

# The Pre-K-8 School Leader in 2018

A 10-Year  
Study



*Ninth in a Series of  
Research Studies  
Launched in 1928*

**naesp**<sup>™</sup>  
National Association of  
Elementary School  
**Principals**

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**National Association of Elementary School Principals**  
*Serving all elementary and middle-level principals*



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# Foreword

As the nation progresses through the first quarter of the 21st century, the education community continues to strive toward ensuring the necessary conditions for all students to thrive. Toward that end, in the past decade the role of principal leadership in guiding teaching and learning has gained greater recognition. “Leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning,” wrote Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, and Anderson (2010, p. 9) in their now seminal research linking principal leadership to student success. But this thinking was not always the case. In 2002, when the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law, it was done so with 119 mentions of “principals” as school leaders. Fast-forward to the 2015 passage of the reauthorized version of the law: the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 mentions principal leadership no fewer than 210 times. Increased visibility and greater recognition for the critical role of school leaders—and in particular principals—in overall school success requires that now, more than ever before, we study, understand, and support principals in their leadership of learning communities.

Since the 1928 publication of its first 10-year study, *The K-8 Principal*, the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) has been doing just that—collecting data on the climate, challenges, and conditions that mark the principalship. *The Pre-K-8 School Leader in 2018: A 10-Year Study* is the ninth in this series of research studies, and it imparts new information about the current education climate; the challenges veteran, early career, and assistant principals face; the students they serve; and the conditions under which they work. It also can assist us in identifying trends and making predictions about the future. NAESP leadership and staff rely on the data from each succeeding survey to guide in strengthening advocacy and policy efforts, delivering communication related services, and providing professional learning opportunities to address the most pressing needs of our members.

## Policy

Principals historically have needed to adapt to dramatic shifts that impact their schools, including significant policy changes at the state and federal levels. For example, the 2008 study recorded principals’ reactions to NCLB, signed into law in early 2002. NCLB substantially altered the landscape of education across the nation, and the federal government was widely perceived as having too heavy a hand on education policy. In contrast, the recently enacted ESSA (2015) has been touted as returning a significant amount of control back to states.

Although it is too early to determine the impact of ESSA on student achievement, 2018 survey respondents foresee that the new law will have less impact on their role as principal and on their schools than previously with NCLB. Additionally, when asked to predict the effect of ESSA on students, the majority of respondents anticipated the new law would have a positive influence, specifically on the attention to the needs of all students as well as on the focus on student socioemotional needs. Most strikingly, respondents were much more positive about the potential effect of ESSA than the effect of NCLB on English language learners and the ability of schools to address the needs of the whole child.

## The K-8 Principal's Perspective

The top-ranked concern for 2018 responding principals was addressing the increase of students with emotional problems. In fact, respondents identified a number of student-related issues as being of moderate, high, and extreme concern. Among those issues identified were the management of student behavior, student mental health issues, absenteeism, lack of effective adult supervision at home, and student poverty. In contrast, none of the student-related issues were identified as a major concern in 2008. Clearly the concerns regarding student populations have shifted over the past decade.

Conditions of employment continue to be a source of additional pressure for school leaders participating in this study. The average number of reported hours per workweek has increased steadily over the past 90 years—from 44 hours in 1928, to 56 hours in 2008, to 61 hours in 2018. Additionally, the average number of school-related work hours per week outside of the school building was almost 8 hours for 2018 respondents—an increase of 1 hour over the past decade.

Between 2008 and 2018, the longevity of contracts decreased such that the majority of the contract terms shifted from 2 or more years in length in 2008 to 1 year in length in 2018. The months designated in principal contracts have steadily increased over time such that 50% of respondents in 2018 reported having a 12-month contract, compared to only 12% of respondents in 1958.

Other major 2018 takeaways from the 10-year study have implications for these areas:

- **Equity:** On average, principals surveyed were 50 years old, female, and White. The median school enrollment increased from 450 in 2008 to 505 in 2018. Further, 62% of principals indicated that the number of assistant principals assigned to their building

was not enough to ensure effective school leadership that meets the needs of all students.

- **Pipeline:** Most principals can and will retire in approximately 8 years if they remain in their present system, which according to the study, they intend to do. Average principal tenure is 11 years, with 7 years in their current school. No dramatic decrease was represented in the percentage of principals who have served for 20 or more years. Fewer than 5% of the administrators in this study reported entering the principalship through an alternative route, receiving the first principalship at 40 years of age, having 10 years' experience as elementary school teacher prior to becoming principal, or having 22 total years of experience in education.
- **Preparation and support:** Whereas more than half of respondents indicated they had participated in online development programs, respondents also indicated that practical experience as an administrator and as a teacher was the most valuable influence on their success. Principals identified improving student performance as the key area of need for professional development.
- **Authority:** Over the last three decades, respondents have noted having substantially less influence over district decisions concerning elementary schools and elementary education.

Responses to the 2018 NAESP 10-year study identify multiple areas of professional development need, including improving student performance, improving staff performance, understanding and applying technology, time management, using social media effectively, and school improvement planning. It is essential that states and districts focus on what principals identify as their learning needs and use that information, along with the growing awareness of new models, to support principal learning throughout the career span and to develop authentic, relevant and high-impact professional learning opportunities for building-level educational leaders.

As with prior NAESP 10-year studies, respondents conveyed the message that they find the work of leading schools to be gratifying. When asked if they would do it all over again, the majority agreed that they would and also would recommend the principalship as a career to others. This is the best news our survey can report. The leadership and staff of NAESP are proud to serve these dedicated school leaders and remain committed to our mission of supporting their efforts on behalf of children.

*L. Earl Franks, EdD, CAE*  
*Executive Director*

# Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge and thank a number of individuals for their contributions to this ninth edition of the NAESP 10-year study. Undertaking a project of this magnitude, which reports on the current state of the field while also reflecting back on patterns over the years, requires the time and attention of a good number of people. Foremost, we would like to thank the principals and assistant principals who completed the survey, without whom there would be no 10-year study. We understand and appreciate the time dedicated to completing a survey of this length.

Planning for and executing this edition of the 10-year study was a group effort under the leadership of former Executive Director Gail Connelly and current Executive Director Earl Franks. In addition to Gail and Earl, we wish to thank Deborah Tyler, Honor Fede, Kelly Pollit, and Scott Richardson for their participation in the development and review of the 2018 survey instrument. It is important to note that this 10-year study occurred in the midst of NAESP leadership transition, and we sincerely appreciate the time that Gail, Earl, and their respective leadership teams dedicated to ensuring the quality and focus of the study. Following NAESP's leadership transition, Gail Morgan played a significant role in keeping the project on track, offering her knowledge of the needs of the NAESP membership and leadership and bringing to the project the expertise of Kaylen Tucker and Danny Carlson.

We would also like to thank our team, which included Kathleen Winn, Andrew Pendola, and Scott Richardson, who enthusiastically dedicated their time and expertise to sharing the story of today's pre-K-8 school leader.

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# Preface

This ninth iteration of the NAESP 10-year study documents a variety of trends and changes in the work and working conditions of leaders in pre-K-8 schools. Taken together with previous NAESP studies, which have been conducted since 1928, the findings provide insight into key factors and trends impacting the public school system generally and school leadership specifically.

In his foreword to the 1988 NAESP 10-year study, then Executive Director Sam Sava shared,

In my 35 years as an educator, I have witnessed and experienced many changes in the principalship. A lot of them have been changes for the better: principals today certainly enjoy more prestige, higher salaries, and greater authority than they did when I was a rookie. But some of the changes have been troubling. (Sava, 1988, p. xi)

The decades since the 1988 study was published have been particularly challenging for educational leaders and have led to significant shifts in the focus of their work. Shortly before the administration of the 1988 survey, *A Nation At Risk* was published (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), ushering in a “tidal wave of educational reform” (Sava, 1988, p. xi).

The 1983 report was quickly followed by a series of additional “national reports,” each driven by the desire to promote a particular point of view and all calling for improvement of the educational system so that the United States might more effectively compete in the “information age” and in a global economy. (Doud, 1988, p. xiii)

Since that time, the numbers of national reports and efforts to promote more effective and efficient schools have multiplied. Most significant have been the accountability movement and the emphasis on school choice with expanded alternatives to local public schools. The accountability pressures on school leaders have been further reinforced by a number of reform efforts over the years including school report cards, performance-based funding, and school turnaround schemes, such as school reconstitution. These efforts were designed and implemented as significant economic and demographic shifts took place within our nation, shifts that required schools to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, larger numbers of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch, and increased percentages of students with special needs. “These students grace America’s classrooms but test the fiscal resources and the leadership abilities of principals and their staffs in meeting their needs” (Sava, 1999, p. ix).

What effect have these and other changes, such as changes in technology and access to information, had on the role of the pre-K-8 school leader? What are the implications of these changes for those who currently serve in or inspire to these roles? Like those that preceded it, the 2018 NAESP 10-year study attempts to address these and other questions. This report on data from the 2018 NAESP 10-year study documents a decade of changes and offers insight into the current realities of leadership in pre-K-8 schools.

NAESP has asked a consistent set of questions over the last 90 years and supplemented those questions over time. The questions “represent an attempt to generate a comprehensive picture of the characteristics of elementary school principals; their attitudes about schools, the principalship, and their preparation for the position; and the assessment of problems facing their schools” (Protheroe, 2008, p. xvi).

We found it enlightening to compare the findings of this 2018 study with those from years past, to follow trends and identify new developments. For example, while variations on supporting student learning have consistently appeared among the key concerns of educational leaders, other concerns have shifted over time. For example, in 1988 site-based management was considered a key challenge for educational leaders; by 1998, a key challenge involved understanding and utilizing technology for learning and management purposes. Today, student mental health issues are among school leaders’ top concerns.

Collectively, the studies document the history of the elementary school principal, and individually they provide insight into the issues of key importance to leadership at the time of the study. The insights have implications for those who currently serve as school leaders, those who support school leaders, and those who prepare school leaders.

# Chapter 1:

## The Typical Elementary School Principal Today

Each of the 10-year study reports has provided a brief overview—a picture—of school principals. Bill Pharis and Sally Zakariya, authors of the 1978 study, talked about such profiles and about elementary school principals:

Principals are not average people. They occupy positions of leadership and respect, positions they have earned on the basis of advanced academic degrees and years of professional experience. By almost any measure one might use, principals would have to be considered high achievers. Although principals are by no means average themselves, it is nevertheless interesting to try to construct the profile of an average or typical principal. (Pharis & Zakariya, 1978, p. 1)

According to the data collected in this 2018 study of the elementary school principal, the typical principal is female, White, and 50 years old. She could retire in about 8 years if she stays in the present system and intends to do so.

Appointed to her first principalship when she was 40 years old, she has been a principal for about 11 years and principal in her current school for 7 years. She has taught about a decade at the elementary school level, and, in total, has 22 years of experience in education. She has a master's degree and completed her preparation at a university-based program after teaching for a number of years. In terms of helping her do her job well, she feels that on-the-job experiences as a principal have been most helpful to her, followed by her teaching experience. She also noted that graduate education has been of some or high value.

She characterizes her authority to make decisions concerning her school as moderate, although the level of authority varies by responsibility. She also feels the authority given to her by the school board and superintendent is in balance with her responsibilities. In addition, she feels she has some influence over decisions impacting elementary education as opposed to little or much influence. She perceives no change in the degree to which decision-making authority had been delegated to her school site in recent years.

Over the past few years, the extent to which she uses assessment data for instructional planning has increased, along with her involvement in helping teachers use effective

instructional practice and her efforts to develop the school as a professional learning community. She spends much of her time in contact with staff, especially in her supervisory role. Her awareness and involvement have increased dramatically regarding student mental health and student socioemotional awareness.

She considers herself to have primary responsibility for supervision and evaluation of staff as well as for selection of teachers, but she is likely to share responsibility for instructional improvement with others in the school. She feels her relationships with individuals in the school, community, and district office are excellent—particularly with respect to students and teachers. In contrast, she perceives her relationship with the school board to be good rather than excellent.

This principal, though, still feels she has much to learn. Indeed, the six areas in which she would most like to receive assistance in improving her abilities are improving student performance, improving staff performance, understanding and applying technology, time management, using social media effectively, and school improvement planning. She is most likely to participate in school- and district-provided professional development as opposed to other professional development opportunities.

The principalship is her sole responsibility, a change from times when principals were also expected to teach. However, an assistant principal is not assigned to her building unless she is assigned to a school with more than 600 students. Despite leading 505 students and supervising between 36 and 70 staff members, her district also has no plans to assign principalship responsibilities—some administrative and others instructional—to two people so that the job might be manageable. She considers the school's parents to be highly supportive and highly involved with the school's programs.

