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Educational Leadership

THE URGENCY OF PRINCIPAL PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT AND THE IMPLICATIONS
FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Abstract

School principals have a significant impact on student achievement, and the need to adequately prepare and develop them is necessary if districts want to positively impact student achievement outcomes. This case study examined 1) the practices and systems that school districts use to support principal professional development (PD) 2) the alignment of district practices and systems to the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (CPSEL) and effective professional development constructs, and 3) principal perceptions of the alignment of received professional development to effective professional development constructs, the CPSEL, and their professional development needs. School district administrators and principals representing the Southern San Joaquin Valley of California participated in this research via interviews and focus groups. The findings indicate a lack of a system of support for principal supervisors. Other findings include that few districts use principal action plans to provide differentiated PD and support to principals, and that differentiated PD was primarily based on district initiatives and school site needs, instead of PD needs as identified directly by principals. The PD and supports provided to principals also primarily focused on instructional leadership and organizational management, two PD areas that most align to principal reported PD needs. Districts are investing in

the human capacity of principals by providing principal PD and support. However, there is a lack of leadership development via a systemic framework across districts that provides principal PD and support needed throughout a continuum. Districts need to reexamine their principal supervision structure and utilize the School Administrator System of Support (SASS) suggested by the researcher to intentionally plan for and develop the varied needs of principals throughout their leadership career. The model ensures that principals are not only provided with PD and support based on district initiatives and school needs, but also based on principal identified needs aligned to the CPSEL and effective PD constructs. Consistent with leadership development theory, a systematic approach to principal PD across districts in the state of California, will ensure educational equity and equity in the growth and development of all leaders in the state.