



EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

at a private K-12 school

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Executive Summary

This research focuses on the professional development needs of a private Christian K–12 school. The partner organization, Texas Christian School (a pseudonym), was founded in 1958 and serves preschool through 12th-grade students in the Dallas/Fort Worth area of Texas. The school’s enrollment was 621 students at the beginning of the 2021–2022 school year, which is an increase of approximately 9% over the previous year when 570 students were enrolled. Prior to the 2021–2022 school year, however, Texas Christian School (TCS) had experienced declining enrollment.

The new president of TCS, Dr. Post, believes there is a need to improve the academic program and pedagogy of the faculty. Parents substantiated this need in their responses to a survey sent in 2019, prior to the arrival of Dr. Post. An executive summary of the survey states, *“It is evident that there is room for improvement—particularly with regard to consistency in the quality of teaching and level of academic rigor.”* Dr. Post speculates that one mechanism for achieving academic improvement might be found in faculty professional development.

The literature suggests that professional development, when targeted, can indeed be effective and have a direct impact on improving teaching, and indirectly, on student outcomes such as student achievement (Sparks & Loucks-Horsey, 1990; Garet et al., 2001; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Kennedy, 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Putting a system in place to support the professional growth of all teachers according to their needs is necessary for achieving school success (Bredeson, 2000; McChesney & Aldridge, 2019; Youngs & King, 2002). To frame a better understanding of how professional development could impact instructional quality and academic outcomes, the conceptual framework used in this study was drawn from the research by Youngs and King (2002). Their model is based on a synthesis of prior research on

school reform and educational change and suggests that professional development activities are the foundation for teachers' knowledge, skills, dispositions, professional community, and program coherence that ultimately lead to student achievement (Youngs & King, 2002).

This quality improvement project aims to uncover the attitudes, perceptions, and needs around professional development at TCS. Five research questions informed by the context, problem of practice, literature, and framework were generated:

1. How do teachers describe the professional community at TCS?
2. Does TCS have the technical resources to support the teachers and their community, including a high-quality curriculum, instructional materials, technology, and adequate workspace?
3. Are the teacher development programs at TCS coordinated, directed at clear learning goals, and sustained over time?
4. What do the teachers at TCS perceive as their needs for professional development?
5. Are the teachers' knowledge and skills viewed as professionally competent in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and classroom management?

A quantitative electronic survey was sent to all faculty to assess their needs and perceptions about professional development at TCS. The survey had a completion rate of 72% or 51 of 71 possible respondents. Based on the survey results, five major findings emerged:

Finding 1

The professional community is not aligned to support the learning goals of teachers at TCS; nor does the community have formal, meaningful collaboration among teachers. Informal relationships are valued more than any type of formal, collaborative professional development that a community could provide.

Teachers indicated that they did not spend much time engaging in professional learning through collaborative activities with other teachers during the previous year. Although professional development activities were considered helpful, they are not occurring within the teacher's professional communities. In fact, when asked how much time was spent during the last year learning through individual support via one-on-one mentoring, coaching, and partnerships, 70% of the faculty respondents indicated they spend less than 10 hours a year in formal one-on-one learning relationships.

Finding 2

Teachers at TCS do not believe they have influence over their own professional development. Most identified recent professional development as either non-existent or top-down.

Research shows that faculty should have input into their own professional development in order for it to be the most effective. When asked how often they chose their own professional development, over half of the faculty respondents indicated only in a few instances. In addition, they indicated that a school-level administrator chooses what happens during collaborative sessions more than 50% of the time.

Finding 3

While teachers felt that, for the most part, they had the technical resources needed, they did not have the time to improve their skills. They also indicated that TCS did not provide enough funding for professional development.

Overall, inadequate technical resources did not emerge as an issue at TCS. Although time and funding are not considered technical resources, they are, however, resources critical to effective professional development programs. Survey respondents indicated a lack of time to participate in professional development. In addition, several comments were made in response to the survey's open-ended question indicating that not enough funds were made available for professional development at TCS.

Finding 4

The current professional development program is not strongly coordinated or clearly directed at student learning goals; nor has it been sustained over time, indicating a lack of coherence.

The faculty respondents indicated that the current professional development sessions were not relevant to the content areas they taught at TCS, nor were they based on research that showed evidence of student performance. The respondents did not feel learning is supported through a combination of strategies (e.g., workshops, peer coaching, study groups, joint planning of lessons), nor has professional development been consistent over time.

Finding 5

Teachers' most significant needs are in the areas of content-specific curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. There was also evidence that newer teachers at TCS are less confident in the area of classroom management.

Faculty respondents were aligned in terms of their greatest needs for professional development. The top two needs identified were content-specific instructional strategies, indicated by 86% of respondents, and meeting the needs of all learners, indicated by 60% of respondents. Specific areas identified for improvement were in knowledge, skills, classroom management, and pedagogy, including opportunities to practice new skills, modeling instructional strategies, and learning how to use data to assess student learning needs.

Based on the findings above and the literature on effective professional development, I made the following recommendations to Texas Christian School to improve their professional learning program.

Recommendation 1

Formalize the vision for a structured professional development program, allowing faculty members to have a greater level of choice by providing individualized learning plans.

It is evident from the research that for professional development to effectively create change, teachers need to be actively involved in their own learning and should be provided some level of choice in type and content. Therefore, my recommendation is to design individualized learning plans that can be customized based on the unique needs of each teacher.

The individualized learning plans would provide formal professional development for each faculty member that could be coordinated and tracked at the school level. The learning plan should incorporate various professional development activities that meet both school-wide goals for student improvement and individual goals for growth.

Recommendation 2

Implement a peer coaching model to include opportunities for collaborative professional development, practice new skills, and gather feedback.

Professional development that provides peer coaching and expert support is a cost-effective way for teachers to gain and share knowledge as well as receive feedback to improve instruction and student outcomes. Joyce and Showers (2002) found that coached teachers practiced new strategies more often, adapted the strategies more appropriately to their own goals and contexts, and retained and increased their skills over time more than uncoached teachers. Peer coaching would also foster a more collaborative professional community.

A peer coaching model provides for professional development sustained over time, offering multiple opportunities for teachers to engage in learning around a single set of concepts or practices. Peer coaching also has a greater chance of positively impacting school capacity and student outcomes.

Recommendation 3

Create K–12 professional learning communities in which the chairs are content experts, thus providing professional development within the learning community.

If the professional community is effectively growing a school's capacity, it will include meaningful collaboration among faculty members and provide the opportunity for in-depth inquiry into assumptions, evidence, and alternative solutions to problems. Creating a formal K–12 professional learning community (PLC) will provide for greater alignment among the faculty. I recommend scheduling regular PLC meetings with planned activities that support the learning goals established by the group.

A goal of the PLC should be to support content-specific teaching, including ongoing, job-embedding learning that is both active and collaborative. PLCs provide for a focus on teaching strategies associated with a specific curriculum and support learning within the teachers' classroom. Lave and Wenger's (1991) theory states that individuals learn through their participation in specific communities of people with whom they interact regularly. Fostering an opportunity for collaboration among participants would create an environment of more robust learning and growth than one could achieve individually.

As with all research, this project has limitations, including a small number of overall participants (51). However, with 72% of the TCS faculty responding, the results should provide insight into their perceptions and needs for professional development. After analysis of the survey data, information obtained from documents provided by TCS, and interviews with Dr. Post, these recommendations to improve the school's professional development program are based on robust data.

Introduction

The professional development of teachers is a widely researched topic as a critical component to the effectiveness of a school. Improving teacher learning has been shown to provide students with the complex skills necessary to prepare them for their future in the 21st century. In addition, the effectiveness of teaching directly impacts student achievement and outcomes.

When the leadership of a school recognizes a need for a change in its academic program, the level of instruction is typically an area that is assessed for quality. Not surprisingly, there has been increasing attention around the role of deliberate, ongoing, impactful professional learning and development in support of teachers. This research study focuses on the professional development needs of a private Christian K–12 school. As with any private school, parents, board members, and donors have a great deal of influence because they provide the school’s funding. Private schools, by nature, do not receive government funding. While board members and parents are not experts in education, they will point to the quality of instruction as an area for improvement when assessing the school.

The connections between student outcomes, quality of instruction, and effective professional development have been widely researched. The new era of professional development has moved away from a lecture style to a more collaborative approach, and participants are becoming active in staff development (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). New reform movements require “most teachers to rethink their practice, to construct new classroom roles and expectations about student outcomes, and to teach in ways they have never done before” (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, p. 597).

This new form of professional development calls for teachers to become active participants in learning activities and work collaboratively with administrators to develop appropriate goals. Therefore, this research seeks to understand teachers' professional development needs and perceptions and recommend ways to improve their learning.

Organizational Context

Texas Christian School (a pseudonym) is a faith-based private school serving preschool through 12th-grade students. The school was founded in 1958 by members of a denomination of a Christian church in the greater Dallas/Fort Worth area of Texas. The mission of Texas Christian School (TCS) is not unique to other private Christian schools, as evidenced by the following statement from its website: "Texas Christian is a Christ-centered, college preparatory school where every student is known, loved, and valued, taught excellence in and out of the classroom, and empowered by a biblical worldview." ("About Us | Texas Christian School," n.d.). The website continues with its history, "for over 60 years, we have been providing a Christ-centered, college preparatory education and empowering students for a lifetime of faith, service, and leadership for Christ."

As depicted in Figure 1, the school's enrollment was 621 students at the beginning of the 2021–2022 school year, which is an increase of approximately 9% over the previous year, when 570 students were enrolled. Prior to the 2021–2022 school year, however, TCS had experienced declining enrollment. Table 1 illustrates the percent change in enrollments for the 2017–2022 academic years.

Figure 1: Total Number of Students by School Year (TCS Internal Documents)

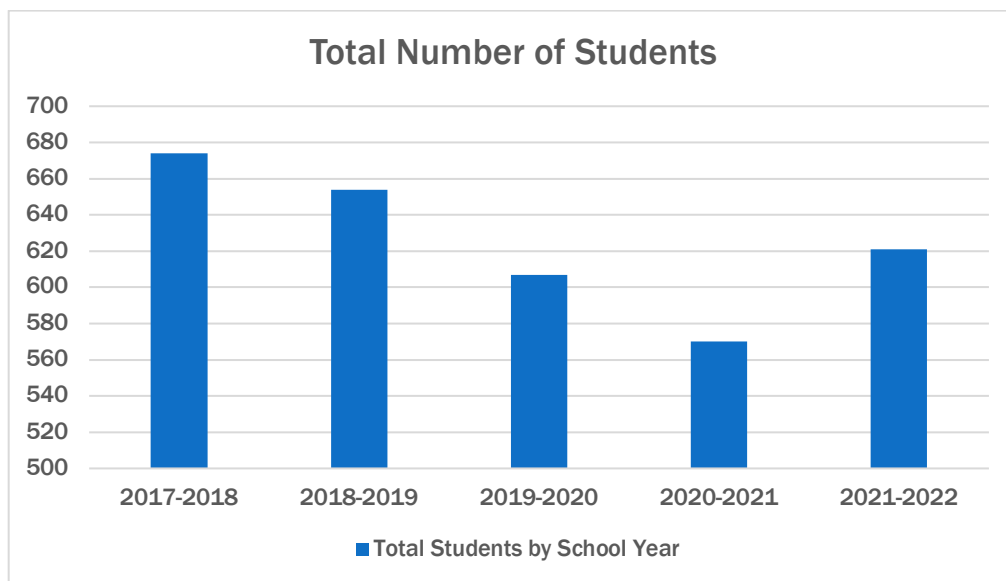


Table 1: Percent Change in Enrollments

School Year	Total Students	Percent Change
2017–2018	674	
2018–2019	654	–2.97%
2019–2020	607	–7.19%
2020–2021	570	–6.10%
2021–2022	621	8.95%

The school president, Dr. Nancy Post (a pseudonym), attributes some of the increase in enrollment to a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the school’s decision to remain open, allowing students to attend school in person, when other schools remained closed.

Another issue the school is facing, particularly in the past five years, is turnover in key leadership roles, including the head of school (called the president at TCS). When the long-time president retired, an interim president was hired during the one-year search for a permanent replacement. The next president served for four years before resigning. After a nationwide

search, the Board of Trustees hired Dr. Nancy Post, the school's first female president. Dr. Post's first year at TCS was the difficult 2020–2021 school year, where she faced the challenges of leading a school during a pandemic. Before accepting the position with TCS, Dr. Post served as head of school at Alabama Christian School (a pseudonym) and was the Vice President of Learning Initiatives and Middle School principal at a different Christian K–12 school in the Atlanta area.

During Dr. Post's first year at TCS, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted her priorities and focus. As a result, she and her administrative team spent the majority of their energy managing the day-to-day objectives required to keep the students physically safe while attending classes in person.

Now that there appears to be some improvement in the COVID-19 outlook, Dr. Post's goal is to make an impact as a leader, and she believes the school is ready for change. In addition, there is pressure from the Board to increase enrollment. A strategic plan, called Vision Forward, was implemented in 2019 under the previous president. Dr. Post would like to achieve the goals identified in the plan by the stated end date of 2024. Faculty, parents, and Board members provided input that was used to develop the strategic plan, making it a priority for Dr. Post. In addition to other objectives, two specific areas of the plan emphasize a need for improvement within the academic program and in faculty and staff training. These are:

- 1. Bolster the breadth and depth of the academic program and the vitality and relevance of technological advances as an integral component*
- 2. Formalize processes for evaluation and assessment, mentoring and coaching, and ongoing professional growth and development of faculty and staff*

TCS operates with three main divisions (Appendix A): Upper School (US), Middle School (MS), and Lower School (LS). Each division has a division head (the equivalent of a principal in other schools). The Upper School also has a dean of students. In addition, TCS operates a small preschool program. Continuing the turnover of leadership, the Middle School division head quit just before the 2021 school year began. Dr. Post immediately promoted a history teacher to MS dean of students and asked the Upper School division head to assume the role of division head for the 6th–12th grades. TCS currently has 132 employees, which includes 71 faculty members, as shown in Table 2 and Table 3. At TCS, the term “faculty” includes classroom teachers, counselors, deans, and division heads.

