

Wyoming Education Leaders' Perceptions of Professional Development Needs and Delivery  
Methods in an Era of Accountability

By

David P. Barker and Gerry J.R. Chase

A Project submitted to the Department of Professional Studies  
and the University of Wyoming  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

Laramie, Wyoming

August 2015

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| INTRODUCTION .....  | 1    |
| Background.....   | 1    |
| Research Questions.....                                     | 3    |
| Purpose.....  | 3    |
| Summary.....  | 4    |
| LITERATURE REVIEW .....                                     | 4    |
| Professional Development for Educational Leaders.....       | 5    |
| Professional Development Needs for Educational Leaders..... | 7    |
| Components of Effective Professional Development.....       | 11   |
| Delivery of Professional Development.....                   | 13   |
| Summary.....  | 16   |
| METHOD .....  | 18   |
| Research Questions.....                                     | 19   |
| Survey Design.....  | 19   |
| Population.....   | 20   |
| Data Collection.....  | 20   |
| RESULTS .....   | 21   |
| Description of Respondents.....                             | 21   |
| Findings of Professional Development Needs.....             | 23   |
| Findings of Preferred Delivery Methods.....                 | 30   |

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Findings of Perceived Ease of Access for Delivery Methods..... | 33 |
| Findings of Frequency and Time of Year for Delivery .....      | 35 |
| Summary .....  | 40 |
| DISCUSSION.....  | 41 |
| Conclusions.....   | 43 |
| Limitations .....  | 47 |
| Recommendations.....   | 47 |
| Suggestions for Further Research .....                         | 49 |
| REFERENCES .....   | 51 |
| APPENDIX A   |    |
| Survey .....   | 55 |
| APPENDIX B   |    |
| Survey Cover Letter .....                                      | 61 |
| APPENDIX C   |    |
| IRB Approval Letter .....                                      | 62 |

## **List of Tables**

|   | Page |
|---|------|
| Table 1. Frequencies and Percentages for Demographic Information  | 22   |
| Table 2. Percents, Means and Standard Deviations of Professional Development Needs                              | 24   |
| Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Professional Development Needs by Position                            | 26   |
| Table 4. Means and Standard Deviations of Professional Development Needs by District Size                       | 28   |
| Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations for Professional Development Delivery Methods                            | 31   |
| Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations of Preferred Delivery Methods by Position                                | 32   |
| Table 7. Means and Standard Deviations of Preferred Delivery Methods by District Size                           | 33   |
| Table 8. Means and Standard Deviations of Perceived Ease of Access to Professional Development Delivery Methods | 34   |
| Table 9. Preferred Frequency of Professional Development Delivery Methods by Position                           | 36   |
| Table 10. Preferred Time of Year for Professional Development Delivery Methods                                  | 38   |

## **Introduction**

In an era of accountability, the roles and responsibilities of school and district administrators have become more focused on instructional leadership to improve student achievement (Honig, 2012; Wallace Foundation, 2011). This study seeks to identify professional development needs and preferred delivery methods of practicing educational leaders in Wyoming. The results may be used to deliver professional development across the state and provide support to educational leaders. Accountability, leadership, and student achievement are put into context in the background section of this paper, and research questions focus on the implications for Wyoming. Also in this section an explanation of the purpose for this project is provided.

## **Background**

Educational leaders across the United States are in an environment being influenced by more rigorous learning standards and accountability pressures arising from local, state, and federal legislation. Their needs for professional development are being driven by efforts to improve student achievement. Federal policymakers and current policy initiatives continue to focus on improving student performance by holding principals and superintendents accountable for continuous growth in achievement, reducing dropout rates, and increasing college and workplace readiness (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Spanneut, Tobin, & Ayers, 2012).

Rising expectations, from both economic and governmental agencies, combined with increased technological advances in program delivery and dwindling resources are pressuring districts to have more students who are college ready with fewer resources (New York State Council of School Superintendents, 2012). The development of more rigorous Common Core Standards, Race to the Top grants that impose required educational policy for grant eligibility,

and the implications of a yet-to-be reauthorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) are requiring improved educational leadership (Canole & Young, 2013). School districts across the country are being driven toward improvement and change by external forces they do not control.

Accountability efforts can be seen in Wyoming as well. The Wyoming Accountability in Education Act (WAEA) (2014) imposes accountability measures on districts, schools, and their leaders. This legislation requires Wyoming's educational leaders to be informed and skilled in instructional leadership resulting in adjustments to their roles and responsibilities. Legislation requiring increases in student achievement has placed additional demands on school leadership to examine every facet of schools so that they focus on learning. These adjustments in the roles and responsibilities of educational leaders may result in a need for additional and ongoing professional development (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Spanneut et al., 2012; Wallace Foundation, 2011).

Within Wyoming's current accountability environment, there exists a need to develop a comprehensive statewide system of support for school districts and their leadership (WAEA, 2014). A major component of this support could be the professional development of new and existing educational leaders by building their capacity as instructional leaders. The sole focus of instructional leadership is to improve student achievement through improved instructional delivery. In terms of building capacity, Beaver and Weinbaum (2012) refer to four research-based components that include human capital, social capital, program coherence, and resources as elements of an organization's capacity. Human capital is simply the amount of benefit each individual brings with his or her strengths, weaknesses, and preferences. Social capital is garnered through relationships where trust, collective competence, and mutuality complement

individual strengths and lessens weaknesses. The individuals and their relationships then need coherence with focused, coordinated, and sustained programs adequately resourced to meet its objectives. Wyoming's ability to develop a system of support should take into consideration these four elements, and the agencies that can affect these elements could examine ways to collaborate and build this capacity. These agencies include the University of Wyoming's College of Education and Professional Studies Department, the Wyoming Department of Education, Wyoming State Board of Education, and Wyoming school districts.

### **Research Questions**

To properly identify professional development needs, prioritize those needs, and determine what delivery approaches are most desirable for Wyoming educational leaders, the following research questions were examined:

1. *What are the perceived professional development needs of Wyoming principals and central office personnel?*
2. *What are the preferred professional development delivery methods of Wyoming principals and central office personnel?*
3. *What is the perceived ease of access for professional development opportunities available to Wyoming principals and central office personnel?*
4. *What is the preferred frequency and time of year for professional development delivery methods for Wyoming principals and central office personnel?*

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to develop and administer a needs assessment for Wyoming principals and central office personnel in their roles as educational leaders. The information may assist policy makers and the University of Wyoming in developing and implementing a Center

for Educational Leadership. By determining the professional development needs and preferred delivery methods of educational leaders, appropriate models may be designed to deliver on-demand and targeted professional development.

## **Summary**

Accountability pressures to increase student achievement in Wyoming support the need to identify the professional development needs and methods of delivery for educational leaders in the state. It also supports a careful examination and reflection of existing professional development opportunities and how policymakers can support an environment for training educational leaders. In the next section, a review of the literature supporting professional development for education leaders and preferred delivery methods is discussed.

## **Literature Review**

This research project focused on developing and administering a needs assessment for Wyoming principals and central office personnel in their roles as educational leaders. To accomplish this, a review of the literature was conducted to ensure the study was grounded in recent and relevant literature regarding professional development for educational leaders. The main purposes of this literature review were to examine the following:

- educational research that has been previously conducted about the professional development of educational leaders;
- professional development topic needs for educational leaders.
- components of effective professional development for educational leaders; and
- preferred professional development delivery methods by practicing educational leaders.

The role of leadership in ensuring all children have access to excellent teaching is critical, and there is overwhelming evidence that strong leadership makes a difference in student

achievement (Barnes, Camburn, Sanders, & Sabastian, 2010; Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Wallace Foundation, 2011). In order to define the attributes of strong leadership in education, the ISLLC standards were designed as the first set of national standards for educational leaders in the mid 1990s. The standards provide a framework for 40 state leadership preparation programs and were developed over the past twenty years from national and state organizations that affect training and leadership training standards with rigorous program accreditation and licensure requirements (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Drago-Severson, Maslin-Ostrowski, & Hoffman, 2012; Spanneut et al., 2012; Wallace Foundation, 2011).

The ISLLC standards have received criticism for not having a strong research base, not having emphasis on shared leadership, and for not connecting leadership standards with student achievement gains (Canole & Young, 2013). Therefore, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) have presented the 2014 ISLLC standards for public review after incorporating a current body of research and best practices from the educational leadership field (CCSSO, 2014). The draft 2014 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards were used as a basis to form perceptions of needs. The next section reviews the literature on professional development for educational leaders.

### **Professional Development for Educational Leaders**

While recent accountability measures are driving educational leaders' professional development needs, they are not the only reason to increase leadership capacity. In order to support a diverse and democratic society that educates people to fill a democracy's multiple roles, public education should provide a system in which all students and teachers learn. This

learning can take place even as expectations are being raised, regardless of community or individual student circumstances (Bellamy, 2011; Fullan, 2003). Professional development becomes the critical component for school leaders to support teachers helping students reach higher levels of achievement (Drago-Severson et al., 2012; Goldring, Preston, & Huff, 2012; Louis, et al., 2010; Spanneut et al., 2012).

Leadership in schools and districts is critical to operations, instruction, and student achievement, and there is a significant body of research and consensus for teacher professional development. However, the research and literature have contributed little evidence and consensus in terms of best practice in developing the essential leadership behaviors that influence learning (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Goldring et al. 2012; Grissom & Harrington, 2010). The leadership factor is second only to that of teachers in affecting student achievement, and districts can support effective leadership practices by improving the training of school leaders (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Spanneut et al., 2012; Wallace Foundation, 2011).

As school districts attempt to continually increase achievement and create success for all students, effectiveness research and the research on high-reliability organizations (HROs) provide clues toward a better educational experience for all students (Bellamy, 2011; Eck, 2011; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Stringfield, Reynolds, & Schaffer, 2011). HROs are considered those organizations and systems where failure can have large and disastrous results. Examples of HROs might include nuclear power plants, aircraft operations, and large-scale wildland firefighting (Eck, 2011; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2007).

The way to make necessary improvements in educational systems and ensure the best education possible for all children is to provide an environment that promotes the most

successful practices with “remarkable reliability” (Stringfield et al., 2011, p. 6). This type of reliability is being achieved in high-reliability organizations and educators can look to these organizations to improve schools and districts. In education, high-reliability schools are distinguished by what Eck (2011) sees as “high levels of student performance” (p. 3). These performances are achieved through high-quality, research-based instruction, with “low variability in the quality of instruction within and between schools” (p. 3).

To obtain this high-level student achievement, top school systems around the world concentrate on a few targeted areas: 1) a clear focus on student achievement and collaborative goal-setting; 2) human resource processes that include recruiting high-quality teachers and administrators, and providing staff with continuous, embedded professional development; and 3) procedures to locate and respond to early warning signs of student failure (Bellamy, 2011; Eck, 2011; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Stringfield et al., 2011). In the next section, research on the professional development needs of educational leaders is reviewed.

### **Professional Development Needs for Educational Leaders**

Instructional leadership is essential to schools helping all students learn, but typical principal training programs lack in the transfer of learning to the real work where complexity, pressure, and changing conditions exist (Barnes, et al., 2010). According to Barnes et al. (2010), maintaining communities of practice is essential to developing instructional leaders who share their skills and thinking to create new knowledge that helps to solve common problems. These communities of practice in school districts include educational leaders comprised of principals, superintendents, and curriculum directors.

