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The Use of Principal Professional Learning Communities by Secondary Principals in Minnesota

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**The Use of Principal Professional Learning Communities
by Secondary Principals in Minnesota**

by

Nicole K. Rittenour

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Abstract

Principals in Minnesota are required to remain current in knowledge of leadership for relicensure and evaluation purposes. One method used by Minnesota principals to increase their leadership capacity using the latest teaching and learning research strategies, is the professional learning community (PLC). Limited research is available on principals' professional learning communities in Minnesota and the challenges to participate in them. The study provides an examination of principal professional learning communities and how Minnesota school district principals use collaboration to increase their knowledge in the field of administration.

Barth (1985b) suggested “the principal is the *head learner* . . . and the power of the leader as learner in improving schools rests squarely on the extent to which we proudly and openly find ways of inventing, owning, sustaining, displaying, and celebrating our own learning” (p. 94). DuFour (2002) proposed principals must “shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning” and “teachers and students benefit when principals function as *learning leaders* rather than *instructional leaders*” supporting the practice of principals serving as models for learning (p. 13).

Adults learn differently than children (Knowles, 1984). Professional development needs to be relevant, action-based, not a traditional sit-and-get type of development opportunity (Zepeda, Parylo, & Bengtson, 2014). Brown, Anfara, Hartman, Mahar, and Mills (2002) recommended that “professional development for middle level principals should take place in a supportive cohort structure that promotes reflection on local school needs and sharing among fellow colleagues” (p. 132).

Various organizations advise principals to meet in a collaborative network, critical friends group or a community of practice (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000; Neufeld, 1997; Oliver, 2005; Wenger, 2000). Pentland (2014) describes “social learning” where people learn from watching each other's behavior and listening to their experiences (p. 20). Pentland (2014) also suggested that collaborative groups may be as effective when using electronic modes of communication and meetings, if trust is established first in a face-to-face setting.

Taking into account the influence of high stakes testing and principal evaluation systems, it is appropriate to research further how professional development among Minnesota principals is occurring through professional learning communities.

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To my family, I could not have gotten this far without the love and support from my parents. Thank you to my mom, Rebecca, for always offering to help edit the drafts. Thank you to my husband, Jay, and to our son, Clayton. You have allowed me to grow and gave me your support, even when it was difficult and not easy to do so. I would not have made it without you!

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my family. You have supported me and given me strength and encouragement to pursue my passions, thank you.

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Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction

Secondary school principals and assistant principals in Minnesota employ professional development to expand their understanding of educational leadership. The study provides an examination of principal professional learning communities and how Minnesota school district principals use collaboration to increase their knowledge in the field of administration.

The 2000 report by the Institute for Educational Leadership disclosed the change in demands on school principals. According to the report, the profession “has not changed to meet those demands—and the tension is starting to show” (p. 3). Principals have indicated their “job satisfaction” levels have decreased while stress levels have increased (Metlife, 2013). As a result of principals having higher difficulty performing their responsibilities, the age of retirement is increasing while the pool of qualified candidates is decreasing (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000). Professional development provides opportunities for principals to increase their knowledge and capacity in meeting the increasing responsibilities of their chosen profession. The Institute for Educational Leadership (2000) has suggested for districts to “provide powerful, ongoing professional development focusing on effective strategies for improving student learning, . . . [which] might include . . . principals networking, mentoring and coaching” (p. 13). The Institute for Educational Leadership report stated:

professional development [for principals] in general is weak, seldom focused on instructional issues and poorly connected to relevant school context . . . principals have few opportunities for networking or coaching, which would provide a vehicle for peer support, sharing information and learning best practices. Without such formal and informal vehicles for interacting with professional peers, principals find themselves ‘alone in the crowd’ at their own schools. (p. 12)

Local, state and federal requirements also impact the role of the principal. Houle (2006) linked the requirements from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Public Law 107-110, with the principalship by stating

emphasis on increased testing and annual yearly progress goals...for identified subgroups of students . . . has increased the number of schools being placed on statewide lists of underperforming schools across the nation. Threatened sanctions against these schools and their principals, coupled with choice and tutoring options for parents, have added even more pressure to these principals. The need for partnerships and job-embedded professional development for principals of our neediest schools . . . is critical to help them build the capacity for strong, focused leadership. (p. 158)

The new evaluation model for principals in Minnesota (2015) includes a professional development emphasis. The Minnesota evaluation model has three main components (MN Statute 123B. 147) (Office of the Revisor of Statutes, Minnesota, 2015). A 2012 report titled, *Measuring Principal Performance in Minnesota. A Report, A Model, And Recommendations* (Minnesota Department of Education), outlines the “details of evaluation components which (a) gather information from an evaluation by the principal’s supervisor, (b) analyze school performance data, and (c) measure feedback from stakeholders” (p. 10). The third component was “designed to help identify a principal’s effectiveness, leadership skills and processes, and strengths and weaknesses in exercising leadership in pursuit of school success” (Minnesota Department of Education, 2012, p. 10). As a result of the recently enacted Minnesota statute, it could be assumed that school principals have pressures from local, state and federal levels to deliver high performing schools.

Conceptual Framework

Principals have numerous roles and responsibilities suggested in the related research. Matthews and Crow (2010) proposed eight roles for the principal. The eight roles include: “(1)

principal as learner; (2) principal as culture builder; (3) principal as advocate; (4) principal as leader; (5) principal as mentor; (6) principal as supervisor; (7) principal as manager; (8) principal as politician” (pp. 13-16). Walker, Mitchel, and Turner (1999) claimed “that educational administration programs at the college level cannot adequately prepare administrators for such complex roles, and therefore the need for continuous professional development experiences become paramount” (p. 23). One method used by Minnesota principals to increase their leadership capacity within the multiple roles they are expected to perform is the Professional Learning Community (PLC). The National Staff Development Council (2000) recommended states “create leadership networks for principals to provide . . . support . . . for principals to communicate with each other, share ideas, and solve problems” (p. 12).

Allmaras (2015) found that PLCs helped Minnesota principals “to reflect on their individual practices, develop a culture of learning and professional behavior, create connections to nearby communities, improve their skills in coaching and evaluating teachers, and model leadership behaviors” (para. 1). Allmaras further asserted “by engaging the principals in continuous and meaningful learning, this practice helped principals increase school performance” (para. 1). Allmaras suggested “time and space may present challenges, but they should not be roadblocks” (para. 7). She concluded “this practice can be effective with both large and small districts” (para. 7).

Professionals influence each other by sharing ideas. Pentland (2014) shared the concept of idea flow and the manner in which people influence each other:

When I look at the smartest people in the world: They are continually engaging with others in order to harvest new ideas, and this exploratory behavior creates better idea flow . . . People’s decisions are a blend of personal information and social information,

and when the personal information is weak, they will tend to rely more on social information. (p. 36)

A further consideration to effective professional development for principals is adults learn differently from the way in which children learn. Knowles (1984) shared examples of adult learning. Adults have had more experiences to shape their perspectives, leading Knowles (1984) to suggest a “greater emphasis in adult education on experiential techniques . . . such as group discussion, simulation exercises, problem-solving activities, case method and . . . on peer-helping activities” (p. 57). A further example of barriers is factors that motivate adults. Knowles (1984) shared “internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life)” are key motivators encourage adults to learn (p. 61). Knowles (1970) stated that “one mission . . . [is] helping individuals to develop the attitude that learning *is* a lifelong process and to acquire the skills of self-directed learning” (p. 23)

Barth (1985a) declared “that being a lifelong learner, is the most important characteristic of a school leader” and should be a priority for principals (p. 93). Barth (1985a) emphasized:

The most powerful form of learning, the most sophisticated form of staff development, comes not from listening to the good words of others but from sharing what we know with others. Learning comes more from giving than by receiving. By reflecting on what we do, by giving it coherence, and by sharing and articulating our craft knowledge we make meaning, we learn. (p. 93)

Barth (1985a) continued:

The principal is the *head* learner . . . and the power of the leader as learner in improving schools rests squarely on the extent to which we proudly and openly find ways of inventing, owning, sustaining, displaying, and celebrating our own learning. (p. 94)

DuFour (2002) suggested principals must “shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning” and “teachers and students benefit when principals function as *learning leaders* rather

than *instructional leaders*” supporting the practice of principals serving as models for learning (p. 13).

A critical friends network of middle school principals:

Came to rely on their colleagues as individuals with whom they could share their shortcomings as well as their strengths, as individuals who could assist them and whom they could assist. Principals reported that these relationships worked, in part, because all but one or two of their ‘critical friends’ were not from their districts. They did not fear exposing themselves to other principals who might react to them with negative evaluations or share their knowledge with other district administrators. (Neufeld, 1997, p. 504)

Brown, Anfara, Hartman, Mahar and Mills (2002) advocated that “the primary purpose of any inservice development for school administrators is to increase professional and personal effectiveness while simultaneously increasing organizational effectiveness” (p. 113). Brown et al. recommended that “professional development for middle level principals should take place in a supportive cohort structure that promotes reflection on local school needs and sharing among fellow colleagues” (p. 132).

Taking into account the variety of elements influencing school principals, including high stakes testing and principal evaluation systems influencing principals in Minnesota, it is appropriate to research further how professional development among Minnesota principals is occurring through professional learning communities.

Statement of the Problem

Principals in Minnesota are required to remain current in their knowledge of leadership for re-licensure and evaluation purposes. The methods for principals to remain current in their field, including skills and knowledge of the latest teaching and learning research strategies, may

vary. There is limited research on principals' professional learning communities in Minnesota and the challenges for school principals to participate in them.

Purpose of the Study

The study examined the use of principal professional learning communities by secondary school principals in Minnesota as a vehicle for principal professional development. The findings of the study may prove to be beneficial for principals as well as professional organizations in Minnesota. Further, the study's findings may provide background for the use of professional learning communities by secondary principals.

Assumptions of the Study

During the conduct of the study, the researcher established the following assumptions:

1. Principals and assistant principals who participated in the study participated voluntarily and answered the survey and interview questions honestly.
2. Participants understood the purpose of participating in a professional learning community.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to more accurately understand Minnesota school principals use of professional learning communities. Data that were collected were shared with the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals to assist in identifying the professional development needs of Minnesota school principals.

Delimitations

The study was designed to gather and analyze data from Minnesota secondary school principals in who participated in professional learning communities and volunteered to

participate in the study. Consequently, the findings of the study are not generalizable to other groups of school principals in Minnesota or throughout the United States.

Research Questions

1. What professional development methods do select Minnesota principals report they used to participate in principal PLCs?
2. How do select Minnesota principals rate the effectiveness of the professional development methods they used in principals PLCs?
3. What do select Minnesota principals report were benefits of their participation in principal PLCs?
4. What were the challenges reported by select Minnesota principals with their participation in principal PLCs?
5. To what extent do select Minnesota principals report that participation in a principal PLC enhanced their professional development?
6. How did the administrative roles, years of experiences, sizes of school and locations of select Minnesota principals impact their perceptions of PLCs as a professional development strategy?

Definition of the Terms

Andragogy: (a theory of adult learning by Knowles, 1984), asserts that an adult:

- (1) has independent self-concept and can direct his or her own learning,
- (2) has accumulated a reservoir of life expectancies that is a rich resource for learning,
- (3) has learning needs closely related to changing social roles,

- (4) is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge,
 (5) is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors (Merriam, 2001, p. 5
 as cited in Zepeda, Parylo, & Bengtson, 2014).

Collective intelligence: Group problem-solving ability, which is greater than our individual abilities, emerges from the connections between individuals (Pentland, 2014).

Critical Friends Group[®] (*CFG*TM): A Critical Friends Group is a “professional learning community consisting of 8-12 members who are committed to improving their practice through collaborative learning and structured interactions (or protocols). CFG members meet at least once a month for about two hours” (National School Reform Faculty Harmony Education Center, 2012, p. 2).

Engagement: Engagement is social learning, usually within a peer group, that typically leads to the development of behavioral norms and social pressure to enforce those norms. In companies, work groups with a high rate of idea flow among the members of the work group tend to be more productive (Pentland, 2014).

Exploration: Exploration is the “process of searching out new, potentially valuable ideas by building and mining diverse social networks. In companies, work groups that have a high rate of idea flow from outside the work group tend to be more innovative” (Pentland, 2014, p. 19).

Idea flow: Idea flow is the

propagation of behaviors and beliefs through a social network by means of social learning and social pressure. Idea flow takes into account the social network structure, the strength of the social influence between each pair of people, as well as individual susceptibility to new ideas. (Pentland, 2014, p. 20)

Principal: For purposes of the study, principal is defined as an administrator who is a head, associate, or assistant principal, as well as a dean of students who is a member of The Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals.

Principal professional learning communities: For purposes of the study, refers to a group of administrators who may or may not be from the same district and who may or may not be participating through MASSP, who meet regularly to discuss topics related to principal professional development. In addition, the group works in a collaborative setting with a goal to improve outcomes for students by enhancing themselves professionally (adapted from DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010).

Professional: A professional is “someone with expertise in a specialized field; an individual who has not only pursued advanced training to enter the field, but who is also expected to remain current in its evolving knowledge base” (Dufour et al., 2010).

Professional development: A lifelong, collaborative learning process that nourishes the growth of individuals, teams, and the school through a daily, job-embedded, learner-centered, focused approach (National Staff Development Council, 2000).

Professional development:

includes activities that . . . are high quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher’s performance in the classroom; . . . are not one-day or short-term workshops or conferences; . . . are regularly evaluated for their impact on increased teacher effectiveness and improve student academic achievement. (Title IX, Part A, section 9101 [34])

Professional learning community (PLC): An ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the

assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators (DuFour et al., 2010).

Social influence: Social influence is “the likelihood that one person’s behavior will affect the behavior of another” (Pentland, 2014, p. 20).

Social learning: “Social learning consists of either (1) learning new strategies (e.g., context, action, outcome) by observation of other people’s behavior, including learning from memorable stories; or (2) learning new beliefs through experience or observation” (Pentland, 2014, p. 20).

Social physics: Social physics is a quantitative social science that describes reliable, mathematical connections between information and idea flow on the one hand and people’s behavior on the other. Social physics helps us understand how ideas flow from person to person through the mechanism of social learning and how this flow of ideas ends up shaping the norms, productivity, and creative output of our companies, cities and societies (Pentland, 2014).

Team: “A group of people working *interdependently* to achieve a *common goal* for which members are held *mutually accountable*. Collaborative teams are the fundamental building blocks of PLCs” (DuFour et al., 2010, p. 6).

Summary

Secondary school principals and assistant principals in Minnesota have the responsibility to remain informed regarding best practices in teaching and learning strategies. The study provides an examination of Minnesota secondary school principals use of principal professional learning communities.

The review of literature in Chapter II will examine current research related to the following themes: (a) the history and critical components of professional learning communities, (b) the history and characteristics of principal professional development, (c) principal professional development needs and preferred methods of professional development delivery in relationship to adult learning theories, and (d) connections between professional learning communities and principal professional development.

Chapter III provides the details of the mixed-methods study, including methodology, participants, human subjects approval, instruments for data collection and analysis, research design, and procedures and timeline.

Chapter II: Review of Literature

Introduction

The review of the literature included the types of professional development available to principals and the benefits for principals as a result of their participation in professional learning communities. Included in the review are the following themes: (a) the history and critical components of professional learning communities, (b) the history and characteristics of principal professional development, (c) principal professional development needs and preferred methods of delivery for professional development as related to adult learning theories, and (d) the connection between professional learning communities and principal professional development. Professional development for principals has several formats. With the pressure from federal, state, and local levels on all educators, it is essential to study the successful support systems available for principals.

