Professional Development Programs as Sources of Policy Implementation:
What does Minnesota Staff Development Policy Look Like in Action?

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

Scott Edward Alger

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSPHY

Jennifer York-Barr, Adviser

June, 2011

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although concluding this effort is the result of many calculated decisions, it is somewhat surreal to reflect on the possibility that such a goal was ever really within reach. When I first departed from my colleagues to pursue a masters degree at the University of Minnesota, I could not have estimated the impact that the University would have on my perspective or my personal development.

I must express my deepest gratitude to my adviser, Dr. Jennifer York-Barr. Dr. York-Barr has played an inspirational role on this journey from the first evening of my first masters class. She has demonstrated to me that the value of the degree that I have been pursuing was established by generations of doctoral candidates who saw their journey through to the end. Dr. York-Barr has been simultaneously encouraging and resolute. I am thankful to Jennifer for not only seeing me through the duration of this journey, but also for being such a principled representative of the University.

My appreciation for University of Minnesota faculty does not end with Dr. York-Barr. Dr. Karen Seashore is one of the most brilliant thinkers I have or will ever meet; and I am grateful for the opportunity I have had to spend time in classrooms under her direction. Additional committee members, Dr. Deanne Magnusson, Dr. Julie Kalnin, and Dr. Matthew Lau provided thoughtful and encouraging reflection during this process. Dr. Scott McLeod, Dr. Kyla Wahlstrom, Dr. C. Cryss Brunner, Dr. Ann Werner, Dr. Lynn Scearcy, Dr. Michael Rodgriguez, the late Dr. Richard Nunneley, and many other individuals collaborated to not only change my thinking in very meaningful ways, but also my professional practices.

Of course, I must look further back to identify my earliest motivations for reaching beyond what I may have thought was the limit of my potential. I am exceedingly grateful to my parents, L. Lee and Evelyn Alger. The completion of this degree is the most significant way I know to express my gratitude for your commitment to not only your children, but to kids in numerous towns and schools. You are the epitome of public school educators and I hope to serve selflessly as you have. Making do has actually proven to be making better—your lessons are inspirational.

Among the kids from one of those schools are my siblings Steve and Ann, and my friends, Tom, Kevin, James, Aaron, Tom, and Brent. Thank you for toeing the line with me and living up to the expectations of our parents and teachers (most of the time). Reflection on the experiences that we have had together, growing and learning, is a source of rejuvenation for me.

Finally and most importantly, I wish to thank my wife, partner, and best friend, Ann, and our magnificent sons, Ryne and Riley. I know that nothing of significance can be achieved without sacrifice and the full support of those closest to us. I understand that you have each passed on exciting opportunities and disregarded your own interests at times in order for Dad to study. Your sacrifices are deeply appreciated, and I will be indebted to you forever for helping me to achieve this goal. I hope that throughout your lives, you experience the love and support that I feel today!

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to
Ryne and Riley,
partners in the Fellowship of the Doers.

ABSTRACT

A comprehensive examination of professional development practices in two Minnesota school districts was conducted to identify the specific responses of stakeholders to policy stipulations. Through this multi-method case study of state statutes, a significant level of correlation between policy and practice was identified. However, it might not be said that compliance has occurred purposefully. Study findings revealed overt efforts to adopt practices that support collaboration, adult learning, and improved practices in teaching. These efforts fortunately produced a reasonable level of compliance with policy. Several explicit program outcomes specified by policy on the other hand, were not necessarily being targeted as policy-makers may have envisioned.

While the degree of alignment between practice and policy across the districts was a significant focus, numerous factors influencing policy implementation were documented in order to account for the actual practices within professional development programs, as well as the purpose behind those practices. The investigation importantly revealed contextual factors associated with unique communities of practice and the districts' distributed leadership models.

Beyond an examination of activities and work of school district staff relevant to specific policy goals, this study employed a relatively unique "policy-as-the-case" methodology. By utilizing the relevant policy dimensions of leadership, process, and outcomes, the target policies were expressed as their own metric for further examination. This design provides a model adaptable to inquiry into a broad range of policies within the social sciences.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF FIGURES

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

Public schools are inherently subject to the scrutiny of the public as well as governing bodies that monitor and influence broad public interactions. The response of the populace to student performance levels has historically indicated a lack of confidence in the ability of schools to fulfill their institutional obligations. Perceived deficiencies in educational processes were articulated in a formal way as early as 1893 in the *Report of the Committee of Ten* . The *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education* (Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, 1918), *A Nation at Risk* (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), and the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) followed suit with periodic and formal efforts to assess and influence the operations of educational institutions. Most recently, the Race to the Top competitive grant program from the United States Department of Education was introduced in order to stimulate innovation in teaching and learning practices (U. S. Department of Education, 2009).

While these examples illustrate a broad national and historical interest in school operations, other examples of efforts to influence educational institutions on a regional or local scale exist as well. In Vermont and Maine, state-level initiatives produced frameworks to help high schools become more personalized and coherent (Hamann, 2005). In Minnesota, school choice advocates utilized political networks to establish school choice initiatives (Mazzoni, 1991). These initiatives and others have lead in part to what Crowson (2003) refers to as a trend "toward the individual and family as

instruments of their own opportunities, expressed increasingly through market mechanisms" (p. 34).

Examples of efforts to identify and address specific problems in education are abundant. Beyond the articulation of shortcomings however, it is the directive to address specific problems in particular that compels schools to take action. The directives are typically imposed on schools in the form of policies, which are implemented to an extent that is sustainable by a school's unique levels of *capacity* and *will* to contribute to desirable outcomes (see Firestone, 1989).

The scenario of a policy formulated by an outside group, authorized by an authoritative assembly, and delivered for implementation, intersects educational institutions at the level of their professional development programs (also known as and referred to in this paper as "staff development" programs). One example of this intersection is evident in how certain educational policy statements, such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), articulate the expectation that each teacher shall receive "high quality" professional development (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Other policy statements explicitly position professional development advisory councils to facilitate the adoption and implementation of policies through teacher learning opportunities ("Staff Development Program," 2008). These examples demonstrate how professional development programs are intentionally situated to be accountable for policy implementation.

A significant body of professional development literature provides insight into how professional development committees or advisory councils can most effectively

impact practices at the school and classroom level (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, & Polovsky, 2005; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Guskey, 2003; Ingvarson, Meiers, & Beavis, 2005). Studies in this literature highlight the most advantageous characteristics and components of professional development programs, as well as the structural features that support their use. In order to construct conditions that heighten chances of improved practice, program components and supports must be purposefully selected and implemented (Desimone, Porter, Garet et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001).

Additional factors that influence the impact of professional development programs in reaching intended outcomes are presented by the unique contexts of each school. Newmann, King, and Youngs (2000) for example, present five aspects of school capacity that must be managed effectively in order to create conditions conducive to successful organizational change. Other factors may not be managed as easily, but are also significant contributors to how unique contexts interpret and facilitate change efforts. Suppositions about communities-of-practice (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Wenger, 1998), sensemaking in organizations (Weick, 1993), and professional community (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996), all contribute to a better understanding of how multiple perceptions can be created from the observation of a single phenomenon, and in turn persuade novel outcomes from common directives.

While unique factors of school context contribute to varied outcomes of policy implementation efforts, there remains an onus on the people inside of school organizations to direct change efforts (Duke, 2004). The administration of professional

development program components and the oversight of aspects of school capacity is the responsibility of a recognized leadership group in each school setting. Traditionally, the school principal has been responsible for administration and management, but according to recent literature, consideration should be given to leadership functions carried out through a model of participatory or distributed leadership (Bass, 1990; Mayrowetz, Murphy, Louis, & Smylie, 2007; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

This is an assertion that is supported by regulatory policy relevant to the focus of this study as well. In the introduction to its review of professional development studies, Chapter 2 provides evidence of how in some cases distributed leadership is mandated, at least in general terms, for use in professional development programs. A better understanding of the distributed leadership model is therefore important if it is to be utilized appropriately and if the structures of professional development are to be implemented in a manner consistent with policy expectations.

Problem Statement

Much has been written about the components of comprehensive professional development programs, worthwhile participative leadership practices, and policy implementation strategies. There remains however, a gap in our understanding of how the actions of stakeholders contribute to specific intended outcomes and whether the outcomes that are observed are actually products of those stakeholders' efforts.

"If reformers have had their plans for schools, people in schools and local communities have had their own ways of dealing with reforms" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 5). And unique ways of dealing with policy implementation has the potential to lead to

very different and sometimes unintended outcomes. As Carnoy and Rhoten (2002) articulate this dilemma, "policies prescribed by the same paradigm but applied in different contexts produce different practices—so different in some cases—that it is difficult to imagine that they were the result of the same policy" (p. 6).

An opportunity to test assertions regarding policy implementation has been presented in the context of statutes governing professional development programming in Minnesota schools. Before investigating the relevance of such assertions however, it is prudent to first observe the scope of the policy's intent. As Figure 1 illustrates, the policy principally responsible for guiding professional development programming for educators in Minnesota schools is constructed of four explicit subdivisions, which are each in turn comprised of multiple stipulations.

Included in these policy stipulations are clear structural guidelines for the formation and function of professional development advisory committees. Among these requirements is the provision that each school district must submit an annual report to the Minnesota State Department of Education ("Staff Development Program," 2008). However, for the 2005-2006 school year, 4% of the state's 347 school districts did not submit a report, indicating at least some level of non-compliance. Districts that did comply with reporting requirements provided self-reports regarding the format of "high quality" professional development opportunities for all categories of staff members, as well as the number and percentage of staff members who actually participated in the activities (Minnesota Department of Education, 2007b).

Figure 1: Subdivisions of Minnesota Statute 122A.60.
Subdivision 1: Leadership Structures • School leadership teams for professional development. • District leadership team for professional development. • Professional development activities aligned with school and district goals. • Representation of specific stakeholder groups on professional development leadership teams. • Budgetary set-aside exclusively for professional development purposes.
Subdivision 1a: Effective staff development activities. • Focus on research-based strategies that improve student learning. • Opportunities for teachers to practice and improve instructional skills. • Opportunities for teachers to use student data. • Enhance teacher content knowledge and instructional skills. • Align with state and local standards. • Opportunities to build professional relationships and foster collaboration. • Align with plan for alternative teacher pay system (performance pay).
Subdivision 2: Contents of the plan. • Support stable and productive professional communities. • Coaching, professional learning communities, action research, and other job-embedded models. • Maintain strong subject matter focus. • Specialized preparation for issues related to students with special needs and limited English proficiency. • Reinforce national and state standards of effective teaching practice.
Subdivision 3: Staff development outcomes. • Student achievement of state and local education standards. • Meet the needs of a diverse student population, including at-risk, children with disabilities, and gifted children. • Inclusive curriculum for racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse student population. • Staff collaboration, mentoring, and peer coaching programs. • Teach and model violence prevention policy and curriculum. • Provide teachers and other members of site-based management teams with management and financial management skills.

What is not exposed through the collective data shared in the Department of

Education's report to the legislature is the nature of advisory committee functions.

Likewise, what existing literature does not reveal, as Chapter 2 further illustrates, is what

strategies and practices are actually being utilized by school leadership teams to integrate

and synthesize the components of professional development, policy implementation, and

leadership practice (Spillane et al., 2001). Although professional development advisory committees are compelled to function according to rigid guidelines, the level of adherence to these guidelines is relatively unknown.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of staff development statutes (policies) in Minnesota on the structures and activities of advisory committees who lead preK-12 professional development efforts.

Context/Background

Between 1994 and 1996, the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) released three levels of Standards for Staff Development, and also during that time period, proposed a 10% school budget allocation to professional development initiatives (Richardson, 2007). Although the first effort to formally organize a professional organization in the field of professional development occurred in 1969, these significant guidelines were not published for another fifteen years. In the meantime, the state legislature in Minnesota ratified state statutes that placed similar expectations on school districts in the state ("Reserved Revenue for Staff Development," 2006; "Staff Development Program," 2006). Whether expressed as policy or in standards, Minnesota state statutes and the NSDC articulate common ideals for professional development programming.

Research Questions

In the state of Minnesota, each school district is mandated to establish an advisory committee for professional development, as well as building-level committees to oversee

coherent professional development programming at respective school sites. It is not known precisely to what extent the prescriptions of state statutes are followed in order to provide coherent professional development for all teachers.

This study was guided by efforts to answer the following research questions relevant to this scenario:

- How do people engage in the processes that are governed by state professional development statues?

- What are the formal and informal norms of decision-making and leadership within professional development committees?

- What are the intended and unintended outcomes of the coordination and leadership efforts of professional development committees?

- In what ways is staff development policy enacted in school districts?

Design

This study was structured as a single case policy study with exemplars to determine if the actions of professional development committees are congruent with the stipulations of professional development policies in the state of Minnesota. The criteria that were utilized to identify exemplary school districts are described in further detail in Chapter 3. The policy or case that was examined consists of Minnesota §160A.60 ("Staff Development Program," 2008) and Minnesota §160A.61 ("Reserved Revenue for Staff Development," 2006). Through a "policy-as-the-case" methodology, these policies, their language, and their intent, fully constitute the framework that was utilized to determine

answers to the research questions. This strategy provided a unique case study approach, derived directly from the statute outlined in Figure 1, to guide the investigation.

Two school districts were chosen purposefully from the 347 school districts in Minnesota. Throughout the remainder of this thesis, the districts will be referred to as District A and District B. The districts' selection was based on the history of each as an exemplar in the field of professional development. The researcher believes that the objective of understanding staff development policy in practice can best be accomplished by selecting and studying school districts with prominent track records in professional development.

Data was collected in each district through individual interviews, staff surveys, and document analyses. Interviews were conducted with each district's professional development coordinator, two building principals, and with the chairpersons of two site staff development committees (one elementary and one secondary). Staff surveys of elementary and secondary staff members were also conducted in each school district. Surveys were used to obtain feedback from professional development committee members as well as from staff members who do not directly participate in committee functions, but are none the less subject to the decisions of professional development committees. Surveys were used to gather in-depth information about the interactions that occur in support of professional development efforts as well as the specific stipulations of state policies.

Additional data was collected from the review of school and district professional development documents. The contents of the districts' staff development plans were

reviewed, as were the plans provided by individual school sites. Additionally, the districts' financial reports and professional development reports to the Department of Education for the 2007-2008 school year were examined to corroborate or dispute the assertions of perspectives shared in interviews.

Definitions

Professional Development

The term "professional development" is also referred to as "staff development" in practice. Guskey defines professional development as, "those processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn, improve the learning of students" (Guskey, 2000).

Professional Development Coordinator

Professional development coordinator is a title given to the individual whose primary responsibility is the oversight of professional development activities at the district level. While dedicating funds to such a position provides insights into a district's commitment to professional development (Little, 1989), there are also several reasons that a district may be prohibited from utilizing such expertise, including limited resources and small district size.

Professional Development Committee

Professional development committees are advisory groups organized for the purpose of demonstrating leadership in professional development. "Large scale improvement requires concerted action among people with different areas of expertise" (Elmore, 2000, p. 36) and professional development committees with diverse

membership help to expand the group's capacity. According to Minnesota statutes, the committee that oversees district professional development activities is called the district advisory committee.

Distributed Leadership

Distributed leadership is characterized by a sharing of responsibilities for leadership and bears the "ability to empower others" outside of traditional leadership roles (Elmore, 2000). In a system of distributed leadership, "leadership practice is [viewed] in the interaction of leaders and their social and material situations" (Elmore, 2000, p. 27).

Situative Influences

Situative influences are the organizational factors that contribute to unique perspectives and practices within an organization. The concept has its roots in *situative theory*, which is "a set of theoretical perspectives and lines of research with roots in various disciplines including anthropology, sociology, and psychology" (Borko, 2004, p. 4).

The fundamental premise behind situative influences is that experiences within a particular context help to create the reality of that context (Borko, 2004). Commonly cited contextual influences are sensemaking, professional community, and communities of practice (see, Brown & Duguid, 1991; Weick, 1993; Wenger, 1998).

Professional Development Policy

Minnesota Statute 122A.60 and 122A.61 comprise the policies that govern school and school district professional development practices in Minnesota ("Reserved Revenue

for Staff Development," 2006; "Staff Development Program," 2008). Figure 1 provides an overview of the specific features of the more complex statute, §122A.60.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

A limitation of this design is that data collected by the Minnesota Department of Education through the Staff Development Report of District and Site Results and Expenditures, categorizes "high-quality" professional development into categories that do not align with the core or structural components of professional development articulated in some notable scholarly literature (see Desimone, Porter, Garet et al., 2002; 2007b; Garet et al., 2001; "Staff Development Program," 2008). A commitment to research-based professional development structures is likely to lead to assumptions that vary from assumptions grounded in an understanding of the state's professional development reporting system. This misalignment enhances the possibility that the researcher and the research subjects may hold different perceptions or understandings of what constitutes common professional development program components and terminology.

The fact that both participating school districts are located within the same metropolitan area is another limitation to broad assumptions about implications from the resulting data. Although ease of access for the researcher was not a primary objective of site selection efforts, the circumstances that evolved through the development of the study were favorable from a logistical perspective. These circumstances did not, ultimately afford an opportunity for the comparison of activities across diverse settings.

A third limitation of this qualitative study is that summaries of findings were subject to the interpretation of the researcher. Although efforts were made to systematically code data, the researcher's biases are likely to have influenced conclusions on some level (Thomas, 2003).

The researcher entered this project with expertise in professional development gained through formal graduate level instruction, scholarly reflection, professional dialogue, as well as experience as a staff development coordinator and building principal in school districts of approximately 1,700 and 2,700 students. These experiences provide background knowledge that substantially diminishes the potential for implied messages and finite data to go unrecognized (Merriam, 1998). Yet it must be acknowledged that through this background, the researcher may have acquired biases toward practices or philosophies that have influenced data analysis and reporting.

Delimitations

This research effort examined the practices and behaviors of advisory committees and school site committees for professional development, primarily through surveys and interviews with key participants and stakeholders in two school districts. A significant delimitation of this research is that due to the small and purposeful sample, generalizations of results to other school districts are difficult to claim. Through a single case study such as this, it is acknowledged that generalizability would be extremely difficult (Merriam, 1998).

A second delimitation of this study is that the study did not examine the effectiveness of professional development initiatives in impacting teacher practice or

student learning, which are regularly considered the most important intended outcomes of professional development efforts (Guskey, 2000, 2003). The results may be viewed as irrelevant by individuals operating in different contexts, working in states other than Minnesota, or those who are not primarily concerned with the implications of professional development policy structures.

Significance of the Research

As described previously, gaps exist in the literature, as well as in policy evaluation summaries regarding our understanding of adherence to professional development policy structures by professional development advisory committees (Minnesota Department of Education, 2007b; "Staff Development Program," 2008). The author hoped that by examining school districts that have reputations as exemplars in professional development, high-quality models of distributed leadership practice in professional development could be observed and an understanding of the impact of professional development policies could also be realized. These outcomes have in fact been realized, to the extent that the reader finds the results valid and reliable.

Summary

Tyack and Cuban (1995) ask two important questions applicable to an investigation of professional development policy. First they inquire, "How have schools changed reforms, as opposed to reforms changing schools?" and second, "What constitutes 'success' in school reform?" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 5). Success in the facilitation of professional development programs in Minnesota hinges on the degree of congruency of local processes with stipulations in state statutes. But, what are the actual

practices of local committees that have come into full compliance with state statutes? This study examined whether district committees have acquired operating procedures that reflect statute language, or have instead created unique procedures that reflect local perceptions and priorities.

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

 People who for many decades have stayed relatively far from the center of

education's administrative arena (e.g., parents, the business community,

governors, and mayors) are now in the thick of the school-improvement fray.

Families and individuals are demanding independence, choice, and options above

the machinery of government. However, the state has also stepped back in, and

staying out of politics is no longer a strong norm of public schooling. (Crowson,

2003, p. 40)

The escalating call for reform in educational practices (e.g., No Child Left Behind

Act, U.S. Department of United States Department of Education, 2002) has presented

those in public school leadership positions with a growing challenge of balancing efforts

to meet public expectations and to meet self-imposed obligations to educate students in a

responsible and appropriate manner. One example of formal efforts to direct activities in

schools has been displayed by mayors of a growing number of major cities in the United

States, including New York, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, and Detroit. In each of these

cities, the mayor has assumed control of school operations on some level (Crowson,

2003). In spite of mounting pressures for control, school administrators continue attempts

to "recapture the authority of hierarchy in public education" (Crowson, 2003, p. 32).

The fate of educational change however, as Duke (2004) stipulates, "is tied to two

sets of assumptions—those held by the individuals involved in designing change and

those held by the individuals who are subject to the change once it is implemented" (p.

111) . Groups and individuals calling for change were identified above, but those accountable for implementing change efforts are equally, if not more, responsible for the result (Garet et al., 2001).

All competing educational priorities, regardless of their foundation, are analyzed and processed by the professional community at the most germane level of dialogue. Youngs (2001) discovered in a significant review of research, that this "community" is characterized by shared goals for student learning and by meaningful collaboration. To this description of professional community, Newmann, King, and Youngs (2000) added the specifications of professional inquiry by staff to address challenges, and opportunities for staff to influence activities and policies. All of these will be important considerations as this literature review delves further into components of school improvement and change.

Pressure is necessary to initiate change in any system and that pressure may come from a wide variety of sources in educational contexts (Guskey, 2002). It is ultimately the responsibility however, of those inside the educational environment to accomplish legitimate change through available means. Guskey and others have identified professional development programs as the primary vehicle utilized by educators for facilitating change, growth, and improvement within school settings (see also, Firestone et al., 2005; Newmann et al., 2000). It is within the context of professional development that this review will apply the implications of the interaction between leadership actions and policy.

Literature Review Parameters

This review of literature is organized around four related bodies of literature; professional development, distributed leadership, situative influences, and policy. Each section of the literature review will highlight research articulating significant assumptions and will also substantiate the topic's relevance in an educational context based on additional empirical work.

Regarding professional development, a brief history, particularly pertaining to the development of formal organizational structures and standards, will be presented. An explanation of the elements of effective professional development systems will contribute to a clearer conception of the context of this study. The literature review will also describe the basis of distributed leadership and its role in facilitating professional development and school improvement. The critical support offered to models of distributed leadership from situative influences such as communities-of-practice, sensemaking, and professional community are also acknowledged. And finally, the mechanisms of policy directives and frameworks affecting school change and professional development initiatives are reviewed. This examination of policy dynamics is framed as five notable considerations to be utilized in response to policy mandates.

The review will not cover specific learning models, issues related to the quality of instruction, classroom practices, or measures of student learning. The review does not present the pro's and con's of various leadership models and does not analyze specific policy initiatives in great detail. Although each of these factors may contribute to an enhanced understanding of how schools effectively achieve goals of improved student

achievement, they do not directly enlighten our understanding of the professional

development/leadership/policy interface that occurs within efforts to establish systemic

priorities and to encourage action within schools consistent with the expectations of

stakeholders.

<center>Author's Perspective</center>

The author shares the perspective of Duke (2004) who states that "most people

who engage in purposeful change proceed in a reasonably orderly manner. They

determine that change is needed, they decide what the change should be, and they make

plans to achieve the change" (p. 59). The evolving policy environment in education

presents an opportunity to determine whether or not program implementation can occur

within dynamic contexts, and if so, how this seemingly logical progression from the

determination of priorities to program implementation occurs. In exploring these contexts,

it is important to understand professional development programming, because

professional development is the backdrop for this study of how school leadership teams

address various policy influences on important school processes.

The introduction to this chapter established that calls for educational change are

initiated in various sectors of society. The change envisioned by a range of concerned

individuals and groups are typically framed, when authorized in policy, as outcomes for

which educators and educational institutions are ultimately responsible. Whether these

outcomes are related to student performance or school system performance, we do have

insights into factors that affect the success of policy implementation in schools (see

Hamann, 2005; Little, 1989). We have also identified best practices in professional

development that enhance system capacity and make the realization of goals possible (see Borko, 2004; Lester, 2003). What we do not fully understand yet, is the interface between competing policy priorities and the self-identified priorities of school personnel, or more specifically, the role of distributed leadership in balancing the interface of competing policies and local priorities.

<div style="text-align: center;">Review of Studies</div>

<div style="text-align: center;">*Professional Development*</div>

While there are numerous operational definitions of the term "professional development," Guskey (2002) defines it as, "systematic efforts to bring about change in the classroom practices of teachers, in their attitudes and beliefs, and in the learning outcomes of students" (p. 382). A broad collection of professional development literature supports the appropriateness of targeting student achievement goals by affecting teacher knowledge, behavior, and beliefs (Guskey, 2000, 2003; Mizell, 2007; Newmann et al., 2000). While there is agreement on the purpose of professional development, the mechanisms used to target student achievement and other improvement goals have been refined continually over the last thirty years.

Professional development was known previously in its evolution as "staff development," and first received formal and organized attention in 1969, when a meeting of individuals responsible for staff development in schools was organized in Minneapolis. The outcome of this meeting was the eventual formation of the NSDC, which was renamed Learning Forward in 2010. Subsequent to the initial gathering, in 1976 and 1978, respectively, the NSDC adopted a constitution and incorporated as a non-profit

organization, dedicated to promoting best practices in teacher learning. Since these initial

organizational milestones, the NSDC released three levels of standards for staff

development between 1994 and 1996, adopted a staff development code of ethics in 2000,

and released revised standards for staff development in 2001 (Mizell, 2007; Richardson,

2007). National Staff Development Council (Learning Forward) activities have led to

more formal and progressive standards for supporting school and teacher growth through

professional development programs.

In Minnesota, acknowledgement of these standards has led to enacted legislation

that establishes professional development programs as required components of school

programming and budgets, as well as systematic lobbying coordinated by Education

Minnesota, the state's principal teacher's union, and other groups. One statute establishes

clear mandates for advisory council membership, specifying that a majority of the

members of the committee must be teachers (as opposed to central office personnel or

administrators). This statute also requires appropriate activities that emphasize best

practices in professional development such as meaningful professional relationships and

collaboration. Furthermore, Minnesota public schools must have a school board-approved,

district-wide staff development plan that establishes an explicit evaluation system and a

formal means for reporting evaluation results to the Minnesota Department of Education

("Staff Development Program," 2008).

A second state statute pertaining to professional development in Minnesota public

schools mandates a budgetary set-aside for use strictly within the parameters of

professional development programs. Although the stipulations of this statute have been

waived by the legislature in the recent era of state budget shortfalls, it was relevant during the period of this study. The set-aside has been equal to two percent of each district's basic revenue. Additional stipulations mandate that the set-aside revenue be distributed for use in supporting district as well as site professional development initiatives ("Reserved Revenue for Staff Development," 2006). These statutes demonstrate the structured and systematic manner in which an institutional emphasis can be and has been placed on the role of professional development in facilitating school improvement. The statutes also demonstrate a commitment to placing program implementers in the role of program designers.

Effective and Comprehensive Professional Development: What the Research Tells Us

Two significant research efforts conducted concurrently by a single team of researchers, have presented consistent conclusions regarding the components of effective professional development (Desimone, Porter, Garet et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001). In Desimone et al.'s (2002) longitudinal study, and Garet et al.'s (2001) cross-sectional study, we find a consistent framework for understanding the characteristics of effective professional development. This framework has differentiated two sets of fundamental components. *Core components* are the characteristics that make up the focus of professional development efforts, and *structural components* are the characteristics that support and make effective professional development possible. The core components are, (a) focus on content knowledge, (b) opportunities for active learning, and (c) coherence with other learning activities. The three structural components that each study identified are, (a) form of the activity, (b) collective participation, and (c) duration (Desimone,

22

Porter, Garet et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001). Explicitly stated, structural features affect core features, which are significantly related to increasing teacher knowledge and changing classroom practice (Desimone, Porter, Birman, Garet, & Yoon, 2002).

These findings are not reflective of many research findings in the field of professional development, only because researchers have traditionally focused on individual activities by evaluating programs for their achievement outcomes and have focused less often on broader quality issues (Desimone, Porter, Birman et al., 2002; Guskey, 2000). The distinction made here between achievement outcomes and quality issues of professional development is between merit and worth. On one hand, many researchers and models utilize merit to determine and report program success (Borko, 2004; Guskey, 2000). Merit establishes the ability of the program to reach specific outcomes, but worth is the extent to which results are valuable to the organization's integrated mission and goals (Guskey, 2000). Given professional development's dependency on teachers to bear the burden of change and given the field's emphasis on collaboration and professional relationships, the lens of program "worth," utilized by Desimone et al. (2002) and Garet et al. (2001) fittingly emphasizes the unique character and context of individual organizations.

Core Components

Subject matter focus. Because teachers work with children to develop a greater understanding of subject matter, it is logical that a substantial emphasis of professional development for teachers be placed on the core component of content knowledge. In fact, Guskey (2003) found in a review of 21 lists of professional development quality

23

indicators, that the "enhancement of teachers' content and pedagogical knowledge" (p. 749) was cited more frequently than any other professional development characteristic on the lists. This refers primarily to curriculum content, but also entails a focus on teaching practices that target the ways students learn particular subject content (Firestone et al., 2005; Garet et al., 2001; Ingvarson et al., 2005). In four studies conducted by Ingvarson et al. (2005), teachers' professional development was most consistently impacted by the level of content focus, "especially those [programs] that focused on how students learn the content and on methods to teach the content" (p. 15).

Active learning. In addition to focusing on appropriate content, teachers should actually participate in activities that model best practices in instructional techniques. The core component of active learning opportunities entails more than modeling or observing. Active learning involves professional discourse, observing *and* being observed, presenting, leading, and ultimately, using learning to engage in professional responsibilities with purpose (Garet et al., 2001). Garet et al. identified 18 different types of active learning, which were made more noteworthy by Desimone et al. (2002), who established that the use of a preferred strategy with children, was increasingly more likely when teachers themselves experienced opportunities to actively participate in the same type of active learning. In fact, the consideration of active learning in a professional development model explains a "good deal of the variation among teachers in the effectiveness of the professional development they experienced" (Desimone, Porter, Garet et al., 2002).