In order to provide for the professional development needs of principals, superintendents and curriculum directors, a primary emphasis on instructional leadership is needed in addition to

the other duties for which they are responsible. Thus, an important component of district-level leadership is providing instructional leadership to school level leaders. Districts across the country are creating positions for principal development leaders or requiring superintendents and assistant superintendents to focus more on instructional leadership than in the past (Honig, 2012).

With changing educational expectations, and the focus on developing principals for improved instructional leadership development opportunities, central office personnel need their own professional development (Harttraft, 2009; Maze, 2009; NYSCSS, 2012; Platter, 2010). Prior to providing this professional development, districts should determine the needs of central office personnel and make efforts to provide delivery in a manner conducive to both time constraints and individual preferences.

According to Honig (2012), the work of improving instructional leadership is a joint effort. This joint participation in professional development engages participants and creates a shared responsibility between principals and central office supervisors. To engage participants, principal developers also model effective leadership in their work, develop tools and protocols to engage participants in the learning, and create safe and productive relationships among participants (Honig, 2012). Central office personnel who followed this process more closely were identified as more supportive of principals' instructional leadership development.

In addition to instructional leadership, education leaders are responsible for many other duties. These duties include effective leadership practices which consistently appear among successful school leaders from a variety of environments. Practices include: setting direction by creating a mission, vision, goals and strategies for improving instruction; developing a community-oriented culture focused on people and attending to social, emotional, and

interpersonal issues; managing operations and personnel including redesigning the organization with corrective actions and professional development; and managing the instructional program including the monitoring of results from change efforts (CCSSO, 2014; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Goldring et al., 2012; Goodwin, 2010; Honig, 2012; Louis, et.al., 2010; Marzano & Waters, 2009). These duties align with the report Spanneut et al. (2012) wrote in which practicing leaders self-identified their top two professional development needs as sustaining an instructional program promoting the success of every student and facilitating staff professional growth. Principals want to maximize time spent on quality instruction and on creating assessments that monitor student progress (Spanneut et al., 2012).

Educational leadership research indicates that to improve student achievement, leaders should focus on mission, vision, strategic planning, and keeping the vision at the forefront of conversations with the community (Hoegh, 2008; Platter, 2010; Taylor, 2009). In addition, most leaders convey the importance of communication with the school board and the wider community in order to further district initiatives. This included working with parents and the community (Hoegh, 2008); building relationships, including consensus-building and collaboration (Harttraft, 2009); and communicating skills, such as speaking, listening, and writing (Taylor, 2009).

The ability to work with school boards is an important skill for superintendents, whether novice or experienced. This included the ability to define expectations, build a relationship of teamwork, and create strategies to deal with the political, legal, and cultural context (Harttraft, 2009; Hoegh, 2008; Platter, 2010; Taylor, 2009). These skills enable superintendents to extend their tenure in a district, which has been shown to correlate positively with student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2006; Plotts & Gutmore, 2014).

Hoegh (2008) and Harttraft (2009) found superintendents believed that hiring the right people was crucial to their success. In addition, in her study of the New Jersey Professional Growth Plan Model, Harttraft (2009) cited several areas which superintendents felt were most important and professional development could address, including: managing people, good decision-making judgment, political savvy, public relations, unions, shared services, finance updates, legal updates, special education, facilities, goals, technology, and stress reduction (Harttraft, 2009).

The 2014 draft of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards and the ISLLC Model Principal Supervisor Instructional Standards are based on the recent research on school leadership (Canole & Richardson, 2014; CCSSO, 2014) and mirror both the research and educational leaders' beliefs about the important skills necessary in their leadership positions. Although not fully adopted at the time of this study, the newest draft of the School Leader standards represent up-to-date research on the skills and knowledge school and district leaders should have to help every child achieve the success necessary for participation in today's global world.

Finally, school districts, policy makers, and educational researchers will need to establish greater clarity in professional development for educational leaders (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Drago-Severson et al., 2012; Goldring et al., 2012; Spanneut et al., 2012). Setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, managing the instructional program, focusing schools on goals and expectations for student achievement, keeping track of teachers' professional development needs, and creating structures and opportunities for teachers to collaborate will require today's leaders to access the knowledge, skills, and support to facilitate the transformation of schools and raise the achievement levels of all students (Louis et al., 2010;

Spanneut et al., 2012). The next section provides an overview of the literature focusing on components of effective professional development.

### **Components of Effective Professional Development**

School leaders need to be equipped to meet the demands of their jobs, and districts need to understand how to better support and evaluate them with the primary aim being the improvement of instruction (Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2011). The Wallace Foundation (2011) has made five recommendations for the preparation and development of effective school leaders that include the following:

- provide better, more selective training to prepare transformative leaders whose goal is to significantly improve teaching and learning and to turn around failing schools;
- don't ignore state policies that can affect principal training;
- encourage school districts to better exercise their own "consumer" power to influence the training of the school leaders they will eventually hire;
- provide more and better mentoring for new principals once they're hired; and
- enhance peer and district support for both novice and veteran principals (pp. 3-4).

Learning associated with professional development includes informational learning, and while this is important, today's effective professional development should include transformational learning. Informational learning includes facts, knowledge, and skills important to the 21<sup>st</sup> century while transformational learning includes growth in leaders' abilities to attend to the complex elements of leading, teaching, and life with a focus on developing cognitive, emotional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal capacities (Drago-Severson et al., 2012). Informational learning is the *what* and transformational learning is the *why* in terms of professional development for educational leaders.

Collaborative efforts to align training practices and licensure requirements by state and local leaders through policy and accreditation levers have influenced the training of aspiring and practicing leaders (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Drago-Severson et al., 2012; Wallace Foundation, 2011). Careful alignment between licensure programs, standards, and evaluation systems may provide coherence and collaboration among agencies and districts (Drago-Severson et al., 2012). This clarity can help build trust among partners lending credibility to assist in the nexus between theory and practice and positively influence the training of instructional leaders (Drago-Severson et al., 2012; Louis et al., 2010).

The need for practical information on how to help leaders build support for adult growth informed by adult developmental theories is critical in schools and districts (Drago-Severson et al., 2012; Wallace Foundation, 2011). This practical information should be provided through collaboration and partnerships where teams are placed in situations aligning theory and practice to solve a real problem (Drago-Severson et al., 2012; Lutrick & Szabo, 2012). Developing these leadership capacities is then based on relevant theory where self-reflection and learning to support one's own and other's leadership growth is realized.

Researchers identified the following elements for training to prepare transformative leaders who improve teaching and learning:

- Rigorous and selective recruitment to identify experts for mentoring and coaching (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Wallace Foundation, 2011);
- Clear leadership focus and values organized for learning (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012);
- A challenging, coherent, standards-based curriculum that focuses on instructional leadership, the ability to change the culture of schools, organizational development, and

the improvement of the skills and effectiveness of teachers (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2011);

- Active instruction that integrates job-embedded theory and practice, problem-based learning, budget exercises, hiring and effective data use (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Goldring et al., 2012; Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2011);
- Strong partnerships with districts to support quality field-based learning for experienced leaders and supervised internships that provide real opportunities for aspiring principals to experience leadership first-hand (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Goldring et al., 2012; Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Wallace Foundation, 2011).

Acquiring the expertise to advocate, nurture, and sustain a culture of improving teacher instruction and student achievement will necessitate skills in identifying high quality instruction, data based decision-making, and standards based reform (Goldring et al., 2012). Grissom and Harrington (2010) found strong evidence an association exists between principals' application of these skills and their participation in a formal mentoring and coaching process. Principles of adult learning in effective instructional leadership programs reflect an approach to learning that is problem-based, experiential, and authentic (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Further, sustained and job embedded opportunities for instructional leaders to apply new learning in context are more likely to yield desired results (Goldring et al., 2012). The next section of this review describes educational leaders' preferred professional development delivery methods.

### **Delivery of Professional Development**

Professional development for school leaders generally refers to training opportunities that occur while on the job (Goldring et al., 2012). While the professional development needs of educational leaders are important, the method of delivery also plays a crucial part if the

professional development is to be effective. Finding time to participate in professional development offerings can be a major barrier (NYSCSS, 2012).

Grissom and Harrington (2010) identified university coursework, networks, and formal mentoring programs as the three delivery methods most often found in the literature. Each of these delivery methods are outlined below.

**Mentoring.** Platter (2010) listed a number of professional development programs for superintendents that described various methods of delivery. In one of the programs, veteran superintendents worked with first and second-year superintendents for eight days throughout the year. Participants focused on many of the important aspects of the superintendency discussed previously, including curriculum, instruction, data, human resources, and superintendent-board relations. Superintendents who participated in this type of program stated that it helped them navigate the politics and culture of their district and build the board's trust and confidence in the superintendent (Platter, 2010).

Another program where experienced superintendents worked with new superintendents was an executive coaching framework (Platter, 2010). In this case, retired superintendents coached new superintendents by focusing on each individual's board goals. Participants met through face-to-face coaching every two weeks in addition to e-mail and telephone contact. Mentees completed self-assessments, 360-degree assessments, and reflective logs. These meetings helped novice superintendents understand the complex nature of the superintendency and develop mastery of educational leadership standards (Platter, 2010).

Strong evidence was identified in the Grissom and Harrington (2010) study that a positive effect on student achievement was found in schools where their principals participated in formal mentoring programs that created apprenticeships, provided coaches, and built support

networks that focused on the work of the principal. These principals were also rated as more effective by their teachers than principals who took university coursework and or participated only in networking.

Mentoring is one of the most preferred professional development delivery methods for principals at all grade levels and school population sizes in rural or urban settings (Spanneut et al., 2012). Principal isolation, especially for new principals, can be a factor influencing their preferences for professional development delivery methods. Recognizing this need for principals has resulted in school districts providing leadership academies, mentoring, coaching, and opportunities for career development (Conley & Cooper, 2011). Principals participating in district-wide professional development cohorts where programming was ongoing, research based, coherent, and focused on managerial and instructional leadership aspects reported confidence in leading change because they knew how to change, what to change, and why changes were needed (Barnes et al., 2010).

**Networking.** Networking was named as a key delivery method for superintendent professional development (Harttraft, 2009; Hoegh, 2008; NYSCSS, 2012). When this professional networking occurred on a regular basis, whether through monthly roundtable meetings, local workshops or regional collaborations, superintendents found value in the meetings (Harttraft, 2009; Hoegh, 2008; NYSCSS, 2012). Other means of collaboration and mentoring included collegial group gatherings, group and panel discussions, lectures, peer mentoring, case studies, and relevant personal professional reading (Platter, 2010).

New Superintendent workshops are another method of providing professional development and many state associations offer such training (Association of California School Administrators, 2013; Platter, 2010; Washington Association School Administrators, 2014).

These workshops provide new superintendents with advice and experience in the challenges that face new superintendents and also provide for networking and building relationships.