The typical principal has an employment contract with her district that addresses salary and fringe benefit provisions as well as district expectations. In addition, she has a written job description that is standard for all principals in her district, and she is evaluated on the degree to which she meets those expectations. She has tenure, but as a professional employee rather than as a principal. She is evaluated annually, and student performance results are taken into account in her evaluation. Goal setting is part of the evaluation process, and she is held accountable for progress toward meeting these goals. Portfolio assessment is not an option for her as part of the evaluation process. Her sense of job security has stayed about the same in the last few years.

Major concerns facing her school include an *increase in the numbers of students with emotional problems, student mental health issues, students not performing to their levels of potential, and*

*providing a continuum of services for students who are at risk.* The concern about the mental health of students was a clear and consistent concern of respondents.

She has mixed feelings concerning the impact of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015). The areas that she feels ESSA may have the most positive impact include *the use of assessment data to drive instruction, a focus on instruction, attention to the needs of all students, and focus on students' socioemotional needs.* Alternatively, she feels ESSA may have a negative impact on the following areas: *pressure on staff due to accountability pressures, morale of educators, and focus on nontested subject areas.*

She is likely to have a 12-month contract and works, on average, 61 hours per week during the formal school year and 42 hours per week outside the formal school year. Her annual salary is about \$96,000, and merit/incentive pay is not available to her.

Her morale is somewhere between moderately high and high. If she were starting out all over again, she would probably, although not definitely, choose to be an elementary school principal. However, she is concerned about the ability of public education to attract quality people to the principalship, citing a salary not commensurate with responsibilities, time demands of the job, an ever-increasing workload, and stress as factors that could discourage good candidates.

## Similarities and Differences Over Time

In this section, we highlight some important similarities and changes over the last decade. With respect to the characteristics of elementary principals, they remain largely White and female and have similar levels of experience as both a teacher and as a principal. They also tend to hold similar levels of education and report experiencing similar types of preparation experiences.



### A Retrospective Look at the Diversification of the Work Force in 1948

During the early reports, much of the written concern centered on reporting the proportions of men and women leading elementary schools. The pattern of the numbers of men and women who served as principals fluctuated throughout the years. In 1948, there was a difference in percentages of men and women serving as elementary principal, at 59% and 41%, respectively (National Education Association, 1948).

A secondary area of imbalance was between teaching principals and supervising principals. Women were more readily teaching principals, and more men held the supervising principal position (National Education Association, 1948).

When describing the principal profile, data on racial and ethnic background of elementary principals were not offered until the 1978 report (24 years after the decision of landmark court case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954)). The 1978 data revealed the imbalance between the percentages of principals of color compared to White principals. For example, in the Northeast, 95.3% of principals were White. In 1978, the Southeast reported the highest percentage of elementary principals of color at 19.3%.

With respect to the characteristics of their schools and districts, a greater percentage of the 2018 respondents than the 2008 respondents were responsible for leading more than one school. In addition, the median total enrollment of respondents increased slightly over the past decade. There were only minimal changes, however, with respect to the diversity of the students in schools. Despite some reports by specific states about the number of assistant principals increasing in the past years, similar percentages of respondents reported having an assistant principal in 2008 and 2018.

Interestingly, the perception of parent support declined from 2008 to 2018, with a 15-percentage-point decrease in the percentage of respondents feeling that parents were highly supportive. Similarly, respondents also perceived a decrease in the level of involvement of parents.

Whereas the 2008 respondents reported an increase in their level of involvement in about 50% of the areas included in that survey, the 2018 respondents indicated an increase in involvement

in almost all of the 27 areas included in the survey. Thus, there appears to be a fairly significant shift in the last decade concerning the amount of involvement of principals in a wide variety of areas in schooling. Whereas both groups of respondents reported increasing their involvement regarding student assessment issues, the 2018 respondents noted a substantial shift in the degree to which they are involved in addressing student mental health and socioemotional needs.

With respect to responsibility for hiring teachers, supervising staff, and ensuring instructional improvement in their school, similar percentages of the 2008 and 2018 respondents reported having primary responsibility for hiring staff. There were changes, however, in the patterns of responses between 2008 and 2018 respondents regarding responsibility for supervising staff and for instructional improvement. Specifically, there was a decrease from 2008 to 2018 in the percentage of respondents reporting they had primary responsibility in these areas and an increase in the percentage of reporting they shared the responsibility with others in the school.

From 2008 to 2018, there was a slight decline in the percentage of respondents reporting that they had a high level of authority to make decisions concerning their own school. There was also a decrease in the percentage of respondents reporting that district personnel delegated greater decision-making authority to the school over the prior 3 years. Despite these changes, there was no change in the percentage of respondents reporting an appropriate balance between their authority to make decisions and the degree to which they were held responsible for their school.

While the vast majority of respondents in both years reported having a contract, there was a fairly dramatic increase in the percentage of respondents reporting having a 1-year contract rather than a longer contract over the past decade. With regard to the specificity of the contract, there was a marked increase from 2008 to 2018 in the percentage of respondents reporting the inclusion of both a specific salary and description of fringe benefits in the contract. In addition, there was a sizable increase in the percentage of respondents noting that the manner in which they would be evaluated was included in the contract language. Further, similar percentages of respondents in the 2 years reported having a written contract and the terms of the contract.



**A Retrospective Look at Contracts in 1988**

As noted in the 1988 study, “For a leader who must be prepared to make some tough decisions, the sense of stability and security that goes with a professional contract with the school district is of crucial importance” (Doud, 1988, p. 75).

In the continuation of a 30-year trend, respondents reported an increase in their salary and the amount of time they spend on the job during the school year. A lower percentage of respondents, however, noted they participated in any type of merit pay plan.

With respect to the frequency of evaluation, there was an increase from 2008 to 2018 in the percentage of respondents reporting that they were evaluated every academic year. Similarly, from 2008 to 2018, there was an increase in the percentage of respondents reporting goal setting was part of their evaluation process and that they were held accountable for meeting the goals set.

There were slight changes in the reported professional development needs from 2008 to 2018. Specifically, a greater percentage of 2018 respondents noted a need for professional development around improving student achievement than in 2008. In contrast, both sets of respondents reported wanting assistance in the use of technology and improving staff performance.

Finally, the 2008 and 2018 surveys both asked respondents to indicate their concerns in a variety of areas related to the school, program, students, staff, stakeholder issues, and management issues. With respect to the overall school, concerns of respondents shifted from 2008 issues such as student assessment and instructional practices to 2018 issues associated with student mental health and socioemotional needs. Interestingly, in 2008, none of the student-related issues was identified as a major concern by a majority of respondents. This was not the case in 2018, with respondents noting the following issues: management of student behavior, student mental health issues, absenteeism, lack of effective adult supervision at home, and student poverty. Regarding staff, the same two issues were rated as the highest concerns by respondents in both 2008 and 2018—namely teacher performance/effectiveness and professional development of staff.

Thus, there has been a fair degree of similarity in the perceptions of respondents in 2008 and 2018. There were, however, some notable shifts from 2008 to 2018. Perhaps the most important shifts were related to the amount of time spent working, salary, principals' own evaluation, level of involvement, and concerns about student well-being.

## Chapter 2:

# Experience and Professional Preparation of Elementary School Principals

There is no question that the work of school leadership is challenging or that achieving high-quality education for all children in all schools is strongly tied to the capacity of educational leaders (Hallinger & Heck, 1996a, 1996b; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000, 2005, 2008; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). In the second edition of *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do*, NAESP highlighted the role of principal as becoming “more complex and challenging,” with these professionals no longer simply managers of their schools (NAESP & Collaborative Communications Group, 2008, p. 2).

Furthermore, a growing body of evidence has demonstrated the link between leadership preparation and practice (Leithwood et al., 2004; Seashore Louis et al., 2010; Young & Crow, 2016; Young, Crow, Murphy, & Ogawa, 2009). Thus far, research has revealed links between characteristics of principal preparation programs and graduate career outcomes (Fuller, Hollingworth, & An, 2016; Fuller, Young, & Baker, 2011) and demonstrated relationships between specific program features and the perceived success of school leaders (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007; Leithwood, Jantzi, Coffin, & Wilson, 1996; Orphanos & Orr, 2014; Orr, 2010).

Essential to adequately preparing principals for their leadership roles and responsibilities is having a strong sense of the knowledge and skills they need. Over the last three decades, NAESP has worked with its partner organizations to articulate standards for school leaders. Beginning with the publication of *Proficiencies for Principals* in 1986, NAESP started on a journey of identifying the expectations for exemplary educational leadership preparation and practice.

Most recently, NAESP participated, with other members of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), in the development of the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) and the National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) standards. PSEL is the latest version of national educational leadership standards, replacing the Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards of 2008, and NELP is the

newest version of national educational leadership preparation standards, replacing the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) standards.

The NAESP 10-year studies serve as complementary resources to NAESP's standard-setting work by providing trend data concerning the paths people take to the principalship. In addition, the researchers ask principals about the training and experiences that have been of most value to them. These opinions can provide a strong direction for those planning higher education graduate programs as well as associations and state departments of education offering development opportunities for both new and experienced principals.

**Question:** Counting this year, how many years have you been employed as a principal? How many of those years were in your current school?

Responding principals reported a mean of 11 years total experience as a principal, representing an increase of 1 year from the 2008 figure, and with a lower percentage of respondents (17.6%) reporting fewer than 4 years of experience than was the case in 2008 (20.8%). This percentage is still much higher than reported in 1998 (7.1%).

Almost 40% of the responding principals have been in the position for fewer than 4 years, with overall means of 11 years as a principal and 7 years in their current schools reported.

Male principals had been in the position for 2 more years than female principals (12 and 10 years), which is a closer interval than in 2008, when the mean difference was 4 years (13 years for men and 9 years for women). Like in 2008, female principals are, on average, older than their male counterparts. In 2008, the difference was an average of 2 years (male: 49 years old; female: 51 years), and in 2018 the difference is an average of 3 years (male: 49 years old; female: 52 years). Women also have more years of experience than men. In 2008 the difference was an average of 1 year (male: 24 years; female: 25 years). In 2018 the difference is an average of 2 years (male: 21 years; female: 23 years). For both men and women the mean number of years serving as an educational professional decreased. See Table 2.1.

When considering other experience patterns of male and female principals, there has been a dramatic decrease in the percentage of principals who have served for 20 years or more. In 2018, 2.5% of males and 4.6% of females reported serving as a principal for more than 20 years. In 2008, the percentages were much higher, with 23.1% of the males and 7.5% of the females

reporting this experience. In both cases, the percentage of women is less than that of their male counterparts. In comparison to 2008, the percentage differences between male and female principals have decreased significantly, indicating a shift toward more females in the elementary school principalship.

Table 2.1  
*Percentage Results of Total Years Employed as Principal in Current School, as Principal All Together, and as a Professional in Education, 2018*

Subgroup	Years as a principal				Gender	
	Total	< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
In current school						
Less than 4 years	38.7	81.6	30.6	15.7	39.1	36.6
4–9 years	33.6	17.7	48.3	22.1	31.0	35.0
10–19 years	24.5	0.7	20.8	51.2	25.3	25.9
20+ years	3.3	0.0	0.3	11.1	4.6	2.5
<i>Mean number of years</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>7</i>	<i>7</i>
As a principal all together (including years in present school)						
Less than 4 years	17.6	73.5	0.0	0.0	36.6	39.1
4–9 years	30.2	26.5	49.7	0.0	35.0	31.0
10–19 years	39.2	0.0	50.3	53.5	25.9	25.3
20+ years	13.1	0.0	0.0	46.5	2.5	4.6
<i>Mean number of years</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>10</i>
As a professional in education (including years as a principal)						
Less than 10 years	1.0	3.4	0.3	0.0	1.2	0.3
10–14 years	7.0	15.7	6.8	0.0	8.6	5.9
15–19 years	17.3	30.6	20.7	1.2	22.4	15.0
20–24 years	24.3	25.9	30.3	12.8	26.4	23.4
25–29 years	19.2	17.0	21.4	17.4	13.2	20.9
30 + years	31.2	7.5	21.1	68.6	28.2	34.3
<i>Mean number of years</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>23</i>

Other interesting patterns are evident in the difference between the 1998, 2008, and 2018 responses. Whereas 17.6% of respondents in 2018 reported having fewer than 4 years of experience, the percentage was higher in 2008 (20.8%) and lower in 1998 (only 7.1%). At the more experienced end of the spectrum (20 or more years of experience as a principal), only 13.1% of the 2018 respondents served for this period of time, down from 14.2% in 2008 and much lower than 20.5% in 1998.

The average age within the experience subgroups is also shifting, with the two more experienced groups older now than in 1998 but appearing to level off by 2018. For the subgroup of 5–14 years experience, the average age in 1998 was 47, 51 in 2008, and 50 in 2018. For the most experienced principals (15 or more years), the average age in 1998 was 53, 57 in 2008, and 57 in 2018. For the subgroup with less than 5 years of experience, the shift is slightly different: average age in 1998 was 45, 44 in 2008, and 47 in 2018. See Table 2.2.