Table 2: Number of TCS Faculty by School Division

School Division	Number of Faculty
Preschool Teachers	5
Lower School Teachers	21
Lower School Admin & Counselor	2
Middle School Teachers	10
Middle School Admin & Counselor	2
High School Teachers	24
High School Admin & Counselor	2
Fine Arts Teachers	5
Total Number of Faculty at TCS	71

Table 3: Number of TCS Faculty by Primary Subject Taught

Primary Subject Taught	Number of Faculty
Admin/Counselor	6
Bible	5
English	5
Fine Arts	5
Learning Center	3
Lower School (PS–5th)	21
Math	5
Other PE (Technology, Living Skills)	3
Preschool	5
Science	5
Social Science	6
World Language	2
Total Number of Faculty at TCS	71

Definition of the Problem

In an initial discussion with Dr. Post, she indicated that the three school levels (Lower, Middle, and Upper) need to be better aligned academically and pedagogically. In order to improve the academic program, Dr. Post believes that one mechanism for achieving alignment might be found in faculty professional development. She explained that some teachers are using the same worksheets they used twenty years ago and that they needed training around a growth mindset and a curriculum focused on teaching for transformation.

Dr. Post had good reason to believe that alignment and development were issues. The school provided me with the results of two surveys that had been conducted with TCS parents. The first survey, “Vision Forward 2019,” was administered online in January and February of 2019 by a consulting firm, Independent School Advancement. The consultant produced an executive summary and reported that 75% (370) of all TCS families had participated in the

survey. According to the executive summary, the purpose of the survey was to acquire feedback from parents that would inform more specific strategic planning strategies. One finding was striking and led to Dr. Post’s focus on alignment and development:

“It is evident that there is room for improvement—particularly with regard to consistency in the quality of teaching and level of academic rigor. Consistency—in the learning environment, in curriculum, in program delivery—was a resounding theme that was repeated throughout all survey elements and across all three divisions.”

-Consultant
TCS Executive Summary Parent Survey
Vision Forward 2019

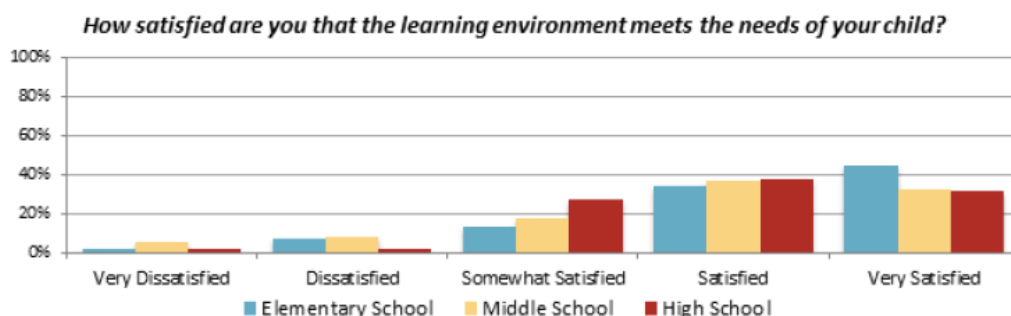
As shown in Figure 2, the consultant provided several parent comments and a graph of the survey question results as supporting evidence for these statements.

Figure 2: From the Executive Summary—Parent Survey Vision Forward 2019 (TCS Consultant)

Overall satisfied, just would hope for more consistency among some teachers that do not strive quite as hard to push/motivate students.
- High School Parent

I believe in the direction the school is going and hope the work being put into aligning the entire school’s curriculum is then used to ensure that all students are well-prepared for what comes next – consistently.
- Middle School Parent

Not all subjects are as challenging as they could be. Academic rigor varies greatly – this is largely dependent on the teacher.
- High School Parent



The consultant's summary further explained the specific areas that required immediate attention and provided additional evidence in the form of parent comments.

There are two key areas in which improvement must be made in Academic and Faculty Standards. It is clear from the feedback in the surveys that while this high quality in teaching is experienced in many instances, it is not consistent across all subject areas in all divisions. As well, it has been noted that parents in both the Middle School and the Upper School do not feel well-informed with regard to their child's progress in general (with scores of 3.4 and 3.7 respectively), nor is there a sense that teachers recognize and/or communicate concerns regarding their child's progress (scores of 3.49 and 3.63). Effective and timely communication in this regard is important.

Finally, as many parents reminded us, the world is changing rapidly and we as a school must keep pace with best practice and appropriate emerging trends in academic programming and teaching methods, as well as maintain an appropriate level of academic rigor. It should also be noted that only 73% of parents are satisfied with the level of integration of technology at TCS—which is lower than typically seen in independent schools. This is another area in which the school must make efforts to always ensure the appropriate and effective level of innovation and integration or risk not only falling behind, but perhaps risk its curricular offerings and mode of delivery becoming outdated or worse, irrelevant. (Consultant—TCS Executive Summary Parent Survey Vision Forward, 2019.)

A comment from a middle school parent quoted in the consultant's report is telling:

I feel that the curriculum/program is antiquated and weighs heavily on paper-based learning and less on interactive, Socratic, and/or immersive methods. I, by no means, want a sole focus on using technology in replace of paper methods but feel that a better mix could be achieved.

The survey was administered prior to the arrival of Dr. Post. She was hired in the spring of 2020 and began her first year that same summer. It is clear that the parents are indicating they have concerns regarding the academics: quality and consistency in teaching as well as in the level of academic rigor. In addition to the variability in the quality of teaching, there were concerns about the inconsistency in teacher communications and a lack of technology integration both in the classroom and in the curriculum.

Dr. Post also provided access to the results of a parent survey that was completed in the fall of 2020. Parents rated the school on a scale of 0–10 of how likely they were to recommend TCS to a friend. The participant had the option to provide the primary reason for their specific response. The response rate of the survey was 46%. TCS received an average score of 8.8, “likely to recommend.” While this is a very high score, several themes surfaced repeatedly in the comments, including a perceived lack of communication from teachers, a perceived lack of rigor in the curriculum, and concern about the need for faculty training. An additional theme noted was faculty turnover.

These challenges contributed to Dr. Post’s determination to understand how these goals might be achieved by utilizing professional development in order to build school capacity. Her objectives led to a literature review of how to build school capacity through effective professional development programs. The collective power of an entire faculty to strengthen student performance throughout their school can be summarized as school organizational capacity (Youngs & King, 2002, p. 645).

Dr. Post’s goal is to design an effective professional development plan aligned with her vision and strategic direction for the school. She believes that by growing research-based teaching methods, TCS will enhance the overall pedagogy, which in turn will provide for improved student outcomes. This is an encouraging sign for TCS, because research has shown that the personal vision of school leaders is an essential condition for organizational learning and school improvement (Geijsel et al., 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, 1994; Marks & Printy, 2003).

The issues identified by the parents’ surveys and confirmed by Dr. Post’s observations point to the need to improve the academic program and pedagogy at TCS. There is extensive

research on the connection between student outcomes, instructional quality, teachers' skills, and professional development. Effective professional development is structured learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2017).

The goal of this research is to uncover the attitudes, perceptions, and needs around professional development at TCS. Teachers' perceptions about the relative effectiveness of their professional development experiences can be an insightful method to explore the extent to which these practices positively affect their instructional approaches.

Literature Review

It is an understatement to say that the published research on professional development is extensive, both in terms of its depth and breadth. However, a school leader cannot improve pedagogy and attain organizational improvement without the necessary professional development infrastructure to support the desired changes. Therefore, putting a system in place to support the professional growth of all teachers according to their needs is necessary for achieving school success (Bredeson, 2002; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Garet et al., 2001; Kennedy, 2016; McChesney & Aldridge, 2019).

Professional development and professional learning are two terms that have been used interchangeably. Bredeson (2002) defines *professional development* as learning opportunities that engage educators' creative and reflective capacities in ways that strengthen their practice.

The research has overwhelmingly shown that professional learning is critical to building a professional development infrastructure and ongoing improvement practices (Day, 1999; Sparks & Hirsch 1997; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1998; Bredeson, 2000; Newmann, 2000). However, professional development can be time-consuming, costly in terms of financial resources, and hampered by organizational structures that do not enable collaborative knowledge sharing and practice (Garet et al., 2001; Bredeson, 2001; Bredeson & Scribner, 2000). These constraints prevent teachers from participating in continuous professional development and are significant challenges to school leaders as they design professional development programs that support school improvement and enhance student learning.

To a great extent, the professional development literature assumes the learner is an adult, but it is still useful to consider the themes associated with the research on the adult learner. The design for professional development programs begins by thinking about the learner, including

their needs, preferences, and motivation (Bredeson, 2002; Broad & Evans, 2006; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Steffy & Wolfe, 2001).

One of the most comprehensive theories on adult learning was developed by Malcolm Knowles. Knowles (1984) describes adult learners as those who perform roles in modern culture and see themselves as responsible for their own lives. Several of Knowles' key points should be considered when planning professional development for teachers. Adult learners desire the freedom to direct themselves or be involved in the process of learning, are goal-oriented, and recognize a reason to learn. Therefore, for professional development to effectively create change, teachers need to be actively involved, collaborate, and apply the learning to their daily practice (Broad & Evans, 2006; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Visser et al., 2012).

Another important consideration for the development of adult learners emerges from Bandura's (1997) description of self-efficacy, defined as a person's belief in their ability to complete a task, including learning. According to the research, strong self-efficacy results in teachers who take more risks as learners and are willing to try new things. Geijsel et al. (2009) confirmed that self-efficacy positively affected teachers' participation in professional learning activities. The research showed that, on average, teachers with a stronger belief in their capabilities are more involved in learning activities.

Teachers' commitment to participating in professional development initiatives is critical. Research found that teachers' and principals' identification with the school's leadership, mission, and goals are positively related to improved performance, professionalism, and increased effort (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Geijsel et al., 2009; Yoon et al., 2007). When designing effective professional development programs, school leaders should build on cultural tools such as the organization's mission, vision, values, and goals.

Despite the challenges of implementation, most school leaders understand the value of improving the quality of teaching. Professional development, when targeted, can indeed be effective and have a direct impact on improving teaching, and indirectly, on student outcomes such as student achievement (Sparks & Loucks-Horsey, 1997; Garet et al., 2001; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Kennedy, 2016; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Bredeson (2002) synthesized the existing research and created a framework with ten characteristics of high-quality, effective professional development. The framework serves as a helpful guide for planning, implementing, and judging the quality of a school's professional development practices. High-quality professional development (Bredeson, 2002, p. 665):

1. Focuses on teachers as central to student learning yet includes all other members of the school community.
2. Focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement.
3. Respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers, principals, and others in the school community.
4. Reflects the best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership.
5. Enables teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, uses of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards.
6. Promotes continuous inquiry and improvement embedded in the school's daily life.
7. Is planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate the development.
8. Requires substantial time and additional resources.
9. Is driven by a coherent long-term plan.
10. Is evaluated ultimately based on its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning outcomes, and this assessment guides subsequent professional development efforts.

Many other researchers have identified essential requirements for effective professional development in terms of changes in teaching as well as student outcomes. The National Staff Development Council (NSDC, 2001) standards for professional development are divided into three categories: content, context, and process (NSDC website, n.d.). Content standards include student equity, the areas or components of quality teaching, and the knowledge of family involvement. Context standards include the organization of teacher learning through professional learning communities, school leaders that guide continuous instructional improvement, and resources to support adult learning and collaboration. Process standards include developing data-driven activities, evaluation, research-based decision-making, design of learning strategies, application of teacher learning into the classroom, and collaboration of faculty members.

Extensive literature has affirmed that professional development that focuses on academic subject matter (content), gives teachers opportunities for “hands-on” work (active learning), and is integrated into the daily life of the school (coherence), is more likely to produce enhanced knowledge and skills (Corcoran, 1995; Sparks & Hirsch, 1997; Garet et al., 2001; Geijsel et al., 2009). Research has also shown that placing a high value on classroom observation and professional discussion can grow an individual teacher’s skills (Kennedy, 2005; Goodall et al., 2005; Broad & Evans, 2006).

The NSDC context standard of professional learning communities is also substantiated in the literature. Providing an opportunity for collaborative engagement and empowering teachers to make critical decisions about their work and professional development contribute to a positive learning community (Louis et al., 1996; Myers & Simpson, 1998).

Lave and Wenger’s (1991) community of practice (CoP) supports the idea of a professional community. The individual members of a CoP share a common passion, and they

want to learn how to do it better or know more about it. A CoP is different from a team in that the shared learning and interests of its members are the factors that keep it together. A CoP is defined by knowledge rather than by task, and it exists because participation has value to its members (Wenger, 1998).

Communities of practice can be especially important vehicles for the professional development of new teachers (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Kennedy, 2005). By sharing information and experiences through practice and participation with the group, new members, called “newcomers,” learn from “old-timers” and have an opportunity to develop personally and professionally. Lave and Wenger (1991) demonstrated how newcomers become acquainted with the tasks, vocabulary, and organizing principles of the community’s practitioners by participating in peripheral activities, called legitimate peripheral participation (LPP), eventually becoming more central to the functioning of their community.

More recently, a collection of studies has focused on reform facilitated through improvement and change within the organization. Professional learning as a catalyst for change inside schools has become a primary initiative of many leaders. When professional learning is designed to meet the interests and needs of teachers and principals, the research argues, it will contribute to improved student learning outcomes, enhance the quality of educators’ work life, facilitate organizational change and school improvement, and help build school capacity (Bredeson, 2002; Galbraith & Fouch, 2007; Wei et al., 2009).