The success of a school principal is based on the degree of working toward continuous improvement established from professional development (Barth, 1985b; National Staff Development Council, 2000). The National Staff Development Council (2000) asserted that “the development of principals cannot continue to be the neglected stepchild of state and district professional development efforts. It must be standards-focused, sustained, intellectually rigorous, and embedded in the principal’s workday” (p. 7).

In Minnesota, a selected number of secondary principals and assistant principals have formed professional learning communities (PLCs) to learn from and with each other. The study provides an examination of the use of secondary principal professional learning communities in Minnesota. With this purpose in mind, the research questions included:

1. What are the reported methods MN principals and assistant principals are using to participate in PLCs and what are their perceptions of the effectiveness of the methods?
2. What are the reported benefits and challenges of implementing principal PLCs in MN?
3. To what extent do MN principals report that being a part of a PLC enhances their development and growth?
4. How do the attributes of age, gender, experience, size of school and location impact principals perceptions of PLCs as a professional development mechanism?

History/Critical Components of Professional Learning Communities

As stated by DuFour et al. (2010), a:

professional learning community (PLC). [is] An ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators. (p. 4)

DuFour (2004) described three “big ideas” for the teacher PLC model. The first one was “ensuring that students learn,” meaning a “simple shift—from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning” (p. 8.) The second big idea was “a culture of collaboration” (p. 9). Instead of isolation, teachers “create structures to promote a collaborative culture” (p. 9). The third big idea for PLCs was “a focus on results” (DuFour, 2004, p. 10). DuFour (2004) pointed out that “schools and teachers typically suffer from the DRIP syndrome-Data Rich/Information Poor” (p. 10).

Teachers may have access to a wealth of information but are not able to compare the data with

others “and honestly confront the sometimes brutal facts” about student learning (DuFour, 2004, p. 11).

According to research, key features of teacher professional learning communities include shared goals and decision making, attention to teacher and student learning, built in time, an environment of trust, and collaborative reflection to improve practice, (Hord, 2009; Matthews, Williams, & Stewart, 2007, as cited by Matthews & Crow, 2010).

Along with the term “professional learning communities,” “critical friends groups,” and “communities of practice” are also used to describe collaboration between educational professionals (National School Reform Faculty, 2012; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). According to the National School Reform Faculty (2012), “The purpose of a critical friends group is to provide professional development that translates into improved student learning. This adult learning is accomplished through formal, ongoing interactions of small groups of staff that participate voluntarily.” Wenger et al. (2002) defined communities of practice as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). The purpose of a critical friends group, a community of practice or a professional learning community are similar.

Communities of practice have components to match professional learning communities. In a community of practice, experiences of the members allow increased expertise on a topic, “social learning systems: *engagement, imagination and alignment,*” producing learning (Wenger, 2000, p. 226). Wenger (2000) described communities of practice as needing “events, leadership, connectivity, membership, projects and artifacts” to be successful (p. 230). The events are activities, or meetings, and are either led by a small group of people or have a more shared type

of leadership (Wenger, 2000). A community of practice is connected, meaning communication takes place between the members and the membership is big enough to sustain the group but not too big that it is difficult to participate (Wenger, 2000). Further, the community of practice has learning projects that may include research or shared learning and artifacts of “documents, tools, stories, symbols, websites, etc.” are made together (Wenger, 2000, p. 232).

Benefits of membership in a PLC include a diminished feeling of seclusion, a renewed allegiance to the school goals, increased knowledge and a revived career (Roy & Hord, 2007).

Hord and Hirsh (2008) shared:

The major goal of the PLC is staff learning together, with the staff’s learning directed to student needs. The staff learning occurs more deeply and richly in interactions and conversations in which staff members pursue intentional learning, share new knowledge, test ideas, ask questions, gain clarification, debate conclusions, and seek consensus on how to transfer new learning to practice. (p. 27)

Hord and Hirsh (2008) made the following recommendations for schools:

The goal of our schools must be the regular engagement of all educators in professional learning communities: where ongoing learning and application of learning is nonnegotiable; where goals are established for the entire school, and responsibility is assumed at all levels; where acknowledging needs is a sign of strength rather than weakness; where teachers recognize that their learning is directly tied to their students’ learning; where entire faculties have numerous opportunities for celebration of working in the same direction and producing great results for students. (p. 39)

History and Characteristics of Principal Professional Development

This section examined the history and characteristics of principal professional development, including state and federal standards for principals, characteristics and recommendations for effective professional development topics, obstacles to principals’ professional development, and how to measure the effectiveness of professional development.

Learning Forward (n.d.) defined the term ‘professional development’ as “a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement” (para. 1). Historically, principal professional development was not a priority and was typically a one-time act of listening to a speaker (Nicholson, Harris-John, & Schimmel, 2005). In the early 1990s, principals were mandated to acquire a designated amount of professional development hours (Nicholson et al., 2005). In 2015, the Minnesota Legislature added a professional development requirement to principals. According to Minnesota Statute, 123B.147, principal professional development should “be linked to professional development that emphasizes improved teaching and learning, curriculum and instruction, student learning, and a collaborative professional culture . . .” (Office of the Revisor of Statutes, Minnesota, 2015). To renew a principal’s license in Minnesota, a person must submit 125 clock hours of approved professional development (Minnesota Board of School Administrators, n.d.).

Research connects the effectiveness of the principal to student and school success. Nicholson et al. (2005) cited three meta-analyses—Hallinger and Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom, 2004; and Waters, Marzano, and McNulty, 2003—“conclude that principals do, in fact, have a measurable impact on school effectiveness and student achievement” (p. 8). These analyses show the number of studies about principals’ effectiveness has increased (Nicholson et al., 2005).

Barth (1985b) proposed learning as the top goal of professional development for principals and DuFour (2001) advocated for principals to model their own ongoing professional

development. DuFour (2001) added principals should “model a commitment to their own ongoing professional development” by participating in research (2001, p. 16).

Numerous researchers point out the necessity for a mentor in principal professional development (Darling-Hammond, Orphanos, & LaPointe, 2007; DuFour & Marzano, 2009), the need for it be ongoing (Nicholson et al., 2005) and job-embedded (DuFour, 2001; Mann, 1998; Nicholson et al., 2005).

In addition, researchers recommend professional development be based on individual school needs (Brown et al., 2002; Mann, 1997) occur in groups (DuFour, 2001; Evans & Mohr, 1999) and allow for reflection (Barth, 1986; Brown et al., 2002; Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2008; Evans & Mohr, 1999; National Board of Professional Teaching Standards [NBPTS], 2010).

Several professional organizations have standards or competencies for principals from which professional development topics can be considered. Recommended standards from professional agencies for administrators include reflection, goal setting, a focus on continuous improvement as well as maintaining a healthy work-life balance (CCSSO, 2008; National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2015).

The Accomplished Principal Standards, from The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) (2010), described standard IX, reflection and growth, stating “accomplished principals are above all, lead leaders” (p. 65). According to the standards, effective principals “assemble a network of support and guidance by enlisting mentors, colleagues, critical friends, and other leaders from inside and outside the field of education” (NBPTS, 2010, p. 66). In addition, these standards suggest principals “participate in digital

networks for communication among professional colleagues, . . . or take part with professional colleagues in online learning communities” (NBPTS, 2010, p. 67). Further, the NBPTS suggests principals be reflective and “establish professional learning communities to provide for collegial reflection” (p. 67).

In addition to the recommendations for states and professional agencies to publicize their beliefs on principal professional development, researchers provide focus areas as topics for principal professional development. Barth (1985a) suggested “learning be on the top of principals list because they have to learn the skills to be effective administrators” (p. 93). Barth (1985a) stated, “the most powerful form of learning, the most sophisticated form of staff development, comes not from listening to the good words of others but from sharing what we know with others” (p. 93).

Further, researchers’ recommendations, including reflection on professional learning, personal connection through reading and group discussions, and a focus on student achievement systems should be in progress throughout the year (Evans & Mohr, 1999; Mann, 1998; Nicholson et al., 2005).

Barth (1986) shared his view, “professional development for principals has been described as a ‘wasteland,’” and then described the history of professional development for principals as based on five principles:

- (1) Find schools where pupils are achieving beyond what might be predicted by their backgrounds, (2) observe principals in those schools and find out what they are doing, (3) identify these behaviors as “desirable traits,” (4) devise training programs to develop these traits in all principals, and (5) enlist principals into these programs. (p. 156)

Barth (1986) subsequently shared the reasons these five principles do not work. Reasons include, “the assumption that strong leadership is whatever results in high student test scores

suggests a very limited . . . view of . . . principals,” “conditions in one school are seldom similar to those in another,” and “principals run schools, (they) don’t want to be themselves run” (1986, p. 156).

Researchers proposed leadership topics for principals. DuFour and Marzano (2009) suggested “schools do not need instructional leaders- they need *learning leaders* who focus on evidence of learning” (p. 63). DuFour (2001) recommended principals “read voraciously, secure a mentor, participate in a principal network, create a guiding coalition within the school to help generate, assess and refine improvement strategies . . . look . . . for experiences that offer an opportunity for professional growth” (p. 17). Supporting teachers, fostering continuous improvement in student learning and instructional methods were also described (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000).

According to research, effective principal professional development should focus on local topics, involve principals in design, be planned around adult learning styles calling for participation, have built in work time that is ongoing, ensuring leaders of the development are highly skilled and use collaborative problem solving methods, tackle individual needs, be held during the work day, use the cohort model and offer coaching or mentoring, and include resources from home district (Barth, 1986, Brown et al., 2002, Celoria & Roberson, 2015, Davis et al., 2005; Fogarty & Pete 2004; Neufeld, 1997).

Guskey (1997) suggested four essential strategies for planning professional development: “(1) have a clear focus on learning and learners, (2) focus on both individual and organizational change, (3) make small change guided by a grand vision, (4) provide ongoing professional development that is procedurally embedded” (pp. 38-39.)

In addition, Barth (1986) provided four questions to consider for the analysis of principal professional development.

(1) under what conditions will school principals become committed, sustained, life-long learners in their important work? (2) under what conditions will principals become learners? (3) under what conditions will principals assume major responsibility for their learning? (4) what conditions will principals devise to encourage and support their own learning? (p. 4, 7)

Obstacles for principals' participation in professional development include insufficient time, uncertainty if invested time will be worth it, doubts about proper use of taxpayers' money for development, and admission of their necessity for professional growth (Barth, 1986; Evans & Mohr, 1999; Nicholson et al., 2005). Barth (1986) stated "one of the paradoxes of professional development is that it can be both energy and time depleting *and* energy and time replenishing" (p. 157).

Principal Professional Development Needs and Preferred Methods of Delivery

This section examines proposed topics in which principals need professional development and the preferred delivery methods successful for adult learners. Professional development topics include issues principals and researchers identified as important, the preferred delivery method options, examples of adult learning techniques, and recommendations for planning principal professional development.

Brown et al. (2002), DuFour and Berkey (1995), Keith (2011), the National Staff Development Council (2000), Oliver (2005), and Salazar (2007) asked principals to indicate their opinion of important areas to spend time on for professional development. Principals reported team building, working toward continuous improvement, clear communication, implementing change using best practices for instruction, and increasing achievement for all students as areas

for professional development (DuFour & Berkey, 1995; Keith, 2011; National Staff Development Council, 2000; Salazar, 2007). Principals also reported building trust and keeping up-to-date in best practices of instructional methods as important topics (Brown et al., 2002). Oliver (2005) researched professional development topics reported by assistant principals to include staff supervision, as well as curriculum and instruction; it was suggested to deliver the professional development on-site and in short amounts during work time through colleague study groups or networks.

Preferred delivery models of professional development indicated by principals include, small study groups, conferences, university courses, engaging activities, mentoring and coaching (Brown et al., 2002; Spanneut, Tobin, & Ayers, 2012; Salazar, 2007; Whitaker & Turner, 2000). Hipp and Weber (2008) viewed professional learning communities as beneficial to principals because “as practitioners, we need to turn to one another and view those with a common vision as potential contributors to our own learning communities” (p.55).

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) found “21 specific leadership responsibilities significantly correlated with student achievement” (p. 3). The authors suggest a 10% improvement in student test scores can be expected if the principal increases “her demonstrated abilities in all 21 responsibilities by one standard deviation” (p. 3). Waters et al. further asserted a possible negative impact of principals on student achievement when they focused on areas outside of the 21 responsibilities.

The question regarding best ways for middle level principals to learn is addressed by Brown et al. (2002). Their findings included: “(1) identification of needs and involvement in planning, (2) reflection within the school context and sharing with other colleagues, (3)

systematic development supported by district time, money and resources, and (4) competent instructors using practical, adult learning processes” (p. 127).

Principals reported:

We need discussion more in the trenches . . . collaboration with other colleagues . . . hearing those nuances, the way others do something . . . having access to different districts, documents, handbooks and things like that,” and “Networking . . . need support of a critical group of friends, people you can call . . . share strategies and ideas, dialogue professionally, problem solve, vent, etc. (Brown et al., 2002, p. 129)

In addition, another principal reported, “We need time to . . . be able to sit and discuss with colleagues, time to go to conferences and come back and implement instead of picking up the pieces” (Brown et al., 2002, p. 130).

Grissom and Harrington (2010) studied “administrator professional development participation correlate[s] with “teachers’ ratings of principal performance” (p. 583). They reported “a significant positive association between principal participation in formal mentoring and coaching and principal effectiveness but find that principals who invest in university coursework as professional development are rated less effective” (p. 585). Grissom and Harrington found “principals who participate in a formal principal network also are rated [slightly] lower in both models” and “perform worse” than principals who participate in formal mentoring or coaching (p. 600-601, 606). The authors recommended additional study on “the benefits and drawbacks of networking and characteristics of successful networks” (p. 608).

Whitaker (1996) provided three focus areas to improve the principalship as reported by principals: “(1) need for support systems, (2) more attractive benefits and salaries, and (3) great opportunities for professional growth” (p. 67). Consequently, “principals visit occasionally at principals’ meetings, time for talking, reflecting, and sharing problems and concerns is

apparently not present, leaving many principals feelings isolated and alone in a world of conflict” (Whitaker, 1996, p. 67).

Adult learning theory provides input to plan principal professional development based on methods that best promote adult learning. Zepeda et al. (2014) indicated current professional development is not self-directed, which is one of the concepts of adult learning theory. They concluded that the principal, instead of district officials, should direct professional development that is relevant, action-based and not a traditional sit-and-get type of development opportunity. As pointed out by several authors, adults prefer to be collaborative and see the relevance of their work (Brackett, 2008 as cited by Beavers, 2009; Bookfield, 1990 as cited by Beavers, 2009).

Compared to the recommendations made by other researchers, adult learning theory concepts reflected the same themes. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2012) provided six principles of adult learning to be considered when planning professional development:

(1) learner’s need to know: why, what, how; (2) self-concept of the learner: autonomous, self-directing; (3) prior experience of the learner: resource, mental models; (4) readiness to learn: life related, developmental task; (5) orientation to learning: problem centered, contextual; (6) motivation to learn: intrinsic value, personal payoff. (p. 4)

Conger and Benjamin (1999) stressed “research has shown that adults are most motivated for learning when it is immediately relevant to their lives,” and “the topics are relevant to what they need and want to know and thus fit their learning style” (p. 211, p. 27). When planning professional development, research suggested involving adults in the decision-making while building trust by utilizing collective learning techniques (Castleman, 2015).

Waters et al. (2003) showed a connection between effective principal professional development and an increase in student achievement. Salazar (2007) explained “principals need continuous opportunities to upgrade their knowledge and skills. Professional development

opportunities should be tailored to the needs of the participants and geared to actual leadership roles” (p. 26). Based on the findings of several researchers, principals need learning opportunities tailored to their specific needs while keeping in mind the needs of adult learners.

