators for other research without obtaining additional informed consent from you.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**
You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences if you choose to withdraw from this study.

The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent.

Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the student investigator, Sarah Bacalia at 269-352-8572 or sarah.j.bacalia@wmich.edu or the principal investigator, Elizabeth Whitten, at 269-760-6801 or elizabeth.whitten@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study.

This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the upper right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

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I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study.

_____________________________________
Please Print Your Name

_____________________________________
Please Sign Your Name Date

Consent Obtained by: Student Investigator/Principal Investigator
Appendix B

Interview Protocol

**Introduction (10 minutes)**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study about how district administrators make decisions regarding professional development for new special education teachers. As a researcher interested in professional development, I am interviewing you to gain an in-depth understanding of the nature of the challenges and successes administrators experience in providing professional development to new special education teachers. You have been selected for your expertise in district administration as well as for the role you play in the decision-making processes for professional development in your district. For the purpose of this study, I am defining professional development as opportunities for educators to gain knowledge and skills needed to more deeply develop effective teaching practices.

In the interview today, I am interested in any experience you have had where you found yourself involved in making decisions for professional development of teachers within your district. I am interested in (a) experts and policies you look to, (b) how teacher needs are assessed, (c) what methods of professional development are implemented and (d) how professional development is evaluated in your district.

It is important to know that I’m interested in your point of view. There are no wrong answers. I will remain objective. Please say what you think, not what you think I want to hear or what you think you should say. The interview will be audio recorded so that I can go back and listen, take notes, and write a short summary about what was shared. I will not share this audio recording.
All of your comments will remain anonymous. Your name will stay secret and won’t link you to what you said. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Again, thanks for letting me interview you about your experiences with how you make professional development decisions for new special education teachers.

This is an interview protocol for the Research Question: How do district administrators make decisions regarding professional development for new special education teachers?

Interview Part 1 (10 minutes)

Please start by telling me a little bit about the nature of your job and the way you play a role in the planning, implementing, and/or evaluating of professional development.

Thank you, now let’s talk about guidance that you look to in your decision-making.

1. What guides or influences your decisions for structuring professional development?

2. What guidance do you look to in determining topics for teacher professional development?

Interview Part 2 (30 minutes)

Thank you, this next set of questions is about assessing teacher needs.

3. As you now begin to think about assessing new special education teacher needs, please explain how instructional, curricular, and cultural needs are assessed?

4. What data (federal, state, local, and/or district) do you look to when assessing new special education teacher needs?

5. What assessment tools do you use to assess the unique needs of special educators?

6. How does the district address the unique learning needs of special educators?
7. How do the different professional development opportunities vary between general education and special education teachers?

8. How do you determine when opportunities are implemented for all teachers or subgroups of teachers?

Break (10 minutes)

Interview Part 3 (20 minutes)

Shifting focus, let’s talk a bit more about methods of professional development.

9. Can you share with me what methods of professional development you are familiar with?

10. How did you learn about these methods?

11. What methods of professional development do you typically use in this district?

12. What methods are used across the district to implement professional development?

Interview Part 4 (10 minutes)

Lastly, I’d like you to speak to evaluation and accountability in terms of professional development.

13. What accountability measures must be considered in evaluating professional development?

14. What does the district do to evaluate professional development?

15. Is there an evaluation method that this district utilizes?

Is there anything that I did not ask that you would like to share about the experience you just described to me?

Thank you again for sharing with me. I appreciate your openness and look forward to seeing you in the future. If you have questions or concerns, please don’t hesitate to contact me at 268-352-8572 or sarah.j.bacalia@wmich.edu.
Appendix C

Online Survey

ANONYMOUS ONLINE SURVEY CONSENT

Western Michigan University
Department of Special Education and Literacy Studies

Principal Investigator: Dr. Elizabeth Whitten
Student Investigator: Sarah Bacalia

You are invited to participate in this research project titled “Examining district administrators' professional development decision-making processes concerning new special education teachers.”

