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Preparing Leaders for Expanded Impact: An Evaluation of the Missouri Leadership Development System

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Summary of the Study and Findings

This report presents learnings from the perspectives of principals, superintendents, mentors, teachers, and specialists about the implementation and the impact of the Missouri Leadership Development System (MLDS). This evaluation was conducted by the Region 12 Comprehensive Center (R12CC), funded under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. Over a six-year period from 2018–19 to 2023–24, principals and superintendents believed MLDS effectively facilitates the professional growth of school leaders in Missouri. Mentors and teachers also indicated MLDS contributes to improvement in classroom instruction and student learning. Findings from this study help the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to continue to deepen its support to an increasingly larger number of school leaders.

Introduction and Context

MLDS is "one of the nation's most comprehensive statewide principal development initiatives" (Duffrin, 2022). It focuses on developing and supporting effective school leaders. The MLDS competencies are aligned to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (DESE, 2020).

MLDS was developed through a systematic approach (Banerji, 2024). The program highlights how states can develop strong principals with research-based professional learning opportunities, mentorships, and peer-to-peer supports (Hedger, 2024).

In 2023–24, MLDS facilitated the professional growth of 2,086 educators from 456 school districts, 13 charter schools, and 45 non-public schools.[1] The 2,064 participants, for whom the position information was available, included 1,020 principals (49%), 800 assistant principals (39%), and 244 other educators (12%).[2] Across the state, MLDS supported 47% of all principals and assistant principals (1,020 out of 2,221 principals, or 46%; 800 out of 1,666 assistant principals, or 48%).[3]

MLDS develops participants from Aspiring (pre-certificated), to Emerging (initial career entry), through Developing (practicing), and ultimately to Transformational (highest level) leaders. It provides three layers of training and support: leadership content learning, implementation support through mentors and specialists, and regional and statewide networking (see Appendix A for the MLDS organizational chart and Appendix B for more details about the MLDS career levels).

Literature Review. MLDS is deeply rooted in strong research. A large body of rigorous empirical studies consistently show that effective principal leadership contributes to improved student achievement (Branch et al., 2013; Gates et al., 2019; Grissom et al., 2021; Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis et al., 2010; Nunnery et al., 2011).

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[1] Data were shared via email correspondence from state officials on July 8, 2024.
[2] R12CC conducted the calculations based on the raw data shared from state officials on July 8, 2024.
[3] According to "Missouri School Statistics" (data as of 9/1/2023; retrieved from https://apps.dese.mo.gov/MCDS/home.aspx?categoryid=1&view=2), there are 3,887 principals and assistant principals in Missouri (i.e., 2,221 principals, and 1,666 assistant principals).

When principals receive inadequate professional development or support, they are more likely to leave the profession (Levin & Bradley, 2019). The attrition of effective principals, in turn, increases teacher turnover and decreases student achievement (Bartanen et al., 2019; Sartain & Estrera, 2023). These negative effects are often more salient in high-poverty and urban schools (DeMatthews et al., 2022). Effective leadership development programs, like MLDS, support the professional growth of principals as instructional leaders, improve principal and teacher retention, and enhance student learning (Bartanen et al., 2024; Gates et al., 2019; Jacob et al., 2015; Pham et al., 2023).

The remainder of the report proceeds as follows. First, the research questions and methodology are described. Then, findings and key issues are discussed. Finally, recommendations are presented. Figures and tables follow in the appendices.

Research Questions

The following overarching research questions (RQs) guided this study:

- » RQ1: What are the respective perceptions of principals, superintendents, mentors, teachers, and specialists[4] about MLDS?
- » RQ2: To what extent is MLDS effectively supporting principals to address leadership challenges they are experiencing?
- » RQ3: How do principals' perceptions of MLDS differ?

RQ1 included several sub-questions, including (a) overall perceptions, (b) fidelity of implementation, (c) professional development, (d) benefits and value, (e) impacts, (f) enhancing factors, and (g) emerging issues. RQ2 focused on leadership challenges that principals are facing today and the extent to which the MLDS learnings are equipping principals to address those issues. RQ3 compared principals' survey responses by school CSI (Comprehensive Support and Improvement) status, community type (i.e., city, suburban, rural), race/ethnicity, years of experience with MLDS, and RPDC (Regional Professional Development Center) region.

Methodology

R12CC used a mixed-methods approach for this evaluation. The multiple data sources, collected from March through May 2024, included (a) statewide surveys of MLDS principals, superintendents, mentors, and specialists;[5] (b) interviews with MLDS principals, superintendents, mentors, teachers, and specialists; and (c) a review of MLDS-related documents and videos.

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[4] Established by DESE, Regional Professional Development Centers (RPDCs) are designed to serve the professional development needs of public-school teachers and leaders in each region. A school district may choose to utilize services from any RPDC. RPDCs are supported by MLDS specialists.

[5] At the request of DESE, R12CC incorporated prompts in the Participant Satisfaction Survey, which was administered by DESE over the years, into the 2024 MLDS principal survey.

Surveys of MLDS Principals, Superintendents, Mentors, and Specialists. In partnership with DESE, R12CC developed and administered four web-based, anonymous surveys for MLDS principals, superintendents, mentors, and specialists. The MLDS principal survey included 44 Likert-scale questions and eight open-ended questions. The superintendent, mentor, and specialist surveys included a similar set of questions (see Appendix C for more details).

Specialists identified and invited the MLDS participants from each RPDC region for the principal survey, superintendents for the superintendent survey, and mentors for the mentor survey. All specialists were invited to take the specialist survey (see Table 1 for the survey response rates, and Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5 for the characteristics of the survey respondents).

The analyses included six years of survey data (i.e., 2018–19 to 2023–24) from principals, superintendents, and specialists, and one year of survey data (i.e., 2023–24) from mentors.

R12CC used Mann-Whitney U tests to examine the statistical significance of differences across two groups, and Kruskal-Wallis H tests across three or more groups (McKight & Najab, 2010). For the written comments, R12CC conducted thematic analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify common themes and key issues.

Analyses showed that MLDS participants' responses to the 2023–24 principal survey were similar across the four MLDS-defined career levels (i.e., Aspiring, Emerging, Developing, and Transformational) and the three position groups (i.e., principals, assistant principals, and other educators). Therefore, their responses were grouped together. In discussions of the survey responses that follow, "principals" refers to current MLDS participants at all four career levels in all three position groups, and "superintendents" refers to MLDS superintendents.

Interviews. R12CC conducted 86 interviews in 2023–24 (see Table 6). The interviewees included 29 principals, 18 superintendents, and 16 mentors (all identified by specialists), eight specialists (identified by DESE), and 15 classroom teachers (identified by MLDS principals). R12CC conducted thematic analyses (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify common themes and key issues.

A Review of Documents and Videos. R12CC reviewed a variety of MLDS-related documents. It included, but was not limited to, the guides for participants at all four levels (DESE, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2023), the MLDS executive summary (DESE, 2020), an MLDS flyer (DESE, n.d.-a), and an introductory infographic (DESE, n.d.-b). R12CC also reviewed the DESE-created mentoring support videos (DESE, n.d.-c) and the Aspiring level video modules (DESE, n.d.-d).

Limitations of the Study. One limitation of this evaluation is it relied primarily on perceptual data collected from MLDS principals and superintendents. Also, due to the anonymity of the MLDS evaluation surveys, R12CC was unable to track individual educator responses over time. Therefore, the survey data were not strictly longitudinal. The changes observed by R12CC might be due to different groups of respondents taking the survey in different years.

Despite these limitations, common themes and consistent trends emerged from the data. Findings of this study help DESE to deepen its support to school leaders across the state.

Findings

RQ1–A: Overall Perceptions

Principals, superintendents, and mentors all have highly positive perceptions of MLDS.

As Figures 1 and 2 show, across the six years from 2018–19 to 2023–24, principals were consistently highly positive about MLDS. Nearly all principals believed the purpose of the program is clear (97–100%) and MLDS helps them to see the connection between developing their leadership skills and improving student learning (96–98%). Superintendents and mentors shared these positive perspectives (see Figures 3, 4, and 5).

Most principals (88–92%) and mentors (86%) also agreed that MLDS principals receive support from their district when applying MLDS learnings; nearly all superintendents concurred (90–97%). They elaborated on district support in interviews and survey comments.

> *"The support from my district has been phenomenal. I have been encouraged at every level to stay in MLDS."*
>
> -Principal

> *The support from my district has been phenomenal. I have been encouraged at every level to stay in MLDS.*
>
> -Principal

> *Our district supports the program. We allow principals to be out of their school to attend MLDS trainings and meetings. We use district Title II funds to enhance the program. We encourage principals to be engaged in the work, to become mentors, and to share the work with others at district meetings.*
>
> -Superintendent

> *My mentee has excellent support from the district superintendent.*
>
> -Mentor

Superintendents (66–86%) indicated discussions with their MLDS-trained principal(s) influenced their districtwide programs and practices (see Figure 4). Many principals concurred that their districts provided opportunities for them to serve as a resource in district policymaking.

> *I get to develop and shape some policies. I have input at the district level when it is needed or when I am asked to contribute.*
>
> -Principal

> *My team of principals join me as we craft policies together. We then present them to our district school board. Our principals play a very important role in this work.*
>
> -Superintendent

RQ1–B: Fidelity of Implementation

Principals, superintendents, and mentors believed MLDS is implemented as designed.

Nearly all principals (99%), superintendents (94%), and mentors (98%) agreed that MLDS delivered the program components as designed (see Figure 6). In addition, as Figure 7 shows, principals believed MLDS provided an appropriate level of support (93–98%) and they regularly used their MLDS learnings at their school (90–95%). In interviews and survey comments, principals, superintendents, and mentors reinforced these findings.

> *Everything that MLDS delivers is excellent. All of the staff (specialists, mentors, etc.) who are involved in MLDS truly believe in the program.*
>
> -Principal

> *MLDS does an excellent job in growing our leaders. The specialists have adjusted the treatments over time to make them relevant to current school challenges and issues.*
>
> -Superintendent

> *MLDS delivers its components as designed. There is a balance between practice and theory. The materials are up-to-date, and the training focuses on current issues.*
>
> -Mentor

Superintendents, mentors, and specialists highlighted the unique characteristics of MLDS (e.g., networking, peer support, mentoring). They believed these features, individually and collectively, contributed to the effectiveness of the program.

> *Instructional feedback needs to be continually emphasized. This leads to the improvement of teachers. MLDS gives principals practical practice, not just the theory that graduate programs provide.*
>
> -Superintendent

> *The most unique and helpful aspects of MLDS are the networking opportunities and the peer support received from such opportunities. The MLDS mentoring program allows for new principals to not feel as though they are on an island amongst themselves, and they can seek advice without fear of judgment.*
>
> -Mentor

> *The MLDS learning is designed to take place at the time of the school year when it is likely to be needed the most. It also is unique in that everyone can take the learning and apply it to their situation regardless of how big or small their school is.*
>
> -Specialist

RQ1–C: MLDS Professional Development

Principals, superintendents, and mentors highly valued the quality, usefulness, and relevance of the MLDS learning content and materials.

As Figures 8 and 9 show, across the years, nearly all principals agreed that MLDS professional development focused on research-based leadership practices (98–100%), the learning content was relevant (96–100%), and they intentionally applied their MLDS learnings (95–98%). Principals also indicated the MLDS learning activities (i.e., variety, pacing, format) were engaging and they were fully engaged in the MLDS learning content (see Figure 10). In interviews and survey comments, principals, superintendents, and mentors reinforced these findings.

> *The learning activities are 100% applicable, relevant, and helpful. I review them weekly and keep my binder on my desk.*
>
> -Principal

> *The training materials are applicable and straight-forward. They are very beneficial immediately and are also a resource in the future.*
>
> -Superintendent

> *MLDS provides information that is current, relevant, and necessary. Principals are then able to take this information back to his/her building and implement it.*
>
> -Mentor

Network with other MLDS principals was highlighted as a key feature of the program (Slotnik & Liang, 2019; Liang & Slotnik, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023). Over the years, most principals (84–94%) agreed they network with other principals (see Figure 9). **Many interviewees underscored the value of building a long-term network of collaboration and receiving continuous support from other MLDS principals.**

> *"We have had six years with the same people. We have a close group of people and candid conversations. Connecting with the same individuals for six years consecutively is unique and great."*
>
> -Mentor

> *My group from two years ago still network regularly with each other. We are planning a reunion for this summer. I have learned so much from them.*
>
> -Principal

> *In Year One, we were deer in the headlights, trying to figure out what to do day to day as principals. In Year Six, we have had six years with the same people. We have a close group of people and candid conversations. Connecting with the same individuals for six years consecutively is unique and great.*
>
> -Mentor

RQ1-D: Benefits and Value of Participation in MLDS

Principals, superintendents, and mentors highlighted the benefits and value of participation in MLDS.

As Figures 11 and 12 show, principals believed MLDS promoted peer collaboration (94–98%) and provided customized support to address their needs (87–92%). They also agreed MLDS strengthened their instructional leadership practices (95–98%) and made them stronger leaders (95–97%). Superintendents and mentors concurred with principals on the benefits and value of participation in MLDS (see Figures 13, 14, and 15).

MLDS has given me confidence in my decision to become a building leader. Having a network of people invested in helping me improve my craft is extremely beneficial.

-Principal

MLDS is a highly valuable program. I was in MLDS as a principal. Networking with your peers was an amazing aspect of the program. There are so many people you can call for help. I support this program 100%.

-Superintendent

Every new leader should be involved in MLDS. The information and networking opportunities are so valuable. The opportunities to learn new strategies and connect with a mentor really strengthen the skills of administrators in our region.

-Mentor

RQ1-E: Multiple Impacts of MLDS

Principals, superintendents, and mentors believed MLDS helps to strengthen principals' instructional leadership, improve teachers' instruction, and enhance student learning. They underscored the program's impact on the growth and retention of school leaders.

Impact on Instructional Leadership Practices and Classroom Instruction

Nearly all principals agreed MLDS strengthened their ability to identify (93–97%) and describe (93–96%) different levels of quality of classroom instruction and provide teachers with constructive feedback (96–98%) (see Figure 16); most superintendents concurred (see Figure 17).

"I am able to give my teachers more specific feedback on what is working within their instruction. They are perfecting their craft as a result of my MLDS training."

-Principal

As Figures 18 and 19 show, principals and superintendents also believed MLDS increased principals' ability to conduct classroom observations, and address teachers' and students' well-being needs. Mentors concurred with principals and superintendents on the impact of MLDS on instructional leadership practices and classroom instruction (see Figure 20).

Teacher instruction and engagement have definitely been two areas that have improved because of my growth and actions from what I have learned from MLDS.

-Principal

I am able to give my teachers more specific feedback on what is working within their instruction. They are perfecting their craft as a result of my MLDS training.

-Principal

Teacher feedback is stronger and instruction improves because of MLDS. The program trains principals on how to focus on teachers' strengths, which is an excellent strategy for the professional growth of teachers.

-Superintendent

MLDS has provided my mentee with ways to think outside the box. My mentee has improved with finding ways to provide constructive feedback to teachers.

-Mentor

They also believed that because of MLDS, principals are becoming more confident and intentional in leading professional development, conducting observations, and providing feedback.

MLDS has changed how I provide teachers with feedback. My conversations are more intentional and meaningful.

-Principal

My MLDS principals are more confident when leading professional development and having critical conversations with teachers.

-Superintendent

The mentee has the confidence to have tough conversations with both teachers and students due to his involvement in MLDS.

-Mentor

Classroom teachers concurred that their MLDS-trained principals are getting more confident, promote reflection on instruction, and provide them with constructive feedback.

My principal offers very constructive feedback. It is not a situation where it is "I am the principal." It is more of a team approach where we come together to figure out how to get better. She asks, "What is going well? Have you tried this? What would you do differently?" It is a reflective conversation.

-Teacher

I have seen my principal grow. He has more confidence. The way he asks questions is better. He also gets input from the staff.

-Teacher

I don't know much of MLDS, but whatever training my principal takes, it has helped her to be a better communicator and give us positive feedback as a result of walkthroughs and observation.

-Teacher

Principals, superintendents, and mentors also credited MLDS with improvement in student behavior and school climate and culture.

I am a better leader as a result of MLDS. My assistant principal and I are highly visible. We are in classrooms all the time. Student behavior has greatly improved because they know we could be anywhere at any time.

-Principal

MLDS has helped my principal to improve instructional feedback for staff and build a positive climate and culture in the school building.

-Superintendent

My mentee has promoted a positive school culture by changing teachers' mindsets around equitable opportunities for students.

-Mentor

Many teachers also indicated their principals promote positive relationships and encourage teachers to engage in two-way communication with families.

My principal has ongoing conversations with teachers and the staff. We are a team. We have the best relationships with our students and parents.

-Teacher

We have strong communication with families. We have weekly school meetings where we focus on both highlights and concerns that we have with our students. Our principal encourages us to communicate with parents.

-Teacher

Impact of MLDS on Student Achievement

Principals, superintendents, and mentors highlighted the connection between MLDS and student learning (see Figures 21, 22, and 23). Nearly all principals (89–93%) and most superintendents (73–92%) believed MLDS contributed to improvement in student achievement.

We have every student track their data and set their goal. That has helped students with their MAP scores. This all goes back to MLDS to have a data-driven mindset. When I arrived, we were a CSI school. We are now no longer in that designation.

-Principal

Our teachers differentiate their instruction better now and our student academic growth is showing positive results due to the instructional improvement.

-Superintendent

"The transition from being a teacher to the principalship is not easy. … MLDS made me feel more empowered and more pro-active. … Without MLDS, I don't think I would have remained in the field. … MLDS really helps with retention."

-Principal

Mentors (97%) and teachers concurred with principals and superintendents.

Teachers are able to improve their instructional practice based off of feedback provided from my mentee which leads to improvement in student achievement.

-Mentor

We have been streamlining our instructional materials and tightening up our curriculum. This was led by our principal. Student outcomes have improved because of our well-defined curriculum.

-Teacher

Impacts of MLDS on Educator Growth and Retention

Nearly all principals (96–98%) and superintendents (95–97%), and all mentors (100%) believed MLDS supported the professional growth of school leaders in the state (see Figures 21 to 23).

Across the six years, approximately nine out of ten principals indicated MLDS makes them more likely to stay as school leaders in Missouri (88–92%); most superintendents (80–92%) and mentors (93%) concurred that MLDS supports the retention of school leaders.

The transition from being a teacher to the principalship is not easy. Initially, I was always putting out fires. MLDS made me feel more empowered and more proactive. I grew into a visionary leader. Without MLDS, I don't think I would have remained in the field. So, yes, MLDS really helps with retention.

-Principal

I knew friends who did not do MLDS and I saw the difference about how long they lasted as principals. Having seen a lot of what it did for me, they wished they had the MLDS experience. Many went back to the classroom or got out of education.

-Mentor

Without a support system, we would be operating in silos. MLDS has a big impact on our professional success and job satisfaction, which helps retention.

-Principal

MLDS helped to retain principals. Burnout is high when a principal feels they are on an island. However, our MLDS principals are supported in multiple meaningful ways.

-Superintendent

In addition, educators noted MLDS contributed to teacher recruitment and retention.

We need to keep teacher morale high, make sure teachers are valued, and take as much off teachers' plates so that they can just teach. MLDS is helping statewide. There does not appear to be as much teacher turnover as before.

-Principal

The best asset my principal brings is the positive culture she is creating. That helps with the recruitment. She makes this a desirable place where you want to work.

-Teacher

MLDS focuses on building school culture. A positive school culture and strong leadership retain teachers.

-Mentor

MLDS helps to create an environment where teachers want to teach and students make academic gains. It helps to retain good teachers and students.

-Superintendent

Many principals planned to participate in MLDS throughout their administrative career.

"The best asset my principal brings is the positive culture she is creating. That helps with the recruitment. She makes this a desirable place where you want to work."

-Teacher

I will participate as long as I can. I am loyal to MLDS.

-Principal

I am very interested in continuing through as I see the value four years of MLDS has had on me as a leader. I am hooked and I want opportunities to grow my learning as this is a wonderful and meaningful group to be a part of.