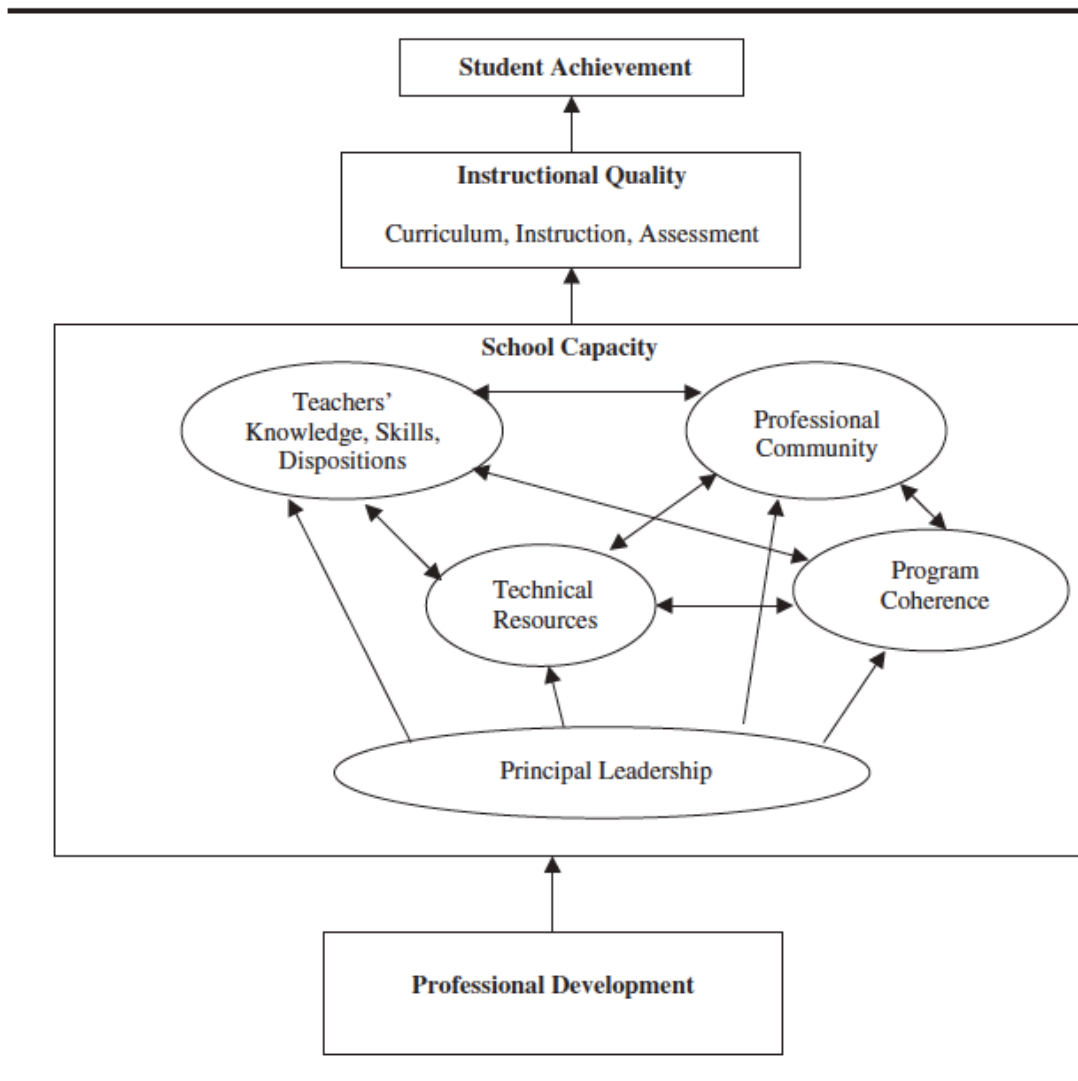
School organizational capacity is the collective power of an entire faculty to strengthen student performance throughout their school (Newmann et al., 2000). The conceptual framework selected for this project identifies the impact of professional development on school capacity leading to improved student achievement and outcomes.

Conceptual Framework

School capacity is affected by professional development designed to improve the knowledge and skills of teachers and leaders (Youngs & King, 2002). Youngs and King (2002) created a framework to demonstrate the relationship between professional development, school capacity, instructional quality, and student achievement. Their model is based on a synthesis of prior research on school reform and educational change and suggests that professional development activities are the foundation for teachers' knowledge, skills, dispositions, professional community, and program coherence that ultimately lead to improved student achievement (Youngs & King, 2002).

The conceptual framework, shown in Figure 3, argues that professional development directly impacts a school's capacity and that each of the five key factors are interrelated: teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions, the professional community, technical resources available to the school, program coherence, and principal leadership. This research explores teacher and administrator perceptions about the extent to which these five factors are implemented effectively at TCS.

Figure 3: A Conceptual Framework Connecting Professional Development to School Capacity (Youngs & King, 2002, p. 643)



Teachers' Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions

Teachers' knowledge and skills include those that represent professional competence in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and classroom management that maintain high expectations for student learning (Anders & Richardson, 1991; Burke, 1997; Newmann et al., 2000; Youngs

& King, 2002). Today more than 15% of new teachers enter the profession through nontraditional pathways, and others bring varied types and qualities of preparation and skills (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snow, 2007).

Another factor that contributes to school capacity is a teacher's attitude and disposition. A teacher with a negative disposition not only affects themselves but others around them. When a teacher has a negative attitude toward professional development specifically, they can create a toxic learning environment for the whole group. Awareness and management of the attitudes of participating teachers are essential for implementing successful professional development programs (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997; Knight, 2000). Negative attitudes can even arise during the professional development activities themselves, especially if the teacher does not value the content. Guskey (2000) points out that teachers sometimes tolerate the professional development activities they perceive as a waste of time, attending strictly to fulfill their professional obligations. The literature shows that it is essential to provide teachers with input and choices about the types, format, and content of professional development activities they could engage in (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019).

Professional Community

A teacher's professional community also plays a role in school capacity. An individual teacher's competence must be utilized in an organized collective enterprise, and not just within their own classroom. (Neumann et al., 2000). A strong schoolwide professional community is characterized by (a) shared goals for student learning; (b) meaningful collaboration among faculty members; (c) in-depth inquiry into assumptions, evidence, and alternative solutions to

problems; and (d) opportunities for teachers to exert influence over their work. (Youngs & King, 2002).

Extensive research supports the value of collaboration in learning. For example, Day (1999) describes the need for teachers to work together enthusiastically to establish a positive learning climate. Teachers who collaborate to share norms and practices can be powerful influences on learning, especially when there is collective knowledge and shared goals across fields and courses (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snow, 2007).

A successful, integrated, professional development program requires the formation of collaborative learning communities. Myers and Simpson (1998) describe learning communities as cultural settings in which everyone learns, every individual is an integral part, and every participant is responsible for both the learning and the overall well-being of everyone else. If a school's professional development program focuses solely on individual skills and knowledge, the needs of teachers for sustained professional contact with colleagues will not be provided for in ways that facilitate growth (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Fostering an opportunity for collaboration among teachers will allow participants to learn and grow more fully than they could individually.

Program Coherence

Program coherence is the extent to which student and faculty programs are coordinated, directed at clear learning goals, and sustained over time (Youngs & King, 2002). Student and staff learning can be weakened by organizational fragmentation when schools implement programs that are not clearly planned and integrated, address only limited numbers of student or staff needs, or end after short periods of time (Newmann et al., 2000). A few of the common problems with professional development is that it is not sustained and not clearly planned and

integrated with school and classroom programs. When professional development opportunities are disconnected or seem fragmented and “one-off,” they lose their value and may generate negative attitudes among teachers.

Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snow (2007) also found that clarity of goals and frequent opportunities to practice new skills are necessary to reinforce professional development. When development is coherent with the school’s structures and policies, both are reinforced synergistically (Sparks & Hirsch, 1997; Goodall et al., 2005).

A final important measurement of program coherence is the extent to which professional development is directed at clear learning goals. Professional development that focuses on specific content and the ways students learn will have greater positive effects on student achievement outcomes (Kennedy, 2005; Guskey, 2003).

Technical Resources

Technical resources are defined as those that support the teachers and their community, including high-quality curriculum, instructional materials, technology, and adequate workspace. The availability of resources is critical to the success of any professional development program (Guskey, 2000). If teachers do not have access to the curriculum or the technology needed for the ways in which students learn today, then the quality of the instruction will suffer. Unfortunately, school improvement efforts that focus mainly on technology and remodeling outdated facilities have become the norm. With such a narrow focus, other critical components necessary to build school capacity are overlooked.

The literature discusses two additional resources that are required for the implementation of professional development: time and funding. While these are not “technical” resources per se,

they are resources that are often referred to in the literature as barriers to the effective development of teachers (Guskey, 2000; Goodall et al., 2005). If an individual is learning a new skill, they must have the proper allocations of time and resources to learn and practice that skill to be effective (Bredeson, 2002; Bredeson & Scribner, 2000; Guskey & Peterson, 1995). The constraints of time and funding pose significant challenges to educators as they design professional development that supports school improvement and enhances student learning, especially when the school is faced with budget pressures due to a declining enrollment.

Principal Leadership

Finally, principal leadership is a key component of school capacity. Both the research and the professional literature are clear that school leadership plays a significant role in the success of any professional development program designed to increase overall school capacity. The quality of a school-level leader or principal has a direct influence on the teachers in their schools. Dwyer (1985) argued that one of the principal's most important roles is that of instructional leadership. Principals influence student outcomes through their impact on instructional organization and culture (Dwyer et al., 1985; Dwyer et al., 1987). When a principal is both an instructional and transformational leader, the influence on school performance, measured by the quality of its pedagogy and the achievement of its students, is substantial (Bossert et al., 1982; Marks & Printy, 2003). Research showed that this type of integrated leadership could positively impact teachers' commitment to school change, teachers' capacity for professional development, school performance, and student achievement (Geijsel et al., 2003; Marks & Printy, 2003; Leithwood et al., 1993; Leithwood, 1994).

In summary, this research study utilized Youngs and King's framework and the five factors of school capacity as a lens to evaluate the perceptions and needs for professional development at TCS. In order to create an effective professional development plan that will support the school's strategic vision, leaders need to understand the current professional development program. More importantly, the leader should know how that program is or is not meeting the needs of the staff. The most effective types of professional development directly address individual needs as well as respond to the needs of the school (Goodall et al., 2005; Knight, 2002; Hopkins & Harris, 2001). Therefore, the goal of this research is to identify what TCS teachers perceive as their needs in the classroom and what they may be missing to be effective.

Research Questions

Given the research on professional development and overlaying Youngs and King's (2002) conceptual framework, the following research questions were constructed. Finding answers to these questions will enable TCS to design a more effective professional development program.

1. How do teachers describe the professional community at TCS?
2. Does TCS have the technical resources to support the teachers and their community, including high-quality curriculum, instructional materials, technology, and adequate workspace?
3. Are the teacher development programs at TCS coordinated, directed at clear learning goals, and sustained over time?
4. What do the teachers at TCS perceive as their needs for professional development?
5. Are the teachers' knowledge and skills viewed as professionally competent in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and classroom management?

Study Design and Methodology

A cross-sectional study, including a survey containing both quantitative questions and one qualitative question, was used to examine the context of professional development at Texas Christian School (TCS). Cross-sectional studies are based on observations made at one point in time but can be used to make inferences about processes that occur over time (Babbie, 2017). Surveys may be used for explanatory purposes and are also used in studies in which the units of analysis are individual people or *respondents* (Babbie, 2017). The survey was designed to determine the TCS faculty's perceptions and needs regarding professional development. Surveys are informative vehicles for measuring the attitudes and orientations of a population (Babbie, 2017). In addition, TCS provided internal documents that included the current strategic plan and the results from two prior parent surveys.

Survey Design

The survey combined a portion of the Tennessee Educator Survey (TES) and a portion of a self-assessment instrument developed by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC). Both surveys are standard tools used to examine the effectiveness of professional development at educational institutions.

The TES was designed to provide feedback to administrators and policymakers related to school performance. It was developed through an alliance between the Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA) and Vanderbilt University (<http://educatorsurvey.tn.k12.gov>). The TES contains the main survey and a survey on four additional areas of "special topics," including professional development. The professional development topic area survey was used for this

research. The first nine questions on the TCS survey came from the TES special topic survey on professional development.

Question 10 on the survey used in this research was taken from a self-assessment instrument developed by the NSDC. Local school districts across the United States utilize the NSDC self-assessment survey for data collection designed to provide feedback regarding a school's capacity to implement high-quality professional development (Bredeson, 2002). In addition, Hirsh (2006) states that this validated instrument may be used to plan for future collective learning and action. The NSDC question, Question 10, is in the form of statements that are evaluated by survey participants. All ten questions on the survey used in this research were closed-ended, matrix questions using varied Likert response categories with ratings from 1 to 5.

By combining the two researched-based surveys on professional development (the TES and the NSDC), I was able to evaluate the five factors listed in Youngs and King's (2002) conceptual framework: individual teachers' skills, knowledge, and dispositions; professional community; program coherence; technical resources; and principal leadership. At the end of the survey, I provided one open-ended, free-response question to allow the respondents the opportunity to share additional thoughts about professional development at TCS. For analysis, the answers to these questions were coded and classified into themes. The themed responses were then quantified and related to the research questions and conceptual framework.

In order to obtain participants for the survey, a recruitment email was sent by Dr. Post (Appendix B) to faculty members in the Lower, Middle, and Upper Schools, in which she noted that participation was voluntary and anonymous. Table 4 identifies the number of TCS employees that are considered faculty listed by their school levels and roles.

Table 4: Number of TCS Faculty by School Division

School Division	Number of Faculty
Preschool Teachers	5
Lower School Teachers	21
Lower School Admin & Counselor	2
Middle School Teachers	10
Middle School Admin & Counselor	2
Upper School Teachers	24
Upper School Admin & Counselor	2
Fine Arts Teachers	5
Total Number of Faculty at TCS	71

The end of the survey contained demographic questions, including years of service, primary subject taught, and school division. The primary purpose of these questions was to determine if the survey respondents represented a cross-section of the TCS faculty population.

The TCS survey (Appendix C) provided an opportunity for the teacher-respondent to volunteer for a confidential follow-up interview. If the participant agreed to be interviewed, they would provide their name and email address. However, only three follow-up interviews were conducted due to the lack of willing participants, scheduling conflicts, and time limitations. In addition, the three interview participants were all high school teachers. Because the sample size was so small and not representative of the entire faculty, I did not include data from those interviews in this report.

Terms and Definitions

Administration:

In a private K–12 school environment, administration typically refers to the head of school or president, principal or division heads (school-level leaders), and assistant principals who are usually referred to as deans (dean of academics, dean of students, dean of school culture). In some cases, administration may also include senior leaders from departments within the school not directly involved in the classroom, such as the business office, development office, and admissions. In this study, the senior leaders in these types of departments were not included.

Faculty:

The term faculty is used interchangeably with the term teacher within a K–12 private secondary school setting and is the unit of analysis for this project. A teacher is a person who is directly responsible for the education of a student inside of the classroom. At TCS, counselors and school-level administrators are considered faculty.

School Capacity:

School organizational capacity is the collective power of an entire faculty to strengthen student performance throughout their school (Newmann et al., 2000). School capacity is affected by professional development intended to grow the knowledge and skills of leaders and teachers to promote organizational growth (Youngs & King, 2002).

Professional Development:

Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines *professional* as relating to a job that requires special education, training, or skill. It defines *development* as the act or process of growing or causing

something to grow or become larger or more advanced. Bredeson (2002) defines *professional development* as learning opportunities that engage educators' creative and reflective capacities in ways that strengthen their practice.

