

Conceptualizing and Evaluating Professional Development for School Leaders

Ellen B Goldring

Courtney Preston

Abstract

The importance of professional development for school leaders is paramount as school leaders are expected to lead teachers and students to achieve new levels of performance and learning. However, few principal development programs have focused directly on the problem of developing professional practice, competence and expertise for instructional improvement and increased learning outcomes for all students.

In this paper we present a review of the field of professional development for school leaders. First the paper sets out a framework for defining what professional development is. Next it articulates criteria to define 'high quality' professional development and describes goals for professional development. The paper then critiques the research on professional development for school leaders in three key areas: 1) conceptualization regarding how professional development can influence practitioners' practice, competence, and expertise, 2) instruments (instrumentation) to measure proximate and ultimate effects of professional development as well as implementation fidelity, and, 3) rigor and scope of research designs. For each of the three areas the paper presents a suggested approach and agenda to develop the knowledge base regarding effective professional development for school leaders.

The chapter is rooted in a perspective that in order for professional development to meet the needs of leaders to improve schools, it is necessary to 'open the black box' of these programs to address and understand the challenges associated with transforming leaders' knowledge, understanding, and practice in school settings.