

Learning To Lead: The Professional Development Needs Of Assistant Principals

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the professional development needs of assistant principals in the northern Kentucky region in preparation for the launch of the Northern Kentucky Assistant Principals' Network, a unique and innovative program to support their leadership development. Using the Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 as the framework for our study, survey data revealed professional development needs in all standards. Findings from the open-ended question revealed professional development needs in specific areas such as school finance/budgeting, time management/work-life balance, school culture, instructional leadership, and special education. This paper is intended to help guide the work of professors of educational leadership and those charged with supporting the ongoing development of assistant principals.

Introduction

The assistant principal lives with the knowledge that daily work will include problems that are never solved, work that is never complete, joys that are never noticed, and needs that are seldom acknowledged. Everyone needs to share the joys and grouse about the problems with others who understand. (Marshall, 1992, p. 99)

Over twenty years ago, Catherine Marshall (1992) wrote the first book focusing specifically on the position of the assistant principal, including the roles they play, the processes of their selection and socialization, and the problems and opportunities they encounter. In particular, the book drew attention to many of the unique issues facing assistant principals at that time: “the issue of the person in the entry-level position, the ‘mop-up’ nature of the tasks, dependency on the principal, and the particular ambiguities, especially in an era with reform called ‘accountability,’ ‘teacher empowerment,’ and ‘school-site management’” (Marshall, 1992, p. vii). Ultimately, the book conveyed the need to better understand and improve the assistant principal’s role and imagines ways to reconceptualize school leadership.

While many of the issues that Marshall wrote about still hold true today, the job roles and expectations of current era assistant principals have added layers of stress and pressure related to countless national, state, and local mandates not present twenty years ago. Common core standards, new teacher and principal evaluation systems, high-stakes student testing, school safety concerns, and the never-ending list of unfunded “mandates” are but a few of such stresses that face current era school leaders. For example, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has required schools to administer challenging annual state standardized tests to ensure that *all* students, regardless of poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency, make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in test scores. This year, the law requires that every child in grades 3-8 must test “on” grade level in reading and mathematics. Schools that fail to make AYP will be subject to corrective action and/or restructuring.

Assistant principals can play a pivotal role in responding to the realities of current era school reform by taking a more central role in assuming some of these responsibilities (Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski, 2012). Unfortunately, many assistant principals feel unprepared for their current role (Busch, MacNeil, & Baraniuk, 2012), thereby indicating a need for meaningful and relevant professional development. However, there are few professional development programs available specifically focusing on the needs of assistant principals, and in fact, “assistant principals are rarely afforded the breadth of professional development opportunities that teachers and principals receive” (Oleszewski, Shoho, & Barnett, 2012, p. 267).

In order to address this problem locally, faculty members in the Educational Leadership program at Northern Kentucky University decided to partner with local school leaders to develop and implement the Northern Kentucky Assistant Principals’ Network (APN), a new and innovative professional development

network to support and develop assistant principals in the eighteen area school districts in northern Kentucky as they prepare to become principals. Prior to the development of this network, we needed to better understand the unique professional development needs of the 104 assistant principals in our region.

Purpose

The purpose of our study was to investigate the professional development needs of assistant principals in the northern Kentucky region as we prepared to initiate the Northern Kentucky Assistant Principals' Network (APN), a unique and innovative program to support their leadership development. The following research question guided our study: What are the current professional development needs of the assistant principals in the northern Kentucky region?

Framework

Because the purpose of our study was to investigate the professional development needs of assistant principals in the northern Kentucky region as we prepared to initiate the Northern Kentucky Assistant Principals' Network (APN), our framework came from the Educational Leadership Policy Standards: ISLLC 2008 (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). According to the Council of Chief State School Officers (2008), the ISLLC 2008 standards "provide high-level guidance and insight about the traits, functions of work, and responsibilities" (p. 5) required of school leaders. Additionally, the standards "can set parameters for developing professional development and evaluation systems that can readily facilitate performance growth of all education leaders" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008, p. 16). In short, ISLLC 2008 served as the framework of our work as we aimed to better understand the professional development needs of the assistant principals in northern Kentucky.