Coherence. Teacher participation in professional development that focuses on appropriate curriculum content or practices is critical, but these efforts must be incorporated in a manner that is coherent with teacher goals, as well as district and state standards (Garet et al., 2001; Newmann et al., 2000). Firestone et al. (2005) looked for coherence in a comparison of three districts' program implementation efforts and found that the district with the most coherent professional development focus had the most significant influence on teaching practice. In fact, if activities are not coherent and consistent with teacher goals, improvement efforts can actually be impeded, so communication with others to foster a better understanding of goals and to sustain motivation is essential (Garet et al., 2001).

Structural Supports

Even if core features are accounted for in the planning and facilitation of professional development activities, it is still important to utilize important structural supports to increase the likelihood of success. Here, Garet et al.'s (2001) and Desimone et al.'s (2002) structural features provide a road map for program facilitation. Considerations of the type of activities utilized for staff learning, the duration of those activities, and the collective participation of all appropriate members are important considerations and increase the likelihood of utilizing the three core features (content knowledge focus, active learning opportunities, and coherence) successfully (Desimone, Porter, Garet et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001).

Reform type. The first structural feature is the type of activity, or reform type. This feature is utilized to facilitate professional learning and is an important consideration

that ideally consists of active learning opportunities such as study groups, coaching, or other participative formats (Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). In reality however, the reform type often takes on forms that are less conducive to adult learning, such as workshops or presentations, which is why this structural feature requires deliberate attention (Firestone et al., 2005; Newmann et al., 2000).

Collective participation. An additional factor that should be purposefully addressed when implementing professional development is how meaningful conversations are fostered through collective participation (Garet et al., 2001; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). Lester (2003) demonstrated the relevance of the consideration of this structural component through a study of criteria for effective professional development, in which teachers reported that they preferred small groups that supported cooperation, discussions, and shared decision-making. The more teachers are engaged in all facets of professional development planning, the more likely they are to affect the school's capacity to improve student achievement (Newmann et al., 2000).

Duration. Following the determination of the most appropriate type of activity, further consideration should be given to the duration of the activity (Firestone et al., 2005). Recent literature advocates for professional development to be sustained over time (Garet et al., 2001; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). This structural feature includes the number of contact hours that staff members spend engaged in the activities, as well as the span of time that passes until the conclusion of the program (Desimone, Porter, Garet et al., 2002).

If appropriate steps are taken to plan activities that support learning and the duration of the activities allows for comprehension and synthesis, and if all other core

26

and structural components are accounted for, then the designers of professional development should consider the collective participation of groups of teachers from the same school, grade, or department that intend to affect student learning in a similar manner (Desimone, Porter, Garet et al., 2002). By enabling groups of teachers to work together, coherence with other learning activities can be enhanced, something that does not occur when teachers meet for only short periods of time at workshops or when teachers attempt to engage in professional development independently (Garet et al., 2001).

School capacity. If school leadership is to demonstrate competence in facilitating effective professional development programs in a manner consistent with the stipulations described above, then there is one additional consideration that overlaps the core and structural components already discussed. Newmann et al. (2000) completed a two year comparative case study of nine elementary schools to study school capacity, or "the collective power of the full staff to improve student achievement schoolwide" (p. 261). This study utilized factors similar to those prescribed by Desimone et al. (2002) and Garet et al. (2001) to uncover and underscore the significance of contextual factors influencing the success of professional development efforts. Professional development, as Newmann et al. discovered, is more likely to be successful if it addresses teacher learning and all aspects of school capacity.

According to Newmann et al.'s (2000) description of school capacity, comprehensive professional development as described above, further develops and influences school capacity, which in turn has the potential to improve instruction and student achievement. Some factors of school capacity associated with comprehensive

professional development that should receive attention are principal leadership, per

teacher funding, assistance from outside experts, district and state policy, teachers'

knowledge and dispositions, professional community, program coherence, and technical

resources (Newmann et al.). These factors are interactive and cross boundaries between

neatly packaged components of effective professional development programs as well as

the previously-discussed structural features that support professional development. "The

collective power of the full staff to improve student achievement schoolwide" (Newmann

et al., p. 261) is a function and a result of deliberate decision-making and actions.

The single factor that Newmann et al. (2000) found to be most strongly correlated

with comprehensive professional development is the school's initial capacity. So even

prior to planning or engaging in professional development activities, it is important to

address all aspects of school capacity to appropriately align efforts with the needs that

exist in a particular context, and at a particular point in time, because all factors affecting

student achievement in a particular school setting may not be neatly situated in or

accounted for by a particular model. Borko (2004) suggested that a situative perspective

be utilized to examine local contexts from a variety of perspectives because the context in

which each school is situated becomes a part of what and how people learn. Therefore, in

each context, factors of school capacity should be enhanced to meet the unique learning

and organizational needs of its members.

Summary of Professional Development Literature

The goal of professional development programs is to positively impact student

achievement through teacher learning and improved teaching practices (Guskey, 2002).

Research findings in professional development indicate that programs that effectively accomplish this goal are built around certain core features that are supported by coherent organizational and structural supports (Desimone, Porter, Garet et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001). Collective participation in active learning, over a sustained period of time, provides an increased likelihood for enhanced teacher knowledge and skills (Garet et al.).

Professional development research also provides insights into the conditions that make program success more likely. Although many programs "generally do not have a coherent, coordinated approach to professional development and instruction . . . an increased emphasis on the importance of strategic, systematic planning for professional development may encourage both districts and schools to focus efforts on high-quality [program development]" (Desimone, Porter, Garet et al., 2002, p. 105). Efforts to improve programming should examine local context from multiple perspectives and consistently be focused on attempts to build coherence and system capacity (Firestone et al., 2005; Newmann et al., 2000).

Efforts to construct efficient and effective systems that reflect research findings in professional development are supported and encouraged by policy guidelines and standards. The NSDC has established standards that emphasize the importance of impacting student learning through appropriate structural design and content focus (NSDC, 2001). In addition, state statutes such as Minnesota's staff development laws, require that school and district-sponsored activities, "enhance teacher content knowledge and instructional skills" and "focus on the school classroom and research-based strategies that improve student and learning" ("Staff Development Program," 2008). These policy

guidelines demonstrate an evident correlation between research findings in professional

development and espoused standards of practice in the field.

Leadership in Education

Policy guidelines are supportive of suitable leadership models for the oversight of

professional development as well. Minnesota §122A.60 Staff Development Program,

states:

> The board must establish an advisory staff development committee to develop the
>
> [staff development] plan, assist professional development teams in developing a
>
> site plan consistent with the goals of the plan, and evaluate staff development
>
> efforts at the site level. A majority of the advisory committee and the site
>
> professional development team must be teachers representing various grade levels,
>
> subject areas, and special education. The advisory committee must also include
>
> nonteaching staff, parents, and administrators. ("Staff Development Program,"
>
> 2006)

The mandates of this state statute clearly establish the expectation that leadership in

professional development will be distributed among various involved stakeholders.

Leadership in education however, does not necessarily or typically conform to the

characteristics of "distributed leadership."

Before further describing the essence of a distributed leadership model and its

relevance to the topics being reviewed here, a more accurate conception of traditional

educational leadership should be presented. "Educational leadership [in general] involves

the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination, and use of the social, material,

and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning" (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 24). Traditionally, school principals have been the figureheads and "principal" actors responsible for facilitating these activities.

Principals however, have not typically been selected because they demonstrated the skill set necessary to accomplish these tasks, but because they have demonstrated traits that we expect in educational settings, such as the ability to simultaneously manage multiple tasks or projects (Elmore, 2000). Studies have indicated that principals are not prepared for the evolving challenges confronting the position. There is a documented disconnect between principal preparation programs and the new demands and conditions that they face in their work. Some policymakers, as well as practitioners and researchers, have advocated for reform in preparation programs to correct the existing misalignment between skills and job demands (Herrington & Wills, 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2005).

Another formal response to the documented inadequacies of leadership models that draw attention to a solitary leader is apparent in movements toward participative models of leadership. Policy mandates, combined with mounting pressures for more diverse skills from leaders, provide adequate motivation for schools to adopt alternative leadership models ("Staff Development Program," 2008). Beyond the need to demonstrate conformity with policy mandates, principals and other school leaders may realize a more supportive professional environment and greater self-efficacy for teachers, by empowering additional staff members in leadership efforts (Arnold, Arad, Rhoades, & Drasgow, 2000).

Distributed Leadership: What the Research Tells Us

The mounting pressure being applied to the principalship comes from an increased focus on, and accountability for student achievement; and specifically from an emphasis on the performance of student subgroups (Herrington & Wills, 2005). Concurrently, the emphasis for school leadership is shifting from management tasks to developing others, influencing commitment, and implementing a participative model of leadership (Arnold et al., 2000; Elmore, 2000; Mayrowetz et al., 2007). As a result of the promotion of shared-leadership philosophies, and the compounding effect of policy pressures that call for shared leadership, it is becoming more evident that "large scale improvement requires concerted action among people with different areas of expertise and a mutual respect that stems from an appreciation of the knowledge and skill requirements of different roles" (Elmore, 2000, p. 36).

Simultaneously acknowledging and studying various roles involved in shared leadership models rather than focusing on individual leaders, supports the principles of distributed leadership (Spillane et al., 2001). In this model, individuals are able to use strengths, competencies, skills, and knowledge in concert with the actions of others to accomplish organizational goals (Elmore, 2000).

Understanding the complexity of distributed leadership however, requires an examination that extends beyond interpersonal interactions and influence. According to Spillane et al. (2001), leadership practice in this view is "constituted in the interaction of leaders and their social and material situations" (p. 27). Sergiovanni (2007) further articulates the interconnectedness of people and contexts by suggesting that

organizational norms, commitments, and levels of professionalism are all components of, if not situational substitutions for leadership. While distributed leadership cannot accurately be depicted as the direct source of improved instructional practices or student achievement, it does support a goal of greater and more purposeful collaboration, and an alternative to the tradition of teacher isolation (Mayrowetz et al., 2007).

Spillane et al.'s (2001) frequently-cited longitudinal study discovered that moving beyond a focus on formal leaders toward a broader focus on leadership practice underscores the need to deliberately transform leadership practice. While pressures exist to transform leadership practice, it is critical that assessments of leadership effectiveness be re-aligned as well, so that empowering leadership behaviors are accepted and expected in educational settings. As Arnold et al. (2000) discovered in the final part of three leadership studies, previous conceptions of leader performance cannot account for empowering, distributed leadership behaviors (see also, Kezar, 2000).

Mayrowetz et al. (2007) have nested the components of distributed leadership in a "sturdy" and "robust" model of work redesign in order to help predict the success of distributed leadership in various educational contexts (see Job Characteristics Model in Hackman & Oldham, 1980). In an effort to institute a rationale for considering distributed leadership, Mayrowetz et al. (2007) have established the following:

. . . if distributed leadership in schools is to begin, teachers must start to conceive

of their roles differently and must assume responsibilities beyond classrooms for

purposes of overall school improvement. As teachers' jobs are redefined in this

model, so too must administrators' jobs if they are to maintain their function as

supporting teachers and setting the conditions for their success. (p. 70)

As roles change, certain specific characteristics of distributed leadership must emerge as

deliberate considerations of work redesign and action. Sustaining the effectiveness of

Hackman and Oldham's model is the stipulation that tasks must be designed and

implemented purposefully. It is important to delineate the characteristics that enhance an

organization's ability to function efficiently, from the tasks that comprise the

organization's work (Mayrowetz et al., 2007).

In the case of distributed leadership, characteristics such as expanding skill

variety, establishing the significance of tasks, maintaining a focus on critical tasks,

enabling collective autonomy, and using accurate feedback, must be considered and

incorporated deliberately (Mayrowetz et al., 2007). If these characteristics are

implemented into a model of distributed leadership appropriately they hold the potential

to help a leadership group perform specific tasks such as providing and selling a vision,

providing encouragement and recognition, obtaining resources, adapting standard

operating procedures, monitoring improvement efforts, and handling disturbances (Heller

& Firestone, 1995).

According to Mayrowetz et al. (2007), purposefully utilizing these characteristics

to effectively carry out tasks, provides benefits beyond the intended accomplishment of

goals. Employees are the beneficiaries of affective outcomes such as meaningfulness

through significant work and increased self-efficacy. A potential pitfall of this highly-

recommended leadership model however, is that because more verbal interactions occur,

communication can actually become more difficult, resulting in coalitions and bargaining (Bass, 1990).

Summary of Distributed Leadership Literature

There are risks and benefits to incorporating a distributed model of leadership. It appears, however, that groups whose members participate in conversations to form their own goals, "demonstrate the greatest increases in compliance and productivity" (Bass, 1990, p. 261). In order to establish successful practices adequate for negotiating potential pitfalls, teachers must learn how to perform leadership tasks such as maintaining a focus on tasks and using feedback (Mayrowetz et al., 2007).

Within the distributed leadership model, principals maintain important roles. First, they are required to observe and preserve conditions that enable groups to complete meaningful work. Factors such as organizational structure, professional culture, relational trust, factors of politics within the organization, and the overall stability of the organization must all be evaluated and maintained. Furthermore, boundaries between individuals, groups, and the tasks in which they immerse themselves must constantly be managed (Mayrowetz et al., 2007). The ability to effectively fulfill these responsibilities requires comprehensive knowledge of the leadership model and a skill set unlike that required by traditional leadership domains.

Situative Influences

A focused study of distributed leadership cannot fully illustrate the interactions occurring within an organization or the influences that shape those interactions. Borko (2004) presents a theoretical-based argument for the need to improve professional

development evaluation. Imbedded within this argument is a justification to look closer at the diverse factors that influence group interactions.

Borko (2004) uses Situative Theory, "a set of theoretical perspectives and lines of research with roots in various disciplines including anthropology, sociology, and psychology" (p. 4), to demonstrate the importance of considering contextual factors when examining school settings. By utilizing this broad perspective, situative tradition encourages and "allows examination of teaching, learning, and professional development in this case simultaneously from multiple perspectives" (Borko, 2004, p. 4). This is important because teachers' learning and work cannot be understood outside of the social system in which they occur. Borko refers to "Situative Theory" through a theoretical or descriptive lens. This paper uses the term "situative" from a practitioner's perspective to describe a range of influences that affect educators' work and interactions. Of primary interest to the author is the term's ability to accommodate and account for a broad range of behaviors, interactions, and influences in a prescriptive manner.

Situative Influences: What the Research Tells Us

Within the existence of a distributed leadership model, personal experiences and interactions occur, simultaneously providing meaning to participants and support to the system. These unique attributes of an organization have been referred to collectively by Garet et al. (2001), Borko (2004), Newmann et al. (2000), and Newmann et al. (2001) as "context." Each local context bears distinctive traits that contribute to group members' collective experience of the organization's characteristics and functions.

As teams develop, certain phenomena of context development may be expected. These significant categories of meaning and support are documented in literature as (a) communities-of-practice, (b) sensemaking, and (c) professional community. All aspects are at once distinct, and simultaneously three facets of one experience. These aspects are the articulation of a common experience and are the negotiation of meaning and understanding. Communities-of-practice, sensemaking, and professional community, are also supports that enable individuals to work collectively to accomplish organizational goals.

Communities-of-practice is a term that accounts for how both the espoused and actual practices of individuals within an organization hold significance. Brown and Duguid (1991) refer to these practices as canonical (espoused) and non-canonical (actual). Canonical practices illustrate the conventional descriptions of *what we say we do*, while observations of non-canonical practices reveal *what we actually do* (Spillane et al., 2001). Although an organization promotes certain practices; narration, collaboration, and social construction between group members contributes to the development of a unique contextual language and understanding that often varies from what the organization advocates (Brown & Duguid, 2001). These communication patterns of narration, collaboration, and social construction enable the existence of non-canonical practices within a system defined by canonical protocols.

At the heart of this "situative influence's" essence is the term *practice*. Wenger (1998) illustrates the concept of practice as both explicit and tacit, as knowing and doing. In order to appropriately apply notions such as canonical and non-canonical practices to a

focused dialogue of organizational dynamics, the primal theoretical underpinnings of their application should be considered. Communities-of-practice evolve from and are comprised of tools, commitments, symbols, criteria, and behaviors. Although these features of community and others are rarely articulated, they are unmistakable and indispensable components of unique organizations (Wenger, 1998).

Also contributing to a more complete understanding of organizational context is the ability of organization members to collectively produce knowledge. The act of creating a uniformly accepted perspective and representing that perspective is referred to by Boland and Tenkasi (1995) as perspective-making. Groups that engage in conversations about tasks and goals, not only create a shared understanding of their context, but also demonstrate the greatest increases in compliance and productivity (Bass, 1990).

When varying and perhaps unfamiliar perspectives are shared between sub-groups in an organization, perspective-taking occurs. Perspective-taking is the acknowledgement of opposing viewpoints. This process is essential for the success of an organization. In fact, failure to successfully engage in the perspective-taking process can actually lead to a breakdown of the team (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995). Sharing perspectives, along with an appreciation of canonical and non-canonical practices, provides group members with a basis for making sense of organizational practices and operational tasks.

Embedded in the development of communities-of-practice as well as distributed leadership frameworks, is the experience of sensemaking. "The basic idea of sensemaking is that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to

create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs" (Weick, 1993, p. 635). "An individual's cognition cannot be understood merely as a function of mental capacity because sense-making is enabled (and constrained) by the situation in which it takes place" (Spillane et al., p. 23). Sensemaking is not synonymous with the common routines acquired through communities-of-practice. Sensemaking's emphasis is on the cognitive domains of perception and understanding, not actions or practices.

Through shared meaning derived from communities-of-practice and sensemaking, come more elaborate frameworks and closer ties, which are important characteristics of the final category of meaning and support discussed here. Louis et al.'s (1996) analysis of case studies of school-focused, interdisciplinary professional community, allows the focus of this conversation of group dynamics, influence, and effectiveness to conclude on the topic of student achievement. In considering all of the factors described above that impact group interactions and behaviors, "attention also needs to be paid to the development of professional community: teachers' collective engagement in sustained efforts to improve practice" (Louis et al., 1996, p. 758).

Professional community is a movement toward shared norms and values, a collective focus on student learning, collaboration, deprivatized practice, and reflective dialogue (Louis et al., 1996). Shared norms and values are evidence of strong structural cohesion. Friedkin (1993) conducted a longitudinal case study that concluded with an observation of the strong personal ties that increase community members' awareness of each other's views on new issues. The structural cohesion established by professional communities can also help to support those communities' progress toward deprivatized

practice, reflective dialogue, and the capacity to influence activities and policies (Newmann et al., 2000). In regard to professional development in particular, the stronger a group's sense of professional community, the greater the impact their combined efforts will have on teachers' knowledge and practice (Ingvarson et al., 2005).

Emphasizing the importance of communities-of-practice, sensemaking, and professional community as considerations of distributed leadership implementation, is the fact that all can be initiated and subsequently influenced by policy and administrative practice. School leaders can build culture, create coherence, and support innovative efforts within the organization (Louis et al., 1996). Providing additional relevance to this position in regard to distributed leadership is the finding that, "professional communities are more likely to thrive in schools with flexible governance arrangements" (Louis et al., p. 762).

Summary of Situative Influences Literature

From certain perspectives, even within a distributed leadership model, activities may appear to be little more than orchestrated individual behaviors. In order to fully understand the conditions and factors that influence behaviors and the development of shared perspectives, all conditions of local context must be considered. Although Selznick (1943) approached the topic of how groups work together from a different point of view, his observation illustrates the essence of how collective experiences aid the construction of local context:

> The day-to-day behavior of the group becomes centered on specific problems and
> proximate goals which have primarily an internal relevance. Then, since these

activities come to consume an increasing proportion of the time and thoughts of the participants, they are—from the point of view of actual behavior—*substituted* for the professed goals. (p. 48)

Understanding the dynamics of communities-of-practice, sensemaking, and professional community is essential to teachers and principals functioning within a system of distributed leadership. As work becomes increasingly more complex, the organization's protocols become less and less likely to sufficiently support leadership's ability to support change efforts. Therefore individuals must learn to be cognizant of their actions and learn to carry out tasks within the context of the organization, continually adapting to changing membership and circumstances (Brown & Duguid, 1991).

The Educational Policy Environment

Policy is a formal regulatory action used either to impede or to initiate certain behaviors. The implementation or activation of policy is about initiating change. It is about altering existing conditions through formal procedures authorized by a governing body in response to dissatisfaction with those conditions. Further discussion and descriptions of educational policy will refer intermittently to the terms "policy" and "change."

Pressures for change originate from various groups, networks, and movements and are made possible by available revenues (Mazzoni, 1991). Mazzoni's noteworthy study of the development of school choice options in Minnesota focused intently on state-level policy formation. This study revealed that regimented organizational elites and policy entrepreneurs articulate and deliver the demands of a wide variety of societal

influences to top officials. These officials must then respond in accordance with available revenues to chart a new course in the areas of concern.

While this discourse of pressures and needs often occurs at a state or national level, there are also similar and frequent interactions in local school communities. In local school communities, pressures are exerted by parent groups, organized teacher groups, and city agencies (Crowson, 2003). The group responsible for reacting to pressures in these scenarios is the dominant coalition, comprised of administrators and other top school officials (Firestone, 1989). The dominant coalition consequently must use a wide variety of strategies to address the concerns of federal, state, and local policy demands in a systematic and efficient manner. This task of policy implementation, the job of introducing change into a system, is influenced by a wide variety of contextual factors and variables, including the organization's overall capacity to carry out the change efforts (see Youngs, 2001).

Educational Policy: What the Research Tells Us

Much professional development literature focuses on the characteristics of professional development, not on organizational strategies for supporting activities or using professional development as a means of implementing policy (Desimone, Porter, Birman et al., 2002). Before an emphasis can be placed on organizational strategies and before successful implementation strategies can be formulated, we must have a better understanding of policy cycles and influences. Many models exist that provide insights into policy environments and within these models patterns of interactions, reactions, and

influence come into view. From these patterns, emerge five significant and relevant considerations in educational policy literature.

The first consideration of educational policy is the impetus for change. Why change? What prompts us to consider changing practices? Educational leaders who respond to calls for change must understand the motives of policy-makers and change advocates. Failure to direct responses toward intended goals could result in negative outcomes for the organization as well as individuals. Policies developed in response to calls for change must be considerate of the motivations for change.

Duke (2004) identifies two possible motivations for change in his text about the challenges of change in education. The first possible motivation for change is a need to address specific problems; the second is to respond to new opportunities. These categories are broad categories, to which responses are often framed in policy. More specifically however, Duke distinguishes four basic orientations of change in educational settings. In some cases, *restoration* is needed to return the organization back to previous conditions. In other cases, *accommodations* are needed so that school systems can meet challenges under difficult circumstances. The third option, the desire for *improvement*, is often touted by government officials as the appropriate response to perceived problems (Crowson, 2003; Duke, 2004). Finally, finding solutions to specific problems or finding creative ways to respond to new opportunities may be expressed as the need for *transformation*. Transformations are often comprised of and induced by complex societal changes occurring inside and outside of educational institutions, such as changing economic conditions (Duke, 2004).

Regardless of the nature of calls for educational reform, the impetus must be identified and considered, because the second consideration apparent in educational policy literature is alignment of the policy's orientation with an appropriate policy function. Policies are designed to do something; they are synonymous with action, and therefore their function and the second policy consideration is the prescribed activity.

Fowler (2004) presents Lowi's Techniques of Control as policy functions that illustrate the role of applied policies. Policy, as formulated by policy-makers at any level, may be *distributive* in nature and provide goods, services, or privileges. Policy may also be *regulative*, and present formalized rules in the form of laws, rules, regulations, or guidelines. Finally, policy may serve a *redistributive* function by shifting resources or authority from one group to another. Each of these functions may be considered an appropriate mechanism for establishing a formal response to identified needs, depending on the original motivation for pursuing change.

Selecting an appropriate instrument for the delivery of policy to various contexts is the third consideration apparent in educational policy literature. "How will the policy be presented" and "how will the policy be supported" are questions to be addressed when considering implementation procedures. Firestone (1989) identifies *mandates* and *inducements* as the two considerations for the delivery of policy specifications to appropriate contexts. Mandates may be used when directives are necessary to compel compliance. Mandates are articulated as expectations and usually offer no alternatives. Inducements, conversely, may be used as a form of reward when the perception of policy

is burdensome, but arguably worth the effort in light of anticipated compensation (Firestone, 1989).

The fourth consideration is the contemplation of factors that influence policy implementation. The two major components of this category are the *will* of organization members to comply with the expectations of policy and the *capacity* of the organization to fulfill its obligations to the policy (Firestone, 1989). According to Firestone, will is the "commitment to a decision" and capacity is the "wherewithal to implement policy" (p. 157). Will and capacity are best illustrated when considered in correlation with the policy instruments of mandates and inducements described above.

Capacity, like many of the factors discussed in this literature review is a multi-faceted notion. Youngs (2001) reviewed five different policy implementation efforts facilitated through professional development in order to better understand the influence of capacity. This study utilized teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions; professional community; and program coherence as three measures for the success of professional development programs to impact school capacity and found that school capacity can be strengthened by teachers' involvement in collaborative practices (Youngs, 2001). However, even in contexts where organizational capacity has been developed, if there is a lack of will to participate or comply, mandates are advisable. In these cases, members are directed to carry out the principles of policy.

When recipients are willing, but the organization's capacity is not adequate for supporting implementation, inducements are advisable (Firestone, 1989). Inducements are offered to participants as a motivating reward for demonstrating a commitment to

policy guidelines. Although inducements may be a fitting response in many cases, there

are usually additional considerations of cost that must be weighed (Firestone, 1989).

Much may be said about motivations for implementing change, but the availability of

revenue to support change is a very influential factor in how top officials respond to

pressures and channel efforts to design and implement policy (Mazzoni, 1991).

The management of factors that influence policy implementation is the fifth

consideration. These actions required to manage policy implementation cannot, unlike

other considerations, be defined through the use of two polar terms such as mandate and

inducement or divided into three functions such as distributive, regulative, and

redistributive (Firestone, 1989; Fowler, 2004). Managers of change in education, the

individuals and groups responsible for implementing policy initiatives, must be cognizant

of pre-existing conditions such as the motivation for change, as well as the function of the

changes imposed through policy, the instruments implicit in policy language, and the

conditions that influence implementation (Dutro, Fisk, Koch, Roop, & Wixson, 2002).

These factors, although not collectively synthesized coherently in existing literature,

comprise the playing field of strategizing for policy implementation.

To identify an appropriate model for direct application to committee or leadership

work centered around policy in educational settings, group members might consider

Desimone et al.'s (2002) District Management and Implementation Strategies for further

guidance. Additional guidance is also provided by Firestone's (1989) contingencies that

affect the likelihood of implementation and ways that schools' relationships with districts

facilitate reform. Duke (2004) has also contributed six functions necessary for

implementation and Youngs (2001) has identified three components of school capacity that influence policy implementation.

To succinctly summarize or outline the factors that influence policy implementation for the benefit of leadership groups is no minor undertaking. Further confounding efforts to map the terrain of policy formation, dissemination, and implementation, is the fact that policies emerging from a single authority, but applied in different contexts, will likely require different strategies (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). Managing policy implementation is comprised of the tasks of overseeing and directing all program components and considerations. These tasks must be completed in a manner that simultaneously satisfy demands for change and supports the organization's ability to comply.

Summary of Educational Policy Literature

The five considerations of policy implementation in educational settings can be summarized succinctly into the following progression of questions: (a) what is the motivation for new policy, (b) what will the new policy do, (c) how will policy directives be accomplished, (d) what factors will influence successful implementation, and (e) how will the policy implementation process be managed. Although this progression of questions is not articulated in any single research summary, there is a logical connection between the findings of numerous research efforts. By understanding the supports prescribed by research in educational policy, the dominant coalition of administrators and other leaders can take direct steps toward successful implementation.

In order to support this paper's purpose to examine the interface between policy and practice, the discussion of educational policy implementation must deliberately conclude by way of a direct association with professional development efforts. Little (1989), Youngs (2001), and L. Desimone et al. (2002) specifically focused research efforts on the interface between professional development and policy influences. Professional development is the mechanism most often utilized by schools and districts to implement policy because these programs exist for the explicit purpose of impacting teachers' practice (Little, 1989). For this reason, discussions of educational policy implementation cannot be separated from further assessment of the role of and factors supporting professional development in schools, or from an emphasis on leadership's role in effective facilitation of coordinated efforts.

Summary and Conclusions

The design, delivery, and evaluation of professional development activities for teachers form a complex web of cause-and-effect relationships. The precise precursor and end result in each of these relationships are sometimes apparent and easy to articulate, yet often convoluted and indefinite (Borko, 2004; Guskey, 2000). Likewise, the origins of reform efforts are widespread and varied in purpose and structure. In order to bring clarity to the work of educators attempting to implement change efforts and to adequately address the needs of change agents, school leaders must effectively develop capacity and influence commitment (Arnold et al., 2000; Dutro et al., 2002; Youngs, 2001). Effectively implementing policy through professional development structures requires attention to more than the mechanisms of adult learning; it is dependent on the accurate

assessment of policy functions, as well as the proper management of organizational supports.

The primary purpose of this literature review has been to develop a better understanding of the tools available to school leadership teams to manage the interface of policy pressures and local initiative through professional development efforts. Guskey (2003) frames the onus on leadership to manage change, in terms that are consistent with the purpose of this review. "A carefully organized collaboration between site-based educators, who are keenly aware of critical contextual characteristics, and district-level personnel, who have broader perspectives on problems, seems essential to optimize the effectiveness of professional development" (p. 749). "Administration in education, then, has come to mean not the management of instruction but the management of the structures and processes around instruction" (Elmore, 2000, p. 7).