Table 2.2  
*Mean Age Based on Years as a Principal and Gender, 1998–2018*

Subgroup	1998	2008	2018
Years as a principal			
< 5	45	44	47
5–14	47	51	50
15 +	53	57	57
Gender			
Male		49	49
Female		51	52

**Question:** How many years (including your years as a principal) have you been employed as a professional in education?

The median number of years in education has held steady since 1998 at 25 years, an increase of 7 years since the 1968 study (see Table 2.3). The percentage of respondents who had served in their current school as a principal for 1–3 years and 4–9 years decreased since 2008 (in 2008 41.5% had served 1–3 years, compared to 38.7% in 2018; in 2008, 39.4% had served 4–9 years, compared to 33.6% in 2018), whereas those respondents serving as principal in their own school for longer than 10 years increased. The patterns are more mixed when considering the number of total years of service as a principal in any school, as shown in Table 2.4.

Table 2.3  
*Percentage of Principals by Total Years of Employment as a Professional in Education, 1968–2018*

Years as education professional	1968	1978	1988	1998	2008	2018
9 or less	13.3	7.0	2.4	1.0	4.0	1.0
10–19	40.3	38.4	36.8	15.9	32.4	24.3
20–29	18.6	43.6	44.5	58.3	26.2	43.6
30+	27.7	11.0	16.3	24.9	37.4	31.2

Principals reported an average of 25 years as a professional in education.

Table 2.4  
*Percentage of Principals by Years as Principal in Current School (Including Current Year) and All Together, 1928–2018*

Years as principal	1928	1948	1958	1968	1978	1988	1998	2008	2018
	In current school								
1–3 years				37.6	34.1	36.7	25.2	41.5	38.7
4–9				32.4	42.7	37.6	45.9	39.4	33.6
10–19				23.1	19.7	21.3	22.6	16.2	24.5
20+				6.9	3.5	4.2	6.3	2.9	3.3
<i>Median years</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>5</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>5</i>
	All together								
1–3 years				22.3	15.4	16.6	7.1	20.8	17.6
4–9				30.1	33.8	29.4	34.3	34.3	30.2
10–19				31.6	37.7	36.0	38.1	30.7	39.2
20 or more				16.0	32.2	17.9	20.5	14.2	13.1
<i>Median years</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>10.5</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>9</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>10</i>	<i>10</i>

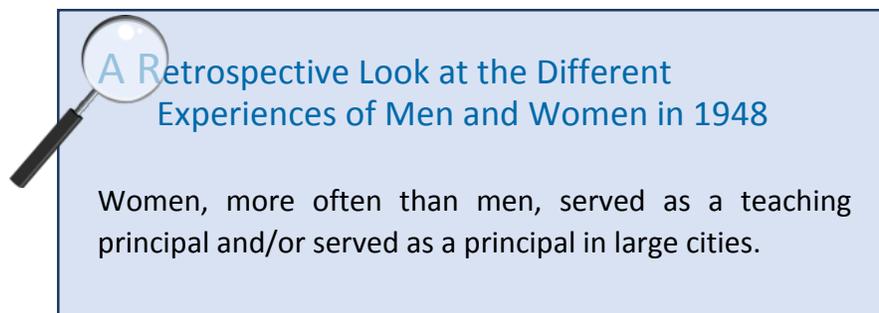
**Question:** Have you ever served as a principal in another school district?

Answers in response to this item were remarkably similar to those received in 1998 and 2008. In all cases, about one third of the principals said they had worked in another school district (35.0% in 1998, 34.3% in 2008, 32.3% in 2018). Not surprisingly, the more experienced principals were much more likely to report having worked previously in another school district (50.6% of those with 15 or more years of experience, down from 63.4% reported in 2008). Of these, 24.4% had worked in more than two other districts, as contrasted with only 12.9% of the principals with fewer than 5 years of experience. See Table 2.5.

Just under one third of the responding principals previously worked in another school district.

Table 2.5  
*Percentage of Principals Who Have Served in Other School Districts, 2018*

Subgroup	Total	Years as principal			Gender	
		< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
Yes	32.3	12.9	31.3	50.6	38.5	28.4
No	67.7	87.1	68.7	49.4	61.5	71.6
Of those who have:						
One other district	60.9	85.7	69.6	47.7	52.9	67.1
Two districts	23.4	7.1	21.7	27.9	29.4	20.5
More than two districts	15.6	7.1	8.7	24.4	17.7	12.5



**A Retrospective Look at the Different Experiences of Men and Women in 1948**

Women, more often than men, served as a teaching principal and/or served as a principal in large cities.

**Question:** How many years did you teach at the elementary level before becoming a principal?

Of the principals who reported elementary teaching experience, the mean number of years was 10, the same as reported in 2008 and 1998. Female principals taught for a higher average number of years (11.9) than male principals (6.9 years), which is similar to the 2008 numbers. It will be interesting to see whether this trend is maintained in the 2028 study.

One interesting shift since 2008 concerns the average number of years of teaching experience prior to becoming a principal. In 2008, principals with fewer years in the position reported more years teaching than more experienced principals (those with fewer than 5 years as a principal reported 11 years of teaching; those with 15 or more years reported 8 years of teaching). However, in 2018 those with less than 5 years of experience as principals had 10.3 years of experience, those who had served as a principal 5–14 years had an average of 10.5 years of experience, and those who had been principals for 15 years or more had 9.2 years of teaching experience. See Table 2.6.

Table 2.6  
*Mean Years Elementary Teaching Experience  
 Prior to Becoming a Principal, 2018*

Subgroup	Mean years
Years as a principal	
< 5	10.3
5–14	10.5
15 +	9.2
Gender	
Male	6.9
Female	11.9
Total	10.1

Over 96% of respondents reported having prior teaching experience, and 93% of those averaged at least 10 years of elementary school teaching experience.

### Question: What is the highest college degree you hold?

To provide some historical perspective on this question, 54% of the respondents in 1928 reported they had no academic degree, and in 1958, 21% of the principals said they had “no education related to elementary school administration” before becoming an elementary school principal. Today, it is unusual for an individual to practice as a principal without an advanced degree (0.2%). See Table 2.7.

Table 2.7  
*Percentage of Elementary Principals by Highest Degree and Years as Principal, 2018*

Degree	Total	Years as a principal		
		< 5	5–14	15+
Bachelor’s	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.6
Master’s	65.2	71.0	62.6	64.7
Certificate of advanced studies/specialist	23.0	16.6	26.5	22.4
Doctorate	11.7	12.4	10.9	12.4

In the 1998 report, Doud and Keller talked about the continuing increase in educational levels of principals over the history of the 10-year studies. They noted that in 1928, approximately 15% of elementary principals held a master’s degree. By 1948, the percentage of principals with master’s degrees had increased to 64% of respondents. The 1998 survey provided evidence that not only had the master’s degree become a standard requirement for the principalship, there also appeared to be a move toward even more preparation requirements. Indeed, today over 65% of respondents had a master’s degree, 23% had a specialist degree, and almost 12% had a doctorate. See Figure 2.1.

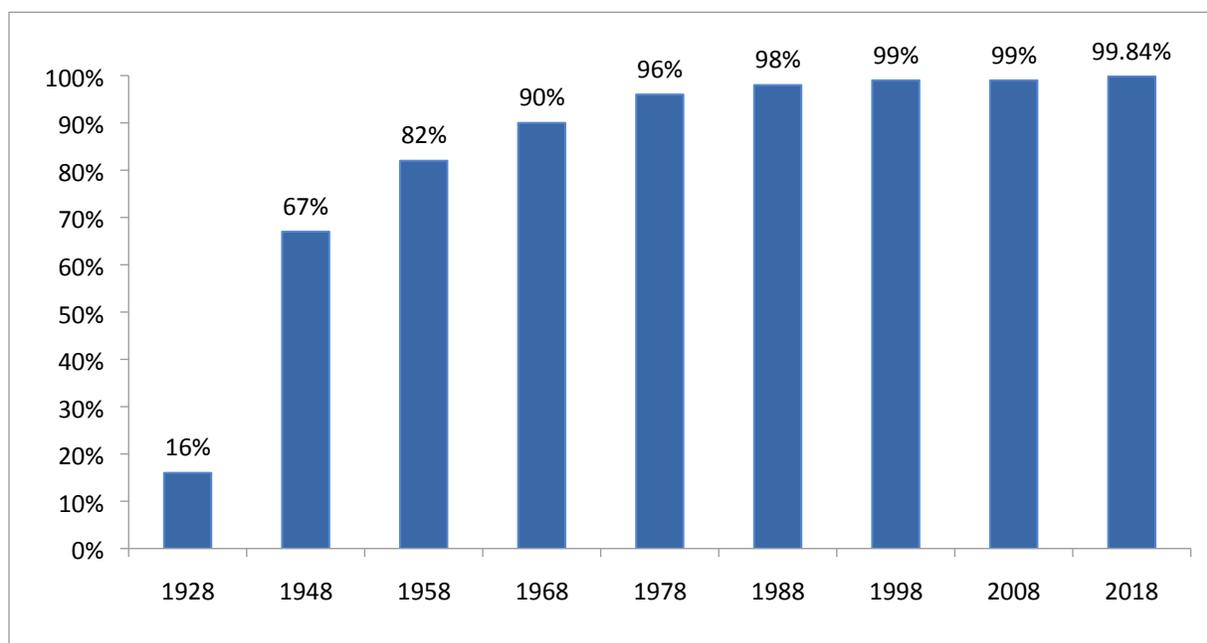


Figure 2.1. Percentage of principals with a master's degree or higher, 1928–2018.

These high educational standards are similar to those reported in 2008 and in 1998. Almost 12% have a doctorate (10% in 2008), and an additional 23% have a specialist degree (28.9% in 2008). Among the experience subgroups, it is evident that the principals continue to work on their formal education: 34.8% of the respondents with 15 or more years of experience had a degree beyond a master's degree (down from 42.3% in 2008), as compared to 29% of the respondents with less than 5 years of experience (also down from 33.4% in 2008).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2017) survey data align with our findings (Taie, Goldring, & Spiegelman, 2017). Among public school principals, 2.3% nationwide had a bachelor's degree or less, 61.3% had a master's degree, 26.6% had an education specialist or professional diploma, and 9.9% held a doctorate.

A master's degree or higher is considered a necessity for a principal candidate.

**Question:** Did you enter the principalship through a traditional route (e.g., teaching experiences and graduate study in educational leadership) or an alternate route (e.g., directly from business or another field without educational experience)?

Over the last 20 years, there has been interest in tapping people for the principalship who have no experience in education. The argument here is that individuals with management skills from other sectors also should be able to manage schools. This question was added to the NAESP 10-year study in 2008 as a source of baseline data. Responses to this question in 2008 indicated that only 1.8% of responding principals entered the profession through an alternative route. The percentages are still low today, although they have increased in some areas. Specifically, for those individuals with teaching experience, 2.6% of respondents reported attending a non-university-based preparation program, and another 1.2% reported having no training (see Table 2.8). Another 0.5% of respondents indicated that they entered the principalship from a noneducation field. Interestingly, the percentage of women who attended a non-university-based program was higher (3.8%) than their male counterparts (1.2%), but the percentage of respondents with no preparation was higher for men (1.8%) than women (0.9%).

Table 2.8  
*Percentage of Principals Entering Through Traditional and Alternative Routes*

Route	Total	Years as principal			Gender	
		< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
Teaching, then completing university-based preparation program	95.7	94.5	95.9	96.5	96.5	94.7
Teaching, then completing a non-university-based preparation program	2.6	4.1	2.7	1.2	1.2	3.8
Teaching, then no principal preparation program	1.2	1.4	0.7	1.8	1.8	0.9
Directly from noneducation field	0.5	0.0	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.6

Fewer than 5% of the responding principals reported entering the principalship through an alternative route.



### A Retrospective Look at Preparation Program Courses in 1928

Three pieces of note emerge from prior reports concerning coursework to prepare principals. One concerns the efficiency and concern for course coherence. The authors of the 1928 report cautioned, “Unnecessary duplication in the teaching of professional topics should be avoided” (National Education Association, 1928, p. 150).

The 1928 report was very specific in course recommendations to be included in the full preparation of future school leaders. Principals should have content-area training including three courses in the arts (fine, industrial, and music), three English courses (composition, literature, and public speaking), one course in foreign language, two courses in healthful living (including physical education and hygiene), four courses in the natural sciences (general chemistry, general physics, general science, and biology), and three courses in social studies (economics, modern history, and sociology). “A person preparing for the principalship should have as wide an experience with academic subjects as possible within the limitations of the whole training program” (National Education Association, 1928, p. 153).

The 1948 report was released only a few years after the conclusion of World War II, and university undergraduate course options reflected the concerns of the current era. A common course selection for university students was military science (although popular, this was not a course specifically suggested in the training of future principals). As class selections have evolved over the years, typical courses of study do not include, for example, military science or hygiene—another common course in 1948. When wondering if courses would change to reflect other public concerns or developments, we did not see a trend. During the Space Race of the 1960s, engineering and science courses were not included in course recommendations (courses in psychology were recommended, however).