Connection between Professional Learning Communities and Principal Professional Development

This section will review the structural characteristics and benefits of successful study groups and introduces the concepts of social learning and idea flow.

Effective principal study groups have key structural characteristics in common. The groups have a facilitator, set agendas and protocols, and work toward an increase in knowledge through shared responsibility, feedback and reflection (Fahey, 2012; Hipp & Weber, 2008; Mohr, 1998) as well as participation in a confidential environment (Fahey, 2012; Hipp & Weber, 2008). Principals should model learning for their own development making it easier to help others with their learning in schools (Mohr, 1998). In conclusion, “as principals discover the power of discussing practice together, the implications are exciting and instructive” and “believe they can learn more by pushing one another than by being led by others” (Mohr, 1998, p. 41).

Along the same idea of Mohr (1998) and Pentland (2014) suggested learning can occur socially and in groups. When a group of people continually exchange ideas, they develop beliefs and practices leading to successful decision making (Pentland, 2014). The members of a group develop original problem-solving strategies by learning from each other’s understanding and information (Pentland, 2014). Pentland (2014) elaborated on ideas flow within the group setting:

Social learning is critical: copying other people’s successes, when combined with individual learning, is dramatically better than individual learning alone. When your individual information is unclear, rely more on social learning; when your individual learning is strong, rely less on social learning. (pp. 39-40)

Effective principal study groups have several benefits acknowledged. One benefit of meeting in a group is the concept of collective intelligence; the combination of independent experience and abilities is stronger than if the group members only had the use of their separate skills (Hipp & Weber, 2008; Pentland, 2014). Another benefit of group learning is the social pressure of using the new idea based on inspiration from the group (Pentland, 2014).

Principals reported benefits of participating in a learning community includes having fun, receiving help, increased confidence in problem-solving, a sense of belonging, and establishing a network of professionals to seek advice from while keeping up to date in education (Wenger et al., 2002).

Principals felt less secluded and were willing to open up to others in the cohort environment, they shared personal experiences and believed that the learning was useful to the immediate situation, not just “busy work” (Williamson, 2000, p 16). Learning happened from each other instead of from experts (Williamson, 2000). An increase in student achievement, using an open atmosphere to expand their professional knowledge, was also reported by principals (Hord & Hirsh, 2008; Neale & Cone, 2013).

Synthesis of the Review of the Research

Included in this review were the following themes: (a) the history and critical components of professional learning communities, (b) the history and characteristics of principal professional development, (c) principal professional development needs and preferred methods of delivery for professional development as related to adult learning theories, and (d) the connection between professional learning communities and principal professional development.

Professional learning communities were designed to increase student achievement by making time for learning as a small group, which impacts student growth (DuFour et al., 2010). Professional learning communities provide a means of expediting professional development for adults while advancing long-term school achievement (Hord & Hirsh, 2008).

Principal professional development has gained momentum with the increase in studies connecting principal effectiveness to student learning (Nicholson et al., 2005). Lewis (2000) pointed out “most school districts investing heavily in standards-based reforms recognize the need to pay as much attention to principal professional development as to that of teachers” (p. 12). Sparks (2002) declared that:

the development of principals cannot continue to be the neglected stepchild of state and district professional development efforts. It must be standards-focused, sustained, intellectually rigorous, and embedded in the principal’s workday. Nothing less will lead to high levels of learning and performance by all students and teachers. (p. 81)

Further, Whitaker (1996) added that “research on the principalship points to the fact that the principal’s job is comprised of role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload.” (p. 61). Whitaker (1995) discussed principal burnout and the need for professional development to address the challenges by acknowledging that the principalship can be grueling, as well as to expand assistance programs that educate principals about the challenges, and strengthen development for principals. Brown et al. (2002) claimed “principals may have greater needs for renewal than anyone else” (p. 109). Brown et al (2002) explained there are “three major policy implications [that] have emerged: (1) strengthen the preservice preparation of aspiring principals by improving certification requirements and formal academic work, (2) improve the process of recruiting and selecting principals, and (3) improve and increase the professional development opportunities for practicing principals. (p. 109)

Brown et al (2002) further said that:

it has become clear that middle school principals need to continually update their knowledge base in order to understand and facilitate the process of change and to develop the depth of human relations skills required to successfully enhance student learning - the ultimate purpose of professional development. (p. 112).

Sparks and Hirsh (1997) pointed out staff development should not be only for teachers, but also for anyone with impact on achievement such as principals. Sparks and Hirsh added “principals and central office administrators may attend conferences or workshops focused on their needs, but those experiences are typically isolated events with little or no follow-up” (p. 91). The authors asserted “principals and teachers not only must have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that make for effective instruction, but also be able to successfully function on school improvement teams and other work groups” (p. 92). Houle (2006) stated effective professional development focuses on instructional leadership, capacity-building and personal renewal.

Preferred delivery models of professional development as indicated by principals include, small study groups, conferences, university courses, engaging activities, mentoring and coaching (Brown et al., 2002; Salazar, 2007; Spanneut et al., 2012; Whitaker & Turner, 2000). Hipp and Weber (2008) pointed to professional learning communities being a benefit to principals because “as practitioners, we need to turn to one another and view those with a common vision as potential contributors to our own learning communities” (p. 55). According to the MetLife Survey (MetLife, 2013), principals in elementary and secondary education participate in exceptionally high rates in PLCs.

The professional learning community model offers a method of professional development that reinforces the learning styles of adults in a collaborative setting while allowing professionals to learn from each other while sharing what they know (Hord & Hirsh, 2008; Pentland, 2014).

Summary

The research indicates professional development for principals has a wide array of components. This chapter shared research on professional learning communities, professional development needs and delivery methods for principals and how professional learning communities relate to the development of principals. Chapter III details the study methods with specific information about the design and the participants of the study.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of secondary principals and assistant principals in Minnesota related to principal professional learning communities. Chapter III provides the details of the mixed-methods study, including methodology, participants, human subjects approval, instruments for data collection and analysis, research design, and lastly, procedures and timeline.

In order to earn an administrative license in Minnesota, principals and assistant principals are required to demonstrate proficiency in 16 competencies, including: leadership, policy and law, communication, judgment and problem analysis (Minnesota Administrative Rules, 3512.0510) (Office of The Revisor of Statutes, 2008). In order to renew an administrative license in Minnesota, principals and assistant principals must complete 125 hours of approved continuing education every five years (MN Rule 3512.1200). To assist principals in staying on track with those hours, the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) received approval to offer continuing education hours for principal professional learning communities for the topics of “research, legislative initiatives, innovative programs, and program reflection and analysis” (MASSP, n.d., para 4). One of the goals of the professional learning community approach established by MASSP is the establishment of a collaborative culture leading to the expanded intellectual capacity of its members (MASSP, n.d., para. 1).

Increasing professional knowledge, as proposed by MASSP, was recommended by Barth (1985a) when he asserted “that being a lifelong learner is the most important characteristic of a school leader” and should be a priority for principals (p. 93). Barth (1985a) also stated:

the most powerful form of learning, the most sophisticated form of staff development, comes not from listening to the good words of others but from sharing what we know with others. Learning comes more from giving than by receiving. By reflecting on what we do, by giving it coherence, and by sharing and articulating our craft knowledge we make meaning, we learn. (p. 93)

Research Questions

1. What professional development methods did select Minnesota principals report they used to participate in principal PLCs?
2. How did select Minnesota principals rate the effectiveness of the characteristics of the professional development methods they used in principals PLCs?
3. What did select Minnesota principals report were benefits of their participation in principal PLCs?
4. What were the challenges reported by select Minnesota principals with their participation in principal PLCs?
5. To what extent did select Minnesota principals report that participation in a principal PLC enhanced their professional development?
6. How did the administrative roles, years of experiences, sizes of school and locations of select Minnesota principals impact their perceptions of PLCs as a professional development strategy?

Participants

Participants in the study were members of the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals who may or may not participate in professional learning communities and volunteered to participate in the study. A convenience sample technique was used for the survey and a purposeful sample was used for the interviews, as defined by Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007);

“a group . . . selected simply because they are available and easy to access” and “selecting cases that are likely to be ‘information-rich’ with respect to the purposes of a qualitative research study” (p. 636, p. 650).

Human Subject Approval—Institutional Review Board (IRB)

After the research committee approved the research proposal, the researcher submitted appropriate application materials to the St. Cloud State University Institutional Review Board. The proposed study was approved by the Institutional Review Board.

Instrument(s) for Data Collection and Analysis

A questionnaire survey and interview instrument was developed and field tested per guidelines in Gall et al. (2007). Survey questions were prepared by the researcher based on studies conducted by Brown et al., (2002), Evans and Mohr, (1999), and Salazar (2007) of reported methods on professional development; the benefits of PLC participation and workplace collaboration reported by Allmaras (2015), Pentland (2014), and Williamson (2000); barriers in PLC implementation reported by Barth (1986); characteristics of effective professional development for principals reported by Brown et al., (2002) and Neufeld (1997).

The survey questions included both open and closed forms of questions to secure participant responses (Gall et al., 2007). Gall et al. (2007) defined open-form as “a question that permits research participants to make any response they wish” (p. 647). Gall et al. define closed-form as “a question that permits a response only from among prespecified response options” (p. 634). A Survey Monkey online research instrument was used to collect responses (see Appendix A).

The Executive Director of the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) prepared a cover letter to accompany the survey to lend importance to the study and to encourage participation (see Appendix B). The instrument is made up of 26 open- and closed-ended questions. If participants chose to offer her/his contact information for the researcher, they gave consent to be contacted for a follow-up interview of four open-ended questions. The participants that chose to offer contact information were grouped by urban, suburban and rural regions and drawn from a hat to provide a random sample, totaling four interviewees.

Research Design

The researcher conducted a mixed-methods study, in which both “quantitative and qualitative methodologies are combined and used in a single investigation” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 645). The study was designed to examine the types of professional development and methods of delivery preferred by Minnesota secondary school principals while using principal professional learning communities. In addition, the survey was designed to identify factors that may lead to a successful principal professional learning community. Finally, follow-up interviews were conducted with four members of existing principal professional learning communities to identify additional factors that may be important to maximize the success of principal professional learning communities. Gall et al. (2007) described multiple interview approaches, including “the standardized open-ended interview . . . [which] involves a predetermined sequence and wording of the same set of questions to be asked of each respondent” chosen by the researcher (p. 247).

Treatment of Data

Data were examined using statistical analysis, specifically cross tabulation. After the survey was conducted, responses were analyzed with the assistance of the Center for Statistical

Consulting and Research at St. Cloud State University. Following interviews, recorded responses of participants were transcribed and coded by the researcher.

Procedures and Timeline

A survey was created with the assistance of the Saint Cloud State University Statistical Center utilizing the online survey tool, Survey Monkey. The researcher provided the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals the link to the secure survey for email distribution.

Participants were asked to:

1. Read through the cover letter and, if chose to continue, consent is assumed.
2. Answer demographic questions on the survey instrument.
3. Answer questions related to participation in a principal professional learning community.
4. Provide contact information if interested in participating in a follow up interview.

The survey and interview instrument were field tested by two groups of doctoral cohort students from Saint Cloud State University. The survey was administered electronically employing Survey Monkey from January 16 to February 6, 2017. The Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) partnered with the researcher and used their email database to send out the electronic survey. A reminder email was sent out by MASSP on January 30, 2017, to encourage more responses. Follow-up interviews were conducted with existing members of principal PLCs from January 16 to February 15, 2017.

Summary

The study examined how professional development for principals provides a medium for principals to stay knowledgeable in their field. In addition, the study provided an examination of

the use of professional learning communities in Minnesota by secondary principals and assistant principals. This chapter described the methods and research design of the study. Chapter IV details the findings of the study organized by research question.

Chapter IV: Findings

Study Purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine Minnesota secondary school principals use of principal professional learning communities as a mechanism for principal professional development. The findings of the study may prove beneficial for principals as well as professional organizations in Minnesota. Further, the study's findings may provide a framework for the use of professional learning communities by secondary principals.

Research Questions

Chapter IV provides the findings of the study based on research questions developed by the researcher and derived from the related literature. Statistical analysis was conducted by the Saint Cloud State Center for Statistical Consulting and Research using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed and findings reported in the same sequence as the research questions were presented. Qualitative data from interviews are reported as appropriate with each question.

1. What professional development methods did select Minnesota principals report they used to participate in principal PLCs?
2. How did select Minnesota principals rate the effectiveness of the characteristics of the professional development methods they used in principals PLCs?
3. What did select Minnesota principals report were benefits of their participation in principal PLCs?
4. What were the challenges reported by select Minnesota principals with their participation in principal PLCs?

5. To what extent did select Minnesota principals report that participation in a principal PLC enhanced their professional development?
6. How did the administrative roles, years of experiences, sizes of school and locations of select Minnesota principals impact their perceptions of PLCs as a professional development strategy?

Description of the Sample

The sample for the study was comprised of the 1200 members of the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP). All members were sent emails with a secure link to a Survey Monkey online survey on January 16, 2017. By February 8, 2017, 213 responses were received. After the responses were analyzed it was determined that 116 were usable for a valid analysis, given that the 116 had fewer than three of the 26 total questions missing. Thirty-seven respondents provided contact information and agreed to participate in a four-question follow-up interview. From the original 37 potential interviewees, four respondents were randomly selected and interviewed between January 17 and February 7, 2017. Those respondents who provided contact information were categorized by the researcher on the basis of their location, rural, suburban, and urban. Potential interviewees were eliminated from consideration if they were employed in the same school district as the researcher. Names were then randomly drawn, providing four interviewees who were employed in different geographical areas in Minnesota, including rural, suburban and urban.

Quantitative Results

In the first section of the survey, respondents were asked demographic questions, including their roles, numbers of years working in administration, sizes of schools, locations of

districts (rural, suburban or urban), and if they were members of principal professional learning communities (PLC). For those respondents who indicated they were not members of principal PLCs, the surveys were closed, and those respondents were not permitted to participate further in the survey. The second section of the survey instructed each respondent to answer questions related to his/her PLC, including the composition of the group, frequency of meetings, topics discussed, professional development delivery methods used, communication, benefits and barriers of his/her participation in the PLC.

Interview questions were chosen to provide additional details about PLC participation from select (four) respondents. The questions inquired about how the respondents became involved in a principal PLC as well as further expanding their benefits from participating in such a PLC and offering suggestions to other secondary principals on why they should participate in a PLC. Tables 1-5 provide demographic data about the study's respondents and refer to Survey Questions 2-5.

In Table 1, information related to administrative roles is revealed, as indicated by Survey Question 2.

Table 1

Administrative Role

Role	Frequency	Percent
Principal	86	74.1%
Assistant Principal	30	25.9%
Total	116	100.0%

A total of 116 respondents were included in the study. Nearly two-thirds of respondents (n=86, 74.10%) indicated they held the role of principal. Assistant principals made up the remainder of the group (n=30, 25.90%).

Respondents who were interviewed revealed they were all four principals in secondary schools in Minnesota.

Table 2 provides information related to the number of years respondents were in an administrative role, as answered by Survey Question 3.

Table 2

Number of Years Working in Administrative Role

Years	Frequency	Percent
0 to 3	19	16.4%
4 to 12	60	51.7%
13 to 25	34	29.3%
Over 25	3	2.6%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 2 provides the respondents' years of experience in which they have worked in administrative roles. The number of years respondents had been in administrative roles varied with 16.4% (n=19) in their roles for three years or less; 51.7% (n=60) in their roles between four and 12 years; followed by 29.3% (n=34) in their roles between 13 and 25 years; and finally 2.6% (n=3) in their roles for over 25 years.

In the following table, Table 3, the size of the school districts where respondents were employed is presented from Survey Question 4.

