Conclusions

The findings indicated that Region 16 middle school English teachers are predominately white females, who were over 30 years old at the time of this study. Nearly one-half were employed at schools with less than 195 students, and many taught multiple grade levels. Half of the teachers had an academic degree in English, annually attended three to five days of professional development, and had more than 10 years of professional teaching experience. Sixty percent were certified in their subject area, and traveled between 30 and 90 miles to attend professional development. Teachers’ preferred professional development delivery methods were live workshops, Internet, and CD-ROM, with books ranked last. Future professional development opportunities should be delivered through live workshops, but distance barriers could be overcome with Internet and CD-ROM delivery methods.

Considering the distances the majority of teachers traveled for professional development, Internet and CD-ROM may be viable alternatives to live workshops. This may be important because half of the teachers did not have English degrees and only 40% were certified in their subject area. We would expect these teachers require more professional development opportunities because their content-knowledge, certification status, and education can affect student achievement (Ehrenberg & Brewer, 1995; Darling-Hammond, 1999; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Humphrey, Stewart, & Linhardt, 1994; McCutchen, Harry, Cunningham, Cox, Sidman, & Covill, 2002; Milanowski, Kimball, & White, 2004).

Teachers reported no TEKS objectives as having extreme high or no importance for middle school student learning. Teachers identified 10 objectives as having average importance to student learning. The two highest ranked objectives were: Use his/her own knowledge and experience to comprehend, and draw inferences such as conclusions or generalizations and
support them with text evidence and experience. They believed that using word origins as an aid to understanding historical influences on English word meanings was least important for student learning.

Teachers reported “not” having taught any of the TEKS objectives on a daily basis, and reported never having taught two of the 23 objectives. Only one TEKS objective “using his/her own knowledge and experience to comprehend” was reported as being taught daily. The remaining 20 TEKS objectives were taught at least monthly by the English teachers.

All Mean Weighted Discrepancy Scores were positive and indicated gaps existed between importance and teaching frequency for each TEKS objective. TEKS objectives with the greatest MWDS indicated the strongest need for professional development (Borich, 1980).

The largest gap was identified in the use of study strategies to learn and recall important ideas from texts such as preview, question, reread, and record, indicating teachers should be provided increased professional development opportunities for this TEKS objective. Because gaps were identified for all TEKS objectives, teachers require more professional development opportunities for each objective. Quality professional development in these TEKS objectives will increase teacher knowledge, increasing teaching frequency of these TEKS, ultimately resulting in increased student learning and achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Suk Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Ehrenberg & Brewer, 1995; Foorman & Torgesen, 2001; Gibson Consulting Group, 2004; Humphrey, Stewart, & Linhardt, 1994; McCutchen, Harry, Cunningham, Cox, Sidman, & Covill, 2002; Milanowski, Kimball, & White, 2004; van Driel, Beijaard, & Verloop, 2001).

This study identified key reading skills that middle school English teachers deemed important for student learning, and the gaps between importance and teaching frequency with
which middle school teachers specifically taught these skills. Knowledge of this information could be utilized for reading improvement programs in all content areas. Other subject-matter educators can use this information to target skills specific to student success, effectively supporting struggling readers and enhancing school achievement scores. Caution should be exercised when generalizing the results of this study to a broader population as the results may be applicable only to Region 16 middle school English teachers.

Additional study on the effects of demographic variables on reading skill discrepancy scores is needed. Possible questions relevant to this investigation may include: Does distance traveled for professional development opportunities affect discrepancy scores? Does having an English degree or certification status affect discrepancy scores? Do differences in groups’ discrepancy scores exist when compared by distance traveled, preferred professional development delivery method, and/or school size?