Review of Literature

Research indicates that school leadership is fundamental in influencing school effectiveness (Heck & Hallinger, 2009) and that principals who focus on teaching and learning greatly influence student performance (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). Unfortunately, a large number of principals are expected to leave the profession or retire in the next few years and finding suitable replacements may be difficult (Maddern, 2009) making recruitment a major challenge. Recruiting assistant principals is often times a viable option but many principals do not think of their "assistants" as potential "principals" (Mertz, 2006) and "some districts do better than others at preparing internal candidates for the job" (Doyle & Locke, 2014, p. 5). Assistant principals often have different job responsibilities and when their principals retire or move to district office positions, they have to make the transition to principal in a short period of time and with little support. And as many school leaders who have served as assistant principals know, "the assistant principalship is a unique entity because

the position lacks a precise job description yet entails numerous tasks to ensure the success of a school. Although the assistant principal is a critical leader in schools, the position is underutilized and under-researched” (Oleszewski et al., 2012, p. 264).

In this review, we examined the types of professional development that assistant principals need as well as programs that have been developed to help them advance to the principalship. As mentioned in the introduction, Catherine Marshall (1992) wrote the first book focusing specifically on the position of the assistant principal, including roles they play, the processes of their selection and socialization, and the problems and opportunities they encounter. Accordingly, she noted that assistant principals need “training and support to enable them to manage the tasks and responsibilities faced in the position such as discipline, scheduling, and extracurricular activities. But beyond this, assistant principals need to be prepared to face the *fundamental dilemmas* in administration” (1992, p. 89). As one strategy for professional development, she suggested that university and professional associations need to work collaboratively to develop training programs for assistant principals. She also proposed that by “actively identifying, recruiting, and supporting individuals as they *enter* administrative positions, universities and professional associations can most strongly affect the way administrators define their roles and leadership styles” (1992, p. 91). Further, she indicated that at this stage of their careers, assistant principals “may be shocked at the overwhelming demands on administrators and may be searching desperately for management techniques” (1992, p. 91).

Skill Development of Assistant Principals

Unfortunately, according to a recent review of literature on the development of assistant principals, there are few professional development programs for this group of administrators (Oleszewski et al., 2012). One of the areas that assistant principals often seek support for, however, is in the area of deepening their educational leadership content knowledge and skill development. According to Oliver (2005), teacher supervision and personnel matters ranked first for assistant principals in California wanting to participate in professional development activities. Additionally, they desired development in the areas of school finance, conflict management, school law, and curriculum/instruction (Oliver, 2005). In a similar study, assistant principals in Indiana felt they needed more training in the areas of technology and special education (Abebe, Lindsey, Bonner, & Heck, 2010).

In exploring the job realities of assistant principals in South Texas, Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012) found that assistant principals’ challenges “pertain to workload and task management, conflicts with adults and students, and curriculum and instruction issues” (2012, p. 92). In particular, novice and experienced assistant principals “did not feel ready to work with people (particularly when conflicts arose), did not understand certain job expectations (especially regarding curriculum and instruction), and did not possess the organizational and managerial skills needed to accomplish tasks” (2012, p. 109).

Preparing for the Principalship

In recent years, some national educational leadership organizations have started focusing on creating specialized programs for assistant principals. For example, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) created the NASSP National Assistant Principal (AP) Leadership Community in order to support the professional development needs of secondary school principals. This special community “focuses on enhancing assistant principals’ job performance and their preparation for the principalship” (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2014, para. 2).