STUDY SUMMARY: This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you decide whether you want to take part in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The purpose of the research is to: 1) provide an in-depth understanding of the barriers and supports district administrators experience in providing professional development to new special education teachers, 2) focus on the in-depth description and analysis of administrator decision making, and 3) examine the thought process and strategies used by current K-12 administrators to meet the needs of the new special education teachers. You were selected to participate in this study because of your position as a district administrator who plays a role in professional development for new special education teachers in one of Michigan’s top 25 school districts. This study will also serve as Sarah Bacalia’s dissertation, research project for the requirements of the Doctor of Special Education Administration. If you take part in the research, you will be asked to complete a 15-minute Qualtrics online survey. The survey includes your demographic information, your district demographic information, sources that provide guidance to you in your role regarding professional development, and strategies you use in your role regarding professional development. At another time, you may be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview, either in person or through an online program such as Facetime, with the student researcher. The interview would be scheduled at your convenience and conducted in a setting that suits your comfort and convenience. The interview will go no longer than 90 minutes, including breaks. Your time in the study will take no more than 105 minutes. All participants will participate in a survey that will take approximately 15 minutes. Five participants will be selected for interviews that will take no more than 90 minutes. There are no foreseen risks to you while participating in this study beyond the loss of time. There are two potential benefits from participating in this study: you may experience satisfaction from contributing to the knowledge in this area and you may enjoy your experience of sharing your knowledge, being listened to, and reflecting on your practices. Your alternative to taking part in the research study is not to take part in it.

The de-identified (anonymous) information collected for this research may be used by or distributed to investigators for other research without obtaining informed consent from you.
Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact the principal investigator, Dr. Elizabeth Whitten, at 269-760-6801 or elizabeth.whitten@wmich.edu or the student investigator, Sarah Bacalia, at 269-352-8572 or sarah.j.bacalia@wmich.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 269-387-8298.

This consent has been approved by the Western Michigan University Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (HSIRB) on (study approval date).

Participating in this survey online indicates your consent for use of the answers you supply.

By clicking “I agree to participate in this research study” below, you are indicating that you are at least 18 years old, have read and understood this consent form, and agree to participate in this research study.

☐ I agree to participate in this research study (Survey following upon clicking)
☐ I do not agree to participate in this research study (Browser closes)

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Please specify your race.
☐ White
☐ Hispanic / Latino
☐ Black or African American
☐ Native American or American Indian
☐ Asian / Pacific Islander
☐ Other
☐ Prefer not to respond

With which sex do you associate? (Please selected one of the following)
☐ Male
☐ Female
☐ Other
☐ Prefer not to respond

Please specify your age range:
☐ 25-35 years old
☐ 36-45 years old
☐ 46-55 years old
☐ 56-65 years old
☐ >66

Please continue to next page.
PROFESSIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Please indicate your highest level of educational attainment.
☐ Bachelor
☐ Master
☐ Specialist
☐ Doctorate

Please indicate your years of experience in education.
☐ 0-5 years
☐ 6-10 years
☐ 11-15 years
☐ 16-20 years
☐ >20 years

Please indicate your years of experience in district administration.
☐ 0-5 years
☐ 6-10 years
☐ 11-15 years
☐ 16-20 years
☐ >20 years

Please continue to next page.
PROFESSIONAL DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Note: For the purpose of this study, “new teachers” are defined as teachers who have worked three or less years within their current district. A new teacher could have previous experience in other districts.

On a scale from 1 to 5, how involved are you in planning professional development for new special education teachers within your district?

1 2 3 4 5
minimally highly

On a scale from 1 to 5, how involved are you in implementing professional development for new special education teachers within your district?

1 2 3 4 5
minimally highly

On a scale from 1 to 5, how involved are you in evaluating professional development for new special education teachers within your district?

1 2 3 4 5
minimally highly

Please continue to next page.
DISTRICT DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Please state the name of your school district. ___________________

Note: This information is to verify appropriate sampling for this study only. The name of your district will not be disclosed in the findings of this study.

Please indicate your current job title.
☐ Superintendent
☐ Assistant Superintendent
☐ Director of Special Education
☐ Supervisor of Special Education
☐ Curriculum and Instruction Director
☐ Other ___________________

Please indicate which category is used to best describe the territory in which your district is located. (Click on the term for a definition.)
☐ Large, Midsize, or Small City (Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city)
☐ Large, Midsize, or Small Suburb (Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area)
☐ Fringe, Distant, or Remote Town (Territory inside an urban cluster)
☐ Fringe, Distant, or Remote Rural (Census-defined rural territory)

About what percentage of your district’s student body qualify for free or reduced lunch?
☐ 0%-20%
☐ 21%-40%
☐ 41%-60%
☐ 61%-80%
☐ 81%-100%

Please indicate the number of teachers employed within your district.
☐ <25
☐ 26-50
☐ 51-150
☐ 151-200
☐ 201-250
☐ 251-300
☐ 301-350
☐ >350

Please indicate the number of students (K-12) that your district serves.
☐ 0-1,500
☐ 1,501-3,000
☐ 3,001-6,000
☐ 6,001-9,000
☐ 9,001-12,000
☐ >12,000

Please continue to next page.
INFLUENTIAL FACTORS

Note: This study is aimed at exploring decision-making in regard to new special education teachers. It may be helpful to think through a broader lens of all teachers first and then when responding, think more specifically about new special education teachers.