Mapping Survey Questions to School Capacity Framework

The conceptual framework used in this study suggests that professional development underlies the factors associated with school capacity. This is important because student achievement is affected most directly by the quality of instruction, and instruction, in turn, is affected by school capacity (Newmann et al., 2000). It is clear from the problem of practice that parents at TCS consider instructional quality, rigor, and consistency areas in need of improvement. Dr. Post agreed with this assessment and believed that one mechanism to solve these issues might be found in faculty professional development.

I used the responses to the survey questions to evaluate each factor in Youngs and King's (2002) conceptual framework: individual teachers' skills, knowledge and dispositions, professional community, program coherence, technical resources, and principal leadership. The following tables (Tables 5–9) illustrate how the survey questions informed both the research questions and the five factors for school capacity identified in the conceptual framework.

The tables denote whether the survey questions originated from the Tennessee Educator Survey (TES) or the self-assessment instrument developed by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC). The self-assessment by the NSDC is one matrix question (Question 10 on the TCS survey) that consists of twenty-two statements. The twenty-two statements within Question 10 are divided among the framework factor and research question to which they most applied.

Table 5: Mapping the Professional Community Framework Factor

Framework Factor	Research Question	Informed by	
		Survey Question	TCS Question
<p>Professional Community</p> <p>Examples: opportunities for teachers to exert influence over their work, meaningful collaboration among faculty members, discussion of alternative solutions to problems, in-depth inquiry into assumptions</p>	(1) How do teachers describe the professional community at TCS?	Question 1 (TES)	Q1: Since summer 2020, about how much time have you spent engaging in the following types of professional learning?
		Question 4 (TES)	Q4: Think back about all of the formal professional development sessions you attended during the current year. To what extent did you choose them yourself versus having them chosen by someone else?
		Question 5 (TES)	Q5: To what extent were the following one-on-one relationships helpful when you were making decisions about the teaching activities or strategies used in your classroom?
		Question 6 (TES)	Q6: Who determines what occurs during your collaborative time? What percentage of the activities were determined by the following people?
		Question 8 (TES)	Q8: Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements. (Four choices were presented.)
		Question 10 (NSDC)	Q10: Please indicate the extent to which the following statements occur at TCS.
		Question 10, Statement 2 (NSDC)	Fellow teachers, trainers, facilitators, and/or consultants are available to help us implement new instructional practices at our school.
		Question 10, Statement 3 (NSDC)	Our faculty learns about effective ways to work together.
		Question 10, Statement 9 (NSDC)	The teachers in my school meet as a whole staff to discuss ways to improve teaching and learning.
		Question 10, Statement 10 (NSDC)	We set aside time to discuss what we learned from our professional development experiences.
		Question 10, Statement 17 (NSDC)	We observe each other's classroom instruction as one way to improve our teaching.
		Question 10, Statement 19 (NSDC)	We receive feedback from our colleagues about classroom practices.

Table 6: Mapping the Principal Leadership Framework Factor

Framework Factor	Research Question	Informed by	
		Survey Question	TCS Question
Principal Leadership	(1) How do teachers describe the professional community at TCS?	Question 10 (NSDC)	Q10: Please indicate the extent to which the following statements occur at TCS.
Examples: effect and impact of principal support of professional development		Question 10, Statement 21 (NSDC)	Our principal believes teacher learning is essential for achieving our school goals.
		Question 10, Statement 22 (NSDC)	Our principal models effective collaboration.

Table 7: Mapping the Technical Resources Framework Factor

Framework Factor	Research Question	Informed by	
		Survey Question	TCS Question
Technical Resources	(2) Does TCS have the technical resources to support the teachers and their community, including high-quality curriculum, instructional materials, technology, and adequate workspace?	Question 8 (TES)	Q8: Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: It is hard to find time to work with other teachers.
Examples: high-quality curriculum, instructional materials, technology, adequate workspace, adequate time given for professional growth. Other resources include time and funding.		Question 10 (NSDC)	Q10: Please indicate the extent to which the following statements occur at TCS.
		Question 10, Statement 7 (NSDC)	Teachers at our school have opportunities to learn how to use technology to enhance instruction.
		Question 10, Statement 15 (NSDC)	My school structures time for teachers to work together to enhance student learning.
		Question 10, Statement 16 (NSDC)	Substitutes are available to cover our classes when we observe each other's classes or engage in other professional development opportunities.

Table 8: Mapping the Program Coherence Framework Factor

Framework Factor	Research Question	Informed by Survey Question	TCS Question
Program Coherence	(3) Does TCS have the technical resources to support the teachers and their community, including high-quality curriculum, instructional materials, technology, and adequate workspace?	Question 1 (TES)	Q1: Since summer 2020, about how much time have you spent engaging in the following types of professional learning?
Examples: programs are coordinated, directed at clear learning goals, sustained over time		Question 3 (TES)	Q3: Think back about all the formal professional development sessions you attended during the current year. Please indicate the extent to which these sessions were relevant to the content area(s) that you teach.
		Question 7 (TES)	Q7: Please indicate the extent to which this collaborative time was relevant to the content area(s) that you teach.
		Question 10 (NSDC)	Q10: Please indicate the extent to which the following statements occur at TCS.
		Question 10, Statement 8 (NSDC)	At our school teacher learning is supported through a combination of strategies (e.g., workshops, peer coaching, study groups, joint planning of lessons, and examination of student work).
		Question 10, Statement 11 (NSDC)	We use several sources to evaluate the effectiveness of our professional development on student learning (e.g., classroom observations, teacher surveys, conversations with principals or coaches).
		Question 10, Statement 13 (NSDC)	We design evaluations of our professional development activities prior to the professional development program or set of activities.
		Question 10, Statement 20 (NSDC)	We make decisions about professional development based on research that shows evidence of improved student performance.

Table 9: Mapping the Teachers’ Knowledge, Skills, Dispositions Framework Factor

Framework Factor	Research Question	Informed by	
		Survey Question	TCS Question
Teachers' Knowledge, Skills, Dispositions Examples: competence in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, classroom management, maintaining high expectations for student learning	(4) What do the teachers at TCS perceive as their needs for professional development?	Question 2 (TES)	Q2: To what extent were the following types of professional development helpful when you were making decisions about the teaching activities or strategies used in your classroom?
	(5) Are the teachers’ knowledge and skills viewed as professionally competent in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and classroom management?	Question 9 (TES)	Q9: Think about your GREATEST NEEDS for professional development. Which of the options below would be most useful to you to receive additional professional development? (Check all that apply)
		Question 10 (NSDC)	Q10: Please indicate the extent to which the following statements occur at TCS.
		Question 10, Statement 1 (NSDC)	Teachers are provided opportunities to gain deep understanding of the subjects they teach.
		Question 10, Statement 4 (NSDC)	We receive support implementing new skills until they become a natural part of instruction.
		Question 10, Statement 5 (NSDC)	We have opportunities to practice new skills gained during staff development.
		Question 10, Statement 6 (NSDC)	Teachers are provided opportunities to learn how to involve families in their children’s education.
		Question 10, Statement 12 (NSDC)	Teachers at our school learn how to use data to assess student learning needs.
		Question 10, Statement 14 (NSDC)	The professional development that I participate in models instructional strategies that I will use in my classroom.
	Question 10, Statement 18 (NSDC)	Our professional development promotes deep understanding of a topic.	

Data Analysis

Response Analysis

The survey of all faculty at TCS was conducted electronically via an email sent to 71 potential participants and was open for 12 days. The response rate was 72%, with 51 faculty members completing the survey. To determine whether the respondents represented a cross-section of the faculty population, several questions allowed for optional self-reported demographic information. Interestingly, the Preschool (PS) and Middle School (MS) had a much lower participation rate, and the Lower (LS) and Upper School (US) had extremely high participation rates. Table 10 displays the details of the 72% response rate by school division.

Table 10: Faculty–Total Number, Participating Number, and Percent Participating by Division

School Division	Number of Faculty	Number Participating	% Participating
Preschool Teachers	5	1	20%
Lower School Teachers/Admin/Fine Arts	25	19	76%
Middle School Teachers/Admin/Fine Arts	13	4	31%
High School Teachers/Admin/Fine Arts	28	26	93%
Did not answer this question		1	
Total Number of Faculty	71	51	72%

A second optional question asked the participants to identify themselves by the primary subject taught. As shown in Table 11, when divided by the subject taught, the number of respondents was so small that analysis by this metric was not conducted.

Table 11: Faculty–Total Number, Participating Number, and Percent Participating by Subject

Primary Subject Taught	Number of Faculty	Number Participating	% Participation
Admin/Counselor	6	1	17%
Bible	5	4	80%
English	5	4	80%
Fine Arts	5	4	80%
Learning Center	3	1	33%
Lower School (All Subjects)	21	18	86%
Math	5	2	40%
Other (PE, Technology, Living Skills)	3	3	100%
Preschool Teacher	5	1	20%
Science	5	4	80%
Social Science	6	6	100%
World Language	2	2	100%
Did not answer this question		1	
Total Number of Faculty	71	51	72%

A third demographic question asked of the participants was their number of years of service at TCS. This respondent data is shown in Table 12. I was unable to compute the percentage of participating faculty by years of service, as TCS did not provide this metric for all of its faculty members.

Table 12: Number of Participants by Years of Service at TCS

Years of Service at TCS	Number of Faculty	LS	MS	US	PS or No Answer
New	5	2	0	2	
1–4 years	12	5	2	6	
5–9 years	11	3	1	6	
10–14 years	9	4	0	5	
15 or more years	13	5	1	7	1
No answer	1				1
Total Number of Faculty	51	19	4	26	2

Teachers were given the opportunity to provide extended responses in the form of an open-ended survey question. Over half of the respondents answered the optional question that asked, “What else would you like to share about your needs for professional development at TCS?” The qualitative responses were grouped by inductive thematic coding used to find topical trends to provide additional insight into the perceptions of professional development at TCS. These themes were then grouped into the factors of the professional development framework used in this study.

Table 13 provides a list of the statements that were used as the basis for coding and the thematic codes that emerged from the analysis. The top sub-themes that emerged were needs for program alignment, knowledge and skills, lack of other resources, and collaboration. The primary codes under the sub-themes that were associated with the most responses were program structured differently (8), need content-specific instructional strategies (10), teachers need choice (4), lack of time during school (4), and would like collaboration (4).

Table 13: Thematic Coding of Responses—“What else would you like to share about your needs for professional development at TCS?”

Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Number of References in Responses
Program Coherence			15
	Program alignment		
		More intentionality	1
		Program structured differently	8
		Like whole-campus meetings	2
	Teacher choice		
		Teachers need choice	4
Teachers' Knowledge, Skills, and Dispositions			16
	Need knowledge/skills		
		Need content-specific/instructional strategies	10
		More technology training	2
	Negative disposition		
		Do not need more things to do	3
		Doesn't want PLC, peer reviews, or formal collaboration	1
Technical Resources			8
	Technical resources provided		
		Are given tools needed	1
	Lack of other resources		
		Lack of time during school year	4
		Lack of substitute teachers	1
		Lack of funds	2
Principal Leadership			9
	Positive feelings about leadership		
		Leaders treat teachers as professionals	2
		Teachers given space to explore their own learning	3
		"Nudging" being provided but may need more	1
	Identified leadership needs		
		Need leaders to provide more choices	1
		PD not a high priority for leaders	2
Professional Community			11
	Peer feedback		
		Feel comfortable asking another teacher for feedback	1
	Peer observation		
		Never been observed	1
	Collaboration		
		No culture to observe others	1
		Would like observation and feedback	3
		Would like collaboration	4
		Feel comfortable asking another teacher a question	1

Findings

Research Question 1: How do teachers describe the professional community at TCS?

The first research question focused on how teachers and administrators describe the professional community at TCS. This question is important as teachers' coworkers, or their professional community, have a significant influence on that teacher and on the school's culture. More importantly, professional development can occur within a professional community that is functioning effectively.

When analyzing the survey responses and the literature, two major findings emerged that informed answers to the research question about the current perceptions of the professional community at TCS.

Finding 1:

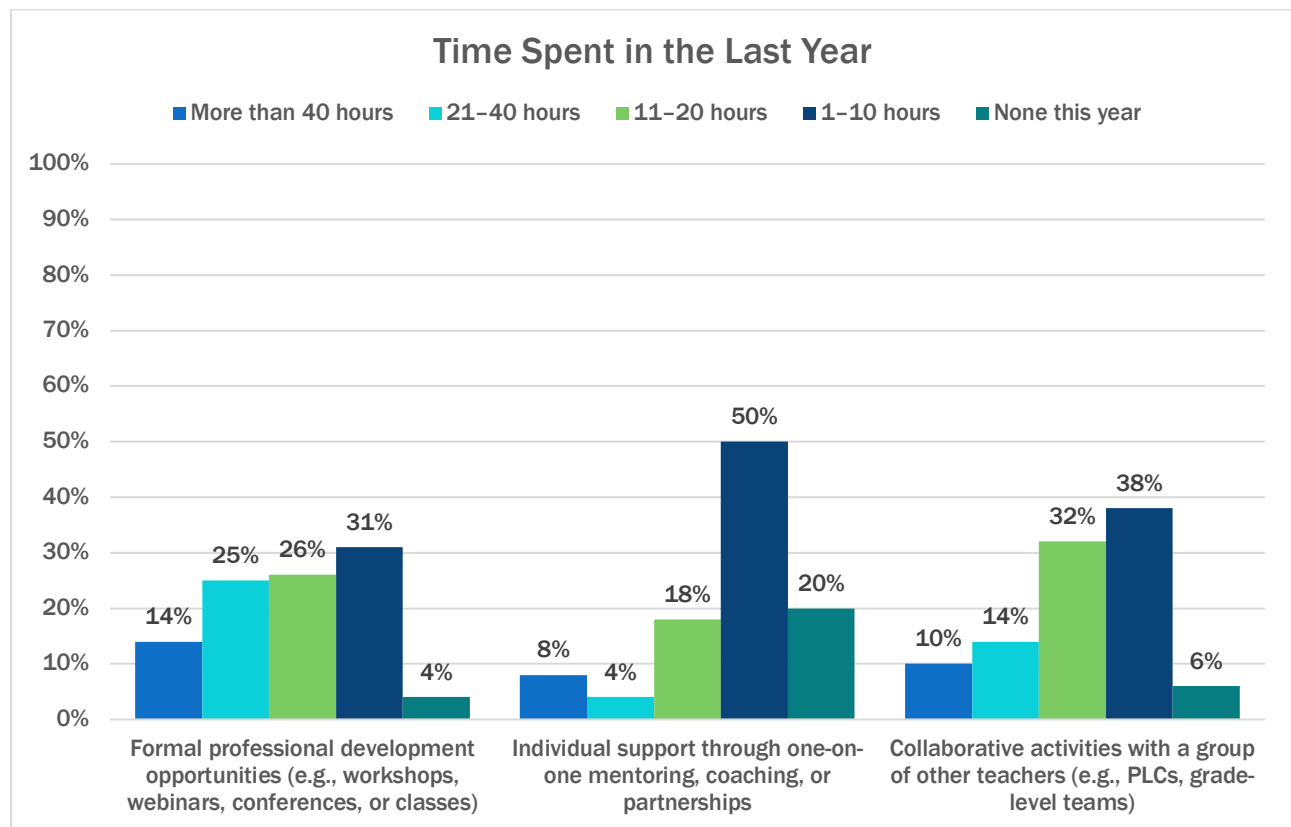
The professional community is not aligned to support the learning goals of teachers at TCS; nor does the community have formal, meaningful collaboration among teachers. Informal relationships are valued more than any type of formal, collaborative professional development that a community could provide.