Additionally, some large school districts across the United States offer training and development for their own assistant principals. For example, the Miami-Dade County Public Schools developed the Assistant Principal Induction Academy in order to support new assistant principals in their district. The vision of this program is that “novice assistant principals will have a network of support as they lead their schools to heightened achievement, understand how their work connects to that of the District, and develop the skills necessary to efficiently recognize and improve teacher effectiveness” (Miami-Dade County Schools, 2014, para. 2).

Similar to the Assistant Principal Induction Academy in the Miami-Dade County Public Schools, assistant principals in New York City have an opportunity to participate in The Advanced Leadership Program for Assistant Principals. The purpose of this program is to “build capacity within the existing pool of assistant principals aspiring to principalship” (Drago-Severson & Aravena, 2011, p. 51). Designed as a yearlong learning experience, assistant principals have the opportunity to “hone existing skills and explore the complex nature of decision making and authentic leadership required for the principalship” (Drago-Severson & Aravena, 2011, p. 51). The experience includes advanced leadership seminars, mentoring by New York City principals, networking and coaching buddies, and optional after-school sessions.

The Lead in Denver (2014) program in the Denver Public Schools (DPS), in partnership with the Wallace Foundation, has established a strong commitment to developing their assistant principals through programs like their School Leadership Framework and intensive pathway programs. DPS’s Lead in Denver program helps assistant principals

gain the tools, resources and support necessary to refine your craft as a current principal or assistant principal, or to pursue the new challenge of school leadership. Lead in Denver will sharpen your passion and talent, resulting in a greater ability to run excellent schools and ensure that every student succeeds. (Denver Public Schools, 2014, para. 1)

It is clear that assistant principals desire professional development related to developing their content knowledge and skills and that such learning is necessary throughout their careers as educational leaders. Unfortunately, many assistant principals who do not have access to specialized training from national

organizations for any number of reasons, or do not work in large districts that offer support for assistant principals, lack access to the necessary ongoing professional development needed to help them grow as educational leaders. In this review, we examined the types of professional development that assistant principals need as well as programs that have been developed to help them advance to the principalship. In the following sections, we explain the details of our study, including method, data analysis, findings, and discussion.

Method

As stated previously, we surveyed assistant principals in the northern Kentucky region in order to better understand their professional development needs. It was our intent to use these data as the starting point in the development of the Northern Kentucky Assistant Principals Network (APN), a new professional development opportunity to support local school leaders as they prepare to become principals. We made a decision to use a survey design in order to gather input from as many assistant principals in our region as possible prior to the development of the APN.

For the purposes of this study, we developed a 5-point Likert-scale survey instrument using the 31 functions from ISLLC 2008, the 2008 Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards (see Appendix). The online survey, administered on SurveyMonkey.com, required assistant principals to rate the “importance” of each of the 31 functions and their “actual performance or proficiency” on each item. The gap or difference between importance and proficiency, what we call “professional development needs,” was analyzed and then used to describe possible professional development areas for the assistant principals. We included one open-ended question at the end of the survey requesting participants to list any knowledge, skills, or topics that they would like to further develop as education leaders.

Participants

At the time of the study, there were 104 assistant principals in the northern Kentucky region. Of these school leaders, 73 granted consent to participate in the study and 66 successfully completed the survey (63% response rate). Demographic characteristics were collected regarding their length of service (1-3, 4-6, 7-9, or 10 or more years) the school level where they work (elementary, middle, or high), the district type (urban, suburban, or rural), and the year they received school leadership certification. The group included 20 assistant principals with 1-3 years of service, 25 with 4-6 years of service, 11 with 7-9 years of service, and 10 with 10 or more years of service; 28 elementary school leaders, 12 middle school leaders, 21 high school leaders, and 5 school leaders representing a different grade configuration; and 14 participants serve schools that are urban, 39 suburban, and 13 rural. Finally, the average administrative certification year for this group of participants was 2004, the median was 2004, and the mode was 2005.