Principal networks, including workshops and conferences, are more convenient to access and are perceived by both new and experienced principals as being helpful to their practice by connecting them to resources for advice in solving school problems (Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Spanneut et al., 2012). Secondary principals report networking as the most desirable delivery method for professional development while elementary principals report networking a close second (Spanneut et al., 2012). Networking appears to be a preferred delivery method for principals, and it is an essential element in more formal mentoring programs.

**University coursework.** University coursework as a delivery method for professional development holds less interest for principals than networking or mentoring programs (Spanneut et al., 2012). Principals often report their dissatisfaction with university coursework preparation and training in that it was too theoretical and irrelevant to utilize in their everyday experiences (Grissom & Harrington, 2010). Spanneut et al. (2012) asserted in their study of principals from 66 public school systems located in the western-central region of New York State, that university coursework was the least desirable delivery method for professional development.

## **Summary**

A review of the literature in identifying professional development needs of educational leaders has revealed preferred topics by practicing leaders and experts in the field. This review has also revealed preferred delivery methods and provided direction for policy and practice.

Goals and purposes for professional development need to be clear and conceptualized in order to influence instructional leaders and ultimately their staff, students, and schools (Goldring et al., 2012). By connecting theory with practice and creating an environment for connecting real

life experiences with professional development, instructional leaders can deliver an effective program (Drago-Severson et al., 2012). These real life experiences are readily available for principals who participate in collaborative training programs where leaders are significantly more likely to focus on student learning, teacher instruction, and teacher professional development than leaders who did not participate in collaborative training programs (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012). Workshops rarely provide coherence or connection to principals' daily work or support networking whereas formal mentoring provides ongoing support, is job embedded, tailored to individual needs, and provides collegial support (Goldring et al., 2012).

Among the implications Louis et al. (2010) provided for policy and practice regarding school leadership were several professional development suggestions. These included the following:

- district-level and state policy makers nurturing principals' dispositions toward the distribution of leadership;
- policy makers and practitioners avoiding conceptions of instructional leadership which adopt an exclusive or narrow focus on classroom instruction;
- significant additional support provided for middle and high school principals to foster the kind of instructional leadership that is "workable" in their larger and more complex settings; and
- educators and policy makers avoiding "one size fits all" leadership development programs (pp. 103-104).

Departments of educational leadership will also need to consider expanding their role and investing resources to establish and nurture partnerships with state departments of education, legislators, and other policy makers (Drago-Severson et al., 2012). Such a process requires

greater attention to building leadership capacity by learning how to support one's own and other adults' development with ongoing support in the field (Drago-Severson et al., 2012). This support is necessary as school leaders are under more pressure today than possibly any other time in educational history. Drago-Severson et al. (2012) found that leaders need a significant support system to create a community that supports professional collegiality and assists in dealing with this pressure.

Educational leaders assume critical roles in ensuring that quality teaching and learning takes place in schools (Drago-Severson et al., 2012). These critical roles will require leaders to be informed, confident, responsible, and skilled. With access to professional development that meets their needs, these leaders can be equipped to successfully carry out these critical roles. The next section describes the study methodology.

### **Method**

This research project focused on developing and administering a needs assessment for Wyoming principals and central office personnel in their roles as educational leaders. Superintendents, curriculum directors, principals, and assistant principals were surveyed to identify professional development needs, prioritize those needs, and determine what delivery approaches were most desirable.

The survey was designed based on a review of the literature and organized around a brief overview of current research of professional development programs for educational leadership. Educational leaders' professional development needs are being driven by efforts to improve student achievement through more rigorous learning standards and by accountability pressure from local, state and federal legislation (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Spanneut et al., 2012).

## **Research Questions**

To properly identify professional development needs, prioritize those needs, and determine what delivery approaches were most desirable for Wyoming educational leaders, the following research questions were examined:

- 1. What are the perceived professional development needs of Wyoming principals and central office personnel?*
- 2. What are the preferred professional development delivery methods of Wyoming principals and central office personnel?*
- 3. What is the perceived ease of access for professional development opportunities available to Wyoming principals and central office personnel?*
- 4. What is the preferred frequency and time of year for professional development delivery methods for Wyoming principals and central office personnel?*

## **Survey Design**

The survey (see Appendix A) consisted of 66 items. Of the 66 items, seven collected demographic information (gender, position, district size, school size (for principals only), school level, total years of Wyoming administrative experience, and total experience in administration). The remaining 59 items consisted of perceived needs (21 items), preferred delivery methods and their ease of access (16 items), and frequency and time of year for receiving professional development, (16 items). Respondents were also asked to provide additional input on their needs, priorities for professional development additional delivery methods and their availability, and preferred frequency of delivery (5 items). In addition to their selected responses, respondents were provided an opportunity to add additional comments at the end of the survey (1 item).

The draft 2014 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (CCSSO, 2014) standards were used as a basis to create the needs section of the survey. In addition, current research on educational leaders' professional development provided additional questions and a foundation for the delivery methods section of the survey. The survey used a 5-point scale with one reflecting "No need" for professional development and five reflecting "Essential need."

Prior to sending the survey to participants, the survey was sent to twelve former practicing superintendents and principals for review. These subject matter experts (SMEs) were asked to provide input on the instrument by choosing whether each item reflected an "essential" skill or need for an educational leader or whether that item was considered "non-essential." These SMEs were also asked to make suggestions for additions if they felt a significant topic or delivery method was missing. Suggested changes were made to the instrument when deemed appropriate by at least half of SMEs. One question, "Understanding Professional Teaching Standards Board (PTSB) processes" was removed as six of twelve SMEs rated it as non-essential. An additional item, "Working with the media" was added as eight SMEs rated it as an essential need.

### **Population**

The survey was sent to all Wyoming school district superintendents, curriculum directors, and principals asking them to take the survey. An email list was obtained from the Wyoming Department of Education with the email addresses of the intended recipients.

### **Data Collection**

Prior to beginning data collection, approval from the Institutional Review Board was sought and received (Appendix C). A cover letter (Appendix B) was sent to participants via email along with a link to a University of Wyoming survey. The cover letter explained the reason

for the survey and emphasized the confidentiality of participants' responses. Participants were given an opportunity to sign up to receive the results of the survey when available. Follow-up emails were sent once a week for two additional weeks after the original email, requesting participants to fill out the survey if they had not already.

## **Results**

This section presents the results of the study conducted to identify professional development needs, prioritize those needs, and determine what delivery approaches would be most desirable for Wyoming's educational leaders. After describing the characteristics of the respondents, analyses are organized by the research questions. Means, standard deviations, and percentages of professional development needs, delivery methods, and the ease of access of delivery methods are reported. Respondents were asked to provide input for their needs and preferred delivery methods in addition to their selected responses.

### **Description of Respondents**

A total of 376 emails were successfully sent, and 190 participants completed the survey for a response rate of 50.5%. Demographic data were collected to include gender, the respondent's current position, school level of the respondent (central office, elementary, middle school, high school, or K-12 school), district size, school size, total years of administrative experience, and total years of Wyoming administrative experience. The sample included 37 of 47 superintendents, 29 of 30 curriculum directors, and 123 of 294 principals and assistant principals. Descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages were used to describe the sample. Table 1 shows demographic details for the 190 respondents.

Table 1

*Frequencies and Percentages for Demographic Information*

| Characteristic                           | N   | (%)     |
|--|-----|---------|
| <b>Gender</b>                            |     |         |
| Male                                     | 132 | (69.5%) |
| Female                                   | 57  | (30.0%) |
| No response                              | 1   | (0.5%)  |
| <b>Position</b>                          |     |         |
| Superintendent                           | 37  | (19.5%) |
| Curriculum Director                      | 29  | (15.3%) |
| Principal                                | 108 | (56.8%) |
| Asst. Principal                          | 15  | (7.9%)  |
| No response                              | 1   | (0.5%)  |
| <b>Level</b>                             |     |         |
| Central Office                           | 57  | (30.0%) |
| Elementary                               | 52  | (27.4%) |
| Middle School                            | 26  | (13.7%) |
| High School                              | 40  | (21.1%) |
| K-12                                     | 15  | (7.9%)  |
| <b>District Size</b>                     |     |         |
| Small (below 500)                        | 24  | (12.6%) |
| Medium (500-2000)                        | 82  | (43.2%) |
| Large (more than 2000)                   | 82  | (43.2%) |
| No response                              | 2   | (1.1%)  |
| <b>School Size</b>                       |     |         |
| 0-100                                    | 14  | (7.4%)  |
| 101-300                                  | 57  | (30.0%) |
| 301-700                                  | 42  | (22.1%) |
| 701 or more                              | 19  | (10.0%) |
| N/A                                      | 43  | (22.6%) |
| No response                              | 15  | (7.9%)  |
| <b>Total Administrative Experience</b>   |     |         |
| 1-5 years                                | 31  | (16.4%) |
| 6-10 years                               | 47  | (24.9%) |
| 11-15 years                              | 42  | (22.2%) |
| 16-20 years                              | 27  | (14.3%) |
| 21 or more years                         | 42  | (22.2%) |
| No response                              | 1   | (0.5%)  |
| <b>Wyoming Administrative Experience</b> |     |         |
| 1-5 years                                | 77  | (40.5%) |
| 6-10 years                               | 57  | (30.0%) |
| 11-15 years                              | 23  | (12.1%) |
| 16-20 years                              | 18  | (9.5%)  |
| 21 or more years                         | 15  | (7.9%)  |

Of the 190 respondents, more than two-thirds were male. More than 60% were principals or assistant principals and over a quarter of these selected elementary as their position level. Just over 12% of participants came from small districts with fewer than 500 students, which compared to almost one-fourth of districts in the state enrolling fewer than 500 students according to Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) data. Medium (501-2000 students) and large districts (over 2000 students) were equally represented in the survey with 43.2% of participants selecting each category.

Three-fourths of principals and assistant principals selected schools with an enrollment between 100 and 700 students. Over 70% of participants had 10 or fewer years of Wyoming administrative experience, including 40% with five or fewer years of Wyoming experience. The next section summarizes survey responses related to the research questions.

### **Professional Development Needs**

*What are the perceived professional development needs of Wyoming principals and central office personnel?* A scale was provided with possible responses of no need (1), little need (2), slight need (3), moderate need (4), and essential need (5). The topics were then rank-ordered from highest mean to lowest mean as seen in Table 2. Those topics with the highest mean (greatest need) were promoting quality instruction, providing differentiated professional development, understanding accountability, leading change, using data for decision making, leading the school improvement process, and building professional learning communities. The overall mean in these topic areas indicated the highest needs. The two topics with the lowest means included working with the media and developing policy.