Indicate the top three methods of professional development that you view to be most impactful (Click on the term to find a definition).

- Traditional professional development (Traditional professional development: Learning opportunities that are externally-designed and non-participatory in nature.)
- Professional learning communities (Professional learning communities: Small groups of educators who meet regularly to share expertise, analyze data, and work collaboratively to generate ideas for improving student learning outcomes.)
- Video analysis (Video analysis: Teachers are video-recorded while teaching, the video is viewed to reflect or analyze, and teachers make changes in their instruction to enhance student learning.)
- Professional conferences (Professional conferences: A meeting of educational professionals dealing with organizational matters, matters concerning the status of the profession, and scientific or technical developments.)
- Presentations from experts in the field (experts in the field: Individuals with extensive knowledge or ability based on research, experience, or occupation and in a particular area of study.)
- Web-based or online learning (Web-based or online learning: Learning of online course content through discussion forums, email, video conferencing, and/or live (video-streamed lectures.)
- Book studies
- Continuous professional development (Continuous professional development: The process of tracking and documenting the skills, knowledge and experience that you gain both formally and informally as you work, beyond any initial training.)
- Other

Indicate the top three professional development topics that you view as essential for developing new special education teachers.

- Classroom management
- Instruction
- Curriculum
- Data-based decision making
- School culture
- Test preparation/administration
- State standards
- Parent relations
- Other

Please continue to next page.
On a scale from 1 to 5, how likely are you to encourage, facilitate, or approve the following:

**Unstructured professional development days within each school (e.g. a planning day with colleagues)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

**Release time from class (e.g. time away from classroom duties to plan, work with colleagues, or attend training)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

**Structured PD days within each school (e.g. staff training day)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

**Unstructured meeting time with leaders to discuss concerns face-to-face within each school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

**Collaborative lesson preparation time (e.g. designated free period)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

**Unstructured meeting time to share ideas with colleagues face-to-face outside of the school**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Please continue to next page.
Listening to a guest visitor during a professional development day or staff meeting

1  2  3  4  5  
not very likely highly likely

Unstructured professional development days within the district (e.g. planning day with colleagues from other schools)

1  2  3  4  5  
not very likely highly likely

Structured professional development days outside of the district (e.g. one-day course)

1  2  3  4  5  
not very likely highly likely

Please continue to next page.
INFLUENTIAL FACTORS IN PLANNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In planning professional development for new special education teachers, what policies do you look to? (Policy refers to the officiation of a procedure through legislation, regulation, guidance, contract, or a memorandum.) Select the top three that apply.

☐ MDE Professional Learning Policy (2011)
☐ District Improvement Plan
☐ New Teacher Professional Development Requirements
☐ District Budget
☐ District-Allocated Professional Development Time
☐ Other__________________
☐ Other__________________
☐ Other__________________

In planning professional development time and topics for new special education teachers, what guides do you look to in planning? (Guides refers to helpful documents or tutorials that do not have high stakes attached to them.) Select the top three that apply.

☐ District-Made Teacher Surveys
☐ Other methods of teacher feedback ____________________
☐ New Teacher Induction Checklists
☐ Principal Feedback
☐ Teacher Evaluations
☐ Current minds in education_____________________
☐ Recommendations from professional development experts
☐ Other__________________
☐ Other__________________
☐ Other__________________

When planning professional development for new special education teachers, in what ways do you draw ideas from inside and outside the school environment? (i.e. direction from the state, direction from an ISD or RESA, central office committees, principal feedback, teacher feedback, community feedback)

_____________________
_____________________
_____________________

How do you assess the needs of new special education teachers? (i.e. teacher recommendations, professional learning community feedback, new laws, recommendations from the state, recent litigation)

_____________________
_____________________
_____________________

Please continue to next page.
What data do you look to when assessing new special education teacher needs?

☐ Student Achievement Data
☐ Teacher Reported Needs
☐ State Achievement Data
☐ National Achievement Data
☐ Other__________________
☐ Other__________________
☐ Other__________________

Decisions regarding professional development in my district are primarily made:

☐ Collaboratively
  ☐ amongst district staff teams
  ☐ amongst building leader teams
  ☐ amongst teacher teams
  ☐ amongst teams that represent teachers, building leaders, and district leaders

☐ Independently
  ☐ by a district administrator
  ☐ by a building leader
  ☐ by individual teachers

☐ Other__________________

List major barriers you face in planning professional development for new special education teachers.