Higher education training continues to evolve in other ways. Now many postsecondary and graduate courses, or even entire programs, are offered online.

## Question: How old were you when you were appointed to your first principalship?

The mean age at which the 2018 respondents were appointed to their first principalship is 40, the same as in 2008 but an increase since the 1998 survey, when the mean age was 36. The trend toward taking a position at a later age, which began sometime after 1978, may have leveled off. According to Doud and Keller (1998), "There is emerging evidence that suggests the pool of acceptable candidates—both male and female—is older and more experienced than it has been in the past" (p. 39). In the 2018 group, 27.8% of respondents were 45 or older when first appointed. This is down from 32.1% in 2008, but up from 13.4% in 1998.

Although male and female principals reported some differences with regard to their age at first appointment, the gap has narrowed slightly since the 2008 study. Specifically, females continue to be, on average, older when first appointed; however, in 2008 the difference was 6 years (age of 36 for males as compared to 42 for females), but today the difference is 4 years (2018: age of 37 for males as compared to 41 for females). Among female principals, 35.1% were at least 45 when first appointed, as compared to 12.2% among males. See Table 2.9.

Table 2.9  
*Percentage of Principals by Age at Time of First Appointment as Principal, 2018*

Age	Total	Years as principal			Gender	
		< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
< 26 years old	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.6	0.6	0.0
26–29	6.7	2.1	7.1	9.9	11.0	4.1
30–34	17.7	6.9	18.0	26.2	26.6	12.8
35–39	24.7	21.2	24.2	28.5	31.8	23.1
40–44	23.0	26.0	22.5	21.5	17.9	25.0
45–49	16.0	22.6	15.3	11.6	8.7	21.3
50+	11.8	21.2	12.9	1.7	3.5	13.8
<i>Mean age</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>37</i>	<i>41</i>

The mean age of appointment to first principalship increased for 30 years but has leveled off over the last 10 years.

Table 2.10  
*Mean Age at Time of First  
Appointment as Principal, 1978–2018*

Year	Mean age
1978	33
1988	34
1998	36
2008	40
2018	40

**Question:** How many of the different professional positions have you held?

The percentage of principals reporting elementary-level teaching experience has decreased over time. The percentage decreased from 89.6% in 1998 to 79.3% in 2008. Over the last 10 years, the percentage decreased further to 77.7% (see Table 2.11). Similarly, the percentage of principals who taught at the middle/junior high or high school level also decreased. In 2008, the percentage of respondents who had taught middle/junior high was 47%; today it is 32%. The percentage of respondents who had taught high school was 25.6% in 2008; today it is 22.5%. Female principals (85.7%) were more likely than males (65.5%) to report elementary teaching experience, although they were less likely to report teaching experience at the other two levels. See Table 2.11.

In addition, the percentage of respondents reporting experience as an assistant principal has decreased at all levels except high school (elementary: 34.6%, down from 37.5% in 2008; middle/junior high: 15%, down from 10.8% in 2008; high school: 11.3%, up from 10.9% in 2008). Respondents also reported increased experience in other types of positions, including coach (30%, up from 23.9% in 2008), school supervisor/curriculum specialist (22.5%, up from 16.1% in 2008), central office administrator (11.3%, up from 10.5% in 2008), counselor (5.4%, up from 4.9% in 2008), and college faculty (13.5%, up from 10.5% in 2008).

Principals have a wide variety of prior professional experiences.

Table 2.11  
 Percentage of Principals Holding Position Prior to Taking Principalship, 2018

Prior position	Total	Years as principal			Gender	
		< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
Teacher						
Elementary	77.7	75.5	76.2	82.0	65.5	85.7
Middle/junior high	32.0	34.7	32.3	29.1	33.3	30.5
High school	22.5	28.6	22.1	18.0	33.3	16.8
Assistant principal						
Elementary	34.6	34.7	39.1	26.7	31.6	37.4
Middle/junior high	15.0	17.0	11.9	18.6	16.7	13.1
High school	11.3	12.2	11.9	9.3	16.7	9.0
Counselor	5.4	4.8	5.1	6.4	4.6	5.3
School supervisor/ curriculum specialist	22.5	33.3	22.8	12.8	16.1	25.6
Coach	30.0	26.5	30.6	32.0	51.7	18.1
Central office admin.	11.3	8.8	9.5	16.3	8.1	13.4
College faculty	13.5	17.7	10.5	15.1	11.5	14.0

*Note.* Respondents were asked to check all experiences that applied to them, so the totals in the table exceed 100%.

### Question: How would you characterize the value of each of the following to you as an elementary school principal?

Respondents were asked to assess 15 experiences that contribute to leadership development over the course of one's career, ranking them as *very valuable*, *somewhat valuable*, *of little value*, and *of no value*. As shown in Table 2.12, in addition to on-the-job experience as a principal and a teacher, respondents ranked networking with peers, experience as an assistant principal, and graduate education as most valuable. Importantly, 42% of respondents never had an opportunity to serve as an assistant principal. Very few development opportunities were ranked as having little or no value; those sources considered of least value were Internet and other online resources.

Respondents indicated that practical experience as a principal and as a teacher were the most valuable in terms of supporting their success.

Table 2.12  
*Percentage of Principals Rating Value of Types of Preparation and Experience to Success as Elementary Principal*

Type of preparation/experience	% respondents reported participating	Value rating		
		Very valuable	Somewhat	Little/no value
Graduate education	100	41.0	46.1	12.8
On-the-job experience as principal	100	96.2	3.5	0.3
Experience as a teacher	99	84.7	13.1	2.2
Local-level professional development	97	26.7	44.8	28.4
State-level professional development	96	25.9	43.4	30.7
State principal organization	96	32.0	34.4	33.6
Assistance and feedback from supervisor	96	30.2	36.2	33.6
National-level professional development	81	26.4	35.4	38.2
Internet or other online resource	81	9.7	33.5	56.9
Principal mentorship program	76	39.7	35.4	25.0
Internship as part of graduate program	74	27.3	31.6	41.1
Coaching	66	35.9	34.4	29.7
Experience as assistant principal	58	79.6	16.2	4.3

### A Retrospective Look at the Internship in 1998

Surprisingly, Doud and Keller’s 1998 report revealed that the internship was still not part of a principal preparation program for 34.1% of elementary principal respondents, despite the authoring committee 50 years earlier calling for it (National Education Association, 1948, p. 27). There continues to be a steady increase in including an internship as part of preparation, which we argue is a positive development, as research has shown the internship is a valuable experience for candidates (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005).

The trend may be related to states’ policy development, as internships are part of 30 states’ policies (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). As a point of reference, internships and residencies took hold in the medical profession in the 1920s. During World War I, “the Council of Medical Education began examining hospitals to accredit them for ‘approved’ internships with the same vigor with which it had already been evaluating medical schools” (Ludmerer, 1999, p. 81).

# Chapter 3:

## The Context of Leadership: Schools and Districts

The job of the elementary school principals covers a wide range of situations and contexts. Research has shown that principals encounter many different challenges in the course of a typical day. Some of those challenges have held constant over the years, whereas others are new. It is clear that context matters. The work that elementary and middle school principals do reflects changes in U.S. society and is affected by the school, community, and district contexts in which they work. In particular, the work of elementary principals is impacted by changing demographics, the increased emphasis on improving school quality, making schools more responsive to student needs, the changing roles of parents and teachers, and school and district size and structure. In this chapter, we address some of these and other factors influencing the work of school leaders.

**Question:** How many separately named elementary schools are under your direction?

Responses to this item indicate that while over time fewer principals were assigned responsibility for more than one school, in the last 10 years this trend appears to have shifted in reverse. The 2018 percentage is less than 10% but is an increase over 10 years ago. Of those respondents with responsibility for more than one school, 5.8% indicated they led two separate schools, 1.2% reported leading three schools, and 1% indicated leading more than three separate schools. See Table 3.1.

Table 3.1  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Serving Number of Separately Named Schools, 1968–2018*

Number of schools	1968	1978	1988	1998	2008	2018
One	85.5	82.3	87.6	90.6	96.1	92.0
More than one	14.6	17.7	12.3	9.4	3.9	8.0

## Question: What is your school's enrollment?

Data reported by principals indicate that PreK-9 principals work in schools ranging in size from under 200 to over 700. Almost 6% of respondents worked in schools that enrolled 200 or fewer students, 21.3% worked in schools that enrolled 700 or more students, and the remaining 72.7% worked in mid-sized schools. The trends with regard to school size are rather interesting. From 1928 to 1948, the average elementary school enrollment shrank significantly, from 632 to 520. A significant reduction occurred again between 1968 and 1978, when the average school enrollment went from 540 students to 430 students. Since then, the size of the elementary school has held fairly steady until now. In 2018, principals reported an average enrollment of 505 students, up an average of 55 students since the 2008 survey. See Figure 3.1.

The median school enrollment increased from 450 in 2008 to 505 in 2018.

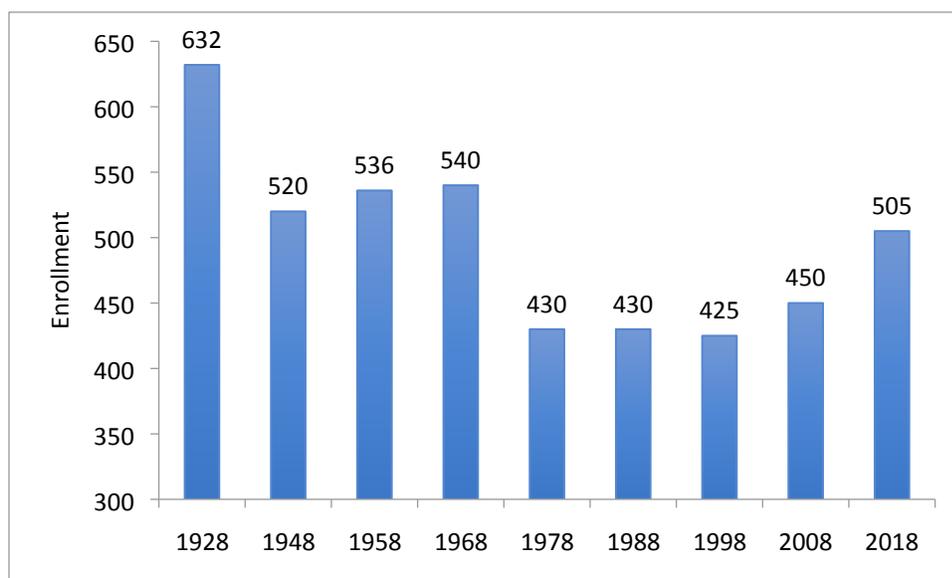


Figure 3.1. Median elementary school enrollment, 1928–2018.

The majority of respondents led schools that served students in kindergarten through Grade 5. Less than 10% of survey respondents led schools that included Grades 7 and 8, though 30.5% of respondents did serve Grade 6 students in their schools. A much larger percentage of respondents reported having pre-K (50.1%) or early childhood (21%) programs in their schools.

The majority of respondents (67%) worked in districts enrolling up to 9,000 students. Of those, 18% enrolled less than 1,000 students. Approximately 22% of respondents worked within districts with enrollments of 10,000–50,000 students, 8% worked in districts enrolling more than 50,000 students, and less than 0.5% worked in districts with enrollments over 250,000.

## Question: How would you characterize the community your school serves?

Just over half of the respondents reported that they work in rural areas (30.7%) or small towns (24.3%). Of those living in rural areas, 13.2% lived in remote areas. About 1 in 4 respondents (22.7%) said they work in suburban communities, and 22.3% reported they work in urban communities. Of those working in urban areas, 9.2% led schools in major city centers and 13% led schools in medium-sized urban areas. Smaller schools tend to be clustered in nonurban areas, although a few large schools are located in these communities. In contrast, larger schools tend to be clustered in urban areas.

The principals responding to the 2018 survey reported working in a variety of settings.

## Question: Would any of these describe the school in which you work?

The majority of survey respondents provided leadership for a public school. The percentage of respondents who reported leading magnet schools, charter schools, private schools, and religiously affiliated schools decreased since the administration of the 2008 NAESP 10-year survey. In comparison to 1998 and 2008 responses, there were decreases in each area, as shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Serving Type of School, 1998–2018*

Type of school	1998	2008	2018
Magnet school	4.7	1.8	1.2
Charter school	0.9	1.8	0.6
Students use vouchers to attend	0.4	0.0	0.0
Serves some nonneighborhood students under a choice plan	31.1	19.3	3.4
Privately managed school	1.3	0.0	0.6

## Question: What is the composition of the student body of your school?

The diversity of the student body shifted only slightly since 2008.

The average racial-ethnic composition of the schools represented in this 2018 NAESP 10-year study has shifted slightly from the composition of the average school in 2008. The percentage of White students in the 2008 study held steady in 2018 at 71.2%. The shifts occurred among diverse student populations. In 2008, respondents' schools were on average 9.9% Black/African American; in the 2018 study, this increased to 10.7%. In contrast, in the 2008 study, Hispanic students made up 14.2% of the student population, but in 2018 the percentage decreased to 10%. The percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students increased from 0.9% to 2.6%, and the percentage of Native American students increased from 0.7% to 2.6%. Finally, respondents to the 2018 survey indicated that 2.8% of their students were mixed race.