Table 2

## Percents, Means, and Standard Deviations of Professional Development Needs

| Professional Development Need                                 | Percents               |                            |                            |                              |                               | <i>M (SD)</i> |
|---|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------|
|   | <i>No<br/>Need (1)</i> | <i>Little<br/>Need (2)</i> | <i>Slight<br/>Need (3)</i> | <i>Moderate<br/>Need (4)</i> | <i>Essential<br/>Need (5)</i> |               |
| Promoting quality instruction that maximizes student learning | 0.5%                   | 8.9%                       | 20.0%                      | 33.2%                        | 37.4%                         | 3.98 (0.99)   |
| Providing differentiated professional development for staff   | 2.6%                   | 6.8%                       | 19.5%                      | 46.8%                        | 24.2%                         | 3.83 (0.96)   |
| Understanding accountability (WA EA)                          | 1.6%                   | 13.8%                      | 22.3%                      | 38.8%                        | 23.4%                         | 3.69 (1.03)   |
| Leading change  | 4.8%                   | 10.1%                      | 23.9%                      | 34.0%                        | 27.1%                         | 3.69 (1.12)   |
| Using data for decision-making                                | 3.7%                   | 13.3%                      | 23.4%                      | 33.0%                        | 26.6%                         | 3.66 (1.12)   |
| Leading the school improvement process                        | 3.7%                   | 11.2%                      | 30.9%                      | 29.3%                        | 25.0%                         | 3.61 (1.09)   |
| Building professional learning communities                    | 3.7%                   | 16.4%                      | 22.2%                      | 32.8%                        | 24.9%                         | 3.59 (1.14)   |
| Understanding implications of Wyoming legal issues            | 3.2%                   | 16.8%                      | 26.3%                      | 36.8%                        | 16.8%                         | 3.47 (1.06)   |
| Determining measures to monitor goal progress                 | 4.3%                   | 15.5%                      | 33.2%                      | 32.1%                        | 15.0%                         | 3.38 (1.06)   |
| Using technology to improve the school/district               | 1.6%                   | 13.8%                      | 22.3%                      | 38.8%                        | 23.4%                         | 3.37 (0.95)   |
| Communicating with stakeholders in the community              | 3.7%                   | 16.4%                      | 22.2%                      | 32.8%                        | 24.9%                         | 3.29 (1.09)   |
| Evaluating staff members using a research-based approach      | 11.1%                  | 18.9%                      | 21.6%                      | 33.2%                        | 15.3%                         | 3.23 (1.24)   |
| Understanding finances and the Wyoming funding model          | 5.8%                   | 25.9%                      | 27.5%                      | 27.5%                        | 13.2%                         | 3.16 (1.13)   |
| Hiring quality personnel                                      | 11.8%                  | 20.4%                      | 29.0%                      | 22.0%                        | 16.7%                         | 3.11 (1.25)   |
| Communicating regularly with families                         | 4.8%                   | 24.9%                      | 36.0%                      | 25.4%                        | 9.0%                          | 3.09 (1.03)   |

|  |       |       |       |       |       |             |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------------|
| Direction-setting with the community                     | 10.0% | 23.2% | 28.9% | 28.4% | 9.5%  | 3.05 (1.14) |
| Ensuring equity in school/district culture               | 7.4%  | 27.5% | 29.6% | 24.3% | 11.1% | 3.04 (1.13) |
| Understanding Wyoming school facilities processes        | 8.0%  | 30.9% | 28.7% | 20.2% | 12.2% | 2.98 (1.15) |
| Developing positive relationships with the board         | 7.9%  | 34.4% | 25.4% | 18.5% | 13.8% | 2.96 (1.19) |
| Developing policy  | 9.2%  | 33.7% | 31.0% | 19.0% | 7.1%  | 2.81 (1.08) |
| Working with the media (i.e. newspaper radio television) | 10.6% | 29.6% | 33.9% | 20.6% | 5.3%  | 2.80 (1.05) |

---

**Position.** Educational leaders in different roles varied slightly in their perceived professional development needs (see Table 3). Superintendents ranked promoting instruction, providing differentiated professional development for staff, and understanding accountability as their top three needs. Principals also ranked promoting instruction and providing differentiated professional development for staff in their top needs, but also added leading change and using data for decision making as top needs. Curriculum directors ranked building professional learning communities as their top need and agreed with superintendents on the need for promoting instruction, providing differentiated professional development for staff and understanding accountability.

Superintendents reported their lowest needs for professional development were ensuring equity in schools/district culture, working with the media, and direction setting with the community. Curriculum directors identified developing policy, direction setting with the community, hiring quality personnel, and understanding Wyoming School Facilities processes as their lowest needs. Principals' lowest needs were in working with the media, developing policy, and developing positive relationships with the board.

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations of Professional Development Needs by Position*

| Professional Development Need  | <i>M (SD) for Position</i> |                                  |                      |
|--|----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
|  | Supt.<br>(n=37)            | Curriculum<br>Director<br>(n=29) | Principal<br>(n=123) |
| Promoting quality instruction that maximizes student learning                    | 4.05 (0.99)                | 3.66 (1.11)                      | 4.04 (0.95)          |
| Providing differentiated professional development for staff                      | 4.00 (0.91)                | 3.66 (1.01)                      | 3.82 (0.96)          |
| Understanding accountability (including Wyoming Accountability in Education Act) | 3.89 (1.14)                | 3.66 (1.11)                      | 3.64 (0.97)          |

|  |             |             |             |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Leading change   | 3.50 (1.25) | 3.62 (1.14) | 3.76 (1.07) |
| Using data for decision-making   | 3.50 (1.20) | 3.48 (1.05) | 3.75 (1.11) |
| Leading the school improvement process   | 3.59 (1.23) | 3.55 (1.18) | 3.64 (1.02) |
| Building professional learning communities                                     | 3.68 (1.13) | 3.68 (1.12) | 3.54 (1.15) |
| Understanding implications of Wyoming legal issues                             | 3.54 (1.09) | 3.48 (0.91) | 3.45 (1.08) |
| Determining measures to monitor goal progress                                  | 3.58 (1.02) | 3.24 (1.12) | 3.36 (1.04) |
| Using technology to improve the school/district                                | 3.46 (0.86) | 3.45 (0.94) | 3.33 (0.97) |
| Communicating regularly with stakeholders in the wider community               | 3.27 (1.17) | 3.18 (1.27) | 3.32 (1.01) |
| Evaluating staff members using a research-based approach                       | 3.30 (1.26) | 3.03 (1.29) | 3.25 (1.22) |
| Understanding financial management including the Wyoming funding model         | 3.14 (1.26) | 3.34 (1.14) | 3.13 (1.09) |
| Hiring quality personnel   | 3.31 (1.36) | 2.83 (1.36) | 3.13 (1.18) |
| Communicating regularly with families  | 3.11 (1.04) | 2.97 (1.01) | 3.11 (1.03) |
| Direction-setting with the community (vision mission goals strategic planning) | 3.00 (1.05) | 2.83 (1.22) | 3.11 (1.14) |
| Ensuring equity in school/district culture                                     | 2.86 (1.15) | 3.07 (1.13) | 2.09 (1.12) |
| Understanding Wyoming school facilities processes                              | 3.24 (1.32) | 2.86 (1.17) | 2.93 (1.08) |
| Developing positive relationships with the board                               | 3.32 (1.24) | 3.10 (1.08) | 2.82 (1.17) |
| Developing policy  | 3.06 (1.24) | 2.67 (1.03) | 2.77 (1.02) |
| Working with the media (i.e. newspaper radio television)                       | 2.95 (1.20) | 2.93 (1.10) | 2.73 (0.99) |

---

*Note:* Response scale ranged from 1 (no need) to 5 (essential need).

**District Size.** Respondents in school districts of all sizes indicated their top needs were promoting quality instruction and providing differentiated professional development. These were

among their top three professional development needs (see Table 4). Large district participants rated leading change as one of their top three needs and leaders in small- and medium-sized districts rated understanding accountability in their top three needs. Working with the media and developing policy were rated among the lowest for all three district sizes.

Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations of Professional Development Needs by District Size*

| Professional Development Need  | <i>M (SD)</i> for District Size |             |              |
|--|---------------------------------|-------------|--------------|
|  | Small (n=23)                    | Med. (n=82) | Large (n=82) |
| Promoting quality instruction that maximizes student learning                    | 4.08 (0.88)                     | 4.11 (0.93) | 3.80 (1.07)  |
| Providing differentiated professional development for staff                      | 4.17 (0.64)                     | 3.94 (0.87) | 3.65 (1.09)  |
| Understanding accountability (including Wyoming Accountability in Education Act) | 3.87 (0.99)                     | 3.79 (0.99) | 3.54 (1.07)  |
| Leading change   | 3.79 (1.18)                     | 3.66 (1.04) | 3.68 (1.19)  |
| Using data for decision-making   | 3.57 (1.16)                     | 3.72 (1.11) | 3.60 (1.13)  |
| Leading the school improvement process   | 3.83 (0.94)                     | 3.65 (1.13) | 3.60 (1.10)  |
| Building professional learning communities                                       | 3.54 (0.98)                     | 3.77 (1.07) | 3.43 (1.23)  |
| Understanding implications of Wyoming legal issues                               | 3.58 (1.06)                     | 3.50 (1.11) | 3.43 (1.02)  |
| Determining measures to monitor goal progress                                    | 3.67 (0.92)                     | 3.19 (1.04) | 3.45 (1.08)  |
| Using technology to improve the school/district                                  | 3.57 (0.91)                     | 3.38 (0.94) | 3.40 (0.98)  |

|  |             |             |             |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| Communicating regularly with stakeholders in the wider community               | 3.38 (0.92) | 3.19 (1.15) | 3.39 (1.04) |
| Evaluating staff members using a research-based approach                       | 3.50 (1.14) | 3.22 (1.26) | 3.16 (1.26) |
| Understanding financial management including the Wyoming funding model         | 3.21 (1.10) | 3.36 (1.15) | 2.98 (1.10) |
| Hiring quality personnel   | 3.65 (1.19) | 3.09 (1.22) | 2.98 (1.26) |
| Communicating regularly with families  | 3.00 (0.98) | 3.10 (1.11) | 3.11 (0.97) |
| Direction-setting with the community (vision mission goals strategic planning) | 3.42 (0.72) | 2.90 (1.19) | 3.07 (1.17) |
| Ensuring equity in school/district culture                                     | 3.04 (1.27) | 2.90 (1.07) | 3.05 (1.14) |
| Understanding Wyoming school facilities processes                              | 3.29 (1.27) | 2.99 (1.28) | 2.90 (0.95) |
| Developing positive relationships with the board                               | 3.12 (1.19) | 2.94 (1.21) | 2.90 (1.16) |
| Developing policy  | 2.91 (1.08) | 2.84 (1.17) | 2.78 (0.97) |
| Working with the media (i.e. newspaper radio television)                       | 2.96 (0.86) | 2.72 (1.06) | 2.86 (1.09) |

---

*Note:* Response scale ranged from 1 (no need) to 5 (essential need).

**Additional Professional Development Needs.** Respondents were given an opportunity to provide additional professional development needs not included in the survey. Participants identified 165 additional needs including several categories that had multiple responses. No common themes stood out given the variety of responses. Assessment was listed most frequently yet had fewer than 10 mentions. It included common formative assessments and assessment literacy among specific entries. Standards were mentioned next most often with a majority of

those consisting of standards-based grading. Finally special education (primarily law) and curriculum (both development and mapping) were mentioned the next most often.

Participants also had an opportunity to name their three highest professional development needs. The constructed response question yielded 316 responses and revealed data and instruction as the two themes mentioned most often by participants. Data included a variety of descriptions including data analysis, data-based decision making, interpreting data, and using data to drive instruction. Instruction was described in areas of staff evaluation, PLCs, accountability, and leading change.