☐ Time
☐ Money
☐ Provision of support structures
☐ Communication
☐ Lack of clearly articulated goals
☐ Determining teacher needs
☐ Differentiating professional development
☐ Other__________________
☐ Other__________________
☐ Other__________________

Are there any additional comments you would like to add regarding evaluating professional development?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Please continue to next page.
IMPLEMENTING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Indicate the top three adult learning principles that are prioritized in district-offered professional development for new special education teachers.

☐ Autonomy
☐ Self-directed learning
☐ Voluntary engagement in learning
☐ Collaborative learning
☐ Hands-on practice
☐ Immediate application of learning
☐ Understanding the purpose of learning
☐ Other__________________
☐ Other__________________
☐ Other__________________

Indicate the three most common formats used for professional development within your district.

☐ Face-to-face
☐ Online networks (e.g. webinars, modules, tutorials)
☐ Social media connections (e.g. Twitter, Skype video calls, blogs, etc.)
☐ Traditional (e.g. externally-designed, non-participatory)
☐ Inquiry-based
☐ Personalized
☐ Practice-focused
☐ Community-oriented
☐ Video-based
☐ Collaborative sharing
☐ Other__________________
☐ Other__________________
☐ Other__________________

Are there any additional comments you would like to add regarding implementing professional development?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Please continue to next page.
EVALUATING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

List accountability measures that must be considered in evaluating professional development. (i.e. MDE new teacher professional development requirements, MDE professional development requirements for all teachers, new teacher mentoring, district improvement goals)

__________________  ________________
__________________  __________________

How does the district collect evaluation data that reflects participant reactions to professional development experiences?

☐ Participant evaluations
☐ Online surveys
☐ Other __________________

How does the district collect evaluation data reflective of new knowledge, skills, or attitudes gained by professional development participants?

☐ Written personal reflections
☐ Oral personal reflections
☐ Portfolios
☐ Other __________________

How does the district collect evaluation data reflective of organizational characteristics necessary for success?

☐ Analyze school records
☐ Examine minutes from follow-up meetings
☐ Questionnaires focused on original efforts
☐ Other __________________

How does the district collect evaluation data reflective of the impact professional development has on professional practice?

☐ Questionnaires
☐ Structured interviews with participants and leaders
☐ Direct observations by trained observers or digital recordings
☐ Through data collected at intervals over time
☐ Other __________________

Please continue to next page.
How does the district collect evaluation data reflective of the impact professional development has on student outcomes?

- Questionnaires
- Online surveys
- Personal reflections
- Analyze school records
- Structured interviews with participants and leaders
- Direct observations by trained observers or digital recordings
- District academic achievement data
- M-Step data
- Other ______________
- None of the above

How do district professionals use their evaluation results to make program improvements?

______________________________________________________________________________

List any professional development evaluation model the district utilizes.

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Are there any additional comments you would like to add regarding evaluating professional development?

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

I would like to volunteer to participate in an interview surrounding the topics of planning, implementing, and evaluating professional development of new special education teachers.

☐ Yes

Thank you for completing this survey.
Appendix D
List of Analyzed Documents

List of Documents Analyzed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Document</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Michigan Compiled Law excerpts (MCL 380.1527, MCL 380.1526, and MCL 380.1249)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDE Professional Learning Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDE Progressing to the Professional Teaching Certificate (How to Page)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDE Successful Teaching (How to Page)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDE Professional Development for New Teachers (How to Page)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Annual Education Reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Improvement Plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Professional Development Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Skills and Attributes Document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Components of Classroom Environment Document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission and Vision Document</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Bargaining Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Evaluation Procedures</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Reflections on Analyzed Documents

**Michigan Compiled Law Revised School Code (Excerpts)**

**What is the title of the document?** Michigan Compiled Law Revised School Code (Excerpts)

**For what purpose and by whom was it produced?** This document was written by Michigan Legislature. It is state policy that guides districts and educators on their legal requirements and responsibilities pertaining to professional development.

**What information does the document contain?** The excerpts contain state requirements regarding teachers in their first 3 years of employment, assignment to a master teacher, and intensive professional development induction. Teacher professional development requirements are also laid out along with the number of day requirements. Issuance of initial professional teaching certificate is provided along with requirements and rules for compliance. Performance evaluation systems for teachers and school administrators are defined as well as requirements, guidance on posting information about evaluation tools on public websites, effect of collective bargaining agreement, establishment and maintenance of list of teacher evaluation tools, and rules.

**What themes or patterns (relevant to the research questions) can be gleaned from that information?**

*How do district administrators make decisions regarding professional development for new special education teachers?*

PLANNING for the first 3 years of teacher employment in the district. New teachers must receive intensive professional development induction into teaching, based on a professional development plan that includes classroom management and instructional delivery.