An alternative to leadership groups astutely managing change would be an awareness by policy-makers of the pressures they create and exert on schools. Policy-makers should develop capacity in schools to support their reforms (Dutro et al., 2002). Policy supports constructed within policy itself to increase the capacity of districts might help make professional development activities more relevant for teachers and less taxing on schools. With an understanding of the relationship between policy initiatives and change, Louis et al. (1996) articulates a set of relationships that demonstrate policy's often inherent lack of support for implementation:

> . . . many national, state, and local policies designed to increase teachers' job performance may be insufficient, at least by themselves. To give just one example,

the current movements of "systemic reform" and "teacher professionalism"

emphasize the upgrading of individual teacher skills and knowledge and clearer

systems of external accountability through more standardized curriculum and

testing . . . but it points to the need to include, in addition, emphasis on the local

development of schools as healthy, professionally sustaining environments in

which teachers are encouraged to do their best job. (p. 787)

In reality, policy rarely provides comprehensive supports for implementation.

This fact is worthy of mention, but may ultimately be unimportant, because the

differences in the context where implementation occurs is a significant factor influencing

the success of implementation, a factor policy-makers could not fully account for if they

desired. And so policy-makers resort to encouraging the adoption of strategies being

utilized by more successful schools without regard for contextual differences (Hamann,

2005). While in the meantime, as noted at the onset of this chapter; parents, the business

community, governors, and mayors all actively demand standards, options, and

accountability (Crowson, 2003). Louis (2006) responds to these environmental conditions

with an obvious reflection, "Is there any potential for strategic change and adaptability

when schools must inevitably reflect the larger economic, political, and social

environment" (p. 172)? The question is especially meaningful when observing how

"external pressures, largely in the form of accountability and budgetary decisions, [grind]

away at the innovative substance of the schools and [undermine] the efforts of teachers to

do something original" (Louis, 2006, p. 170).

These reflections direct the focus of this synthesis back to the leadership teams accountable for appropriate action. "If school systems try to apply emerging standards-based educational policy through the cogs of existing systematic structures, the policy will not be recognizable in its intended form when delivered to students" (Elmore, 2000, p. 4). Therefore, the adoption of new leadership paradigm is essential, and distributed leadership, as discussed in this review of literature is most promising. "Whether exercised by principals or site-based teams, supportive leadership focuses efforts on issues related to school improvement: collegiality, shared purpose, continuous improvement, accountability and responsibility for performance, and structural change" (Louis et al., 1996, p. 763).

Of primary importance to our understanding of distributive leadership functions is the fact that leader behaviors are not fully representative of leadership activities. Behavior of leaders is constrained by the demands of others and by contextual expectations of leaders (Pfeffer, 1977). Further discussion of leadership in this frame must consist of a reflection on the qualities of leaders, the roles of other school personnel, as well as the artifacts, protocols, and policies that support leadership practice (Spillane et al., 2001). And very importantly, further consideration of distributed leadership in any context must integrate the strengths, competencies, skills, and knowledge of many organizational stakeholders (Elmore, 2000).

In order for unique contexts to adapt to the conditions espoused through leadership hierarchies, group members must construct their own understanding of the work at hand. There are three phenomena evident in literature around interpersonal

influence in groups that facilitate the acquisition of common meaning from a shared experience. Developing communities-of-practice is one important means in which a unique contextual language and understanding emerge (Brown & Duguid, 1991). Within such a community, "a narrative explanation works [to accomplish a unique language and understanding], not only because it is logically acceptable, but also because it is lifelike and plausible; it fits the culturally bound demands of a form of life" (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995, p. 357). Sensemaking is a second characteristic and a natural compliment to this feature in which "reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs" (Weick, 1993, p. 635). The third phenomenon responsible for facilitating the acquisition of common meaning is professional community. Fittingly, professional community, or "teachers' collective engagement in sustained efforts to improve practice" (Louis et al., 1996, p. 758), is more likely in schools utilizing distributed leadership frameworks. Collectively, these features of interpersonal influence help to develop closer ties and clearer thinking, which enables people to find paths around obstacles in their work (Weick, 1993).

Equipped with efficiently operating teams, leadership groups may engage in the work of implementing policy and facilitating professional growth experiences for teachers. The five considerations of policy implementation identified in this literature review provide a road map for school leaders in accomplishing this work. Knowing the motivation for new policy, its purpose, function, influences, and ideal management strategies are important to policy facilitators at the school level. Additionally,

understanding the "histories and competing forces that operate for individuals and districts" (Dutro et al., 2002, p. 787) is important to implementation efforts.

The role of leadership teams in regard to school policy implementation is multi-dimensional, but principally engaged in the facilitation of coherent professional development experiences. "The coherence of professional development activities has an important positive influence on change in teaching practice" (Garet et al., 2001, p. 934), and so is an important focus of leadership teams working to implement instruction-related change. Supporting these teams' efforts, Sparks and Hirsh (1997) have provided a list of paradigm shifts in professional development as guidelines for facilitating effective professional development that idealize systemic efforts. These guidelines are compatible with goals to remove teachers from isolated conditions to talk about practice and to develop stronger professional community (Elmore, 2000; Louis et al., 1996).

Professional development must be coherent, but it must also be comprehensive. "Professional development activities must address teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions; professional community; and coherence in order to affect teachers' practices or student achievement" (Youngs, 2001, p. 282).

Professional development activities ideally consist of the well-planned core components of focus on content knowledge, opportunities for active learning, and coherence with learning activities, that are supported by appropriate structural components. These structural supports are the form of the activity, collective participation, and the duration of learning activities (Desimone, Porter, Garet et al., 2002; Garet et al., 2001). "An increased emphasis on the importance of strategic, systematic

planning for professional development may encourage both districts and schools to focus efforts on high-quality professional development" (Desimone, Porter, Garet et al., 2002, p. 105).

Based on this review of literature, it is apparent that researchers have identified best practices in professional development. Scholarly literature also presents us with the necessary considerations for successful implementation of policy. In addition, there are numerous, yet aligned perspectives on the effective practices of leadership teams and the influences exerted on those teams. What existing literature does not reveal, is what strategies and practices are actually being utilized by school leadership teams to integrate and synthesize the components of professional development, policy implementation, and leadership practice in order to accomplish goals. "We know what structures are important, but less about how changes are enacted in school leaders' daily work" (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 23). We need a better understanding of how teacher involvement in planning addresses individual and school needs (Desimone, Porter, Birman et al., 2002). We also need "further explanation as to why distributed leadership can end in positive results for schools and students" (Mayrowetz et al., 2007, p. 95). The purpose of this research effort is to move closer to answers for questions such as these, and to contribute to the research base and general understanding of how participants in professional development and policy implementation efforts make sense of the interface between policy demands and local priorities.

The Need for Further Inquiry

Educational institutions are "loosely coupled organizations," in which leadership is not able to directly impact teachers isolated in classrooms (Firestone et al., 2005). It is clear that educational leaders are faced with the somewhat daunting undertaking of managing large interactive systems that go far beyond the classroom-level tasks of teaching and learning. Given this reality, it is apparent that in order to map patterns of interaction between what is mandated of educators and what actually occurs; we must broaden our scope of investigation. Unfortunately, for all of its efforts to identify components of effective professional development, policy implementation, and leadership roles, existing literature has not reported on the actual practices and strategies of individuals in key roles within school systems to balance policy mandates and local priorities.

The investigation described in the following chapters includes documentation of the factors influencing practices in schools and maps the actual practices of individuals who are faced with the multiple and often conflicting demands of educational policy and the needs demonstrated by local schools and school systems. School administrators, other top school officials, and even policy-makers, may gain from these results a better understanding of how modern school systems are dealing with some of the many pressures they face.

CHAPTER 3 – DESIGN AND METHODS

Design

Chapter three describes the design and methodology of this research effort. The study described is classified as an interpretive case study conducted at multiple sites. "A case study typically consists of a description of an entity and that entity's actions" (Thomas, 2003, p. 33). Merriam (1998) recognizes that an *interpretive* case study's goal is not simply to construct thick, rich descriptions of a phenomenon, but to do so with the "intent of analyzing, interpreting, or theorizing about the phenomenon" (p. 38).

Phenomena "that are the focus of case studies can be of various sorts, such as individuals, groups, organizations, or events" (Thomas, 2003, p. 33). This research focused on a bound case, comprised of the state statutes that govern preK-12 staff development programs and practices in Minnesota public schools. The appropriateness of case study methodology in this research effort is supported by Merriam (1998), who affirms that "case study [design] is a particularly suitable design if you are interested in process" (p. 33). The process explored through this research effort was the process of implementing staff development policies as prescribed by state law in Minnesota.

Qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry were utilized to determine how people actually engage in the processes regulated by these state statutes and to identify the intended and unintended outcomes of their efforts. These methods are described in detail, including instrumentation, sampling, data collection and analysis, and methodological integrity. The research questions that guided this study are:

- How do people engage in the processes that are governed by state professional development statues?

- What are the formal and informal norms of decision-making and leadership within professional development committees?

- What are the intended and unintended outcomes of the coordination and leadership efforts of professional development committees?

- In what ways is staff development policy enacted in school districts?

Because case study methodology naturally embraces multiple methods, the "policy-as-the-case" framework that was designed to guide this research effort is justifiably supported by multiple data-collection methods. "Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter" (Thomas, 2003, p. 1). In qualitative research, as Thomas (2003) explains, objects and events are studied in their natural settings, in order "to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring them"(p. 1). Because this case may be known or experienced by a wide variety of school personnel, it was also be important to summarize findings regarding these individuals' perception of certain variables. Just as Thomas (2003) consents to the use of qualitative methods in studies such as this, it was also sensible to utilize quantitative methods as a means for obtaining summaries.

The relevance of blended qualitative and quantitative approaches in this study is even more apparent after examining and accepting premises of contextual influences on policy implementation efforts. "District leaders are responsible for interpreting policy and determining priorities…resulting reform efforts however are subject to multiple

opposition forces" (Firestone et al., 2005, p. 417). It is not sufficient to make assumptions about the successful implementation of policy based on a policy's intentions, because "social context is an integral component, not just a container, for intelligent activity" (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 23). Implementation and enactment are conditions that are subject to individuals' engagement with their own social world, and "qualitative research can reveal how all the parts work together to form a whole" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). And the insights of those affected by the policy are important components of a complete understanding as well.

Site Selection

In consultation with the researcher's advisor and one other committee member, the decision was made to consider only school districts known to have strong systems of professional development. Given that the purpose of the study was to examine ways in which school district policies and practices in the area of professional development aligned with state policy, identifying positive exemplars of local practice was most appropriate. Furthermore, by selecting exemplars, the opportunity for other school districts to benefit from the documentation of practices observed through this study was enhanced.

Several factors were considered when selecting "exemplary" or best-case school districts. First, insights from the Directors of the Minnesota Staff Development Council (MSDC) were considered. Second, the researcher requested recommendations from two University of Minnesota Professors who had extensive experience in the field of professional development and who were familiar with the districts identified by the

MSDC Board. Third, the districts' demographic characteristics were gathered and considered. The fourth factor considered was whether a policy or research-based framework was being utilized in potential sites to guide professional development work. And finally, logistical considerations were weighed to determine which sites provided the fewest challenges to study completion, while maximizing opportunities for the collection of meaningful data.

Three specific characteristics precluded districts participation in this research effort. First, the five largest districts in the state of Minnesota were not considered. These districts, whose enrollment numbers range from approximately 21,000 to over 40,000, were not likely to offer insights directly applicable to or directly beneficial to the majority of school districts within or outside of the state. Second, school districts with especially small enrollments, particularly those with enrollments under 200 students, were not included for reasons also related to the applicability of results. And third, districts involved in the state's Quality Compensation (Q Comp) program were not eligible to participate. Q Comp is a program that was initiated by the governor in 2005 and is comprised of five components, the most notable of which is performance pay. Although there is also a significant professional development emphasis embedded in Q Comp, it would have unnecessarily complicated the effort of this study to understand policy implementation by introducing an additional policy containing related language, but guided by different objectives.

Perspectives from individual Directors from the MSDC were considered in order to identify several school districts whose work in professional development carries a

reputation for quality and effectiveness. MSDC Board members are in a unique position in that they come from varying backgrounds and have insights into best practices being enacted in schools, but they also have expert opinions about which school districts do especially good work in the area of professional development. In addition, Directors of the MSDC were asked to consider schools districts' status as exemplary professional development sites according to the existence of a coherent district staff development plan, as well as each district's commitment to specific initiatives. These indicators were utilized collectively to guide the council's Board of Directors to more objectively categorize districts as "best-case" scenarios in the realm of professional development. The Directors identified school districts that according to their experiences and interactions, had demonstrated excellence in professional development programming.

Following the identification of multiple school districts meeting initial criteria, the researcher's goal was to narrow the list of potential districts to two. In order to do this, the list of potential school districts submitted anonymously by board members was delivered to two university professors who have high levels of expertise in professional development as well as many experiences in direct contact with practitioners in schools. Each university faculty member independently selected the same two districts as recommendations for inclusion in this study.

Following the identification of two districts that were identified through the abovementioned methods, the researcher initiated conversations with professional development coordinators about potential involvement in the research effort. It should be noted that the coordinator of professional development in school districts may hold one

of any number of possible titles (e.g. Assistant Superintendent, Director of Teaching and Learning, Curriculum Director). During these conversations, the researcher inquired about the standards that sustain the districts' staff development programs. Indications of alignment with state policies and with research-based practices and standards were considered as positive attributes and ultimately substantiated the school districts' invitations to participate in the study.

While District A is almost twice as large as District B, both are comparable in organizational structure and demographic profiles. District A's student enrollment is 8,000 students who attend thirteen different schools in the district, two of which are high schools. District B's enrollment consists of approximately 4,500 students. These students attend six different school buildings, including one central high school. Both District A and District B sponsor and provide numerous programs that fall outside of a traditional preK-12 configuration, including alternative education, early childhood, immersion, and even senior programs.

After identifying school districts, the researcher worked with the professional development coordinators to select appropriate school sites within each district. Selected sites demonstrated a coherent plan and commitment to professional development initiatives according to the observations of the district's professional development coordinator. These sites also had principals that supported professional development programming and who were supportive of this research effort.

Finally, the participants of individual interviews were identified, as were the strategies for inviting survey respondents. Certain participants were selected according to

their designated titles, such as principal or committee chairperson. Other participants were selected from groups of staff members who either did or did not have formal roles on professional development committees. Regardless of the data collection method, each potential study participant received a paper invitation describing the study and the opportunity to participate. Individuals could only participate in the study by contacting the investigator directly or by willingly completing the anonymous survey.

<div align="center">Methods</div>

This study employed three data collection methods, including an online survey, personal interviews, and document analyses. Stakeholders involved in these data collection efforts included the district professional development coordinator, building principals, professional development committee chairpersons, and teachers who both do and do not formally participate in committee functions. The professional development coordinator, principals, and committee chairpersons were interviewed through a one-on-one interview format. Data was collected from additional staff members through surveys that were available in both paper and electronic formats. The supplementary data collection method of document analysis was utilized to further scrutinize both stakeholder involvement and structural program components related to policies and practices.

Surveys

As the methodological alternatives were initially being considered, the researcher proposed utilizing focus group interviews. As focus group meeting dates and locations were established, it became evident that staff members were reluctant to spend time outside of their work day contributing to this effort. In most cases, focus group invitations attracted no more than one or two potential participants. The focus group data collection method was therefore replaced with a comprehensive survey on the topic. Although the quality of data was not negatively impacted by this change, a significant amount of time was required to establish a new protocol and to obtain necessary approvals in order to proceed with the survey.

Surveys were utilized to gather data to better understand how people feel and think about the degree to which professional development programs support professional learning and satisfy legislative obligations. Survey data from two groups at each school district was differentiated. These groups were the individuals who held active positions on professional development committees and individuals who did not hold formal positions on professional development committees. In order to obtain a better understanding of the potential impact that instructional level has on perspectives, respondents were also asked to identify their status as an elementary or secondary staff member.

We have evidence that leadership is frequently shared between multiple leader figures (Spillane et al., 2001). Therefore it was important to consider the observations made by members of professional development committees. Although it was probable

that very detailed insights could have been obtained from committee chairpersons and principals through face-to-face interviews, the perspective of other committee members also needed to be considered. As Hofstede (1983) illustrates, power differences between committee members do exist. And the researcher presumed that that particular dimension of committee dynamics may have contributed to varying viewpoints. A deliberate effort by the researcher to seek insights from an array of committee members through surveys was made in part to negate any possible affect of differences in opinion created by power distance between participants.

It was equally important to obtain feedback from individuals who do not participate in decision-making or leadership assemblies. As Elmore (2000) has stipulated, in order for improvement to occur in school systems, teachers must be removed from isolated conditions in order to talk about practice in non-threatening ways. For this reason, a deliberate effort was also made to collect feedback from those working outside of the leadership ranks, because those individuals have perhaps the best perspective from which to report on the actions and impact of professional development work. An anonymous survey was determined to be an appropriate tool to obtain feedback from certain school members in a "non-threatening way" (Elmore, 2000).

The survey was first created in a paper format which allowed the investigator to seek input from informed professionals and then make revisions before transferring each question into the electronic format. The investigator determined that Survey Monkey was a suitable online survey vendor and so developed the electronic version of the survey through that select vendor. Potential survey respondents first received a paper copy of the

survey, along with appropriate approved consent forms. The information included in the packet of survey information also included a URL that linked individuals to the online electronic version of the survey.

Survey data needed to be collected from committee members and non-committee members, but it was also analyzed from the dimension of instructional level (i.e. secondary verses elementary). Responses obtained from survey respondents were ultimately utilized to identify staff members' perceptions of their schools' professional development programs. Each group's answers were utilized to identify an association between the intentions of staff developers and the actual impact of their efforts on staff members for whom programming is typically assembled and delivered. Responses obtained from survey respondents were ultimately utilized to identify staff members' perceptions of their schools' professional development programs. Each group's answers were utilized to identify an association between the intentions of staff developers and the actual impact of their efforts on staff members for whom programming is typically assembled and delivered.

Instrumentation

The survey commenced with statements of informed consent (See Appendix A). Explicitly communicated in these statements was the purpose of the survey as well as an assurance that each respondent could participate under conditions of complete anonymity. The survey instrument itself (See Appendix B) consisted of 29 questions. Five questions sought insights into how leadership responsibilities were carried out by professional development personnel in the districts. Six questions explored insights into the processes

used to deliver professional development activities. Seven questions asked respondents'

to assess program effectiveness in terms of specific stipulations in state statutes. Each of

these questions provided participants with a response scale in which they were asked to

select the option that best described their opinion or observations. Furthermore, each of

these eighteen survey questions aligned with a specific component of Minnesota Statute

122A.60 ("Staff Development Program," 2008). Should the reader choose to compare the

two documents, a precise correlation would be revealed between the components of state

statutes and the survey questions. These questions and the statutes together also align

with and inform the overarching research questions, which were constructed from

insights gained by the author through professional experience and literature reviewed for

the study.

An additional twelve questions in the survey pertained to the interactions and

associations that survey participants had with professional development programs, as

well as their general perceptions about strengths and weaknesses of those programs.

These questions that helped outline participants' experiences, were stated as either

closed-ended questions with unordered response categories or as open-ended questions

(Dillman, 2000). The additional questions were intended to provide participants with an

opportunity to share further comments and also to highlight characteristics of the

participants that would augment data analysis.

Principals who were identified by the Professional Development Director from

District A and Assistant Superintendent from District B distributed paper copies of the

survey to 54 staff members in each district. Each survey was enclosed in a packet that

was labeled with three stickers. One sticker designated either elementary or secondary, one sticker designated either committee member or non-committee member, and the third sticker designated a specific grade level or departmental association. Thus each potential survey respondent was identified according to three independent criteria. Through this labeling strategy, as well as paper and online survey options, a favorable response rate of 73% was achieved.

Data Collection, Management, and Analysis

Survey responses, if collected through self-addressed, stamped envelopes included in the initial mailing were manually entered into the Survey Monkey survey tool by the researcher. Some participants elected to access the same online program independently in order to record their perspectives. The survey was terminated by the author following a two week period of time, during which potential respondents had an opportunity to respond. The online survey tool offered numerous management and analysis features that supported analysis efforts.

Data obtained through the online survey ultimately provided quantitative evidence of teachers' perceptions that was first analyzed independently and then coded according to a matrix of policy characteristics (see Appendix C). Trends observed in the survey data were plotted along horizontal rows in the matrix that corresponded with appropriate categories of policy specifications. Findings were positioned in the matrix according to their support of policy enactment, or conversely, by their evident failure to support policy enactment.

Methodological Integrity

 Reliability of survey data was enhanced by an adherence to characteristics of the

Tailored Design Method (TDM) (Dillman, 2000, p. 3). In accordance with Dillman's

explanation of social exchange (p. 5), the value of respondents' opinions and perspectives

was underscored at the onset of the survey in order to help individuals feel comfortable

and to encourage open participation. It was also clarified that the researcher's goal from

the onset was to understand experiences and viewpoints.

The survey progressed according to additional principles outlined by Dillman

(2000), who contends that any survey's initial questions should be applicable to all

respondents and that those questions should also be easy to answer (p. 92). Survey

participants should also have found all questions to be free of distracting jargon, phrased

in ways that did not present biases, and in the form of complete, technically accurate

sentences (Dillman, 2000). These strategies were not only intended to assist respondents

in taking the survey, but also to minimize measurement error due to respondents'

inability to answer inaccurate or imprecise questions (Dillman, 2000, p. 9).

Internal validity is a significant strength of the research design of this study due to

direct contact of the researcher with the people who are living the experiences being

examined (Merriam, 1998). One strategy that was utilized to support the internal validity

of the surveys was triangulation. Since all survey questions were correlated with research

questions (see Appendix B) and all data were analyzed against the same framework (see

Appendix C), triangulation could be achieved by comparing emerging findings as data

collection occurred. In addition, as stated above, specific steps were taken to minimize measurement error that may have otherwise affected internal validity.

External validity has been enhanced by the collection of data at two school districts rather than one. However, as stated in the delimitations in Chapter 1, generalizability is limited due to the purposeful sample of only two districts as well as the design's failure to accommodate random sampling and other experimental design components. The emphasis of this research effort has been placed on the desired outcome of understanding human relationships that lead to observed outcomes, as well as on a better understanding of the association between staff development policy and school district practices.

Interviews

Semistructured interviews were utilized to gather information about past events so that the organization of professional development programs within the framework of applicable policy could be understood and so that the meaning attached to the organizational structure could be acknowledged. A total of five interviews were conducted with three different types of individuals from each school district. These interviews were conducted with the district's professional development coordinator, one elementary and one secondary (middle school or high school) building principal, and one elementary and one secondary site staff development committee chairperson. This array of participants was chosen because of each position's direct interaction with and influence on professional development programming and because comprehensive improvement efforts are dependent on the "concerted action [of] people with different

69

areas of expertise" (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 36). For the purpose of this research effort, the researcher believed that experience and direct interaction with professional development programming would translate into an informed interview participant.

Instrumentation

One-on-one interviews was the second source of data in this research effort. The interview instrument demonstrated a direct correlation between overarching research questions and the interview questions. Where the survey process was intended to gather many perspectives from across a range of stakeholders, the interview process was intended to gather insights through more in-depth probing and responses.

The interview instrument began with an overview, acknowledgement of consent, and introductory questions intended to engage participants. The remaining segments contained questions written in a loose-question format in which the researcher looked for respondents' interpretations of general inquiries (Thomas, 2003). Each question was visually connected to a guiding research question by the format of the instrument and reasonably bound to that research question's purpose. Each interview concluded with an opportunity for the respondent to reflect on the interactions that occur between individuals involved in professional development programming. Respondents were also asked to provide advice to others in similar positions.

The interview protocol was piloted with staff developers and administrators from outside school districts, through a think aloud process adapted from Willis (2004). Feedback was obtained through the think aloud process in order to improve the interview

instrument. The interview protocol is included as Appendix D and the interview think aloud protocol is included as Appendix E.

Sampling

The population of District Professional Development Coordinators (n=1) allowed the entire population to be sampled for one-on-one interviews. The population of building principals and site staff development committee chairpersons was congruent with the number of schools in each district. One elementary and one secondary principal, in addition to a site committee chairperson from each level were interviewed in both districts.

Data Collection, Management, and Analysis

All interviews were digitally recorded as the researcher took notes about participants' responses. Additional field notes were recorded following interviews and included comments about methodology, emerging findings, and personal reflections (Merriam, 1998). Following the interviews, the digital recording was transcribed by a transcriber in order to provide a written record of the dialogue. Analysis of these records was conducted throughout and following the data-collection effort.

Data was analyzed in a manner consistent with the management of survey data. The data matrix found in Appendix C was utilized to organize participant responses according to policy stipulations. Emerging themes and patterns were also continually evaluated against the findings of focus group interviews "to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they interact" (Thomas, 2003).

Reliability of interview data was enhanced by an adherence to characteristics of

qualitative research promoted by Merriam (1998). At the onset of individual interview

sessions, the value of respondents' opinions and perspectives were underscored to

encourage open participation. It was also clarified that the researcher's goal was not to

make judgments, but to understand experiences and viewpoints. In order to establish a

comfort level and encourage open participation, respondents were acknowledged for their

expertise and commended for their involvement in a worthwhile program. While

respondents were engaged by somewhat technical questions, their level of involvement

with professional development programming satisfied an assertion that participants

would be familiar with the field's terminology. Likewise, the knowledge level of

interview respondents and their familiarity of the topic enhanced the value of their

contributions to this research effort.

Within this research effort, internal validity of interview data was a particular

strength due to the direct contact of the researcher with the individuals whose experiences

were under scrutiny (Merriam, 1998). As with all data collection methods, triangulation

was utilized to identify congruency of responses. Since the overall alignment of

professional development practices with state statutes is of primary significance to this

study, the responses of interview participants were compared to identify common themes

that illustrated a previously unknown level of alignment with these state policies.

External validity was enhanced in this study by the collection of data at two

school districts. The interview protocol however did no more to enhance generalizability

than the previously-described survey methods. Since this research project did not consider data from a broader representation of the entire population of school districts in Minnesota, it is unknown whether those selected were truly representative of the population. The emphasis of this effort then, as stated previously, was to develop a better understanding of the collective experience that produces espoused as well as actual practices within a limited, purposeful sample of professional development programs.

Document Analysis

Artifacts created for internal purposes in professional development programs, including staff development plans, were reviewed to identify support for or contradictions to the claims and assertions revealed through surveys and interviews. In addition to these documents, each district's most recent report to the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) was reviewed to understand the assertions of district personnel involved in staff development efforts. Each of these documents was requested through a written document request (see Appendix F) submitted to each district's staff development coordinator.

Additionally, the document request specifically asked for reports related to district and site staff development expenditures. According to the state automated budget recording system protocols, each district is required to code revenues and expenditures within a finite range of an extended coding scheme. The researcher was available to address questions related to the use of staff development revenue and expenditure information before receiving reports. The research effort actually proceeded without the benefit of this information directly from school officials. The researcher instead satisfied

this request with information available directly from the Minnesota Department of
Education website.

Instrumentation

Since the documents used in this review were part of a predetermined list, there
was not a particular pressure on the researcher to inquire about appropriate artifacts
through an extended discovery process. However, the researcher's purpose for collecting
these documents was much different from the purpose for which they were created
(Merriam, 1998). For this reason, it was important for the researcher to pay special
attention during the coding process to segregate data into themes significant to the
inquiry.

Sampling

Through the use of a written document request (Appendix F) all relevant
documents gathered from the District Staff Development Coordinator were utilized in the
research effort. Since the existence of program artifacts cannot be verified, it is unknown
whether the documents obtained by the researcher comprise the sum of all documents
created or even of all documents that were currently available.

Data Collection, Management, and Analysis

Following the collection of artifacts from district professional development
coordinators, comments, statements, and phrases were appropriately coded. The coded
collections of evidence from document analysis were then be situated over interview data
previously coded through Creswell's (1998) qualitative coding strategies. This final effort
to link comparable data substantiated assertions of interview respondents or otherwise

74

provided evidence of discrepancies between the actual and espoused practices of program participants.

Methodological Integrity

Reliability of data obtained through document analysis was dependent, first and foremost, on the quality of and detail contained within the documents. The second factor influencing the reliability of document data was also beyond the control of the investigator, and that was the accuracy of the documents. There was no practical manner to reconstruct the events that occurred in conjunction with the creation of the documents, therefore it must be acknowledged that their accuracy is to some degree unknown.

In spite of the potential weaknesses described above, there was an underlying strength in the internal validity of this strategy. Because program participants who created the documents could not have anticipated that the documents would have been used in a research effort, it is likely that they presented information in a reasonable and accurate manner. Although other potential factors such as time constraints, personal biases, or unique perspectives, may have influenced the creation of documents by program participants, a certain level of confidence in these individuals' efforts may be assumed.

External validity of document analysis was made vulnerable by the uniqueness of each school district included in the study. Borko (2004), Garet et al. (2001), and others have articulated the significance of factors related to unique contexts. And so without a uniform method for creating documents, such as professional development plans, it is

difficult to draw conclusions about the relevance of observations here to other districts and school sites.

<div align="center">Data Organization and Analysis</div>

Throughout and upon completion of each data-collection effort, and upon completion of the entire research effort, data was coded into the Data Analysis Framework (see Appendix C) that was derived directly from the components of Minnesota staff development statutes. All comments, observations, and extracted data were categorized appropriately into individual frameworks for each data source and data-collection method.

Specific findings relevant to each research question are presented in Chapter 4. In order to draw broad conclusions about the alignment of districts' efforts with policy however, more simplistic figures are presented in Chapter 5. These figures were constructed to communicate observations of alignment or observations of a lack of alignment by illustrating the relevant extent to which evidence was recorded and observed to support the author's assertions.