## Question: How many staff members do you supervise?

A fifth of respondents (20%) reported supervising 35 or fewer staff members. Of the remaining 80%, 57% reported supervising between 36 and 70 staff members, and 23% reported supervising 71 or more staff members. This is consistent with the percentages reported in the 2008 NAESP 10-year study.

In addition to the numbers of staff supervised, respondents were also asked about the composition of their teaching staff. Responding principals' typical teaching staff included, on average, 33 teachers, of whom 30 (90.9%) were women, 29 were White (87.8%), and 27 (81.8%) had more than 3 years of experience. As was the case with the race or ethnicity of the responding principals, the diversity of their teaching staff does not reflect the diversity of their students.

## Question: Do you have a student council in your school?

The percentage of schools that support student voice and leadership opportunities through student councils has fluctuated over the years. As demonstrated in Figure 3.2, the percentage of schools with student councils in 2018 is slightly higher than 10 years ago, but lower than in 1998. However, it appears that principals are making good on their intentions to add student councils within their school communities.

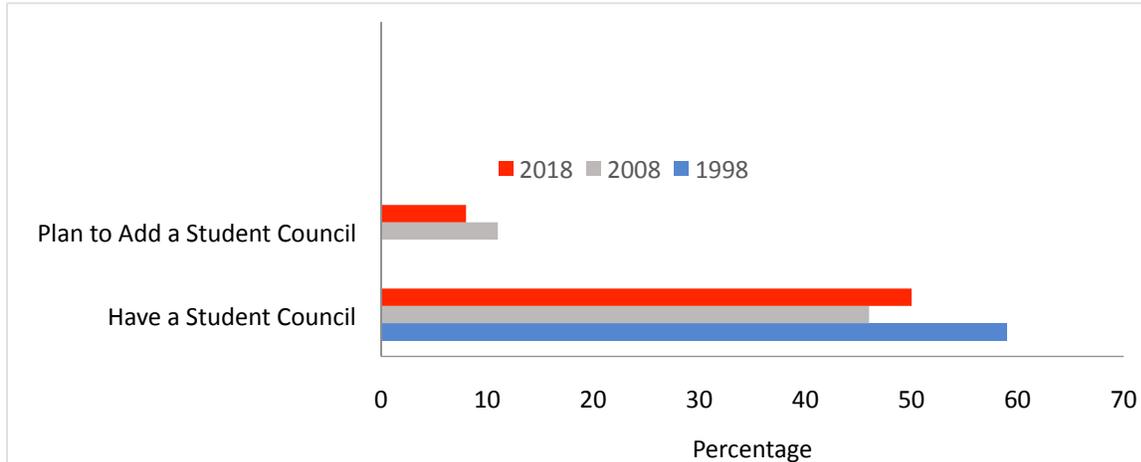


Figure 3.2. Percentage of schools with student councils.

**Question:** Do you have any assistant principals? If so, how many?  
What allocation formula is used in your district?

One third of participants in the 2008 NAESP 10-year study reported working with an assistant principal. In the 2018 study, the percentage was approximately the same, with the percentages being higher in larger schools and lower in smaller schools, as shown in Table 3.3. Of those principals who were assigned one or more assistant principals, 24% were provided one part-time assistant principal, 25% were provided one full-time assistant principal, 2.6% were assigned two full-time assistant principals, and 1% were assigned more than two full-time assistant principals.

In 2018, 62% of principals indicated the number of assistant principals assigned to their building was not enough to ensure effective school leadership that meets the needs of all students.

Approximately 38% of respondents felt that the number of assistant principals assigned to their building was adequate to ensure effective school leadership that meets the needs of all students. The remaining 62% disagreed, with 27.5% strongly disagreeing. The most commonly reported criterion for allocating an assistant principal to a school was the school's enrollment. However, the use of school enrollment as the chief criterion has decreased over time. In 1998, 62.3% reported enrollment as the primary criterion, in 2008 the percentage had decreased to 51.4%, and this year the percentage is down to 48.7%. Student characteristics, such as the

percentage of English language learner students, was listed as the second most common criterion, at 12.3%. Interestingly, over 25% indicated that they were unsure how those decisions were made.

Table 3.3  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating How Assistant Principal Is Assigned to School, 2018*

Response	Total	School enrollment		
		< 400	400–599	600+
Yes	31.1	7.1	33.7	72.6
No	68.9	92.9	66.3	27.4
If yes, what allocation formula is used in your district?				
Based on student characteristics (% in poverty, % English language learner, etc.)	12.3	6.4	17.4	12.8
Based on school enrollment	48.7	40.4	50.7	59.8
Based on student achievement	3.6	2.7	5.3	2.0
Other	12.0	15.9	8.2	11.8
Not sure	25.1	34.9	21.7	18.6

*Note.* Total percentages can be over 100%.



### A Retrospective Look at the Evolution of the Position in 1978

For many years, principals identified serving as either a supervising or teaching principal, and the jobs of the teaching and supervising principals differed. The 1978 report noted these titles had widely been phased out (Pharis & Zakariya, 1978).

In 1927, only 22.2% of elementary schools had an assistant principal. This percentage has increased over time, and 33% of elementary schools had assistant principals in 2008. Other trends have indicated the administrative positions in schools continue to evolve with the introductions of school administration managers, for example. When schools incorporate this position, someone within the school assumes several of the managerial responsibilities often completed by the principal. The purpose of the school administration manager is to free up principals' time that instead could be dedicated to instruction and student learning (Turnbull et al., 2009).

## Question: How would you describe the attitude of parents and the community in general toward your school and its programs?

Elementary schools have long enjoyed strong parent and community support. In the 2018 study, over 60% described parents as highly supportive, which is down from 75% in 2008. Like in 2008, the highly supportive rating was reported most often by the most experienced principals (2008: 86.4%; 2018: 73.9%). Interestingly, male principals (63.8%) were more likely than their female counterparts (59.5%) to describe parents as highly supportive. See Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Parent and Community Attitudes Toward the School and its Programs, 2018*

Response	Total	Years as principal			Gender	
		< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
<b>Parents</b>						
Highly supportive	60.8	55.1	55.7	73.9	63.8	59.5
Moderately supportive	33.0	35.8	37.8	22.5	30.5	34.3
Little support	5.8	8.3	6.1	3.5	5.8	5.6
No support at all	0.4	0.9	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.6
<b>Community</b>						
Highly supportive	49.3	51.4	48.0	50.0	50.6	48.9
Moderately supportive	41.7	38.5	42.3	43.0	42.0	41.4
Little support	8.7	10.1	9.4	6.3	6.9	9.4
No support at all	0.4	0.0	0.4	0.7	0.6	0.3

Communities were also characterized as supportive, though not at the same levels as parents. Almost 50% of principals described communities as highly supportive, and another 42% described communities as moderately supportive. Again, male principals (54.8%) were more likely than their female counterparts (53.7%) to describe communities as highly supportive, though the difference was not as striking as with their assessment of parental support. These percentages are fairly similar to those reported in 2008.

Over 60% of principals described their students' parents as "highly supportive."

## Question: How would you describe the level of involvement of parents and the community with your school?

The percentage of principals describing their parents as highly involved decreased since 2008. In 2008, approximately two thirds of principals characterized their school’s parents as highly involved, with another 42.5% reporting that their parents were moderately involved. In 2018, these percentages fell to 54.5% for highly involved and 38.6% for little or moderate involvement (see Table 3.5). In the 2018 study, a new category was added: “overinvolved.” According to responding principals, 6% of parents were overinvolved in 2018. This categorization was offered more often by the less experienced principals.

Table 3.5  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Level of Parent and Community Involvement, 2018*

Response	Total	Years as principal			Gender	
		< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
<b>Parents</b>						
Overinvolved	6.0	8.3	5.9	2.8	4.6	6.9
Highly involved	54.5	45.9	50.8	67.6	59.2	52.0
Little involvement	38.6	45.0	41.1	29.6	35.6	40.2
No involvement	0.8	0.9	1.2	0.0	0.6	0.9
<b>Community</b>						
Overinvolved	2.6	1.8	4.1	0.7	3.5	2.2
Highly involved	33.0	39.5	30.5	32.4	35.1	31.8
Little involvement	61.4	56.0	62.6	63.4	58.6	62.9
No involvement	3.0	2.8	2.9	3.5	2.9	3.1

Communities were characterized as much less involved than parents. Over 61% were described as having little involvement, and another 3% were described as having no involvement. Conversely, 33% of principals described their community as highly involved, and another 2.6% were characterized as overinvolved.

## Summary

While over time fewer principals have been assigned responsibility for more than one school, in the last 10 years this trend appears to have shifted in reverse, though the percentage is still less than 10%. The majority of respondents led schools that served between 200 and 700 students enrolled in kindergarten through Grade 5. Just over half of the respondents reported that they

work in rural areas (30.7%) or small towns (24.3%). Respondents indicated that their schools enjoy both strong parent and community support and parent engagement, though the numbers are down from 10 years ago.

One third reported having an assistant principal, and 57% reported supervising between 36 and 70 staff members, who are overwhelmingly White and female. The populations that respondents serve are more diverse than the school staff, though student diversity has shifted very little since 2008. Finally, 62% of respondents indicated that the number of assistant principals assigned to their building was not enough to ensure effective school leadership that meets the needs of all students.



### A Retrospective Look at the School in 1948

From the 1948 report:

The elementary school principal has passed through several stages of development all of which still exist in some communities. From the one or two teacher school, in which the clerical and administrative duties were incidental to regular classroom instruction, the office has developed in some communities until now demands a technically trained executive of the highest order. The committee believes that the future advance of the nation's public elementary schools will be largely conditioned by the extent to which the idea of the elementary school principal as a professional leader and executive gains general recognition in practice. (National Education Association, 1948, p. 141)

# Chapter 4:

## Relationships and Responsibilities

A large body of research underscores the importance of developing and maintaining positive relationships with other involved in schools. Indeed, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) “recognize the central importance of human relationships not only in leadership work but in teaching and student learning” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 3). In addition, the PSEL also discuss the more than 80 important responsibilities of school leaders (NPBEA, 2015). This chapter reviews the perceptions of respondents about the quality of their relationships with various actors within the educational arena, perceptions of respondents about how their level of involvement has changed in 22 different areas, and their perceptions of their level of authority in making various decisions related to their school.

**Question:** How would you describe your working relationships with each of the parties listed?

As shown in Figure 4.1, the majority of respondents perceived that they had excellent working relationships with students (81%), teachers (60.9%), and school advisory groups (51.5%). Moreover, about 50% of respondents believed they had an excellent relationship with their superintendent and with other central office personnel. In contrast, only 31.8% of respondents characterized their working relationship with school board members as excellent. When combining “excellent” relationships with “good” relationships, only three categories received less than 90% agreement. These three categories were school board (82.4%), superintendent (97.1%), and other central office personnel (88.3%). There were only minimal differences in the perceptions of respondents between 2008 and 2018.

Over 80% of respondents perceive that they maintain excellent or good relationships with all of the various actors in the educational arena, with more experienced respondents reporting the most positive relationships.