### **Professional Development Delivery Methods**

*What are the preferred professional development delivery methods of Wyoming principals and central office personnel?* Table 5 outlines responses to the survey question that asked educational leaders to assess their preferred professional development delivery methods using a scale with possible responses of no interest (1), little interest (2), slight interest (3), moderate interest (4), and strong interest (5). The delivery methods with the highest-ranked interest were networking and professional learning network (PLN) via technology. Networking was defined as meeting regularly through roundtables, workshops, regional collaborations, and/or panel discussions while PLN via technology was described as colleagues and/or experts discussing a variety of issues using an electronic medium, for example. The lowest ranked interest for a delivery method was university coursework on campus, working toward a degree.

Table 5

*Means and Standard Deviations for Professional Development Delivery Methods*

| Preferred Delivery Method                                 | <i>M (SD)</i> |
|---|---------------|
| Networking  | 3.76 (1.06)   |
| Professional learning network via technology              | 3.52 (1.04)   |
| New Superintendent/principal workshops                    | 3.37 (1.29)   |
| Formal mentoring program                                  | 3.25 (1.20)   |
| Peer observations   | 3.20 (1.07)   |
| University coursework online (working toward a degree)    | 2.89 (1.41)   |
| Book studies  | 2.85 (1.09)   |
| University coursework on campus (working toward a degree) | 2.11 (1.14)   |

*Note:* Response scale ranged from 1 (no interest) to 5 (strong interest).

**Position.** There were no differences in the top ranked delivery method based on position. Networking was the top-ranked delivery method for superintendents, curriculum directors, and principals. Superintendents showed more interest in professional learning networks and new superintendent/principal workshops than curriculum directors and principals (see Table 6). Respondents in all positions were least interested in the delivery method of university coursework on campus, working towards a degree.

Table 6

*Means and Standard Deviations of Preferred Delivery Methods by Position*

|                                 | Position          |                                    |                        |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|
|                                 | Supt.<br>(n = 37) | Curriculum<br>Director<br>(n = 28) | Principal<br>(n = 123) |
| Networking                      | 4.17 (0.87)       | 3.85 (1.02)                        | 3.61 (1.12)            |
| Professional learning network   | 3.84 (1.04)       | 3.65 (0.96)                        | 3.34 (1.10)            |
| New supt./principal workshop    | 3.76 (1.16)       | 3.43 (1.23)                        | 3.32 (1.34)            |
| Formal mentoring                | 3.39 (1.33)       | 3.17 (1.15)                        | 3.30 (1.21)            |
| Peer Observations               | 3.23 (1.08)       | 3.26 (0.93)                        | 3.14 (1.20)            |
| University coursework online    | 2.78 (1.60)       | 3.01 (1.40)                        | 2.84 (1.46)            |
| Book Studies                    | 2.73 (1.07)       | 2.92 (0.99)                        | 2.81 (1.18)            |
| University coursework on campus | 2.11 (1.19)       | 2.04 (1.04)                        | 2.20 (1.27)            |

*Note:* Response scale ranged from 1 (no interest) to 5 (strong interest).

**District Size.** There were no differences in the top rated delivery method based on district size. Networking was the top rated delivery method for each district size (see Table 7). The lowest rated delivery method was university course-work on campus working towards a degree.

Table 7

*Means and Standard Deviations of Preferred Delivery Methods by District Size*

|                                 | District Size     |                    |                   |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
|                                 | Small<br>(n = 24) | Medium<br>(n = 82) | Large<br>(n = 81) |
| Networking                      | 3.87 (0.92)       | 3.85 (1.02)        | 3.61 (1.12)       |
| Professional learning network   | 3.75 (1.03)       | 3.65 (0.96)        | 3.34 (1.10)       |
| New supt./principal workshop    | 3.42 (1.34)       | 3.43 (1.23)        | 3.32 (1.34)       |
| Formal mentoring                | 3.33 (1.37)       | 3.17 (1.15)        | 3.30 (1.21)       |
| Peer Observations               | 2.20 (1.05)       | 3.26 (0.93)        | 3.14 (1.20)       |
| University coursework online    | 2.78 (1.34)       | 3.01 (1.40)        | 2.84 (1.46)       |
| Book Studies                    | 2.62 (0.97)       | 2.92 (0.99)        | 2.81 (1.18)       |
| University coursework on campus | 2.08 (0.97)       | 2.04 (1.04)        | 2.20 (1.27)       |

*Note:* Response scale ranged from 1 (no interest) to 5 (strong interest).

**Additional Delivery Methods.** Respondents were given an opportunity to provide additional professional development delivery methods. Only 41 responses were provided, but multiple leaders mentioned a hybrid or blended method as an additional delivery method. This was described as a week or weekends and/or a combination of face-to-face with online components. Cohort opportunities, using video technology, and providing University of Wyoming courses in local venues were also mentioned as possible delivery methods.

### **Perceptions of Ease of Access of Delivery Methods**

*What is the perceived ease of access for professional development opportunities available to Wyoming principals and central office personnel?* Respondents were asked for their perceptions of the ease of access to professional development delivery methods (see Table 8). A

five-point scale was provided using a scale of cannot obtain (1), difficult to obtain (2), somewhat difficult to obtain (3), somewhat easy to obtain (4), and easy to obtain (5). The professional development opportunity perceived as easiest to obtain was reported as working toward a degree through university online coursework. The rest of the delivery methods were rated as more difficult to obtain. Respondents perceived working toward a degree via university coursework on campus and peer observations as the delivery methods most difficult to access.

Table 8

*Means and Standard Deviations of Perceived Ease of Access to Professional Development Delivery Methods*

| Perceived Ease of Access                                  | <i>M (SD)</i> |
|---|---------------|
| University coursework online (working toward a degree)    | 3.84 (1.16)   |
| Professional learning network via technology              | 3.48 (1.05)   |
| Book studies  | 3.24 (1.21)   |
| Networking  | 3.20 (0.95)   |
| New Superintendent/principal workshops                    | 3.04 (1.10)   |
| Formal mentoring program                                  | 2.92 (1.02)   |
| Peer observations   | 2.79 (1.04)   |
| University coursework on campus (working toward a degree) | 2.60 (1.18)   |

*Note:* Response scale ranged from 1 (difficult to obtain) to 5 (easy to obtain).

## **Preferred Frequency and Time of Year for Professional Development Methods Delivery**

*What is the preferred frequency and time of year for professional development delivery methods of Wyoming's principals and central office personnel?* Educational leaders in Wyoming were asked to determine how often they would prefer different professional development methods delivered. They were also asked to provide their preferences for the time of year for each of the delivery methods.

**Preferred Frequency.** In order to determine the preferred frequency of delivery methods, respondents were asked to select once a week, once or twice a month, once or twice a semester, or not desired. Preferred delivery methods are listed in rank order by most preferred (see Table 9).

As the top-ranked professional development delivery method, networking was found to be desired once or twice a semester by over two thirds of educational leaders. Respondents also chose once or twice a semester as their preferred frequency in new superintendent/principal workshops and peer observations.

Respondents were split relatively evenly between once or twice a month and once or twice a semester when asked to rate their preferences for professional learning networks. However, almost two thirds of superintendents preferred once or twice a month delivery for this method compared to only one fourth of superintendents who preferred once or twice a semester. Frequency for formal mentoring was also relatively even among respondents with approximately 40% of leaders choosing either once or twice a month or once or twice a semester.

Overall, respondents determined three delivery methods were not desired, including university coursework on campus, book studies, and university online coursework. Nonetheless,

approximately one third of respondents did prefer to have both university online coursework and book studies once or twice a semester.

Table 9

*Percents for Preferred Rate of Professional Development Delivery by Position*

|                               | Supt.<br>(n =37) | Curriculum<br>Director<br>(n = 29) | Principal<br>(n = 120) | Total<br>(n = 186) |
|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------|
| Networking                    |                  |                                    |                        |                    |
| Once a week                   | 2.7%             | 3.4%                               | 0.9%                   | 1.6%               |
| Once or twice a month         | 37.8%            | 27.6%                              | 24.1%                  | 27.5%              |
| Once or twice a semester      | 59.5%            | 62.1%                              | 72.4%                  | 68.1%              |
| Not Desired                   | 0.0%             | 6.9%                               | 2.6%                   | 2.7%               |
| Professional learning network |                  |                                    |                        |                    |
| Once a week                   | 5.4%             | 3.4%                               | 4.2%                   | 4.3%               |
| Once or twice a month         | 62.2%            | 44.8%                              | 40.0%                  | 45.2%              |
| Once or twice a semester      | 27.0%            | 48.3%                              | 49.2%                  | 44.6%              |
| Not Desired                   | 5.4%             | 3.4%                               | 6.7%                   | 5.9%               |
| New supt./principal workshop  |                  |                                    |                        |                    |
| Once a week                   | 0.0%             | 6.9%                               | 1.7%                   | 2.2%               |
| Once or twice a month         | 32.4%            | 20.7%                              | 19.3%                  | 22.2%              |
| Once or twice a semester      | 59.5%            | 62.1%                              | 58.0%                  | 58.9%              |
| Not Desired                   | 8.1%             | 10.3%                              | 21.0%                  | 16.8%              |
| Formal mentoring              |                  |                                    |                        |                    |
| Once a week                   | 5.4%             | 0.0%                               | 4.2%                   | 3.8%               |
| Once or twice a month         | 43.2%            | 37.0%                              | 45.8%                  | 44.0%              |
| Once or twice a semester      | 32.4%            | 51.9%                              | 42.5%                  | 41.8%              |
| Not Desired                   | 18.9%            | 11.1%                              | 7.5%                   | 10.3%              |
| Peer observations             |                  |                                    |                        |                    |
| Once a week                   | 2.8%             | 3.4%                               | 5.2%                   | 4.4%               |

|                                 |       |       |       |       |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Once or twice a month           | 25.0% | 17.2% | 17.2% | 18.8% |
| Once or twice a semester        | 44.4% | 62.1% | 60.3% | 57.5% |
| Not Desired                     | 27.8% | 17.2% | 17.2% | 19.3% |
| University coursework online    |       |       |       |       |
| Once a week                     | 22.2% | 17.2% | 15.1% | 16.8% |
| Once or twice a month           | 27.8% | 24.1% | 31.1% | 29.3% |
| Once or twice a semester        | 8.3%  | 20.7% | 20.2% | 17.9% |
| Not Desired                     | 41.7% | 37.9% | 33.6% | 35.9% |
| Book studies                    |       |       |       |       |
| Once a week                     | 0.0%  | 3.6%  | 6.7%  | 4.9%  |
| Once or twice a month           | 25.7% | 28.6% | 26.9% | 26.9% |
| Once or twice a semester        | 28.6% | 35.7% | 32.8% | 32.4% |
| Not Desired                     | 45.7% | 32.1% | 33.6% | 35.7% |
| University coursework on campus |       |       |       |       |
| Once a week                     | 0.0%  | 0.0%  | 5.0%  | 3.2%  |
| Once or twice a month           | 16.2% | 13.8% | 14.2% | 14.5% |
| Once or twice a semester        | 21.6% | 27.6% | 16.7% | 19.4% |
| Not Desired                     | 62.2% | 58.6% | 64.2% | 62.9% |

**Preferred Time of Year.** In order to determine the preferred time of year for each delivery method, respondents were asked to select fall, spring, fall/spring (entire academic year), summer, no preference, or not desired. The entire academic year was the most preferred time of year for five of the eight delivery methods and spring was the least favorable in all categories except peer observations (see Table 10).