<div align="center">Summary</div>

The purpose of the proposed research was to examine and describe how people engage in the processes that are governed by Minnesota staff development statutes in District A and District B. This objective was achieved through the use of surveys, personal interviews, and document analyses. The researcher focused on leadership, process, and outcome dimensions of the relevant polices ("Reserved Revenue for Staff Development," 2006; "Staff Development Program," 2008), as well as the parameters

defined by the study's research questions to produce a descriptive conclusion about the districts' professional development practices.

CHAPTER 4 - FINDINGS

Results

The ultimate goal of this study was to identify the ways in which staff development policy is enacted in school districts. "Minnesota statute 122A.60 establishes a staff development program in each school district and the structure to carry out planning and reporting of staff development that supports improved student learning" and Minnesota statute 122A.61 "requires a district to reserve at least two percent of the basic revenue for various forms of staff development" (M. D. o. Education, 2007a, p. 16). Each of these statutes is significant from a policy perspective, however, the former is more complex and therefore required greater effort to examine and explain.

Minnesota statute 122A.60, Staff Development Program ("Staff Development Program," 2008), is comprised of three subdivisions. The first subdivision, titled Staff Development Committee, provides a description of the mandatory make-up of school districts' professional development oversight committees. It also includes an additional subdivision, Subdivision 1a, Effective Staff Development Activities. This segment identifies seven categories of activities with which professional development activities "must" align. The second subdivision, Contents of the Plan, provides five specific components that, "must" be included in each districts' staff development plan. The third subdivision, Subdivision 3, Staff Development Outcomes, provides six specific areas of focus that again, "must" be integrated into efforts to improve student achievement.

At the onset of this study, the 2006 version of §122A.60 was in place. In this version, Subdivision 2, Contents of the Plan, was wholly comprised of this statement:

"The plan must include the staff development outcomes under subdivision 3, the means to achieve the outcomes, and procedures for evaluating progress at each school site toward meeting education outcomes" ("Staff Development Program," 2006). In 2008, the state legislature approved a revised version of §122A.60 (to be enacted in the 2009-2010 school year), which included five specific plan components in a greatly expanded Subdivision 2 ("Staff Development Program," 2008).

The original prospectus for this study was designed around the 2006 version of §122A.60, which created difficulty for the researcher when analyzing study data. In order to make the findings most relevant to professional developers, an effort was made to retrofit the results documented in this chapter to the framework of the 2008 version of §122A.60. The description below and the details of Figure 2 illustrate the systematic approach utilized to accomplish this retrofitting.

The seven components of Subdivision 1a, the five components of Subdivision 2, and the six outcomes documented in Subdivision 3 share common themes. While there is no discrete correlation between themes, it is clear that the intent of the statute is to convey stipulations that professional growth activities of school district employees conform to particular standards and that those activities shall be documented explicitly in district professional development plans.

As Figure 2 reveals however, untangling the components of the statute subdivisions proves to be a challenging task. To do so for the purpose of complete clarity and understanding would require a volume not advantageous to this document. It may be interesting to consider the possibility, if not likelihood, that school districts' efforts to

maintain compliance with the policy are similarly problematic, due to these casual

correlations.

Figure 2: Alignment of themes within subdivisions of Minnesota Statute 122A.60.		
Subdivision 1a Effective staff development activities.	**Subdivision 2 Contents of plan.**	**Subdivision 3 Staff development outcomes.**
1. Focus on research-based strategies that improve student learning.	2. Coaching, professional learning communities, action research, and other job-embedded models.	
2. Opportunities for teachers to practice and improve instructional skills.	5. Reinforce national and state standards of effective teaching practice.	
3. Opportunities for teachers to use student data.		
4. Enhance teacher content knowledge and instructional skills.	3. Maintain strong subject matter focus.	
5. Align with state and local standards.		1. Student achievement of state and local education standards.
6. Opportunities to build professional relationships and foster collaboration.	1. Support stable and productive professional communities.	4. Staff collaboration, mentoring, and peer coaching programs.
*7. Align with plan for alternative teacher pay system (performance pay).		
	4. Specialized preparation for issues related to students with special needs and limited English proficiency.	2. Meet the needs of a diverse student population, including at-risk, children with disabilities, and gifted children.
		3. Inclusive curriculum for racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse student population.
		5. Teach and model violence prevention policy and curriculum.
		6. Provide teachers and other members of site-based management teams with management and financial management skills.

Note. Horizontal alignment in the table indicates conceptual parallels. Numeric labels indicate the sequence of points within respective statute subdivisions.
*Alternative teacher pay system was not utilized in District A or District B throughout the period of this study.

In order to understand the actual practices occurring in school districts' professional development programs and to ascertain whether those practices are in alignment with governing policies, the researcher conducted online surveys of staff members, interviews of school personnel in particular roles, as well as document analyses of relevant district plans. A review of information gathered from these sources is presented below, as well as summaries of conclusions reached in response to the project's overarching research questions.

Survey questions were administered to 54 staff members from District A and 54 staff members from District B. Certain principals who were identified by the Professional Development Director at District A and the Assistant Superintendent at District B, received labeled envelopes containing paper copies of a 29 question survey (See Appendix B). Also included in the envelopes were directions for returning surveys to the researcher by mail, as well as directions for completing the survey through the online survey tool, surveymonkey.com. Survey responses received by the researcher in the mail were hand-entered into the online tool.

In order to ensure that the survey provided a sufficient and balanced account of staff member perceptions of professional development practices in both districts, the labeled envelopes delivered to principals were marked with specific staff member titles, such as math teacher (at the secondary level) or 4th grade teacher (at the elementary level). Envelopes were further labeled to indicate committee member or non-committee member in order to provide a balance of insights from individuals with varying levels of responsibility for professional development programming.

According to the sufficient return rate and the variation in respondents' roles, an appropriate and balanced perspective has been obtained. Eighty-one percent of the survey respondents in District A responded with completed surveys, while 65% of the respondents of District B provided completed surveys. Survey respondents provided information indicating that 1% held district level positions, 43% held elementary positions, and 56% held secondary positions. Thirty-six percent of these staff members across the two districts served on site professional development teams, 19% served on district level professional development teams, and 45% indicated that they had no formal association with professional development committees. These proportions provide sufficient confidence to the researcher that survey results were not likely to be influenced overwhelmingly by individuals' knowledge of professional development programming details, or conversely by their lack of knowledge of these details.

Although the survey tool was essential to the research effort in obtaining the views of a wide variety of staff members, it was also necessary to acquire a deeper understanding of professional development programming from those who are most integral to sustaining professional development efforts. In each district, interviews were conducted with the supervisor of professional development activities (the Professional Development Director or the Assistant Superintendent). An elementary principal and secondary principal were interviewed in each district, as well as an elementary teacher and a secondary teacher who held positions on professional development teams. The five interviews conducted in each district revealed a broad understanding of professional development programming and an enormous amount background information.

It is important to note, as explained in Chapter 3, that District A and District B were selected and studied because of their status as exemplars according to anonymous recommendations from board members of the Minnesota Staff Development Council. These school districts have demonstrated exemplary practices in professional development; however alignment of their practices in professional development with state statutes was previously unknown. The details discussed below provide insight into actual levels of policy compliance where practices are already considered superior.

Rather than discuss explicit differences between District A and District B findings, this results chapter will express results in terms of the broad impressions that may be drawn from the findings. Specific data points from each district must certainly be highlighted to provide insights into the dimensions of the aggregate data; however the focus of the analysis will remain on "the case" examined by this case study, which is the policy language documented in Minnesota Statutes 122A.60 and 122A.61.

Question #1: How do people engage in the processes that are governed by state professional development statutes?

Stipulations outlined in Subdivision 1a, Effective Staff Development Activities and Subdivision 2, Contents of the Plan were examined both through survey questions as well as interview questions. The aim of this level of examination was to determine to what extent professional development activities are supportive or unsupportive of, (a) research-based strategies, (b) teachers' efforts to practice and improve their instructional skills, (c) teachers' use of data, (d) teachers' efforts to enhance content knowledge, (e) the use of state and local academic standards, and (f) collaborative, professional

relationships. Survey questions asked respondents to indicate the extent to which

practices support these policy stipulations.

Findings

The response rates for questions inquiring about the level of support for specific

program dimensions by professional development are displayed in Figure 3. This data

provides insights into a combination of factors embedded in Subdivision 1a and

Subdivision 2. The comments and analyses that follow contribute essential insights and

illustrate unique contextual characteristics necessary to wholly understand the findings.

Figure 3: Agreement of Disagreement with statements about how supportive or unsupportive activities are of specific program attributes.

Survey Question	Very Supportive or Somewhat Supportive	Very Unsupportive or Somewhat Unsupportive
	n=79	
To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of *research-based strategies*?	94.9%	0%
To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of teachers' efforts to *practice and improve their instructional skills* over time?	89.9%	3.8%
To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of *teachers' use of data as part of their daily work to increase student achievement*?	84.8%	6.4%
To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of *teachers' efforts to enhance content knowledge*?	70.9%	17.7%
To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of the *use of state and local academic standards*?	87.3%	6.3%
To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of *collaborative, professional relationships*?	82.3%	7.6%

Note. Responses not included in the percentages above were recorded by respondents in the "Do Not Know" or the "Neither Agree or Disagree" category.

Promote Research-based Strategies

Staff development activities must "focus on the classroom and research-based strategies that improve student learning" ("Staff Development Program," 2008). While the statute does not specify which strategies are most advantageous to student learning, there is a sense in each district that purposeful choices are being made and initiatives are leading toward outcomes of improved student achievement. "We think we've coined the term 'teach back.' When we take information back from curriculum or for professional development, we expect that people teach it back," stated the Professional Development Director at District A. An example described by the Director involved a physical education department. "They read [a particular book relevant to their department]. It has just ignited such passion now within our elementary [physical education] people, especially the leader who now has a cause. And she's doing an action research project."

In District B, several individuals commented with enthusiasm on the wave of changes occurring. One statement illustrative of these findings included this perception from an elementary professional development committee member:

> I just think a lot of teachers are trying new things. I've seen more Socratic seminars, trying to do more sharing of lessons. Teachers are trying. It just seems like they're really, after this year in our building, making a real effort to use what they've learned. I think the embedded professional development has been really helpful. I think that's a success that I've seen in our professional development.

Another individual stated on the survey that, "all of our work is research based [and] leadership staff is trained ahead of teaching staff in order to provide support along the way."

A noteworthy 94.9% of survey respondents concurred, finding professional development activities across both districts supportive of research-based strategies. Not a single respondent found either district's practices to be very unsupportive or even somewhat unsupportive of research-based strategies.

Although there is overwhelming appreciation for this aspect of the districts' professional development practices, there were numerous statements about one particular limitation in realizing the success targeted by research-based strategies. The lack of time to implement strategies was the weakness cited most frequently in the open-ended survey question, "What do you view as the greatest weaknesses of the formal professional development or ongoing professional learning you experience as an educator in your school district?" One respondent explained that, "time is the greatest weakness; we often learn new ideas or ways to enhance teaching, but to go back into the classroom and have time to implement is always challenging. At times it can become overwhelming." Another survey respondent from District B also commented on the practical challenge of implementing new strategies. "Sometimes there are too many 'new' ideas, concepts, [and] practices that make it difficult to focus on one area."

Fortunately, while "allowing teachers time to reflect and implement learning is a weakness, [it] is beginning to be recognized and addressed," according to one survey respondent in District A. District A's Director provided the insight that this is likely

being accomplished through a systematic approach. "The continuous improvement books or goals and plans that are developed at the building level, those are written—they are designed in a way that teachers can use them from year to year to build their plans and to report how they're doing, how they're meeting their goals. It becomes evidence as far as how students are doing, how teachers are doing—and we use all of this to put together our report to the state."

One additional factor that emerged in open-ended survey responses and may to some extent be limiting the success of program efforts is the participants themselves. A District B respondent has observed that, "some people drag their feet and are reluctant to work at this." According to the survey data however, this is likely not inhibiting substantial progress in either districts' efforts to promote research-based strategies.

Practice and Improve Teaching Skills

Staff members in each district were able to describe specific strategies being utilized to improve teaching skills. Since the policy does not specify any particular strategy or combination of strategies to be employed by teachers, the tactics described by interview participants and survey respondents were understandably varied. Collectively however, survey respondents indicated acknowledgment of their districts' support of improving teaching skills, through a lofty positive survey response of 89.9%.

An elementary principal from District B described multiple supports for efforts to improve teaching skills. "While you have the conversations within forty-five minute PLC meetings, within a study group, you also have an instructional coach in the building that's helping you apply the conversations and the resources or the initiative into practice. So,

that instructional coach is ahead of the curve, as well, and can model—can coach and go through a reflective process with the teacher so we are making that positive progress."

The application of these specific strategies is clearly not random or incidental. Garet et al.'s (2001) study confirms the importance of maintaining a focus on several core features of professional development that lead to gains in knowledge and skill, and changes in classroom practice, including a focus on content knowledge and providing opportunities for active learning such as these.

A committee member from District B described not only additional strategies at work in the district, but the successes being realized through professional development work. "We have innovation configurations, [or] ICs, that we have to kind of guide our practice. And I think you could see that people have moved along the IC from where they would have been. People don't even think, I mean PLCs for example are standard work. They don't think about it anymore." Even the statement that in District B, there is "constant reflection on teaching practices to enhance our teaching" from a non-committee member provides support for informed assertions.

In spite of overwhelming appreciation for positive supports, there was a somewhat noticeable sentiment of dissatisfaction within open-ended responses regarding the districts' efforts to improve teaching skills. However, comments such as those shared by a District A staff member that, "professional development does not excite or motivate our staff. It's something we follow along with (not too much criticism), but it really seems more like an exercise than a true benefit," were not the norm. This statement is in fact

illustrative of the extent of the dissatisfaction as the staff member softened his or her own criticism with a parenthetical disclaimer.

Opportunities for Teachers to Use Student Data

Staff members provided evidence of satisfaction with their programs' support of data use to increase student achievement. Through survey responses, 84.8% indicated that professional development activities were either very supportive or somewhat supportive of efforts to incorporate data into daily work.

While staff members apparently have had experiences that align with policy expectations, relatively few comments were provided or recorded through interviews and open-ended questions to describe or define these experiences. In one affirmative statement, District B's Assistant Superintendent did provide an informed acknowledgement of the use of student data. "We use this a lot from a district level. [At the] school level, we want them using the student data; as well as where are they at with these practices. So, it's really driven from what we're seeing in practice and what our student learning needs dictate." A non-committee member from District B supported this assertion by stating, "I am allowed to use a lot of data to analyze my students' strengths and weaknesses." And likewise, a District B elementary principal provided some additional detail of this work. He explained that the question, "what instruction needs to take place at that student's instructional level so that [students] can be more successful?" initially guides data work. "And then [we] identify what our response is, following that instruction, if a child has or has not learned what we expected. So, it's following through

with that cycle and having those conversations on a week in, week out basis, recognizing the needs of all kids."

Collectively, these comments indicate some level of focus on student learning data on a regular basis. A committee member from District A however, provided remarks on a different sort of experience, "As teachers we believe we need more time to look at and interpret data [and] use that data to plan long range, [to] collaborate with each other so we are all not reinventing the wheel and help our children make progress. We need time!" Although the full statement has not been shared here, it should be evident that the comments transitioned from a statement about data to a declaration of the need for more allotted time, which was discussed more fully in the "research-based strategies" segment above.

Although it will be discussed later in this chapter in more detail, a significant finding did arise from open-ended survey questions that may be reflective of districts' efforts to support data use. A significant number of remarks indicated that professional development programming is influenced by student test results. Since respondents did not communicate the idea that reviewing test scores is equivalent to data work, those findings have not been included here. However, there is likely an important correlation that should weigh heavily in favor of a perception of policy compliance for the districts in terms of the use of data.

Enhance Teacher Content Knowledge

Data collected to understand whether or not professional development programs are supportive of efforts to enhance teacher content knowledge (examined here) and to

align practices with state and local standards (examined in the following section) share

common attributes. Generally speaking, *standards* are comprised of the *content* of

academic disciplines. And that *content* may likewise be expressed concisely as *standards*.

While agreement with this assertion is not critical to the following analysis, it does

explain the author's perspective that data collected in these areas is viewed as relevant to

each.

Survey respondents were slightly less approving of districts' efforts to help them

enhance content knowledge. Still, 70.9% of staff members surveyed found their district's

efforts to be very supportive or somewhat supportive. Unlike the previous segment's

report on using student data, comments were provided that do describe numerous

examples of overt efforts to enhance content knowledge.

The Professional Development Director from District A described a

comprehensive process of study and interaction between her department and that of the

Curriculum Director. The description that she provided gives insight into not only the

considerations made at the district level to support enhanced content knowledge, but also

the various content disciplines addressed through the work of the professional

development program.

> We meet with curriculum leaders, and they work on curriculum initiatives like the
>
> math or in an adoption series—or an adoption process—review process with math
>
> and with social studies. So, we work with them very closely, going through the
>
> process of review and creating a framework. But we also, then, are heavily
>
> involved in what kind of ongoing professional learning needs to take place so then

the staff development committees also get involved in the building so that they're learning about the initiative and so then they work to align what they're doing within professional development so it aligns with the curriculum. And the curriculum does align with the district goals. For a number of years we worked very specifically on vocabulary, which was identified by the data—from our MCA data, from our MAP data, from anecdotal evidence. So, then at the secondary level, 6-12, we put together a professional development plan. (District A Professional Development Director)

An elementary principal from District B described the interactions that take place as teachers acquire information. While there is guidance from the building Equity and Achievement Advisory Council, teachers do not rely solely on that group's leadership, "because we've developed that shared understanding, staff can interpret the information." He also explained that in terms of resources, "they can go to a curriculum lead in the building, like our math curriculum lead, our language arts curriculum lead, our social studies lead, or our instructional coach." These comments indicate concrete and organized supports for teachers' efforts to increase content knowledge. Comments such as, "I think we're neglecting content area work," while existent, were only minimally detectable.

Align Practices with State and Local Standards

Very few comments were shared by interview participants on open-ended survey questions detailing a professional development program focus on standards; however staff members are certainly cognizant of the influence of standards on their work. Five

survey respondents identified state standards as a factor that most significantly influences professional development programming. If combined with statements about curriculum changes, the total of open-ended responses in this category is nine. In addition to these explicit statements, 87.3% of survey respondents indicated that professional development activities in their respective districts were supportive of the use of state and local academic standards.

As stated above, few details were provided about what work involving state and local standards looks like. A District B survey respondent did offer some clues however. "During my time at [District B], the driving force for professional development has been to increase student achievement. There has been a heavy emphasis placed on collaboration in PLC's to create common assessments that are directly linked to daily and unit learner objectives." After communicating directly with many individuals in District B and District A, the researcher feels comfortable in asserting a substantial correlation between daily and unit learner objectives and academic standards. If the correlation is perceived as a weak link according to any other relevant information, then it should at least be acknowledged that the intent of professional developers in these districts is to develop linkages between learner objectives and academic standards. Therefore, this description is insightful in understanding the systematic perspective from which professional development activities are developed and facilitated.

Build Collaborative Professional Relationships

Consistent with previous activity categories, survey results indicated that 82.3% of respondents identified a supportive environment in professional development for

collaborative, professional relationships. Although this percentage fell slightly below the mean (85%) positive response across six categories of professional development activities articulated in state policy, it is the category that presented the most noteworthy dialogue both through interviews and open-ended survey questions. Program participants at all levels not only described appreciable collaborative experiences in explicit terms, but also provided supportive commentary while discussing a wide range of program components.

Typical of the experiences conveyed are those of a District A elementary committee member who described the principal with whom she works as, "hands-on, very involved, very interested, but yet also taking the role more of a facilitator rather than a true leader—that he is not making decisions for us saying what we need to do, but he is there to facilitate and help guide where we need to go." A secondary principal in the same district provided some insight as to what that might look like in action; "the committee members are asked to be part of the decision making process, to be active members of the committee that way and are asked to promote the activities in staff development. That might mean by leading a session or recruiting other teachers to lead sessions."

This perspective is part of a shared experience and is clearly evident beyond any formal planning circles. Committee members and non-committee members alike in District A shared comments that were consistent with one participant's observation that, "the district does a wonderful job of listening to our needs & making an effort to address them. They ask for teachers' input in making changes and when appropriate use the

teachers to do their training on site at their buildings." Teachers believe that "this district openly encourages feedback on the programs," and specifically, over the past few years, teachers "have been given more choice on what to study."

District B teachers report similar experiences, on a broad scale stating that, "one of the greatest strengths is to be able to work with our teams in learning and planning" and that "recently, professional development has been more collaborative and seems to be tied directly to learning targets.

As the Assistant Superintendent at District B described, these experiences have been purposefully and thoughtfully facilitated. For example, in one particular area of staff learning, he described that:

> Around personalization, there had to be some fronting, more awareness level work at each school prior to. What we did was pull all the teachers over here for two days of training in January and February. But there was awareness level training that each school had to do. But we didn't say, 'Here, you have to do it this way.' We gave them options… and everybody did their study groups a little bit differently.

Integrated into this dialogue about collaboration was an alternate perspective. A number of staff members also expressed their displeasure with their lack of influence. "I believe the teachers, not the administrators need to have more input into the decisions for professional development," one District A teacher stated. While another from District B used the survey as an opportunity to explain that a weakness of the professional development program was how administrators decide to do something, "whether or not it

is good for students or teachers agree with it." Although it is necessary to present this perspective, it is fair to say it is not a predominant perspective, as a large majority of staff members appreciate the opportunities for collaboration that exist across District A and District B.

Contents of "the" Plan

Subdivision 2 of §122A.60, as described earlier, has a unique history that is relevant to this study. Prior to the 2009-2010 school year, the subdivision was wholly comprised of the following statement, which is concisely stated in one sentence; "The plan must include the staff development outcomes under subdivision 3, the means to achieve the outcomes, and procedures for evaluating progress at each school site toward meeting education outcomes" ("Staff Development Program," 2006). Subsequent to the initial considerations of this study, Subdivision 2 was amended by the state legislature to include specific language about program outcomes. And in addition to these specific outcomes, oversight procedures, as determined by the district advisory committee, must also be included in a district-wide professional development plan.

While governing policy in this case aims to standardize districts' work to some extent, significant features of required plans vary not only from statute specifications, but also from the evident program components described so far in this study. Through an analysis of the components of plans from District A and District B, it is possible to distinguish where plans do and do not align with policy provisions. Figure 4 demonstrates the occurrence of precise alignment between the plan components and statute provisions found in Subdivision 2, Contents of the Plan (see, "Staff Development Program," 2008).

Additionally, the format of Figure 4 has allowed the researcher to accommodate the
amended 2008 version of §122A.40, even though this study was not initially designed to
collect data for such an analysis (because the details currently found in Subdivision 2 did
not exist).

During the analysis, the researcher was cautious not to identify correlations that
required presumptions in order to appreciate their significance. Each statement
recognized through an entry in Figure 4, should be apparent in explicit language to others
who might review these plans more casually. On the other hand, there is no explicit
evidence that plan language was developed to reflect policy specifications.

Figure 4: Subdivision 2. Contents of the Plan.		
Subdivision 2 Specifications	**District A**	**District B**
(1) Support stable and productive professional communities achieved through ongoing and school-wide progress and growth in teaching practice	4	8
(2) Emphasize coaching, professional learning communities, classroom action research, and other job-embedded models	4	11
(3) Maintain a strong subject-matter focus premised on students' learning goals	2	2
(4) Ensure specialized preparation and learning about issues related to teaching students with special needs and limited English proficiency	2	3
(5) Reinforce national and state standards of effective teaching practice	2	3
Other specifications identified in Subdivision 2	3	4

Note. Numbers in the table indicate the quantity of statements found in respective district
professional development plans that directly aligned with policy provisions.

Each district's unique context and priorities are clearly the foundation for its plan
structure and details. For example, in the District A plan, an outline for building
improvement plans is provided. Included in this outline are statements about the National

Staff Development Council Standards (see NSDC, 2001) and Charlotte Danielson's framework for teaching (see Danielson, 2007). While the details of these standards or frameworks are not outlined explicitly, the researcher concluded that the plan does, "reinforce national and state standards of effective teaching practice," as required by Subdivision 2 of §122A.60 ("Staff Development Program," 2008). Likewise, District B's plan includes many statements about the structure and function of professional learning communities that indicate support for "stable and productive professional communities," as stipulated in the statute. Based on the analysis of these district plans, the researcher believes that it is likely that most existing plans do not align precisely with state statutes. There are certainly strong correlations between the strategies documented and employed in these districts however, which demonstrate considerable alignment between policy and practice.

If developing a district plan that reflects statute language was the primary criterion for identification as an exemplary professional development program, then by an objective determination, both District A and District B would be eligible for recognition as exemplars. Each district provided the researcher with copies of district professional development plans that demonstrated, on numerous points, alignment with statute subdivisions pertaining to the contents of district plans. However, due to the significant role of human interaction, professional development programming clearly cannot be reduced to or fully understood in terms of a single document.

Furthermore, although each plan provided evidence of required components, neither was structured around the precise policy format. Each district constructed a

unique plan that contained no references to state statutes. District A's plan was published by the district in a three ring binder and contained eight tabbed sections, the majority of which contained one or two pages of broad conceptual models or guidelines. District B's plan provided detailed descriptions of beliefs, program models, expected personnel interactions, and assessment procedures, all collected in a stapled packet of 31 pages. It is important to re-emphasize that neither plan was built around the structure of state statutes, but each contained all necessary components.

As Figure 2 illustrated, school districts in Minnesota are responsible for adhering to a wide variety of practices through their professional development programs. Although documentation of other program components is not required, plans in District A and District B contained other important details relevant to the specifications found in §122A.60. An analysis of the districts' plans was also conducted across all statute subdivisions to identify correlations. Figure 5 provides an overview of the number of statements identified in each district plan that correspond with specifications from Subdivision 1a and Subdivision 3. Any positive number in the cells in Figure 5 likely indicates a district's interest in promoting the corresponding theme through professional development, while a zero simply indicates that there was not an overt statement in the content to call attention to such a priority. A zero does not however indicate that the district has demonstrated non-compliance because there is no requirement in policy that specifications identified in Subdivision 1a and Subdivision 3 of §122A.60 must be articulated in the district professional development plan.

Although care has been taken here not to present the impression that either district

may be in a position of non-compliance, the analysis provides an opportunity to draw

conclusions about emphases and priorities, as well as the strategies utilized across

Figure 5: Subdivision 1a. Professional Development Activities and Subdivision 3. Program Outcomes.

Subdivision 1a Specifications			Subdivision 3 Specifications		
Category	District A	District B	Category	District A	District B
(1) Research-based strategies	1	2	(1) Improve student achievement	4	2
(2) Opportunities to improve instructional skills	0	0	(2) Meet needs of diverse student population	0	3
(3) Opportunities for teachers to use data	3	2	(3) Provide inclusive curriculum for race, ethnicity, culture	2	1
(4) Enhance teacher content knowledge	0	0	(4) Improve staff collaboration	3	5
(5) Align with standards	2	0	(5) Teach violence prevention curriculum	0	0
(6) Foster collaboration	3	2	(6) Provide management teams with management skills	2	3

Note. Numbers in the table indicate the quantity of statements found in respective district professional development plans that directly aligned with policy provisions. Category descriptions are condensed and paraphrased.

settings. For example, it is apparent that collectively, an emphasis has been placed on

improving student achievement and staff collaboration, as well as using student data and

developing management skills. Such conclusions, while not directly indicative of the

districts' adherence to stipulations of plan elements, help understand the development

work being facilitated in District A and District B.

Conversely, teaching a violence prevention curriculum, improving teacher content knowledge, improving instructional skills, and meeting the needs of a diverse student population did not appear to have strong representation in plans. There is other evidence however that the districts view these as priorities in a more actionable way. District A's professional development plan included appendices of committee meeting calendars, which indicated seven scheduled meetings on the topic of teaching students with special needs or limited English proficiency. A District A elementary principal also commented during an interview that, "we're really trying to look, I think, at whether we're providing our special services, like special education, and [English as a Second Language]" support through the most advantageous model. A District B committee member concurred, saying that due to an increase in English language learners, professional development academies have been formed to study appropriate strategies.

Summary

Staff members in District A and District B reported engaging in professional development activities that align with statutory guidelines and best practices in the field. Throughout this research effort, participants consistently confirmed adherence to the core principles of (a) adhering to researched-based strategies, (b) striving to improve instructional skills, (c) using data in daily work, (d) enhancing content knowledge, (e) aligning state and local standards in instruction, and (f) engaging in collaborative, professional relationships. While each of these factors is explicitly stipulated in statute, there are other forces supporting their application and practice in District A and District B.

Practices in these school districts' professional development programs, as articulated by study participants, reflected many of the principles outlined in noteworthy literature in the field. The district administrators responsible for the leadership of professional development experiences for example, verified their commitment to coherent plans with the intent to facilitate individual improvement *and* improved organizational capacity. There is a comparable theme in Guskey's (2000) definition of professional development as intentional, ongoing, and systemic (p. 16).

Overt and coherent attention to the combination of factors described in this summary also align with Firestone et al's (2005) framework to improve teacher content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge; and the three professional development core features identified by Desimone et al. (2002) and Garet et al. (2001), (1) a focus on content knowledge, (2) opportunities for active learning, and (3) coherence with other learning activities.

Of all of the interactions that occur throughout the professional development programs of District A and District B however, the author believes that the appreciation for collaborative practices; and the consistent effort to enhance collaborative practices is most noteworthy. While participants did share comments describing negative experiences, the only pessimistic feedback regarding collaboration was that perhaps not enough time was available for the development of meaningful professional relationships.