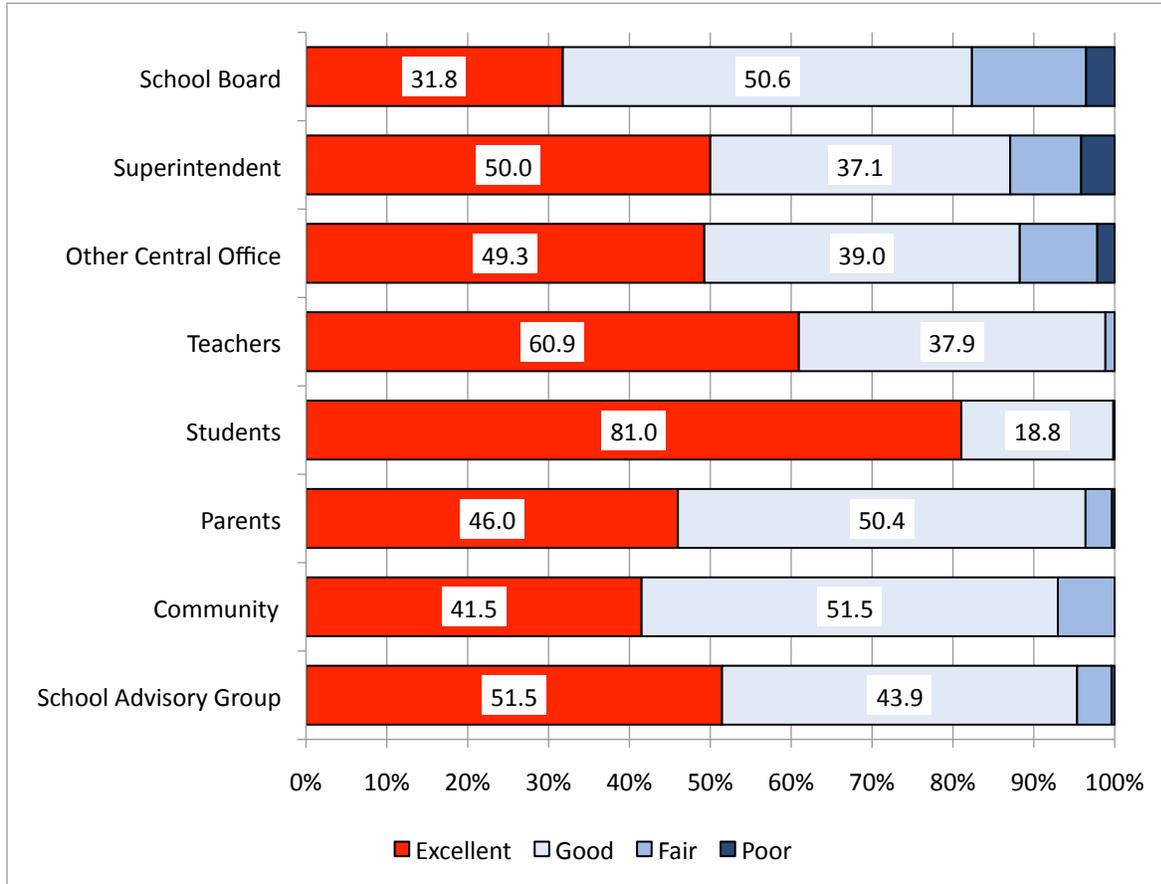


Figure 4.1. Quality of working relationships: Percentage of respondents giving each rating.

In Table 4.1, we present the relationships for which there were relatively large differences in perceptions between less experienced principals (those with less than 5 years of experience as a principal) and more experienced principals (those with more than 15 years of experience as a principal). Note that there were not differences by years as a principal for relationships between principals and school boards, superintendents, and other central office personnel.

As shown in Table 4.1, a greater percentage of more experienced principals than less experienced principals indicated having excellent relationships with teachers, students, parents, community members, and school advisory group members. All of these differences favored more experienced principals by at least 5 percentage points, with the greatest difference being a 16.6-percentage-point difference for the relationship between principals and teachers.

Table 4.1  
*Perceptions of the Quality of Relationships With  
 Various Groups by Years as a Principal, 2018*

Rating	Years as a principal		
	< 5	5–14	15+
<b>Teachers</b>			
Excellent	52.4	60.5	69.0
Good	46.3	38.1	30.4
Fair	1.4	1.4	0.6
Poor	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Students</b>			
Excellent	77.6	80.3	85.4
Good	21.8	19.7	14.6
Fair	0.7	0.0	0.0
Poor	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Parents</b>			
Excellent	42.5	44.9	50.9
Good	52.1	51.7	46.8
Fair	4.8	3.1	2.3
Poor	0.7	0.3	0.0
<b>Community members</b>			
Excellent	36.1	41.2	46.8
Good	55.8	51.7	47.4
Fair	8.2	7.1	5.8
Poor	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>School advisory group members</b>			
Excellent	48.0	50.8	55.5
Good	44.7	45.2	41.1
Fair	7.3	3.2	3.4
Poor	0.0	0.8	0.0

**Question:** During your tenure as a principal up to and including the last 3 years, how has your level of involvement as a principal changed with respect to the following areas?

Principals must attend to a very large number of tasks. The amount of time committed to these tasks can ebb and flow over time as policies, strategies, and foci change. Thus, the 2018 survey asked respondents to identify the degree to which their level of involvement in 27 different

areas had changed over the previous 3 years. Figure 4.2 includes the 12 areas for which at least 70% of respondents indicated either a large or a moderate increase in their level of involvement. Also for each of these 12 areas, at least 22% of respondents noted a large increase in their level of involvement.

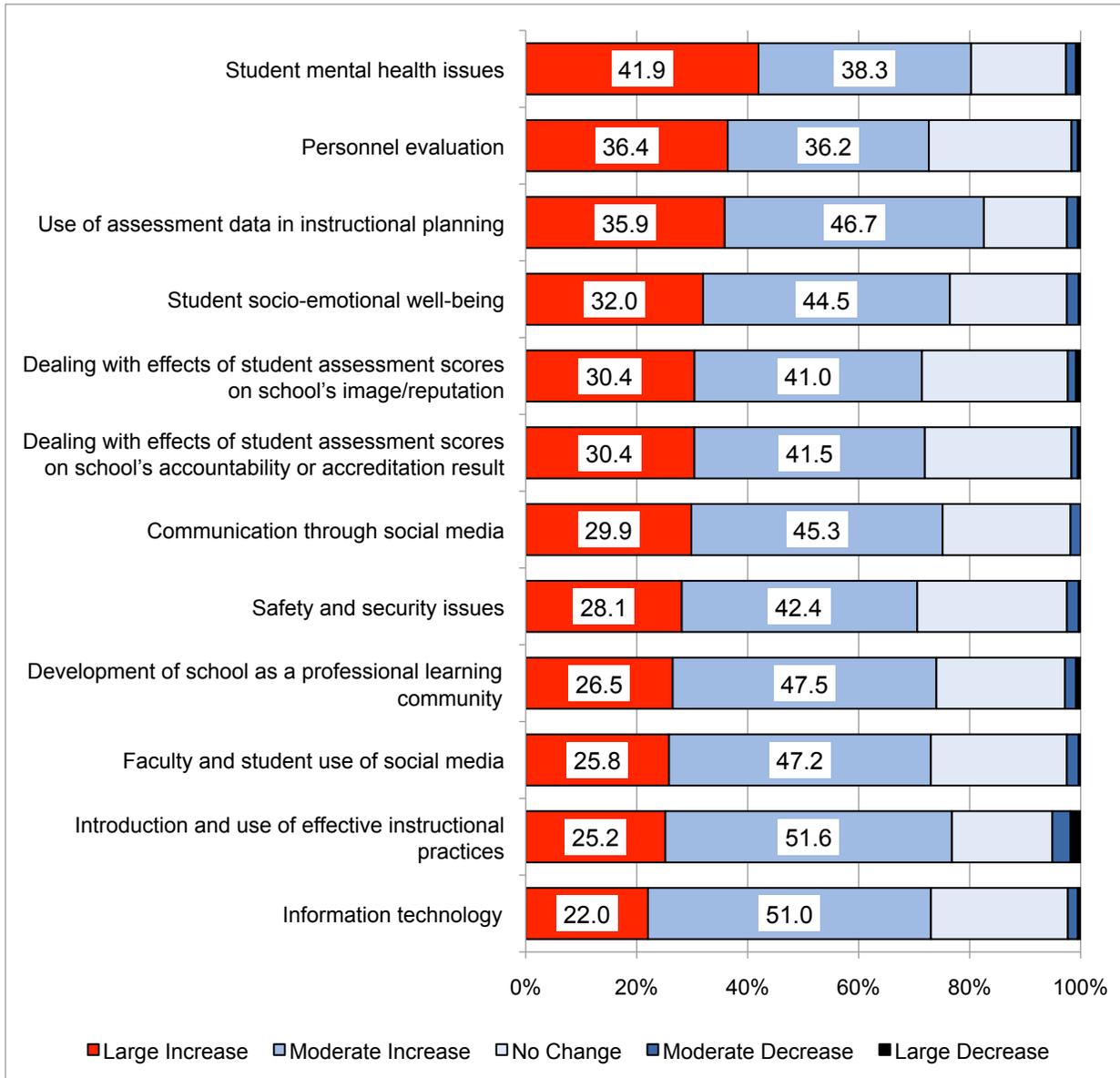


Figure 4.2. Areas of greatest growth in level of involvement.

Of the four areas with the greatest percentage of respondents noting a large increase in their level of involvement, two were associated with student issues, one was associated with personnel evaluations, and one with the use of data in planning. Specifically, about 42% of respondents noted a large increase in involvement with student mental health issues, and 32%

of respondents noted a large increase in involvement in student socioemotional well-being. About 36% of respondents noted a large increase in involvement with personnel evaluations and in the use of assessment data in instructional planning. Other issues mentioned included dealing with the effects of student assessment, social media use, safety issues, instructional practices, and technology.

There were only three areas for which at least 10% of respondents indicated either a moderate or large decrease in their level of involvement with the area over the previous 3 years. These three areas are displayed in Table 4.2. Even though these three areas had the greatest percentage of respondents indicating an overall decrease in involvement, the majority of respondents still indicated that their own involvement in these areas had increased.

A majority of respondents indicated that their level of involvement in all 27 areas included in the survey had increased. Areas with the greatest increase in involvement were student socioemotional health, personnel evaluations, and using data to improve instruction.

Table 4.2  
*Areas of Greatest Decrease in Level of Involvement*

Area of involvement	Change in level of involvement				
	Large increase	Moderate increase	No change	Moderate decrease	Large decrease
Resource allocation	15.2	32.1	36.1	9.6	7.1
Participation in district policy development	6.4	30.0	53.4	5.9	4.4
Curriculum development	18.0	41.5	29.0	8.6	3.0

Relative to 2008, the 2018 respondents reported an increase in involvement with a much greater percentage of the areas presented to them. Specifically, the 2018 respondents indicated an increase in involvement in 22 of the 27 areas included in the survey, whereas the 2008 respondents indicated an increase in involvement for only 7 of the 16 areas included in the survey. Although both sets of respondents indicated an increase in involvement with student assessment issues, the 2018 respondents reported an increase in involvement in the areas of student mental health and socioemotional issues—areas not included in the 2008 survey.

**Question:** What amount of time do you spend on the following activities?

There were five areas that at least 25% of respondents identified as among their top five time expenditures. These five areas are interaction with students (46.1%), supervision of faculty and staff (32.3%), informal interactions with teachers (28.5%), addressing socioemotional needs of students (27.7%), and discipline and student management issues (25.8%). Thus, respondents identified spending much of their time interacting with students and teachers.

**Question:** How has your time expenditure on the following areas changed over the last 3 years?

Respondents were also asked to estimate the degree to which the time spent on the same areas had changed over the prior 3 years. Six areas garnered at least 20% of respondents indicating that they spend a much greater time in the particular area. These six areas are formal teacher evaluations (33.8%), addressing socioemotional needs of students (33.7%), supervision of faculty and staff (22.5%), discipline and student management issues (22.5%), data use and management (21.4%), and informal teacher observations (20.7%). As with the prior question, almost all of the highly rated areas included interactions with students and teachers.

**Question:** What is your level of authority in selecting teachers for your school?

A slight majority (54%) of all principals indicated that they held the primary authority for selecting teachers. This was about the same percentage as in 2008. An additional 24.6% indicated that they shared this authority with individuals with others, and a slightly lower percentage—18.8%—said they shared this authority with individuals in the central office. Only 2.5% of respondents said they have little or no responsibility for the selection of teachers. See Table 4.3.

There were few differences across the levels of responsibility by years of experience as a principal. The only difference of note was for the percentages of respondents indicating that they shared responsibility with individuals at the central office. Specifically, only 12.9% of less experienced principals indicated that they shared responsibility with central office personnel, as compared to about 20% of respondents with greater years of experience as a principal.

Table 4.3

*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Authority in Selecting Teachers, by Years as a Principal, 2018*

Level of authority	All principals	Years as a principal		
		< 5	5–14	15+
Primary authority	54.2	57.8	51.0	56.4
Share responsibility with others in school	24.6	25.9	25.9	21.5
Share responsibility with central office personnel	18.8	12.9	20.7	20.3
Have little responsibility	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.7
Have no responsibility	0.5	1.4	0.3	0.0

There were no differences of note between male and female respondents for any of the response categories. Thus, no table is included with the percentages by gender.

**Question:** What level of responsibility do you have for supervising and evaluating staff in your school?

The vast majority (80.4%) of respondents noted that they had primary responsibility for supervising and evaluating staff. Another 16.7% of respondents indicated that they shared this responsibility with other individuals in the school. Only 3% of respondents chose one of the other three options. See Table 4.4. A lower percentage of the 2018 respondents than the 2008 respondents noted that they have primary authority for supervising and evaluating staff. Over the decade, there was a clear shift to sharing the responsibility with others in the school.

Table 4.4

*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Responsibility for Supervising and Evaluating Staff, by Years as a Principal, 2018*

Level of authority	All principals	Years as a principal		
		< 5	5–14	15+
Primary authority	80.4	86.3	77.9	79.7
Share responsibility with others in school	16.7	11.0	19.4	16.9
Share responsibility with central office personnel	2.5	1.4	2.4	3.5
Have little responsibility	0.3	0.7	0.3	0.0
Have no responsibility	0.2	0.7	0.0	0.0

A greater percentage of the less experienced respondents than other respondents indicated that they held primary authority for supervising and evaluating staff. Specifically, 86.3% of less

experienced principals indicated that they held primary responsibility in this area, compared to about 78% of respondents with 5–14 years as a principal and about 80% of more experienced respondents. Conversely, a lower percentage of less experienced respondents than other respondents indicated that they shared this responsibility.