Data Analysis

Given that the design of our study failed to meet the assumptions of a paired-samples *t*-test, we made a decision to use the non-parametric Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks test at an alpha level of significance of 0.05. The Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks test requires that each of the subjects has two interval scores where “a difference score is computed for each subject (or pair of matched subjects) by subtracting a subject’s score in Condition 2 from his score in Condition 1” (Sheskin, 2004, p. 609). The Wilcoxon evaluates whether or not the median of the difference scores equals zero. In our study, we were interested in determining the professional development needs of the participants by examining whether there was a difference between how they value the “importance” of the educational leadership functions and their “actual performance or proficiency.” We hypothesized that assistant principals would rate the “importance” of each of the educational leadership elements higher than their “performance or proficiency” on each of the items in the survey.

Findings

A Wilcoxon matched-pairs signed-ranks test with an alpha level of significance of 0.05 was conducted to evaluate how assistant principals’ rated the “importance” of each of the leadership statements relative to their “actual performance or proficiency” in each of the educational leadership functions. The results indicated a significant difference on all of the thirty-one items. For example, assistant principals’ rated the “importance” of “Create a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular program” (Survey Element 7) higher than their “actual performance or proficiency,” $z=-6.033, p=.000$. As another example, they rated the “importance” of “Supervise instruction” (Survey Element 9) higher than their “actual performance or proficiency,” $z=-5.938, p=.000$. As a final example, they rated the “importance” of “Obtain, allocate, align, and efficiently utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources” (Survey Element 16) higher than their “actual performance or proficiency,” $z=-6.255, p=.000$. This pattern occurred for each of the 31 Survey Elements and in every case, there was a statistically significant difference in their ratings between the “importance” and their “actual performance or proficiency” as indicated in Table 1. On all elements, “importance” was rated higher than “actual performance or proficiency” (see Table 2).

Table 1
Results of Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks Test

Survey Element	<i>z-score</i>	Sig. (2-tailed)
1. Collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision and mission	-5.432	.000*
2. Collect and use data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and promote organizational learning	-5.429	.000*
3. Create and implement plans to achieve goals	-4.977	.000*
4. Promote continuous and sustainable improvement	-5.548	.000*
5. Monitor and evaluate progress and revise plans	-5.765	.000*
6. Nurture and sustain a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations	-5.831	.000*
7. Create a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular program	-6.033	.000*
8. Create a personalized and motivating learning environment for students	-5.575	.000*
9. Supervise instruction	-5.938	.000*
10. Develop assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress	-5.866	.000*
11. Develop the instructional and leadership capacity of staff	-6.125	.000*
12. Maximize time spent on quality instruction	-6.515	.000*
13. Promote the use of the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning	-5.772	.000*
14. Monitor and evaluate the impact of the instructional program	-5.841	.000*
15. Monitor and evaluate the management and operational systems	-5.331	.000*
16. Obtain, allocate, align, and efficiently utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources	-6.255	.000*
17. Promote and protect the welfare and safety of students and staff	-4.413	.000*
18. Develop the capacity for distributed leadership	-5.763	.000*
19. Ensure teacher and organizational time is focused to support quality instruction and student learning	-6.155	.000*
20. Collect and analyze data and information pertinent to the educational environment	-6.393	.000*
21. Promote understanding, appreciation, and use of the community's diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources	-5.577	.000*
22. Build and sustain positive relationships with families and caregivers	-5.564	.000*
23. Build and sustain productive relationships with community partners	-6.104	.000*
24. Ensure a system of accountability for every student's academic and social success	-6.209	.000*
25. Model principles of self-awareness, reflective practice, transparency, and ethical behavior	-3.283	.000*
26. Safeguard the values of democracy, equity, and diversity	-4.326	.000*
27. Consider and evaluate the potential moral and legal consequences of decision-making	-4.917	.000*
28. Promote social justice and ensure that individual student needs inform all aspects of schooling	-5.378	.000*
29. Advocate for children, families, and caregivers	-4.917	.000*
30. Act to influence local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning	-6.043	.000*
31. Assess, analyze, and anticipate emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt leadership strategies	-6.273	.000*

* $p < .05$.