-Principal

RQ1–F: Enhancing Factors

Principals, superintendents, and mentors believed all components of MLDS are important and effective. In interviews and survey comments, they highlighted several factors (e.g., coaching labs, peer networking, research-based practices and learning experiences).

> *I feel the entire program is effective. I love the research component, the learning labs, going into other schools and observing. I really enjoy this program.*
>
> -Principal

> *MLDS gave me the opportunity to reflect, grow, and network with area principals. I am still good friends with my first-year cohort.*
>
> -Superintendent

> *The MLDS program is effective, because it keeps school leaders abreast of best researched-based practices and it provides opportunities to learn from veteran principals and MLDS specialists. MLDS opens the door for principals to share ideas and practice giving instructional feedback to teachers, through coaching labs and mentor/mentee meetings.*
>
> -Mentor

Support from MLDS specialists and mentors continued to be highlighted as a key factor.
As Figure 24 shows, nearly all principals agreed their MLDS specialists clearly explained the MLDS content (98%), keep them engaged (95%), and effectively supported them (95–96%). Superintendents and mentors also valued the specialist component of the program (see Figure 25).

> *"Having strong mentors and specialists is key."*
>
> -Superintendent

> *Our specialists truly care about us and check on us. There is a lot of heart in MLDS.*
>
> -Principal

> *MLDS specialists are highly effective in instructional leadership. They supported me with walkthroughs. They helped me to build instructional and personal relationships. They also gave me one-on-one time and mentorship.*
>
> -Principal

> *Our specialists are very talented and effective. They were building leaders with a wealth of knowledge and experience. They have walked the walk and now they talk the talk. They stay current with school issues in 2024.*
>
> -Superintendent

Our specialists are top-notch. They have the expertise. They are game changers.

-Mentor

As Figure 26 shows, principals (91–94%) and superintendents (86–92%) also highlighted the key role that mentors played in supporting and developing principals.

I love the support from my mentor. She regularly works with me, answers my questions, and is always available for me. My mentor is incredibly effective in developing my leadership skills.

-Principal

The mentors are first-rate and I respect the relationships they have with the MLDS participants. They collaborate and share with me.

-Superintendent

Having strong mentors and specialists is key. If either of these key positions are weak, the program will be poor.

-Superintendent

Principals continued to underscore the importance of the support from their superintendents. When superintendents have professional experiences with MLDS (e.g., as participants at earlier stages of their career, as mentors), they gained a better understanding of the benefits and value of their principals' participation and engagement in MLDS.

Our district has been very supportive. Our superintendent went through the MLDS program as a principal. They see the value of the program. That helps a lot.

-Principal

Our superintendent was in MLDS and loves the program. He encourages me to continue to participate year after year.

-Principal

MLDS is a very focused program. I am very satisfied with the program. My principals are growing in their instructional leadership and feedback skills. I was a mentor in the program for several years.

-Superintendent

Principals, superintendents, and mentors observed MLDS got stronger over the years.

MLDS continues to get better. It is a very intentional program and is very focused. MLDS gives mentors a lot of guidance. Each year the clarity of the mentoring responsibilities grows.

-Mentor

MLDS has improved greatly over the years. Their content is now more aligned to the leadership standards that principals are evaluated on.

-Superintendent

I think the MLDS is a gold mine. I have never met a group of people so willing to help a person succeed in their career.

-Principal

Multiple principals and superintendents, unsolicitedly, indicated the importance of sustaining the implementation of MLDS.

It is imperative that DESE continue to fund this program. I hope these interviews clearly give evidence that the program is working and is highly regarded.

-Principal

Please continue to fund MLDS. Keep it a priority. We are all so proud of the program.

-Principal

We need continued funding for MLDS. The quality of the specialists, mentors, and the professional development they offer is excellent.

-Superintendent

MLDS needs to be funded! It is a priority! We need to retain and grow our teachers as well as administrators. We are worried about budget cuts.

-Superintendent

RQ1–G: (Re)Emerging Issues

Specialists and superintendents indicated **MLDS needs to continue to build the specialist team and intensify the consistency of high-quality services from all specialists**. As Table 7 shows, from 2019–20 to 2023–24, the number of specialists increased notably from 16 to 26 (a 63% increase). During the same period, however, the number of MLDS participants soared from 1,080 to 2,086 (a 93% increase). The corresponding participant-specialist ratio increased from 68:1 to 80:1. When compared to 2021–22, the change of the ratio was significant (from 44:1 in 2021–22 to 80:1 in 2023–24). As a result, it is challenging for the specialist team to continue to provide high-quality, customized support to a larger number of participating school leaders. Also, it is crucial to ensure all specialists are providing the same level of high-quality services to school leaders.

More specialists are needed to ensure effectiveness across the board. Our specialists are absolutely fantastic, but they are overworked. The system works only as good as the specialists and mentors that do the job. We have so many small districts that need strong support. There should be more specialists to do the job.

-Superintendent

> *"Our specialists are absolutely fantastic, but they are overworked. The system works only as good as the specialists and mentors that do the job. We have so many small districts that need strong support. There should be more specialists."*
>
> -Superintendent

We have grown as a team in size and not everyone has had the in-depth training our team received in the first few years. I hope we can slow down a bit and focus on our own team's leadership and facilitation development.

-Specialist

We are still struggling with a system of...onboarding new specialists while, at the same time, improving the skill set of current specialists.

-Specialist

Principals, superintendents, and mentors agreed MLDS supported principals with useful and relevant professional development. Within this context, interviewees noted **MLDS efforts to improve and contextualize training content, as needed, to current challenges are valued.**

In interviews and survey comments, specialists noted MLDS should keep updating existing training content and materials so that they are more responsive to the needs of today's school leaders.

The curriculum should be updated to include more contemporary resources.

-Specialist

We need to update our research in some of our learning experiences.

-Specialist

Principals request more work around areas such as how to use data effectively and how to deal with difficult people. Our content is not responsive to them all the time.

-Specialist

Mentors concurred and highlighted the value of relevant training content.

Professional development needs to be more timely. Topics need to be more tailored to the time of the year when they happen and more practical. Support principals with the real-world stuff. Help them learn the practical stuff that is relevant to the job.

-Mentor

I am excited to see that new treatments have been infused, especially the social/emotional materials. The more relevant the PD and training materials are, the more useful they are to my mentees.

<div align="right">-Mentor</div>

A few interviewees noted some of the training courses were repetitive and less beneficial.

My principals feel the trainings are useful in years one and two. A third-year principal told me she was not going to the meetings anymore because they were redundant and not beneficial.

<div align="right">-Superintendent</div>

It seems like we cover a lot of the same content.

<div align="right">-Principal</div>

We need to be thoughtful about repetition from year-to-year and create space for the new content.

<div align="right">-Specialist</div>

Several interviewees also believed MLDS should continue to deepen the differentiation of training sessions (e.g., by school level, district size, school locale).

As an elementary administrator, I feel lucky most of our site visits are elementary based. But for the others in our group that are middle school and up, I think it would be beneficial to focus more on their age group during these visits.

<div align="right">-Principal</div>

I work in an underserved, urban school. MLDS is not necessarily geared towards supporting principals in this type of environment in terms of dealing with myriad challenges we face with high levels of trauma and poverty in the community.

<div align="right">-Principal</div>

We have several rural schools and a larger district participating in the same sessions. There is sometimes a disconnect between the message and the principals from the larger district as the message is typically geared toward the smaller rural schools.

<div align="right">-Mentor</div>

Some principals and superintendents hoped MLDS can deepen its support to principals on some challenging issues (e.g., student discipline, how to have tough conversations with parents, staff members, and other school administrators).

We need more relative information on the biggest concerns facing school districts: Discipline, staffing, attributes that great principals have, and so on.

<div align="right">-Principal</div>

I would like to see MLDS help principals understand how to have tough conversations with parents. I know this is a hard area to work through, but I have seen my principal struggle the most in this area.

<div align="right">-Superintendent</div>

We are increasing expectations of our counselors and getting a lot of pushback. It would be great if MLDS could focus on these areas next year.

<div align="right">-Principal</div>

One big challenge is that the other assistant principals and I disagree with decisions/approaches from the head principal. We try to balance respecting that this is his building with trying to make suggestions for new/different approaches. MLDS hasn't really helped with that yet, but it would be nice to have some suggestions.

<div align="right">-Principal</div>

Principals and superintendents noted it is challenging for many principals to be away from their building for in-person learning sessions; mentors concurred.

The major roadblock is just being able to find the time to get away from school to meet and attend MLDS meetings.

<div align="right">-Principal</div>

It is hard for principals to get out of the building, and they feel guilty. This affects the buy-in when buildings are understaffed.

<div align="right">-Superintendent</div>

One of the hardest parts of being a new administrator is leaving your building. Any time taken from their building causes hardship.

<div align="right">-Mentor</div>

While many principals and superintendents believed face-to-face learnings were more effective, a few interviewees valued the flexibility of the virtual participation format.

During Covid, Zoom was used out of necessity, and it was horrible. Face-to-face is essential.

<div align="right">-Superintendent</div>

Zoom meetings are tedious, hard to follow, and not very engaging.

<div align="right">-Principal</div>

I would like more online opportunities which would provide more flexibility accommodating the busy schedules of current leaders.

-Principal

[MLDS should] Stay flexible for meetings and continue to use Zoom.

-Mentor

Most superintendents and mentors believed that the supports from their districts, the mentors, and the MLDS specialists, were well aligned in developing effective school leaders.

The supports are very aligned. I got my start in MLDS in its infancy so the transition to my becoming superintendent and continuing to support my principals has been easy.

-Superintendent

I believe supports are very much aligned from mentors and the MLDS specialists in supporting the mentees.

-Mentor

The supports from myself and the superintendent align in developing leaders through observations, and consistent discussions of good leadership practices.

-Mentor

Within this context, **a few superintendents and mentors hope to strengthen the collaboration with specialists.**

Things might work better if there were more regularly scheduled updates, meetings with MLDS specialists and superintendent groups to coordinate, or even just the sharing of the MLDS curriculum, so we could know the topics to support in-house.

-Superintendent

Send mentors quarterly updates about the content covered in each MLDS session since mentors do not attend every session.

-Mentor

A couple of superintendents and mentors also expressed a desire for feedback from the specialists (e.g., progress of the participant, quality of the mentor support).

I have had people involved in MLDS since it began but I feel MLDS has not communicated with me on how my staff is progressing. That concerns me.

-Superintendent

I would really like to get feedback on the quality of the job I do as a mentor. Do they survey the mentees? I would appreciate it if the specialists give this consideration.

-Mentor

While they are satisfied with the mentor-mentee relationships, a few superintendents indicated they had not been asked for input in pairing principals with mentors.

In the past, MLDS did reach out for input about mentors. This has not happened recently. However, these mentor-mentee relationships are always a great fit.

-Superintendent

RQ2: Leadership Challenges and MLDS Support

Principals believed that their MLDS learnings effectively equipped them to address the many leadership challenges that they face.

In my first year of MLDS, they gave us information and skills that were needed for a beginning principal. Now after several years in, they gave us invaluable skills and coaching opportunities to grow as instructional leaders. The pacing and timeliness of MLDS instruction is fantastic and a lifeline.

-Principal

I have grown in a way in which I respond to certain situations that could be uncomfortable. Those situations are not as uncomfortable because of what I have learned in MLDS. The program has prepared me to handle them.

-Principal

Teacher recruitment is the most challenging aspect of the leadership position. MLDS has equipped me with different tools and resources to help with teacher recruitment and retention.

-Principal

Within this context, **a leadership challenge that has grown in scope and frequency since the pandemic is related to student behavior and discipline.**

Student behavior is an ongoing challenge. Much of the day-to-day is spent managing and responding to that.

-Principal

Student behavior and discipline takes up a great deal of my time. We do our best to manage behaviors to provide trauma practices and we are just a band-aid.

-Principal

Another was the balance between being an instructional leader and a building manager.

> *I am challenged by a creative balance between being an instructional leader versus a behavior-management leader. MLDS prepared me for both, yet I want to make sure that instruction takes priority.*
>
> -Principal

> *My biggest struggle is to manage time between managerial tasks and instructional leadership tasks. We have talked about managing situations and ideas have been given to manage time, but this continues to be something that I am working on.*
>
> -Principal

A few principals identified time management as a challenge.

> *Time management is a challenge. I have prioritized tasks and focused on what needed to be done immediately, but there are days where all the planning fails.*
>
> -Principal

> *Time management [is a challenge]. Being short staffed consistently keeps me from getting into classrooms.*
>
> -Principal

For some principals, recruiting and retaining quality teachers was a challenge.

> *It's difficult to recruit and retain teachers because of the distance to get here, we are in an isolated rural community, and offer poor pay.*
>
> -Principal

> *[The leadership challenge is the] Recruitment and retention of quality educators.*
>
> -Principal

RQ3: Comparisons of Principals' Survey Responses

Table 8 compares the responses of principals by whether their school is a Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) school under ESSA. As the table shows, **the perceptions of principals in CSI and Non-CSI schools were similar and both were highly positive about MLDS.**

As Table 9 shows, **the perceptions of principals in cities, suburbs, and rural areas were all highly positive and the responses of principals in rural areas were generally more positive.** For example, principals in all three types of communities believed their MLDS specialists clearly explain the MLDS content (97% for cities, 96% for suburbs, and 100% for rural areas). Within this context, the perceptions of principals in rural areas were generally more positive. As an example, higher percentages of principals in rural areas agreed MLDS makes them better school leaders (89% for cities, 92% for suburbs, and 100% for rural areas).

Table 10 compares principals' responses by race/ethnicity. **The perceptions of principals across races/ethnicities were similar and highly positive.**

Table 11 examines principals' responses by their years of experience with MLDS. The table shows that **responses of principals who have participated in the program for one year, two years, and three years or longer, were all highly positive about MLDS. The perceptions of principals who have been in MLDS for three years or longer were generally the most positive.**

Table 12 shows the percentages of principals who agreed with the prompts by RPDC region. **The perceptions of principals in all regions were generally similar and all were highly positive.**

Implications and Recommendations

Survey and interview data, collected over a six-year period, consistently showed MLDS was successfully developing and supporting school leaders. Within this context, the following issues and recommendations are intended to assist DESE in deepening the program's impact.

Issue One: The Specialist Team

Overview

Principals, superintendents, and mentors highly valued the support from the specialists. They expressed a desire for the specialist team to continue to provide high-quality services to a growing number of school leaders.

Recommended Action

Place a priority on building the specialist team. Specialists play a pivotal role in the success of MLDS. From 2019–20 to 2023–24, the number of specialists increased notably from 16 to 26 (a 63% increase). These additions enabled the specialist team to support more school leaders. During the same period, however, the number of MLDS participants grew at a higher rate of 93% (from 1,080 to 2,086). The corresponding participant-specialist ratio increased from 68:1 to 80:1. When compared to 2021–22, the increase was even more significant (from 44:1 in 2021–22 to 80:1 in 2023–24). As a result, resources currently available constrain the specialist team's capacity to fully meet the leadership development needs of a larger number of principals. Therefore, DESE should continue to place a priority on building the specialist team.

Intensify the consistency of high–quality services from the specialists. Over the years, MLDS specialists provided high-quality services to principals. As the specialist team grows, principals and superintendents will expect the same effective support from specialists in the years ahead. It is crucial to ensure all specialists are providing the same level of high-quality assistance. MLDS should therefore convene the specialist team to (a) review and strengthen the onboarding process for incoming specialists; (b) ensure all specialists understand the expectations for their roles; (c) identify areas of improvement that will lead to greater consistency across the entire specialist team; and (d) provide training as needed to current and new specialists.

Issue Two: MLDS Trainings

Overview

Principals, superintendents, and mentors indicated MLDS was being implemented as designed. They agreed the program supported school leaders with useful and relevant content and materials.

Recommended Action

Continue to tie training content to growing or emerging need areas. Principals, superintendents, and mentors thought highly of the quality, usefulness, and relevance of MLDS content and learning materials. Within this context, they noted there are areas where principals have growing needs (e.g., student discipline, how to have tough conversations with parents, staff members, and other school administrators). In addition, new leadership challenges emerged during the pandemic (e.g., student well-being, academic acceleration, teacher recruitment, development and retention). MLDS has been responsive and is addressing those emerging issues. MLDS should continue to engage the specialist team to review training content, explore how it can best be used in the context of these growing or emerging need areas, identify improvements needed (e.g., new research, how to address pressing issues), and update the learning content and materials.

Strengthen the differentiation of learning activities. Principals found the MLDS learning activities most impactful when they were relevant and applicable to their individual contexts and school characteristics. Over the years, most principals and superintendents agreed MLDS provides customized support to principals. Within this context, several principals and mentors highlighted the need for more differentiated support. Therefore, MLDS should continue to create more cohesive and homogeneous groups based on principal characteristics (e.g., primary position) or local contexts (e.g., school level, district size, school locale). As the program provides training to principals and assistant principals, MLDS might consider more emphasis on the relationship between the two groups in some sessions.

MLDS should also continue to offer school leaders topic-specific training sessions. These optional trainings may focus on the pressing leadership challenges that principals identify (e.g., student discipline, how to have tough conversations with parents, staff members, and other school administrators). They should be offered in dual formats—as in-person sessions and as remote sessions. Also, while principals are asking for specific assistance about the problems they are facing, MLDS can further help principals distinguish between what is urgent and what is the priority, and the best ways to balance the two.

Issue Three: MLDS Specialists, Superintendents, and Mentors

Overview

Superintendents and mentors play a pivotal role in supporting principals. Strengthening the collaboration among MLDS specialists, superintendents, and mentors helps to ensure coordinated and aligned support for school leaders.

Recommended Action

Strengthen the collaboration among MLDS specialists, superintendents, and mentors. In interviews and survey comments, educators indicated the supports from MLDS specialists, superintendents, and mentors were very much aligned. Within this context, there is interest in further strengthening the collaboration among all three. MLDS should consider convening regular sessions for shared communication and joint planning involving specialists, superintendents, and mentors together. This approach could be field-tested in select regions in 2024–25 so as not to overburden the specialists.

Summary

Over the years from 2018–19 to 2023–24, principals and superintendents believed MLDS effectively facilitated the professional growth of school leaders in Missouri. Mentors and teachers concurred that principals' participation in the program contributed to improvement in classroom instruction and student learning. Looking ahead, by building the specialist team, enhancing MLDS trainings, and strengthening collaboration among specialists, superintendents, and mentors, MLDS will be well-prepared to support a growing number of school leaders as they address heightened challenges across the state.