Table 3

Student Size of School

Size of School/No. of Students	Frequency	Percent
Under 500	31	26.7%
501-1,000	42	36.2%
1,001-2,000	39	33.6%
2,001-3,000	1	0.9%
Over 3,000	3	2.6%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 3 displays the size of respondents schools.

Table 3 revealed that the sizes of schools in which respondents worked varied. Of the respondents, 26.7% (n=31) indicated they worked in schools with less than 500 students; 36.2% (n=42) stated they worked at schools with between 501 and 1,000 students. Respondents who stated they worked at schools with enrollments with between 1,001 and 2,000 students totaled 33.6% (n=39).

Respondents who were interviewed revealed they were from four different sized schools in Minnesota. Interviewee 1 was from a suburban school that had slightly more than 2,000 students enrolled. Interviewee 2 was from an urban school which enrolled slightly over 1,500 students. Interviewee 3 was from a rural school with over 500 students enrolled. Interviewee 4 was from a rural school that enrolled fewer than 500 students.

Table 4 presents information related to the type of school district respondents were employed in from Survey Question 5.

Table 4

Type of Area of School District

Type	Frequency	Percent
Rural	61	52.6%
Suburban	42	36.2%
Urban	13	11.2%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 4 reports respondents type of district they were employed- rural, suburban or urban. A majority, 52.6% or (n=61), were employed in rural districts. Respondents employed in suburban districts were 36.2% or (n=42) and respondents employed in urban districts were 11.2% or (n=13). The largest number and percentage of respondents indicated they worked in rural schools.

Respondents who were interviewed revealed two were from rural school districts, one was from a suburban school district and one was from an urban school district in Minnesota.

In the next table, Table 5, participants membership in a principal PLC is presented from Survey Question 6.

Table 5

Membership in a Principal PLC

Y/N	Frequency	Percent
Yes	115	99.1%
No	1	0.9%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 5 provides respondents participation in a principal PLC, yes or no.

Table 5 indicates respondents' involvement in a principal professional learning community (PLC). Of the 116 respondents, 115, or 99.1%, stated they were principal PLC members. Logical branching was included in the survey to prohibit respondents who were not members of principal PLCs from answering the remaining survey questions. Due to a programming error in the design of the survey, however, one individual indicated a lack of desire to participate in a principal PLC, but was allowed to complete the remainder of the survey. This individual was included in the final data file (n=116) used for reporting the research. Since this one case did not have an impact on the conclusions drawn from the analysis, it was decided to report the findings with this individual's responses included in the data, but to point out this error.

Research Question 1: What professional development methods do select Minnesota principals report they used to participate in principal PLCs?

The researcher analyzed responses to Survey Questions 8, 16, and 17. Respondents were asked to indicate which of nine suggested types of professional development structure and methods were used in their PLCs, to rate the characteristics of professional development, and to report the types of communication used in PLCs.

In Table 6, information related to the reported methods of professional development structures and methods is presented from Survey Question 8.

Table 6

Reported Methods of Professional Development Structures/Methods Used

Method	Frequency
Seminar/Conference	19
Workshop	22
Hands-On/Field Based	24
Mentoring/Interning/Coaching	32
Small Study Group	82
University Coursework	1
Online (Webinars, Discussion Boards, Social Media)	6
Self-Directed	50
Problem-Based Projects	22
Other	4
Total	262

Table 6 reports the types of professional development methods respondents used in their principal PLCs.

The professional development structures and methods used were rated with a check all that apply method. Respondents indicated that small study groups was their top choice with a frequency of 82, followed by self-directed methods (n=50), mentoring/interning/coaching (n=32), hands-on/field based (n=24), and problem-based projects and workshops (n=22 each).

When respondents were asked to rate the level of importance of seven principal professional development characteristics, the rating scale included the following five options: least important, not that important, important, most important, and does not apply. The results of the seven professional development characteristics are reported individually in Tables 7 through

13. The highest rated principal professional development characteristics viewed as most important by respondents were be ongoing 73.3%, (n=85), e reflective 64.7%, (n=75) and be job-embedded 55.2%, (n= 64).

In Table 7, information related to the participants rating of a professional development attribute of involve a mentor, is presented from Survey Question 16.

Table 7

Participant Rating of the Professional Development Attribute: Involve a Mentor

Rank	Frequency	Percent
Least Important	3	2.6%
Not That Important	25	21.6%
Important	59	50.9%
Most Important	24	20.7%
Does Not Apply	3	2.6%
Did Not Answer	2	1.7%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 7 reveals that 83 respondents or 71.6% rated mentoring most important or important as a principal professional development characteristic.

In Table 8, information related to the participants rating of a professional development attribute of be ongoing, is presented from Survey Question 16.

Table 8

Participant Rating of the Professional Development Attribute: Be Ongoing

Rank	Frequency	Percent
Least Important	0	0.0%
Not That Important	1	0.9%
Important	29	25.0%
Most Important	85	73.3%
Does Not Apply	1	0.9%
Did Not Answer	0	0.0%
Total	116	100.0%

In Table 8, 85 respondents, or 73.3%, reported it was most important that professional development be on going. Twenty-nine respondents or 25.0% reported it was important for professional development to be on going.

In the next table, Table 9, information related to the participants rating of one of the attributes, be reflective, is presented from Survey Question 16.

Table 9

Participant Rating of the Professional Development Attribute: Be Reflective

Rank	Frequency	Percent
Least Important	0	0.0%
Not That Important	4	3.4%
Important	33	28.4%
Most Important	75	64.7%
Does Not Apply	3	2.6%
Did Not Answer	1	0.9%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 9 reveals 108, or 93.1%, of respondents believed it was most important, or important, for reflection to be included in their principal professional development.

In the next table, Table 10, information related to the participants rating of a professional development attribute, be job-embedded, is presented from Survey Question 16.

Table 10

Participant Rating of the Professional Development Attribute: Be Job-Embedded

Rank	Frequency	Percent
Least Important	1	0.9%
Not That Important	6	5.2%
Important	42	36.2%
Most Important	64	55.2%
Does Not Apply	1	0.9%
Did Not Answer	2	1.7%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 10 reports 106, or 91.4%, of respondents believed it was most important or important that their principal professional development be job-embedded.

In the next table, Table 11, information related to the participants rating of a professional development attribute, be based on your local school needs, is presented from Survey Question 16.

Table 11

Participant Rating of the Professional Development Attribute: Be Based On Your Individual Local School Needs

Rank	Frequency	Percent
Least Important	2	1.7%
Not That Important	9	7.8%
Important	60	51.7%
Most Important	43	37.1%
Does Not Apply	2	1.7%
Did Not Answer	0	0.0%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 11 reveals 103 or 88.8% of respondents believed it was most important, or important, for principal professional development to be based on local schools' needs.

In the next table, Table 12, information related to the participants rating of a professional development attribute, to occur in groups, is presented from Survey Question 16.

Table 12

Participant Rating of the Professional Development Attribute: Occur in Groups

Rank	Frequency	Percent
Least Important	3	2.6%
Not That Important	13	11.2%
Important	58	50.0%
Most Important	40	34.5%
Does Not Apply	2	1.7%
Did Not Answer	0	0.0%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 12 reports 98 or 84.5% of respondents believed it was most important, or important, for their principal professional development to occur in a group setting. Table 12 also reports that 13 respondents or 11.2% viewed occurring in groups as not that important.

In the next table, Table 13, information related to the participants rating of a professional development attribute, to involve goal setting, is presented from Survey Question 16.

Table 13

Participant Rating of the Professional Development Attribute: Involve Goal Setting

Rank	Frequency	Percent
Least Important	1	0.9%
Not That Important	20	17.2%
Important	59	50.9%
Most Important	35	30.2%
Does Not Apply	1	0.9%
Did Not Answer	0	0.0%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 13 reports 94 or 81.0% of respondents believed it was most important or important for principal professional development to include goal setting. Table 13 also reports that 20 respondents or 17.2% viewed involvement in goal setting as not that important.

A comparison of the responses of principals and assistant principals was undertaken with the aid of a T-test with an independent sample. A Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was performed. There was no significant difference found between principals and assistant principals responses ($p > .05$) when comparing ratings of the characteristics of principal professional development.

In Table 14, the methods used by principal PLC members to communicate is reported from Survey Question 17.

Table 14

Mode of Communication Reported Used by Principal PLC Members

Mode	Frequency	Percent
Strictly face-to-face	87	75.0%
Sometimes e-conferencing, sometimes face-to-face	29	25.0%
Strictly e-conferencing	0	0.0%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 14 displays the methods of communication respondents indicated they used to participate in principal PLCs.

Communication in principal PLCs was reported by respondents to occur largely on a face-to-face basis (75.0%, n=87), with 25.0% (n=29) communicating with a combination of online and face-to-face interactions. No respondents expressed that their principal PLC communications were strictly through e-conferencing.

In Research Question 2, respondents were asked to indicate the type of leadership their PLCs used, the topics discussed, the value of the PLC experience, and whether or not they planned to continue participating in PLCs. The responses were cross tabulated with information from survey questions on role and benefits as well as barriers to PLC participation.

Research Question 2: How did select Minnesota principals rate the effectiveness of the professional development methods they used in principal PLCs?

In Table 15, data related to the participants reported value of their principal PLC experience is presented from Survey Question 25.

Table 15

Participant Reported Value of the Principal PLC Experience

Value	Frequency	Percent
5 - Very Valuable	47	40.5%
4 - Valuable	49	42.2%
3 - Moderately Valuable	14	12.1%
2 - Slightly Valuable	3	2.6%
1 - Not Valuable	1	0.9%
Did Not Answer	2	1.7%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 15 displays the respondents rating the value of participation in a principal PLC. Table data revealed that 96 or 82.70%, of respondents rated their principal PLC experience as very valuable or valuable. Also, 14 or 12.1% of respondents rated their principal PLC experience as moderately valuable while 4 or 3.5% of respondents rated their principal PLC experience as slightly valuable or not valuable.

In Table 16, data related to the participants reported use of meeting tracking tools is presented from Survey Question 18.

Table 16

Protocols, Norms, Agendas, and Minutes in Place for Principal PLCs

Options	Frequency	Percent
Some or All of Those Items Listed	96	82.9%
None of Those Items Listed	20	17.2%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 16 reports the respondents' perceptions of the use of protocols, norms, agendas in principal PLCs.

Respondents reported that 82.9% (n=96) of their principal PLCs had some form of protocols, norms, agendas and minutes in place, while 17.2% (n=20) do not have those meeting features.

The data were confirmed during the interviews; all four subjects described the use of technology to facilitate agendas, protocols, and sharing information with each other. Interviewee 3 stated that, when sharing information with one another or asking for information from one another, "... we'll send out a google form and ... get feedback so quickly ...". Interviewee 3 further reported that "our agendas go out early ... you [know] what you want to put on the agenda, you can see what the other principals are putting on ... I can always bring something on that or I can share on that ...".

In Table 17, data related to the participants reported type of leadership structure is presented from Survey Question 19.

Table 17

Individual or Shared Leadership Responsibility for Principal PLCs

Options	Frequency	Percent
One Person Leads	41	35.7%
Shared Responsibility (specific roles are assigned, i.e.: one person takes notes, one person is the timer, one person is the facilitator, take turns setting the agenda, etc.)	74	64.3%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 17 reports respondents' perceptions of the leadership structures of their principal PLCs.

Shared leadership responsibility was reported by 64.3% (n=74) of respondents while 35.7% (n=41) reported one person led their principal PLCs.

During the interviews, Interviewee 4 stated that the PLC had an outside facilitator who was a retired principal. The facilitator researched topics the group members wanted to explore and shared information about these topics at their PLC session.

Research Question 3: What did select Minnesota principals report were benefits of their participation in principal PLCs?

In order to address the research question, respondents were directed to identify from a list, the topics that were discussed at their PLCs; rank the topics that were discussed that allowed them to be granted continuing education credits (CEUs); designate, from a list, benefits experienced; and identify, from a list, subject areas from which knowledge was gained through the PLC experience.

In Table 18, data related to the participants reported topics of principal PLC meetings is presented from Survey Question 20.

Table 18

Reported Topics Discussed in Principal PLCs

Topics	Frequency (Check All That Apply)
Curriculum Management	88
Supporting the Role of Teachers in School	95
Transforming School Culture	101
State or Federal Assessments	57
Leadership	97
Learning as a Principal	82
Political Community Matters	50
Involve Goal Setting	15
Total	585

Table 18 displays respondents' reported discussion topics in their principal PLCs.

The five most frequently reported topics were: transforming school culture (n=101), leadership (n=97), supporting the role of teachers in school (n=95), curriculum management (n=88), and learning as a principal (n=82).

In Table 19, data related to the participants reported ranking (most amount of time, second most amount of time, least amount of time) of discussion topics eligible to earn CEUs is presented from Survey Question 21.

Table 19

Reported Rank of Time Spent on Topics Eligible to Earn CEUs in Principal PLCs

CEU Eligible Topic	Rank
Sharing Innovative Ideas	Ranked 1st by 80 Ranked 2nd by 22 Ranked 3rd by 5
Sharing Current Research	Ranked 1st by 19 Ranked 2nd by 80 Ranked 3rd by 5
Sharing How to Meet Legislative Requirements	Ranked 1st by 7 Ranked 2nd by 25 Ranked 3rd by 78
Total	321

Table 19 reported the ranking of time respondents indicated they gave to topics for which they would receive continuing education hours while participating in principal PLCs.

Sharing innovative ideas was ranked first by 80 respondents, while sharing current research was ranked second by 80 respondents, and sharing how to meet legislative requirements was ranked third by 78 respondents.

In Table 20, data related to the participants reported benefits from principal PLC experiences is presented from Survey Question 22. Participants were asked to check all benefits that applied to their experience.

Table 20

Reported Benefits from Principal PLC Experience

Benefit	Frequency (check all that apply)
Feel less isolated	93
Willing to open up to others	73
Share personal experiences	88
Believe the time is not “busy work”	63
Able to reflect on own practices	97
Able to develop a culture of learning and professional behavior	80
Able to create connections to nearby communities	70
Able to improve skills in coaching and evaluating teachers	58
Able to model leadership behaviors	67
Able to share ideas with each other	104
Other	2
Total	795

Table 20 illustrates the reported benefits respondents identified from their participation in their principal PLCs.

Respondents chose being able to share ideas with each other (n=104), able to reflect on their own practices (n=97) and feeling less isolated (n=93), as the highest benefits of principal PLC participation.

The data were confirmed in the interviews. All four interviewees reported the benefit of sharing ideas with and learning from their PLC members. Further, the interviewees stated that it was beneficial to hear from others who had experienced an issue with which they now had to undergo, and solicit feedback from them.

In Table 21, data related to the participants reported areas of knowledge gained or professional growth is presented from Survey Question 24.

Table 21

Reported Areas of Knowledge Gained or Changed Professionally as Result of Principal PLC Experience

Topics	Frequency (check all that apply)
Curriculum Management	45
Supporting the Role of Teachers in School	74
Transforming School Culture	83
State or Federal Assessments	27
Leadership	90
Learning as a Principal	82
Political Community Matters	33
Other	1
None of the Above	1
Total	435

Table 21 communicates the areas in which respondents gained knowledge or grew professionally as a result of their principal PLC experiences.

Respondents chose leadership n=90, transforming school culture n=83, and learning as a principal n=82, as the highest areas of knowledge gained or areas in which they had grown professionally as a result of their principal PLC membership. Political community matters and state or federal assessments were the lowest occurring areas of knowledge gained with n=33 and n=27 respectively.

Research Question 4: What were the challenges reported by select Minnesota principals with their participation in principal PLCs?