Teachers in the Middle School and High School at TCS are organized into "departments," while the Lower School teachers are grouped by grade level. However, survey respondents indicated that they did not spend much time engaging in professional learning through collaborative activities (e.g., professional learning community [PLC], grade-level teams) with other teachers during the previous year. As shown in Figure 4, only 10% of the faculty that

participated in the survey indicated they had spent “more than 40 hours” learning within the PLC, grade level, or department during the previous year. The remaining participants indicated that they had spent even less time.

A few of the specific ways a teacher’s professional community can support learning is through mentoring, peer observations, or coaching partnerships. However, formal one-on-one relationships designed to enhance professional development do not seem to be occurring at TCS. In fact, 70% of the faculty respondents indicated they had spent 10 hours or less in those types of learning relationships in the past year.

Figure 4: Time Spent Engaged in Various Types of Learning Activities



These responses indicate that teachers at TCS either do not perceive that time spent with their professional community, department, or grade-level groups contribute to their professional learning or that the teachers are not spending much time with their professional community. In addition, the teachers who responded to the survey said they are not participating in structured one-on-one professional development opportunities very often, if at all.

“We do not have the time it takes to do all of these things. We are spread WAY too thin as it is. Our staff lunch time is our number one collaboration time and that has been reduced this year. Asking teachers to do more is not the answer.”

(Lower School Teacher)

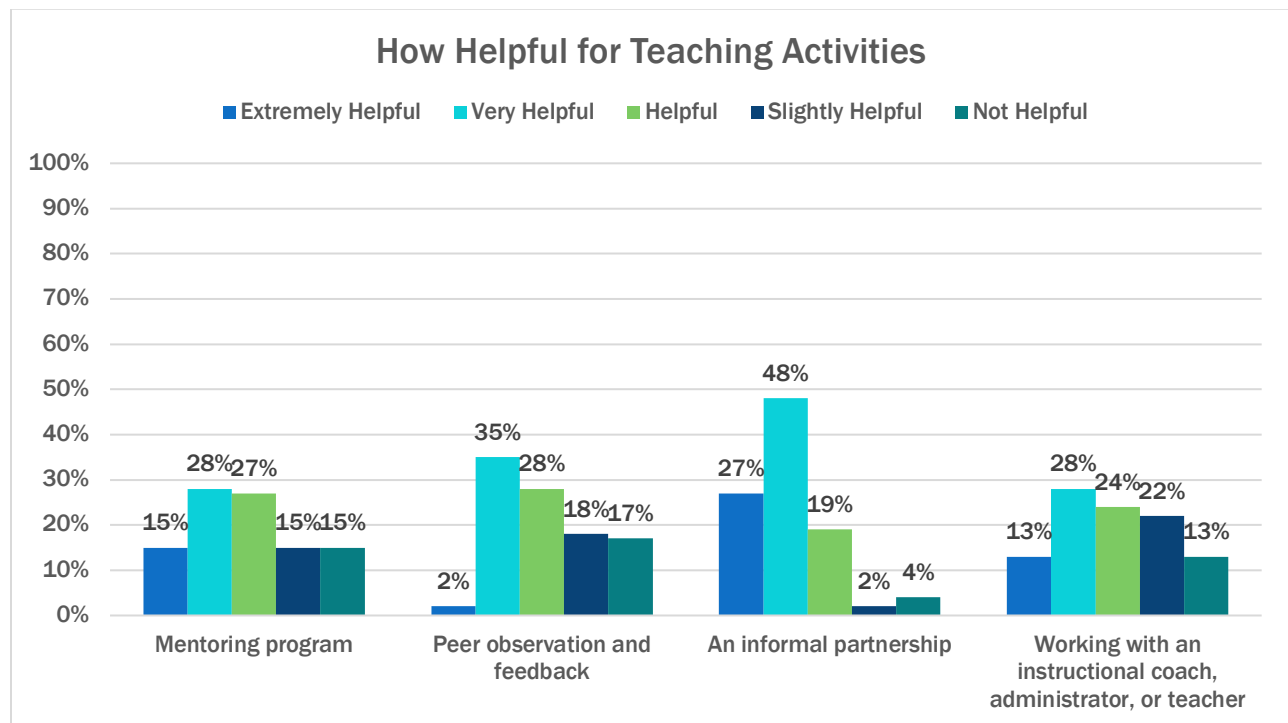
“To be fair... our all school Inservices are “big picture” teaching for transformation strategies that bond us as a community. I truly enjoy them, and would not want to discontinue that part of PD.”

(Preschool Teacher)

Survey respondents indicated that relationships within their professional community were helpful when making decisions about the teaching activities or strategies used in the classroom. However, as shown in Figure 5, the TCS respondents value more “informal” types of partnerships or collaboration with others. In fact, 75% stated that informal partnerships were either very helpful or extremely helpful.

Other types of support that a professional community could provide, including peer observation and feedback, mentoring/coaching, and working with an instructional coach, were rated lower. The perception of respondents that one-on-one learning relationships are not helpful could be a result of the fact that these do not occur at TCS or are perceived as ineffective vehicles for professional development. Peer observation and feedback, mentoring, and working with an instructional coach or an administrator were perceived as very helpful or extremely helpful by approximately 40% of respondents.

Figure 5: How Helpful Are the Various Types of Professional Activities for Teaching Activities



Six statements from the self-assessment instrument developed by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) provided insight into the research question about how the TCS faculty describe their professional community. In addition, two statements assessed faculty views

of their principal leadership. Respondents evaluated each statement on a Likert scale from 1 (Never), 2 (Seldom), 3 (Sometimes), 4 (Frequently), to 5 (Always).

Table 14 lists the statements identified as relating to professional community, along with the mean (average) and standard deviation of the responses.

Table 14: Professional Community Statements Evaluated on the Extent to Which They Occur

Please indicate the extent to which the following statements occur at TCS. (Likert scale of 1–5 measured from Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Frequently, Always)	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Fellow teachers, trainers, facilitators, and/or consultants are available to help us implement new instructional practices at our school.	3.00	0.93
Our faculty learns about effective ways to work together.	3.22	0.89
The teachers in my school meet as a whole staff to discuss ways to improve teaching and learning.	2.86	0.95
We set aside time to discuss what we learned from our professional development experiences.	2.49	1.00
We observe each other’s classroom instruction as one way to improve our teaching.	2.29	1.11
We receive feedback from our colleagues about classroom practices.	2.35	0.97

Given the importance of professional community to school capacity, several areas stand out as requiring improvement, as each statement was evaluated with a mean score below a 3 (Sometimes):

- teachers need to meet together to discuss ways to improve learning and teaching
- time should be set aside to discuss what is learned from professional development experiences

- faculty should observe each other’s classroom instruction as one way to improve teaching
- colleagues should provide feedback to each other to improve classroom practices

“As a younger teacher, I was hoping to be able to improve my teaching strategies and skills from collaboration and observation, but TCS does not promote or encourage this type of learning.”

“Whenever I asked about observing another teacher, I was given strange looks and a response, “That isn’t something we really do here.”

(Upper School Teacher)

Principal leadership is essential to an effective professional development program and is a vital part of a teacher’s community. Principals are viewed very positively by the teachers at TCS. On average, respondents indicated their principal frequently demonstrates their belief that professional learning is important to school goals and models collaboration. As shown in Table 15, these two statements about principal leadership received the highest overall score of the 22 listed in Question 10, which was adopted from the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) self-assessment instrument.

Table 15: Principal Leadership Statements Evaluated on the Extent to Which They Occur

Please indicate the extent to which the following statements occur at TCS. (Likert scale of 1–5 measured from Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Frequently, Always)	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Our principal believes teacher learning is essential for achieving our school goals.	4.04	0.93
Our principal models effective collaboration.	3.88	0.94

The average scores of 4.04 and 3.88 for each statement describing principal leadership were extremely positive. In addition, there were a few responses to the open-ended survey question about how their principal or administration facilitates professional development. While the responses were mainly positive, a few offered suggestions for ways principals could improve the professional development program at TCS.

"I'm on my own. No development. No observation. Love the freedom and independence but would love the feedback. Also, would love time to collaborate and learn from other teachers. I have had to ask older teachers about ideas, but I don't know if I'm asking effective teachers or just average teachers. Principal should designate the "best practices" of our faculty and let those teachers train other teachers. Compensation for being selected to that level would be a nice bonus, but we must recognize our GREAT faculty and promote what they do and how they do it - just because someone has been here 5, 10, or 15 years, doesn't mean they are effective. New teachers do not know - principal should point new teachers to those teachers who teach effectively, not just assign a departmental mentor. And mentors should have an established guideline on onboarding a new teacher (best practices in the TCS classroom, understanding TCS culture (i.e., most kids are NOT Christian in their practice), etc."

(Upper School Teacher)

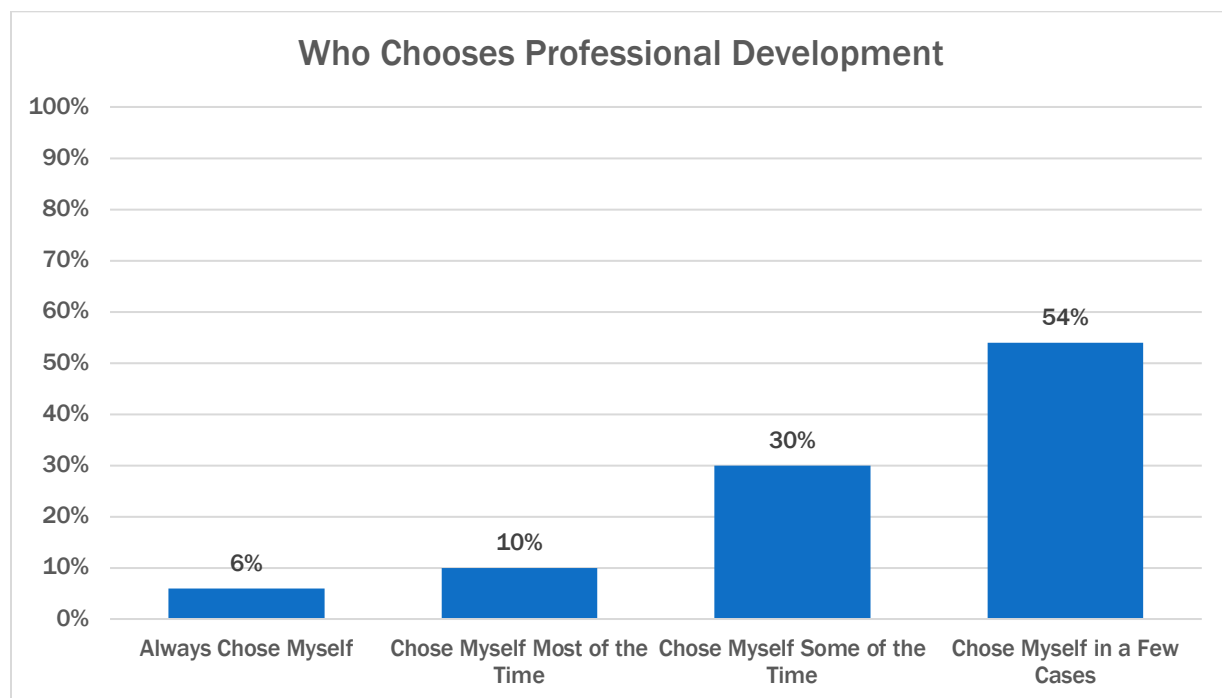
Finding 2:

Teachers at TCS do not believe they have influence over their own professional development. Most identified recent professional development as either non-existent or top-down.

The literature review showed that teachers should have input into their own professional development for it to be the most effective. Two questions were specifically asked to determine the respondents’ perception of who selects and implements professional development at TCS. In both questions, the respondents indicated that someone else primarily chooses their professional development.

The first question asked was, “Who chooses professional development, you or someone else?” Figure 6 demonstrates that only 16% of respondents indicated they always or most of the time choose their own professional development. The majority of respondents indicated that they only get to choose professional development in a few cases.