Table 2
Mean Scores of Survey Elements

Survey Element	Importance	Proficiency
1. Collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision and mission	4.59	3.97
2. Collect and use data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and promote organizational learning	4.74	4.12
3. Create and implement plans to achieve goals	4.64	4.11
4. Promote continuous and sustainable improvement	4.71	4.05
5. Monitor and evaluate progress and revise plans	4.65	3.95
6. Nurture and sustain a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations	4.83	4.14
7. Create a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular program	4.70	3.79
8. Create a personalized and motivating learning environment for students	4.66	4.00
9. Supervise instruction	4.74	3.85
10. Develop assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress	4.52	3.74
11. Develop the instructional and leadership capacity of staff	4.62	3.71
12. Maximize time spent on quality instruction	4.86	3.89
13. Promote the use of the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning	4.45	3.56
14. Monitor and evaluate the impact of the instructional program	4.74	3.89
15. Monitor and evaluate the management and operational systems	4.34	3.63
16. Obtain, allocate, align, and efficiently utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources	4.41	3.29
17. Promote and protect the welfare and safety of students and staff	4.92	4.58
18. Develop the capacity for distributed leadership	4.65	3.79
19. Ensure teacher and organizational time is focused to support quality instruction and student learning	4.79	3.88
20. Collect and analyze data and information pertinent to the educational environment	4.67	3.77
21. Promote understanding, appreciation, & use of the community's diverse cultural, social, & intellectual resources	4.21	3.38
22. Build and sustain positive relationships with families and caregivers	4.82	4.25
23. Build and sustain productive relationships with community partners	4.42	3.39
24. Ensure a system of accountability for every student's academic and social success	4.76	3.88
25. Model principles of self-awareness, reflective practice, transparency, and ethical behavior	4.58	4.29
26. Safeguard the values of democracy, equity, and diversity	4.36	3.95
27. Consider and evaluate the potential moral and legal consequences of decision-making	4.67	4.14
28. Promote social justice and ensure that individual student needs inform all aspects of schooling	4.50	3.89
29. Advocate for children, families, and caregivers	4.48	3.98
30. Act to influence local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning	4.00	2.88
31. Assess, analyze, and anticipate emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt leadership strategies	4.35	3.41

As mentioned previously, assistant principals were asked to respond to one open-ended statement at the end of the survey. The statement asked them to “list any knowledge, skills, or topics that you need to further develop before assuming the role of principal.” While 66 participants completed the Likert-scale survey items, only 44 added open-ended comments to this last question. We manually sorted and categorized these responses according to topic. The most frequently listed topic was school finance, particularly as related to school budget issues. Fourteen assistant principals listed this as an important topic to develop prior to becoming principals. Time management/work-life balance and creating a culture of collaboration were next, each being listed five times. Instructional leadership and supervision along with curriculum were also important (see Table 3).

Table 3
Professional Development Topics Requested by Assistant Principals

Professional Development Topic	Frequency	Percentage
School finance/budget	14	32%
Time management/work-life balance	5	11%
Creating a culture of collaboration	5	11%
Instructional leadership and supervision	4	9%
Special education	3	7%
Curriculum	2	4%
Facilities management	2	4%
Data analysis	2	4%
Discipline	2	4%
Technology leadership	1	2%
Scheduling	1	2%
Anticipating emerging trends	1	2%
Community involvement	1	2%