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Appendix A: MLDS Organizational Chart

The MLDS Commission

State Educational Agency | Education Administration Programs
Professional Associations | Regional Service Centers
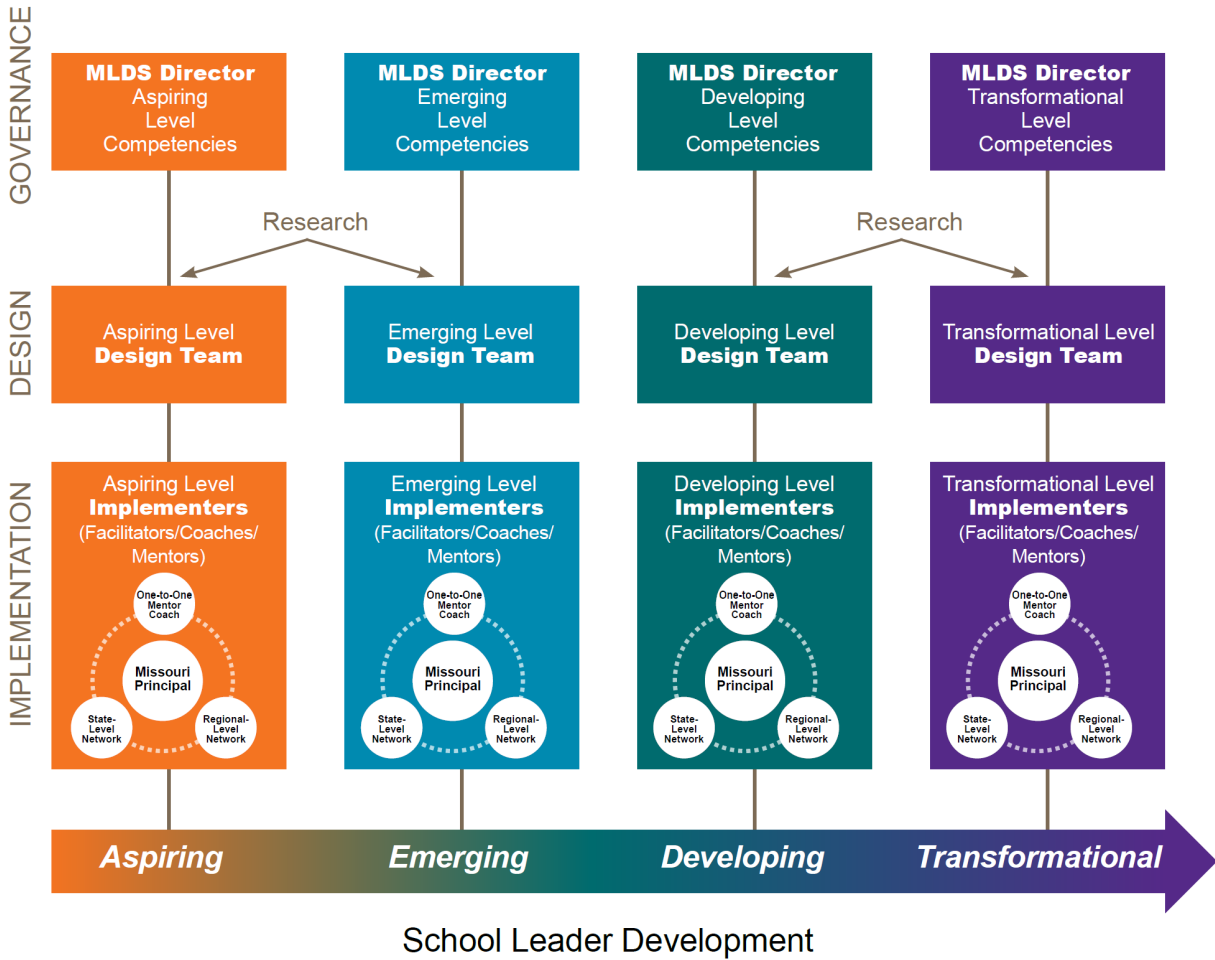
Source: Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2023).

Appendix B: MLDS Career Levels

MLDS develops school leaders from Aspiring (pre-certificated), to Emerging (initial career entry), through Developing (practicing), and ultimately to Transformational (highest level) leaders.

» *Aspiring Level* participants. Their learning experiences are designed to engage administrators in preparing for the principalship. This preparation (pre-service) phase results in an administrative certificate. The *Aspiring Level* training became available to participants in 2019–20.

» *Emerging Level* participants (Year 1 or 2 MLDS content). Their learning experiences are delivered across a two-year timeline to align with the state's requirement that beginning school leaders be mentored for their first two years. The initial years of practice result in readiness for the next phase. This training became available to participants in 2016–17.

» *Developing Level* participants (Year 3 or 4 MLDS content). Their learning experiences are designed to engage administrators across a span of several years. It further develops and refines participants' leadership skills. The training became available to participants in 2018–19.

» *Transformational Level* participants (Year 5+ MLDS content). Their learning experiences are designed to engage administrators across a span of several years. This phase builds the necessary skills and knowledge of principals to lead schools in ways fully responsive to the learning needs of students. This training became available to partricipants in 2019–20.

Appendix C: Data Sources, Sample, and Methods

Statewide Surveys of MLDS Principals, Superintendents, Mentors, and Specialists

R12CC used an independent platform and launched the 2024 MLDS principal, superintendent, mentor, and specialist surveys on February 26, 2024. R12CC sent the survey links to DESE, and the RPDC specialists then forwarded the survey links to half of MLDS principals, half of superintendents, and half of mentors, all identified by the specialists in their RPDC region. R12CC provided DESE with weekly updates on survey participation. The mentor and specialist surveys were open for four weeks and closed on March 22, 2024. The MLDS principal and superintendent surveys were open for eight weeks and closed on April 19, 2024.

The MLDS principal survey included a series of Likert-scale questions for current MLDS participants. The questions focused on overall perceptions; fidelity of implementation; professional development; benefits and value; impact of the program; and support from MLDS specialists and mentors. Eight open-ended questions further explored the perceptions of MLDS participants about leadership challenges and MLDS learnings; specific changes to their instructional leadership practices; accomplishments due to participation in MLDS; enhancing factors; impeding factors; additional supports needed; participation in MLDS; and other comments related to the program.

At the request of DESE, R12CC incorporated prompts in the Participant Satisfaction Survey, which was administered by DESE over the years, into the 2024 MLDS principal survey. This helped to minimize the time demand for MLDS participants and enabled the collection of quality data.

The questions for MLDS superintendents, whose districts have principal(s) involved in MLDS, focused on overall perceptions; benefits and value; impact of the program; and support from MLDS specialists and mentors. Seven open-ended questions further explored the perceptions of superintendents about specific changes to their principal(s)' instructional leadership practices; their MLDS principal(s)' accomplishments due to participation in MLDS; enhancing factors; impeding factors; alignment of supports from district and MLDS specialists; alignment of support from district and mentors; and other comments related to the program.

The mentor survey included a similar set of Likert-scale and open-ended questions to the superintendent survey, with some wording adjustments as appropriate. The specialist survey included a similar set of Likert-scale and open-ended questions as the MLDS principal survey, with some wording adjustments as appropriate. All mentors and specialists surveyed were those who provide training and/or support through MLDS.

Response Rates for the Surveys

Table 1 shows the response rates for the MLDS principal, superintendent, mentor, and specialist surveys.

Table 1. Response Rates for the MLDS Principal, Superintendent, Mentor, and Specialist Surveys, 2023–24

Respondents	Population	Number of Responses	Response Rate
MLDS Principals	652	336	52%
Superintendents	175	72	41%
Mentors	204	118	58%
Specialists	27	27	100%

Note. "MLDS Principals" refers to current MLDS participants, who are primarily principals and assistant principals. The "Superintendents" group includes three Central Office Administrators (i.e., two assistant superintendents and one associate superintendent) who responded to the superintendent survey. In 2023–24, half of MLDS principals, half of superintendents, and half of mentors in each RPDC region were identified by their specialists and invited to participate in the MLDS principal, superintendent, and mentor surveys. Responses to survey questions were not required, therefore total numbers of respondents may vary throughout this report.

Characteristics of the Survey Respondents

As Table 2 shows, respondents to the principal survey were primarily at the Emerging (81%) level. Most of them were principals (41%) and assistant principals (47%). Coming from all nine RPDCs, the respondents were primarily white (86%) school leaders in rural areas (58%). Most of them (93%) participated in MLDS for 1–3 years.

Table 2. Characteristics of Principal Survey Respondents, 2023–24

	Number	Percent
By MLDS Program Level		
Aspiring	24	7%
Emerging (Year 1 or 2 MLDS content)	272	81%
Developing (Year 3 or 4 MLDS content)	27	8%
Transformational (Year 5+ MLDS content)	13	4%
By Current Primary Position		
Principal	137	41%
Assistant Principal	159	47%
Other (e.g., director, teacher)	40	12%
By RPDC		
Central	42	13%
Heart of Missouri	30	9%
Kansas City	53	16%
Northeast	24	7%
Northwest	24	7%

	Number	Percent
South Central	41	12%
Southeast	29	9%
Southwest	26	8%
St. Louis	67	20%
By Race/Ethnicity		
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0%
Asian	1	0%
Black or African American	29	9%
Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity	2	1%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	0%
White	289	86%
Multi-Racial	7	2%
Prefer not to answer	6	2%
By CSI School Status		
Yes	35	10%
No	167	50%
I am not sure whether or not my school is a CSI school.	134	40%
By Community Type		
City	47	14%
Suburban	94	28%
Rural	195	58%
By Years Participating in MLDS		
1 year	183	54%
2 years	114	34%
3 years	17	5%
4 years	10	3%
5 years	6	2%
More than 5 years	6	2%

Note. N = 336.

Table 3 shows the superintendent survey respondents were primarily superintendents (94%). Coming from all nine RPDCs, more than half of them (56%) supported MLDS principals for 1–3 years, and approximately one-third (35%) for five years or longer.

Table 3. Characteristics of Superintendent Survey Respondents, 2023–24

	Number	Percent
By Current Primary Position		
Superintendent	69	96%
Central Administrator*	3	4%
By RPDC		
Central	8	11%
Heart of Missouri	7	10%
Kansas City	2	3%
Northeast	8	11%
Northwest	8	11%
South Central	11	15%
Southeast	13	18%
Southwest	12	17%
St. Louis	3	4%
By Years of Experience in Supporting MLDS Principals		
1 year	13	18%
2 years	14	19%
3 years	14	19%
4 years	6	8%
5 years	3	4%
More than 5 years	22	31%

Note. N = 72. *The "Central Administrator" group included two assistant superintendents and one associate superintendent.

As Table 4 shows, nearly all mentor survey respondents (90%) were mentoring 1–2 MLDS mentees. Coming from all nine RPDCs, two-thirds of the respondents (66%) were mentors for MLDS for 1–2 years.

Table 4. Characteristics of Mentor Survey Respondents, 2023−24

	Number	Percent
By # of MLDS Mentees		
1 mentee	76	64%
2 mentees	31	26%
3 mentees	8	7%
4 or more mentees	3	3%
By Mentees' Years of Experience in School Administration*		
1 year	52	44%
2 years	63	53%
3 years or more	20	17%
By RPDC		
Central	16	14%
Heart of Missouri	19	16%
Kansas City	12	10%
Northeast	6	5%
Northwest	11	9%
South Central	6	5%
Southeast	10	8%
Southwest	11	9%
St. Louis	27	23%
By Years of Experience as a Mentor for MLDS		
1 year	37	31%
2 years	41	35%
3 years	14	12%
4 years	11	9%
5 years	4	3%
More than 5 years	11	9%

Note. N = 118. *This is a multiple-choice question. Respondents can choose more than one answer.

Table 5 shows most respondents (82%) worked as an MLDS specialist for 3 years or longer.

Table 5. Characteristics of Specialist Survey Respondents, 2023−24

Total Years as an MLDS Specialist	Number	Percent
1 year	2	7%
2 years	3	11%
3 years	10	37%
4 years	4	15%
5 years	4	15%
More than 5 years	4	15%

Note. N = 27. The survey question was, "How many years, in total, have you been an MLDS specialist? (If 2023–24 is your first year as an MLDS specialist, mark '1 year.')"

Table 6 shows the number of interviewees by role. R12CC developed five interview protocols for MLDS principals, superintendents, specialists, mentors, and classroom teachers, respectively. The questions were tailored appropriately to the role of the interviewees.

Table 6. Number of Interviewees by Role, 2023−24 (N = 86)

Role	Number of Interviewees
MLDS Principals	29
Superintendents	18
Mentors	16
Specialists	8
Teachers	15

The interview protocols for MLDS principals, superintendents, mentors, and specialists focused on questions including implementation fidelity, MLDS trainings, support to MLDS principals, and impacts of MLDS on leadership practices, classroom instruction, student learning, and the recruitment and retention of school leaders. Interviewees were also asked about their perceptions of factors enhancing or impeding MLDS implementation, and recommendations for improvement.

The protocol for classroom teachers included questions on principals' professional development support and leadership practices, and the impact of principals' participation in MLDS.

Implementation Fidelity

To examine respondents' perceptions of the fidelity of MLDS implementation, this evaluation focuses on Participant Responsiveness and Program Differentiation (e.g., Dane & Schneider, 1998, as cited in U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2015). These two dimensions of fidelity were adequately captured with survey and interview data. Participant Responsiveness refers to the extent to which participants react to or engage in the program (e.g., perceptions about the relevance, appropriateness, and helpfulness of MLDS). Program Differentiation refers to the degree that the critical components of the program are distinguishable from each other and from other programs.

Appendix D: Survey Results

Figure 1. Overall Perceptions of Principals: Purpose and Information, 2018–19 to 2023–24
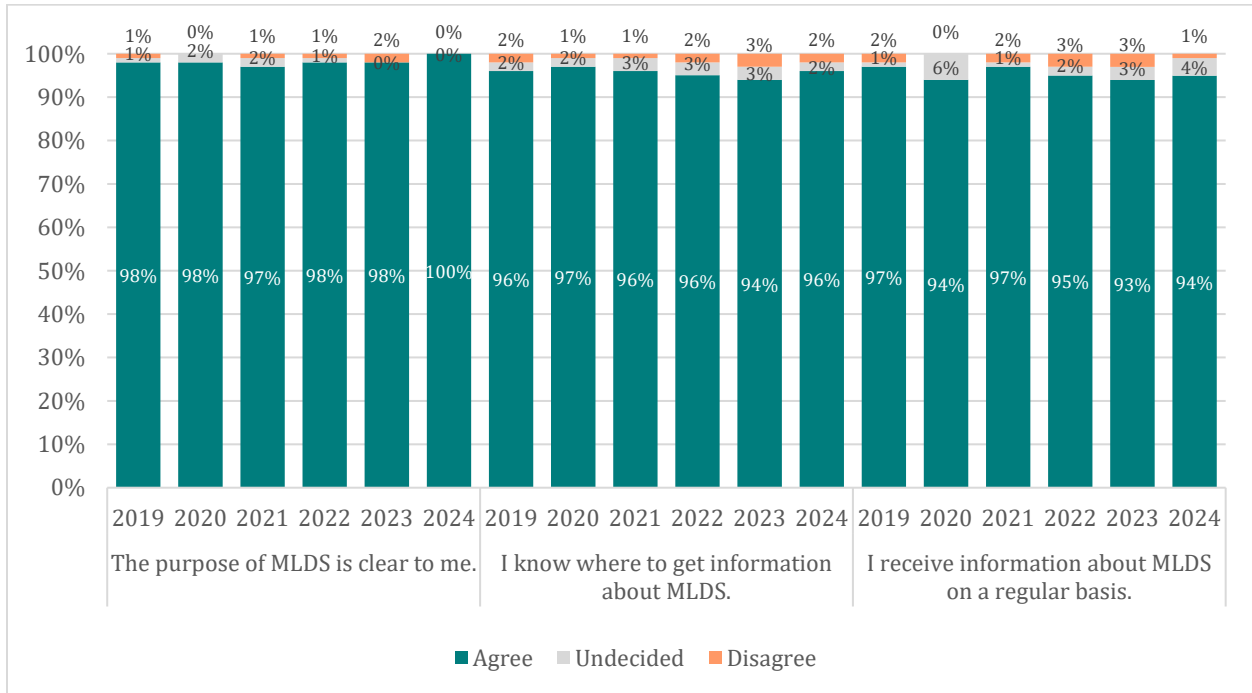
Note. Throughout this report, unless otherwise noted, agree is a composite of strongly agree/agree, and disagree is a composite of strongly disagree/disagree. Due to rounding, percentages may not always add up to precisely 100%. Survey prompts in the figures and tables are those used in 2023–24. Slotnik and Liang (2019) and Liang and Slotnik (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023) include the previous years' survey questions, which are essentially the same as those in the 2023–24 survey with only minor modifications.

Figure 2. Principals' Overall Perceptions: Skills and Support, 2018–19 to 2023–24
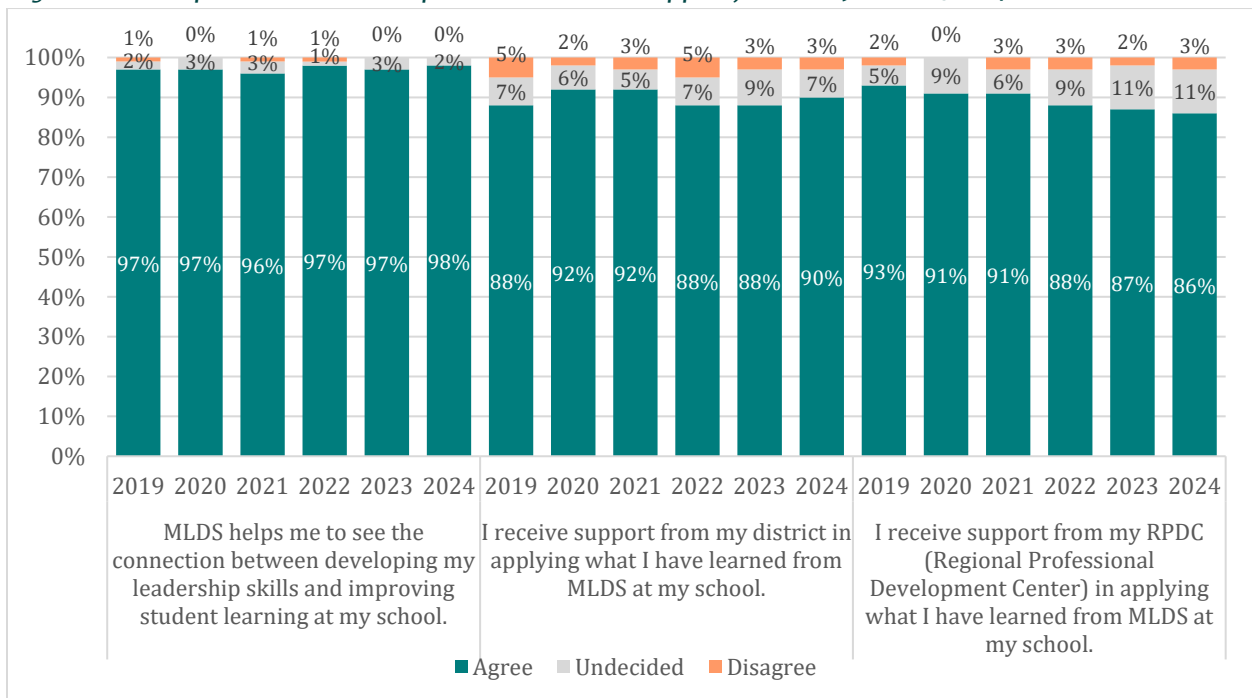
*Figure 3. Overall Perceptions of Superintendents: Purpose and Information, 2018–19 to 2023–24*
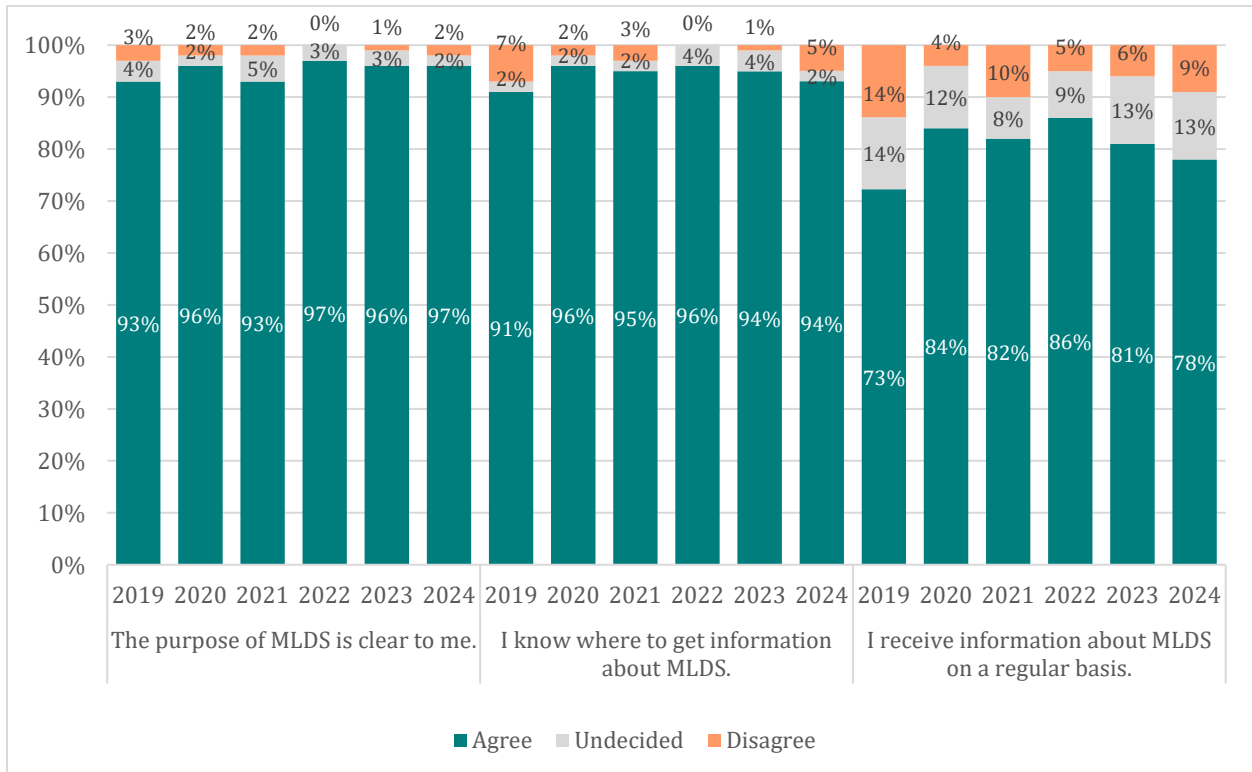