Respondents were asked to disclose: the type of support that was provided by their supervisors; meeting times; the frequency of PLC meetings; type of communication used; their barriers to participation. MASSP members who were not members of principal PLCs were also asked to reveal barriers they had to participation in a principal PLC.

In Table 22, data related to the participants reported support given by supervisors is disseminated from Survey Question 9.

Table 22

Support Given by Supervisor for Principal PLC Participation

Type	Frequency	Percent
Allowed to Leave During Workday	85	73.3%
None	18	15.5%
Other	12	10.3%
Missing	1	0.9%
Total	116	100.0%

Note: Other includes: supervisor participates n=3, time is provided by district during the day n=4, other n=4.

Table 22 indicates the type of support supervisors provided to principals and assistant principals for participation in a principal PLC.

Respondents reported being allowed to leave work during the day for PLC time as the highest type of support given by their supervisors (73.30%, n=85). Respondents indicated 18 or 15.5% received no support from their supervisor.

In Table 23, data related to the participants reported meeting times is disseminated from Survey Question 10.

Table 23

Reported Meeting Times of Principal PLCs

Time	Frequency	Percent
Before Workday	6	5.2%
During Workday	82	70.7%
After Workday	21	18.1%
Other	7	6.0%
Total	116	100.0%

Note: Other- n=3 reported using a variety of time, n=4 reported meeting both during and after the workday.

Table 23 displays the time of day that principal PLCs met according to respondents.

Nearly three of four respondents reported their principal PLC met during the workday (70.7%, n=82). Respondents also indicated they met before the workday or after the workday, 6 or 5.2% and 21 or 18.1% respectively.

In Table 24, data related to the participants reported frequency of principal PLC meetings is disseminated from Survey Question 11.

Table 24

Reported Frequency of Principal PLC Meetings During the School Year

Number of Meetings	Frequency	Percent
Once a Month	55	47.4%
Twice a Month	9	7.8%
Every other Month	35	30.2%
Other	17	14.7%
Total	116	100.0%

Note: Other- weekly n= 3, every 2 weeks n= 1, 2-4 times a year n=1, 6 times a year n= 4, 3-4 times a year n=8

Table 24 reports the frequency with which respondents stated that principal PLCs met during the school year.

Table data reveal that principal PLCs most frequently met once a month 47.40% (n=55). Every other month principal PLC meetings occurred on 30.20% (n=35) of the occasions.

In Table 25, data related to the participants reported barriers to principal PLC participation, by principal PLC members, is disseminated from Survey Question 23.

Table 25

Reported Barriers to Principal PLC Participation by Members of Principal PLCs

Barrier	Frequency (check all that apply)
Time away from other duties	81
Doubt the benefits	8
Participation reveals own deficiencies	4
Believe it's unethical to use public funds to participate	0
I do not have any barriers	28
Other	7
Total	121

Note: Other- PLC is not organized enough to help problem solve n=1, leader's role prohibits free dialogue n = 1, pulled to attend to other business/ overscheduled n= 3, travel (time? distance?) n= 2.

Table 25 illustrates the various barriers to principal PLC participation as reported by respondents who are members of a principal PLC.

Respondents, 81 or 66.9%, reported that time away from other duties was the greatest barrier to participation in principal PLCs. Twenty-eight or 23.1% of respondents said they do not have any barriers to participation in principal PLCs.

Table data were confirmed during the interviews; three of the four interviewees acknowledged time as a potential barrier to their participation in a principal PLC. The interviewees said that not every member of the PLC had the same level of commitment, and that it was hard to meet during the workday. One interviewee reported that the PLCs met during the work day on non-student days or during the summer, and outside of the work day during the school year. One interviewee revealed that she does not have any barriers to meeting in a principal PLC.

Interviewee 3 commented that even though it took time away from the building to participate in the PLC, the time was made up for by being more efficient when returning to the building. The statement established that because the principals can learn from each other, both the successes and the failures, they have a head start on how to address an issue after hearing the outcome of others' experiences.

In Table 26, data related to the participants reported barriers to principal PLC participation, by non-members of principal PLCs, is disseminated from Survey Question 7.

Table 26

Reported Barriers to Principal PLC Participation by Non-Members of Principal PLCs

Barrier	Frequency (check all that apply)
Lack of time	59
Lack of support from leadership	5
Do not believe will benefit from meeting	2
Participation will reveal own deficiencies	1
Do not know how to participate or start a PLC	13
Do not want to participate in PLC	3
Other	22
Total	105

Table 26 illustrates the various barriers to principal PLC participation as reported by respondents who were not members of a principal PLC.

Lack of time was reported as the greatest barrier to principal PLC participation by respondents who were non-members of principal PLCs, 59 or 56.2%. Thirteen or 12.4% of respondents reported they do not know how to start or to participate in a principal PLC while three or 2.9% of respondents reported they do not want to participate in a principal PLC.

Research Question 5: To what extent did select Minnesota principals report that participation in a principal PLC enhanced their professional development?

The following survey questions were analyzed by the researcher: what topics were discussed at PLCs by principals as compared to assistant principals; what topics were discussed that can earn CEUs in the PLC by principals as compared to assistant principals; what were the

areas in which principals and assistant principals gained knowledge from their participation in PLCs; how valuable did principals and assistant principals rate their participation in PLCs.

In Table 27, data related to the participants reported discussion topics of principal PLCs is disseminated from Survey Question 20, as related to respondent's role of principal or assistant principal.

Table 27

Topics Discussed by Principal PLCs Reported by Principals and Assistant Principals

Topics	Frequency (Check All That Apply)
Curriculum	Principals- 62 Assistant Principals- 13
Supporting Role of Teacher	Principals- 63 Assistant Principals- 16
Transforming School Culture	Principals- 68 Assistant Principals- 18
State or Federal Assessments	Principals- 40 Assistant Principals- 9
Leadership	Principals-65 Assistant Principals- 16
Learning as a Principal	Principals- 57 Assistant Principals- 13
Political Community Matters	Principals- 34 Assistant Principals- 8
Total	482

Table 27 reports the topics discussed at principal PLCs, by role of either principal or assistant principal.

Transforming school culture, leadership, and supporting the role of teachers were the most frequently reported discussed topics by both principal and assistant principals. State or

federal assessments, learning as a principal and political community matters were the least frequently discussed topics by both principals and assistant principals.

In Table 28, data related to the participants reported areas of knowledge gained or changed in professionally, as a result of principal PLCs, is disseminated from Survey Question 24, as related to respondent's role of principal or assistant principal.

Table 28

Reported Areas of Knowledge Gained or Changed Professionally as Result of Principal PLC Experience by Principals and Assistant Principals

Topics	Frequency (Check All That Apply)
Curriculum Management	Principals- 32 Assistant Principals- 6
Supporting the Role of Teachers in School	Principals- 48 Assistant Principals- 15
Transforming School Culture	Principals- 56 Assistant Principals- 15
State or Federal Assessments	Principals- 20 Assistant Principals- 2
Leadership	Principals- 60 Assistant Principals- 14
Learning as a Principal	Principals- 55 Assistant Principals- 12
Political Community Matters	Principals- 23 Assistant Principals- 4
Total	362

Table 28 illustrates principals and assistant principals areas of growth or knowledge gained from principal PLC participation.

Principals and assistant principals reported similar areas of knowledge gained.

Leadership was the most recurring choice reported by principals while supporting teachers and

curriculum were the most recurring choices for assistant principals. Political community matters was the least reported choice of growth or knowledge gained by principals and assistant principals.

In Table 29, data related to the participants reported value of principal PLCs is presented from Survey Question 25, as related to respondent's role of principal or assistant principal.

Table 29

Reported Value of Principal PLC Participation by Principals and Assistant Principals

Value	Frequency
5 - Very Valuable	Principal- 31 Assistant Principal- 8
4 - Valuable	Principal- 35 Assistant Principal- 8
3 - Moderately Valuable/2 - Slightly Valuable/1 - Not Valuable	Principal- 9 Assistant Principal- 5
Total	96

Table 29 displays the ratings of the value of principal PLCs by principals and assistant principals.

A majority, 68.8% or n=66, of principals and assistant principals found their principal PLC experience to be very valuable or valuable.

In Table 30, data related to the participants reported plan to continue participation in principal PLCs is disseminated from Survey Question 26.

Table 30

Plan to Continue in Principal PLC

Y/N	Frequency	Percent
Yes	105	90.5%
No	1	0.9%
Not Sure	6	5.2%
Other	2	1.7%
Did Not Answer	2	1.7%
Total	116	100.0%

Table 30 displays respondents' plans to continue with their participation in principal PLCs.

Table data reveals that 105 respondents or 90.5% will continue to participate in principal PLCs. Of the remaining respondents, one reported no plans to continue participation in principal PLCs.

Data was confirmed in the interviews; all four interviewees expressed they recommended other principals participate in principal PLCs. Two of the interviewees referenced being isolated in the role of principal unless they reached out to others. One interviewee suggested building a base of knowledge from participation in the PLC and then reaching out to the group when there were questions to ask. Another interviewee noted that a principal's role is different than other staff in the building, and that unless principals connect with those in the same role, they are isolated.

Research Question 6: How did administrative roles, years of experiences, sizes of schools, and locations of select Minnesota principals impact their perceptions of PLCs as a professional development strategy?

The researcher conducted an analysis of the demographic section of the survey cross tabulated with reported benefits, barriers, areas of knowledge gained, value rating of PLC and continuation of PLC, reported by respondents. Specifically, the analysis of type of district- rural, suburban, or urban- provided information pertinent to research question six.

In Table 31, data related to the participants reported years of administrative experience, as related to reported benefits of principal PLC participation, is presented from Survey Questions 3 and 22.

Table 31

Years of Experience in Administrative Role Related to Reported Benefits of Principal PLC Participation

Frequency (Check All That Apply)					
Years	Feel Less Isolated	Able to Share Personal Experiences	Able to Reflect on Own Practices	Able to Connect to Nearby Communities	Able to Share Ideas With Each Other
0-3	15	15	15	11	17
4-12	51	46	50	42	55
13-25+	27	27	32	27	32
Total	93	88	97	80	104

Table 31 reports the benefits as a result of principal PLC participation on the basis of respondents years of experience as a principal or assistant principal. The choices were: feel less isolated, able to share personal experiences with others, able to reflect on own practices, able to connect to nearby communities, and able to share ideas with each other.

Table data reveals the years of administrative experience of 4-12 years reports the highest occurring frequencies; however, this group of respondents is higher in participants than the other two groups. During the interviews, Interviewee 3 revealed that he more greatly appreciated the value of the principal PLC meetings now as an experienced principal than when he was a new principal.

In Table 32, data related to the participants reported barriers to principal PLC participation as related to respondent's years in an administrative role, is disseminated from Survey Questions 3 and 22.

Table 32

Years of Experience in Role Related to Reported Barriers to Principal PLC Participation for Principal PLC Members: Time Away from Other Duties

Years in Administrative Role	Frequency (Check All That Apply)
0-3	13
4-12	46
13-25+	22
Total	81

Table 32 reports time away from other duties as a barrier to principal PLC participation compared on the basis of respondents' years of experience as a principal.

Respondents in the 4-12 years of experience range reported the highest frequency of time away from other duties as a barrier to principal PLC participation.

In Table 33, data related to the participants reported barriers to principal PLC participation is disseminated from Survey Questions 43 and 23, as related to respondent's size of school district where employed.

Table 33

*Size of School Related to Reported Barriers of Principal PLC Participation:
Time Away from Other Duties*

School size	Frequency (Check All That Apply)
Under 500 Students	22
501-1,000 Students	32
1,001 + Students	27
Total	81

Table 33 reports the number of respondents who indicated time away from other duties as a barrier to participation in a principal PLC on the basis of the respondents' school sizes.

Table data reveals time away from other duties as the a frequent response for those principals and assistant principals employed in schools with 501-1,000 students, n=32. Principals and assistant principals employed in schools with under 500 students account for n=22 and those employed in schools with 1,001 or more students account for n=27.

In Table 34, data related to the participants reported size of school employed in related to benefits of principal PLCs, is disseminated from Survey Questions 4 and 22.

Table 34

Size of School Related to Reported Benefits of Principal PLC

School Size	Frequency (Check All That Apply)				
	Feel Less Isolated	Able to Share Personal Experiences	Able to Reflect on Own Practices	Able to Connect to Nearby Communities	Able to Share Ideas with Each Other
Under 500 Students	27	23	23	23	28
501-1,000 Students	34	35	35	32	37
1,001 + Students	32	30	39	15	39
Total	93	88	97	70	104

Table 34 reports benefits of principal PLC participation on the basis of respondent's school sizes employed.

Table data reveals feeling less isolated n=27, and being able to share ideas with each other n=28, as the most frequent reported benefits of principal PLC participation for principals and assistant principals employed in schools with under 500 students. Data reveals feeling less isolated n=34, and being able to share personal experiences n=35, as the most frequent reported benefits of principal PLC participation for principals and assistant principals employed in schools with 501-1,000 students. Data reveals being able to share ideas with others n=39 and being able to reflect on their own practices n=39, as the most frequent reported benefits of principal PLC participation for principals and assistant principals employed in schools with 1,001 or more students.

In Table 35, data related to the participants reported type of school district employed in related to benefits of principal PLCs, is disseminated from Survey Questions 5 and 22.

Table 35

Type of School District Area Related to Reported Benefits of Principal PLC

Type of District	Frequency (Check All That Apply)				
	Feel Less Isolated	Share Personal Experiences	Able to Reflect on Own Practices	Able to Connect to Nearby Communities	Able to Share Ideas with Each Other
Rural	50	49	50	49	56
Suburban	32	31	37	19	39
Urban	11	8	10	2	9
Total	93	88	97	70	104

Table 35 reports the frequency with which respondents indicated five areas of benefits as result of principal PLC participation, based on type of school district.

Table data reveals feeling less isolated n=50, and being able to reflect on one's own practices n=50, were the most frequent responses for rural principals and assistant principals. Data reveals that being able to share ideas with each other n=39, and being able to reflect one one's own practices n=37, were the most frequent responses for suburban principals and assistant principals. Data revealed that feeling less isolated n=11, and being able to reflect on one's own practices were the most frequent responses for urban principals and assistant principals.

In Table 36, data related to the participants reported type of school district employed in related to the barrier of participation of time away from other duties, is disseminated from Survey Questions 5 and 23.

Table 36

Type of School District Area Related to Reported Barriers of PLC Participation: Time Away from Other Duties

Type of District	Frequency (Check All That Apply)
Rural	44
Suburban	30
Urban	7
Total	81

Table 36 shows the respondents who indicated time away from other duties as a barrier to principal PLC participation, based on type of school district.

Table data reveals n=44 rural principals and assistant principals indicated time as a barrier to their principal PLC participation. Data reveals n=30 suburban principals and assistant principals indicated time as a barrier to their principal PLC participation. Data reveals n=7 urban principals and assistant principals indicated time as a barrier to their principal PLC participation.

In Table 37, data related to the participants reported type of school district employed in related to areas of gained knowledge as a result of principal PLCs participation, is disseminated from Survey Questions 5 and 24.

Table 37

Type of School District Area Related to reported Benefits of Principal PLC Areas of Gained Knowledge

Frequency (Check All That Apply)				
Type of District	State or Federal Assessments	Leadership	Learning as a Principal	Political Community Matters
Rural	20	48	49	18
Suburban	7	32	28	14
Urban	0	10	5	1
Total	27	90	82	33

Table 37 shows the respondents who reported gaining knowledge in the area of state or federal assessments as a result of principal PLC participation, based on type of school district.

Table data reveals learning as a principal n=49, as the most frequent response for rural principals and assistant principals. Data reveals leadership n=32, as the most frequent response for suburban principals and assistant principals. Data reveals leadership n=10, as the most frequent response for urban principals and assistant principals.