As the most preferred professional development delivery method, nearly half of the educational leaders found networking to be desired during the academic year. In addition, one

third had no preference for time of year. Superintendents, curriculum directors, and principals all preferred the academic year for professional learning networks and peer observations.

The most preferred time of year for new superintendent/principal workshops was the entire academic year, although 27% of superintendents also chose fall as their preferred time. Formal mentoring during the academic year was preferred by almost half of superintendents and 40% of principals, whereas nearly the same amount of curriculum directors had no preference. For book studies, principals and curriculum directors were about evenly split between no preference and not desired, with about one third of them selecting each option. Forty percent of superintendents had no desire for book studies, although a quarter of them chose the academic year for delivery.

Over half of respondents in each position did not desire university coursework on campus. It should be noted one fourth to over one third of the respondents selected no preference in every delivery method except university work on campus.

Table 10

*Percents for Preferred Time of Year for Professional Development Delivery Methods*

|                                      | Supt.<br>(n = 37) | Curriculum<br>Director<br>(n = 29) | Principal<br>(n = 122) | All<br>(n = 188) |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Networking</b>                    |                   |                                    |                        |                  |
| Fall                                 | 8.30%             | 3.40%                              | 10.00%                 | 8.60%            |
| Spring                               | 2.80%             | 0.00%                              | 0.83%                  | 1.10%            |
| Fall/Spring                          | 50.00%            | 48.30%                             | 45.83%                 | 47.00%           |
| Summer                               | 2.80%             | 3.40%                              | 10.00%                 | 7.60%            |
| No preference                        | 36.10%            | 41.40%                             | 30.83%                 | 33.50%           |
| Not desired                          | 0.00%             | 3.40%                              | 2.50%                  | 2.20%            |
| <b>Professional learning network</b> |                   |                                    |                        |                  |
| Fall                                 | 8.10%             | 0.00%                              | 3.33%                  | 3.80%            |
| Spring                               | 0.00%             | 3.40%                              | 0.83%                  | 1.10%            |
| Fall/Spring                          | 51.40%            | 55.20%                             | 44.17%                 | 47.30%           |
| Summer                               | 0.00%             | 0.00%                              | 10.00%                 | 6.50%            |
| No preference                        | 35.10%            | 37.90%                             | 35.83%                 | 36.00%           |
| Not desired                          | 5.40%             | 3.40%                              | 5.83%                  | 5.40%            |
| <b>New supt./principal workshop</b>  |                   |                                    |                        |                  |
| Fall                                 | 27.00%            | 13.80%                             | 12.40%                 | 15.50%           |
| Spring                               | 0.00%             | 0.00%                              | 4.13%                  | 2.70%            |
| Fall/Spring                          | 27.00%            | 27.60%                             | 27.27%                 | 27.30%           |
| Summer                               | 21.60%            | 20.70%                             | 14.88%                 | 17.10%           |
| No preference                        | 21.60%            | 31.00%                             | 23.14%                 | 24.10%           |
| Not desired                          | 2.70%             | 6.90%                              | 18.18%                 | 13.40%           |
| <b>Formal mentoring</b>              |                   |                                    |                        |                  |
| Fall                                 | 10.80%            | 10.70%                             | 10.83%                 | 10.80%           |
| Spring                               | 0.00%             | 0.00%                              | 0.00%                  | 0.00%            |
| Fall/Spring                          | 48.60%            | 35.70%                             | 40.83%                 | 41.60%           |
| Summer                               | 2.70%             | 0.00%                              | 5.00%                  | 3.80%            |
| No preference                        | 24.30%            | 39.30%                             | 33.33%                 | 32.40%           |
| Not desired                          | 13.50%            | 14.30%                             | 10.00%                 | 11.40%           |
| <b>Peer observations</b>             |                   |                                    |                        |                  |
| Fall                                 | 2.80%             | 7.10%                              | 5.08%                  | 4.90%            |
| Spring                               | 5.60%             | 3.60%                              | 1.69%                  | 2.70%            |
| Fall/Spring                          | 52.80%            | 42.90%                             | 45.76%                 | 46.70%           |
| Summer                               | 0.00%             | 0.00%                              | 0.85%                  | 0.50%            |
| No preference                        | 19.40%            | 25.00%                             | 29.66%                 | 26.90%           |
| Not desired                          | 19.40%            | 21.40%                             | 16.95%                 | 18.10%           |
| <b>University coursework online</b>  |                   |                                    |                        |                  |

|                                 |        |        |        |        |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Fall                            | 2.80%  | 3.40%  | 4.92%  | 4.30%  |
| Spring                          | 0.00%  | 0.00%  | 1.64%  | 1.10%  |
| Fall/Spring                     | 11.10% | 17.20% | 13.11% | 13.40% |
| Summer                          | 0.00%  | 3.40%  | 9.84%  | 7.00%  |
| No preference                   | 52.80% | 37.90% | 40.98% | 42.80% |
| Not desired                     | 33.30% | 37.90% | 29.51% | 31.60% |
| Book studies                    |        |        |        |        |
| Fall                            | 2.80%  | 3.40%  | 5.00%  | 4.30%  |
| Spring                          | 2.80%  | 0.00%  | 1.67%  | 1.60%  |
| Fall/Spring                     | 25.00% | 24.10% | 20.00% | 21.60% |
| Summer                          | 11.10% | 3.40%  | 12.50% | 10.80% |
| No preference                   | 16.70% | 34.50% | 30.00% | 28.10% |
| Not desired                     | 41.70% | 34.50% | 30.83% | 33.50% |
| University coursework on campus |        |        |        |        |
| Fall                            | 2.70%  | 0.00%  | 0.82%  | 1.10%  |
| Spring                          | 0.00%  | 0.00%  | 0.00%  | 0.00%  |
| Fall/Spring                     | 2.70%  | 3.60%  | 3.28%  | 3.20%  |
| Summer                          | 18.90% | 21.40% | 19.67% | 19.80% |
| No preference                   | 18.90% | 17.90% | 21.31% | 20.30% |
| Not desired                     | 56.80% | 57.10% | 54.92% | 55.60% |

---

## Summary

This section provided the data analysis from Wyoming’s educational leaders and their perceptions of need, ease of access, and delivery preferences regarding professional development. The sample included 37 of 47 superintendents, 29 of 30 curriculum directors, and 123 of 294 principals and assistant principals. A description of the respondents included years of experience in administration, years of administrative experience in Wyoming, gender, size of district, size of school, building level, and position.

In this study, respondents reported their highest need was professional development that supports the promotion of quality instruction that maximizes student learning. The lowest ranked need was working with the media.

An analysis of the delivery methods and time of year preferences indicated networking as a top choice, and university coursework on campus as the least desirable method. The perceived access to different delivery methods revealed university online coursework as the easiest to obtain, and university coursework on campus as the most difficult to obtain. Finally, the academic year was the most preferred time of year for five of the eight delivery methods, and the spring option was the least preferred time for all but one of the eight delivery methods. Conclusions, limitations, recommendations, and suggestions for further research are discussed in the final chapter.

### **Discussion**

Accountability being legislated at the federal and state levels to improve student achievement has brought attention to improving instructional practice. Improving instructional practice is influenced through improving instructional leadership (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). This study and its analysis will assist in the creation and delivery of professional development for Wyoming's district and building level administrators.

Wyoming's legislative body has charged the State Board of Education to adopt a statewide system of support for Wyoming's schools (Wyo. Stat. §21-2-304, 2014). The State Board has thus directed the Wyoming Department of Education to solicit requests for proposals to implement a statewide system of support. The present study informs both agencies, institutions of higher learning, school districts, and potential entities submitting proposals that a key component of improving student achievement is found in improving instructional leadership at both the building and central office levels.

To clearly identify the professional development needs and preferred delivery methods of Wyoming's educational leaders, survey participants were asked about their specific needs and

preferred delivery methods. Wyoming's educational leaders reported their top needs were for professional development that assisted them in promoting quality instruction that maximizes student learning and in providing differentiated professional development for staff. To gain this professional development, leaders expressed a preference for networking and professional networks via technology to be delivered primarily during the academic year.

In addition, about one third of respondents selected no preference for delivery time of year for both networking and professional learning networks via technology. Including respondents with no preference together with those leaders who preferred the academic year would increase the overall preference for the academic year delivery to just over 80%. Another interesting point is that 18 superintendents who reported one to five years of experience in Wyoming indicated their need for goal setting was a top need while the remaining superintendents ranked it as a lesser need.

This information also provides critical insight into the unique conditions in which Wyoming's educational leaders work. Ease of access to professional development in the rural state of Wyoming will require innovative methods and information from those consuming professional development. This study showed that educational leaders perceived university online coursework as the easiest delivery method to access. However, respondents preferred a majority of the other delivery methods more than online coursework. Leaders' top-ranked professional development delivery methods were not rated as the easiest to obtain.

When comparing Wyoming's educational leaders' results with the research presented in the literature, low interest in the delivery method of university coursework on campus was also found in other studies. Also, the literature revealed the delivery method of formal mentoring/coaching as the most effective method, yet Wyoming's educational leaders did not

prefer it as a top delivery method. Another interesting point is the SME's felt working with the media was an essential need, yet it had the lowest overall mean from the survey results. Small districts showed a tendency to have higher means in the areas of need than medium and larger districts, and respondents with 1-5 years of experience also showed higher means in the areas of need.

With an understanding of the needs, the preferred delivery methods, and the perceptions of accessibility to professional development, providers can create an effective environment informed by what needs to be provided to whom and how, and when and how often it can be delivered.

The following section provides conclusions determined by the survey results. The conclusions are followed by limitations, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.

## **Conclusions**

This project began with a review of the recent literature to assist in identifying the professional development needs of educational leaders. From this review, topics for professional development and delivery methods were identified and further defined. A survey to collect information from Wyoming's district and school leaders regarding their perceived needs and preferred delivery methods was conducted. In the next sections, the research questions are referenced for further discussion of the study's conclusions.

*What are the perceived professional development needs of Wyoming principals and central office personnel?* Educational leaders reported promoting quality instruction that maximizes student learning was the top-ranked need followed by providing differentiated professional development for staff. This aligns with what Spanneut, et al. (2012) found in their study where educational leaders identified sustaining an instructional program and facilitating

staff professional development as their top priorities. Respondents also listed data and instruction as the top two priorities when asked to prioritize their professional development needs.

Honig (2012) determined that instructional leadership was a primary need for the professional development of principals, superintendents, and curriculum directors. This primary need for Wyoming's educational leaders can be met through the coordination of professional development providers, state agencies, and school districts. Providers can use the information from this study to create better access to essential professional development needs while overcoming Wyoming's challenges with small populations and long distances between communities.

Survey responses also indicated other areas with higher ranked needs for professional development as well as differences between superintendents, curriculum directors, and principals. Curriculum directors ranked building professional learning communities as their top professional development need. This knowledge may help agencies, state associations, and school districts target resources for professional development to those needs identified by different educational leaders.