OFFERING of trainings that must be provided-use of teacher evaluation tools

Refer to INFLUENCING documents such as the requirements for the issuance of initial professional teaching certificates

Refer to INFLUENCING criterion such as the requirement for rigorous, transparent, and fair performance evaluation systems.

Prioritization of on-going teacher development is evident.

INFORMING DECISIONS -Teacher evaluations

*How is professional development implemented across a district?*

Encouraged to assign a COACH/MENTOR
What is the significance of the document for the study?
MCL is a major source of guidance for district administrators and sets forth specific guidelines for Michigan educators and administrators.

What further questions does the document generate?

In what ways is the document consistent or inconsistent with other sources of information about the setting?
During the Instructional Skills observation, MCL was mentioned and referred to many times. Within the district, Instructional Coaches run the Instructional Skills professional development and coach/mentor every new teacher in the district.

MDE How to Pages

What is the title of the document?
MDE Progressing to the Professional Teaching Certificate (How To)
MDE Successful Teaching (How To)
MDE Professional Development for New Teachers (How To)

For what purpose and by whom was it produced?
These How To documents were created by the Michigan Department of Education. They are meant to be simplified instructions on how to achieve a “successful teaching” ranking, progress to a professional teaching certificate, and navigate professional development as a new teacher.

What information does the document contain?
Summarized guidance information for new teachers to support them is successful teaching, earning a professional teaching certificate, and understand their professional development requirements.

What themes or patterns (relevant to the research questions) can be gleaned from that information?

How do district administrators make decisions regarding professional development for new special education teachers?

Look to GUIDING documents like MCL for guidance on professional development requirements for new teachers

Audits also INFLUENCE professional development decisions.

What professional development models do district administrators use?

MENTORING/COACHING
IMPLEMENTING professional development MODELS-time provided for teachers to work in PLCs, examining actual student data in their own schools

DOCUMENTING (accountability)-tracking and recording professional development for the Registry of Educational Personnel and professional development specific to new teachers

How do district administrators determine professional development needs for new special education teachers?

INFLUENCING documents such as InTASC standards and Michigan’s Teacher Induction and Mentoring Standards, both of which contain key components related to teacher effectiveness. Effectiveness is conveyed through effectiveness ratings and considered vital to a teacher’s professional advancement.

How do district administrators address the unique learning needs of special educators?

How is professional development implemented across a district?

IMPLEMENTING professional development MODELS-time provided for teachers to work in PLCs, examining actual student data in their own schools

Are general and special educators provided learning opportunities separately?

How do district administrators evaluate their professional development?

What is the significance of the document for the study?

These documents highlight specific reasons decisions on professional development topics might be decided upon as well as specific models (coaching/mentoring and PLCs)

What further questions does the document generate?

What research supports the use of coaching/mentoring and PLCs

In what ways is the document consistent or inconsistent with other sources of information about the setting?

This document aligns with MCL. Topics here were also observed in Instructional Skills such as documenting new teacher professional development.

Teacher Contract

What is the title of the document?

Teacher Contract

For what purpose and by whom was it produced?

Labor agreement between Board of Education of the District
What information does the document contain?
Association/Teacher Rights
Association/Teacher Responsibility
Management Rights
Hours
Assignments
Pupil/Teacher Ratio
Leaves of Absence
Evaluation
Curriculum and School Improvement Committees
Layoff and Recall Procedures
Grievance Procedures
Contract Maintenance
Salary Schedules and Health Insurance

What themes or patterns (relevant to the research questions) can be gleaned from that information?

*How do district administrators make decisions regarding professional development for new special education teachers?*

*What professional development models do district administrators use?*

*How do district administrators determine professional development needs for new special education teachers?*

*How do district administrators address the unique learning needs of special educators?*

*How is professional development implemented across a district?*

PLANNING for professional development district wide is grounded in the set aside days laid out in the contract. The district contract ALIGNS with the DIP in terms of time spend in district wide professional development.

*Are general and special educators provided learning opportunities separately?*

All teachers are OFFERED opportunities to schedule 12 hours of professional development sessions outside of the normal work day to participate in activities that they decide are beneficial to them (as long as they align with the DIP).

*How do district administrators evaluate their professional development?*

*What is the significance of the document for the study?*
This document is significant because it is a contractual agreement that outlines professional development requirements.

*What further questions does the document generate?*

*In what ways is the document consistent or inconsistent with other sources of information about the setting?*

This document is consistent with other sources of information in that the contract requirements reflect the state requirements and MCL.