There were not any notable differences across any of the five response options between male and female respondents. Thus, no table is included with the percentages by gender.

### Question: What level of responsibility do you have for instructional improvement in your school?

With respect to the responsibility for instructional improvement, none of the three options garnered a majority of responses. The option with the greatest response (45.8%) was shared responsibility with others in the school. This was followed relatively closely by 38.5% of respondents indicating they had primary responsibility for this area. Finally, nearly 15% of respondents indicated that they shared this responsibility with personnel from central office. As with the prior question, there was a decrease in the percentage of respondents reporting they held primary responsibility for instructional improvement in their school and a corresponding increase in respondents noting that they shared this responsibility with others in the school. See Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Responsibility for Instructional Improvement, by Years as a Principal, 2018*

Level of authority	All principals	Years as a principal		
		< 5	5–14	15+
Primary authority	38.5	44.9	39.8	30.8
Share responsibility with others in school	45.8	44.2	43.9	50.6
Share responsibility with central office personnel	14.8	10.2	15.3	18.0
Have little responsibility	0.5	0.0	0.7	0.6
Have no responsibility	0.3	0.7	0.3	0.0

A greater percentage of less experienced respondents (44.9%) than more experienced respondents (30.8%) indicated that instructional improvement was their primary responsibility. Conversely, a slightly lower percentage of less experienced respondents than more experienced respondents indicated that they shared the responsibility with other individuals at the school or with personnel in central office.

As with the prior two questions, there were no substantial differences in responses between male and female respondents. Thus, no table is included with results by gender.

### Summary

The results of the 2018 NAESP 10-year study suggest some interesting findings. First, the vast majority of respondents perceive that they maintain excellent or good relationships with all of the various actors within the education arena. In particular, respondents noted very positive relationships with students and teachers.

In addition, the majority of respondents indicated that their level of involvement in the 22 areas included in the survey had increased over the previous 3 years. In particular, respondents noted dramatic increases in involvement in the areas of student socioemotional and mental health, personnel evaluations, and the use of data in instructional improvement. Policymakers and preparation program personnel should take note of these results and plan their professional development and preparation activities accordingly.

Finally, respondents indicated sharing authority with other individuals in their school and in the district office regarding the selection of teachers. Respondents also reported sharing authority with other individuals—primarily individuals in their own school—regarding instructional improvement. In contrast, the vast majority of respondents perceived they possessed primary authority with respect to supervising and evaluating staff. Research is not clear about the degree to which these areas should be the primary responsibility of principals or a shared responsibility between the principal and others. Thus, greater research—especially research that includes the voices of principals—is needed to better understand these issues.

# Chapter 5:

## Decision Making at the School Site

Over the past 100 years, there has been a constant debate about the degree to which decisions should be made at the district level or at the school level. In the 1990s, there was a substantial push to devolve decision-making authority to the school site, in the belief that the quality of decisions would increase if made by those working in schools (Patrinos & Fasih, 2009). More recently, advocates for a more centralized approach to decision making have argued that having central office personnel involved in decision making increases efficiency and equity (Corcoran, Fuhrman, & Belcher, 2001; Galiani, Gertler, & Schargrotsky, 2008). Research suggests the most effective approach for effective decision making is one in which school personnel and central office personnel share decision-making duties (Honig, 2008).

**Question:** How would you describe the level of authority that principals in your district have to make decisions concerning their own schools?

Respondents were also asked about their perceptions of the level of authority that principals have to make decisions concerning their own school. As shown in Figure 5.1, the vast majority of respondents perceived that principals had a high or moderate authority to make decisions concerning their schools. Indeed, over 89% of respondents chose one of these two responses, with 41% of respondents perceiving principals had a high degree of authority. At the other end of the continuum, about 11% of respondents thought principals had a low degree of authority, and less than 1% of respondents believed that principals had no authority at all to make decisions concerning their school.

As shown in Figure 5.2, there has been a slight but steady decline in the percentage of respondents reporting that principals have a high degree of authority to make decisions about their own school. This decline has been reflected in small increases in the percentages of respondents perceiving that principals have a moderate or low degree of authority to make decisions about their own school.

Nearly all respondents believe principals have a high or moderate degree of authority to make decisions concerning their own schools.

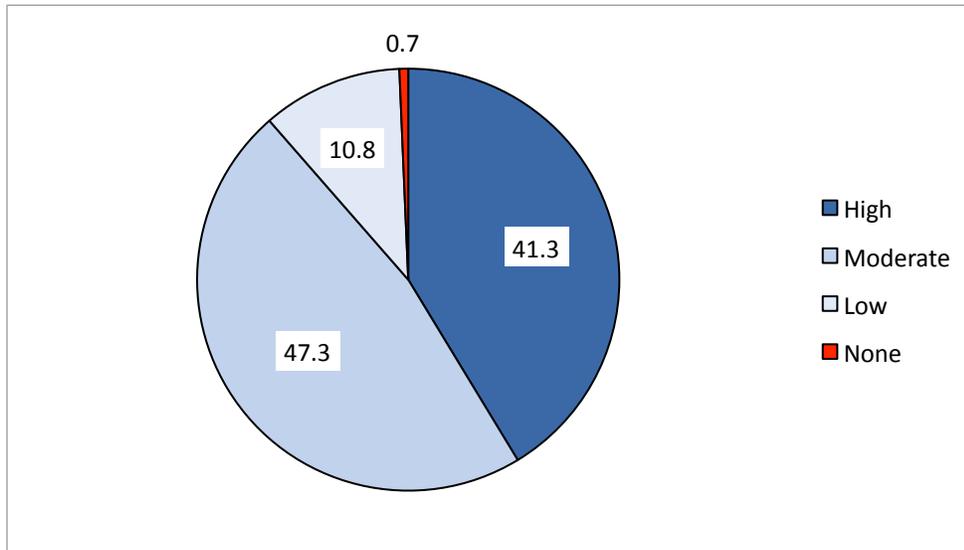


Figure 5.1. Percentage of respondents indicating level of authority that principals have to make decisions concerning their own schools.

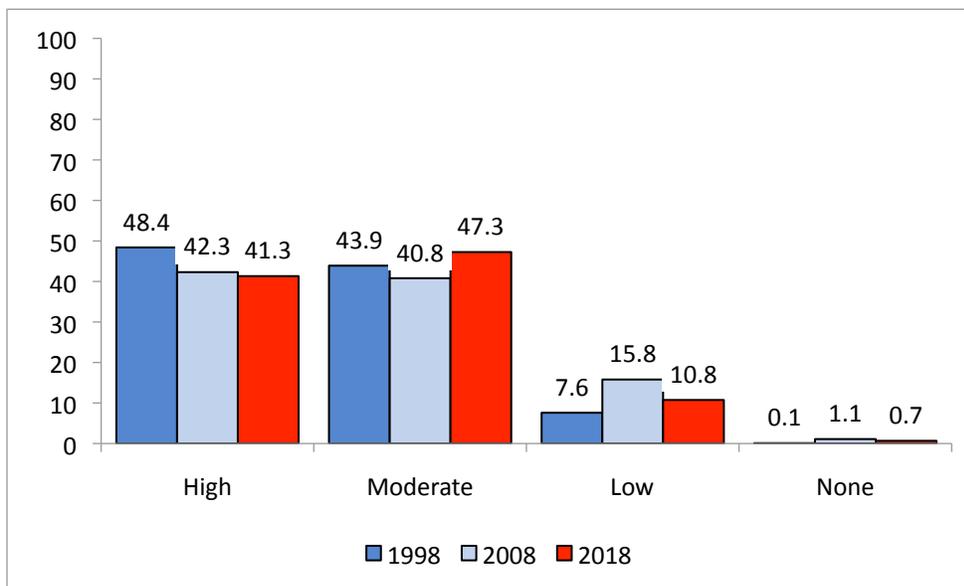


Figure 5.2. Percentage of respondents indicating level of authority principals have to make decisions concerning their own schools for 1998, 2008, and 2018.

In Table 5.1, we present the 2018 respondent perceptions by years as a principal and gender. Interestingly, a greater percentage of less experienced principals (38.1%) than more experienced principals (28.5%) believed principals have a high level of authority to make decisions about their school. In contrast, a greater percentage of more experienced principals (16.3%) than less experienced principals (8.2%) perceived principals have either low or no authority to make decisions about their own school.

With respect to the gender of the respondent, there were a few slight differences in perceptions. However, given the sample size and the relatively small value of the difference between the two groups of respondents, we conclude the differences are neither statistically significant nor practically significant.

Table 5.1

*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Perceived Degree of Authority to Make Decisions About School, by Years as a Principal and Gender, 2018*

Survey response	Years as principal			Gender	
	< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
High	38.1	37.4	28.5	37.3	32.8
Moderate	53.7	49.7	55.2	50.8	53.1
Low	8.2	11.9	15.7	11.3	13.4
None	0.0	1.0	0.6	0.6	0.6

### Retrospective Look at Approaches to Distributing Leadership in 1948

The research on the effective school leader and distributed leadership found a prominent role during the 1980s and early 2000s, respectively. Often described as a best practice approach to leadership, present literature acknowledges the positive effects distributed and collaborative leadership has on schools (Harris, 2004). Prior to the prominence and focus of this leadership framework, early reports of the elementary principal referenced the practice. The 1948 report described the importance of collaborative leadership and decision making as a best practice, recommending elementary school principals capitalize on the expertise and leadership of others in the school. For example, the report noted,

In the future the elementary-school principal with imagination and foresight will not plan alone. He will work closely with his faculty, and he will utilize other available resources in planning for children. In fact, if he is to assume his responsibility for leadership, the cooperation of faculty, students, and community must be secured. (National Education Association, 1948, p. 11)

Later, the report stated, “The authority of the elementary-school principal of the future should be embodied in the democratic process. ... His quality of leadership should make it possible to share authority with his coworkers” (p. 14).

Notably, no mention of collaboration was referenced in the 1988 report, and little mention of collaboration was found in the 1998 report. The 2008 report featured some data that showed principals identified collaborative visioning for the school was an area on which they needed to improve their professional practice.

## Question: Has your school district delegated more decision-making authority to the school site in the last 3 years?

As shown in Figure 5.3, there was a fairly substantial decrease in the delegation of decision-making authority over the previous 3 years from 1998 to 2008 and then a slight decrease in decision-making authority delegated to schools from 2008 to 2018. Specifically, the percentage of respondents indicating a substantial amount of decision-making authority was delegated to the school site decreased from 26.7% in 1998 to 13.4% in 2008 and finally to 7.7% in 2018. Importantly, over half of the respondents in both 2008 and 2018 perceived no change in the degree to which decision-making authority had been delegated to the school site.

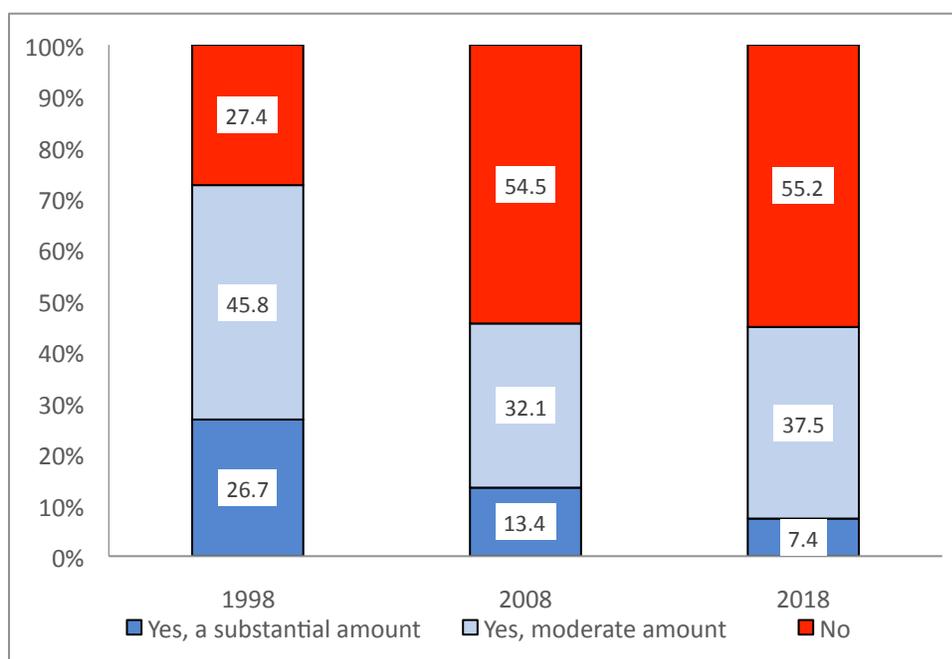


Figure 5.3. Percentage of respondents indicating changes in the delegation of decision making over the previous 3 years, from 1998 to 2018.