Figure 4. Superintendents' Overall Perceptions: Skills and Support, 2018–19 to 2023–24
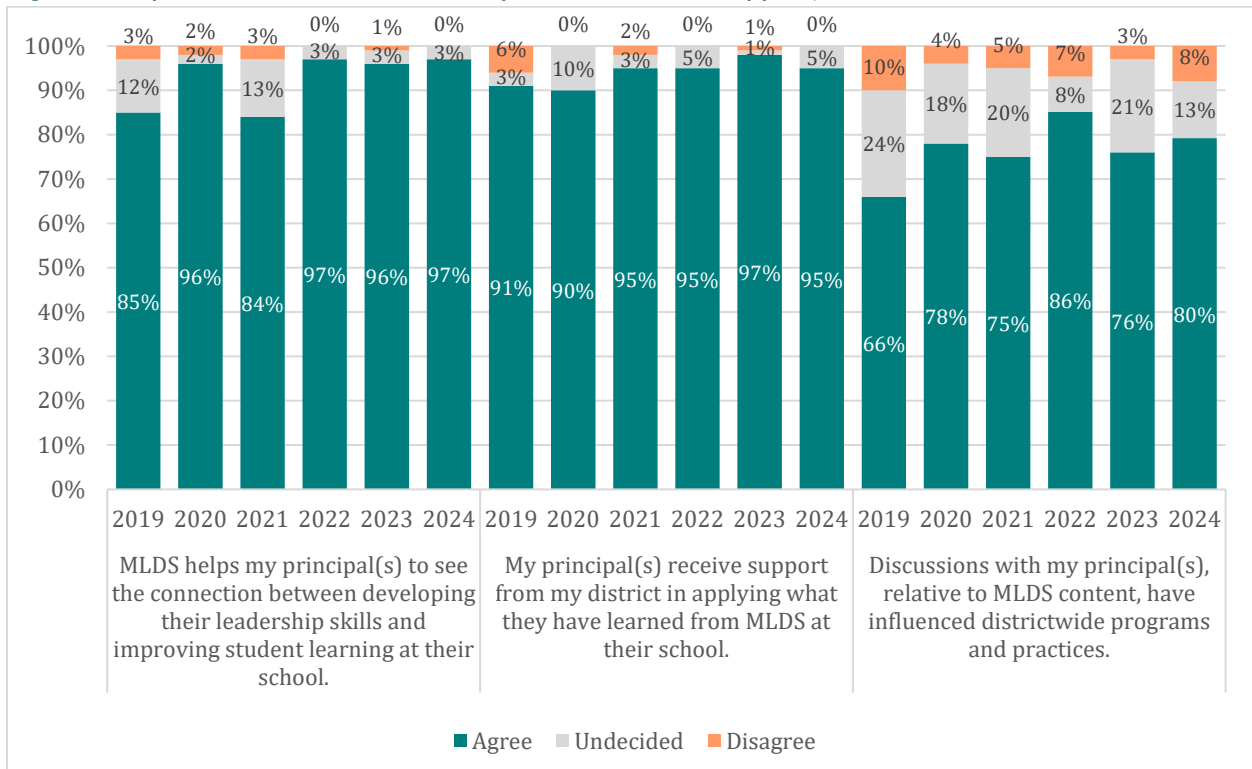
Figure 5. Mentors' Overall Perceptions, 2023–24

Bar chart showing mentors' perceptions across five statements (Agree / Undecided / Disagree):

- The purpose of MLDS is clear to me. — Agree 100%, Undecided 0%, Disagree 0%
- I know where to get information about MLDS. — Agree 100%, Undecided 0%, Disagree 0%
- I receive information about MLDS on a regular basis. — Agree 100%, Undecided 0%, Disagree 0%
- MLDS helps my mentee(s) to see the connection between developing their leadership skills and improving student learning at their school. — Agree 99%, Undecided 1%, Disagree 0%
- My mentee(s) receive support from their district in applying what they have learned from MLDS at their school. — Agree 86%, Undecided 14%, Disagree 0%

Legend: Agree, Undecided, Disagree

Figure 6. Perceptions of Principals, Superintendents, and Mentors on Fidelity of MLDS Implementation, 2023–24

Bar chart for "MLDS delivers its components (e.g., learning experiences, treatments, engagement platforms) as designed." (Agree / Undecided / Disagree):

- Principals — Agree 99%, Undecided 1%, Disagree 1%
- Superintendents — Agree 94%, Undecided 5%, Disagree 2%
- Mentors — Agree 98%, Undecided 2%, Disagree 0%

Legend: Agree, Undecided, Disagree
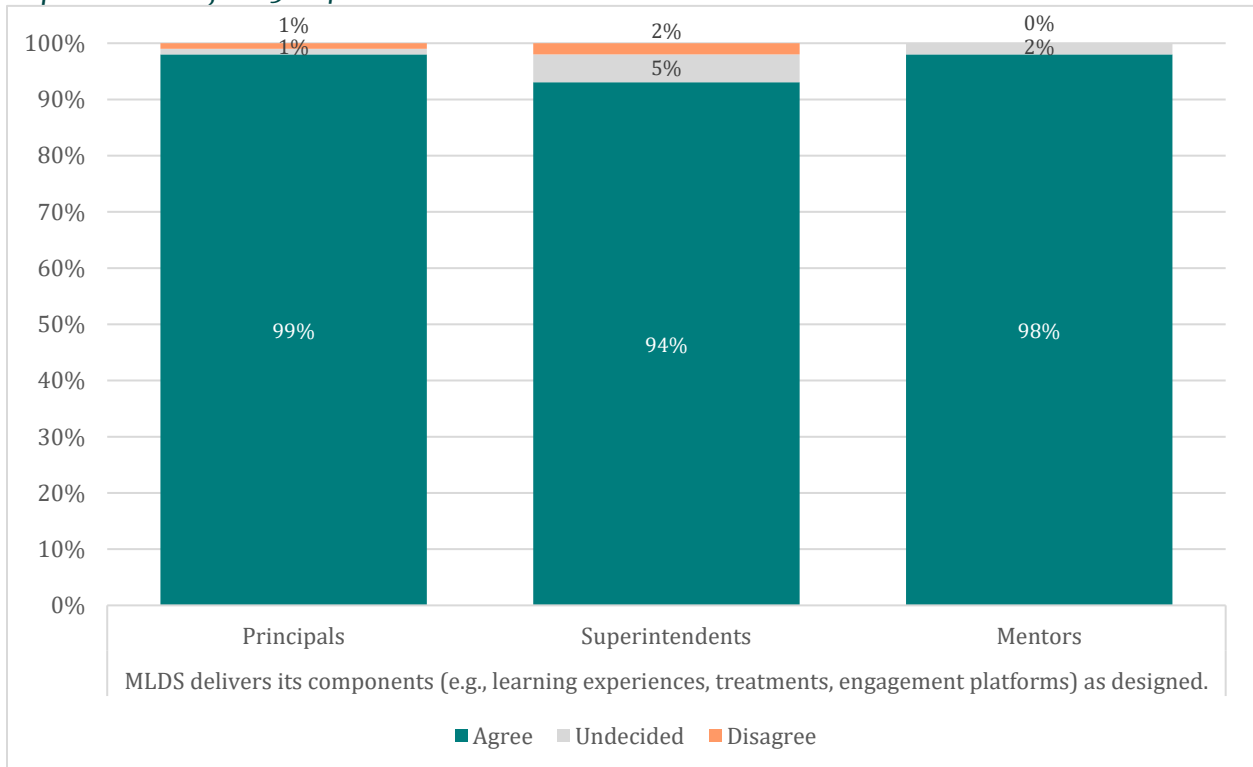
Figure 7. Perceptions of Principals on Fidelity of MLDS Implementation, 2018−19 to 2023−24

The level of support provided by MLDS (e.g., number of sessions or contacts, frequency and duration of sessions) is appropriate for building my leadership capacity as a principal.

The MLDS methods (e.g., regional meetings, state conferences, learning labs, one-to-one mentoring and coaching) are helpful in developing my leadership skills.

I am regularly using what I learn from MLDS at my school.

■ Agree ■ Undecided ■ Disagree

Figure 8. Perceptions of Principals on MLDS Professional Development, 2018−19 to 2023−24

MLDS professional development focuses on research-based leadership practices.

The professional development content is relevant to my needs as a school leader.

■ Agree ■ Undecided ■ Disagree

Figure 9. Perceptions of Principals on MLDS Professional Development, 2018–19 to 2023–24 (Cont'd)
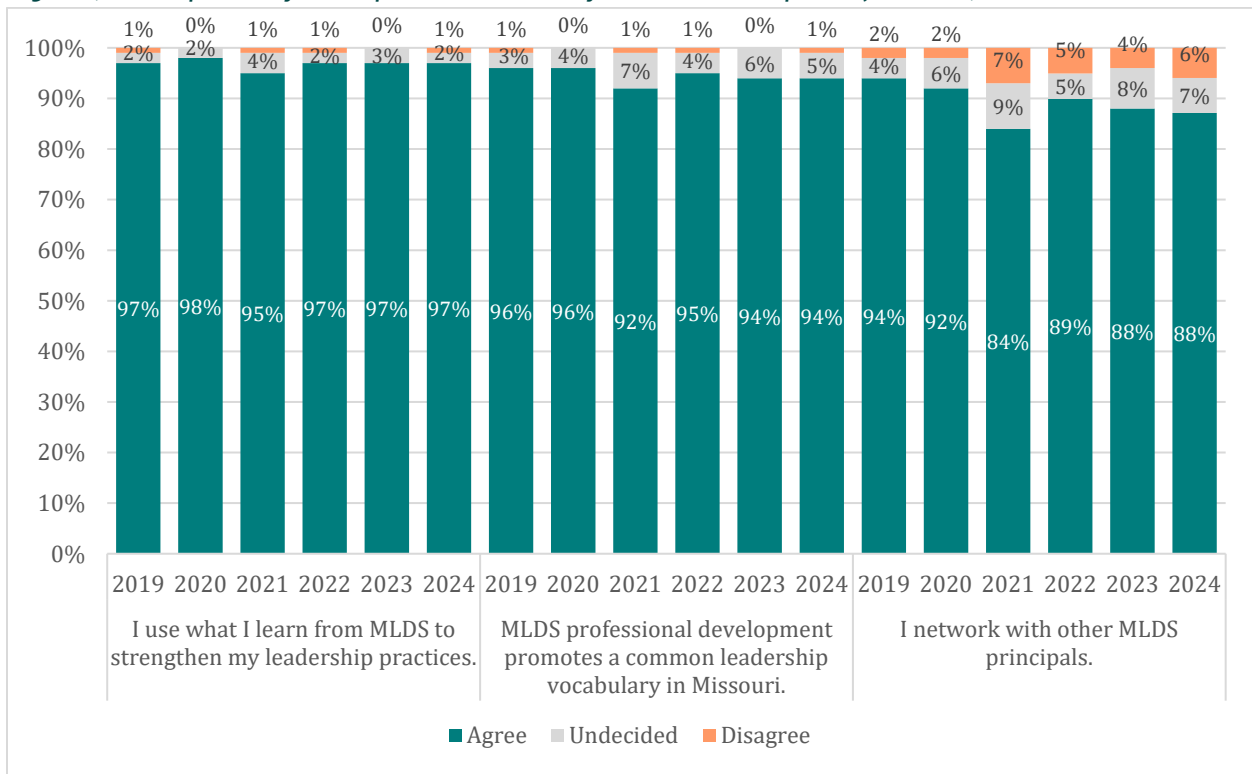
Figure 10. Principals' Perceptions of MLDS Learning Activities, 2023–24
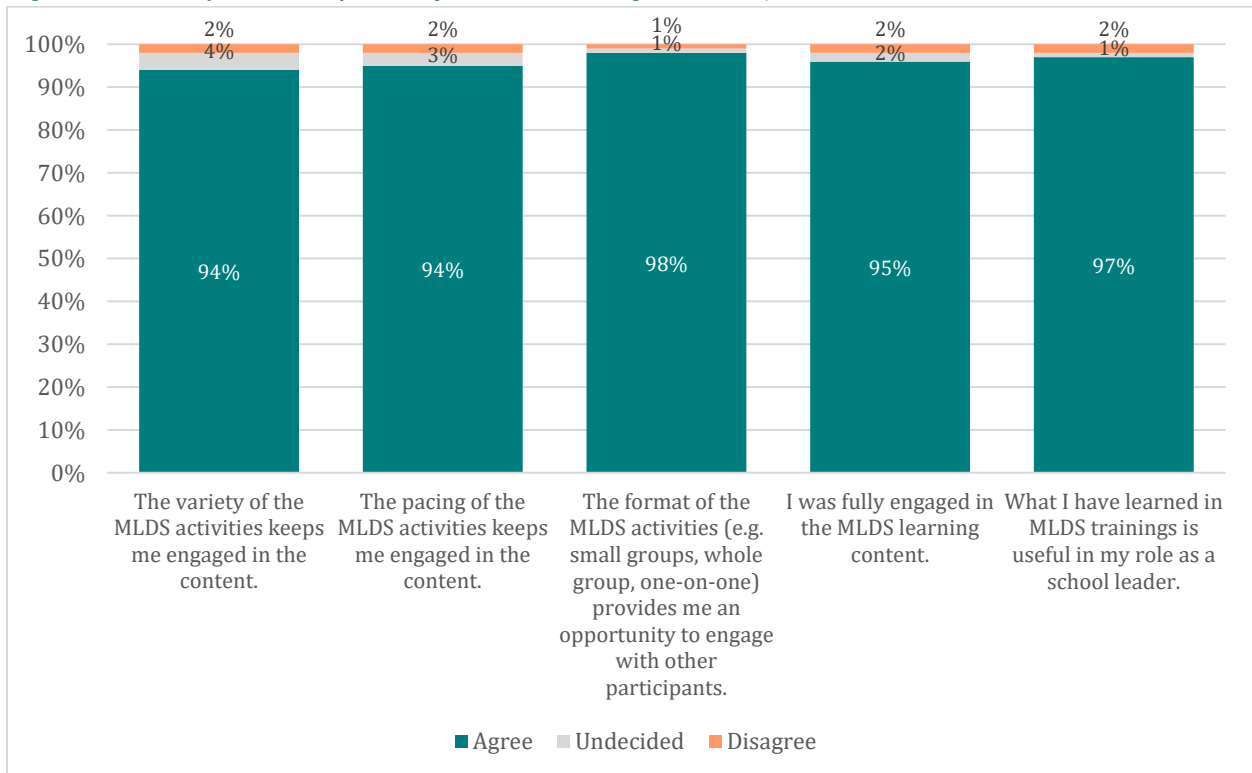
Figure 11. Perceptions of Principals on Benefits and Value of MLDS: Collaboration and Customized Support, 2018–19 to 2023–24
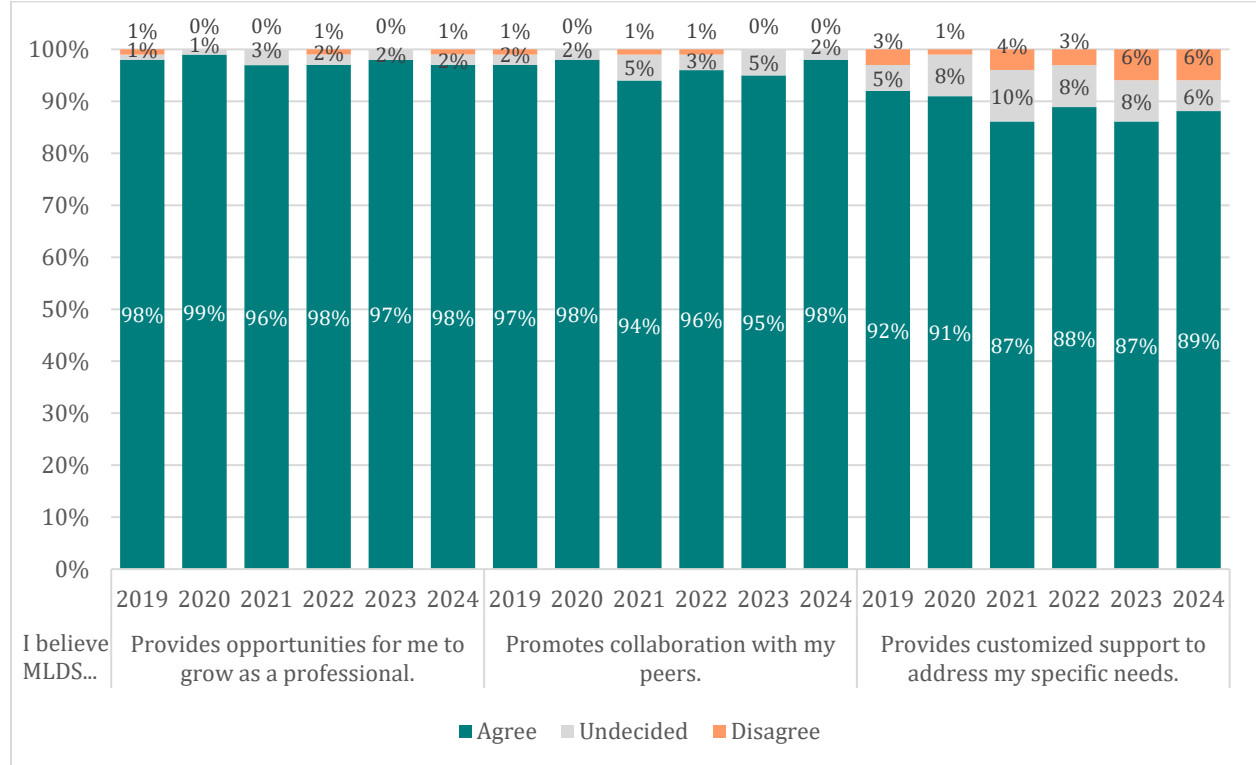
Figure 12. Principals' Perceptions of Benefits and Value of MLDS: Instructional Leadership, 2018–19 to 2023–24
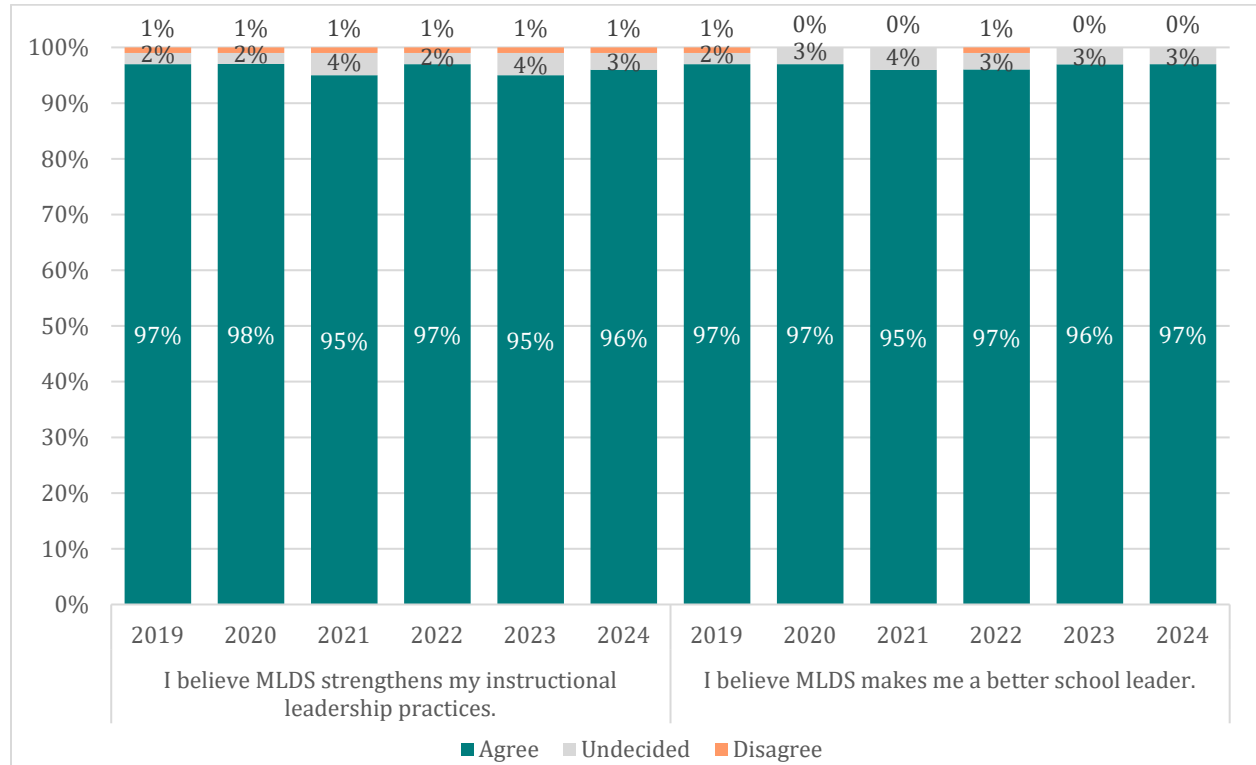
Figure 13. Perceptions of Superintendents on Benefits and Value of MLDS: Collaboration and Customized Support, 2018–19 to 2023–24
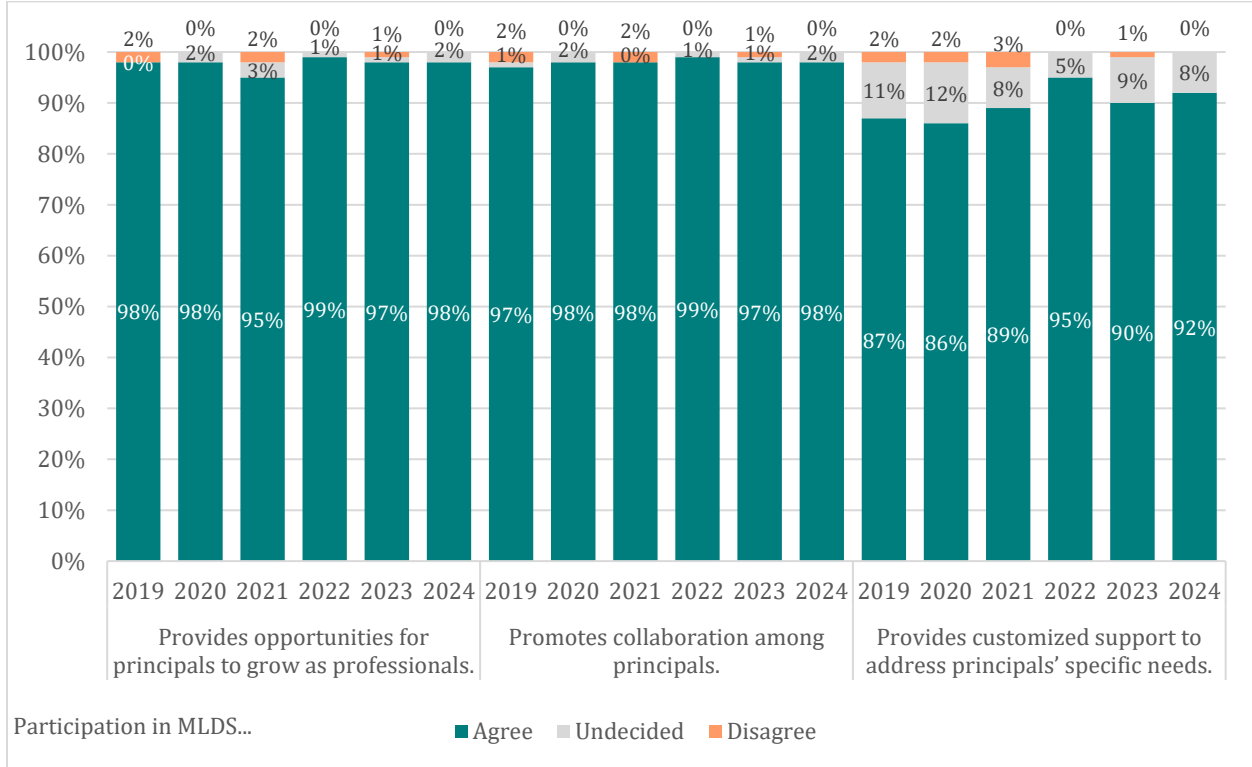
Figure 14. Superintendents' Perceptions of Benefits and Value of MLDS: Instructional Leadership, 2018–19 to 2023–24
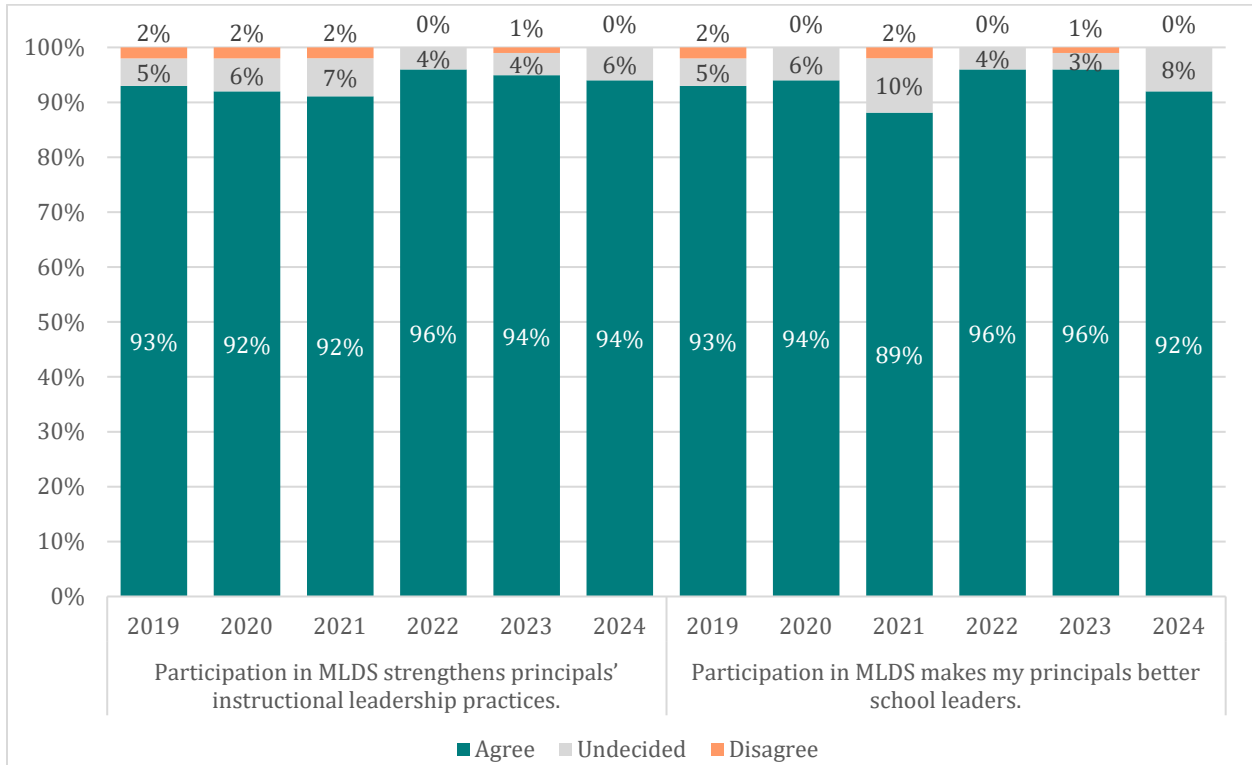
Figure 15. Mentors' Perceptions of Benefits and Value of MLDS, 2023–24