Figure 6: Who Chooses Professional Development



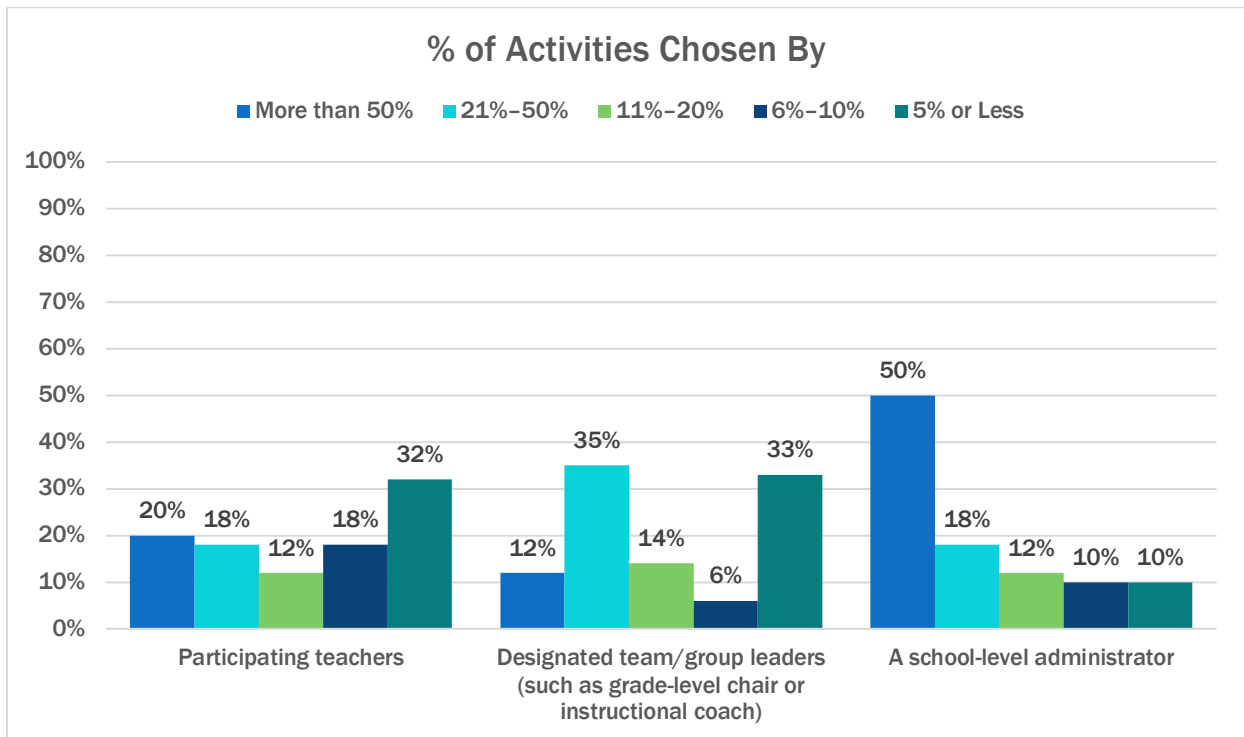
“When we (teachers) are spread thin to cover too many classes, our ability to think deeply and share cooperatively suffers. No one has ever asked me what I would like for staff development. It has always felt top down and that doesn't promote engagement, or fellowship, or a feeling of gratitude (worship).”

(Upper School Teacher)

The second question asked was, “Who determines what occurs during your collaborative time? What percentage of the activities were determined by the following people?” Respondents evaluated each choice on a Likert scale from 1 (5% or Less), 2 (6%–10%), 3 (11%–20%), 4 (21%–50%), or 5 (More than 50%). The answer choices for this matrix question, shown in Figure 7, were participating teachers, team/group leaders, or a school-level administrator. The Likert scale for this question was different and therefore could not be combined for analysis with the first question regarding who makes the decisions about professional development.

The majority of respondents indicated that a school administrator determines what occurs during collaborative activities more than 50% of the time. The next largest percentage (35%) of respondents indicated that designated team/group/grade-level leaders chose what occurs during collaborative activities.

Figure 7: Who Chooses Collaborative Activities



As a whole, the respondents’ perception was that teachers do not typically have the opportunity to choose the activities that occur during collaborative time. The importance of teachers having a choice about their professional development was affirmed by four of the respondents in the open-ended survey question.

“I do feel that TCS or specific campuses could perhaps do more in providing learning opportunities for the faculty to choose from.”

(Upper School Teacher)

In summary, the professional community is not aligned to support teachers' learning goals at TCS, nor is there formal, meaningful collaboration among teachers. The fact that informal relationship was so highly evaluated as being helpful to teaching strategies indicates that faculty at TCS respect and value each other. Based on the literature's definition of an effective community compared with the responses from the survey, it is apparent that TCS does not have a formalized professional learning community (PLC). A PLC built around learning would provide for more teacher choice regarding their professional development.

Research Question 2: Does TCS have the technical resources to support the teachers and their community, including high-quality curriculum, instructional materials, technology, and adequate workspace?

The second research question focused on whether the teachers at TCS perceive that they have the technical resources necessary to be effective in the classroom, including high-quality curriculum, instructional materials, technology, and adequate workspace. Respondents frequently mentioned time and funding as a resource. When provided the opportunity to express additional thoughts about professional development at TCS through the open-ended question on the survey, seven of the responses were in the context of inadequate time or funding. While time and funding are not a "technical" resource per se, they are required to conduct effective professional development in a school.

Finding 3:

While teachers felt that, for the most part, they had the technical resources needed, they did not have the time to improve their skills. They also indicated that TCS did not provide enough funding for professional development.

Overall, technical resources did not emerge as lacking at TCS. Respondents indicated a lack of time as the main obstacle to professional development. The survey asked specifically about the resources of technology, providing time to work together, and providing substitutes for teachers to participate in professional development activities. Curriculum, technology, and physical space were not identified as a need. In the open-ended responses, the only need mentioned was training on technology.

“I think that the TCS teaching community and administration are very effective at treating teachers as professionals and giving them space to explore their own teaching methods and also providing them with tools when and if they ask.”

(Upper School Teacher)

Time and funding are common reasons for why professional development does not occur in schools. Several qualitative remarks were made in response to the open-ended question on the survey in regard to whether or not enough funding is provided for professional development at TCS.

“It is a bit harder to find time to train during the school year. I save up my webinars & conference for the summer.”

(Upper School Teacher)

“Time always seems to be the biggest factor working against us to go deeper, work collaboratively, give feedback etc.”

(Lower School Teacher)

“Since Summer 2020, our funds have not afforded us the professional development opportunities that classroom teachers deem necessary for instruction. We have been presented with a book that we read, touch on, and then never hear about again.”

(Upper School Teacher)

“We need the funds available to go to the training we feel would benefit us.”

(Lower School Teacher)

This research was limited to identifying the TCS teachers’ perceptions about their needs for professional development. Based on their responses, technical resources were not on their list of needs. However, inadequate time and funding were both perceived as areas for improvement at TCS.

Research Question 3: Are the teacher development programs at TCS coordinated, directed at clear learning goals, and sustained over time?

The third research question centered on whether the student and faculty learning programs at TCS are coordinated, directed at clear learning goals, and sustained over time, which is described in the professional development framework as program coherence. When leaders implement programs unrelated to each other, that address only a limited number of students and staff, or that are ended after a short period of time, they can weaken staff and student learning (Newmann et al., 2000). Alignment and sustainment of professional development initiatives are critical to faculty dispositions and attitudes about the development activities themselves as well as their impact on school capacity.

Finding 4:

The current professional development program is not strongly coordinated or clearly directed at student learning goals; nor has it been sustained over time, indicating a lack of coherence.

Teachers at Texas Christian School (TCS) do not feel that professional development programs or collaborative time have been relevant to the content areas being taught or helpful when making decisions about teaching strategies or activities used in the classroom.

Figure 8 demonstrates that less than 40% of teachers believe that the current professional development is frequently or always relevant to their content area. Likewise, 33% of respondents believe that the time spent in collaboration with other teachers is relevant to their content area.

The literature review indicated that professional development programs need to be clearly directed at student learning goals to be effective. If faculty do not see a connection to their content areas, then a connection to student outcomes may be missing.

Figure 8: Relevance of Professional Development to Content Areas Being Taught at TCS

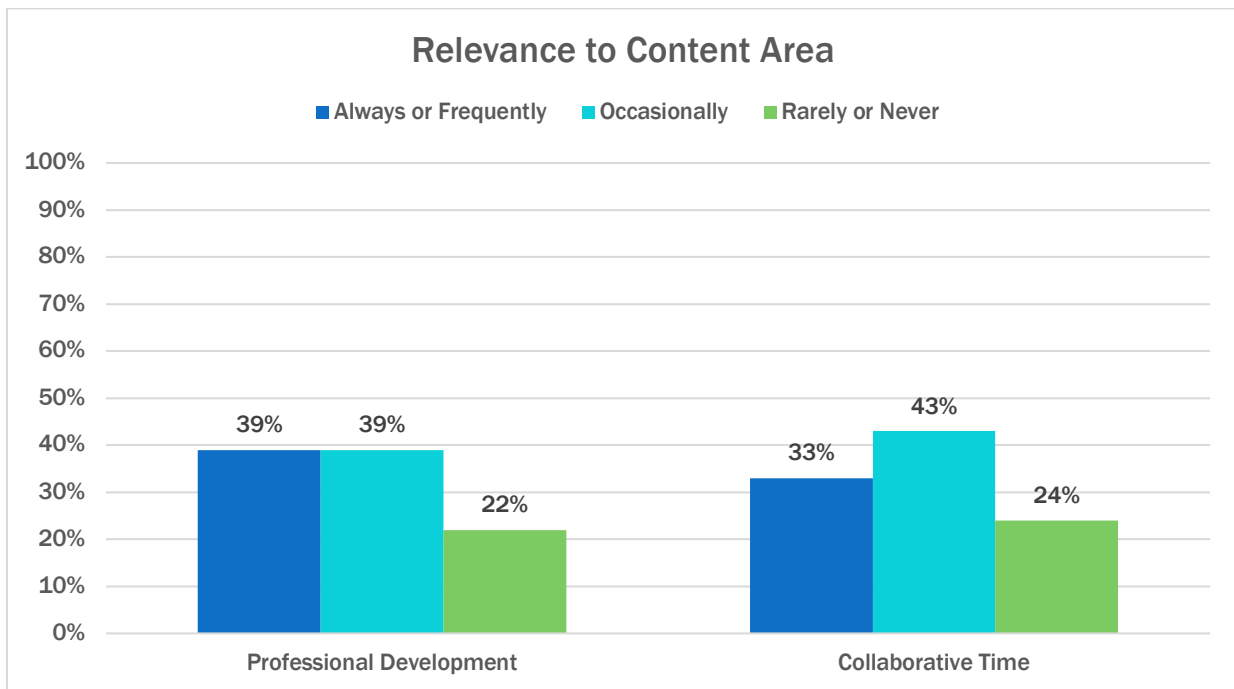
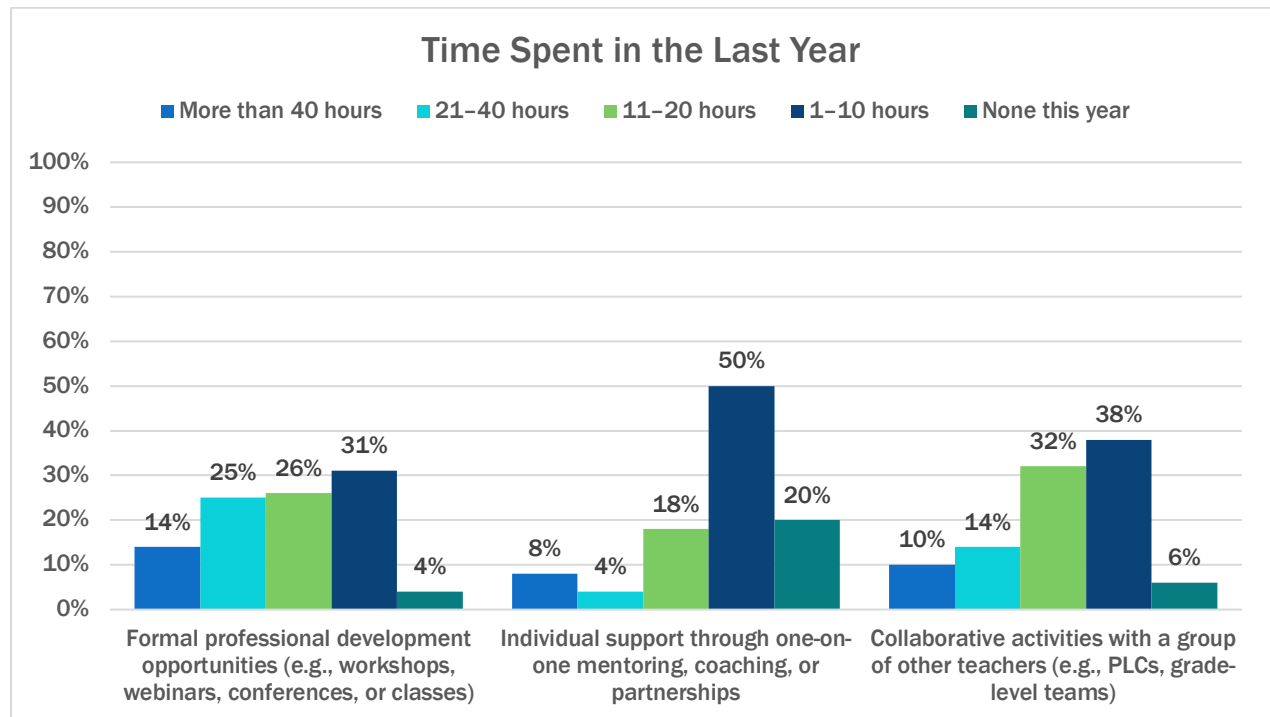


Figure 9 shows that TCS faculty are not spending much time in professional development activities. The lack of time spent in the past year could be a result of the pandemic. The data indicates that TCS does not utilize mentoring, coaching, or other collaborative activities with teachers. Without formal programs in the areas of mentoring and coaching, the lack of time spent in those one-on-one formal learning relationships is expected. However, the amount of time spent in formal professional development opportunities is low as well. The percent of respondents indicating they had spent 20 hours or less in formal professional development last

year was 61%. The lack of time spent in formal learning activities could be an indicator that professional development plans are not being sustained over time.

Figure 9: Percent of Time Spent Engaged in Various Types of Learning



Four statements from the self-assessment instrument developed by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) provide insight into the research question about whether the professional development program at TCS is coordinated, directed at clear learning goals, and sustained over time. Respondents evaluated each statement on a Likert scale from 1 (Never), 2 (Seldom), 3 (Sometimes), 4 (Frequently), to 5 (Always).

Table 16 lists the statements identified as relating to program coherence, along with the mean (average) and standard deviation of the responses.

Table 16: Program Coherence Statements Evaluated on the Extent to Which They Occur

Please indicate the extent to which the following statements occur at TCS.	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
At our school teacher learning is supported through a combination of strategies (e.g., workshops, peer coaching, study groups, joint planning of lessons, and examination of student work).	2.84	0.83
We use several sources to evaluate the effectiveness of our professional development on student learning (e.g., classroom observations, teacher surveys, conversations with principals or coaches).	2.63	1.01
We design evaluations of our professional development activities prior to the professional development program or set of activities.	2.08	0.89
We make decisions about professional development based on research that shows evidence of improved student performance.	2.45	0.90

Given the importance of program coherence to school capacity, each of the four statements in the table above are areas requiring improvement as each statement was evaluated with a mean score below a 3 (Sometimes):

- learning needs to be supported through a combination of strategies (e.g., workshops, peer coaching, study groups, joint planning of lessons)
- several sources should be used to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development on student performance
- evaluations of professional development activities should be designed prior to the professional development program or set of activities
- decisions about professional development need to be based on research that shows evidence of improved student performance

“At TCS, I’m not sure I’ve ever really had actual professional development. I’ve had some enjoyable times and some less enjoyable times, but I can’t remember anything I’ve learned that I’ve taken with me. We often talk about our community or goals, or switch from alignment to differentiation to Teaching for Transformation-TfT (or other ways to rename similar activities), but teachers do not really receive time for the basics—how to use LMS properly—or instructional strategies that might interest us or be useful at our grade/subject levels. I do not think MORE time spent in this is the answer. Quality over quantity would be key.”