In Table 38, data related to the participants reported size type of school district employed in reported value of principal PLCs, is disseminated from Survey Questions 5 and 25.

Table 38

Type of School District Area Related to Reported Value of PLC Experience

Type of District	Frequency (Check All That Apply)
Rural	Very valuable- 26 Valuable- 27 Moderately/Slightly/Not valuable- 7
Suburban	Very valuable- 17 Valuable- 17 Moderately/slightly/Not valuable- 7
Urban	Very valuable- 4 Valuable- 5 Moderately/Slightly/Not valuable- 4
Total	114

Table 38 reports respondents rating of their principal PLC experience, based on type of school district employed.

Table data reveals 46.5% or 53 respondents employed in rural school districts rate their principal PLC experience as very valuable or valuable. Data reveals 29.8% or 34 respondents employed in suburban school districts rate their principal PLC experience as very valuable or valuable. Data reveals 7.9% or 9 respondents rate their principal PLC experience as very valuable or valuable.

Qualitative Results

Interviewee 1 was a Minnesota suburban administrator in a school with more than 2,000 students. The administrator reported that she saw teachers benefiting from the collaboration in a teacher PLC and wanted to have that same benefit. The principal PLC in which she participated was comprised of only female administrators from within her school district, and they mainly read and discussed books for their development. In reflecting on her growth as a result of

participation in the principal PLC, the administrator expanded that she had gained perspective that there was more than one way to resolve issues. Also, she indicated learning from others' successes and failures as a resource so that she avoided making the same mistakes as others did. Interviewee 1 shared that time was the biggest barrier to participating in the principal PLC, but that they plan around each other's schedules and "of the nine [members] there are six of us who are die hards; we do absolutely everything to make sure that we don't miss." Technology was used for Interviewee 1's PLC members mostly for scheduling the meetings, sharing agenda items and raising book study questions. Interviewee 1 recommended principal PLCs for others because of the isolation that can occur in the principals' role, "we don't really fit into the world as a colleague of a teacher, in the world of clerical...they are different." Further, she recommended finding "a group that you are really fascinated by or interested in," like the group of women with whom that she meets.

Interviewee 2 was employed by an urban school district in a building with over 1,500 students. His participation in a principal PLC began when MASSP suggested principals should formalize their groups. Interviewee 2 reported on his experiences in a small district in comparison to the one in which he is now engaged. He stated that when the insights of all the principals are put together and "they bring in experiences from other districts . . . it's really helpful." Interviewee 2 also reported time was a barrier, and the principal PLC members meet at different times to accommodate one another's schedules. Technology has been used for sharing resources, though most of the PLC discussions occurred face to face. He recommended PLC participation as a reliable network on which they can rely when members have questions and to remain connected to participants from outside a building or district.

Interviewee 3 was employed in a rural school district and served in a building with over 600 students. This administrator was a member of two principal PLCs. One principal PLC is comprised of participants from the same county where the school resides. The group began meeting before MASSP had received approval to provide CEUs for membership in principal PLCs. The interviewee commented on barriers to attending the principal PLC as a newer principal. As of now, he really appreciates the time devoted to collaborating. The growth occurred for this administrator by “sharing from your own experience some things you’ve done and things that have been really successful or some of the mistakes you’ve made along the way.” Also, the interviewee reported as helpful hearing other administrators’ ideas, including legislative updates.

Time was cited as a potential barrier. The interviewee works around meetings when possible in order to attend the PLC. Technology was used by the principal PLC to solicit feedback quickly from each other on topics of interest and to establish agendas in between meetings. Participation in principal PLCs was recommended by this administrator. According to his suggestion, “the time you spend away from your school, the time you spend with your PLC, will be made up in other ways of efficiency, just by . . . understanding things, sharing ideas . . . taking time to help a colleague; those kinds of things are huge, not only in building relationships but in helping all of us be more effective.”

Interviewee 4 was employed by a rural district with 300 students in the building. The administrator PLC was formed after discussion regarding the need of such collaboration by a colleague at a learning center. The interviewee’s PLC had a retired principal as the facilitator, who gathers research on preferred topics requested by the group. Growth for this administrator

included being able “to just talk to the different principals about issues that are happening then and now . . . have that instant feedback about how they are dealing with different things.”

Interviewee 4 shared she did not have any barriers to participating in the principal PLC. Emailing to schedule meetings, agendas and surveys were completed online by the PLC members.

Interviewee 4 recommended participation in a principal PLC “because then you don’t feel like you’re all by yourself, isolated. Especially if you’re in a smaller school and you’re the only principal, a K-12 principal, you don’t have anybody else to talk to or vent to or get ideas from.”

Summary

Chapter IV detailed the findings of the study gathered from surveying 116 respondents who served in the role of either the principal or assistant principal roles in secondary Minnesota schools, and from interviewing four of those respondents. Six research questions provided the framework for the study and guided the format in which the study data were reported. In the review of each research question, tables and a summary of the findings was provided.

Chapter V presents the conclusions, discussion, limitations, and recommendations of the study. The researcher explains connections between the study’s findings and the related literature and offers recommendations for further study.

Chapter V: Introduction, Conclusions, Discussion, Limitations, Recommendations, and Summary

Introduction

Chapter V reveals a summary of the study and conclusions derived from the data reported in Chapter IV. The researcher presents the findings as they relate to the literature, the findings as they relate to the research questions, and a discussion of each research question by the researcher. Finally, the chapter contains recommendations for further research and for professional practice in the field.

Research Purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of secondary principals and assistant principals in Minnesota related to principal professional learning communities. The study questions were developed to understand methods of professional development used in principal PLCs, and to understand what factors influenced the benefits and challenges associated with principal PLCs.

The purpose of the study was achieved by surveying secondary principals and assistant principals in Minnesota about their perception of principal professional learning communities. In the study, a definition of principal professional learning communities was shared with respondents prior to their completion of the online survey. The definition was: Principal professional learning communities: for purposes of the study, refers to a group of administrators who may or may not be from the same district and who may or may not be participating through MASSP, who meet regularly to discuss topics related to principal professional development. In

addition, the group works in a collaborative setting with a goal to improve outcomes for students by enhancing themselves professionally (adapted from DuFour et al., 2010).

Research Questions

The following research questions governed the study:

1. What professional development methods did select Minnesota principals report they used to participate in principal PLCs?
2. How did select Minnesota principals rate the effectiveness of the characteristics of the professional development methods they used in principals PLCs?
3. What did select Minnesota principals report were benefits of their participation in principal PLCs?
4. What were the challenges reported by select Minnesota principals with their participation in principal PLCs?
5. To what extent did select Minnesota principals report that participation in a principal PLC enhanced their professional development?
6. How did the administrative roles, years of experiences, sizes of school and locations of select Minnesota principals impact their perceptions of PLCs as a professional development strategy?

Conclusions and Discussion

This section answers each research question and includes feedback from the researcher about the outcomes of the study.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 collected evidence to compare the professional development methods used by principals as found in the literature review, with the methods used during principal PLCs as reported by respondents of the study.

What professional development methods did select Minnesota principals report they used to participate in principal PLCs?

Minnesota principals reported in Survey Question 8 the professional development methods and structures used during their principal PLC. Brown et al. (2002), Neufeld (1997), the Institute for Educational Leadership (2000), and Salazar (2007) reported small study groups was a preferred delivery method for principal professional development, which supports the findings of the study, as presented in Table 6. The small study group method of professional development was reported as the most used method, n=82. Self-directed was selected as the second most used professional development method, n=50. This finding matched the research of Knowles (1970) who reported that learning continues throughout life and it is important to be able to direct one's own learning. Mentoring/interning/coaching was indicated as the third most frequent method n=32, supporting the research of Barth (1986), Brown et al. (2002), Celoria and Roberson (2015), Darling-Hammond, Orphanos & LaPointe (2007), Davis et al., (2005), Dufour and Marzano (2009), Fogarty and Pete (2004), Neufeld (1997), and Salazar (2007).

Numerous researchers suggested participation in a small study group. Brown et al. (2002) advocated for a “supportive cohort structure that promotes reflection on local school needs and sharing among fellow colleagues” (p. 132). The Institute for Educational Leadership (2000)

suggested principals form a networking group while Neufeld (1997) praised a critical friends group of principals from different districts who met together.

Zepeda et al. (2014) encouraged “self-directed professional development, based on the concepts of adult learning theory, in which independent motivation is needed” (p. 4). Adult learning methods suggested by Knowles (1984) included “group discussion, simulation exercises, problem-solving activities, case method and . . . peer helping activities” (p. 57). During the researcher’s time in a principal PLC, the most intriguing conversations centered around problem-solving and helping each other reach a working solution to school based situations.

The research was confirmed in the interviews where it was articulated from all four interviewees that sharing experiences and problem solving via discussions, was the most utilized method of professional development. Interviewee 3 stated about his principal PLC discussions:

. . . it helps you to grow by actually explaining what you did, which is good self-reflective practice . . . so I think that’s a professional growth . . . when you are sharing from your own experience some things you’ve done and things that have been really successful or some of the mistakes you’ve made along the way.

Interviewee 4 stated about her principal PLC discussions: “. . . it’s just nice to have that instant feedback about how they are dealing with different things . . . being able to have other colleagues to rely on to see what they’re doing, as a resource.”

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 gathered evidence to understand the effectiveness of the professional development methods used by asking participants to rank the characteristics and compare findings to the research.

How did select Minnesota principals rate the effectiveness of the characteristics of the professional development methods they used in principal PLCs? Research Question 2 focused on how effective principals rated the professional development methods used in their principal PLC and what they believed to be the most important.

Respondents were given seven characteristics based from the research by Brown et al. (2002), DuFour (2001), Evans and Mohr (1999), and Mann (1998) of professional development and asked to rank them from least to most important. The most selected responses were— principal professional development should be ongoing, reflective and job-embedded. Respondents, however, ranked “to occur in groups” as less important than having professional development be ongoing, reflective, and job-embedded. The three characteristics respondents selected the most frequently for professional development, be ongoing, be reflective, be job-embedded, are attributes that researchers have advocated for effective PLCs (Brown et al., 2002; DuFour, 2001; Evans & Mohr, 1999; Mann, 1998). In comparison of the literature, Nicholson et al. (2005) recommended principal professional development be ongoing; DuFour (2001), Mann (1998), and Nicholson et al. (2005) endorsed job-embedded development. The research was also confirmed in the interviews conducted as part of the study. Three of four interviewees noted that their PLCs occur outside of the workday, but that it is ongoing throughout the year. Support from supervisors was detailed in the study as being allowed to participate during the workday for PLC time by a majority, 73.90% (n=85), of the respondents. Strong support from a supervisor may be one reason why the characteristic of job-embedded professional development was ranked so highly. One analysis drawn from the study is that the characteristic of job embedded could be defined as occurring during the workday.

In addition to analyzing professional development methods preferred by the respondents, the researcher asked them to rate the value of their principal PLC experience. A majority of the respondents, (82.70%) rated their experience as valuable or very valuable. For this reason, it is likely that principals in Minnesota who participate in principal PLCs value their experience as an effective means of professional development.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 reviewed the research related to benefits of principal PLCs and collaboration as interpreted by Allmaras (2015), Pentland (2014), and Williamson (2000) compared with respondents reported benefits from the survey.

What did select Minnesota principals report were benefits of their participation in principal PLCs? Research Question 3 focused on the reported benefits of participating in a principal PLC and whether the benefits reported by Minnesota secondary principals support the literature.

Sharing ideas with each other, being able to reflect on their own work, and feeling less isolated were chosen as the most occurring benefits of principal professional learning communities. Allmaras (2015) wrote about the connection of Minnesota principals to PLCs and reflection on their work was noted as a result of participation. Further, researchers recommended that professional development for principals allow for reflection (Barth, 1986; Brown et al., 2002; CCSSO, 2008; Evans & Mohr, 1997; NBPTS 2010).

Sharing ideas with others was noted by Pentland (2014) as a way to facilitate making choices; “people’s decisions are a blend of personal information and social information, and when the personal information is weak, they will rely more on social information” (p. 36). In his work on productive companies, Pentland’s suggestion was

to spend 90% of our efforts on exploration, i.e., finding and copying others who appear to be doing well. The remaining 10% should be spent on individual experimentation and thinking things through. (p. 54)

One conclusion from the study is, administrators uninformed about a subject may rely more on the experiences of other administrators to guide them. During the interviews,

participants indicated that using each other's insights, successes and failures, helped them to solve situations other principals may have already experienced. As recommended by the National Staff Development Council, (2000), collegial groups allow "principals to communicate with each other, share ideas, and solve problems" (p. 12).

The findings aligned with Pentland's (2014) research recommending sharing ideas with each other as a possible benefit of collaboration. Both the survey and interview data show a need to include sharing ideas as part of principal professional development. All four interviewees reported sharing ideas and learning from others' experiences as a benefit from their participation in a principal PLC. Interviewee 2 said "you get kinda used to working in your building, it gets easy to forget about somebody that is not all that far away."

Another key benefit is feeling less isolated in the principal role. Roy and Hord (2007) as well as Williamson (2000) pointed out a diminished feeling of seclusion as a benefit of principal PLC participation. All four interviewees recommended principal PLCs to other principals.

Interviewee 4 said:

Because then you don't feel like you're all by yourself, isolated. Especially if you're a smaller school and you're the only principal, a K-12 principal, you don't have anybody else to talk to or to vent to or get ideas from.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 compared challenges to professional development from the research of Barth (1986) to respondents reported challenges to principal PLC participation.

What were the challenges reported by select Minnesota principals with their participation in principal PLCs? Research Question 4 sought to find the reported barriers to participation in a

principal PLC by Minnesota secondary principals and if they match the barriers suggested in the literature.

Participants in the study who are members of a principal PLC reported the most recurring barrier to be time away from professional duties (n=81). Participants in the study who are not members of a principal PLC also reported a lack of time as the most recurring barrier to their participation (n=59). The study data matched the literature, indicating that time is an obstacle (Barth 1986; Evans & Mohr, 1999; Nicholson et al., 2005). Based on the data, it can be generalized that time is the largest barrier to principal PLC participation both for those actually in a principal PLC and those not in a principal PLC.

Further barriers to consider include: whether or not principal PLCs have shared leadership or if one person is in charge; whether there are set agendas and protocols for meetings; what the communication style is used for meeting; the time of day the PLC meets; and frequency of PLC meetings through the year. Respondents indicated that a majority (63.80%) have a shared responsibility system set up for their PLCs, coinciding with recommendations from Fahey (2012), Hipp and Weber, (2008), and Mohr (1998). Respondents also reported a majority (82.80%) of their PLCs have protocols, norms, agendas and/or minutes, coordinating again with Fahey (2012), Hipp and Weber, (2008), and Mohr (1998).

Because time was reported as a barrier in the research, meeting times and frequencies were explored in the study. Respondents indicated that 47.40% of their principal PLCs meet once a month, followed by 30.20% meeting every other month. Meeting frequency was not found in the literature; however, the study data aids to understand why participants rated time as a barrier to participation. The importance of time of day a PLC meets was referenced in the literature.

DuFour (2001), Sparks (2002), Mann (1997), and Nicholson et al. (2005) suggested that principal professional development should be embedded during the workday. When investigating the study data, the researcher found that respondents had a variety of meeting times; however, a majority (70.70%) occurred during the workday. One conclusion is that although it is difficult to be away from the office, spending time in a principal PLC may be worth the time missed at school. One interviewee reported that he is more efficient with his time after participating in a PLC, meaning that he is able to use the experiences and information shared by the other principals to make more informed decisions for his situations, allowing him more time to embrace the opportunity to attend PLC meetings. Pentland's (2014) research supports the findings, noting "the fact that most of our attitudes and thoughts are based on integrating the experiences of others is the very basis for both culture and society. It is why we can cooperate and work together toward common goals" (p. 191).