Question #2: What are the formal and informal norms of decision-making and leadership

within professional development committees?

Stipulations outlined in Subdivision 1, Staff development committee, were

examined both through survey questions as well as interview questions. The aim of this

level of examination was to determine whether or not school districts have established, (a)

district advisory staff development committees, (b) site professional development teams,

(c) professional development activities that align with goals, (d) appropriate committee

membership, and (e) funding practices that explicitly support professional development

activities. Survey questions asked respondents to indicate the extent to which they agreed

or disagreed with statements aligning with these policy stipulations.

Findings

Figure 6 serves as a reference for specific language utilized in survey questions as

well as the percentage of responses recorded by respondents in supportive (agree), or

unsupportive (disagree) response categories. The comments and analyses that follow

contribute essential insights and illustrate unique contextual characteristics necessary to

wholly understand the findings.

School Professional Development Committee

Data collected through the staff member survey indicates a high level of

agreement with a statement about the existence of a site level professional development

committee. Eighty-seven percent of respondents reported that they strongly agree or

somewhat agree that a committee does exist in their school. This finding provides

substantial evidence that these districts regularly utilize organized networks of staff

members to carry out professional development planning and work.

Figure 6: Agreement or Disagreement with statements about professional development teams.			
Central Focus of Question	**Survey Question**	**Strongly Agree or Somewhat Agree**	**Strongly Disagree or Somewhat Disagree**
		n=77	
School Professional Development Committee	To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "My school utilizes a committee or team for the purpose of leading professional development efforts."	87%	10.4%
District Professional Development Committee	To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "My district utilizes committees or teams for the purpose of leading professional development efforts."	84.4%	10.4%
Activities Aligned with Goals	To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "Professional development activities in my district are aligned with district and site goals."	93.5%	3.9%
Committee Representation	To what extent to you agree or disagree with this statement: "Nonteaching staff, parents, administrators, and teachers all have representation on professional development leadership teams."	13%	59.8%
Dedicated Funding	To what extent to you agree or disagree with this statement: "Our district's professional development funding is used only to support efforts related to professional growth."	59.8%	5.2%

Note. Responses not included in the percentages above were recorded by respondents in the "Neither Agree or Disagree" category.

A secondary principal from District B explained her district's professional

development hierarchy; "at the district level, we have a group called TLAC, which

[stands for] Teaching and Learning Advisory Council, and . . . the people who serve on

that group then bring it back to our building level leadership team, which is our EAAC."

An elementary principal from District B explained the EAAC, or Equity and

Achievement Advisory Council. "So, our EAAC is the group that identifies what the

needs are and helps build that shared vision within the school. That EAAC team is the

one that facilitates the PLC meetings within grade levels or department. . . . They're also

the ones that identify, 'What do we need to learn?' as it relates to what we don't know.

The instructional leadership stems from the principal, but the leadership is shared by the

practitioners within the school. So, my EAAC team, my Equity and Achievement

Advisory Council, isn't comprised of people that want to represent the grade level. It's

comprised and made up of a group of individuals that want to lead the district forward."

This description is precisely aligned with the idyllic leadership model described by

Mayrowetz et al. (2007) in Chapter 2. "If distributed leadership in schools is to begin,

teachers must start to conceive of their roles differently and must assume responsibilities

beyond classrooms for purposes of overall school improvement" (p. 70).

District A's Professional Development Director described some variation in

committee structure at the building level. "There is a committee at the building level.

Some committees are larger, smaller than other committees. Some are folded into

building level improvement committees, but they have representation. There is integrated

professional development with their building level teams, and they all have a

representative on the district committee, but the configuration at the building [level] does

vary a little bit."

These comments along with positive indications from the survey verify alignment of the districts' practices with state policy. However, there are indications that some confusion exits among staff members. A small representation (10.4%) of survey respondents indicated that building committees do not exist. While the existence of a committee should be acknowledged and indisputable by everyone in a school building, teacher comments helped shed light on how changes over time may cause confusion. A teacher committee member from District A for example acknowledged that collaboration does occur, but that committee structure has changed over time:

> There used to be two teachers, a principal and our secretary also involved. Now, it is just [me] and basically the principal and secretary, because the secretary helps with keeping books for me and keeping track of how much we're spending. And the principal is another set of eyes that run by all of the things that happen in our building and whether it's meeting the staff development goals or not. So, he and I work pretty much side by side rather than [he] in charge and me doing the work that he wants me to do. It's really the two of us making decisions together.

A secondary teacher and committee participant from the same district provided evidence of similar changes over time, saying, "Well, it depends, I mean, upon the principal. Some just take it over and they just have that committee and say, "Yeah, we're doing this."

These comments may provide reason to further explore the dynamics of committee functions; however they do not necessarily provide evidence of contradictions to the intent of policy. A secondary principal from District A, shared in an interview, "I have a hard time getting people to step up to the leadership plate on the building level of

106

staff development, because they see it as work—one more thing. So, the staff development lead in my building and I drive those initiatives, for the most part." While there are likely a variety of committee structures across these and other districts, it would be short-sighted to draw conclusions about effectiveness or even consequences of employing particular group structures without further exploring the contextual dynamics that have lead to the development of those configurations (Boland & Tenkasi, 1995; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Louis et al., 1996).

District Advisory Professional Development Committee

Data collected through the staff member survey indicated a high level of agreement with the perception that each district maintains a functioning staff development advisory committee. 84.4% of the respondents either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that district-wide professional development efforts are lead by committees. The district-level leaders in both District A and District B provided direct evidence through their comments to support this finding. District A's Professional Development Director explained, "I coordinate the district staff development committee," which verified the existence of a district committee. During her interview, the Director further described specific actions that comprise her regular responsibilities, such as periodically facilitating building level meetings.

District B's Assistant Superintendent acknowledged not only the existence of a district committee, but also demonstrated familiarity of the relevant statutes when he stated, "there's the staff development advisory committee that every district is supposed to have . . . and what we did was, instead, we went with the learning teaching advisory

council, because what had happened previously in the district and what I see happening too much is the staff development becomes silent—it's not connected to things. So, this really became the leadership team around teaching and learning in the district. And the biggest part of their work was the professional learning we're [going to] do around whatever initiatives we have." Through these comments, the Assistant Superintendent provided confirmation of an advisory committee's existence, but also a further insight into the role of District B's district advisory committee.

A secondary committee member from District B described membership on that district committee; "I'm a member of an advisory committee we call TLA, which is Teaching, Learning Advisory Committee. And we work with the Assistant Superintendent and our professional development leaders in the district. And [this is] where we make our strategic directions and our initiatives for the year and years to come, and we work on improvement planning based on data."

One comment provided on an open-ended survey item indicated at least some lack of confidence in the benefits of a district committee:

Generally, [staff development] is of the lowest priority for [the] school district and receives no or little input from the district level (although a budget is provided). The building depends upon leadership from individual teachers who volunteer (unpaid) for a committee. This committee aligns its priorities directly with building goals of the administration, the goals of the state, and the goals and standards of NSDC [National Staff Development Council].

This statement illustrates an existing divergent viewpoint, but it was not possible to substantiate such a perspective through survey items or interview feedback. There is a significant amount of evidence indicating the existence of functioning professional development advisory committees in District A and District B.

Professional Development Activities Aligned with Goals

Although survey results, in general, indicate alignment of school districts' practices with state statutes, there was a noteworthy expression by study participants in each district that professional development activities in particular align with goals. An overwhelming percentage of survey respondents (93.5%) strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that this was the case. It was also difficult to identify interview comments or open-ended survey responses that contradicted this finding. This is an affirmative finding for both District A and District B, considering the framework outlined by Desimone et al. (2002) and the specific finding in that study that districts that align professional development with standards and assessments are more likely to engage in continuous improvement.

Many comments shared by study participants not only acknowledged alignment between goals and activities, but demonstrated an understanding of the relationships between individuals necessary to promote those goals, and the systematic actions taken to sustain those relationships. District A's Professional Development Director for example, explained her role in utilizing district goals across school buildings; "I work with building administrators and the staff development committee . . . and building level leadership teams as they take the goals and develop building level goals." According to

the Director, this work is not done in isolation from policy expectations. "And that's part of the statute," she explained, "is that you align your goals with the district goals and the building goals and individual goals. They've really worked so that when teachers identify the goal that they are working on, [it] also fits . . . it needs to be aligned."

Committee members and non-committee members alike concur with these observations in District A. On an open-ended survey question, a committee member explained that "District goals very much decide what our professional development is. Our district committee decides what our staff development will look like." A non-committee member likewise stated that "priorities for staff development seem to be most driven by district initiatives."

The experience in District B is not dissimilar. A committee member explained during an interview that "every year, each building does a continuous improvement plan, and on that we set goals for the year." Other staff members took opportunities to describe their understanding of professional development planning on open-ended survey questions as well. "District vision and goals drive professional development. The individual building goals and initiatives are tied directly to the district. Professional Development supports goals so that we may achieve our vision," stated on respondent, while another explained that, "all professional development activities are designed around our district initiatives and school improvement plan."

Although data collected and reviewed here clearly verifies alignment of professional development activities with goals as policy stipulates, comments were shared that may provide a starting point for further inquiries into the implications of this

alignment. An elementary principal from District A shared that, "there's that pull between that autonomy of having . . . building dollars and [advocating for] some things you need to do at the building level for your needs, and then there's what the district wants to do, and they're not always aligned. And that's a frustration. I've got some other issues here that are bigger than this right now, and trying to balance those two was difficult." Selznick (1943) predicts this incongruence on some level in organizations because "day-to-day behavior of the group becomes centered around specific problems and proximate goals which have primarily an internal relevance" (p. 48). It is therefore not surprising that leaders occasionally articulate frustration when their planning and efforts do not align with broader efforts.

In addition to the possibility that alignment of resources and activities with goals could inhibit autonomy and site goal attainment, it is also prudent to consider whether the models being emulated in these districts is consistent with the practices of other school districts. One survey respondent from District B reflected on quite different experiences in another district:

> Coming from another district four years ago, where I had no clue why we were learning what we were learning, things were random, and didn't sequence. Nothing ever tied into anything else, and we were filled with useless stuff we would never use again. This district is like a breath of fresh air when it comes to [professional development.] It all aligns, it all goes back to our district goals, and it really truly is a great example of what [professional development] should look like!

Committee Representation Consistent with Statute Guidelines

Although policy language is explicit regarding committee membership, apparently very little is known by school personnel about these stipulations. There are indications that District A and District B are compliant, however that assertion cannot be verified completely from the data collected.

District A's Professional Development Director meets "directly with the superintendent, [because] he is a part of the planning for the leadership, the overall direction of the areas that we want to focus on…he is [also] a member of [the] Curriculum Advisory Committee. There are board members on the committee, community members, teachers, [and] there usually is a student." According to the Director's description of this committee's "advisory" nature, it does appear to satisfy the specific stipulations of state statutes through its membership (see Subdivision 1 of "Staff Development Program," 2008).

It is the researcher's impression however that the obligation to maintain specific committee membership is an unfamiliar component of the policy. Contributing to this perception is the fact that while comments from District B participants revealed comprehensive knowledge about their District TLAC committee, no commentary on committee membership was provided. And to support this finding, only a combined 13% of survey respondents were able to report knowledge of appropriate committee membership. While there is no explicit evidence to suggest that appropriate committee membership *is not* maintained, it is also not possible to conclude that appropriate advisory committee membership *is* maintained.

Dedicated Funding for Professional Development Activities

Although §122A.61 provides explicit budgetary conditions for school districts, this study's level of inquiry stopped short of determining precisely what budgetary allocations were made. It is relatively easy to determine from the information collected from staff members however, that each district maintains an awareness of their statutory obligations for sustaining adequate professional development budgets. It is also evident in Fiscal Year 2008 finance reports obtained from the Minnesota Department of Education website that District A and District B maintain compliance with statutory guidelines pertaining to program funding.

The statute requires that 2% of each district's reserved revenue be allocated for professional development purposes. Of this amount, 50% must be directed toward school sites "on a per teacher basis, which must be retained by the school site until used. The board may retain 25 percent to be used for district wide staff development efforts. The remaining 25 percent of the revenue must be used to make grants to school sites for best practices methods" ("Reserved Revenue for Staff Development," 2006).

In fiscal year (FY) 2008, District A professional development expenditures totaled approximately $698,000.00. This equates to 1.98% of the total revenue reserved for professional development. District B expenditures for FY 2008 totaled approximately $1,244,000.00, or 1.96% of the total revenue reserved for professional development (M. D. o. Education, 2008). Although expenditures did not equate precisely to the 2% revenue stipulation of statutes, districts are required to carryover any unused revenue into

the next fiscal year, and to again dedicated that amount to professional development

expenditures (see "Reserved Revenue for Staff Development," 2006).

In regard to building allocations, District A's Professional Development

Coordinator explained that, "they get their dollars . . . they know what they have for their

budgets, and then they make decisions." An elementary committee member from District

A verified that her "building gets a lump of money" based on the number of staff

members at each site, and that "some of the staff development monies are kept at the

district level and are used for bigger, district-wide opportunities." She also importantly

expressed that "we can make our own decisions based on that."

The obvious efforts to bring staff members into the decision-making process in

District A and District B are not accomplished with ease however. Although Bass and

Stodgill (1990) purport that compliance and productivity are direct benefits of groups

engaging in conversations about work and goals, there is a potential consequence. "Given

the tendency of the powerful to gain more power, demands for change in the organization

may bring about a greater concentration of power, rather than equalization in power" (p.

254).

This in fact appears to be congruent with the experiences of at least some program

participants. Not every respondent conceded that the process is open; some reported that

staff members are not able to make their own decisions about professional development.

A committee member from District A commented on a survey that one of the greatest

weaknesses of professional development programming is that is "top down." The

individual acknowledged that the district needs to follow guidelines, but that it essentially

has goals and decides what teachers need. An elementary principal from District A

concurred with this message; however she emphasized a different perspective:

> Basically, I know every dollar that [is] spent. And what I tried to do is reasonably,
>
> and professionally, ask the question, "Is this in line with our building goals?" And
>
> there are times when I've said, "I don't think that's a good idea," and that's tough
>
> for teachers to hear . . . But we're always coming back to, "What's our building
>
> plan? What [are] our initiatives? Where are the initiatives? And does that request
>
> for staff development dollars align with what our building plan initiatives are?"

While not every individual in these systems reported the feeling of involvement, a

secondary principal from District B provided additional support for the manner in which

dollars are utilized and the formal efforts to provide support for all staff members:

> The other piece that is more specifically set aside because of the state statute and
>
> the expectations that that put in place, some of it is set aside for people who don't
>
> fit the mainstream, typical classroom teacher position who are benefiting from the
>
> other broad-based professional learning experiences.

59.8% of survey respondents somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that

"professional development funding is used only to support efforts related to professional

growth." This may not seem as significant as the support recorded in favor of other policy

components; however it is important to consider that only 5.2% of respondents disagreed.

Likely due to a lack of knowledge in this area, 35% reported that they neither agreed nor

disagreed.

Summary

According to Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001), educational leadership "involves the identification, acquisition, allocation, coordination, and use of the social, material, and cultural resources necessary to establish the conditions for the possibility of teaching and learning" (p. 24). This definition seems to sufficiently summarize the intent of Subdivision 1, Staff Development Committee of §122A.60 ("Staff Development Program," 2008). The cited subdivision provides provisions for leadership group membership and also references §122A.61, which establishes the parameters for funding professional development work in schools ("Reserved Revenue for Staff Development," 2006).

Although a sentiment consistent with Elmore's (2000) finding that impact in this arena is dependent on teacher "volunteerism" was expressed, there appears to be a significant level of appreciation for the practices of professional development programs and the alignment of those practices with statutes. Survey participants were largely in agreement that schools and districts utilized professional development committees and that their professional development activities aligned with district and site goals. Although there wasn't the same level of positive agreement regarding program funding, this was undoubtedly due to a lack of information, rather than disagreement. And finally, the only area in which survey participants reported higher levels of disagreement with the program leadership structure, was in regard to specific committee membership stipulations, not committee actions.

"Leadership activity analyzed according to individual actions and orientations is not as significant as the study of leadership activity situated in a school context" (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 27). And through this examination of leadership activities situated in the professional development programs of District A and District B, study participants demonstrated vast appreciation for committee structures. In particular, both survey results and interview comments consistently demonstrated affirmation of the alignment existing between school goals and program activities.

Question #3: What are the intended and unintended outcomes of the coordination and leadership efforts of professional development committees?

Subdivision 3 of §122A.60 provides direction to school districts to ensure that their plan for professional development aligns with school board goals, as well as six additional specific goals articulated in the statute ("Staff Development Program," 2008). Each of the six prescriptive goals was presented to survey participants through a question included in Figure 7. Respondents were asked to report on their respective program's ability to positively contribute to desired outcomes.

Findings

Although some categories received acknowledgement of sufficient support from survey and interview participants, others earned unsatisfactory recognition. In regard to the outcomes outlined in policy, perceptions of success were not generally overwhelming. In fact, the mean affirmative response was 55.1%; while the mean negative response across the same six categories was 38.5% (see Figure 7). Compared to other program factors analyzed through the survey tool, the positive and negative response rates are

relatively similar and relatively unfavorable. Therefore it is particularly important to closely examine the comments shared by study participants to identify actual practices as well as clues to where staff dissatisfaction may lie.

Figure 7: Perceptions of how effectively activities contribute to specific outcomes.		
Survey Question	**Very Effectively or Somewhat Effectively**	**Very Ineffectively or Somewhat Ineffectively**
	n=79	
To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute to *improved student achievement of state and local standards*?	77.2%	8.9%
To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute *to meeting the needs of a diverse student population, including at-risk children, children with disabilities, and gifted children, within the regular classroom and other settings*?	73.4%	16.5%
To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute to *an inclusive curriculum for racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse student population*?	63.3%	11.4%
To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute to *improved staff collaboration*?	83.6%	8.9%
To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute to *teaching about violence prevention policies, issues of harassment, and conflict resolution*?	20.3%	55.7%
To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively *assist teachers and other members of site-based management teams with appropriate management and financial management skills*?	12.8%	69.3%

Note. Responses not included in the percentages above were recorded by respondents in the "Do Not Know" or the "Neither Agree or Disagree" category.

Improved Student Achievement of Standards

As a District A elementary principal described, attaining target student performance rates is a district goal that became a professional development objective as well. "We took a big chunk of our staff development and started to allocate that toward math and instruction in math, because again, we didn't hit that eighty percent proficiency mark," she said. In another interview, a secondary committee member from District B echoed this commitment to improving student achievement of standards:

> One of the things we've been working on really hard here is we want to make sure our professional development is for student learning, not staff development for staff development. And so we're constantly looking at the data, "Alright, so we've worked on implementing comprehension strategies this year. Did our comprehension strategies go up?"

Although the districts' professional development plans did little to overtly express this priority, comments like these and a strong 77.2% positive exhibition of support on the survey indicate that student achievement of standards is a priority being supported through professional development efforts. On an open-ended survey question asking about the factors that most significantly influence the priorities for professional development, 70 total responses were recorded by survey respondents. Of these responses, 27 identified testing results as at least one of the primary factors influencing professional development initiatives. The open-ended nature of this question indicates that student achievement is a significant focus of attention in these school districts.

It is interesting to note that of the twenty-seven recorded "testing" responses, nineteen were submitted by non-committee members, perhaps indicating that those who do not participate on professional development committees recognize a different level of pressure or accountability for testing results. It should also be noted that it was not possible to discern between responses that may have indicated satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the fact that "testing" was a primary factor influencing professional development initiatives.

Meeting the Needs of a Diverse Student Population

A substantial 73.4% of survey respondents shared the perception that their district does a very effective or somewhat effective job of meeting the needs of a diverse student population. Interestingly however, a slightly higher percentage expressed a negative perception than had been the trend throughout this program analysis. A noteworthy 16.5% of respondents indicated the perception that their district was very ineffective or somewhat ineffective at meeting the needs of a diverse student population.

A District A elementary principal explained that an earnest effort does exist; "we're really trying to look, I think, at whether we're providing our special services, like special education and [English language learners], whether we're providing some of the best situations" possible. A secondary professional development committee member reflected on similar concerns, "we had done a survey the year before, and the staff really came out strong, that they wanted to do more with connecting [with] the kids and what's going on with kids." This committee member described the flexibility that was built into the professional development program to allow staff members to focus on mental illness,

resiliency, children of poverty, and preparation for college after high school. In addition, a student inventory was conducted to enhance connections with kids by looking at tardies, referrals, and absences. Each district also has some type of formal committee structure in place to address the issue of equity.

Many staff members certainly provided concrete examples of the work being done to meet the needs of a diverse student population, but others were not as impressed by the progress being made. This is the point however, where distinctions between two particular stated outcomes in the policy become difficult to discern. The goals stated in the policy are, (a) "effectively meet the needs of a diverse student population, including at-risk children, children with disabilities, and gifted children, within the regular classroom and other settings," and (b) "provide an inclusive curriculum for a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse student population that is consistent with the state education diversity rule and the district's education diversity plan" ("Staff Development Program," 2008). In conversations with school personnel and through a review of responses to open-ended survey questions, it is clear that the policy draws distinctions that are not generally recognized by school staff. Student sub-groups such as children with disabilities and children from across diverse ethnic backgrounds are considered distinctly different by the policy. In practice however, school staff seem to consider all student sub-groups as unique and worthy of unique supports.

The following section (*Providing an Inclusive Curriculum for a Culturally Diverse Population*) will look further into the specific perceptions of staff, but some comments are worthy of review in this context as well. One District B committee

member shared that not all "at-risk" groups are represented or addressed in many professional development opportunities, including children belonging to certain racial, cultural, socio-economic, and even gifted groups. "We don't do as much as I personally would like about certain topics such as equity, diversity, and relationships," another District B staff member stated.

Providing an Inclusive Curriculum for a Culturally Diverse Population

As stated above, staff members provided evidence through their comments, of concerns about all sub-groups of students. In District B, in fact, committees were renamed to place an appropriate emphasis on equity. A secondary committee member described how Teaching and Learning Teams transformed into Equity and Achievement Advisory Councils, "we decided that equity can't be a separate initiative. It needs to be incorporated. So, now it's the Equity and Achievement Advisory Council." The District A Professional Development Director also recognized the Equity and Integration Team's role in professional development programming.

Although there are formal working teams in place, a relatively low 63.3% of survey respondents indicated approval of districts' effectiveness at providing an inclusive curriculum. Perhaps some of those responding positively truly identify diversity and inclusion as the districts' top priority. When asked about the factors most significantly influencing priorities for professional development on the survey tool, three respondents from District A identified "diversity." What's difficult to discern, as explained above, is whether this perception is that diversity (i.e. at-risk children, children with disabilities,

and gifted children) or diversity (i.e. racially, ethnically, and culturally) is the basis for their report.

Survey respondents from both districts also sounded off on the failure of districts to meet certain student needs. Although it was the minority perception, a District B staff member expressed the concern, that "often times the [professional development] that we receive is designed with the high average student in mind. It does not address the needs of the diverse population of learners, especially the [English as Second Language] population." Another staff member from District A acknowledged the findings discussed earlier, that test scores are significant focal points of professional development efforts. This individual assessed the current reality and concluded that:

> We focus on test scores and don't see the big pictures. We need professional development on educating populations with students who live in poverty. Our population is changing and more immigrants move into the area. We need to understand them more before we can teach them the academics. Then, we will know how they learn.

Improved Staff Collaboration

Staff members' belief about their districts' effectiveness at achieving particular goals stated in policy, waxes and wanes, depending on the outcome being discussed. And at the uppermost point of satisfaction is "improved staff collaboration." 83.6% of survey respondents indicated that they believed that professional development activities sponsored by their district contributed to improved staff collaboration. At the highest level within this positive finding were District B committee members, who concurred at a

rate of 92.3%; and at the lowest were District A non-committee members, who agreed at a lesser rate of 69.2%.

As was stated at the beginning of Chapter 4, the purpose of this analysis is not to compare districts, but rather to examine the implementation of policy. There is much to be said about the role of collaboration in districts through this study, and therefore it is prudent to examine any potential dissonance between those who plan professional development experiences and who therefore possibly experience a collaborative model more tangible than those who do not participate on planning and implementation committees. As the following paragraphs will reveal however, this is an assertion that while plausible, is supported by little evidence.

A non-committee member from District B in fact demonstrated a contradiction to this assertion while commenting through the survey:

In my personal opinion, I think that there has been an increase in successful collaboration for achieving the previously mentioned objectives. Similarly, we have been given (some) time to apply these measures on professional development days. Additionally, some presenters effectively model instructional and assessment practices while delivering [professional development] to the staff.

These reflections are more consistent with professional development planners such as an elementary principal from District B who describe in an interview, the role of collegiality in helping individuals grow within their profession; "we've recognized the need for [teachers] to be working with a team . . . as a team and as a school versus working in isolation." Another District B respondent reflected on positive experiences

planning professional development activities and stated that, "staff see their role and obligation through professional development so that the vision can be achieved. Staff become empowered because they are a part of the decision making body."

Many non-committee members from across both District A and District B demonstrated an appreciation for the role and impact of collaboration through open-ended survey questions as well. When describing program strengths, District A staff members described their program leadership as "generally responsive to feedback" and committed to staying "in touch with what we want and need." Another staff member explained that collaboration is evident in how "school and district level administrators are listening more carefully to what teachers feel will help them develop professionally."

Relatively few comments emerged indicating negative perceptions of collaboration. The relevant focused comments that were recorded focused specifically on a lack of time for collaboration or the inability to collaborate with colleagues in particular roles, such as special education or other grade levels. The general perception therefore documented through all data sources, including surveys, interviews, and professional development plans, is that collaboration is an outcome targeted through policy and realized in practice.

Teach and Model Violence Prevention

Teaching and modeling violence prevention is an outcome targeted through policy for which there is likely no significant level of explicit focus. There was no mention of the topic of violence prevention efforts during interviews or open-ended survey questions.

Even after responding negatively to a survey question on the topic, no participants were compelled to elaborate on specific positive or negative program attributes.

When compared to other topics in this study, the data from the violence prevention prompt provided a fairly limited understanding of the districts' practices. The data table presented in Figure 8 has been constructed to demonstrate the uniformity of the results, although without any further supporting details, it is difficult to draw specific conclusions.

Figure 8: How effectively or ineffectively staff members perceive efforts to teach and model violence prevention.			
Survey Question: To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute to *teaching about violence prevention policies, issues of harassment, and conflict resolution*?			
	All Respondents **n=79**	**District A Respondents** **n=44**	**District B Respondents** **n=35**
Very Effectively or Somewhat Effectively	20.3%	21.5%	20%
Neither Effectively or Ineffectively	24%	26.1%	20%
Very Ineffectively or Somewhat Ineffectively	55.7%	52.4%	60%

Provide Management and Financial Management Skills

Information collected about the districts' efforts to provide committee members with management and financial management skills training indicated a general impression of ineffectiveness. Figure 9, demonstrates the clear message being sent by staff members in both District A and District B, that committee members are not supported as the statute outcomes require. Unlike the outcome of teaching and modeling

of violence prevention however, numerous comments were recorded that provide greater depth to the analysis of this factor.

Figure 9: How effectively staff members perceive management and financial management skills support for committee members.			
Survey Question: To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively *assist teachers and other members of site-based management teams with appropriate management and financial management skills*?			
	All Respondents **n=79**	**District A Respondents** **n=44**	**District B Respondents** **n=35**
Very Effectively or Somewhat Effectively	12.8%	14.3%	11.5%
Don't Know or Neither	17.9%	16.7%	20%
Very Ineffectively or Somewhat Ineffectively	69.3%	69%	68.5%

The District A Professional Development Director explained that a primary focus of her program "is always the development of leadership capacity." She stated that,

> We're mindful of who is doing the work and that it's very important that we build the skills, not just give them instructional knowledge or data knowledge. And we're very mindful of not only administrative leadership, but teacher leadership and building their capacity. So, while they're doing their work, we thread in opportunities to learn about different skills, [such as utilizing norms of collaboration, and understanding how to work through change].

District B's Assistant Superintendent described consultation received from a University of Minnesota a Professor with expertise in school leadership to help develop leadership capacity among teachers. "So it's not just, 'Here, go figure this out.' We're trying to give them the tools to be able to do that," so that they can in turn provide

127

leadership at the building level. A committee member from District B concurred, explaining that the Assistant Superintendent often presents opportunities for teacher leaders and leadership teams to "build their capacity to make decisions" concerning the direction of professional development. "He sets up the structures for leadership teams to be in place to facilitate that ongoing professional development as well as to build leadership capacity with other people."

Although Figure 9 initially presents a rather bleak illustration of the two districts' ability to deliver on the outcome of promoting management skills for leadership teams, the comments shared above provide contradictory evidence that efforts are being made to do just that. It is difficult to determine the source of this dissonance form the data collected, however it is a noteworthy gap, perhaps worthy of attention and inquiry by district officials.

Summary

"Leadership activity analyzed according to individual actions and orientations is not as significant as the study of leadership activity situated in a school context" (Spillane et al., 2001, p. 27). And this inquiry into differences between actual and espoused leadership practices examined both alignment with policies and members' perspectives. Ultimately, findings indicated coherent agreement on purpose and action between leaders and followers on most points. An understanding of the presence and application of statutory provisions was disjointed however.

Several of the outcomes targeted by state statutes proved to be difficult for staff members to discern. Staff members made their own interpretations of at-risk populations,

exceptional students, and diversity within their schools. Although teachers could identify

programs being implemented to meet student needs, there was no apparent regard for the

structure that policy-makers might have envisioned in terms of supporting specific

populations of students. This could perhaps be due to the fact that "language cannot be

understood apart from its rootedness in life experience, nor can words stand apart from

situated use with unambiguous meaning" (Wittgenstein, 1961, as cited in Boland &

Tenkasi, 1995, p. 353). And the every-day uses of the terms documented in policy do not

necessarily align with the definitions or experiences of staff members of District A and

District B.