(Upper School Teacher)

“I don't know that we necessarily need more professional development, but maybe having it structured differently than in previous iterations would be good.”

(Upper School Teacher)

“Since I started working at TCS eight years ago, the professional development has become much less check-the-box and more intentional. However, it still does not appear to be a high priority for the TCS administration as PD sessions are still loosely structured, over-generalized, impractical for the classroom.”

(Upper School Teacher)

Coherence of the professional development program at TCS is an area that should be improved. Part of the lack of sustainability over time could be due to the turnover in leadership at TCS. Dr. Post has an opportunity to provide this stability and coherence going forward.

Research Question 4: What do the teachers at TCS perceive as their needs for professional development?

Research Question 5: Are the teachers' knowledge and skills viewed as professionally competent in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and classroom management?

The fourth and fifth research questions focused on identifying the needs for professional development in the area of the teachers' knowledge and skills and whether or not the teachers view themselves as professionally competent in curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and classroom management. These questions go together in informing the conceptual framework factor of teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions and are critical to instructional quality.

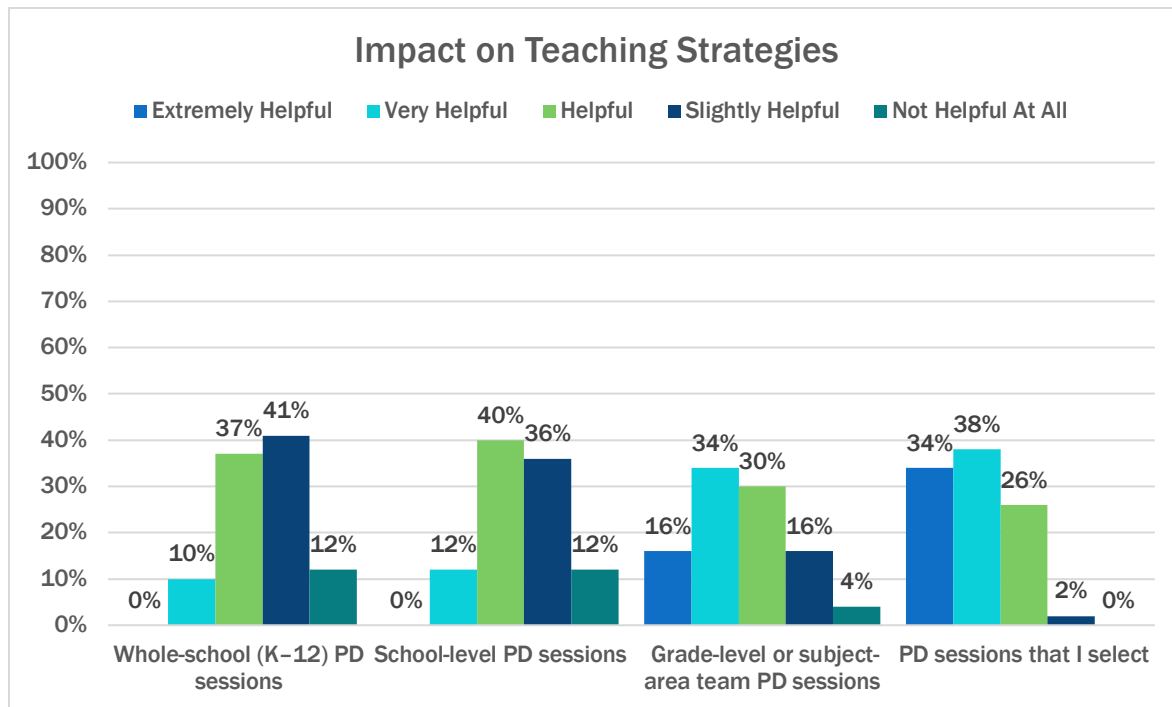
Finding 5:

Teachers' most significant needs are in the areas of content-specific curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment. There was also evidence that newer teachers at TCS are less confident in the area of classroom management.

Professional development is designed to improve the instructional skills of teachers. Respondents indicated that the majority of professional development occurs at the whole-school level. However, as shown in Figure 10, the majority of the survey respondents suggest that this type of whole-school professional development was not helpful or was only slightly helpful

when making decisions about teaching activities or strategies used in the classroom. School-level professional development sessions were also shown to only be slightly more helpful than whole-school sessions. If the primary modes of development at TCS do not positively impact teaching activities or strategies, then the lack of effective professional development could lead to inconsistent competence in the skillsets of the faculty members.

Figure 10: Impact of Various Types of Professional Development on Teaching Strategies



Survey participants were provided a list of potential needs in the area of professional development. Their responses indicated their greatest needs for professional development were content-specific instructional strategies and meeting the needs of all learners. When asked to select only their top priority, the same two needs were chosen by the majority of respondents, with content-specific instructional strategies again being selected the most often.

Given that respondents did not identify needs in the areas of general instructional practices, classroom management, and curriculum indicates they feel competent in these areas. An extremely high percentage of teachers (86%) identified a need for professional development in content-specific instructional strategies, and 60% of teachers also chose meeting the needs of different learners. In addition to these two needs, respondents who self-reported this as their first year of teaching also chose general instructional practices and addressing students' socio-emotional development as areas in which they would like professional development. The complete list of possible choices for professional development needs, along with the number of respondents who chose each need, are included in Table 17.

Table 17: Greatest Needs for Professional Development

Greatest Need for Professional Development	Percent Selected All That Apply	Number of Respondents Select All That Apply	Number of Respondents Selecting Top Priority
Content-specific instructional strategies	86%	43	20
Meeting the needs of all learners (e.g., students with learning disabilities)	60%	30	13
General instructional practices (e.g., differentiation, questioning)	40%	20	4
Addressing students' socio-emotional development needs	22%	11	3
Using the curriculum provided for my classes	12%	6	1
Working with students from diverse ethnic/cultural backgrounds	4%	2	0
Other: Using technology	0%	1	1

"I want professional development to be relevant to my content area and building level, reading a book, have that be our PD that is not useful. Many times, PD is set campus-wide, which does not help for our building. I would love for PD to be something we can actually take to our rooms and implement, not just say, 'Oh, that sounds great.'"

(Lower School Teacher)

"I love PD that allows for in-depth discussion about my actual content area. The need to enhance technology skills has supplanted that."

(Upper School Teacher)

Seven statements from the self-assessment instrument developed by the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) provide insight into the research questions that directly address teachers' skills and knowledge. Respondents evaluated each statement on a Likert scale from 1 (Never), 2 (Seldom), 3 (Sometimes), 4 (Frequently), to 5 (Always).

Table 18 lists the statements identified as relating to teachers' knowledge, skills, and dispositions, along with the mean (average) and standard deviation of the responses.

Table 18: Teachers' Knowledge and Skills Statements Evaluated on the Extent to Which They Occur

Please indicate the extent to which the following statements occur at TCS.	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Teachers are provided opportunities to gain deep understanding of the subjects they teach.	3.02	0.92
We receive support implementing new skills until they become a natural part of instruction.	2.65	0.90
We have opportunities to practice new skills gained during staff development.	2.84	0.89
Teachers are provided opportunities to learn how to involve families in their children's education.	3.02	0.90
Teachers at our school learn how to use data to assess student learning needs.	2.70	0.98
The professional development that I participate in models instructional strategies that I will use in my classroom.	2.86	0.84
Our professional development promotes deep understanding of a topic.	2.71	0.82

Given the importance of teacher's knowledge, skills, classroom management, and pedagogy to school capacity, five of the seven areas stand out as requiring improvement as each statement was evaluated with a mean score below a 3 (Sometimes):

- Support implementing new skills until they become a natural part of instruction
- Provide opportunities to practice new skills gained during professional development
- Learn how to use data to assess student learning needs
- Model instructional strategies used in the classroom
- Promote ways to allow for a deep understanding of a topic

"I would like to train in grade level specific activities that I can use with my students and have time to share ideas with teachers in the grades above me and below me."

(Lower School Teacher)

"I feel like the majority of our professional development that happens on campus does not improve my teaching or management in my classroom. I seek that on my own from outside services, podcasts, or YouTube videos."

(Lower School Teacher)

Recommendations

As the new president of Texas Christian School (TCS), Dr. Post believes there is a need to improve the academic program and pedagogy of the faculty. Parents substantiated this need in their responses to a survey sent in 2019, prior to the arrival of Dr. Post. In addition, the strategic plan, adopted that same year by the TCS Board of Trustees and a second parent survey sent in the fall of 2020, identified similar issues. Dr. Post speculates that one mechanism for achieving academic improvement might be found in faculty professional development.

A quantitative electronic survey was sent to all faculty in order to assess their needs and perceptions about professional development at TCS. The survey had a completion rate of 72% or 51 of 71 possible participants. Based on the survey results and the associated literature, I have made the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1:

Formalize the vision for a structured professional development program, allowing faculty members to have a greater level of choice by providing individualized learning plans.

The literature illustrated that putting a system in place to support the professional growth of teachers is a necessary step to achieve school success. The Youngs and King (2002) conceptual framework used in this research study states that student achievement is affected directly by the quality of instruction, which is influenced by school capacity. A primary factor of a school's capacity are teachers' knowledge and skills. Teachers must be professionally competent in instruction and assessment, centered on appropriate curriculum, and hold high expectations for their students' learning (Newmann et al., 2000).

According to the survey results, the faculty at TCS do not believe that the current professional development program is strongly coordinated, clearly directed at student learning goals, nor has it been sustained over time. When professional development is aligned and connected to student learning, teachers are more apt to support and participate in the program

initiatives. A way to encourage teachers to support and participate in professional development is to allow them to have input into their plan for learning (Bredeson 2002; Visser et al., 2012).

Teachers are adult learners who require the freedom to direct themselves or be involved in the process, are goal-oriented, and see a reason for learning something (Knowles, 1984; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Broad & Evans, 2006). It was evident from the research that in order for professional development to effectively create change, teachers need to be actively involved and should be provided some level of choice.

My first recommendation is to design individualized learning plans that can be customized based on the unique needs of each teacher. Teachers are at different stages in their careers, growth, and skill sets. A novice teacher often will require sustained opportunities to practice, more frequent feedback, and instruction on classroom management strategies. Expert teachers will possess an increased mastery in specific skill sets and could benefit from collaborative inquiry, curriculum review or design, or by mentoring new teachers.

The TCS faculty value the opportunity to choose their own professional development. Faculty rated professional development sessions that they selected as the most effective in helping them decide on teaching strategies or activities for their classroom. However, only 16% of participants indicated they were “always” able or “most of the time” able to choose professional development themselves.

The recommendation to implement individualized learning plans will provide for formal professional development for each faculty member that can be coordinated and tracked at the school level. The learning plan should incorporate various professional development activities that meet both school-wide goals for student improvement and individual goals for growth. Along with their school-level principal or team leader, the faculty member should develop their individualized learning plan consisting of school-wide sessions and self-selected opportunities for professional development. The learning plans could contain a combination of online and in-person options.

Recommendation 2:

Implement a peer coaching model to include opportunities for collaborative professional development, practice new skills, and gather feedback.

Research shows that learning is less likely to occur in a traditional “sit-and-get” environment. The typical student classroom has transitioned to focus on more collaborative and active learning models. A school’s professional development program for teachers should consist of a similar methodology. Active learning engages teachers directly in designing and trying out new teaching strategies, providing them an opportunity to engage in the same style of learning they are developing for their students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Professional development that provides peer coaching and expert support is a cost-effective way for teachers to gain and share knowledge as well as receive feedback to improve instruction and student outcomes.

Joyce and Showers (2002) found that coached teachers practiced new strategies more often, adapted the strategies more appropriately to their own goals and contexts, and retained and increased their skills over time more than uncoached teachers. However, in the survey, TCS faculty indicated that they did not spend much time observing each other’s classroom instruction to improve their own teaching, nor did they receive much feedback from colleagues about their classroom practices.

A peer coaching model would allow teachers to improve their knowledge and skills, directly impacting school capacity as shown in Youngs and King’s (2002) conceptual framework. Peer coaching would also foster a more collaborative professional community.

Additionally, a peer coaching model could address several of the specific items for improvement that were identified in the areas of knowledge, skills, classroom management, and pedagogy, including:

- Supporting the implementation of new skills until they become a natural part of instruction
- Providing opportunities to practice the new skills gained during professional development
- Learning how to use data to assess student learning needs

- Providing the ability to model instructional strategies used in the classroom

A peer coaching model could be implemented in multiple ways:

1. Teachers that teach the same subject (6th–12th) or grade level (Lower School) would be paired together.
2. Teachers would be paired together based on their level of expertise, which would encourage the pairing of a more experienced or successful teacher with a novice teacher.
3. A lead instructional teacher(s) who is considered experienced and effective would be chosen as the peer coach and assigned to multiple teachers.

One of the primary responsibilities of the peer coach would be to observe, provide feedback, and engage in reflective conversations with their assigned partner teacher. During the coaching cycle, each teacher would be observed in person or would record lessons and share the videos with their partner. The partner would then record their observations and provide their feedback. Joyce and Showers (2002) also recommend that when teachers observe each other, the person who is teaching is the coach and the person observing is the one being coached.

The purpose of these observations would be to provide meaningful feedback leading to reflective conversations about effective instructional practices rather than for evaluative purposes. Therefore, a second responsibility of the peer coach would be to meet with their partner teacher at least once a month to allow for discussions and reflective inquiry.

Recent literature suggests that coaching or other expert scaffolding can support educators' effective implementation of new curricula, tools, and approaches (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). A peer coaching model could be used to implement new initiatives agreed upon by the school. Professional development sustained over time, offering multiple opportunities for teachers to engage in learning around a single set of concepts or practices, has a greater chance of positively impacting school capacity and student outcomes. A peer coaching model would provide that opportunity.

Recommendation 3:

Create K–12 professional learning communities in which the chairs are content experts, thus providing professional development within the learning community.

In order to improve instructional quality, leaders must create opportunities for the professional community to grow together as a whole. Teachers who collaborate to share norms and practices can be powerful influences on learning, especially when there is collective knowledge and shared goals across fields and courses (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snow, 2007).