Participation in MLDS...
■ Agree   ■ Undecided   ■ Disagree
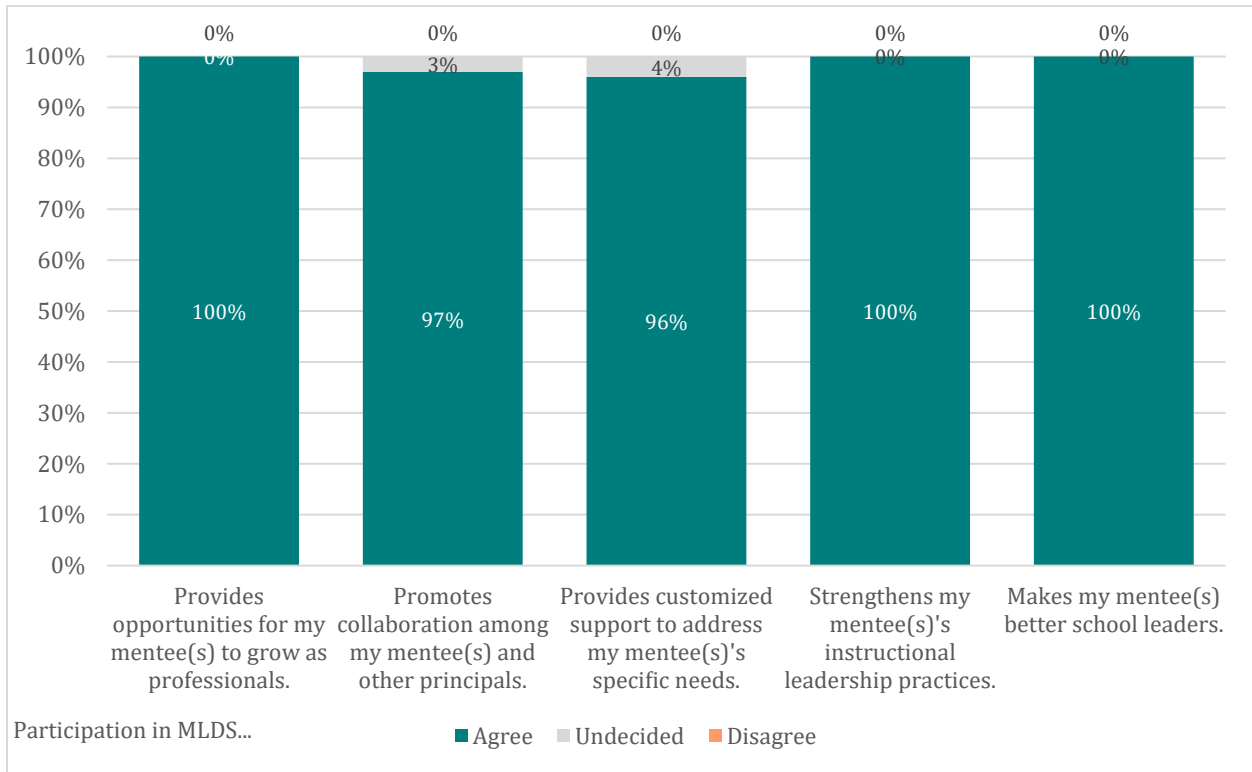
Figure 16. Perceptions of Principals on Impacts of MLDS on Instructional Leadership Practices, 2018–19 to 2023–24

I believe MLDS increases my ability to...
■ Agree   ■ Undecided   ■ Disagree
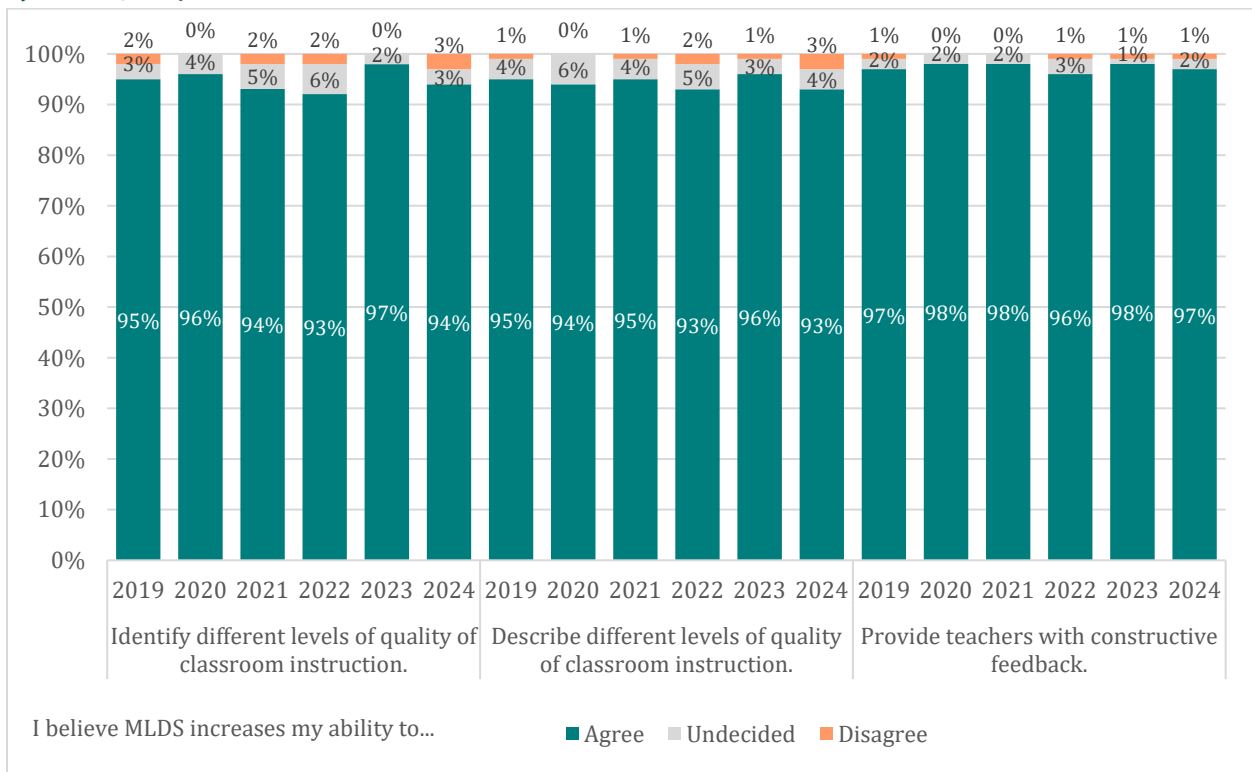
Figure 17. Perceptions of Superintendents on Impacts of MLDS on Instructional Leadership Practices, 2018–19 to 2023–24
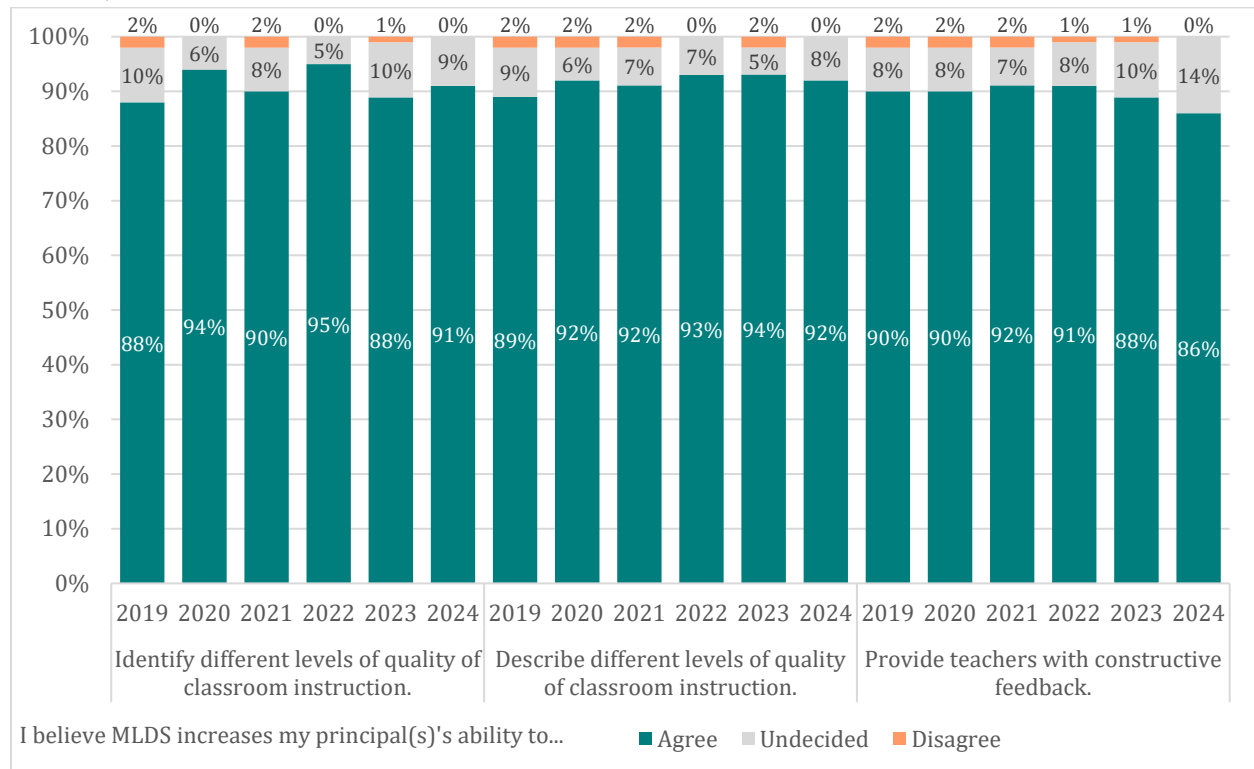
Figure 18. Perceptions of Principals and Superintendents on Impacts of MLDS on Classroom Instruction, 2018–19 to 2023–24
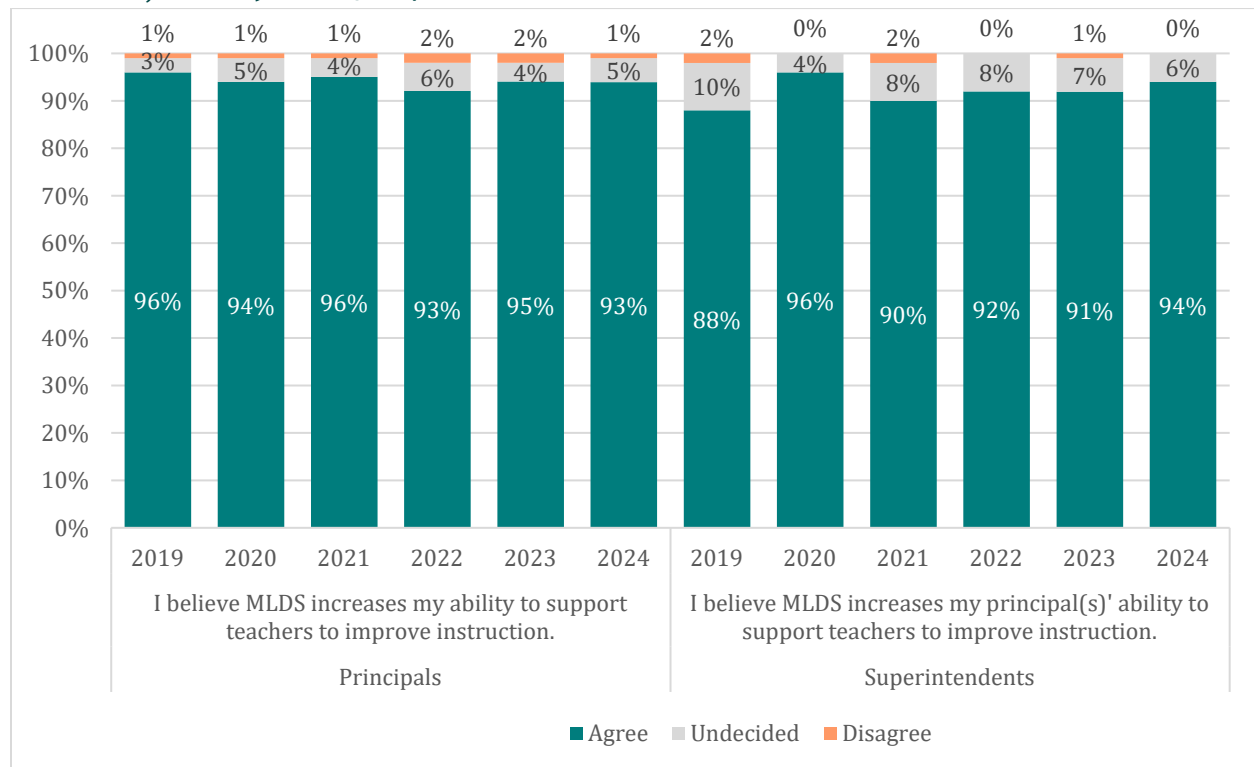
Figure 19. Perceptions of Principals and Superintendents on Impacts of MLDS on Instructional Leadership Practices and Classroom Instruction, 2021–22 and 2023–24
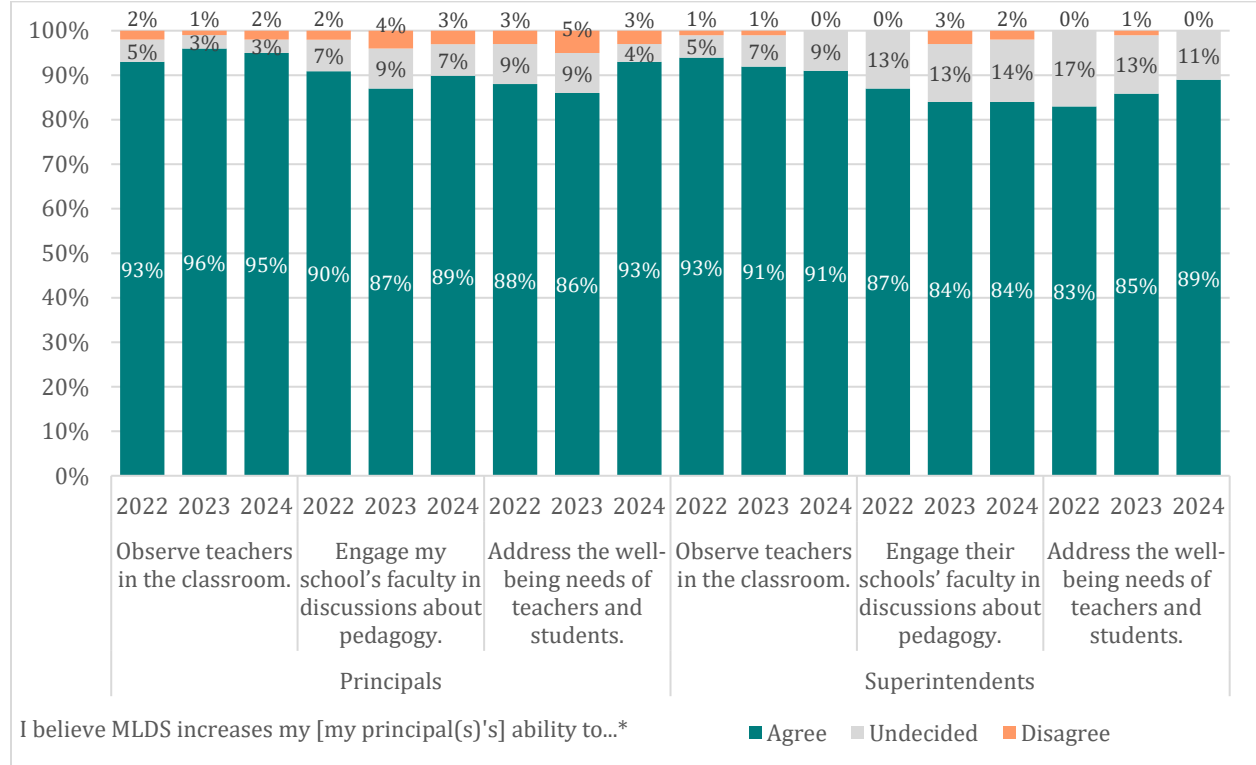
I believe MLDS increases my [my principal(s)'s] ability to...*