Other areas of professional development leaders listed as higher-ranked needs included understanding accountability, leading change, using data for decision making, and leading the school improvement process. In fact, data-based decision making was listed as the top priority by leaders prioritizing their needs.

*What are the preferred professional development delivery methods for Wyoming principals and central office personnel?* Networking and networking via technology were the overall most preferred methods of delivery for professional development by Wyoming's educational leaders. Previous studies have found networks to be key delivery methods for

superintendents and principals as they are helpful connecting leaders to resources and information (Harttraft, 2009; Hoegh, 2008; NYSCSS, 2012; Grissom & Harrington, 2010; Spanneut et al., 2012).

Wyoming's rural nature with long distances between districts makes professional development opportunities delivered via technology a preferred option. One respondent, a principal, echoed this with the comment, "I know there were opportunities but traveling and spending more time away from my building wasn't a good use of my time." The ability to provide a network of colleagues and/or experts saves some of the travel time and provides educational leaders more opportunity for professional development.

Using technology also allows educational leaders the ability to network more often, as time constraints are lessened due to travel and more flexibility can be built into the time of day for delivery. Regular networking has been found to be valuable to leaders (Harttraft, 2009; Hoegh, 2008; NYSCSS, 2012) and technology provides Wyoming educators the ability to do that more often and more efficiently.

*What is the perceived ease of access for professional development opportunities available to Wyoming principals and central office personnel?* University online coursework (working toward a degree) was reported as somewhat easy to obtain for Wyoming's educational leaders. The remaining methods were reported as more difficult to obtain. This difficulty may be due to previously mentioned situations in terms of distance and population size. The Internet provides access to information, but respondents did not report being part of a professional learning network via technology as the easiest to access. Perhaps this is due to the lack of an organized or recognized platform available for this delivery method.

*What is the preferred frequency and time of year of professional development delivery methods of Wyoming's principals and central office personnel?* Networking and professional learning networks were preferred delivery methods among educational leaders in Wyoming. The responses indicate that leaders prefer networking once or twice a semester, although the preference for professional learning networks via technology was more evenly split between once or twice a month and once or twice a semester. It appears that Wyoming's educational leaders are willing to meet more often through technology, but also prefer to meet in person less frequently.

Finding time can be a major barrier to accessing professional development (NYSCSS, 2012). However, Wyoming's educational leaders prefer to have professional development throughout the academic year. The ability to use recent professional development in job-embedded opportunities may be a reason to prefer delivery during the academic year. Respondents also indicated professional development only in the spring was the least preferred time of year. This may be due to activities and the needs of their school and district during that time.

To conclude, Wyoming's educational leaders report they need access to professional development in specific topics, through networking and collaboration that meets at scheduled intervals throughout the academic year. Given these results, the unique conditions associated with the state of Wyoming, and the nature of busy educational leaders, technology presents itself as a possible avenue. The findings suggest the use of technology as the easiest delivery method to access. Because of this, the possibility of using technology for delivery of professional development might be embraced. While access to technology appears to be easy, it is important to create awareness of the existence of technology based learning networks. What is somewhat

difficult to obtain is a platform that also meets the needs of topic, method, frequency, and time of year. All of these areas need to be considered in order to provide sustained and job-embedded professional development for educational leaders that lead to better outcomes (Goldring et al., 2012).

The combination of ease of access to technology with preferred delivery methods could point to professional learning networks via technology being a priority focus for professional development providers and state agencies. This study also points to the desire of educational leaders to participate in professional development on a regular basis, whether that is once or twice a month or each semester during the year with their peers.

### **Limitations**

Although the survey was sent to all Wyoming superintendents, curriculum directors and principals, the response rate may not allow the findings to generalize to the entire population of educational leaders in Wyoming. Another limitation is the description of each professional development topic and their interpretation by respondents. The ISLLC standards provide broad definitions that each cover a large number of more detailed benchmarks. Respondents may have less focused opinions on broad topics as they do on more detailed subjects. Finally, some respondents could have matched their responses for delivery methods and time of year instead of reflecting on each area independently.

### **Recommendations**

The results from this study could help inform school districts and agencies in developing and providing professional development opportunities for educational leaders in Wyoming. The perceptions of need and the preferences of Wyoming's educational leaders can inform agencies in their allocation of resources, assembly of materials, and methods of delivery.

Respondents reported networking and professional learning networks as preferred methods. These methods require collaboration and the development of social capital through trust and partnerships with districts, higher education, and state agencies to provide timely and relevant professional development.

Clarity in the areas of need identified by the survey respondents could help entities providing professional development to educational leaders focus on the right targets. With this clarity and focus, a collective effort to address these needs can be realized. The results of the survey and analysis have led to the following recommendations being offered for future efforts.

- Provide Wyoming educational leaders with professional development in a variety of prioritized areas as shown in this needs assessment.
- Create networks of leaders, both face-to-face and via technology that are both structured and well-recognized through marketing and information sharing. Technology can provide the majority of contact, with some in-person networking occurring at least once a semester.
- Provide opportunities for professional development throughout the school year. Professional development opportunities should be targeted to meet participants' needs and may be created based on topics needed at various times of the year. These targeted professional learning networks should occur at regular intervals based on the needs of the participants.
- Create professional learning networks for new educational leaders in Wyoming that begin immediately in the early fall of their first year and continue on a regular basis.

- Begin with broad professional development, but continue to build opportunities to investigate each need further by examining components of individual topics in more detail.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The information contained in this study provides a beginning point for further research on providing Wyoming's educational leaders with professional development and advancing the knowledge and skills for effective leadership. The findings and conclusions of this study lead to the following suggestions for further research:

1. Researchers may want to analyze professional development activities and their effect on student achievement.
2. Further research might include determining more detailed, individual components of professional development needs to provide in-depth study of key benchmarks.
3. Although these results could be generalized to experienced educational leaders, it would be important to conduct research specifically for first-year leaders in each position in order to more effectively provide professional development for this population.
4. Researchers could conduct a qualitative study on high-performing schools/districts to determine the professional development activities that have taken place over a period of time and/or the needs of these types of schools/districts to continue to excel.
5. Researchers could study each professional development need and determine experts in that area to provide professional development and/or lead networking and mentoring cadres.

## **Summary**

Pressure to improve student achievement in an era of accountability has created more focus on instructional leadership at the building and central office levels. As an example of this drive for higher expectations, Wyoming's legislature has written in statute the goal to be a national leader of education among states. To realize this, educational leaders must be equipped with the essential skills and knowledge. As a result, the importance of supporting educational leaders in their ongoing development has become more of a priority.

This support begins with identifying the professional development needs and methods of delivery in consideration of the needs and preferences of Wyoming's educational leaders. These needs and preferences could serve as essential information through the coordination of resources, time, and expertise with collaboration between and among school districts, higher education, and state agencies. This is particularly important in a rural state with few people and long distances between communities.

This study sought to determine those needs and preferences by gathering information from Wyoming's principals, curriculum directors, and superintendents. Information was collected using the ISLLC standards as a framework of competencies to identify areas of need. Wyoming's educational leaders reported they have needs in a variety of areas and are willing to participate regularly in professional development that is accessible and associated with their peers. It is important to create and provide professional development opportunities to meet the needs of educational leaders in topic, delivery methods, and timeframe.

## References

- Association of California School Administrators. (2013). New superintendent workshop addresses real change. Retrieved from <http://www.acsa.org/FunctionalMenuCategories/media/EdCalNewspaper/EdCal-2013/March4/Workshop.aspx>
- Barnes, C.A., Camburn, E., Sanders, B.R., & Sabastian, J. (2010). Developing instructional leaders: Using mixed methods to explore the black box of planned change in principals' professional practice. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(2), 241-279.
- Beaver, J., & Weinbaum, E. (2012). Measuring school capacity, maximizing school improvement. (CPRE Policy Briefs RB-53). Philadelphia: Consortium for Policy Research in Education.
- Bellamy, G. T. (2011). High reliability and leadership for educational change. *Noteworthy Perspectives: High Reliability Organizations in Education*, 24-35. Retrieved from [http://www.mcrel.org/pdf/LeadershipOrganizationDevelopment/0121MM\\_HRO\\_Noteworthy\\_sml.pdf](http://www.mcrel.org/pdf/LeadershipOrganizationDevelopment/0121MM_HRO_Noteworthy_sml.pdf)
- Canole, M., & Richardson, I. (2014). *Draft #2 model principal supervisor instructional standards*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers. Retrieved from <https://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/Principal%20Supervisor%20Instructional%20Standards.pdf>
- Canole, M., & Young, M. (2013). *Standards for educational leaders: An analysis*. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.
- Conley, S., & Cooper, B.S. (Eds.). (2011). *Finding, preparing and supporting school leaders: Critical issues, useful solutions*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

- Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). (2014). *2014 ISLLC standards draft for public comment*. Retrieved from <http://www.ccsso.org/>
- Davis, H., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2012). Innovative principal preparation programs: What works & how we know. *Planning and Changing*, 43(1/2), 25-45.
- Drago-Severson, E., Maslin-Ostrowski, P., & Hoffman, A. (2012). Resisting fragmentation: Calling for a holistic approach to professional practice and preparation for educational leaders. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 7, 44-77.
- Dufour, R., & Marzano, R. J. (2011). *Leaders of Learning: How district school, and classroom leaders improve student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Eck, J. H. (2011). Becoming the best in the world at educating our students. *Noteworthy Perspectives: High Reliability Organizations in Education*, 1-5. Retrieved from <http://www.mcrel.org/>
- Fullan, M. (2003). *The moral imperative of school leadership*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Golding, E., Preston, C., & Huff, J. (2012). Conceptualizing and evaluating professional development for school leaders. *Planning and Changing*, 43(3/4), 223-242.
- Goodwin, B. (2010). *Changing the odds for student success: What matters most*. Denver, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL).
- Grissom, J., & Harrington, J. (2010). Investing in administrator efficacy: An examination of professional development as a tool for enhancing principal effectiveness. *American Journal of Education*, 116, 583-612.

- Harttraft, C. (2009). *Professional development and learning strategies of 12 New Jersey superintendents: What matters to novices, mid-career, and veteran district superintendents*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3363755)
- Hoegh, E. (2008). *Effective practices employed by superintendents' leadership teams that impact student achievement*. (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3311101)
- Honig, M. (2012). District central office leadership as teaching: How central office administrators support principals' development as instructional leaders. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(4), 733-774.
- Louis, K. S., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement.
- Lutrick, E., & Szabo, S. (2012). Instructional leaders' beliefs about effective professional development. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 78(3), 6-12.
- Marzano, R. J., & Waters, J. T. (2009). *District leadership that works: Striking the right balance*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Maze, J. (2009). *Superintendent perceptions of their professional development in leadership for student achievement at Texas regional education service centers* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3447685).
- New York State Council of School Superintendents. (2012). *Snapshot 2012: The 8th triennial study of the superintendency in New York*. Albany, NY: Author.