Neufeld (1997) shared that PLCs composed of members from different districts allowed relationships to work better; however, the conclusion of the study is inconsistent with that guidance. Principals reported similar numbers when asked if their PLC was made up of members from within or outside of their district. Those indicating the members were only from within their home district were 36.20%, those indicating members from outside of their home district were 26.70%, and those with a mix of within and outside membership was slightly higher at 37.10%, thus no generalizations can be made to support Neufeld's finding.

The research did not indicate how technology was used in principal PLCs; however, the survey asked respondents to indicate if technology was used to meet as a PLC. Pentland (2014) suggested a group can meet together in person to establish trust and then have ongoing meetings

using electronic formats. While this may serve as a recommendation, principals report that 75% of them use only face-to-face type meetings for their principal PLCs while 25% use a blend of e-conferencing and face-to-face, and none use strictly e-conferencing. It is important to note no participants used only e-conferencing techniques, even though technology use in education is on the rise. This result was surprising to the researcher because respondents indicated time was a barrier to participation. Further, in-between-PLC-meetings collaboration may be achieved by utilizing modern means of communication such as social media; a recent study suggests the advantages of using Twitter, and other social networking sites, as an effective professional development platform (Rudolph, 2016). More research is needed to better understand the role technology could play in principal PLCs, chiefly for those principals in rural Minnesota.

Research Question 5

Research Question 5 sought to understand if participation in a principal PLC helped principals to grow professionally as indicated in the literature.

To what extent did select Minnesota principals report that participation in a principal PLC enhanced their professional development? Topics discussed in professional development was found in the literature. However, principal growth from PLC discussions on these topics was not directly established, thus the study asked for areas of growth.

Respondents noted leadership (n=90) as the area in which they have grown the most, followed by transforming school culture (n=83) and learning as a principal (n=82). Information was not found in the literature to support these areas of growth; nonetheless, the areas selected by principals as areas of growth will be used to make recommendations for effective principal PLCs.

It is not surprising that leadership was a dominant topic of professional growth indicated by principals, n=97. Leadership was the number one role of the principal designated by Matthews and Crow (2010). Transforming school culture was suggested by Davis et al. (2005) and Matthews and Crow (2010), and was the topic indicated by administrators as the most recurring, n=101. Learning as a principal is also a major role defined by Matthews and Crow (2010) while Barth (1985) said that “the principal is the *head* learner” (p. 94). Respondents also indicated learning as a major topic in their professional development, n=82.

Respondents were asked about three essential areas that a professional learning community may discuss to earn Minnesota continuing education credits. Sharing innovative ideas was ranked first, second was sharing current research, and ranked third was how to meet legislative requirements.

Research Question 6

Research Question 6 compared through cross tabulation, the impact of demographic factors on perceptions of participation in principal PLCs.

How did the administrative roles, years of experiences, sizes of school and locations of select Minnesota principals impact their perceptions of PLCs as a professional development strategy? Research Question 6 looked for connections between demographics of respondents to their reported benefits and challenges as suggested in the literature to guide recommendations for practice.

Participants in principal PLCs who responded to the survey, indicated the type of school district they work in as well as their role. A majority of respondents worked in rural districts 52.60%, followed by suburban districts with 36.20% and urban districts with 11.20%.

Respondents indicated 74.10% of themselves to be principals while 25.90% indicated they are assistant principals. Considering the majority of respondents work in a rural district and a majority are principals, the analysis naturally points to those two factors as having higher frequencies reported when looking at benefits and barriers of principal PLC participation.

Respondents in rural districts reported the highest frequency for each benefit when the results were cross tabulated. The top three benefits for rural district participants were sharing ideas (n=56), being able to reflect (n=50) and feeling less isolated (n=50). Rural respondents also reported time away from other duties as the number one barrier to principal PLC participation (n=44). These findings are not different from the overall findings of the study, thus no generalizations can be made based on the type of school district.

The demographic question of years of experience in an administrative role, showed those principals with 4-12 years of experience reported the highest frequency of each benefit. However, 51.70% of the respondents indicated they have 4-12 years of experience, thus the frequency of benefits should be higher for this subgroup, and generalizations based on years of experience compared to benefits were not evident.

Comparing size of school in how principals responded did not reveal any surprising data. The frequencies were very close, with under 500 students (n=310), 501-1,000 students (n=42), 1,001 and higher (n=43). One example of the close group frequencies, the benefit of being able to share ideas with others, was rated highest by the 1,001+ group, with (n=39), followed by (n=37) for the 501-1,000 students group, and (n=28) for the under 500 students group. No generalizations based on size of school were apparent.

Reported role of the administrator, principal or assistant principal, did not suggest a difference in benefits even though principals reported a higher frequency for each benefit due to higher participation in the study by principals than assistant principals. The data did not show any significant generalizations based on role of administrator.

Limitations

Limitations for the study include:

1. The online survey was not set up to force an answer to all of the questions. This led to respondents skipping questions, resulting in missing data. The sample size went from 200 to 116 because of missing data.
2. Even though the survey was sent to all members of MASSP, a majority of the respondents were from rural Minnesota districts, thus the results cannot be generalized to all principals or all assistant principals in suburban or urban districts.
3. Even though the survey was sent to all members of MASSP, a majority of the respondents were principals, thus the results cannot be generalized to other administrators in Minnesota.
4. Of the 116 respondents to the survey, 115 said yes to being a member of a principal PLC and one said no. Logical branching was included in the survey to prohibit people who were not a member of a PLC from answering the majority of the survey questions. Due to a programming error in the design of the survey, however, one person did indicate that s/he did not want to participate in a principal PLC, but was allowed to complete the rest of the survey. Therefore, this one person was included in the final data file (n=116) used for the research. Since this one case does not make a

significant difference in the conclusions drawn from the analysis, it was decided to report the findings with this one person in the data, but to point out this error.

Recommendations for Further Research

Recommendations for further research include:

1. The study could examine in depth the effect that members of the same district or members of different districts have on the perceived effectiveness of the PLC. In the study, some principals indicated they are members of more than one principal PLC, such as a group of administrators from the same district, or a group of administrators from various districts.
2. A study should be conducted to examine why principals chose a PLC group if choice to participate is available. One respondent indicated he/she may not have a choice on whether to participate in a PLC, however, choice to participate may impact the perceived effectiveness of the PLC.
3. A study should be conducted to analyze gender effects on principal PLC groups. The interviews revealed gender influence on the structure of the principal PLC. For example, a PLC with a prevalence of female participants may have a specific routine and content as opposed to a PLC with a prevalence of male participants.
4. A replication of the study should be conducted to examine the perceptions of elementary principals in principal professional learning communities in Minnesota or other states.
5. A study should be conducted to examine technology use by professional learning communities and the possible benefits of technology use.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations for practitioners include:

1. School districts should consider providing time during the workday for principals to participate in professional development through principal PLCs. The researcher also recommends principals to meet with their supervisors and discuss guidelines for participation in a PLC during the workday.
2. Principals should consider participation in a principal PLC to further their professional growth. Participation could be face-to-face or, once established, participation could happen electronically, saving travel time.
3. The activities of principals and assistant principals at PLCs could be recorded, structured and archived in a way to secure constant convenient access and reference for future use. For example, a Google Doc shared among the participants can allow a crowdsourcing of documents and literature in support of the activities and knowledge built at the PLCs. A school media specialist and/or university librarian could provide support for the methodology and use of tools for the database.
4. MASSP should consider developing a database to connect principals to PLCs that may already exist or in locations where there is a demonstrated need.
5. MASSP should consider securing retired principals or experts in the field to serve as facilitators of a PLC. This could allow more administrators to participate without having to do a lot of research on topics prior to a PLC meeting.

Summary

As complex as a principalship is, many principals lack the time and resources to grow professionally. Based on the findings of the study, the researcher recommends principal professional learning communities as an effective means of professional development. The idea that resources from associations like MASSP are accessed in greater numbers by smaller and rural districts is supported by the study; a majority of the respondents indicated they were from a rural district. Looking at Table 4, 52.60% , a majority, of the respondents are from a rural district while 36.20% are from a suburban district. The principals in rural and suburban districts participated more in the survey, showing there may be a stronger connection to support organizations like MASSP.

Overall, a majority of respondents reported their PLC experience to be valuable or very valuable along with 92.10% saying they will continue their participation in a principal PLC. The study found participation in a principal PLC provided benefits such as being able to share ideas, be reflective, and feel less isolated, as well as enhanced professional development by growth in leadership, transforming school culture, and learning as a principal. The researcher agrees with the study data and research related to principal professional development characteristics—principal professional development should be ongoing, reflective and job-embedded—and participation in a principal PLC may allow for opportunities for these characteristics to occur. School principals are essential to the success or failure of a school; therefore, they have a responsibility to themselves and their schools to continue learning as a professional.

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Appendix A: Survey

Principal Professional Learning Communities

Consent to Participate

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding your perceptions of principal professional learning communities in MN.

Principal, in the study, refers to head principals, associate principals, assistant principals, administrative interns and deans of students.

Principal professional learning communities, in the study, refers to a group of administrators who may or may not be from the same district and who may or may not be participating through MASSP, who meet regularly to discuss topics related to principal professional development. In addition, the group works in a collaborative setting with a goal to improve outcomes for students by enhancing themselves professionally (adapted from DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010).

If you agree to be part of the research study, you will be asked to answer questions about your perceptions of principal professional learning communities and asked to participate in a voluntary follow-up interview.

Benefits of the research: The benefits of the study include providing information to colleagues to aid in understanding how principal professional learning communities are being used as a professional development method in Minnesota. Results will be shared with the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals and its members.

Risks and discomforts: There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts for participants.

Confidentiality: Data collected will remain confidential. Data will be reported and presented in aggregate form with no more than two descriptors presented together. For interviews, responses will be kept strictly confidential, your name will not be disclosed nor will identified direct quotes be used. During the interview you may refuse to answer any question. All data will be kept on a computer secured with a password and destroyed within three years. Participating in the study is completely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Cloud State University, or the researcher. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

If you have questions about the research study, you may contact Nicole Rittenour at nkrittenour@stcloudstate.edu or Dr. John Eller, faculty advisor, at jfeller@stcloudstate.edu. Results of the study will be published at the St. Cloud State University Repository.

* 1. I agree that I am at least 18 years of age and I consent to participate in the study.

Yes

No

Principal Professional Learning Communities

For purposes of this survey, **principal** is defined as a secondary principal, assistant principal, administrative intern, associate principal or dean of students in MN. Also, for purpose of this survey, **professional learning community (PLC)** is defined as a group of administrators who may or may not be from the same district and who may or may not be participating through MASSP, who meet regularly to discuss topics related to principal professional development. In addition, the group works in a collaborative setting with a goal to improve outcomes for students by enhancing themselves professionally (adapted from DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010).

2. Are you a:

- Principal Administrative Intern Associate Principal
 Assistant Principal Dean of Students
 Other (please specify)

3. Years working in an administrative role?

- 0-3 years 4-12 years 13-25 years Over 25 years

4. Size of your school?

- Under 500 students 2,001-3,000 students
 501-1,000 students Over 3,000 students
 1,001-2,000 students

5. What type of area is your school district located?

- Rural, meaning in the country
 Suburban, meaning on the outskirts of a larger community
 Urban, meaning a larger community

* 6. Are you a member of a principal learning community?

- Yes
 No

Principal Professional Learning Communities

* 7. If no to question 6, but you would like to participate in a principal PLC, are there any barriers listed that prevent you from participating? (Check all that apply)

- Lack of time available to meet
- Lack of support from leadership (direct supervisor or district office supervisor)
- Do not believe that you will benefit from this meeting
- Believe it is unethical to use public resources to further your own learning
- Believe by participating in professional development you may reveal your own deficiencies
- Do not know how to participate or start a principal PLC
- I do not want to participate in a principal PLC
- Other (please specify)

Principal Professional Learning Communities

8. During your PLC meetings, what type of professional development structure/method is used? (Check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seminar/conference | <input type="checkbox"/> University coursework |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Workshop | <input type="checkbox"/> Online (webinars, discussion boards, social media) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hands-on/field based | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-directed |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mentoring/internship/coaching | <input type="checkbox"/> Problem-based projects |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Small study group | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

9. What type of support does your supervisor provide for you to participate in a PLC?

- Allowed to leave during the workday
- None
- Other (please specify)

10. What is the meeting time of your PLC?

- Before the workday
- During the workday
- After the workday
- Other (please specify)

11. How often does your PLC meet during the school year?

- Once a month
- Twice a month
- Every other month
- Other (please specify)

Principal Professional Learning Communities

12. Who are the members of your PLC?

- Principals only
- Assistant principals only
- Mix of principals and assistant principals
- Other (please specify)

13. Is your PLC comprised of principals from within your home district or beyond?

- Only from within my home district
- Only from outside of my home district
- From both within and outside of my home district

14. How many members are in your PLC?

15. How many years have you participated in a principal PLC?

Principal Professional Learning Communities

16. Please rate the following items from least important to most important when analyzing your professional development. Do you believe that professional development for principals should:

	Least important	Not that important	Important	Most important	Does not apply
Involve a mentor	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Be ongoing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Be reflective	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Be job-embedded	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Be based on your individual local school needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Occur in groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Involve goal setting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

17. What mode of communication does your PLC use?

- Strictly Face-to-Face
- Strictly e-conferencing (i.e. Google Hangout, Facebook Messenger, Skype, Facebook Webex, Adobe Connect, etc.) or telephone
- Sometimes e-conferencing, sometimes Face-to-Face

18. Do you have protocols, norms, agendas, and minutes in place for you PLC?

- Some or all of those items listed
- None of those items listed

19. Is there one person who leads your PLC or is there shared responsibility?

- One person leads
- Shared responsibility (specific roles assigned, i.e.: one person takes notes, one person is the timer, one person is the facilitator, take turns setting the agenda, etc.)

Principal Professional Learning Communities

20. What topics are discussed at your PLC meetings? (Check all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum management | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting the role of teachers in your school | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning as a principal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transforming school culture | <input type="checkbox"/> Political community matters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> State or Federal assessments | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

21. In Minnesota, to earn CEU's, principal PLCs need to address research, innovation and/or legislation. Rank the following in terms of how much time your PLC spends on each area. 1 is the most amount of time, 2 is the second most amount of time and 3 is the least amount of time.

⋮	<input type="text"/>	Sharing current research
⋮	<input type="text"/>	Sharing innovative ideas or programs
⋮	<input type="text"/>	Sharing how meet requirements of legislation

22. What benefits have you experienced related to participating in a PLC? (Check all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feel less isolated | <input type="checkbox"/> Able to develop a culture of learning and professional behavior |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Willing to open up to others | <input type="checkbox"/> Able to create connections to nearby communities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Share personal experiences | <input type="checkbox"/> Able to improve skills in coaching and evaluating teachers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Believe the time is not "busy work" | <input type="checkbox"/> Able to model leadership behaviors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Able to reflect on own practices | <input type="checkbox"/> Able to share ideas with each other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

23. What barriers, if any, have made it difficult to meet in your PLC? (Check all that apply)

- Time away from other duties
- Believe by participating in professional development you may reveal your deficiencies
- Doubt the benefits from the meeting
- I do not have any barriers
- Believe it is unethical to use public resources to further your own learning (i.e.: participation during the workday)
- Other (please specify)

Principal Professional Learning Communities

24. In what areas have you gained knowledge or changed professionally as a result of participation in a principal PLC? (Check all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Curriculum management | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporting the role of teachers in your school | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning as a principal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transforming school culture | <input type="checkbox"/> Political community matters |
| <input type="checkbox"/> State or Federal assessments | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

25. How valuable would you rate your experience in a principal PLC?

- 5 - Very Valuable
- 4 - Valuable
- 3 - Moderately Valuable
- 2 - Slightly Valuable
- 1 - Not Valuable
- Prefer not to answer

26. Do you plan to continue your participation in a principal PLC?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure
- Other (please explain)

* 27. Would you be willing to participate in a five question, follow-up interview about your principal PLC?