■ Agree ■ Undecided ■ Disagree

Note. *The text in brackets shows the different wording of the question for superintendents.

Figure 20. Perceptions of Mentors on Impacts of MLDS on Instructional Leadership Practices and Classroom Instruction, 2023–24

I believe MLDS increases my mentee(s)'s ability to...

■ Agree ■ Undecided ■ Disagree
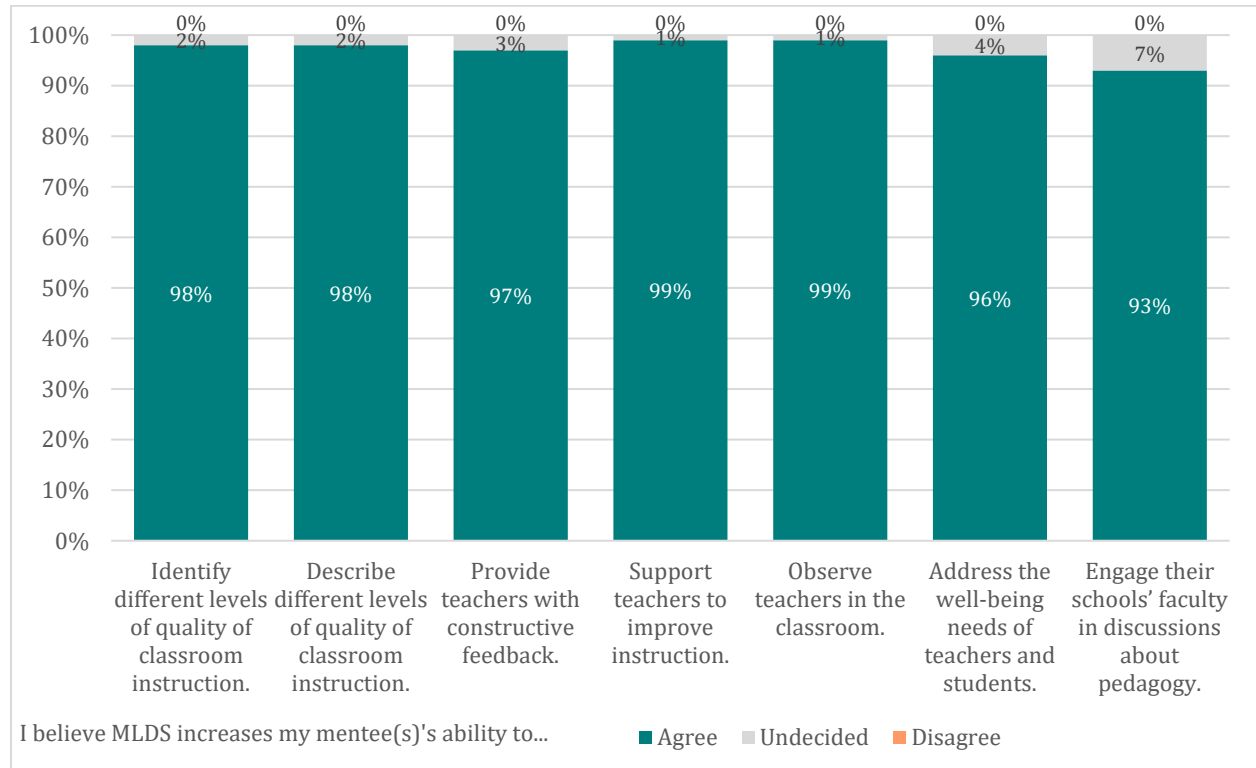
Figure 21. Perceptions of Principals on Impacts of MLDS on Student Achievement and School Leader Growth and Retention, 2018–19 to 2023–24
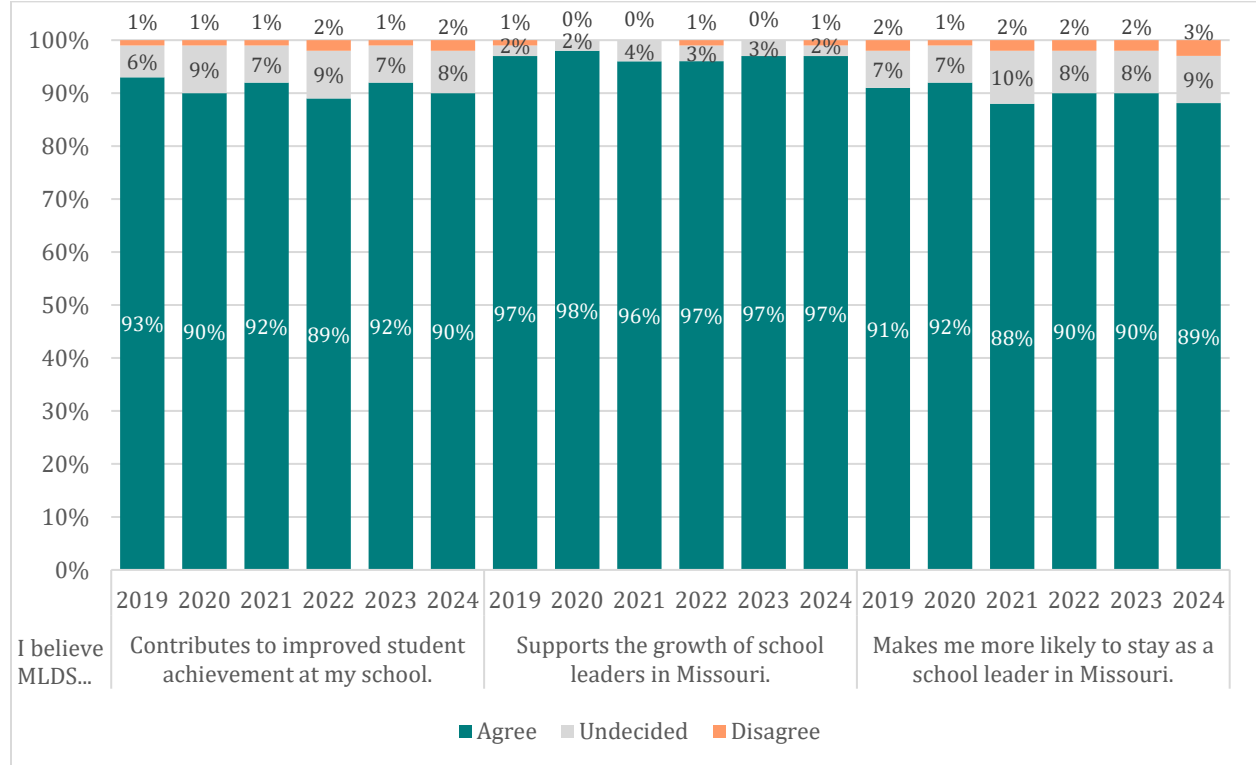
Figure 22. Perceptions of Superintendents on Impacts of MLDS on Student Achievement and School Leader Growth and Retention, 2018–19 to 2023–24
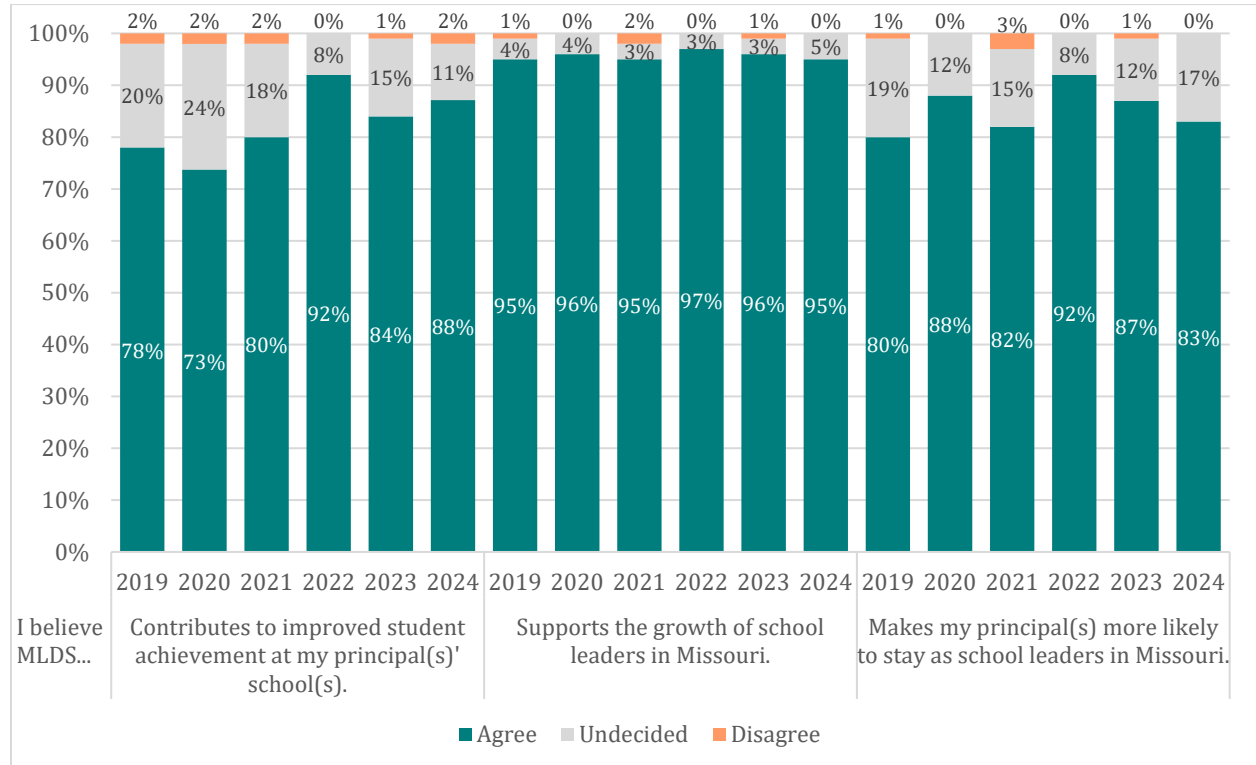
Figure 23. Perceptions of Mentors on Impacts of MLDS on Student Achievement and School Leader Growth and Retention, 2023–24


I believe MLDS…

Categories: Contributes to improved student achievement at my mentee(s)'s school(s). (Agree 97%, Undecided 3%, Disagree 0%); Supports the growth of school leaders in Missouri. (Agree 100%, Undecided 0%, Disagree 0%); Makes my mentee(s) more likely to stay as school leaders in Missouri. (Agree 93%, Undecided 7%, Disagree 0%)

Legend: Agree, Undecided, Disagree
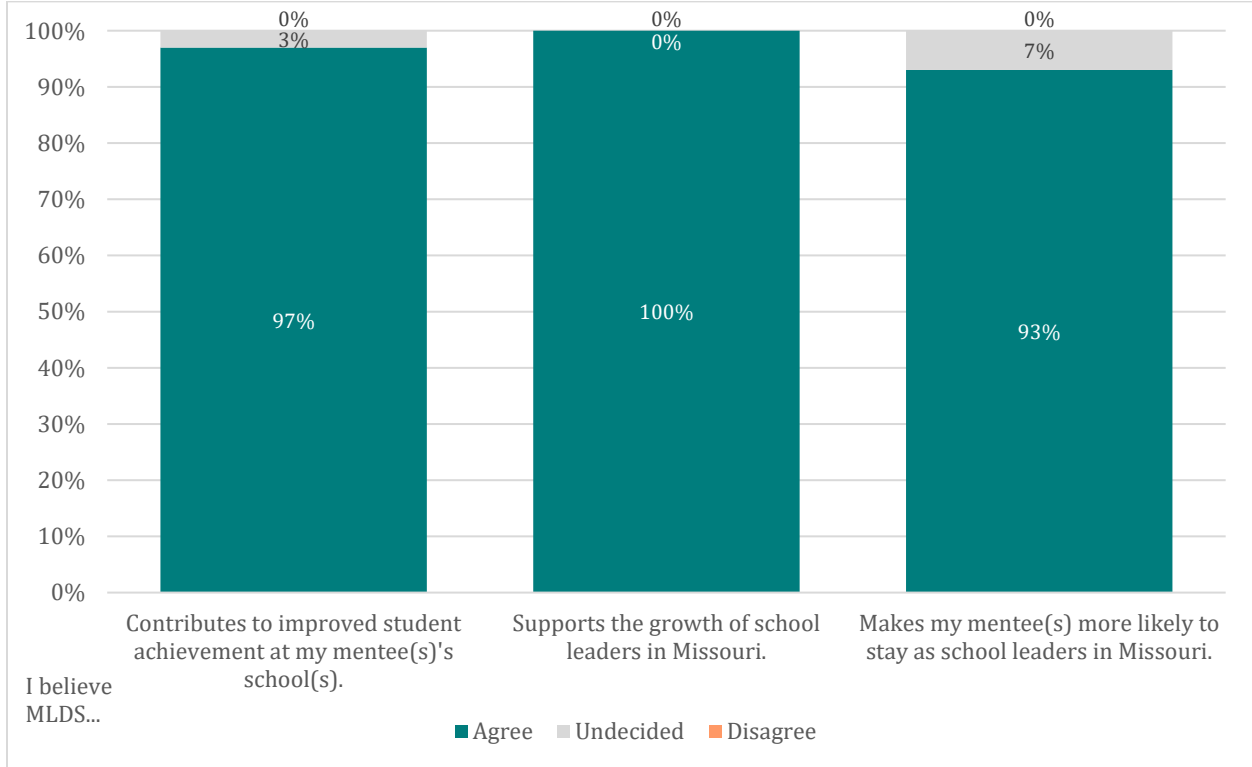
Figure 24. Perceptions of Principals on Support from MLDS Specialists, 2021–22 to 2023–24

The MLDS specialists in my Regional Professional Development Center…

Understand schools like mine. (2022: Agree 92%, Undecided 6%, Disagree 2%; 2023: Agree 93%, Undecided 5%, Disagree 1%; 2024: Agree 96%, Undecided 3%, Disagree 1%)

Help me to apply the MLDS content to practical situations. (2022: Agree 96%, Undecided 3%, Disagree 1%; 2023: Agree 97%, Undecided 1%, Disagree 1%; 2024: Agree 95%, Undecided 3%, Disagree 2%)

Effectively support me in my leadership role. (2022: Agree 95%, Undecided 4%, Disagree 1%; 2023: Agree 96%, Undecided 3%, Disagree 1%; 2024: Agree 95%, Undecided 4%, Disagree 1%)

Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the content areas. (2024: Agree 97%, Undecided 1%, Disagree 2%)

Clearly explain the MLDS content. (2024: Agree 98%, Undecided 2%, Disagree 0%)

Keep me engaged in the MLDS content. (2024: Agree 95%, Undecided 4%, Disagree 1%)

Legend: Agree, Undecided, Disagree

Figure 25. Perceptions of Superintendents and Mentors on Support from MLDS Specialists, 2021–22 to 2023–24