Staff members in both districts did report favorable shared experiences of

collaboration and working to improve student achievement. District professional

development plans did not explicitly specify the intention to accomplish either outcome;

however both district officials and staff members who participated in this effort were

enthusiastic about their experiences and successes. Youngs (2001) asserts that

professional community involves shared goals for student learning, meaningful

collaboration, and opportunities for teachers to exert influence over their work. These are

precisely the program characteristics identified and targeted by administrators and

committee members; and simultaneously reported by staff members.

Question #4: In what ways is staff development policy enacted in school districts?

The data analysis framework below (See Figure 10) was constructed prior to the

execution of this research effort. It was originally intended to guide data analysis efforts

upon completion of data collection. And although the previous three sections of this

129

chapter provided details regarding the answers to overarching research questions, this

section, in response to research question #4, is uniquely related to the framework. The

Data Analysis Framework was designed to allow the researcher to evaluate the alignment

of practices and policy by utilizing the policy itself as the study's framework. While there

are many professional development models and school leadership arrangements that

could have been utilized to measure these districts' effectiveness, it was decided to first

identify alignment of practices to policy, and then secondarily to make sense of the

complex interactions in terms of the perspectives presented in literature.

Figure 10: Data Analysis Framework.						
			District Governance Aggregate Perspective **n=79**	**Elementary Perspective** **n=34**	**Secondary Perspective** **n=44**	**Teacher Participation**
I.	**Advisory Committee & Activities** *(Leadership)* Representation of Subdivision 1	Contributes to Policy Enactment	69.45%	74.56%	64.34%	Independently analyzed in the narrative.
		Does not Contribute to Policy Enactment	17.94%	16.34%	19.1%	
II.	**Plan Structure** *(Process)* Representation of Subdivision 1a and Subdivision 2	Contributes to Policy Enactment	85%	85.3%	84.85%	
		Does not Contribute to Policy Enactment	6.96%	13.67%	9.46%	
III.	**Outcomes** *(Outcomes)* Representation of Subdivision 3	Contributes to Policy Enactment	55.1%	50.98%	58.3%	
		Does not Contribute to Policy Enactment	28.45%	26.45%	23.33%	

Figure 10: Continued						
IV.	**State Report**	Contributes to Policy Enactment	District practices satisfy statutory obligations.	District practices satisfy statutory obligations.	District practices satisfy statutory obligations.	Independently analyzed in the narrative.
		Does not Contribute to Policy Enactment				
V.	**Reserved Revenue**	Contributes to Policy Enactment	District practices satisfy statutory obligations.	District practices satisfy statutory obligations.	District practices satisfy statutory obligations.	
		Does not Contribute to Policy Enactment				

Notes.

- Percentages indicate the mean level of agreement or disagreement about policy enactment through professional development programs.
- District reports indicate compliance in Category IV and Category V.
- The sum of elementary and secondary respondents does not equal 79, due to the fact that one survey respondent reported holding a district-level position.

Findings

Like the previous sections of this chapter, the data must be described primarily in

an anecdotal nature due to the data collection methods; however it is important to

reference the framework behind the broader inquiry. Question #4, "In what ways is staff

development policy enacted in school districts?" guides the summary and big-picture

examination of this effort.

Rather than restating the findings identified above, or summarizing the

perspectives already shared, this section of Chapter 4 will subject many of the same

findings to an alternative analysis that utilizes elementary and secondary perspectives

131

independently in order to determine the ways in which staff development policy is enacted. As this analysis draws to a close, it is important to provide insights into the professional development practices and experiences school staff members experience at different "levels" (i.e. elementary vs. secondary) in order for the results to have any immediate usefulness or applicability in schools governed by the policies studied here.

Subdivision 1: Staff Development Committee

Subdivision 1 of § 122A.60 has established the leadership structure expectations for professional development programs in Minnesota school districts. The most significant directives stated here collectively serve the purpose of defining the membership of the district and site professional development committees. The statute states that, "A majority of the advisory committee and the site professional development team must be teachers representing various grade levels, subject areas, and special education. The advisory committee must also include nonteaching staff, parents, and administrators" ("Staff Development Program," 2008).

The perception of districts' adherence to these stipulations is fairly consistent across levels. Figure 10 illustrates that elementary teachers from District A and B identified alignment of district practices with policy, so did the secondary teachers. Where the perception of alignment waned among elementary teachers, it also waned among secondary teachers. A majority of teachers, regardless of level, strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that, (a) their school utilizes committees for leading professional development, (b) their district utilizes committees for leading professional development, and (c) professional development activities in their districts aligned with goals. The

lowest level of agreement in these areas was reported by secondary staff members whose 86.1% level of agreement was still a resounding acknowledgement of alignment between policy and practices.

The two areas in which alignment was not reported were in regard to stipulations about committee membership and the use of professional development funds. Only 27.3% of elementary survey respondents and an even lower 2.3% of secondary respondents reported any level of agreement with a statement, "Nonteaching staff, parents, administrators, and teachers all have representation on professional development leadership teams." It is not clear which group identified by this statement from the statute is underrepresented, or whether there are multiple categories of people without appropriate representation. It is clear however that while staff members acknowledge the existence of functioning committees, they have not observed representative participation on those committees.

In regard to the use of staff development budgets, there was a shared sense of uncertainty across levels. One particular state statute, specifically stipulates the level of funding required by school districts and the manner in which those funds may be used ("Reserved Revenue for Staff Development," 2006). Elementary staff members agreed at a rate of 53.7%, while secondary staff members acknowledged agreement at a rate of 51.2% that professional development budgets were utilized solely to support professional development activities (See Figure 11). These comparable rates indicate similar experiences or perceptions, regardless of level. However, they also demonstrate a lesser

degree of certainty about the use of professional development funds than other program

factors attributed to leadership decisions.

Figure 11: Elementary and Secondary Perspectives of Professional Development Leadership Structures.		
Survey Question	**ELEMENTARY Strongly Agree or Somewhat Agree n=34**	**SECONDARY Strongly Agree or Somewhat Agree n=44**
To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "My school utilizes a committee or team for the purpose of leading professional development efforts."	87.9%	86.1%
To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "My district utilizes committees or teams for the purpose of leading professional development efforts."	87.9%	91.4%
To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "Professional development activities in my district are aligned with district and site goals."	97%	90.7
To what extent to you agree or disagree with this statement: "Nonteaching staff, parents, administrators, and teachers all have representation on professional development leadership teams."	27.3%	2.3%
To what extent to you agree or disagree with this statement: "Our district's professional development funding is used only to support efforts related to professional growth."	53.7%	51.2%

Note. Reflections on Subdivision 1: Staff Development Committee. Survey evidence of leadership structures that CONTRIBUTE to policy enactment.

Subdivision 1a: Effective Staff Development Activities and Subdivision 2: Contents of the Plan

Figure 12 provides insight into the activities utilized by professional development

programmers to support district and school efforts. These activities, as outlined in the

statute, encompass the processes deemed appropriate by policy-makers for facilitating

adult learning within school districts ("Staff Development Program," 2008).

According to survey respondents across elementary and secondary levels, there was general agreement that practices in the districts aligned with policy stipulations. While variation in the measure of agreement across both levels existed, there was certainly no pattern between activity categories or across levels. For example, while secondary staff members reported a higher level of agreement about opportunities to "practice and improve their instructional skills," elementary staff members reported a higher level of agreement about opportunities to "enhance content knowledge."

Figure 12: Elementary and Secondary Perspectives of Professional Development Activities.		
Survey Question	**ELEMENTARY Strongly Agree or Somewhat Agree n=34**	**SECONDARY Strongly Agree or Somewhat Agree n=44**
To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of *research-based strategies*?	91.2%	97.7%
To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of teachers' efforts to *practice and improve their instructional skills* over time?	85.3%	93.2%
To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of *teachers' use of data as part of their daily work to increase student achievement*?	82.4%	86.3%
To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of *teachers' efforts to enhance content knowledge*?	82.4%	61.4%
To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of the *use of state and local academic standards*?	94.1%	81.8%
To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of *collaborative, professional relationships*?	76.5%	88.7%

Note. Reflections on Subdivision 1a: Effective Staff Development Activities and Subdivision 2: Contents of the Plan. Survey evidence of activities that CONTRIBUTE to policy enactment.

Differences such as these, as documented and exhibited in Figure 12, provide

evidence that elementary and secondary staff members do not reflect on their experiences

from a common perspective. The fluctuations in levels of agreement also provide

evidence however, that staff members across both levels neither view their programs as

wholly and completely successful, or completely ineffective. Survey respondents

undoubtedly examined each activity category independently and responded accordingly.

Subdivision 3: Staff Development Outcomes

The final subdivision of §122A.60 Staff Development Program, Subdivision 3,

establishes the specific outcomes that each districts' professional development program

should accomplish. Questions posed through the survey that are relevant to an inquiry

about Subdivision 3 and the corresponding results are stated in Table 13. These results

convey the perception of a lower rate of effectiveness than the districts may be achieving

with other statute components. From these results, the researcher's conclusion is first that

the districts' are likely less effective at attaining certain outcomes, or second, that

districts possibly have not promoted the concepts and goals associated with these

statutory outcomes among staff members.

These results outlined in Figure 13, like the results of survey questions examining

the use of activities (see Figure 12), are varied across levels. Secondary teachers report a

higher rate of effectiveness of their districts' professional development program in some

outcome categories, such as the goal of providing "an inclusive curriculum for racially,

ethnically, and culturally diverse student population." Elementary teachers on the other

hand report a higher level of effectiveness on outcome categories such as "improved

student achievement of state and local standards." It is therefore difficult to ascertain

whether elementary or secondary staff members have a greater sense of appreciation for

program efforts to achieve specific outcomes.

Figure 13: Elementary and Secondary Perspectives of Professional Development Program Outcomes.		
Survey Question	**ELEMENTARY Very Effectively or Somewhat Effectively** **n=34**	**SECONDARY Very Effectively or Somewhat Effectively** **n=44**
To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute to *improved student achievement of state and local standards*?	82.3%	72.7%
To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute *to meeting the needs of a diverse student population, including at-risk children, children with disabilities, and gifted children, within the regular classroom and other settings*?	73.6%	72.8%
To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute to *an inclusive curriculum for racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse student population*?	47.1%	75%
To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute to *improved staff collaboration*?	73.5%	93.2%
To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute to *teaching about violence prevention policies, issues of harassment, and conflict resolution*?	14.7%	25%
To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively *assist teachers and other members of site-based management teams with appropriate management and financial management skills*?	14.7%	11.6%

Note. Percentages indicate staff members' perception of programs' abilities to effectively enact statue provisions.

The more significant point conveyed by Table 13 is that concerning two specific outcomes, both elementary and secondary staff members identified effective practices at considerably low rates. Only 14.7% of elementary staff members and 25% of secondary staff members affirmed that their districts' very effectively or somewhat effectively employed activities that teach about violence prevention, harassment, and conflict resolution. Similarly, only 14.7% of elementary staff members and 11.6% of secondary staff members reported that the professional development activities in their district very effectively or somewhat effectively assisted "teachers and other members of site-based management teams with appropriate management and financial management skills."

The lower rates of satisfaction observed here demonstrate likely areas of misalignment between practices and policy. Further discussion is necessary however to determine whether policy articulates and promotes best practices that districts' discount, or whether at least these districts have prioritized efforts according to autonomous goals or alternate models of professional learning.

While the reason or reasons for lower recognition of alignment are not easily determined from the data explored so far, it is sensible to acknowledge the prospect that elementary and secondary teachers do not experience radically different professional development experiences in District A and District B. Further inquiries may reveal differences between the perceptions of elementary and secondary teachers; however their reflections on professional development programming components do not demonstrate conclusive evidence of discrepancies.

Although it was not an original focus of this study, the theme of collaboration emerged as a significant emphasis of the statute. Teacher participation was however a factor that was originally and intentionally included as an important factor worthy of study. It wasn't clear to the researcher at the onset of this effort, just how significant the concept of teacher participation would be. Nor was it understood initially how "collaboration" would align within the study as the suitable synonym for "teacher participation."

As stated earlier, Subdivision 2 of §120A.60, Contents of the Plan, did not originally contain specific provisions. However, with legislative approval of the revised statute in 2008 (which became effective in 2009), *collaboration* became the only provision or characteristic stipulated in *each* subdivision. The language utilized in the subdivisions is not identical; however each carries an analogous message. In Subdivision 1a, the statute states that professional development activities must "provide opportunities to build professional relationships, foster collaboration among principals and staff who provide instruction, and provide opportunities for teacher-to-teacher mentoring." Subdivision 2 mandates that district professional development plans must "support stable and productive professional communities achieved through ongoing and school wide progress and growth in teaching practice." Subdivision 3 states that schools must work through their professional development programs to "improve staff collaboration and develop mentoring and peer coaching programs for teachers new to the school or district" ("Staff Development Program," 2008).

Not only was collaboration the only statute feature manifest in all subdivisions, it was also the program attribute highlighted most frequently by staff members. For these reasons, it was important to examine the experiences of staff members and to reflect on the collaborative dimensions of their experiences.

The Professional Development Director from District A described a purposeful basis for the development of a collaborative culture when she explained the various committee structures that exist in each building and the fact that, "they all have a representative on the district committee." The committees and teams are not only able to, but are responsible for designing unique building plans to address particular needs. As the director states, "So it isn't the district saying, 'We are going to do this on a certain day,'" rather, committee members coordinate improvement processes in their own buildings. In this way, District A has developed routines that require teacher participation and promote collaboration.

Staff members from District A substantiate claims that teachers do have legitimate roles in the promotion of district initiatives through collaborative practices. One committee member from District A commented on a survey that "there seems to be a fair amount of teacher leadership opportunities in not only the planning of professional development, but in leading professional development for others." Another staff member explained in an interview that during staff development meetings at the district level, much of the time is devoted to sharing about what each building is doing in regard to specific initiatives. These meetings consequently provide an important forum for the manifestation of teacher participation and collaboration.

Experiences in District B were conveyed in similar terms. As an elementary

principal in District B explained, staff members who participate on the site committee for

his school, share leadership responsibilities and actually want to "lead the district

forward." A secondary principal in District B expanded the parameters of collaboration in

practice beyond dialogue to include the use of student data and staff feedback data as a

basis for supporting staff discussions. Comments such as these were so numerous, that it

is difficult to convey an adequate sense of the collaborative setting in both District A and

District B. The most accurate and succinct description likely came from a District B

teacher who, when asked to describe the leadership model utilized in her district's

professional development program, responded by saying, "I would say it's very—well,

it's collaborative."

Summary

Louis et al. (1996) and others have identified numerous differences between

elementary and secondary teachers collective engagement in their practice. For this

reason, it was important to consider the potential impact of varying perspectives on the

findings of this study.

As elementary and secondary staff members reflected on leadership structures

(see Figure 11), similar trends in perceptions were evident. Where elementary staff

recognized alignment between practices and policy, so did secondary staff. In terms of

the professional development activities in which they engage however, elementary staff

members perceived greater support in enhancing content knowledge and targeting

academic standards, where secondary staff perceived a greater focus on collaborative

professional relationships (see Figure 12 and Figure 13). These differences are

discernable and important to consider, however they were not conspicuous dimensions of

the professional development programs, likely to be responsible for alignment or lack of

alignment with policies.

CHAPTER 5 – SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

This chapter will summarize the parameters of this study as well as the noteworthy findings. In regard to the findings, it must be acknowledged by the researcher and the reader alike, that limitations exist in the extent to which generalizations may be made. District A and District B provided exceptional opportunities to explore professional development practices in action. Staff members in each district were forthcoming through their participation and the districts modeled well-developed frameworks for professional development work. It cannot be presumed however that these characteristics are typical of the traits and practices that might be observed in other school settings.

Also included in the summary are implications for policy, practice, and future research. In spite of the limited opportunity for generalizations to other settings, it is sensible to focus on what works and what does not work in a variety of settings in order to draw reasonable conclusions about trends and patterns in potentially applicable behaviors across settings. Thietart and Forgues (1995) suggest the existence of "continuous processes of convergence and divergence, stability and instability, evolution and revolution in every organization" (p. 19), a supposition that justifies the consideration of germane factors. "It requires that we step back, refocus our attention on the system as a whole, and realize there are other processes at work" (Wheatley, 1999, p. 102). Therefore, in order to support policy-makers, practitioners, and other researchers, the author would like to increase the potential for benefits to be realized through the completion of this

work by sharing findings applicable to a broad notion of professional development programming.

The purpose of this study was to identify the impact of staff development statutes (policies) in Minnesota on the structures and activities of advisory committees who lead preK-12 professional development efforts. A relatively atypical case study approach was employed in the effort to conduct the study. In an archetypal comparative case study, the selected school districts would have been examined independently as unique "cases," thus allowing a comparison of relevant characteristics and responses to state policy. Merriam (1998) though, offers a broad definition which defines a case as "a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries . . . the case then, could be a person such as a student, a teacher, a principal, a program, a group such as a class, a school a community; a specific *policy* [italics added]; and so on" (p. 27). Therefore, rather than examine the selected school districts and compare their unique responses to the state policy as "cases," insights from the author's university advisor initiated a deliberate decision to view the state policy as "the case" through a policy-as-the-case, research approach.

This results chapter will express study findings in terms of the broad impressions that may be drawn from the data. Specific data points from each district must certainly be highlighted to provide insights into the dimensions of the aggregate data; however the focus of the analysis will remain on "the case" examined by this case study, which is the policy language documented in Minnesota Statutes 122A.60 and 122A.61.

Sampling was achieved through an effort by the researcher to identify two school districts with exemplary professional development programs. This was accomplished by first seeking recommendations from the Board of Directors of the Minnesota Staff Development Council. Members of the board submitted anonymous recommendations based on their own observations and experiences with numerous school districts. Recommendations received from the directors were then submitted to two university professors with vast practical experience and scholarly expertise in the field of professional development for educators. These university faculty members submitted identical proposals of two districts from the list of potential sites, which ultimately comprised the final district selections (referred to as District A and District B throughout the analysis).

Following the identification of two districts through these purposive methods, the researcher initiated conversations with the professional development coordinators from each about potential involvement in the research effort. During these conversations, the researcher inquired about and verified program alignment with research-based practices, ultimately justifying the school districts' invitations to participate in the study. The researcher then worked with the professional development coordinators to select appropriate school sites within each district, as well as individual participants. Selected sites demonstrated coherent plans and a commitment to professional development; and individual participants were selected according to their designated titles, such as principal or committee chairperson. Other participants were selected from groups of staff members who either specifically did or did not have formal roles on staff development committees.

Ultimately, this purposive sampling process lead to the selections of District A, District B, and the numerous individual participants from each district.
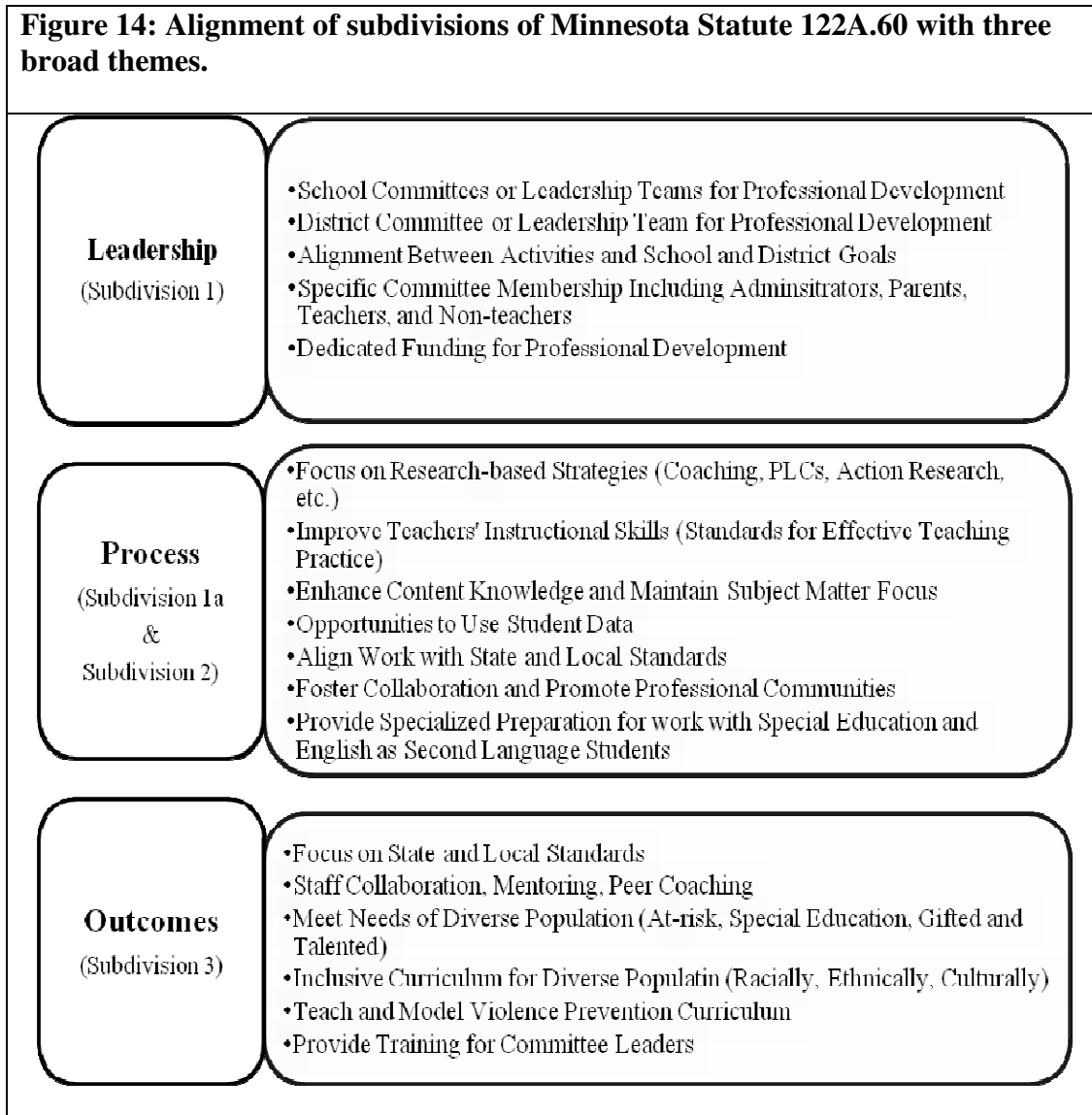
Summary of Key Findings

As described in Chapter 4 (See Figure 2), although the text of Minnesota Statute 122A.60, Staff Development Program, covers only two pages, those pages contain sometimes redundant and sometimes obscure stipulations. Commendably, the professional development activities of District A and District B are generally aligned with these stipulations, in spite of both ambiguities and redundancies in the policy. The findings of this research effort cannot conclude however, that the formation of exemplary professional development programs in these schools has occurred due to the influence of governing policies.

School districts' professional development programs may in fact have been influenced greatly by policy, because there is generally appropriate alignment between policy and actual practices. There appears however to be a lack of familiarity with policy details by staff members that suggest the possible evolution of exemplary programs outside the influences of policy. The apparent alignment between practice and policy could also be attributed to the prospect that policy has imitated best practices, rather than distinguishing and initiating those practices.

Professional development practices outlined in the four subdivisions of Minnesota §122A.60, can be aligned under three program dimensions, (a) leadership, (b) process, and (c) outcomes. Figure 14 illustrates how entire subdivisions can be situated in an advantageous manner within the three broader themes to aid in understanding the

subdivisions' implicit intent. Wholly considered, this illustration provides a succinct view

of what school districts must do to fulfill their statutory obligations in terms of

professional development programming.

In order to make definitive determinations regarding statutory compliance, each

of the components from Figure 14 were evaluated independently. There are eleven

Figure 14: Alignment of subdivisions of Minnesota Statute 122A.60 with three broad themes.

Leadership
(Subdivision 1)
- School Committees or Leadership Teams for Professional Development
- District Committee or Leadership Team for Professional Development
- Alignment Between Activities and School and District Goals
- Specific Committee Membership Including Adminsitrators, Parents, Teachers, and Non-teachers
- Dedicated Funding for Professional Development

Process
(Subdivision 1a
&
Subdivision 2)
- Focus on Research-based Strategies (Coaching, PLCs, Action Research, etc.)
- Improve Teachers' Instructional Skills (Standards for Effective Teaching Practice)
- Enhance Content Knowledge and Maintain Subject Matter Focus
- Opportunities to Use Student Data
- Align Work with State and Local Standards
- Foster Collaboration and Promote Professional Communities
- Provide Specialized Preparation for work with Special Education and English as Second Language Students

Outcomes
(Subdivision 3)
- Focus on State and Local Standards
- Staff Collaboration, Mentoring, Peer Coaching
- Meet Needs of Diverse Population (At-risk, Special Education, Gifted and Talented)
- Inclusive Curriculum for Diverse Populatin (Racially, Ethnically, Culturally)
- Teach and Model Violence Prevention Curriculum
- Provide Training for Committee Leaders

Note. "Process" components include a combination of Subdivision 1a and Subdivision 2 stipulations. Redundant stipulations in the "process" theme have been condensed.

147

specific areas in which District A and District B collectively measure up to the strictest interpretation of state policy governing public schools' professional development programs. In each of these eleven areas, at least 80% of the staff members surveyed reported conformity of practices with policy language. Although the survey results utilized to draw conclusions in this study should not be referenced independently, they provide a point of distinction, and are supported by comments from personal interviews. And while this point of distinction is admittedly subjective, it is at the same time reasonable and appropriate to establish a high standard, considering the ideal of 100% compliance with statute language. Therefore, the threshold of 80% was identified by the researcher as a reasonable level of affirmation of compliance by staff members.

Four especially affirmative categories pertain to *leadership* dimensions, and two are relevant to the professed *outcomes* of state policy. Five of the eleven particularly affirmative categories are descriptive of the type of activities in which school personnel engage, constituting elements of the *process* theme.

Although it is clear that generalizations across diverse settings outside of District A and District B would be difficult to assert based on these findings and the subjective manner in which the districts were identified, there is at least minimally a starting point for the examination of professional development work in other schools. There are also potential insights to be drawn by policy-makers who intend to standardize the work of school personnel. Policy-makers should however be cautious to fully accept the assertions derived from staff reports. In either case, these findings are worthy of appreciation due to the exceptionally high level of consensus by staff members.

As Figure 15 illustrates, the theme of leadership obtained distinguishing levels of

appreciation from staff members for the evident alignment between the school districts'

professional development leadership team structures and applicable policy stipulations. It

is not surprising that survey participants recognized the utilization of school and district

professional development committees, because 38% of the survey respondents claimed

Figure 15: LEADERSHIP. Alignment of Districts' practices with statute stipulations pertaining to Leadership program dimensions.

Note. Data represents Subdivision 1 stipulations. Evidence of alignment indicates correlations between policy and practice.

membership on one of the existing committees. It is also not surprising due to the very

high level of appreciation reported by staff members for the many collaborative

opportunities that exist in each district. Staff members from these exemplary districts not

149

only observed the shared-leadership structure that exists in their districts, they also commented on the sense of satisfaction from genuine participation.

Of all of the leadership dimensions examined through the study, it was especially clear to participants that leadership groups in District A and District B enacted professional development programming that aligned with district and site goals. Committee members and non-committee members alike were able to articulate the relationships between district and site goals, planning efforts, and leadership team work.

In regard to specific committee membership requirements, the districts garnered fewer favorable responses. According to high level district leaders, such as the Professional Development Director in District A, the statute plays an undeniable role in the formation of committees. But while committees were certainly in place, it was not clear to staff members whether roles on those committees were held by specific individuals such as administrators, parents, non-teaching staff, and teachers.