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the professional development needs of assistant principals in the northern Kentucky region and we set out to answer the following research question: What are the current professional development needs of northern Kentucky assistant principals? We hypothesized that assistant principals would rate the “importance” of the educational leadership elements higher than their “actual performance” on each of the items in the survey. Evidence clearly indicates that assistant principals highly value the “importance” of each of the 31 survey elements related to educational leadership. Additionally, they rated their “actual performance” significantly lower on each item. We believe that the gaps between “importance” and “actual proficiency” indicate areas for professional growth, in this case representing all 31 statements. As stated in the method section, the 31 survey elements are the actual functions of ISLLC 2008 and represent the standards directly. Due to the fact that over half of our participants had less than six years of administrative leadership experience, they may have had limited

opportunities to fully develop their skills in all of these areas. Additionally, many assistant principals may experience an overload of the stereotypical three Bs – “books, behinds, and buses,” thereby potentially limiting their involvement and development in other school leadership roles and functions. Further, most of the participants indicated that their administrative certification was around 2004 (the median was 2004, and the mode was 2005). We know anecdotally that many graduates of principal preparation programs in our region return to the classroom for a period of time before taking on their first administrative position. Because it has been ten years since initial administrative certification for many of these assistant principals, they may have had limited professional development in educational leadership functions measured in this survey.

Findings from the open-ended question revealed professional development needs in specific areas such as school finance/budgeting, time management/work-life balance, school culture, instructional leadership, and special education. The area of school finance, the most frequently reported professional development need, is a topic that many assistant principals in this study may feel unprepared to handle because they typically have little experience with school budgets and related accounting procedures. For example, school principals in Kentucky are required to comply with “Redbook,” the Kentucky Administrative Regulations *Accounting Procedures for Kentucky School Activity Funds* (2008). “Redbook” outlines the policies and procedure that principals must comply with as they account for all school activity funds. Although “Redbook” policies and procedures are included within the curriculum of most school finance courses in Kentucky, it is possible that the topic was too abstract at the time the assistant principals took the course, that their principal mentors share too little of the school budgeting and accounting responsibilities, or that the anxiety of facing the realities of the “Redbook” guidelines as new principals is generating the strong response in this area.

It is clear to us that this group of assistant principals could benefit from professional development in all of the areas as indicated in these findings. While we believe that some of the findings may be unique to this particular group of principals, many of the findings align closely with research that has been conducted in other parts of the country. For example, while we believe that assistant principals in Kentucky are challenged by Kentucky Administrative Regulations related to issues of school finance, according to Oliver (2005), assistant principals in California also indicated a need for professional development in a variety of areas including school finance. While finance was not their top priority, they indicated professional development needs in teacher supervision and personnel matters, curriculum and instruction, scheduling, law, conflict management, communication, and discipline to name a few. Similarly, Barnett, Shoho, and Oleszewski (2012) found that the job realities of assistant principals in South Texas had professional challenges in conflict management, curriculum and instruction, and workload/task management. Further, Abebe et al. (2010) found that assistant principals in Indiana felt they needed more training in the areas of special education and technology. All of these areas were found to be significant within our findings and could point to a trend in understanding the professional development needs of assistant principals across other regions and states.

Our findings have helped us better understand the professional development needs of the assistant principals in northern Kentucky and as a result, we offer three implications related to research and practice. The first relates to our roles as professors of educational leadership. We recommend educational leadership programs or other related professional organizations begin to offer more professional development to assistant principals targeting their specialized needs. After we completed the analysis from this study, our faculty team, in conjunction with selected principals and administrators, used the data to develop the Northern Kentucky Assistant Principals' Network (APN), a new effort to support local school leaders through a variety of professional development opportunities as they prepare to become principals. According to Marshall (1992), "by actively identifying, recruiting, and supporting individuals as they *enter* administrative positions, universities and professional associations can most strongly affect the way administrators define their roles and leadership styles" (p. 91). We planned a series of monthly professional development opportunities on topics such as school finance, time management, issues of school culture, instructional leadership, and special education in online, hybrid and face-to-face formats. Additionally, an online community was established to allow participants to network, discuss, share ideas, pose questions, connect with experts, find resources, etc. – a community that we hope will span far beyond the scope of this project. These seminars have been extremely popular with high participation rates. For those who were unable to attend, sessions were recorded and posted in an online organization that was created to facilitate communication. At the end of each session, assistant principals completed evaluations to provide feedback and offer suggestions for future sessions. During the summer, the assistant principals were invited to attend an innovative two-day academy which included panels of expert leaders such as principals, superintendents, finance officers, and others. It is our hope that the Northern Kentucky Assistant Principals' Network will serve as ongoing leadership support as these future principals prepare for their new roles and responsibilities. While it is exciting to note that professional development opportunities are happening in some of our large urban districts like Denver, Miami-Dade, and New York City, we believe that additional opportunities need to occur elsewhere and the Northern Kentucky Assistant Principals' Network could serve as an example for others to replicate within their service regions.