The MLDS specialists in my Regional Professional Development Center…
■ Agree ■ Undecided ■ Disagree
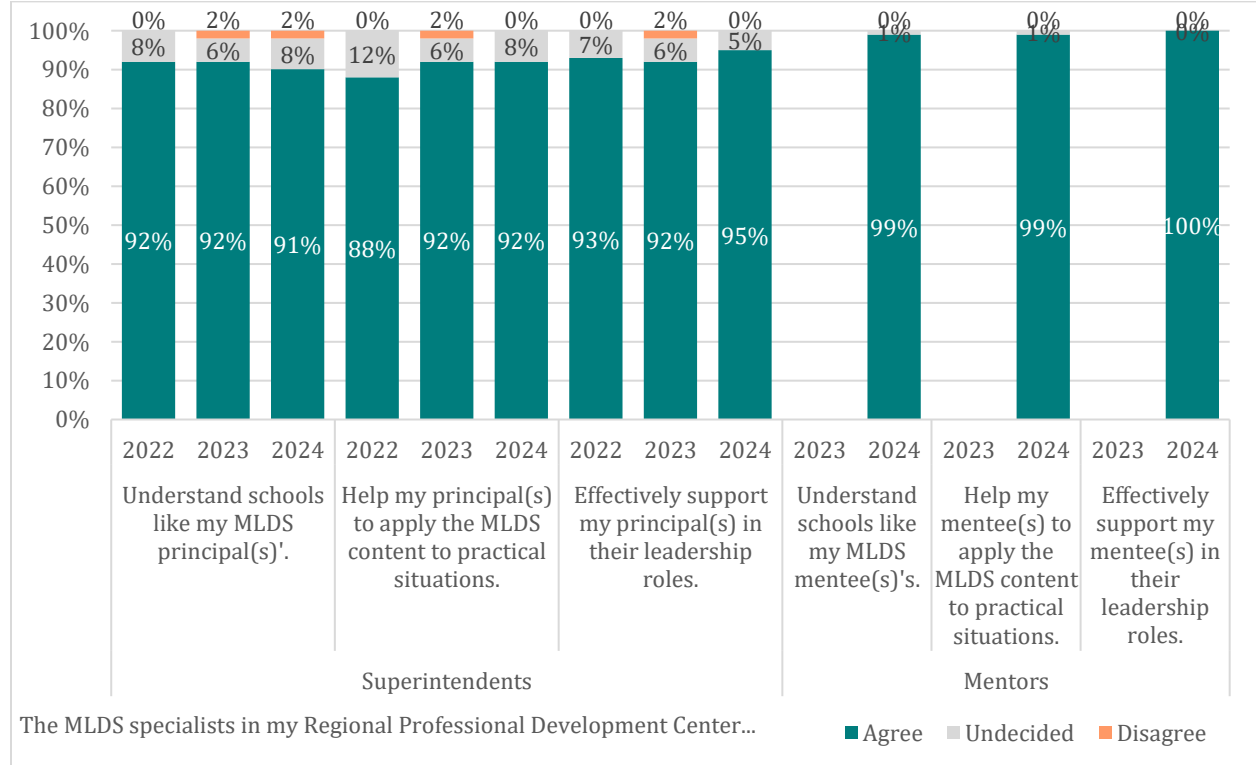
Figure 26. Perceptions of Principals and Superintendents on Support from Mentors, 2021–22 to 2023–24
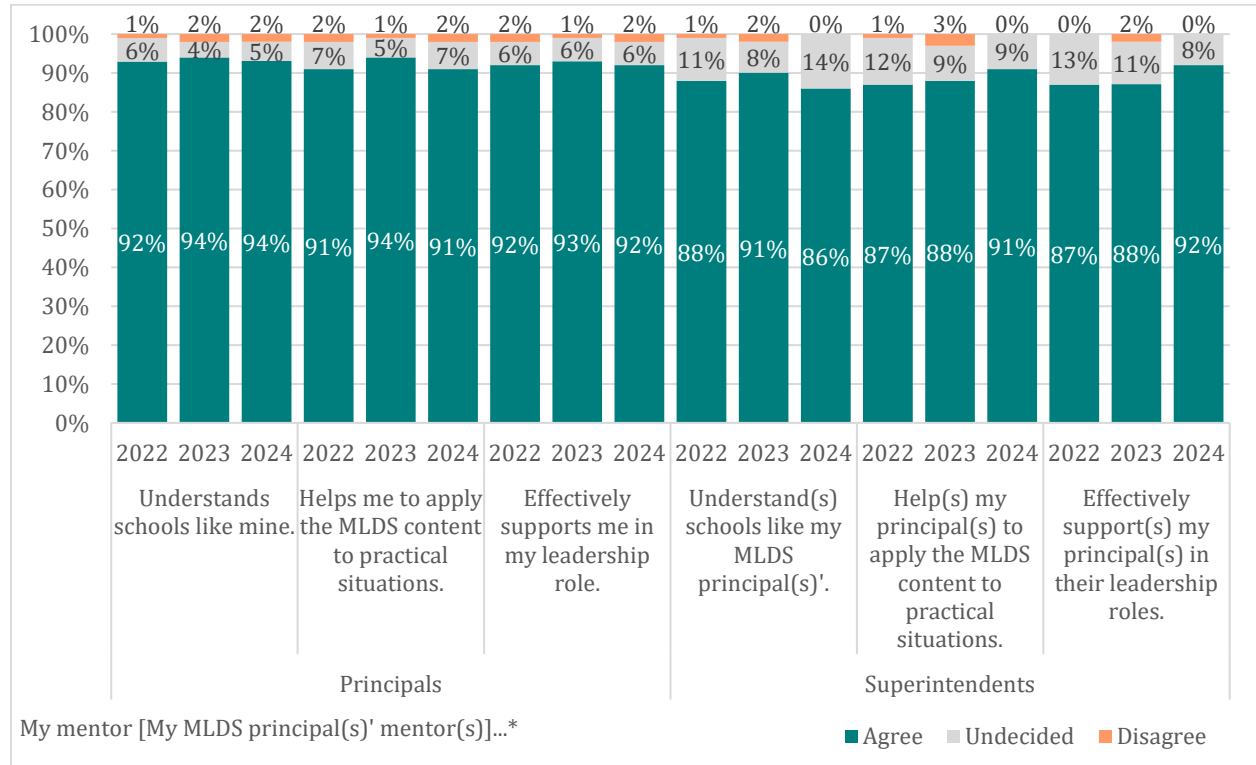
My mentor [My MLDS principal(s)' mentor(s)]…*
■ Agree ■ Undecided ■ Disagree

Note. *The text in brackets shows the different wording of the question for superintendents.

Table 7 shows the numbers of MLDS participants and specialists, and the participant/specialist ratios from 2019–20 to 2023–24.

Table 7. MLDS Participant/Specialist Ratio, 2019–20 to 2023–24

Year	Number of MLDS Participants	Number of MLDS Specialists	Participant / Specialist Ratio
2019–20	1,080	16	68:1
2020–21	1,067	17	63:1
2021–22	1,192	27	44:1
2022–23	1,628	27	60:1
2023–24	2,086	26	80:1

Note. See Liang & Slotnik (2020, 2021, 2022, 2023) for the data from 2019–20 to 2022–23. The 2023–24 number of MLDS participants was calculated based on the raw data shared from state officials on July 8, 2024. The 2023–24 number of MLDS specialists was retrieved from https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/oeq-ed-mldscontactinformation

Table 8 compares the responses of MLDS principals by whether they work at a school identified as a Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) school under ESSA. As the table shows, principals in CSI and Non-CSI schools were both highly positive about MLDS.

Table 8. Perceptions of Principals by School CSI Status, 2023–24

	CSI Schools			Non-CSI Schools			Not Sure of School CSI Status		
	n	SA	A	n	SA	A	n	SA	A
Overall Perceptions									
The purpose of MLDS is clear to me.	30	73%	27%	146	77%	23%	114	70%	30%
I know where to get information about MLDS.	30	77%	20%	146	62%	34%	114	54%	41%
I receive information about MLDS on a regular basis.	30	57%	33%	146	60%	34%	114	54%	40%
I receive support from my district in applying what I have learned from MLDS at my school.	30	53%	30%	146	55%	36%	114	51%	39%
I receive support from my RPDC (Regional Professional Development Center) in applying what I have learned from MLDS at my school.	30	63%	23%	145	57%	30%	114	49%	36%
MLDS helps me to see the connection between developing my leadership skills and improving student learning at my school.	30	67%	30%	146	68%	28%	113	66%	33%

	CSI Schools			Non-CSI Schools			Not Sure of School CSI Status		
	n	SA	A	n	SA	A	n	SA	A
Fidelity of Implementation									
The level of support provided by MLDS (e.g., number of sessions or contacts, frequency and duration of sessions) is appropriate for building my leadership capacity as a principal.	30	63%	37%	146	61%	34%	114	61%	36%
The MLDS methods (e.g., regional meetings, state conferences, learning labs, one-to-one mentoring and coaching) are helpful in developing my leadership skills.	30	67%	30%	146	63%	32%	114	62%	35%
I am regularly using what I learn from MLDS at my school.	30	47%	43%	146	55%	35%	113	49%	47%
The variety of the MLDS activities keeps me engaged in the content.	30	57%	40%	144	58%	34%	114	57%	38%
The pacing of the MLDS activities keeps me engaged in the content.	30	57%	43%	146	58%	36%	114	57%	37%
The format of the MLDS activities (e.g. small groups, whole group, one-on-one) provides me an opportunity to engage with other participants.	30	63%	37%	146	64%	34%	114	66%	32%
MLDS delivers its components (e.g., learning experiences, treatments, engagement platforms) as designed.	30	67%	33%	146	65%	32%	113	62%	38%
Professional Development									
MLDS professional development focuses on research-based leadership practices.	30	70%	30%	146	71%	27%	114	67%	33%
The professional development content is relevant to my needs as a school leader.	30	63%	33%	146	68%	29%	114	57%	42%
I use what I learn from MLDS to strengthen my leadership practices.	30	63%	30%	146	66%	29%	113	64%	35%
I network with other MLDS principals.	30	50%	40%	145	57%	28%	114	43%	46%
MLDS professional development promotes a common leadership vocabulary in Missouri.	30	63%	30%	146	60%	32%	114	50%	47%
I was fully engaged in the MLDS learning content.	30	67%	30%	146	58%	36%	114	52%	45%
What I have learned in MLDS trainings is useful in my role as a school leader.	30	67%	30%	146	66%	29%	114	61%	38%
Benefits and Value │ *I believe MLDS…*									
Provides opportunities for me to grow as a professional.	30	70%	27%	146	69%	27%	114	73%	26%
Promotes collaboration with my peers.	30	73%	23%	146	70%	27%	114	69%	30%

	CSI Schools			Non-CSI Schools			Not Sure of School CSI Status		
	n	SA	A	n	SA	A	n	SA	A
Provides customized support to address my specific needs.	30	60%	27%	146	54%	33%	114	44%	47%
Strengthens my instructional leadership practices.	30	67%	30%	146	67%	25%	114	67%	33%
Makes me a better school leader.	30	73%	20%	146	68%	27%	113	68%	30%
Impact │ *I believe MLDS increases my ability to…*									
Observe teachers in the classroom.	29	52%	41%	146	61%	33%	114	61%	36%
Identify different levels of quality of classroom instruction.	29	55%	41%	146	57%	34%	114	58%	39%
Describe different levels of quality of classroom instruction.	29	59%	31%	146	56%	34%	114	55%	43%
Provide teachers with constructive feedback.	29	69%	24%	146	71%	25%	114	63%	37%
Support teachers to improve instruction.	29	66%	21%	146	56%	36%	114	54%	42%
Address the well-being needs of teachers and students.	29	66%	24%	146	55%	36%	114	49%	47%
Engage my school's faculty in discussions about pedagogy.	29	52%	38%	145	48%	38%	114	42%	52%
I believe MLDS…									
Contributes to improved student achievement at my school.	29	66%	28%	146	49%	38%	114	44%	49%
Makes me more likely to stay as a school leader in Missouri.	30	53%	30%	146	58%	30%	114	58%	33%
Supports the growth of school leaders in Missouri.	29	62%	31%	146	65%	32%	114	63%	34%
Support from MLDS Specialists and Mentors │ *The MLDS specialists in my Regional Professional Development Center…*									
Understand schools like mine.*	30	43%	47%	145	64%	31%	114	66%	33%
Help me to apply the MLDS content to practical situations.	30	50%	40%	146	62%	30%	114	63%	36%
Effectively support me in my leadership role.	29	72%	21%	146	64%	31%	114	61%	35%
Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the content areas.	30	70%	20%	146	66%	30%	114	64%	36%
Clearly explain the MLDS content.	29	76%	17%	145	68%	30%	114	69%	31%
Keep me engaged in the MLDS content.	29	69%	28%	145	68%	25%	113	67%	29%

	CSI Schools			Non-CSI Schools			Not Sure of School CSI Status		
	n	SA	A	n	SA	A	n	SA	A
My mentor…									
Understands schools like mine.	26	85%	12%	132	73%	21%	108	77%	16%
Helps me to apply the MLDS content to practical situations.	26	81%	19%	133	67%	21%	107	73%	19%
Effectively supports me in my leadership role.	26	81%	19%	134	65%	25%	106	74%	20%

Note. As the percentages of MLDS principals who disagree or strongly disagree with the survey questions were very small, the table shows only the percentages of MLDS principals who strongly agree (SA) and agree (A) with the survey questions. * Indicates statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence level between "CSI School" principals and principals who chose "Not Sure of School CSI Status."

Table 9 shows the perceptions of principals in city, suburban, and rural areas were all highly positive about MLDS, and the responses of principals in rural areas were the most positive.

Table 9. Perceptions of Principals by Community Type, 2023–24

	City			Suburban			Rural		
	n	SA	A	n	SA	A	n	SA	A
Overall Perceptions									
The purpose of MLDS is clear to me.	37	65%	35%	76	70%	30%	177	78%	22%
I know where to get information about MLDS.*	37	54%	41%	76	42%	54%	177	69%	27%
I receive information about MLDS on a regular basis.*	37	51%	43%	76	47%	42%	177	63%	33%
I receive support from my district in applying what I have learned from MLDS at my school.*	37	41%	43%	76	42%	46%	177	60%	31%
I receive support from my RPDC (Regional Professional Development Center) in applying what I have learned from MLDS at my school.* **	37	41%	38%	76	43%	32%	176	62%	30%
MLDS helps me to see the connection between developing my leadership skills and improving student learning at my school.	36	58%	36%	76	63%	33%	177	71%	28%
Fidelity of Implementation									
The level of support provided by MLDS (e.g., number of sessions or contacts, frequency and duration of sessions) is appropriate for building my leadership capacity as a principal.*	37	51%	35%	76	51%	42%	177	67%	32%

	City			Suburban			Rural		
	n	SA	A	n	SA	A	n	SA	A
The MLDS methods (e.g., regional meetings, state conferences, learning labs, one-to-one mentoring and coaching) are helpful in developing my leadership skills.*	37	57%	38%	76	53%	41%	177	69%	29%
I am regularly using what I learn from MLDS at my school.**	37	35%	51%	76	46%	41%	176	57%	38%
The variety of the MLDS activities keeps me engaged in the content.	37	51%	35%	76	53%	39%	175	61%	35%
The pacing of the MLDS activities keeps me engaged in the content.	37	51%	38%	76	53%	39%	177	60%	36%
The format of the MLDS activities (e.g. small groups, whole group, one-on-one) provides me an opportunity to engage with other participants.	37	57%	38%	76	55%	42%	177	70%	29%
MLDS delivers its components (e.g., learning experiences, treatments, engagement platforms) as designed.*	37	54%	43%	76	51%	45%	176	72%	28%
Professional Development									
MLDS professional development focuses on research-based leadership practices.	37	57%	41%	76	64%	36%	177	73%	25%
The professional development content is relevant to my needs as a school leader.	37	51%	43%	76	61%	37%	177	67%	32%
I use what I learn from MLDS to strengthen my leadership practices.**	36	47%	44%	76	58%	36%	177	72%	27%
I network with other MLDS principals.* **	36	33%	44%	76	41%	39%	177	59%	34%
MLDS professional development promotes a common leadership vocabulary in Missouri.* **	37	43%	38%	76	41%	51%	177	66%	32%
I was fully engaged in the MLDS learning content.	37	54%	32%	76	47%	49%	177	60%	36%
What I have learned in MLDS trainings is useful in my role as a school leader.* **	37	51%	43%	76	50%	46%	177	73%	24%
Benefits and Value ┃ *I believe MLDS…*									
Provides opportunities for me to grow as a professional.**	37	51%	41%	76	64%	32%	177	77%	22%
Promotes collaboration with my peers.* **	37	57%	38%	76	61%	37%	177	77%	21%
Provides customized support to address my specific needs.*	37	49%	27%	76	33%	49%	177	59%	36%
Strengthens my instructional leadership practices.**	37	51%	38%	76	62%	30%	177	72%	27%
Makes me a better school leader.* **	37	57%	32%	75	59%	33%	177	76%	24%

	City			Suburban			Rural		
	n	**SA**	**A**	**n**	**SA**	**A**	**n**	**SA**	**A**
Impact │ *I believe MLDS increases my ability to…*									
Observe teachers in the classroom.	36	53%	42%	76	51%	41%	177	66%	31%
Identify different levels of quality of classroom instruction.*	36	50%	36%	76	46%	42%	177	63%	35%
Describe different levels of quality of classroom instruction.*	36	50%	33%	76	45%	45%	177	62%	34%
Provide teachers with constructive feedback.*	36	58%	33%	76	57%	37%	177	74%	26%
Support teachers to improve instruction.*	36	53%	31%	76	45%	45%	177	62%	35%
Address the well-being needs of teachers and students.*	36	50%	39%	76	42%	45%	177	60%	37%
Engage my school's faculty in discussions about pedagogy.*	36	44%	42%	76	37%	43%	176	50%	44%
I believe MLDS…									
Contributes to improved student achievement at my school.*	36	56%	25%	76	37%	49%	177	52%	42%
Makes me more likely to stay as a school leader in Missouri.*	37	51%	24%	76	49%	34%	177	62%	32%
Supports the growth of school leaders in Missouri.*	37	57%	32%	76	50%	47%	176	72%	27%
Support from MLDS Specialists and Mentors │ *The MLDS specialists in my Regional Professional Development Center…*									
Understand schools like mine.**	37	43%	46%	76	58%	38%	176	69%	29%
Help me to apply the MLDS content to practical situations.* **	37	49%	38%	76	53%	39%	177	68%	30%
Effectively support me in my leadership role.	36	56%	31%	76	55%	36%	177	69%	30%
Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the content areas.**	37	51%	41%	76	58%	37%	177	72%	27%
Clearly explain the MLDS content.	36	64%	33%	76	62%	34%	176	74%	26%
Keep me engaged in the MLDS content.	36	61%	28%	76	64%	25%	175	71%	27%
My mentor…									
Understands schools like mine.	36	69%	19%	67	70%	27%	163	79%	14%
Helps me to apply the MLDS content to practical situations.	35	66%	23%	66	65%	26%	165	74%	17%

	City			Suburban			Rural		
	n	SA	A	n	SA	A	n	SA	A
Effectively supports me in my leadership role.	35	66%	23%	67	64%	28%	164	73%	20%

Note. As the percentages of MLDS principals who disagree or strongly disagree with, or are undecided about the survey questions were very small, the table shows only the percentages of MLDS principals who strongly agree (SA) and agree (A) with the survey questions. * Indicates statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence level between "Rural" and "Suburban". ** Indicates statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence level between "Rural" and "City".

As Table 10 shows, principals from all races/ethnicities were highly positive about MLDS.