It is important to note that one statutory requirement in the leadership domain that did not receive a requisite affirmative survey response level of 80% was still substantiated by sufficient evidence to warrant verification of complete compliance. Staff members were not convinced that professional development funding was used across the districts to *only* support efforts related to professional growth. The affirmative response rate was only 59.8% to a survey inquiry about this condition. However, it was clear from a review of budget expenditures, as explained in Chapter 4, that District A and District B spent nearly their full required 2% budget allocation appropriately on professional development expenditures. Acknowledgement of this information is vital,
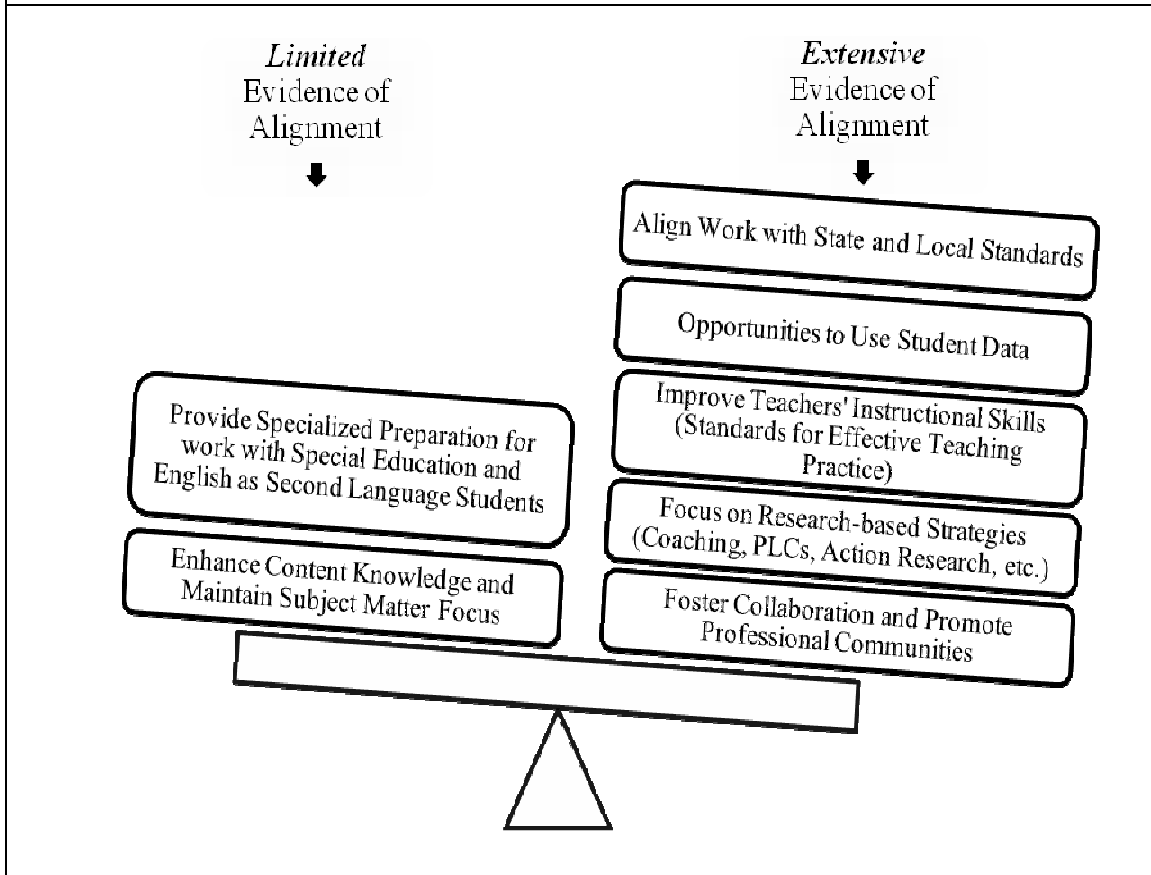
due first to the fact that this stipulation is identified in Figure 15 as an area of full

compliance, regardless of the perception that some staff members may hold to the

contrary. The second important reason for recognizing this fact is that Minnesota

§122A.61 Reserved Revenue for Staff Development, provides explicit detail about the

use of school district funds for professional development activities, and is properly

recognized and accounted for in these cases by school district leaders.

Process

The process theme examined through this study is defined by two different, but

not necessarily distinct subdivisions of the policy. Subdivision 1a, Effective Activities,

and Subdivision 2, Contents of the Plan, present a somewhat convoluted description of

how the work of professional development should be accomplished. However, analyzing

the subdivisions simultaneously proved to be a feasible task through the collected data.

As Figure 16 illustrates, after merging comparable components, the theme presented

seven stipulations for review, of which five demonstrated positive correlations between

policy and practice.

Among the categories of activities promoted by the statute, this research effort

revealed schools' emphases on (a) the use of research-based strategies, (b) explicit efforts

to improve instructional skills, (c) the application of state and local standards, (d) the use

of data in daily work, and (e) collaborative professional relationships. Although the

researcher was not able to observe these activities in action, staff members in District A

and District B conveyed verification of experiences in specific practices that made each

of these evident. In particular, it was clear from all data sources that a major emphasis has

Figure 16: PROCESS. Alignment of Districts' practices with statute stipulations pertaining to Process program dimensions.

Note. Data represents Subdivision 1a and Subdivision 2 stipulations. Eleven stipulations across the subdivisions have been merged into analogous components (See Figure 2 for elaboration.) Evidence of alignment indicates correlations between policy and practice.

been placed on collaboration and collaborative practices in each district. An elementary teacher, who had not a held a committee role, commented that "at the school and district level, administrators are listening more carefully to what teachers feel will help them develop professionally." Many staff members commented more generally however about their programs' greatest strength by citing examples of increases "in successful collaboration." There were only a minimal number of outliers in the comments shared by

staff members indicating dissatisfaction with the levels of collaboration and opportunities for participation by all staff members in professional development programming. The negative comments relevant to the topic of collaboration pertained almost exclusively to the lack of time available for collaboration.

The key presumption from this strong showing in the area of professional development activities is that the work is done in a systematic and comprehensive manner that is consistent with the ideals of policy-makers. Only one policy stipulation in the area of professional development activities registered a percentage of agreement below 80% on the staff survey, that being "teachers' efforts to enhance content knowledge" (70.9%). Consequently, five of the six categories of ideal activities were recognized by staff members to be evident in practice at distinctive levels, making it the category demonstrating the highest level of compliance.

The second important program component necessary for review in order to understand the *processes* enacted in these school districts is the formal professional development plan. Each district and school site is required to utilize a plan for regulating professional development work. As explained in Chapter 4, prior to the 2009-2010 school year, essential professional development plan components were not articulated explicitly in policy. The summary presented in the following paragraphs is based on the statute that was approved by the legislature in 2008 (see, "Staff Development Program," 2008).

While more might be said specifically about the nature of the alignment between practices and the plan documents, it is true that staff members acknowledged the existence of a number of the practices that are required by policy. Survey results across

the districts evidenced high levels of support (80% or greater) in three of five categories. The three positive areas included, (a) coaching, professional learning communities, action research, and other job-embedded models, (b) reinforcement of national and state standards of effective teaching practice, and (c) support of stable and productive professional communities. Although district plans revealed evidence of all five plan components, staff members did not substantiate the existence of correlating practices in all five areas (with high levels of affirmative response). Survey respondents did not report that districts maintained a strong subject matter focus and did not report that the districts provided specialized preparation for issues related to students with special needs and limited English proficiency.

The significance of this information is not sufficiently revealed through survey responses however. It was not only the aim of this study to identify how people engage in professional development processes after all, but moreover to identify the ways in which professional development policy is wholly enacted in school districts, including an account of the structure and application of mandatory plans. District A and District B each provided a comprehensive district plan for review, which demonstrated compliance through references to every required component (See Figure 4).

Although staff members' survey responses provided indications that a majority of professional development plan components were being enacted in the districts, and all specifications from policy were present in District A's and District B's official plans, the correlations between the plans and policy were apparently not deliberate. The plans had very different structures that supported each district's unique needs and clearly did not

154

reflect intentional alignment with the outline of Subdivision 2 of §122A.60. While this is

not necessarily a negative finding, it contributes to the presumption stated earlier in this

chapter, that the apparent alignment between practice and policy could be attributed to

the prospect that policy has mirrored best practices, rather than distinguishing and
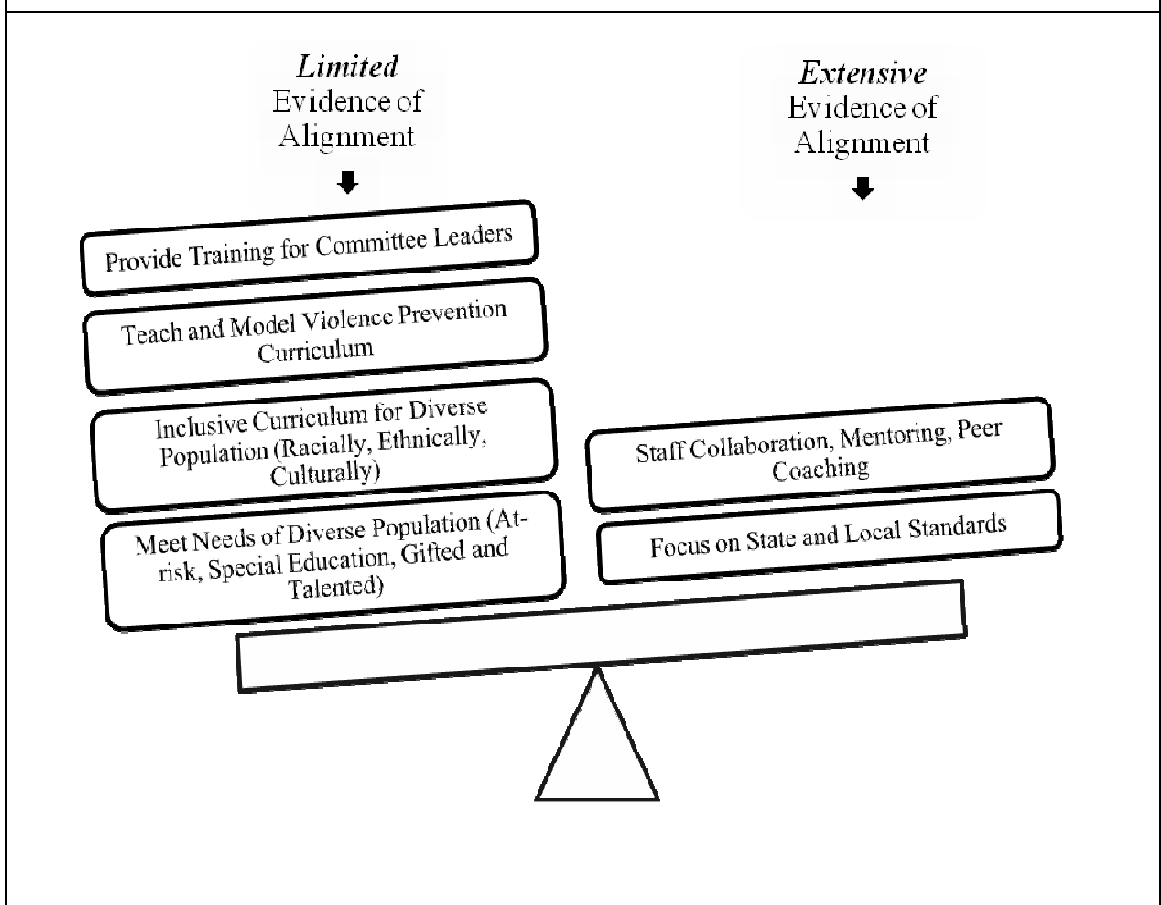
initiating those practices.

Outcomes

The third and final policy theme examined through this study revealed that a

concerted effort had not been placed on the outcomes of professional development work

by District A and District B, as emphasized by policy, in the same manner in which

activities and professional development plan components were emphasized. Although

individuals throughout the research effort highlighted the importance of several program

outcomes articulated in Subdivision 3 of §122A.60, only (a) student achievement of state

and local education standards, and (b) staff collaboration, mentoring, and peer coaching

programs, received significant recognition (80% or greater) as demonstrated through

survey results. Figure 17 illustrates the finding that four remaining categories of desirable

outcomes were not evident to staff members, including, (a) meeting the needs of a diverse

student population, (b) providing an inclusive curriculum for a racially, ethnically, and

culturally diverse population, (c) teaching and modeling violence prevention, and (d)

providing teachers and other members of site-based management teams with management

and financial management skills.

The program category summarized by these outcomes proved to offer the weakest

association with the relevant statute. Staff members did not report feelings of satisfaction

when reflecting on efforts to meet the needs of specific sub-groups of students. In fact, several staff members commented specifically that not all "at-risk" groups, including racial, cultural, socio-economic, and varied academic performance sub-groups, were not explicitly supported through professional development work.

Figure 17: OUTCOMES. Alignment of Districts' practices with statute stipulations pertaining to Outcome program dimensions.

Note. Data represents Subdivision 3 stipulations. Evidence of alignment indicates correlations between policy and practice.

These findings are interesting considering the fact that as evidenced by calendars contained in the district professional development plan, District A scheduled numerous

156

monthly meetings that pertained to the specific needs of diverse populations of students. District B even went to the extent of renaming committees to reflect the priority that diverse student populations represent to the district. Somehow, not only were staff members generally oblivious to certain policy requirements, they were unable to identify specific actions in practice that may have aligned with significant stipulations.

<div align="center">Implications</div>

<div align="center">*Implications for Policy*</div>

There are three perspectives from which policy implications may be considered in regard to the findings of this research effort. First and foremost, policy-makers may likely be interested in straightforward determinations of compliance or non-compliance, regardless of the breadth or depth of the inquiry. Policies after all are developed to regulate specific behaviors, but their effectiveness is not always known. Second, it is prudent to review existing research in order to consider the applicability of these findings to common assumptions about policy implementation. And third, it is sensible to articulate and consider policy revisions that could potentially improve the effectiveness of relevant professional development policies.

Compliance or Non-Compliance

Through their policy research, Stevenson and Schiller concluded that "state reform policies vary in their domains and specificity. They provide directions for school change but the nature of the guidance and the responsiveness of schools vary" (Stevenson & Schiller, 1999, p. 279), and therefore provide grounds to not be presumptuous about the prospect of desirable outcomes. In regard to the relevant policies examined through

this project however, most desirable outcomes were affirmed by study participants. As Figures 14, 15, and 16 collectively illustrate, while eight were less recognizable by staff, eleven specific policy stipulations were acknowledged at high levels. The favorable trend toward the affirmative described here is substantiated with a greater emphasis in Figure 10, where five categories, as analyzed from three perspectives (district, elementary, and secondary staff), all provide verification of policy compliance.

The primary implication for policy-makers and enforcement officers that can be derived from this analysis is that policy stipulations generally *are* enacted in the districts studied, although possibly "only in very narrow, policy-specific ways," as Crowson (2003, p. 41) concludes. Specifically however, there is a need to develop a greater appreciation for the specific outcomes of policy. This cannot be accomplished without either promoting clearer definitions where ambiguity exists, such as the bounds of at-risk and diverse student populations, or by appropriately modifying policy to match the perceptions of school staff members. Study participants provided evidence of a commitment to diverse populations of students; however the policy does not provide sufficient clarification to staff members to be an influential factor in guiding their efforts.

An additional implication regarding compliance was evident in the review of each district's professional development plan. While plans conveyed all required information, it was not easy to discern the purpose of individual plan components. If the intended result of policy-makers' revisions to plan requirements in 2008 (See "Staff Development Program," 2008) was greater clarity and uniformity, the goal was clearly not achieved.

Communication of specific details and a clearer focus on what was really intended are necessary guides for district officials that are currently unavailable.

Applicability of Current Research

A substantial and reaffirming finding for policy-makers was that both districts studied through this research effort demonstrated similar rates of recognition for and alignment between practice and policy. A contrary finding would have been predictable according to Carnoy and Rhoten (2002), who revealed that "policies prescribed by the same paradigm but applied in different contexts produce different practices—so different in some cases—that it is difficult to imagine that they were the result of the same policy" (p. 6). In this case, districts, both identified as exemplary in the field or professional development demonstrated remarkably similar response rates in both affirmative and negative categories. While there were definite indications through interview responses that staff members were involved in unique programs, those programs shared consistent parallels to policy provisions.

There was additional evidence that the districts adhere to common practices, contributing to the proposition that specific core program features are advisable in policy. Two specific findings of this effort naturally correlate with the guidelines for district and state professional development policy identified by Youngs (2001), who highlighted the need to promote within-school collaboration and the need for districts to negotiate tension between mandating conformity and providing autonomy between individual schools. And although "past research suggest that mandates [are] typically met by minimal compliance

to the letter of the law" (Firestone, 1989, p. 189), these school districts seemed willing to, and even likely to adopt evidence-based practices without extensive pressure from policy.

Policy Recommendations

Policy research has regularly concluded that a difficulty exists in ensuring the implementation of policy with fidelity across diverse settings (Crowson, 2003; Dutro et al., 2002; Gamse, Millsap, & Goodson, 2002; Youngs, 2001, and others). One eloquent model of enacting reform is presented by Firestone (1989), who illustrates a system of mandates and inducements leveraged against the anticipated will and capacity of policy subjects, in order to achieve specific objectives. While this model is sensible and could not be refuted by the findings of this effort, there still lies within these recent findings, the hope for policy-makers that achieving specific objectives may be accomplished without resorting to enforcement tactics.

In the case of the statutes examined here, policy-makers could reduce the redundancies present in policy without compromising a commitment to specific outcomes. Furthermore, in order to better align policy and actions, it would be advisable to provide a model plan designed in a format that supports policy implementation, including clear and specific definitions that align with practitioners' perceptions. And finally, but more broadly, it would be beneficial to examine and consider what practices are currently leading to the idealic outcomes envisioned by policy-makers in exemplary settings.

The "outcomes" outlined in the statutes for example, are not well-understood in their current form, although staff members clearly share a sense of obligation toward the sentiments of the policy. It is likely that in situations in which actual practices are not

160

aligned with policy, two conditions seem plausible. First, it may be that policy is not intentionally being circumvented, but rather is being enacted according to perceptions of policy intent. Or second, school officials may be determining a sensible approach based on knowledge of best practices in the absence of clear direction from policy.

In spite the delimitations of this study due to the difficulty of claiming generalizability of results; the researcher maintains a sense of optimism for successful policy implementation across settings. There is clearly substantial evidence nonetheless, that the process of policy implementation is too complex to make general assertions from such results. Researchers have consistently concluded that context is a critical and influential factor on implementation efforts (Brunner, 2005; Firestone, 1989; Little, 1989, and others). Recognition of these facts should not however disqualify potential policy improvements in favor of policy enforcement actions or expansive reform efforts.

Implications for Practice

The practices of professional developers in two school districts have been documented throughout this thesis. And while the development of conclusions has been substantially guided by accounts of practice, the results could likewise inform practice and support further improvement efforts in educator professional development programs. The implications described in the following paragraphs are obviously specific to the participants of this study. Efforts to generalize beyond the circumstances and cultures of the participating districts would certainly prove to be feasible, but care must be taken by independent practitioners to consider similarities and differences between their own observations and those described throughout this paper.

161

The researcher has identified implications for practitioners in three areas. First, efforts to synthesize and communicate efforts in policy terms would help to develop coherency where misinterpretations exist. Second, based on the findings in these districts that schools struggle with attempts to achieve the *outcomes* articulated explicitly in these policies, it may be advisable to conduct an internal evaluation in this area of possible nonconformity. And third, in order to capitalize on an evident strength observed in District A and District B, it would be prudent for school professional developers to reflect on the models utilized to develop successful collaborative relationships. Considering potential improvements is important, but to do so without acute consideration of technical and cultural strengths would be shortsighted.

Synthesize Vocabulary

Where common vocabulary does not exist between policy and practice, there exist opportunities for misinterpretations. There is also an implication in this scenario for school officials who may well anticipate misunderstandings across a variety of their staffs' work with programs and initiatives, and provide appropriate and timely explanations. As one staff member from District B commented on an open-ended survey question, "I agree with the plan, however parts of it confuse and frustrate me." Another staff member reflected that "sometimes the plan seems to lack a direction or seems chaotic." Based on these expressions, although they were not universal, it would be sensible for district leaders to strive for greater clarity of purpose and to define program features as well as policy directives.

As with many school districts examined in education and policy literature, unique local contexts contributed to the perceptions of stakeholders of District A and District B. And while stakeholder experiences were not immune to a certain level of divergent thinking, District A and District B rose above complications of misunderstandings in ways that other districts may not have been able. The author observed the structural cohesion in these districts described by Friedkin (1993), whereby even if all members are not coupled together by common understandings, there still exists a sense of commitment to the group's mission.

Identify and Target Policy Gaps

As the implications discussed in the following section (*Implications for Future Research*) will express, the framework used to develop this study has the potential to support policy analysis of various magnitudes. Regardless of the analysis tool utilized however, the findings of this study present the implication that it is prudent to identify whatever gaps might exist between policy and practice.

Information collected through this effort helped lead to the conclusion that not all policy priorities were achieved or even overtly targeted. Based on the assumption that policy priorities are desirable, it is necessary for district officials to utilize a practical tool to evaluate alignment between policy and practices. In order to do so, consideration must first be given to the development or adoption of a measurement tool, and then also to the methodology for employing that tool. Finally, gaps between practice and policy should be acknowledged and targeted through a coherent plan.

Promote Collaborative Practices (and all strengths)

While deficiencies, whatever their magnitude, typically provide insight into implications, specific program strengths were revealed by study participants that hint at an encouraging proposition. Throughout the data collection effort of this project, individuals from both districts celebrated their collaborative experiences with colleagues. Not only did this dimension demonstrate alignment of practices with policy stipulations, but it sustained connections between the work in which individuals engaged and their relative satisfaction with the experience.

Through the act of evaluating policy implementation in the social sciences, officials should heed the implication that a collaborative model is a sustaining structure for organizations. As experienced in a school setting, "when teachers share in decision-making, they become committed to the decisions that emerge. They buy into the decision; they feel a sense of ownership; therefore, they are more likely to see that decisions are actually implemented" (Weiss, Cambone, & Wyeth, 1992, p. 350). It is also advisable to consider the likely possibility that any perceived program strength, or any program dimension valued by participants, is worthy of attention and further development. Study participants not only highlighted the positive impact of collaboration in this study for example, but also indicated dissatisfaction in certain scenarios where collaboration was not intentionally facilitated.

Implications for Future Research

It is possible to generalize from the results documented throughout this effort about effective and ineffective attempts to satisfy statutory obligations across the

participating school districts. And it may be inconsequential to final study conclusions whether those obligations were explicitly considered and targeted, or whether relevant policies existed simply as documents with a parallel theme. In either case, professional development programs were viewed as more effective at aligning *leadership* practices and *processes* with policy, but were viewed less effective at accomplishing stipulated *outcomes*.

Implications for future research are therefore embedded in questions that remain unanswered. First, what are the sources of pressures and motivations, outside of relevant policy (and presumably inside a school organization), that lead to resolution and action within professional development programs? The aspects of these exemplary districts' functions that demonstrate policy compliance are now well documented. A further examination of the pressures inside the systems would be helpful and would align with previous inquiries by others to examine contextual influences such as sensemaking, professional community, and communities of practice (see, Brown & Duguid, 1991; Louis & Marks, 1998; Louis et al., 1996; Weick, 1993; Wenger, 1998).

A second prospective inquiry for future research is regarding the ability of this policy to deliver on its principal objective of improved student achievement. Is there evidence that particular policy stipulations lead directly to improved student achievement? This question is paramount to studies in education and educational programming, but is not answered in any significant way through this particular research effort.

A third and final research implication does not pertain directly to the outcomes documented throughout this effort, but rather is embedded in the case study methodology,

165

which utilized the policy as the case. As Figure 10 illustrates (See also Appendix C), there is potential for programs to be examined for policy compliance in accordance with the policy's own provisions. While this study conceptually began with a draft of the Data Analysis Framework (See Appendix C), and in the end reflected on the policy through the aid of the framework (See Figure 10), the true implication for future research lies in the approach's potential to contribute a measurement instrument to other policy scenarios.

Professional Development, Program Development

While this thesis was devoted to an examination of the impact of professional development policy, it is clear that policy is only one of the influences on organizational practices. Newmann (2000) established that a strong correlation exists between the initial capacity of a district and the effectiveness of its professional development program. Firestone (2005) identified situations in which district leaders achieved desirable program outcomes when they emphasized coherence and pressed for uniform district approaches, even in cases where those efforts contradicted particular state policies encouraging determination of initiatives at the site level. From another broad perspective, Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, and Fung (2007) identified seven themes for what works in professional development, providing a comprehensive guide of evidence-based practices. Similarly, but on a smaller scale, leaders from District A and District B identified the National Staff Development Council, a multi-phase professional teaching and learning cycle, and annual continuous improvement books as influential guides for program structures.

The noteworthy implication then is that all dimensions of professional development programming must be considered within unique contexts to determine

desirable outcomes as well as the best strategies for achieving those outcomes. And while there are numerous and sometimes incongruous models articulated in relevant literature (see Firestone et al., 2005; Garet et al., 2001; Guskey, 2003; Ingvarson et al., 2005, and others), there is a consistent acknowledgement of the need to assemble professional development structures that sustain a district's priorities.

A defining feature of the districts studied here was their articulated and well-defined structures. A District B committee member described in his opening interview comments the district's numerous committees and their functions, as well as the explicit intent to transfer philosophical perspectives to classroom practices. This same committee member also described his district committee's use of the National Staff Development Council's standards to align professional development work across the district.

It is apparent that these well-defined structures have contributed to coherence and have helped the districts sustain their efforts to accomplish specific outcomes. It is also evident that the structures properly align district practices with the notion documented in professional development literature that program structure should be designed and implemented purposefully. Based on the evidence documented throughout this effort, structures do not necessarily have to be consistent across all settings. Emerging professional development programs across a wide variety of settings might benefit from the adoption of structural models that are compatible with unique local needs as well as personnel strengths.

Policy Influences on Student Achievement

Garet et. al. (2001), Borko (2004), Desimone (2002), and others have documented noteworthy findings on very important professional development features such as teacher learning and teachers' instructional practices. Guskey (2003) has insisted however that we need to progress beyond such considerations and "move toward professional development's ultimate goal: improvements in student learning outcomes" (p. 750). If research conducted by established and credentialed researchers has somehow revealed an apparent difficulty in obtaining a better understanding of what makes a material difference in student learning, then it should be no surprise that this project does nothing more to shed light on this important factor.

What this study does accomplish however is an illumination of the opportunity to reflect on the intersection of student achievement and the policy arena. While broadly-conceived national policies such as the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), as well as narrower state policies that regulate specific program components (e.g. "Reserved Revenue for Staff Development," 2006), are all intended to impact student learning, little is known about their true impact. An implication for future research is that a wide chasm continues to exist between our understanding of what constitutes good professional development; how policy does, can, or should be implemented to support those good practices; and the impact that all of our tinkering has on student learning. If the knowledge gap between what is known about professional development and student learning is already slow to close, then the introduction of policy dimensions into the discourse has obvious confounding effects. In order to validate the development of policy

168

however, policy's impact on learning is an issue that must be directly engaged and studied.

The Policy as the Metric

This study set out to reduce a gap in understanding of how the actions of stakeholders contribute to specific intended outcomes and whether the outcomes that are observed are actually *intended* products of those stakeholders' efforts. In order to support this endeavor, a data analysis framework was created to align with policy specifications (See Appendix C) and a synthesis of the individual components of Minnesota Statute 122A.60 was produced to aid in understanding policy features (See Figure 2). It was the author's intent to develop a concise and logical format through which the policy might not only be reflected, but could also be examined according to its own dimensions.

The implication for future policy research is that by constructing a framework from any policy of interest, researchers may find the structure necessary to evaluate implementation efforts, consider alignment between various agencies, or study the impact of policy. The framework utilized here (See Appendix C) does not draw from any other resources, but the policy itself. And while questions were answered relevant to the author's specific area of interest, it became increasingly obvious throughout the data collection effort that if questions and data collection strategies are constructed appropriately, any policy could be utilized as the metric in an examination. Doing so would not even require that the focus of the research effort (the organization or entity) be subject to the particular policy. Policy analysis can be conducted across settings and policy arenas in order to better understand how practices in one setting might align with

169

or contradict practices in another setting; or how certain strategies, best-practices, or issues throughout the social sciences are congruent or incongruent to a relevant policy.

The possibilities for this "policy-as-the-case," policy analysis approach, may only be limited by the researcher's obligation to subject individuals and organizations to fair and germane evaluations, and by the attention to detail applied to the development of the metric. The author is not suggesting that overly broad associations could be considered, such as an analysis of an evening curfew policy for teenagers, as examined according to the practices of a food safety agency for example. However, parallel policies with a similar focus could be examined across jurisdictions, state lines, or school districts to determine the applicability of policy provisions in a different setting.

Conclusion

This thesis provided an in-depth examination of the practices facilitated through professional development programs for educators in two school districts. The school districts selected to participate in the study had previously demonstrated track records of exemplary performance in this area and proved to be cooperative and forthcoming through their participation. The practices that were examined and ultimately documented throughout these chapters were recorded through surveys, interviews, and document analyses, in purposefully-selected school districts with exemplary professional development programs. The reports by study participants conveyed experiences that align with the stipulations of Minnesota state statutes that govern district activities, leading to the supposition that at least in these cases, the districts were compliant.

It is true that several factors under the direction of district leaders did not appear to align completely with policy stipulations. In these instances, there was appreciable evidence from the variety of data sources that indications of non-compliance were more likely signs of misunderstandings or misinterpretations of statute details. Although these assertions help to establish an appreciation for policy compliance, it cannot necessarily be said that compliance was especially purposeful. It was not evident that overt efforts had been made to align practices with policy, but instead, overt efforts have been made to adopt practices that effectively support collaboration, adult learning, and improved practices in teaching.

Efforts to adopt practices which are conducive to these features are described by Weick (1993) as "a series of interlocking routines [and] habituated action patterns that bring the same people together around the same activities in the same time and places" (p. 632). This remark does not alone infer coherence however. That is another dimension of what was observed by the author in District A and District B.

The author observed firsthand in the energetic responses from staff members, how a holistic movement to improve learning opportunities for children was present. Even staff members who were less enthusiastic about particular district strategies communicated a dedication to their students and recognition that continuous learning by staff was important for continuing to advance student learning. And it was the orchestrated efforts to integrate experiences consistent with teachers' goals, which were aligned with standards and facilitated through professional communication, as Desimone,

Porter, Garet et al. (2002) prescribed, which markedly strengthened coherence throughout the professional development programs of District A and District B.

As acknowledged throughout this thesis, a reader should have little confidence that the results documented here are broadly applicable to other settings. A reader should however have an appreciable sense that the strategies utilized to gather information and measure policy implementation would be fully applicable to a variety of settings. Although there may not be an impetus to replicate this particular study, school officials could examine their own practices according to policy stipulations examined here. In fact, practitioners, policy-makers, and researchers, may all find a functional resource in this model for developing a policy analysis framework throughout the field of policy studies.

References

Arnold, J. A., Arad, S., Rhoades, J. A., & Drasgow, F. (2000). The Empowering Leadership Questionnaire: The Construction and Validation of a New Scale for Measuring Leader Behaviors. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 21*(3), 249-269.

Bass, B. M. (1990). *Bass and Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications* (3rd ed.). New York: The Free Press.

Boland, R. J., & Tenkasi, R. V. (1995). Perspective Making and Perspective Taking in Communities of Knowing. *Organization Science, 6*(4), 350-372.