The second implication relates to using standards as a framework for professional growth. Because we used ISLLC 2008 as the framework for our survey, we believe that standards can indeed make a difference and influence our practice. According to Oliver (2005), "ISLLC and state standards offer excellent frameworks within which to design and monitor such professional development activities to ensure that they produce effective instructional leaders" (p. 99). As indicated by Council of Chief State School Officers (2008), these standards "can set parameters for professional development and evaluation systems that can readily facilitate performance growth of all education leaders" (p. 16). Unfortunately, although most states have adopted the ISLLC standards, "support and evaluation systems for principals do not typically map back to these standards" (Sun, 2011, p. 6). In our case, we set out to intentionally utilize the ISLLC 2008 standards and as a result, we were able to better understand the professional development need of the assistant principals in our region at this particular point in time. Leadership preparation programs in other regions or states should indeed use the standards as a basis for developing professional development for assistant principals in

areas such as school finance/budgeting, time management/work-life balance, school culture, instructional leadership, and special education.

The third implication relates to future research. Because research on assistant principals is still somewhat limited, we recommend further work needs to be done to address their unique needs, ongoing professional development, and career advancement. For example, we would recommend implementing a longitudinal approach to better understand assistant principals' needs and how they may change over time, especially once they become principals. Additionally, we would recommend the use of a 360° process (Allen, Wasicsko, & Chirichello, 2014) in order to give assistant principals feedback from multiple perspectives and possibly minimizing any gap between their self-perceptions and how others see them. After gathering multiple inputs, assistant principals should also be encouraged to develop professional growth plans to begin to address areas targeted for growth as well as strength areas. Further, professors of educational leadership in other states or regions could replicate this study in order to explore the professional development needs of the assistant principals within their region. Even though contextual factors may differ, we believe that understanding and then providing ongoing quality professional development for assistant principals is imperative. This is particularly critical for assistant principals who serve in districts that do not offer opportunities like the programs in Denver, New York, or Miami.

In addition to these three implications, we propose the following questions to guide future research:

1. Would similar findings apply on a state, national, or international level?
2. Could interviews or focus groups provide qualitative data to reveal further information regarding assistant principals' professional development needs?
3. Would a longitudinal approach reveal useful information regarding how professional development needs change over time, especially once they become principals.
4. How are individual schools/districts or other regions in Kentucky (or another state), the United States, or internationally engaging assistant principals in professional development?

Limitations

Throughout the development and implementation of this study, we took safeguards to minimize two potential limitations. The first limitation concerns generalizability. Because this study took place within the northern Kentucky region of the United States, similar results may not be produced within other regions, other states, or internationally. It would be beneficial to conduct a similar study inclusive of a stratified sample of assistant principals from across Kentucky (or another state), across the United States, or internationally.

The second limitation deals with a measurement issue. As detailed in the method section, data were collected from assistant principals through self-reports. We are well aware that the assistant principals may not give honest answers or that some may inflate their answers because they believe their skill sets as educational leaders are better than what they really are. We also understood that "even when respondents are doing their best to be forthright and insightful, their self-reports

are subject to various sources of inaccuracy” (Paulhus & Vazire, 2009, p. 228). Some researchers supplement self-reported data with observational data or data from multiple perspectives if they are available. To minimize this limitation, our informed consent explained clearly that participation in the research was voluntary and that all data would be confidential and all reports would be completely anonymous. As noted in the previous discussion section, we have recommended the use of a 360° process to further minimize this concern in the future.