- Yes
- No

Principal Professional Learning Communities

Please click link to provide contact information.

[Follow-up Interview Contact Information](#)

Principal Professional Learning Communities

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Appendix B: Survey Solicitation Email



Nicole Rittenour <nicole.rittenour@isd728.org>

MASSP - Question from a Member

1 message

MASSP Office <massp_staff@mail.massp.org>
 Reply-To: MASSP Office <massp_staff@mail.massp.org>
 To: nicole.rittenour@isd728.org

Mon, Jan 16, 2017 at 11:01 AM



MASSP Members-

One of our members is doing a survey about principal PLCs as part of her doctorate work. This survey will provide us with valuable information and I encourage you to take a few minutes to complete it.

Thank you,
 Dave Adney
 MASSP Executive Director

Greetings Colleagues-

I am partnering with the Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals to examine how principals are participating in principal professional learning communities (PLCs). The survey below is for every member, even if you do not currently participate in a principal PLC. Your participation is voluntary, thank you for your consideration.

Please complete by Monday, February 6th.

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PY9X95T>

With Appreciation,
 Nicole Rittenour
 Rogers Middle School

Assistant Principal
St. Cloud State University
Doctoral Candidate
nkrittenour@stcloudstate.edu

--

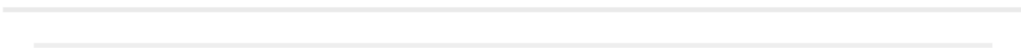
Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals

1667 Snelling Avenue N, Suite C-100

St. Paul, MN 55108

[651-999-7333](tel:651-999-7333) phone

[651-999-7331](tel:651-999-7331) fax



This email was sent to nicole.rittenour@isd728.org
why did I get this? [unsubscribe from this list](#) [update subscription preferences](#)
MASSP - 1667 Snelling Ave N, Saint Paul, MN - St. Paul, MN 55108 - USA

Appendix C: Interviewee Answers

Rittenour: Interviewee 1

January 19, 2017

1. Explain how you became involved in a principal PLC?

I have had the opportunity to supervise PLCs for our teachers and then realized the benefits that they were having and that I was not benefiting from having that opportunity. So I actually reached out, we are a very large district, realized there were very few women administrators at the secondary level and so we created own PLC called the women of District X, we meet monthly, and we do book talks and we also just talk about working in a male dominated uh, field and how we talk about how to raise our children and how to get along with our spouses, and everything. So it's something we look forward to every month, and um we always find a place off site of our school site so we can go and just be people, and I think that's one of the great things, we can have our work discussions but we can also how to be just better people.

2. Can you expand on how/if participation in a PLC has helped you to grow as a principal?

I think it's given me a different perspective just while we are a big district, there are a lot of things that are similar, but how each school attacks a situation or talks through a situations has been so different. So to have a different perspective on similar issues,. So you know when it talks about our equity work, for example, every school approaches it differently. And it works for each school, but you know I now have the resource of having 9 other people who have shared with me what works in their school, what hasn't worked in their school, so we can tweak it to make it our own, we also have got some experience of others, uh, and their successes, so we don't make the same mistakes.

3. Are there any factors that make your participation in the PLC difficult?

Yeah, because it's not scheduled during a work day, we always schedule it at 4 o'clock, um, there are always some people who can't make it because of something that's come up at the end of the day, uh, or uh you know, suddenly their kid has to go to the doctor, so it's kinda just the natural ebbs and flows of life that make it difficult and it's ya know different I guess not everybody has the same level of commitment, it's not tied to anything, it's just for our own personal growth so uh, I would say of the 9 there are six of us who are die hards, we do absolutely everything to make sure that we don't miss um and there are 3 who are hit or miss depending on when it's convenient or not convenient. It they have a burning question you always see them there.

4. How does your PLC use technology to communicate?

We just use for setting up our meetings, we just do invite, calendar invites, sometimes we will like when I am in charge or the book I'll send out questions ahead of time, so we're not using extravagant tech but we are pinpointing the things we want to talk to about, kind of creating an agenda, people all kind of add in, if there is something that they want to add, just to make sure we don't forget to get to the very important topics.

Q- Do you think that having an agenda is really important?

A- it is just because um, for us, it's I mean, first and foremost it's a professional learning community and so we want to make sure we touch those things that are really important to our work first and then secondly, the other stuff comes out of that, and how we deal with our stress, and whatever the situation is, so um, having that agenda at least for the first part really kinda gets us on task to knowing what it is that we want to make sure and cover, because otherwise we could get on the topic of we're so mad at a coworker that we never actually get to the real reason that we're together.

5. Would you recommend participation in principal PLCs to other principals, and if so why?

I would say, just so that, I think um the job of the principal is rather isolating, we don't really fit into the world as a colleague of a teacher, in the world of clerical, they are all, they are all kind of a different group. And as much as you have colleagues or assistant principals in your building, it's not the same as social connection and emotional connection, so I would say yes you should find a group that you are really fascinated by or interested in, for us it was women in secondary and that was really important to us to actually have the same thought process i think it could be

any group, grouping, but there is a lot of power in the fact that us women get together and we problem solve and think through where things that are at in the world.

Rittenour: Interviewee 2

January 26, 2017

1. Explain how you became involved in a principal PLC?

Basically we kinda saw MASSP talking about that, um the other way though really honestly is we're a big enough district, we have got, well right now 3 elementaries, a middle school and a high school, that's soon to become 4 elementaries, 2 middle schools and a high school, so we got a head principal obviously in each in building, and when I was hired going on 5 years ago now, there were two assistants, in the high school and one in the middle school and they were just adding one to each elementary. Our group has grown so with that, you know, especially between the high school and middle school, we kinda started meeting as a group to try and get some things rolling between the two schools. So that is probably where it really started, and then MASSP offering those hours was kinda the bonus, cuz we were already meeting with that group.

2. Can you expand on how/if participation in a PLC has helped you to grow as a principal?

I think it's helped quite a bit for the simple fact you are bouncing some ideas off of other people um you know I have been doing admin work this is 12 years now, my first 7 I was thee guy, I was in small schools where I was it. I had the superintendent obviously, and that was good, I worked with good people that way, but it's not quite the same as when you are working with other principals and what not. Everybody here has some time in for the most part elsewhere as well, from other towns and districts they bring in experiences from other districts. So when you get that experience with those other people, it's really helpful to say here's what I did before, here's how I know this place has done it, you can get some different opinions on how things should go.

3. Are there any factors that make your participation in the PLC difficult?

You know the biggest one that everybody is going to say is time. We are all busy and trying to find those times to get together with each other and make sure you do it and do it right, that's probably the biggest thing. Uh, I think everybody wants to do it, it's just a matter of when, so lots of times we met early in the morning, 6:30 if we have to or into the evenings. It's really hard to tie up any school time, that 8-3:30, that's just not a good time to meet, so you really to try to avoid doing anything during the school day when school is in session. The other thing we will do is do it in the summer we will find those times when the kids aren't in session and sneak in an hour or two as well.

4. How does your PLC use technology to communicate?

Probably nothing outside the norm other than obviously email, google docs, that kind of stuff. Beyond that, I don't know that we haven't done any kind of skype or anything like that, we are pretty much all in town. We just try to find the time to do it face to face so we don't have to do that, but you know we'll share google docs, articles, that kind of stuff, those basic level things.

5. Would you recommend participation in principal PLCs to other principals, and if so why?

Yeah I would, and again, it's building that base, that learning base, it's good to get some other opinions uh whether you agree with them or not, you can kinda say that guy tried this or that girl tried this and whatever it may be, and you can say did that work for them or not, you can compare. Even in our own district here we can compare how are they handling some things at the middle school you know, does that pertain here or not, if it does great, if not what can we do differently but then too, we've all got contacts with other people we know doing this elsewhere, so we can branch out, they may not be part of our PLC, but we can still get whats going on in other towns around us or other schools our size that are comparable, and say hey, this is what they are doing, what do you think.

Anything else that you think is important to share.

I don't think so, like for us even what I have found, when you come from a smaller district, it's all on you so you

always kinda know what's happening, when you get into a bigger district with more moving parts, it's a good idea to meet to know how all of this is going. But I think even for us we find, one of the things we found that we really need to start working on better is probably our vertical alignment in our district. You know, are we really doing things....we're gonna have K-4, 5-6, 7-8 and we're gonna have 9-12, are we really tied together here well enough, so that by the time they get to us at the high school are the students really ready for what we're expecting. Are we correct in what our expectations are, or should we be doing something different because they have been prepared differently. We found through our PLC stuff that we probably don't do enough of getting together, you get kinda used to working in your building, it gets easy to forget about somebody that is not all that far away.

Rittenour: Interviewee 3 **January 27, 2017**

1. Explain how you became involved in a principal PLC?

Sure two different PLCs I guess that I am currently a part of, one would be X County Conference principals get together, I've been principal here at X high school for 10 years, in my first year starting receiving advice to come to our X county principal meetings, and um so they were taking place 10 years ago, but they are more informal as they are now, the board of administrators is offering some hours through this now, so we have more formalized it with google docs in ways that we can add to agendas, provide minutes and all of that kind of stuff. So um I guess that's been going on awhile, you know my first couple years as principal I was trying to get my feet on the ground as a high school principal, so I probably didn't attend as much, but I have certainly come to uh understand the importance in and appreciate the value of going, so now I rarely miss unless I absolutely can't be there, but I will definitely try to go to every one, and we meet once a month, um, August, while September through May, I would say and we usually meet for a couple hours, I would say attendance is usually you know at least 5 out of the prospective 12 schools would be represented and sometimes may be as many as 8 9 will be there, but you know principals are busy, and if they can get there, and uh, it's been a really good process and thing to be involved in. I do the notes for it, so I've been taking the notes and you know running the agendas and minutes for probably like the last 5-6 years and then whenever our lead person is not there, I have been basically running the meetings. Or he and I kinda share that. Then we have a local principal PLC there's four principals in our district two elementary, the middle school and myself, so the four of us have been meeting, um, and I have been kinda arranging it setting that up, um, here and we actually just met yesterday morning for breakfast at a local place at 6:30 in the morning, and met for about an hour and talked about issues and concerns and questions that each other has, and that one we don't take notes on, it's the four of us we're friends, been there for a few years or more, uh, but we've been finding that to be quite valuable in terms of just support for each other, and uh questions or concerns that come up ways we can be more consistent in how we do things that need to be consistent and help each other when things come up that we don't have answers for.

2. Can you expand on how/if participation in a PLC has helped you to grow as a principal?

Um hum, I think part of it is when certainly there is a concern or question that a principal raises, and you've been through that experience, it helps you to grow by actually explaining what you did, which is good self-reflective practice. Um and certainly helps you to also think through things you would have done differently would you be presented with that similar scenario so I think that's a professional growth certainly when you are sharing from your own experience some things you've done and things that have been really successful or some of the mistakes you've made along the way. Um, so I see that certainly as a professional growth opportunity, and certainly when you are hearing ideas come from um other principals that you can replicate in your building, that is obviously very helpful, cuz you don't need to necessarily reinvent the wheel and something's been working somewhere and sometimes just interpretation of you know new requirements coming from the state or uh changes in things that we do when you have other principals that are like ok, do you understand the certain aspects of the Every Student Succeeds Act, or do you understand some of the latest testing requirements or you know, those kinds of things. How are you going to implement college and career readiness, uh statute, requirements, and those kinds of things, so when you're sitting around with other principals who've done that, um you know that is certainly helpful. We had talked about a number

of small things from small issues to big issues but you know, 1 to 1 you know technology implementation and fees you charge for certain things, and you know all that stuff. You know and so um, yeah, it's fantastic to get together with colleagues to do that.

3. Are there any factors that make your participation in the PLC difficult?

Yeah, and I would say the only thing there really is the natural answer of time. The times I've missed being able to go it's usually because of a conflict with another meeting, or you know something you just can't miss, and it's nice to be able to work around those meetings so you can ensure that you attend, but there's just some times that are unavoidable so um that's probably the only thing I would say that is kinda a negative.

4. How does your PLC use technology to communicate?

Yeah I think the big thing there that I shared is we use google docs, and anything related to google, google sheets, we do a lot of surveying, and that type of thing, we'll send out a google form and you know you get that feedback back so quickly, google form of you know do you do this, do you do that, and you can get an answer back immediately. You know I've done that you know the MASSP, the Minnesota Association of Secondary Principals, has a you know a great service they put out, it's just you know question from a member, and you can get that question answered from around the state. One of the things we're doing right now is changing what we had called our flex advisory type time, we are going to change things up you know and do some things differently, um because we don't feel it's as effective as we'd like it to be. I sent out a survey through Patti down at MASSP um, she'd never used a google form before, where I said you know I can be your guinea pig, and said I've never done it before either, and you know we ended up with 57 principals from around the state responded within a day, it was kinda neat that I was at the google sheet version of it looking at the results coming in I could watch 13 people at one time inputting their information. And it's kinda cool. You know so, that's certainly been a huge benefit to collaboration. So our agendas go out early, you say, ok what do you want to put on the agenda, you can see what the other principals are putting on and go oh, ok, and I can always bring something on that or I can share on that or so.

5. Would you recommend participation in principal PLCs to other principals, and if so why?

Um hum, absolutely I would. And I would just say that uh the time you spend away from your school, the time you spend with your PLC, will be made up in other ways of efficiency, just by being you know understanding things, sharing of ideas, um, taking time to help a colleague, those kinds of things are huge not only in building relationships but in helping all of us be more effective cuz it isn't about me, competing against the rest of the schools in the X County Conference for some sort of principals thing, our teams can compete against each other, which is fine, but we ought to collaborate as a group to make our schools better, which is better for students, so definitely.

**Rittenour: Interviewee 4
February 7, 2017**

1. Explain how you became involved in a principal PLC?

Well the area principals have talked about it, about developing one, and we reached out to a colleague of ours at the X Learning Center, and she decided to spearhead it, and gather all of the principals like once every 3 months or so to meet. And then we found a facilitator to facilitate the meetings also. There can be between 10 and I suppose 15 people there.

2. Can you expand on how/if participation in a PLC has helped you to grow as a principal?

Well the person that runs these, she is a retired principal and so she has the ability to have the time to do the research for us, so if there's topics that we want to like, instructional practices that increase student achievement that we can pass on to our teachers when we go into observe, she'll do the research for us and then bring it back to us. So I mean just having somebody doing that leg work for us um, has helped, and the um ability to just talk to the different principals about issues that are happening then and now, like, it's just nice to have that instant feedback about how

they are dealing with different things like, weighted grading, or um the detention, graduation, just the things that come up on a weekly basis, being able to have other colleagues to rely on to see what they're doing, as a resource.

3. Are there any factors that make your participation in the PLC difficult?

Not really. Um hum.

4. How does your PLC use technology to communicate?

Well I guess you know there is through email and then there is usually a survey, a monkey survey that we receive about what times and dates work for us, and um then the agenda comes out electronically, too via email.

5. Would you recommend participation in principal PLCs to other principals, and if so why?

Oh yes, I definitely would. Because then you don't feel like you're all by yourself, isolated. Especially in if you're a smaller school and you're the only principal, a K-12 principal, you don't have anybody else to talk to or to vent to or get ideas from.