Borko, H. (2004). Professional Development and Teacher Learning: Mapping the Terrain. *Educational Researcher, 33*(8), 3-15.

Brown, J. S., & Duguid, P. (1991). Organizational Learning and Communities-of-Practice: Toward a Unified View of Working, Learning, and Innovation. *Organization Science, 2*(1), 40-57.

Brown, J. S., & Duguid, P. (2001). Knowledge and Organization: A Social-Practice Perspective. *Organization Science, 12*(2), 198-213.

Brunner, J. J. (2005). Comparative Research and Public Policy: From Authoritarianism to Democracy. *Peabody Journal of Education, 80*(1), 100-106.

Carnoy, M., & Rhoten, D. (2002). What does globalization mean for educational change? *Comparative Education Review, 46*(1), 1-9.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Crowson, R. L. (2003). The Turbulent Policy Environment in Education: Implications for School Administration and Accountability. *Peabody Journal of Education, 78*(4), 29-43.

Danielson, C. (2007). *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Desimone, L., Porter, A. C., Birman, B. F., Garet, M. S., & Yoon, K. S. (2002). How Do District Management and Implementation Strategies Relate to the Quality of the Professional Development That Districts Provide to Teachers? *Teachers College Record, 104*(7), 1265-1312.

Desimone, L., Porter, A. C., Garet, M. S., Yoon, K. S., & Birman, B. F. (2002). Effects of Professional Development on Teachers' Instruction: Results from a Three-Year Longitudinal Study. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 24*(2), 81-112.

Dillman, D. A. (2000). *Mail and Internet Surveys* (2nd ed.). New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Duke, D. (2004). *The Challenges of Educational Change*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.

Dutro, E., Fisk, M. C., Koch, R., Roop, L. J., & Wixson, K. (2002). When State Policies Meet Local District Contexts: Standards-Based Professional Development as a Means to Individual Agency and Collective Ownership. *Teachers College Record, 104*(4), 787-811.

Education, C. o. t. R. o. S. (1918). *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*: U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education.

Education, M. D. o. (2007a, 7-12-07). *Minnesota Policies for Staff Development*, from http://education.state.mn.us/mdeprod/groups/SchImprove/documents/Publication/002655.pdf

Education, M. D. o. (2007b). *Staff Development Report of District and Site Results and Expenditures for 2005-06*: Minnesota Department of Education.

Education, M. D. o. (2008). FY 2007-08 Allocation of General Education Revenue - Among Buildings: Minnesota Department of Education.

Education, U. S. D. o. (2002). *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Retrieved July 21, 2007, from http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/107-110.pdf

Education, U. S. D. o. (2009). American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. In U. S. D. o. Education (Ed.) (pp. 9).

Eliot, C. W., Harris, W. T., Angell, J. B., Tetlow, J., Taylor, J. M., Robinson, O. D., et al. (1893). *Report of the Committee of Ten*.

Elmore, R. F. (2000). *Building a New Structure for School Leadership*: The Albert Shanker Institute.

Firestone, W. A. (1989). Using Reform: Conceptualizing District Initiative. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 11*(2), 151-164.

Firestone, W. A., Mangin, M. M., Martinez, M. C., & Polovsky, T. (2005). Leading Coherent Professional Development; A Comparison of Three Districts. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 41*(3), 413-448.

Fowler, F. C. (2004). *Policy Studies for Educational Leaders: An Introduction*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.

Friedkin, N. E. (1993). Structural Bases of Interpersonal Influence in Groups: A Longitudinal Case Study. *American Sociological Review, 58*(6), 861-872.

Gamse, B., Millsap, M. A., & Goodson, B. (2002). When Implementation Threatens Impact: Challenging Lessons From Evaluating Educational Programs. *Peabody Journal of Education, 77*(4), 146-166.

Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Yoon, K. S. (2001). What Makes Professional Development Effective? Results from a National Sample of Teachers. *American Educational Research Journal, 38*(4), 915-945.

Guskey, T. R. (2000). *Evaluating Professional Development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Guskey, T. R. (2002). Professional Development and Teacher Change. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 8*(3/4), 381-391.

Guskey, T. R. (2003). What Makes Professional Development Effective? *Phi Delta Kappan, 84*(10), 748-750.

Hackman, J. R., & Oldham, G. R. (1980). *Work redesign*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Hamann, E. T. (2005). Systematic High School Reform. *The High School Journal, 89*(1), 1-17.

Heller, M. F., & Firestone, W. A. (1995). Who's in charge here? Sources of leadership for change in eight schools. *The Elementary School Journal, 96*(1), 65-86.

Herrington, C. D., & Wills, B. K. (2005). Decertifying the Principalship: The Politics of Administrator Preparation in Florida. *Educational Policy, 19*(1), 181-200.

Hess, F. M., & Kelly, A. P. (2005). An Innovative Look, a Recalcitrant Reality. *Educational Policy, 19*(1), 155-180.

Hofstede, G. (1983). The Cultural Relativity of Organizational Practices and Theories. *Journal of International Business Studies, 14*(2), 75-89.

Ingvarson, L., Meiers, M., & Beavis, A. (2005). Factors affecting the impact of professional development programs on teachers' knowledge, practice, student outcomes, and efficacy. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 13*(10), 1-28.

Kezar, A. (2000). Pluralistic Leadership: Incorporating Diverse Voices. *The Journal of Higher Education, 71*(6), 722-723.

Lester, J. H. (2003). Planning Effective Secondary Professional Development Programs. *American Secondary Education, 32*(1), 49-61.

Little, J. W. (1989). District Policy Choices and Teachers' Professional Development Opportunities. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 11*(2), 165-179.

Louis, K. S. (2006). Change Over Time? An Introduction? A Reflection? *Educational Administration Quarterly, 42*(1), 165-173.

Louis, K. S., & Marks, H. M. (1998). Does Professional Community Affect the Classroom? Techers' Work and Student Experiences in Restructuring Schools. *American Journal of Education, 106*(4), 532-575.

Louis, K. S., Marks, H. M., & Kruse, S. (1996). Teachers' Professional Community in Restructuring Schools. *American Educational Research Journal, 33*(4), 757-798.

Mayrowetz, D., Murphy, J., Louis, K. S., & Smylie, M. A. (2007). Distributed Leadership as Work Redesign: Retrofitting the Job Characteristics Model. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 6*(1), 69-101.

Mazzoni, T. L. (1991). Analyzing State School Policymaking: An Arena Model. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 13*(2), 115-138.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mizell, H. (2007). Narrow the Focus, Expand the Possibilities. *Journal of Staff Development, 28*(3), 18-22.

Newmann, F. M., King, B. M., & Youngs, P. (2000). Professional Development That Addresses School Capacity: Lessons from Urban Elementary Schools. *American Journal of Education, 108*(4), 259-299.

NSDC. (2001). *NSDC's Standards for Staff Development*. Retrieved February 19, 2007, from http://www.nsdc.org/standards/index.cfm?printPage=1&

Pfeffer, J. (1977). The Ambiguity of Leadership. *The Academy of Management Review, 2*(1), 104-112.

Reserved Revenue for Staff Development, Minnesota Statute 122A.61 (2006).

Richardson, J. (2007). How We Got Here, The Evolution of Professional Learning: National Staff Development Council.

Selznick, P. (1943). An Approach to a Theory of Bureaucracy. *American Sociological Review, 8*(1), 47-54.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (2007). *Rethinking Leadership* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Sparks, D., & Hirsh, S. (1997). *A New Vision for Staff Development*. Alexandria, Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (2001). Investigating School Leadership Practice: A Distributed Perspective. *Educational Researcher, 30*(3), 23-28.

Staff Development Program, Minnesota Statute 122A.60 (2006).

Staff Development Program, Minnesota Statute 122A.60 (2008).

Stevenson, D. L., & Schiller, K. S. (1999). State Education Policies and Changing School Practices: Evidence from the National Longitudinal Study of Schools, 1980-1993. *American Journal of Education, 107*(4), 261-285.

The National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*.

Thietart, R. A., & Forgues, B. (1995). Focused Issue: European Perspective on Organization Theory. *Organization Science, 6*(1), 19-31.

Thomas, R. M. (2003). *Blending Qualitative and Quantitative Research Methods in Theses and Dissertations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press, Inc.

Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H., & Fung, I. (2007). Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration (pp. 291): New Zealand Ministry of Education.

Tyack, D., & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Weick, K. E. (1993). The Collapse of Sensemaking in Organizations: The Mann Gulch Disaster. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 38*(4), 628-652.

Weiss, C. H., Cambone, J., & Wyeth, A. (1992). Trouble in Paradise: Teacher conflicts in shared decision making. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 28*, 350-367.

Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Wheatley, M. J. (1999). *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Berret-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

Willis, G. B. (2004). *Cognitive interviewing: A tool for improving questionnaire design.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Wittgenstein, L. (1961). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Youngs, P. (2001). District and State Policy Influences on Professional Development and School Capacity. *Educational Policy, 15*(2), 278-301.

Appendix A – Survey Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in this survey as part of a research study of how Minnesota staff development statutes are enacted in school districts. You were selected as a possible participant because of your status as a school district employee. I ask that you read the statements below before consenting to take the survey.

This study is being conducted by: Scott E. Alger, Doctoral Candidate at the University of Minnesota.   alge0004@umn.edu
        Cell: 952-367-7342   Home: 952-955-3384   Office: 952-955-0483
For further information or to convey concerns, you may also contact Scott's university faculty advisor: Dr. Jennifer York-Barr   Office: 612-625-6387 yorkx001@umn.edu

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding of how Minnesota school districts enact state staff development policies. It is important to note that state department personnel will not have access to the data collected for this study, although they may be interested in the results of the study. To minimize risk that could be incurred if state department personnel were to discern the specific school districts involved in the study, the researcher is seeking to study only districts viewed as having exemplary staff development programs.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to:
- Click "Continue" next to the statement below, "I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study."
- Complete all questions in this survey according to your observations and understanding.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

There are several risks inherent in this research effort. First, although your responses will be anonymous (meaning, your name, school, or district name would never be used), information that emerges from survey responses may be identified as having come from a member. While it is useful for researchers and readers of a study to understand whether different points of view exist among varied respondent individuals, this does run the risk of you being associated with a majority view of your respondent group. The risk incurred with role identification is that local readers (meaning readers who happen to know that your district or school was involved given local conversations about participation) of a report that emerges from this study may know that you responded to

179

a survey and, therefore, may assume you subscribe to the majority view in that group. Second, as alluded to above, it is possible despite the "best-case" or "exemplary" status of participating sites, that varying degrees of compliance with particular aspects of state statutes may be revealed. And third, it is possible that the investigator could introduce unwarranted controversy into the school settings through inquiries about district, site or individual practices.

The likelihood of these risks transpiring is minimal. Therefore, you must feel free to weigh the potential negative impact of these risks on your participation and exclude yourself from the study if you are uncomfortable assuming these potential risks.

While there may be no personal benefits to you for participating in this study besides that of an opportunity to reflect with your colleagues about staff development related policies and practices, it is hoped that you consider the benefit that this information may provide to school district personnel and state-level policy makers involved in advancing high quality staff development practices. The investigator, in the role of student researcher, has an opportunity to study in your school district as an informed observer and to provide, in turn, many more school districts with insights into effective and efficient alignment of efforts and outcomes with policy structures.

Confidentiality:
Your name will not be requested or recorded in this survey and the records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report that might be published, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject (participants such as you). Further, district and school names will not be used. Given general demographic information it is possible, however, that informed individuals could guess the participating districts in this study. Research records will be stored securely and only Scott E. Alger (researcher) and Dr. Jennifer York-Barr (doctoral dissertation advisor) will have access to the records

All information collected during this study from identifiable sources will be permanently deleted upon completion of the study and related reports. Only documents containing non-identifiable information will be maintained.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate as a survey respondent will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota, with your school district, or with the investigator. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Scott E. Alger. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him, 952-367-7342, 952-955-3384, 952-955-0405, or alge0004@umn.edu. You may also contact Dr. Jennifer York-Barr at the University of Minnesota, 612-625-6387 or yorkx001@umn.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; 612-625-1650.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

"Continue"

"Name of School District"
Staff Survey

The purpose of this survey is to gather information about professional development in ISD XXX. Information gathered through this survey will be used by Scott Alger, Doctoral Candidate at the University of Minnesota as part of a study about ways in which state staff development policies are applied in school districts identified to have high quality professional development programs. The information that is gathered through this survey will be reported to the district in the form of an executive summary.

Please respond to each question by placing an ☒ in the box for the answer that most closely represents your experiences and/or opinions or by writing fitting responses in the appropriate blanks. At the end of the survey there will be opportunities for you to provide additional comments.

1.	Which category most closely represents the location or level at which you are currently employed in your school district?	☐ District ☐ Elementary ☐ Secondary (Middle & High School)
2.	Which category most closely represents your current position?	☐ Teacher ☐ Administrator ☐ Other licensed staff ☐ Non-licensed Staff

		YES	NO
4.	Are you currently a member of your <u>school's</u> professional development committee or professional development leadership team?	☐	☐
5.	Are you currently a member of your <u>district's</u> professional development committee or professional development leadership team?	☐	☐
6.	Do you participate in district-sponsored professional development activities at least annually?	☐	☐

7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "My <u>school</u> utilizes a committee or team for the purpose of leading professional development efforts."

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "My <u>district</u> utilizes committees or teams for the purpose of leading professional development efforts."

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

9. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement: "Professional development activities in my district are aligned with district and site goals."

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

10. To what extent to you agree or disagree with this statement: "Nonteaching staff, parents, administrators, and teachers all have representation on professional development leadership teams."

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11. To what extent to you agree or disagree with this statement: "Our district's professional development funding is used only to support efforts related to professional growth."

Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

PROCESS

12. To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of <u>research-based strategies</u>?

Very Unsupportive	Somewhat Unsupportive	Neither Supportive or Unsupportive	Somewhat Supportive	Very Supportive	Do Not Know
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

13. To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of teachers' efforts to <u>practice and improve their instructional skills</u> over time?

Very Unsupportive	Somewhat Unsupportive	Neither Supportive or Unsupportive	Somewhat Supportive	Very Supportive	Do Not Know
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

14. To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of <u>teachers' use of data as part of their daily work to increase student achievement</u>?

Very Unsupportive	Somewhat Unsupportive	Neither Supportive or Unsupportive	Somewhat Supportive	Very Supportive	Do Not Know
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

15. To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of <u>teachers' efforts to enhance content knowledge</u>?

Very Unsupportive	Somewhat Unsupportive	Neither Supportive or Unsupportive	Somewhat Supportive	Very Supportive	Do Not Know
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

16. To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of the <u>use of state and local academic standards</u>?

Very Unsupportive	Somewhat Unsupportive	Neither Supportive or Unsupportive	Somewhat Supportive	Very Supportive	Do Not Know
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

17. To what extent are professional development activities supportive or unsupportive of <u>collaborative, professional relationships</u>?

Very Unsupportive	Somewhat Unsupportive	Neither Supportive or Unsupportive	Somewhat Supportive	Very Supportive	Do Not Know
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

OUTCOMES

18. To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute to <u>improved student achievement of state and local standards</u>?

Very Ineffectively	Somewhat Ineffectively	Neither Effectively or Ineffectively	Somewhat Effectively	Very Effectively	Do Not Know
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

19. To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute <u>to meeting the needs of a diverse student population, including at-risk children, children with disabilities, and gifted children, within the regular classroom and other settings</u>?

Very Ineffectively	Somewhat Ineffectively	Neither Effectively or Ineffectively	Somewhat Effectively	Very Effectively	Do Not Know
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

20. To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute to <u>an inclusive curriculum for racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse student population</u>?

Very Ineffectively	Somewhat Ineffectively	Neither Effectively or Ineffectively	Somewhat Effectively	Very Effectively	Do Not Know
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

21. To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute to <u>improved staff collaboration</u>?

Very Ineffectively	Somewhat Ineffectively	Neither Effectively or Ineffectively	Somewhat Effectively	Very Effectively	Do Not Know
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

22. To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively contribute to <u>teaching about violence prevention policies, issues of harassment, and conflict resolution</u>?

Very Ineffectively	Somewhat Ineffectively	Neither Effectively or Ineffectively	Somewhat Effectively	Very Effectively	Do Not Know
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

23. To what extent do professional development activities effectively or ineffectively <u>assist teachers and other members of site-based management teams with appropriate management and financial management skills</u>?

Very Ineffectively	Somewhat Ineffectively	Neither Effectively or Ineffectively	Somewhat Effectively	Very Effectively	Do Not Know
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

24. How familiar or unfamiliar are you with your school district's professional development plan or other documents used to guide formal and ongoing professional learning in your district? ?

☐ Very Unfamiliar
☐ Somewhat Unfamiliar
☐ Neither Familiar or Unfamiliar
☐ Somewhat Familiar
☐ Very Familiar

25. How clear or unclear are the district's procedures for evaluating professional development activities?

☐ Completely Unclear
☐ Somewhat Unclear
☐ Neither Clear or Unclear
☐ Somewhat Clear
☐ Completely Clear

Please share any additional comments that you believe will be helpful in developing a complete understanding of staff development programming at ISD XXX.

26. Given your experiences in this school and district, what are the FACTORS that most significantly influence the priorities for professional development?

27. What do you view as the greatest STRENGTHS of the formal professional development or ongoing professional learning you experience as an educator in your school district?

28. What do you view as the greatest WEAKNESSES of the formal professional development or ongoing professional learning you experience as an educator in your school district?

29. In the open space provided here, please add any additional information that would help me understand the current state of professional development in your school or district.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your input is greatly appreciated. For further information about this study or to report concerns, contact Scott Alger alge0004@umn.edu
    Cell: 952-367-7342   Home: 952-955-3384   Office: 952-955-0483

You may also contact Scott's university faculty advisor: Dr. Jennifer York-Barr
        Office: 612-625-6387 yorkx001@umn.edu

Appendix C – Data Analysis Framework

			District Governance	Site Governance Elementary	Site Governance Secondary	Teacher Participation
I.	Advisory Committee & Activities *(Leadership)*	Contributes to Policy Enactment				
		Does not Contribute to Policy Enactment				
II.	Plan Structure *(Process)*	Contributes to Policy Enactment				
		Does not Contribute to Policy Enactment				
III.	Outcomes *(Outcomes)*	Contributes to Policy Enactment				
		Does not Contribute to Policy Enactment				
IV.	State Report	Contributes to Policy Enactment				
		Does not Contribute to Policy Enactment				
V.	Reserved Revenue	Contributes to Policy Enactment				
		Does not Contribute to Policy Enactment				

Appendix D – Interview Questions

	What is the impact of staff development statutes (policies) in Minnesota on the structures and activities of advisory committees who lead preK-12 professional development efforts?		
	Staff Development Coordinator	**Principal**	**Staff Development Site Committee Chair**
Thank you ***Background, Purpose, Overview, Use, and Permission***	I appreciate your willingness to meet with me and assist my efforts... Your involvement is important and your perspective is important to me. I will not make judgments about your comments; my interest is in your experiences and viewpoints.		
	The purpose of this study is to identify the impact of staff development statutes (policies) in Minnesota on the structures and activities of advisory committees who lead preK-12 professional development efforts.		
	Focus group interviews will be conducted with teacher participants/members of staff development committees to understand the same.		
	Specific interest in this interview is to better understand your views and perspectives about the role staff development plays and in the practices of staff development committees at _____ school and at the school district.		
	Your responses will be anonymous. Any written summary will draw on all the interviews and will describe overall experiences and perspectives of [staff development coordinators/principals/site committee chairs] so that actual protocols may be identified and correlated with prescriptions of legislative mandates.		
	I would like you to consider allowing me to make a digital audio recording of this interview for two reasons; 1) allow me to focus on what is being said without having to worry about taking detailed notes, and 2) to ultimately provide a transcript which is a more complete record of your thoughts and more accurate in terms of capturing your words exactly. The only individuals who would have access to transcripts are me, my advisor, and a confidential transcriptionist.		
	I am required to obtain your informed consent. Please read, ask any questions you have and decide whether to sign or not. If you decide not to participate, there are no repercussions by me, the University of Minnesota, or the school district.		
Introduction	**Staff Development Coordinator**	**Principal**	**Staff Development Site Committee Chair**
	How long have you worked at _____?	How long have you worked at _____?	How long have you worked at _____?
	How long have you been in your current position?	How long have you been in your current position?	How long have you been in your current position?
	Could you tell me about how your work is connected to (or affected by) staff development programming at your school or in your district?	Could you tell me about how your work is connected to (or affected by) staff development programming at your school or in your district?	Could you tell me about how your work is connected to (or affected by) staff development programming at your school or in your district?
PROCESS ***How do people engage in the processes that are governed by state professional development statutes?***	How are individuals organized into committees or teams for the purpose of leading staff development efforts?	How are individuals organized into committees or teams for the purpose of leading staff development efforts?	How are individuals organized into committees or teams for the purpose of leading staff development efforts?
	What, if any, school or district documents exist to direct the actions and interactions of committee	What, if any, school or district documents exist to direct the actions and interactions of committee	What, if any, school or district documents exist to direct the actions and interactions of

	members?	members?	committee members?
	What role do committee members play in facilitating and/or monitoring staff development activities?	What role do committee members play in facilitating and/or monitoring staff development activities?	What role do committee members play in facilitating and/or monitoring staff development activities?
	How do staff development committees communicate with other school personnel and administration about the impact of their efforts?	How do staff development committees communicate with other school personnel and administration about the impact of their efforts?	How do staff development committees communicate with other school personnel and administration about the impact of their efforts?
	What role does the Superintendent play in facilitating and/or monitoring staff development activities?	What role does the Superintendent play in facilitating and/or monitoring staff development activities?	What role does the Superintendent play in facilitating and/or monitoring staff development activities?
	What role does the School Board play in facilitating and/or monitoring staff development activities?	What role does the School Board play in facilitating and/or monitoring staff development activities?	What role does the School Board play in facilitating and/or monitoring staff development activities?
	What are the fiscal accountability and reporting relationships that exist between people within the staff development program?	What are the basic fiscal accountability and reporting relationships that affect your duties in regard to staff development?	What are the basic fiscal accountability and reporting relationships that affect your staff development duties?
LEADERSHIP ***What are the formal and informal norms of decision-making and leadership within professional development committees?***	How would you describe the leadership model utilized in your district's staff development program?	How would you describe the leadership model utilized in your school's staff development program?	How would you describe the leadership model utilized in your school's staff development program?
	What role do you play in identifying priorities and initiating staff development activities?	What role do you and other principals play in identifying priorities and initiating staff development activities?	What role do you and other site committee chairs play in identifying priorities and initiating staff development activities?
	What role do teachers play in identifying priorities and initiating staff development activities?	What role does the district staff development coordinator play in identifying priorities and initiating staff development activities?	Is this different from other teachers? What role do teachers play in identifying priorities and initiating staff development activities?
	What role do principals play in identifying priorities and initiating staff development activities?	What role do teachers play in identifying priorities and initiating staff development activities?	What roles do principals and the district staff development coordinator play in identifying priorities and initiating staff development activities?

190

	What are the formal protocols for decision-making in the staff development program?	What are formal protocols must you observe in order to influence decisions in the staff development program?	What are formal protocols must you observe in order to influence decisions in the staff development program?
	Who do you go to if you really need to get something done at the district level? Who seems to have a great influence? How are they able to respond to your needs in a way that others are not?	Who do you go to if you really need to get something done at the district level?	Who do you go to if you really need to get something done at the district level?
		Who do you go to if you really need to get something done in your building? Who seems to have a great influence? How are they able to respond to your needs in a way that others are not?	Who do you go to if you really need to get something done in your building? Who seems to have a great influence? How are they able to respond to your needs in a way that others are not?
	What does your staff development plan say about decision-making processes?	What does your staff development plan say about decision-making processes?	What does your staff development plan say about decision-making processes?
OUTCOMES ***What are the intended and unintended outcomes of the coordination and leadership efforts of professional development committees?***	What priorities have attracted the attention and resources of your staff development committee(s) during the last one to two years?	What priorities have attracted the attention and resources of your staff development committee(s) during the last one to two years?	What priorities have attracted the attention and resources of your staff development committee(s) during the last one to two years?
	At what level were these priorities ultimately determined (i.e. federal or state government level, site or district level)?	At what level were these priorities ultimately determined (i.e. federal or state government level, site or district level)?	At what level were these priorities ultimately determined (i.e. federal or state government level, site or district level)?
	Do you believe evidence exists that demonstrates progress toward this/these goal(s)? If yes, what does the evidence reveal?	Do you believe evidence exists that demonstrates progress toward this/these goal(s)? If yes, what does the evidence reveal?	Do you believe evidence exists that demonstrates progress toward this/these goal(s)? If yes, what does the evidence reveal?
	Can you think of any unanticipated outcomes that have resulted from staff development efforts in the last one to two years? For students?	Can you think of any unanticipated outcomes that have resulted from staff development efforts in the last one to two years? For students? For staff?	Can you think of any unanticipated outcomes that have resulted from staff development efforts in the last one to two years? For students?

	For staff? The school?	The school?	For staff? The school?
	Are there any outstanding individual achievements or lessons learned that you would like to share that materialized because of staff development efforts? Ex. Leadership stories, mentoring, etc.	Are there any outstanding individual achievements or lessons learned that you would like to share that materialized because of staff development efforts? Ex. Leadership stories, mentoring, etc.	Are there any outstanding individual achievements or lessons learned that you would like to share that materialized because of staff development efforts? Ex. Leadership stories, mentoring, etc.
	Have you altered any staff development processes or adopted new protocols in the last one to two years due to "lessons learned?"	Have you altered any staff development processes or adopted new protocols in the last one to two years due to "lessons learned?"	Have you altered any staff development processes or adopted new protocols in the last one to two years due to "lessons learned?"
In what ways is staff development policy enacted in school districts?	Describe your methods for monitoring the district's staff development activities?	Describe your methods for monitoring the district's staff development activities?	Describe your methods for monitoring the school's staff development activities?
	How familiar are the district's staff development committee members with state staff development statutes?	How familiar are the district's staff development committee members with state staff development statutes?	How familiar are your school's staff development committee members with state staff development statutes?
	To what degree do you believe staff development statutes are used as a guide for determining committee structure?	To what degree do you believe staff development statutes are used as a guide for determining committee structure?	To what degree do you believe staff development statutes are used as a guide for determining committee structure?
	To what degree do you believe staff development statutes are used as a guide for decision-making and establishing priorities? Explanation or examples?	To what degree do you believe staff development statutes are used as a guide for decision-making and establishing priorities? Explanation or examples?	To what degree do you believe staff development statutes are used as a guide for decision-making and establishing priorities? Explanation or examples?
	What do you believe are the greatest benefits of a staff development program to your school district?	What do you believe are the greatest benefits of a staff development program to your school?	What do you believe are the greatest benefits of a staff development program to your school?
	Are there any negative impacts?	Are there any negative impacts?	Are there any negative impacts?
	What advice would you offer to other staff developers who wish to have a positive impact on their school system?	What advice would you offer to principals and staff developers who wish to have a positive impact on their school system?	What advice would you offer to other staff developers who wish to have a positive impact on their school system?

Closing *Thank you* *Follow up*	Is there anything else you think I should know to help me better understand the staff development program in your school district? Thank you for your time and insights. I appreciate your commitment to improvement in your schools. Your efforts will make a difference. As I go through my notes, the need may arise to ask for clarification. May I contact you if necessary?

Appendix E – Interview Think Aloud Protocol

1. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. I would like to tell you about this project and what I will do.

2. The purpose of this case study project is to determine how policies, as articulated in state staff development statutes, are being implemented in school districts. All components of the project are part of a doctoral program through the University of Minnesota.

3. I am testing these interview questions to make improvements before collecting data through actual interviews.

4. I will read the questions and then ask you to answer them just like you would if you were responding in an interview setting.

5. The reason for doing this is to understand how the questions are working. To help me with this process, I would like to ask you to think aloud when you answer each question – to think aloud as much as possible.

6. Sometimes I will remind you to think aloud as you answer a question and I might even ask you to explain something that you say so I can learn what you are thinking about for each question.

7. My purpose here is to learn about your understanding of the questions, not about understanding your responses.

8. Please remember that I do want to hear all of your opinions and reactions. Do not hesitate to talk about something that is unclear, difficult to answer, or does not apply to you.

9. Do you have any questions before I start?

10. I will read the directions and then we can begin the interview – and remember to think aloud as you answer the question.

Reminders
☑ Focus on questions, not the respondent.   ☑ Probe the processing, not the answer.
☑ What are you thinking?   ☑ Nod, okay.
☑ What do *you* think it means?   ☑ Keep talking.

Adapted from: Willis, G.B. (2004). *Cognitive interviewing: A tool for improving questionnaire design.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Appendix F – Request for Documents

Date

District Staff Development Coordinator
Independent School District A/B
Street
City, State, Zip

Dear Staff Development Coordinator,

Thank you for your assistance in obtaining consent for the participation of
<District A/B> in my doctoral research effort to better understand the impact of staff
development statutes (policies) in Minnesota on the structures and activities of advisory
committees who lead preK-12 professional development efforts. As you are aware,
certain documents are created in all school districts in an effort to coordinate professional
development programming. A thorough analysis of these documents has the potential to
provide noteworthy insights into the impact of the policies and activities being studied.

I would appreciate your further assistance to obtain copies of the following
documents from your district's staff development advisory committee functions, as well
as any similar artifacts created at the site level:

- Staff development plans
- Meeting agendas
- Meeting minutes
- The district's two most recent state staff development reports
- District and site UFARS reports of staff development expenditures

Each of these documents will be reviewed to better understand the assertions of district
and site personnel involved in staff development efforts.

Thank you again for helping to ensure that a comprehensive perspective of staff
development in <District A/B> is acquired. Please contact me with any questions or
concerns that you have regarding this request.

Sincerely,

Scott E. Alger