Conclusion

Given the scarcity of research on the professional development needs of assistant principals, this study will contribute to the knowledge base concerning how we might more effectively design professional development programming and networking opportunities for these educational leaders. It is our hope that through such contributions, “the assistant principalship can continue to develop as an integral member of an administrative team that influences school effectiveness and academic performance and is prepared to move into the principalship with confidence” (Oleszewski et al., 2012). Additionally, we hope that the assistant principals who have participated in the Northern Kentucky Assistant Principals’ Network, continue to “share the joys and grouse about the problems with others who understand” (Marshall, 1992, p. 99).

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Appendix



Northern Kentucky Assistant Principals' Network-Survey

Instructions: In the left hand column, rate the “importance” of the statements relative to what principals should know and be able to do as educational leaders. In the right hand column, rate your current “actual performance or proficiency” on each of the statements in the area of educational leadership.

Length of service as an assistant principal: 1-3 years 4-6 years 7-9 years 10 or more years
School level: Elementary Middle High (check all that apply)
District type: Urban Suburban Rural
What year did you complete principal certification? _____

IMPORTANCE					ACTUAL PROFICIENCY					
Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important		Very Weak	Weak	Neutral	Strong	Very Strong
1	2	3	4	5		1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	1. Collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision and mission	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	2. Collect and use data to identify goals, assess organizational effectiveness, and promote organizational learning	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	3. Create and implement plans to achieve goals	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	4. Promote continuous and sustainable improvement	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	5. Monitor and evaluate progress and revise plans	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	6. Nurture and sustain a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	7. Create a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular program	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	8. Create a personalized and motivating learning environment for students	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	9. Supervise instruction	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	10. Develop assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	11. Develop the instructional and leadership capacity of staff	1	2	3	4	5

IMPORTANCE					ACTUAL PROFICIENCY					
Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important		Very Weak	Weak	Neutral	Strong	very strong
1	2	3	4	5	12. Maximize time spent on quality instruction	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	13. Promote the use of the most effective and appropriate technologies to support teaching and learning	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	14. Monitor and evaluate the impact of the instructional program	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	15. Monitor and evaluate the management and operational systems	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	16. Obtain, allocate, align, and efficiently utilize human, fiscal, and technological resources	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	17. Promote and protect the welfare and safety of students and staff	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	18. Develop the capacity for distributed leadership	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	19. Ensure teacher and organizational time is focused to support quality instruction and student learning	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	20. Collect and analyze data and information pertinent to the educational environment	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	21. Promote understanding, appreciation, and use of the community's diverse cultural, social, and intellectual resources	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	22. Build and sustain positive relationships with families and caregivers	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	23. Build and sustain productive relationships with community partners	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	24. Ensure a system of accountability for every student's academic and social success	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	25. Model principles of self-awareness, reflective practice, transparency, and ethical behavior	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	26. Safeguard the values of democracy, equity, and diversity	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	27. Consider and evaluate the potential moral and legal consequences of decision-making	1	2	3	4	5

IMPORTANCE					ACTUAL PROFICIENCY					
Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important		Very Weak	Weak	Neutral	Strong	very strong
1	2	3	4	5	28. Promote social justice and ensure that individual student needs inform all aspects of schooling	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	29. Advocate for children, families, and caregivers	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	30. Act to influence local, district, state, and national decisions affecting student learning	1	2	3	4	5
1	2	3	4	5	31. Assess, analyze, and anticipate emerging trends and initiatives in order to adapt leadership strategies	1	2	3	4	5
					32. Please list below any knowledge, skills, or topics that you need to further develop before assuming the role of principal.					
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