- Platter, L. M. (2010). *Superintendent professional development* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database (UMI No. 3404310).
- Plotts, T., and Gutmore, D. (2014). The superintendent's influence on student achievement. *AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice*, 11(1), 26.
- Spanneut, G., Tobin, J., & Ayers, S. (2012). Identifying the professional development needs of public school principals based on the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium standards. *NASSP Bulletin*, 96(1), 67-88.
- Stringfield, S., Reynolds, D., & Schaffer, E. (2011). Toward highly reliable, high-quality public schooling. *Noteworthy Perspectives: High Reliability Organizations in Education*, 6-23. Retrieved from <http://www.mcrel.org>
- Taylor, T. (2009). *Superintendent levels of desirability for professional development* (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3435905)
- Wallace Foundation. (2011). *Research findings to support effective educational policies: A guide for policymakers (2nd ed.)*. New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation.
- Washington Association of School Administrators (2014). *2014 WASA new superintendent workshop*. Retrieved from <http://www.wasa-oly.org/>
- Waters, J. T., & Marzano, R. J. (2006). *School district leadership that works: The effect of superintendent leadership on student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
- Weick, K. E., & Sutcliffe, K. M. (2007). *Managing the unexpected: Resilient performance in an age of uncertainty (2nd ed.)*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wyoming Accountability in Education Act, WY Stat § 21-2-204 (2014).
- Wyo. Stat. § 21-2-304 (2014).

## Appendix A

### Wyoming Leadership Professional Development Needs Survey

**1. Please choose the response that best represents your need for each of the following professional development topics using the following scale: 0=No need; 1=Little need; 2=Slight need; 3=Moderate need; 4=Essential need.**

| Topic:  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Direction-setting with the community (vision, mission, goals, strategic planning) |   |   |   |   |   |
| Determining measures to monitor goal progress                                     |   |   |   |   |   |
| Hiring quality personnel  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Providing differentiated professional development for staff                       |   |   |   |   |   |
| Evaluating staff members using a research-based approach                          |   |   |   |   |   |
| Promoting quality instruction that maximizes student learning                     |   |   |   |   |   |
| Building professional learning communities  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Communicating regularly with stakeholders in the wider community                  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Communicating regularly with families   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Working with the media (i.e., newspaper, radio, television)                       |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understanding Wyoming school facilities processes                                 |   |   |   |   |   |
| Using data for decision-making  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understanding accountability (including Wyoming Accountability in Education Act)  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Using technology to improve the school/district                                   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understanding implications of Wyoming legal issues                                |   |   |   |   |   |
| Developing policy   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Understanding financial management, including the Wyoming funding model           |   |   |   |   |   |
| Developing positive relationships with the board                                  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Ensuring equity in school/district culture  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Leading change  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Leading the school improvement process  |   |   |   |   |   |

**2. Please choose up to three additional topics that were not covered above and list them below.**

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Please list your top 3 priority needs for educational leader professional development.**

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Please select your interest in the following professional development delivery methods using the following scale: 0=No Interest; 1=Little Interest, 2=Slight Interest, 3=Moderate Interest, 4=Strong Interest.**

| <b>Delivery method:</b>  | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| University coursework on campus (working toward a degree)  |   |   |   |   |   |
| University coursework online (working toward a degree)   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Formal mentoring program (Using a framework with, for example, face-to-face coaching, regular e-mails and phone contacts, and/or self-assessments and reflective logs) |   |   |   |   |   |
| New Superintendent/principal workshops   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Networking (Meeting regularly through roundtables, workshops, regional collaborations, and/or panel discussions.)  |   |   |   |   |   |
| Professional learning network via technology (i.e. colleagues and/or experts discussing a variety of issues using an electronic medium)                                |   |   |   |   |   |
| Book studies   |   |   |   |   |   |
| Peer observations  |   |   |   |   |   |

**5. Please choose up to three additional delivery methods that were not covered above and list them below.**

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

**6. For each of the following delivery methods, please select the appropriate availability to you in Wyoming using the following scale: 0 = Cannot obtain; 1=Difficult to obtain, 2=Somewhat difficult to obtain, 3=Somewhat easy to obtain, 4=Easy to obtain.**

| <b>Delivery method:</b>                                   | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| University coursework on campus (working toward a degree) |   |   |   |   |   |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| University coursework online (working toward a degree)   |  |  |  |  |  |
| Formal mentoring program (Using a framework with, for example, face-to-face coaching, regular e-mails and phone contacts, and/or self-assessments and reflective logs) |  |  |  |  |  |
| New Superintendent-principal workshop  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Networking (Meeting regularly through roundtables, workshops, regional collaborations, and panel discussions.)   |  |  |  |  |  |
| Professional learning network via technology (i.e. colleagues and experts discussing a variety of issues)  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Book studies   |  |  |  |  |  |
| Peer observations  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other (fill in the blank)  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other (fill in the blank)  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other (fill in the blank)  |  |  |  |  |  |

**7. If you provided additional delivery methods in question 5 above, please list them and describe their availability.**

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

**8. Please select how often you would prefer the following professional development delivery methods.**

| <b>Delivery method:</b>   | Once a week | Once or twice a month | Once or twice each semester | Not desired |
|---|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| University coursework on campus (working toward a degree)   |             |                       |                             |             |
| University coursework online (working toward a degree)  |             |                       |                             |             |
| Formal mentoring program (Using a framework with, for example, face-to-face coaching, regular e-mails and |             |                       |                             |             |

|  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| phone contacts, and/or self-assessments and reflective logs)   |  |  |  |  |
| New Superintendent-principal workshop  |  |  |  |  |
| Networking (Meeting regularly through roundtables, workshops, regional collaborations, and panel discussions.) |  |  |  |  |
| Professional learning network via technology (i.e. colleagues and experts discussing a variety of issues)      |  |  |  |  |
| Book studies   |  |  |  |  |
| Peer observations  |  |  |  |  |
| Other (fill in the blank)  |  |  |  |  |
| Other (fill in the blank)  |  |  |  |  |
| Other (fill in the blank)  |  |  |  |  |

**9. If you provided additional delivery methods in question 5 above, please list them and determine how often you would prefer to have them delivered (Once a week, once or twice a month, or once or twice a semester).**

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Please select the time of year when you would prefer the following professional development delivery methods. Please check all that apply.**

| <b>Delivery method:</b> | Fall | Spring | Fall/Spring | Summer | No preference | Not desired |
|-------------------------|------|--------|-------------|--------|---------------|-------------|
| University coursework   |      |        |             |        |               |             |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| on campus (working toward a degree)  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| University coursework online (working toward a degree)   |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Formal mentoring program (Using a framework with, for example, face-to-face coaching, regular e-mails and phone contacts, and/or self-assessments and reflective logs) |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| New Superintendent-principal workshop  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Networking (Meeting regularly through roundtables, workshops, regional collaborations, and panel discussions.)   |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Professional learning network via technology (i.e. colleagues and experts discussing a variety of issues)  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Book studies   |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Peer observations  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other (fill in the blank)  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other (fill in the blank)  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other (fill in the blank)  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Other (fill in the blank)  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**11. What is your gender?**

Female

Male

**12. What is your position?**

Superintendent

Other Central Office Personnel

Principal

Assistant Principal

**13. Choose the level that best represents your position.**

Central Office

Elementary

Middle School

- High School
- K-12

**14. In what size district do you work?**

- Small (below 500)
- Medium (500-2,000)
- Large (above 2,000)

**15. Please select your school size (Select Not Applicable for central office).**

- 1-100
- 101-300
- 301-700
- 701 or more
- Not Applicable

**16. How many total years of experience do you have as a school and/or district administrator (including this year)?**

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21 or more

**17. How many years of experience in Wyoming do you have in your current role (including this year)?**

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21 or more

18. Please add any additional comments about your professional development needs including topic areas and delivery.

## Appendix B

Dear Wyoming Educational Leader:

We are requesting your support of a doctoral study we are conducting at the University of Wyoming. The survey will be used to help create a needs assessment regarding professional development for educational leaders in Wyoming.

The information gathered may assist policy makers and the University of Wyoming in developing and implementing a Center for Educational Leadership. You will be asked to rate your interest in various professional development topics and preferred delivery methods. You will benefit directly by having an opportunity to reflect on your professional practice and professional development while completing the survey. The survey also consists of a section where you will be asked to provide limited personal and demographic information.

Your identity will remain anonymous, although there is a minimal risk that you could be identified based on your survey responses. Anything that serves to identify you will be deleted. Data will be stored in a secure, password-protected file for up to five years. Only the principal investigators and their advisor will have access to the data. The survey should take seven to ten minutes to complete.

Participation in this study is voluntary, refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue participation at any time. To withdraw after beginning the survey, simply close the browser page of the survey. Incomplete surveys will not be used. Your consent is provided by clicking on the link below to go to the survey website.

The results of this study will be made available to you upon request. To receive the results of this study, please contact one of the principal investigators listed below. We sincerely appreciate your support of this request. If you have any questions, please contact one of us directly at the telephone numbers or email addresses listed below. You may also contact our advisor, Dr. Suzanne Young ([syoung@uwyo.edu](mailto:syoung@uwyo.edu), 307-766-3145). If you have questions about your rights as a participant, please contact the UW IRB Administrator at (307) 766-5320.

Sincerely,

Gerry Chase  
(307) 260-6510  
[gchase@gjcsd1.us](mailto:gchase@gjcsd1.us)

David Barker  
(308) 641-4821  
[dbark13@gmail.com](mailto:dbark13@gmail.com)

[survey link is here]

## Appendix C

# UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

Vice President for Research & Economic Development  
1000 E. University Avenue, Department 3355 • Room 305/308, Old Main • Laramie, WY 82071  
(307) 766-5353 • (307) 766-5320 • fax (307) 766-2608 • [www.uwyo.edu/research](http://www.uwyo.edu/research)

June 8, 2015

Gerry Chase  
Student  
Professional Studies  
University of Wyoming  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Suzanne Young

David Barker  
Student  
Professional Studies  
University of Wyoming  
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Suzanne Young

***Protocol # 20150608GC00825***

Re: IRB Proposal “*Wyoming Education Leaders’ Perceptions of Professional Development Needs and Delivery Methods in an Era of Accountability*”

Dear Mr. Chase and Mr. Barker-

The proposal referenced above qualifies for exempt review and is approved as one that would not involve more than minimal risk to participants. Our exempt review and approval will be reported to the IRB at their next convened meeting Sept 24, 2015.

Any significant change(s) in the research/project protocol(s) from what was approved should be submitted to the IRB (Protocol Update Form) for review and approval prior to initiating any change. Per recent policy and compliance requirements, any investigator with an active research protocol may be contacted by the recently convened Data Safety Monitoring Board (DSMB) for periodic review. The DSMB’s charge (sections 7.3 and 7.4 of the IRB Policy and Procedures Manual) is to review active human subject(s) projects to assure that the procedures, data management, and protection of human participants follow approved protocols. Further information and the forms referenced above may be accessed at the “Human Subjects” link on the Office of Research and Economic Development website: <http://www.uwyo.edu/research/human-subjects/index.html>.

You may proceed with the project/research and we wish you luck in the endeavor. Please feel free to call me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

*Colette Kuhfuss*

Colette Kuhfuss  
IRB Coordinator  
On behalf of the Chairman,  
Institutional Review Board