Table 10. Perceptions of Principals by Race/Ethnicity, 2023–24

	White				Other Race/Ethnicity			
	n	SA	A	U	n	SA	A	U
Overall Perceptions								
The purpose of MLDS is clear to me.	257	75%	25%	0%	30	73%	27%	0%
I know where to get information about MLDS.	257	61%	35%	2%	30	53%	40%	3%
I receive information about MLDS on a regular basis.	257	59%	36%	4%	30	50%	40%	7%
I receive support from my district in applying what I have learned from MLDS at my school.*	257	56%	34%	7%	30	27%	53%	10%
I receive support from my RPDC (Regional Professional Development Center) in applying what I have learned from MLDS at my school.	256	56%	30%	10%	30	40%	40%	17%
MLDS helps me to see the connection between developing my leadership skills and improving student learning at my school.	256	69%	29%	2%	30	57%	37%	7%
Fidelity of Implementation								
The level of support provided by MLDS (e.g., number of sessions or contacts, frequency and duration of sessions) is appropriate for building my leadership capacity as a principal.	257	62%	33%	2%	30	50%	47%	0%
The MLDS methods (e.g., regional meetings, state conferences, learning labs, one-to-one mentoring and coaching) are helpful in developing my leadership skills.	257	64%	32%	4%	30	57%	43%	0%
I am regularly using what I learn from MLDS at my school.	256	52%	40%	5%	30	47%	43%	7%
The variety of the MLDS activities keeps me engaged in the content.	255	59%	35%	4%	30	47%	47%	3%
The pacing of the MLDS activities keeps me engaged in the content.	257	58%	36%	3%	30	50%	43%	3%

	White				Other Race/Ethnicity			
	n	SA	A	U	n	SA	A	U
The format of the MLDS activities (e.g. small groups, whole group, one-on-one) provides me an opportunity to engage with other participants.	257	66%	32%	1%	30	57%	40%	0%
MLDS delivers its components (e.g., learning experiences, treatments, engagement platforms) as designed.	256	66%	33%	1%	30	53%	47%	0%
Professional Development								
MLDS professional development focuses on research-based leadership practices.	257	70%	29%	1%	30	63%	37%	0%
The professional development content is relevant to my needs as a school leader.	257	65%	33%	1%	30	57%	43%	0%
I use what I learn from MLDS to strengthen my leadership practices.	257	66%	30%	3%	29	59%	38%	0%
I network with other MLDS principals.	257	52%	35%	7%	29	48%	41%	3%
MLDS professional development promotes a common leadership vocabulary in Missouri.	257	58%	36%	5%	30	47%	47%	3%
I was fully engaged in the MLDS learning content.	257	57%	38%	3%	30	53%	43%	0%
What I have learned in MLDS trainings is useful in my role as a school leader.	257	66%	31%	2%	30	60%	40%	0%
Benefits and Value │ *I believe MLDS…*								
Provides opportunities for me to grow as a professional.	257	72%	26%	2%	30	67%	30%	3%
Promotes collaboration with my peers.	257	72%	26%	2%	30	60%	37%	3%
Provides customized support to address my specific needs.	257	51%	39%	5%	30	57%	27%	10%
Strengthens my instructional leadership practices.	257	68%	28%	3%	30	63%	33%	3%
Makes me a better school leader.	256	70%	27%	3%	30	67%	27%	7%
Impact │ *I believe MLDS increases my ability to…*								
Observe teachers in the classroom.	256	60%	35%	4%	30	63%	30%	0%
Identify different levels of quality of classroom instruction.	256	57%	38%	3%	30	63%	27%	7%
Describe different levels of quality of classroom instruction.	256	56%	37%	4%	30	57%	37%	3%
Provide teachers with constructive feedback.	256	68%	30%	2%	30	70%	27%	0%
Support teachers to improve instruction.	256	57%	37%	5%	30	57%	37%	3%

	White			Other Race/Ethnicity			
	n	SA	A	U	n	SA	A	U
Address the well-being needs of teachers and students.	256	54%	40%	4%	30	60%	33%	7%
Engage my school's faculty in discussions about pedagogy.	255	45%	45%	7%	30	57%	30%	10%
I believe MLDS…								
Contributes to improved student achievement at my school.	256	48%	43%	7%	30	53%	33%	10%
Makes me more likely to stay as a school leader in Missouri.	257	58%	31%	9%	30	57%	30%	7%
Supports the growth of school leaders in Missouri.	256	65%	32%	3%	30	60%	37%	0%
Support from MLDS Specialists and Mentors | *The MLDS specialists in my Regional Professional Development Center…*								
Understand schools like mine.	256	64%	32%	3%	30	53%	43%	3%
Help me to apply the MLDS content to practical situations.	257	63%	32%	4%	30	50%	43%	3%
Effectively support me in my leadership role.	256	64%	31%	3%	30	60%	30%	10%
Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the content areas.	257	66%	31%	1%	30	63%	33%	3%
Clearly explain the MLDS content.	255	69%	29%	2%	30	73%	27%	0%
Keep me engaged in the MLDS content.	254	68%	27%	4%	30	73%	23%	3%
My mentor…								
Understands schools like mine.	235	77%	17%	4%	29	66%	28%	7%
Helps me to apply the MLDS content to practical situations.	236	71%	20%	7%	28	71%	21%	7%
Effectively supports me in my leadership role.	236	70%	23%	5%	28	71%	18%	11%

Note. The race/ethnicity answer choices were retrieved from the template (https://dese.mo.gov/media/24306/download) created by DESE's Office of Data System Management. The "Other Race/Ethnicity" group includes "American Indian or Alaska Native," "Asian," "Black or African American," "Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity," "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander," and "Multi-Racial." * Indicates statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence level between the two groups.

Table 11 shows responses were all highly positive across the three groups of principals by years of experience with MLDS. The perceptions of principals who participated in the MLDS program for three years or longer were the most positive.

Table 11. Perceptions of Principals by Years of Experience with MLDS, 2023–24

	1 Year			2 Years			3+ Years		
	n	SA	A	n	SA	A	n	SA	A
Overall Perceptions									
The purpose of MLDS is clear to me.	158	72%	28%	100	74%	26%	32	84%	16%
I know where to get information about MLDS.	158	57%	39%	100	63%	31%	32	69%	31%
I receive information about MLDS on a regular basis.	158	59%	35%	100	53%	38%	32	63%	38%
I receive support from my district in applying what I have learned from MLDS at my school.	158	53%	38%	100	48%	37%	32	69%	28%
I receive support from my RPDC (Regional Professional Development Center) in applying what I have learned from MLDS at my school.	158	55%	28%	99	51%	37%	32	63%	31%
MLDS helps me to see the connection between developing my leadership skills and improving student learning at my school.	157	67%	30%	100	64%	34%	32	81%	19%
Fidelity of Implementation									
The level of support provided by MLDS (e.g., number of sessions or contacts, frequency and duration of sessions) is appropriate for building my leadership capacity as a principal.	158	61%	34%	100	59%	38%	32	69%	28%
The MLDS methods (e.g., regional meetings, state conferences, learning labs, one-to-one mentoring and coaching) are helpful in developing my leadership skills.	158	62%	33%	100	60%	37%	32	78%	22%
I am regularly using what I learn from MLDS at my school.	157	48%	45%	100	51%	36%	32	69%	31%
The variety of the MLDS activities keeps me engaged in the content.	158	58%	34%	98	55%	40%	32	66%	34%
The pacing of the MLDS activities keeps me engaged in the content.	158	57%	37%	100	54%	40%	32	69%	31%
The format of the MLDS activities (e.g. small groups, whole group, one-on-one) provides me an opportunity to engage with other participants.	158	64%	34%	100	62%	36%	32	75%	25%
MLDS delivers its components (e.g., learning experiences, treatments, engagement platforms) as designed.	157	63%	35%	100	61%	38%	32	78%	22%

	1 Year			2 Years			3+ Years		
	n	SA	A	n	SA	A	n	SA	A
Professional Development									
MLDS professional development focuses on research-based leadership practices.	158	68%	31%	100	67%	31%	32	78%	22%
The professional development content is relevant to my needs as a school leader.	158	63%	35%	100	61%	36%	32	75%	25%
I use what I learn from MLDS to strengthen my leadership practices.	157	66%	31%	100	62%	33%	32	72%	28%
I network with other MLDS principals.* **	158	49%	38%	99	44%	40%	32	78%	19%
MLDS professional development promotes a common leadership vocabulary in Missouri.	158	56%	38%	100	52%	42%	32	72%	25%
I was fully engaged in the MLDS learning content.**	158	55%	41%	100	52%	40%	32	75%	25%
What I have learned in MLDS trainings is useful in my role as a school leader.	158	65%	32%	100	60%	36%	32	75%	25%
Benefits and Value │ *I believe MLDS...*									
Provides opportunities for me to grow as a professional.	158	70%	28%	100	68%	29%	32	84%	16%
Promotes collaboration with my peers.	158	68%	31%	100	68%	27%	32	84%	13%
Provides customized support to address my specific needs.* **	158	44%	44%	100	53%	33%	32	75%	25%
Strengthens my instructional leadership practices.	158	68%	28%	100	63%	33%	32	75%	22%
Makes me a better school leader.	157	69%	28%	100	65%	30%	32	81%	19%
Impact │ *I believe MLDS increases my ability to...*									
Observe teachers in the classroom.	157	64%	32%	100	53%	40%	32	63%	34%
Identify different levels of quality of classroom instruction.	157	55%	39%	100	56%	36%	32	72%	28%
Describe different levels of quality of classroom instruction.	157	52%	41%	100	56%	36%	32	75%	22%
Provide teachers with constructive feedback.	157	69%	28%	100	63%	34%	32	75%	25%
Support teachers to improve instruction.	157	57%	36%	100	53%	41%	32	66%	31%
Address the well-being needs of teachers and students.	157	53%	39%	100	51%	42%	32	69%	31%
Engage my school's faculty in discussions about pedagogy.	156	42%	47%	100	45%	43%	32	66%	28%

	1 Year			2 Years			3+ Years		
	n	SA	A	n	SA	A	n	SA	A
I believe MLDS…									
Contributes to improved student achievement at my school.	157	47%	44%	100	47%	41%	32	59%	31%
Makes me more likely to stay as a school leader in Missouri.** ****	158	62%	28%	100	46%	37%	32	69%	31%
Supports the growth of school leaders in Missouri.	157	67%	30%	100	57%	39%	32	72%	28%
Support from MLDS Specialists and Mentors │ *The MLDS specialists in my Regional Professional Development Center…*									
Understand schools like mine.**	158	64%	32%	99	55%	40%	32	81%	19%
Help me to apply the MLDS content to practical situations.	158	60%	35%	100	58%	34%	32	78%	22%
Effectively support me in my leadership role.	157	66%	30%	100	57%	36%	32	75%	25%
Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the content areas.	158	66%	30%	100	60%	37%	32	78%	22%
Clearly explain the MLDS content.	156	71%	27%	100	65%	34%	32	78%	22%
Keep me engaged in the MLDS content.	157	69%	25%	99	63%	32%	31	81%	19%
My mentor…									
Understands schools like mine.	150	75%	17%	90	73%	22%	26	85%	12%
Helps me to apply the MLDS content to practical situations.	149	72%	17%	91	65%	29%	26	85%	8%
Effectively supports me in my leadership role.	149	68%	23%	91	68%	25%	26	85%	8%

Note. The question was, "How many years, in total, have you participated in the MLDS program? (If 2023–24 is your first year in MLDS, mark '1 year.')" As the percentages of principals who disagree or strongly disagree with the questions were very small and there are four groups, the table shows only the percentages of MLDS principals who strongly agree (SA), and agree (A) with the survey items. Responses to survey questions were not required, therefore the numbers of respondents may vary throughout the survey questions. * Indicates statistically significant differences at the 95% confidence level between "1 Year" and "3+ Years", ** between "2 Years" and "3+ Years", and **** between "1 Year" and "2 Years."

Table 12 shows the percentages of MLDS principals who agreed (a composite of agree and strongly agree) with the survey prompts by RPDC region. Principals' responses are very similar by RPDC region.

Table 12. Perceptions of Principals (% Agreeing) by RPDC Region, 2023–24

	Central	HOM	Kansas City	NE	NW	SC	SE	SW	St. Louis
Overall Perceptions									
The purpose of MLDS is clear to me.	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
I know where to get information about MLDS.	100%	96%	91%	100%	86%	94%	100%	95%	98%
I receive information about MLDS on a regular basis.	100%	96%	93%	100%	95%	97%	89%	100%	85%
I receive support from my district in applying what I have learned from MLDS at my school.	87%	89%	80%	100%	91%	89%	100%	95%	88%
I receive support from my RPDC (Regional Professional Development Center) in applying what I have learned from MLDS at my school.	87%	89%	75%	100%	91%	97%	96%	86%	71%
MLDS helps me to see the connection between developing my leadership skills and improving student learning at my school.	95%	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	96%
Fidelity of Implementation									
The level of support provided by MLDS (e.g., number of sessions or contacts, frequency and duration of sessions) is appropriate for building my leadership capacity as a principal.	100%	100%	82%	100%	95%	94%	100%	100%	98%
The MLDS methods (e.g., regional meetings, state conferences, learning labs, one-to-one mentoring and coaching) are helpful in developing my leadership skills.	100%	96%	89%	100%	100%	100%	96%	100%	92%
I am regularly using what I learn from MLDS at my school.	95%	89%	82%	100%	100%	97%	93%	100%	87%

	Central	HOM	Kansas City	NE	NW	SC	SE	SW	St. Louis
The variety of the MLDS activities keeps me engaged in the content.	95%	96%	82%	95%	86%	97%	96%	100%	98%
The pacing of the MLDS activities keeps me engaged in the content.	97%	93%	82%	95%	91%	100%	96%	100%	98%
The format of the MLDS activities (e.g. small groups, whole group, one-on-one) provides me an opportunity to engage with other participants.	97%	100%	93%	100%	91%	100%	100%	100%	100%
MLDS delivers its components (e.g., learning experiences, treatments, engagement platforms) as designed.	100%	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	98%
Professional Development									
MLDS professional development focuses on research-based leadership practices.	100%	96%	98%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	98%
The professional development content is relevant to my needs as a school leader.	97%	100%	93%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	96%
I use what I learn from MLDS to strengthen my leadership practices.	100%	96%	86%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	94%
I network with other MLDS principals.	79%	96%	79%	95%	95%	91%	96%	100%	77%
MLDS professional development promotes a common leadership vocabulary in Missouri.	97%	100%	80%	100%	95%	97%	96%	100%	92%
I was fully engaged in the MLDS learning content.	97%	93%	84%	91%	100%	100%	100%	100%	96%
What I have learned in MLDS trainings is useful in my role as a school leader.	95%	100%	91%	100%	100%	97%	100%	100%	96%

	Central	HOM	Kansas City	NE	NW	SC	SE	SW	St. Louis
Benefits and Value │ *I believe MLDS...*									
Provides opportunities for me to grow as a professional.	100%	96%	91%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	96%
Promotes collaboration with my peers.	95%	100%	93%	100%	100%	97%	100%	100%	98%
Provides customized support to address my specific needs.	92%	96%	70%	86%	86%	97%	96%	86%	90%
Strengthens my instructional leadership practices.	92%	100%	89%	100%	100%	97%	100%	100%	94%
Makes me a better school leader.	100%	100%	84%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	94%
Impact │ *I believe MLDS increases my ability to...*									
Observe teachers in the classroom.	97%	100%	88%	95%	100%	97%	93%	100%	92%
Identify different levels of quality of classroom instruction.	97%	100%	79%	95%	100%	100%	96%	100%	90%
Describe different levels of quality of classroom instruction.	95%	100%	74%	95%	95%	97%	96%	100%	94%
Provide teachers with constructive feedback.	100%	100%	86%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	96%
Support teachers to improve instruction.	92%	100%	79%	95%	100%	97%	96%	95%	94%
Address the well-being needs of teachers and students.	92%	96%	81%	100%	100%	97%	100%	95%	90%
Engage my school's faculty in discussions about pedagogy.	82%	96%	79%	86%	95%	94%	100%	100%	85%
I believe MLDS...									
Contributes to improved student achievement at my school.	87%	89%	77%	95%	100%	97%	93%	95%	88%
Makes me more likely to stay as a school leader in Missouri.	90%	93%	73%	95%	91%	91%	89%	100%	88%

	Central	HOM	Kansas City	NE	NW	SC	SE	SW	St. Louis
Supports the growth of school leaders in Missouri.	100%	93%	93%	100%	100%	100%	93%	100%	96%
Support from MLDS Specialists and Mentors | *The MLDS specialists in my Regional Professional Development Center...*									
Understand schools like mine.	95%	96%	91%	100%	91%	100%	100%	100%	96%
Help me to apply the MLDS content to practical situations.	92%	96%	84%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	92%
Effectively support me in my leadership role.	97%	96%	79%	100%	100%	100%	100%	95%	96%
Demonstrate a thorough understanding of the content areas.	97%	100%	91%	100%	91%	100%	100%	95%	98%
Clearly explain the MLDS content.	95%	100%	98%	100%	100%	100%	100%	95%	98%
Keep me engaged in the MLDS content.	92%	96%	86%	100%	100%	100%	100%	90%	94%
My mentor...									
Understands schools like mine.	92%	92%	90%	100%	100%	97%	88%	90%	96%
Helps me to apply the MLDS content to practical situations.	84%	85%	87%	100%	95%	97%	88%	90%	94%
Effectively supports me in my leadership role.	78%	88%	92%	100%	95%	97%	96%	95%	94%

Note. By RPDC region, the number of responses ranged from 37 to 39 for Central, from 26 to 28 for Heart of Missouri (HOM), from 38 to 44 for Kansas City, from 17 to 22 for Northeast (NE), 22 for Northwest (NW), from 32 to 35 for South Central (SC), from 25 to 27 for Southeast (SE), 21 for Southwest (SW), and from 46 to 52 for St. Louis. Of the 44 survey questions, Kruskal-Wallis tests, based on a five-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, indicated there were statistically significant differences on eight questions between the responses of principals in Kansas City and the Southeast regions, on five prompts between the Kansas City and the South Central regions, and one to two prompts among a few other regions.

Table 13 shows the responses of the specialists. Overall, the responses of the specialists are highly positive.

Table 13. Perceptions of MLDS Specialists, 2023–24

	n	A	U	D
Overall Perceptions				
The purpose of MLDS is clear to me.	27	100%	0%	0%
I know where to get information about MLDS.	27	100%	0%	0%
I receive information about MLDS on a regular basis.	27	100%	0%	0%
Principals receive support from my RPDC in applying what they have learned from MLDS at their school.	27	96%	4%	0%
MLDS helps principals to see the connection between developing their leadership skills and improving student learning at their school.	27	96%	4%	0%
Fidelity of Implementation				
The level of support provided by MLDS (e.g., number of sessions or contacts, frequency and duration of sessions) is appropriate for building principals' leadership capacity.	27	96%	4%	0%
The MLDS methods (e.g., regional meetings, state conferences, learning labs, one-to-one mentoring and coaching) are helpful in developing principals' leadership skills.	27	100%	0%	0%
Principals are regularly using what they learn from MLDS at their school.	27	93%	7%	0%
MLDS delivers its components (e.g., learning experiences, treatments, engagement platforms) as designed.	27	89%	7%	4%
Professional Development				
MLDS professional development focuses on research-based leadership practices.	27	96%	4%	0%
The professional development content is relevant to principals' needs as school leaders.	27	96%	0%	4%
I help principals to apply the content to practical situations.	27	96%	4%	0%
I understand the schools of the principals I support.	27	96%	4%	0%
The training materials are relevant to the principals.	27	96%	4%	0%
Principals use what they learn from MLDS to strengthen their leadership practices.	27	93%	7%	0%
Principals network with other MLDS principals.	27	96%	4%	0%
MLDS professional development promotes a common leadership vocabulary in Missouri.	27	93%	7%	0%
Benefits and Value │ *I believe MLDS…*				
Provides opportunities for principals to grow as professionals.	27	96%	4%	0%
Promotes collaboration among principals.	27	100%	0%	0%
Provides customized support to address principals' specific needs.	27	96%	4%	0%
Strengthens principals' instructional leadership practices.	27	89%	7%	4%
Makes principals better school leaders.	27	100%	0%	0%

	n	A	U	D
Impact | *I believe MLDS increases principals' ability to…*				
Observe teachers in the classroom.	27	93%	7%	0%
Identify different levels of quality of classroom instruction.	27	78%	15%	7%
Describe different levels of quality of classroom instruction.	27	81%	15%	4%
Provide teachers with constructive feedback.	27	93%	7%	0%
Support teachers to improve instruction.	27	85%	15%	0%
Address the well-being needs of teachers and students.	27	81%	19%	0%
Engage their school's faculty in discussions about pedagogy.	26	85%	15%	0%
I believe MLDS…				
Contributes to improved student achievement at the schools.	27	93%	7%	0%
Makes principals more likely to stay as school leaders in Missouri.	27	100%	0%	0%
Supports the growth of school leaders in Missouri.	27	100%	0%	0%
Support from Mentors to MLDS Principals | *Mentors in my RPDC…*				
Understand schools like the MLDS principals'.	27	93%	7%	0%
Help principals to apply the MLDS content to practical situations.	27	96%	4%	0%
Effectively support principals in their leadership roles.	27	96%	0%	4%