The TCS faculty is currently organized into groups called departments. However, the survey revealed that they do not believe that learning occurs in their department-level groups. Only 10% of the faculty that participated in the survey indicated that they spent “more than 40 hours” with the PLC, grade-level, or department during the previous year. The remaining participants indicated that they had spent even less time.

Professional community is an important factor in the Youngs and King (2002) conceptual framework. If the professional community is effectively growing a school’s capacity, it will include meaningful collaboration among faculty members and provide the opportunity for in-depth inquiry into assumptions, evidence, and alternative solutions to problems. The creation of a formal professional learning community (PLC) will provide for greater alignment among the faculty.

TCS should implement a K–12 PLC organized by content area. PLC chairs should be chosen based on their expertise in the specific content area and their leadership skills. A stipend may need to be attached to the role of PLC chair. Regular PLC meetings should be scheduled with planned activities that support the learning goals established by the group. Learning in a community can be a source of efficacy and confidence when adopting new practices, especially for new teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2001).

Lave and Wenger's (1991) proposed community of practice (CoP) supports the idea of a professional community. The theory states that individuals learn through their participation in specific communities of people with whom they interact regularly. Fostering an opportunity for collaboration among participants would create an environment of more robust learning and growth than one could achieve individually. New teachers or novices will benefit significantly from the opportunity to be a member of a CoP. Lave and Wenger (1991) called this form of learning "legitimate peripheral participation," which is critical to the integration of new teachers into the profession by providing an opportunity to become an apprentice for a period of time.

A goal of the PLC should be to support content-specific teaching, including ongoing, job-embedding learning that is both active and collaborative. The TCS faculty indicated their greatest need for professional development is "content-specific instructional strategies," which was chosen by 86% of the participants. In addition, 60% chose "meeting the needs of all learners" (including students with learning challenges).

Professional learning communities (PLCs) provide for a focus on teaching strategies associated with a specific curriculum and support learning within the teachers' classroom. Professional development conducted through one's own PLC will be more effective than PD conducted at the whole-school level. By working collaboratively, teachers can create communities that positively change the culture and instruction of their entire grade level or department. As the professional community grows, so will school capacity.

Study Limitations

This research study was completed in 2020 and 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. Because the virus was airborne, many schools and organizations had to close or limit campus access to nonessential personnel. The pandemic increased the workload among teachers and administrators as schools moved to a virtual delivery model. The faculty's subsequent lack of time restricted the ability to conduct in-person interviews. Although virtual interviews were originally planned, the coordination of schedules with TCS faculty members was challenging. Several of the faculty indicated that they were overwhelmed with extra sections that had been

added due to the recent increase in enrollment and the additional workload caused by the virtual delivery model. Therefore, they had very little time to participate. Only three interviews were completed, and they were all from the same school level. Due to the limited number of interview participants, the data collected was not used in this study.

A second limitation would be my own potential bias. As an employee of a K–12 private Christian school with eighteen years of experience in education, some bias exists. This bias includes but is not limited to my perceptions of effective professional development. Aware of this bias, I relied on the survey as the primary vehicle for gathering information about the professional development program at Texas Christian School.

Finally, although the response rate for the survey was 72%, the sample size is still considered small, which could affect the reliability of the survey's results leading to bias. The responses from the Middle School faculty represent an example of a small sample size, where only four individuals participated. Another common cause of bias arises as a result of nonresponse. Drawing conclusions from a small sample size could lead to extrapolations that do not apply to the entire population.

Conclusion

This research study examined the professional development needs of the faculty at Texas Christian School, a private Christian K–12 school located near Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas. The quantitative data provided by the electronic survey identified the current needs of the faculty and uncovered several areas for improvement to the current professional development program. These results were not surprising given the data previously provided by parents in a 2019 survey. Through her own observations, the school’s new president, Dr. Post, identified a need to improve the academic program and pedagogy of the faculty. She believes one way to achieve academic improvement might be to design an updated faculty professional development program.

The focus on teacher professional development as a way to implement school change is not unique to TCS. Both the literature and the research reveal that professional development is a key component that affects all aspects of a school’s capacity. The solutions to improve school and instructional practices are not “somewhere out there,” instead, they lie within teachers’ individual and collective capacity (Bredeson, 2002).

This research identified the TCS faculty’s perceptions about their professional community, knowledge, skills, dispositions, and coherence in relation to the current professional development program. In addition, the faculty members that participated in the survey identified their most significant needs for professional development. This project provides Dr. Post with insight into what she might include when designing a new professional development program at TCS that will lead to increased school capacity and positive student outcomes. A reasonable case might be made that professional development should be designed to fit the specific capacity needs of a school at a particular point in time (Newmann et al., 2000).

Given the decline in enrollment from 2017 to 2020, and the recent increase in enrollment this school year (2021), TCS is positioned to implement changes that will impact its strategic direction. The implementation of an improved professional development program, equipping the TCS faculty with the skills to create a strong academic program and pedagogic alignment, will have a positive impact on TCS students for years to come.

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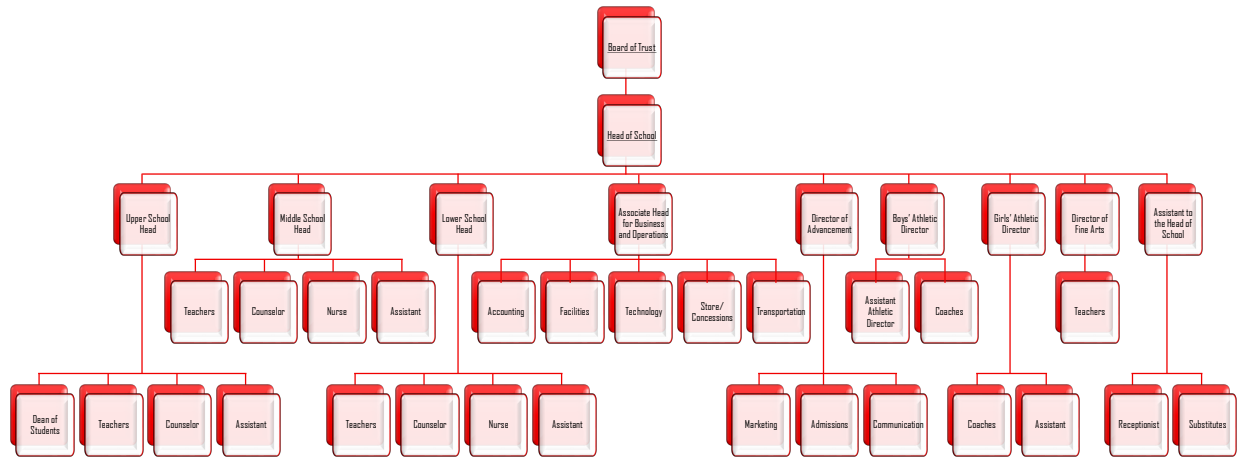
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Appendix A: TCS Organizational Chart



Appendix B: Recruitment Email

From: [REDACTED]
Date: Tuesday, September 7, 2021 at 9:18 PM
To: US Faculty and Staff <us@[REDACTED].org>, MS Faculty and Staff <ms@[REDACTED].org>, LS Faculty and Staff <ls@[REDACTED].org>
Subject: Professional Development Survey

Dear [REDACTED] Faculty,

You are invited to participate in a project designed to explore your thoughts on both the current and future needs for professional development. Providing for your ongoing professional development is vital to success of [REDACTED] Christian School. With that goal in mind, I have partnered with a Vanderbilt University Doctoral student to create a survey that we respectfully are asking to you complete.

The survey should take no longer than 8 minutes to complete, and your participation is voluntary and responses will be confidential. Submission of the survey will be interpreted as your informed consent to participate. Please take a few minutes today to respond to the survey ([linked](#)) so that we can gain your valuable feedback. The results of this survey will be extremely helpful in contributing to this research study and to in understanding your needs in the area of professional development.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact the Principal Investigator, Katherine White, via email at Katherine.k.white@vanderbilt.edu or the faculty advisor, Dr. Chris Trank at chris.quinn.trank@vanderbilt.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Vanderbilt Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (615) 322-2918. Please print or save a copy of this page for your records.

We know your time is limited, so thank you for taking time today to complete this survey ([linked](#)). You will also have an opportunity to volunteer for a follow-up interview. Your participation is important and I appreciate your support.

With thanks, and in partnership with you,

Misty

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/FWCVandy>

[REDACTED]
Head of School

Appendix C: TCS Survey

A link to the survey was provided in the recruitment email (Appendix B) sent on September 7, 2021, from the President, Dr. Post, to all Lower, Middle, and Upper School teachers at TCS. A brief reminder email was sent September 15. The survey was closed September 19, with 51 out of 71 teachers completing the survey.

1. Survey on Professional Development in cooperation with Vanderbilt University

Thank you for completing this survey on professional development. The results will be used to guide the process of future professional development at Texas Christian School. You will have the opportunity to volunteer to participate in a short interview with the Vanderbilt researcher. If you do agree to be interviewed, your name will be kept confidential by the Vanderbilt researcher.

1. Since summer 2020, about how much time have you spent engaging in the following types of professional learning?

	More than 40 hours	21–40 hours	11–20 hours	1–10 hours	None this year
Formal professional development opportunities (e.g., workshops, webinars, conferences, or classes)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Individual support through one-on-one mentoring, coaching, or partnerships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborative activities with a group of other teachers (e.g., PLCs, grade-level teams)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. To what extent were the following types of professional development helpful when you were making decisions about the teaching activities or strategies used in your classroom?

	Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Helpful	Slightly helpful	Not helpful at all
Whole-school (K–12) professional development sessions (e.g., most or all teachers at FWC participated)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School-level professional development sessions (e.g., most or all teachers at my school-level participated)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional development sessions for my grade-level or subject-area team	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional development sessions or trainings that I selected (e.g., elective professional development, online trainings, conferences, graduate or continuing coursework)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. Think back about all the formal professional development sessions you attended during the current year. Please indicate the extent to which these sessions were relevant to the content area(s) that you teach.

Always relevant to my content area(s)	Frequently relevant to my content area(s)	Occasionally relevant to my content area(s)	Rarely relevant to my content area(s)	Never relevant to my content area(s)
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. Think back about all of the formal professional development sessions you attended during the current year. To what extent did you choose them yourself versus having them chosen by someone else?

Always chose myself	Chose myself most of the time	Chose myself some of the time	Chose myself in a few cases
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. To what extent were the following one-on-one relationships helpful when you were making decisions about the teaching activities or strategies used in your classroom?

	Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Helpful	Slightly helpful	Not helpful
Mentoring program (As mentor or mentee)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Peer observation/feedback program in which teachers observe and provide feedback to each other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An informal partnership in which I sought out another teacher to work on an instructional issue	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with an instructional coach, administrator, or teacher leader to improve my teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Who determines what occurs during your collaborative time? What percentage of the activities were determined by the following people?

	More than 50%	21%-50%	11%-20%	6%-10%	5% or Less
Participating teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Designated team/group leaders (such as grade-level chair or instructional coach)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A school administrator	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Please indicate the extent to which this collaborative time was relevant to the content area(s) that you teach.

Always relevant to my content area(s)	Frequently relevant to my content area(s)	Occasionally relevant to my content area(s)	Rarely relevant to my content area(s)	Never relevant to my content area(s)
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
New ideas presented during professional development are discussed afterwards by teachers in my school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers in this school observe each other's classrooms to get ideas about teaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is hard to find time to work with other teachers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I do not feel comfortable asking other teachers in my school for advice about my teaching challenges.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
There are teachers in my school from whom I can get useful assistance about my content area or subject.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. Think about your GREATEST NEEDS for professional development. Which of the options below would be most useful to you to receive additional professional development? (Check all that apply)

- Content-specific instructional strategies
- Addressing student behavioral issues
- Meeting the needs of all learners (e.g., students with learning challenges)
- Addressing students' socio-emotional development needs
- General instructional practices (e.g., differentiation, questioning)
- Using the curriculum provided for my classes
- Working with students from diverse ethnic/cultural backgrounds

Which of the items you checked above would you say is the number one most important need?

10. Please indicate the extent to which the following statements occur at TCS.

	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Teachers are provided opportunities to gain deep understanding of the subjects they teach.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Fellow teachers, trainers, facilitators, and/or consultants are available to help us implement new instructional practices at our school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our faculty learns about effective ways to work together.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We receive support implementing new skills until they become a natural part of instruction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We have opportunities to practice new skills gained during staff development.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Teachers are provided opportunities to learn how to involve families in their children's education.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers at our school have opportunities to learn how to use technology to enhance instruction.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
At our school teacher learning is supported through a combination of strategies (e.g., workshops, peer coaching, study groups, joint planning of lessons, and examination of student work).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The teachers in my school meet as a whole staff to discuss ways to improve teaching and learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We set aside time to discuss what we learned from our professional development experiences.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We use several sources to evaluate the effectiveness of our professional development on student learning (e.g., classroom observations, teacher surveys, conversations with principals or coaches).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teachers at our school learn how to use data to assess student learning needs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We design evaluations of our professional development activities prior to the professional development program or set of activities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The professional development that I participate in models instructional strategies that I will use in my classroom.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school structures time for teachers to work together to enhance student learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Substitutes are available to cover our classes when we observe each other's classes or engage in other professional development opportunities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We observe each other's classroom instruction as one way to improve our teaching.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our professional development promotes deep understanding of a topic.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We receive feedback from our colleagues about classroom practices.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
We make decisions about professional development based on research that shows evidence of improved student performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our principal believes teacher learning is essential for achieving our school goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our principal models effective collaboration.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. What else would you like to share about your needs for professional development at TCS?

2. Demographic Questions

The following are questions will be used to summarize and draw conclusions and recommendations as a group. They are not intended to be able to identify you as an individual.

* 1. I have been a teacher at TCS:

- This is my first year
- 1-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-14 years
- 15 or more years

* 2. I was a teacher prior to joining TCS for:

- This is my first year teaching
- 1-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-14 years
- 15 or more years

* 3. I primarily teach in the subject area:

- Math
- Science
- English
- Social Science
- World Language
- All primary Subjects (I teach in the lower grades)
- Other (please specify)

* 4. I primarily teach in:

- Lower School
- Middle School
- Upper School
- Pre-School/Pre-School Prep

3. Final Page of the Survey

You may leave this question blank if you do not want to participate in a follow-up interview. Just hit the submit button to submit your anonymous survey answers. Thank you for your participation.

1. I would be happy to participate in an interview over Zoom to further discuss professional development needs at TCS. I recognize my participation is optional and will be kept confidential. My answers may be shared in the research paper anonymously.

Name

Email

Cell number