As shown in Table 5.2, there were few differences in the perceptions of principals about changes in the delegation of decision-making authority by either years of experience as a principal or the gender of the principal. There were only two differences of note by years of experience as a principal. First, a greater percentage of less experienced principals (those with fewer than 5 years of experience) than more experienced principals (those with 15 or more years of experience) perceived slight increase in the delegation of decision-making authority to the school. Second, a greater percentage of more experienced principals than less experienced principals perceived a moderate amount of change in the delegation of decision-making to the school site over the previous 3 years.

Table 5.2  
*Percentage Indicating Perceived Delegation of Decision Making, by Years of Experience and Gender, 2018*

Survey statement	Total	Years as principal			Gender	
		< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
Yes, a substantial amount	7.4	6.7	6.5	9.3	5.2	7.7
Yes, moderate amount	19.6	17.2	19.5	21.5	17.2	17.9
Yes, a slight amount	17.9	23.9	17.1	14.5	17.8	18.5
No	55.2	52.2	56.8	54.7	59.8	55.9

**Question:** In general, is the authority to run your school given to you by the school board and central administration in balance with the degree to which they hold you responsible when things go wrong?

In 2018, 72.6% of respondents believed that the authority to run their school was in balance with the degree to which they are held responsible when things go wrong. This percentage was not different than the percentages of respondents agreeing with the statement in both 1998 and 2008, as shown in Figure 5.4.

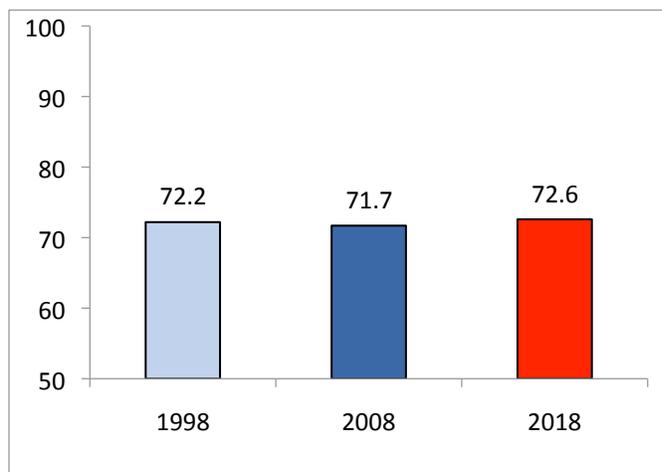


Figure 5.4. Percentage of principals indicating a balance of authority with responsibility.

As with the previous section, respondent perceptions differed by years as a principal, as shown in Table 5.3. Specifically, a greater percentage of less experienced principals (76.2%) than more experienced principals (69.8%) perceived that their authority and the degree to which they are

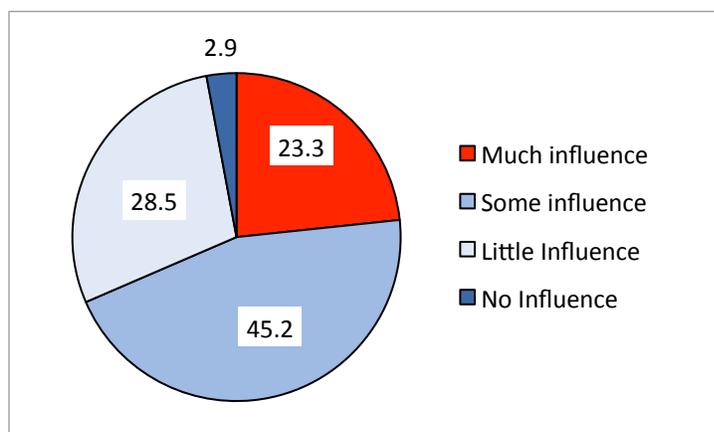
held responsible are appropriately balanced. With respect to the gender of the respondents, a slightly greater percentage of male (74.0%) than female (69.4%) respondents perceived the balance between authority and responsibility to be appropriately balanced.

Table 5.3  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating a Balance of Authority With Responsibility, by Years as a Principal and Gender*

Survey response	Years as principal			Gender	
	< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
Yes	38.1	37.4	28.5	37.3	32.8

**Question:** How much influence do you think you have on school district decisions that affect elementary schools and elementary education?

As shown in Figure 5.5, a little more than two thirds of respondents (68.5%) believed they had either some or much influence on school district decisions that influence elementary schools and education. Despite this fairly large majority of respondents, only 23.3% of the respondents perceived they had much influence. Strikingly, 31.4% of respondents indicated they had only little or no influence on such decisions—a percentage significantly greater than the percentage indicating they had much influence.



Nearly one third of respondents indicated they had little to no influence on district decisions that affect elementary schools and elementary education.

Figure 5.5. Degree of influence on district decisions influencing elementary schools and education

As shown in Figure 5.6, the degree to which respondents perceived they have influence over district decisions concerning elementary schools and elementary education has become more negative over time. Indeed, the percentage of respondents indicating they had much influence

has decreased from 35.0% in 1998 to 27.8% in 2008 and then to 23.3% in 2018. Conversely, the percentage of respondents indicating they had little influence increased from 13.0% in 1998 to 21.8% in 2008 and then to 28.5% in 2018.

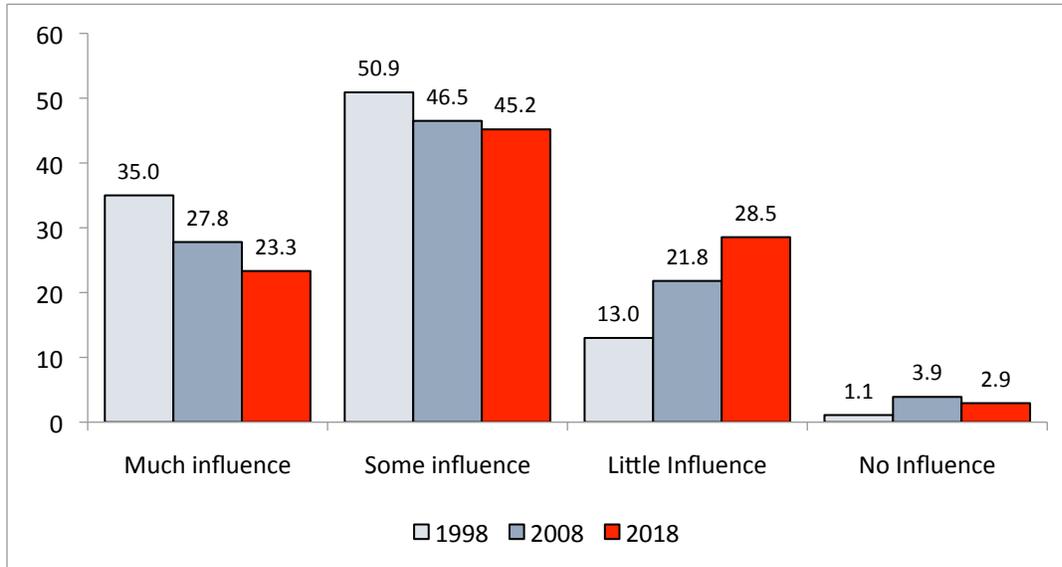


Figure 5.6. Percentage of respondents indicating degree of influence on district decisions influencing elementary schools and education, 1998, 2008, and 2018.

As shown in Table 5.4, there were no differences in the perceptions of respondents by years of experience about their influence on district decisions affecting elementary schools and education. Indeed, there were only very slight differences across the three experience groups for each response category. There were also no differences in response categories by gender.

Table 5.4  
Percentage of Respondents Indicating Degree of Influence on District Decisions Impacting Elementary Schools and Education, by Years as a Principal and Gender, 2018

Degree of influence	Years as principal			Gender	
	< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
Much influence	23.8	24.1	21.5	24.9	22.8
Some influence	44.2	43.2	49.4	45.8	45.0
Little influence	30.6	28.6	26.7	27.1	29.4
No influence	1.4	4.1	2.3	2.3	2.8

As shown in Table 5.5, respondent perceptions of their level of influence differed by district enrollment. In short, as district enrollment increases, the percentage of respondents indicating that principal have much influence on decision making decreases substantially. Specifically,

46.1% of respondents in small districts (those with 1,000 or fewer students) responded that they had much influence, whereas only 5.5% of respondents in large districts (those with more than 10,000 students) indicated that they had much influence.

Table 5.5  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Degree of Influence on District Decisions Impacting Elementary Schools and Education, by District Enrollment, 2018*

Degree of influence	District enrollment			
	1–1,000	1,001–2,500	2,501–10,000	> 10,000
Much influence	46.1	38.9	18.6	5.5
Some influence	46.1	41.1	54.2	45.5
Little Influence	7.9	18.9	22.0	45.5
No Influence	0.0	1.1	5.1	3.6

This finding is not particularly surprising. Indeed, as district enrollment increases, the layers of bureaucracy increase, and the ability to share decision making between central office personnel and school personnel becomes increasingly difficult.

Over the last three decades, respondents have noted having substantially less influence over district decisions concerning elementary schools and elementary education.

## Summary

Recent research suggests that effective models of decision making include shared authority for making decisions between central office personnel and school personnel. Responses to the 2018 NAESP 10-year study appear to reflect this reality. Indeed, in some areas, respondents indicate that principals have primary authority over particular decisions. In other areas, respondents indicate that central office personnel retain primary authority. Further in support of this interpretation is the finding that around two thirds of respondents believe they have some or much influence on decisions made about elementary schools and elementary schools in their district. Perhaps the most difficult issue raised by this chapter is the difficulty in creating shared models of governance in very large districts. This is certainly an area that should be investigated by school and district leaders as well as researchers.

# Chapter 6:

## Accountability and Educational Leadership

Since the first 10-year study was conducted in 1928, principals have needed to adapt to often-dramatic changes in factors impacting their schools, including significant policy changes at the state and federal levels. For example, prior to the 2008 report, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002), which substantially altered the U.S. education system. In the last 10-year study, researchers asked principals how NCLB impacted their role as a principal and how the policy impacted their schools.

Whereas NCLB was widely perceived as the federal government having an outsized role in local education, ESSA (2015) was touted as returning a significant amount of control back to states. Principals' perception of how this might affect them, however, was unclear. Thus, we asked principals about the potential impact of ESSA using the following question.

**Question:** How do you expect ESSA to impact your practice in the following areas?

Principals were asked to provide an assessment of the impact of ESSA on some aspects of their school (*very positive effect, positive effect, little to no effect, negative effect, or very negative effect*). The 18 areas of potential impact were the same 18 areas used in the 2008 survey that asked principals about the effects of NCLB.

As shown in Figure 1.1, responses clearly indicated principals believe ESSA could have both positive and negative effects. Over half of respondents thought ESSA would have a positive or very positive effect on four areas:

- Use of assessment data to drive instruction (59.8%),
- Focus on instruction (57.9%),
- Attention to needs of all students (56.5%), and
- Focus on student socioemotional needs (50.6%).

Interestingly, the 2008 respondents perceived that NCLB had a positive impact on three of these four areas. Specifically, the four areas impacted by NCLB that received the greatest percentages of positive responses were the following:

- Use of assessment data to drive instruction (75.3%),
- Focus on instruction (71.7%),
- Attention to needs of all students (63.8%), and
- Understanding of content-area standards (63.3%).

The difference in the areas receiving the most positive responses between NCLB in 2008 and ESSA in 2018 was the inclusion of a “focus on student socioemotional needs” and the exclusion of “understanding of content area standards” in the 2018 survey. Note also that the percentages of respondents perceiving NCLB had a positive impact on the three common areas was much greater than the percentage of respondents predicting that ESSA would have a positive impact on these areas. Thus, although a majority of 2018 respondents predicted that ESSA would positively impact these four areas, the percentages were only modestly greater than 50%.

Of the 18 areas, the four with the greatest percentage of respondents predicting that ESSA would have a negative impact included the following three statements:

- Pressure on staff due to accountability pressures (30.5%),
- Morale of educators (29.6%), and
- Focus on nontested subject areas (19.7%).

These were the same three areas that received the highest percentages of negative responses in 2008. Specifically, the 2008 areas with the highest percentages of respondents indicating that NCLB would have a negative impact were the following:

- Stress on staff due to accountability pressures (65.0%),
- School morale (60.2%), and
- Impact on nontested subject areas (59.4%).

Note that, once again, the percentages for the 2008 survey about NCLB were much greater than the percentages for the 2018 survey about ESSA. What explains the differences in the percentages across years? One potential reason is that the 2008 respondents had experienced the impacts of NCLB on their roles and on their schools. In contrast, 2018 respondents had to predict the potential impact of ESSA on their role as principal and on their schools. Another potential explanation is that principals perceived NCLB to have a greater effect on their roles and schools—regardless of whether the effect was positive or negative—than ESSA. Unfortunately, we cannot determine the actual reasons for these differences.

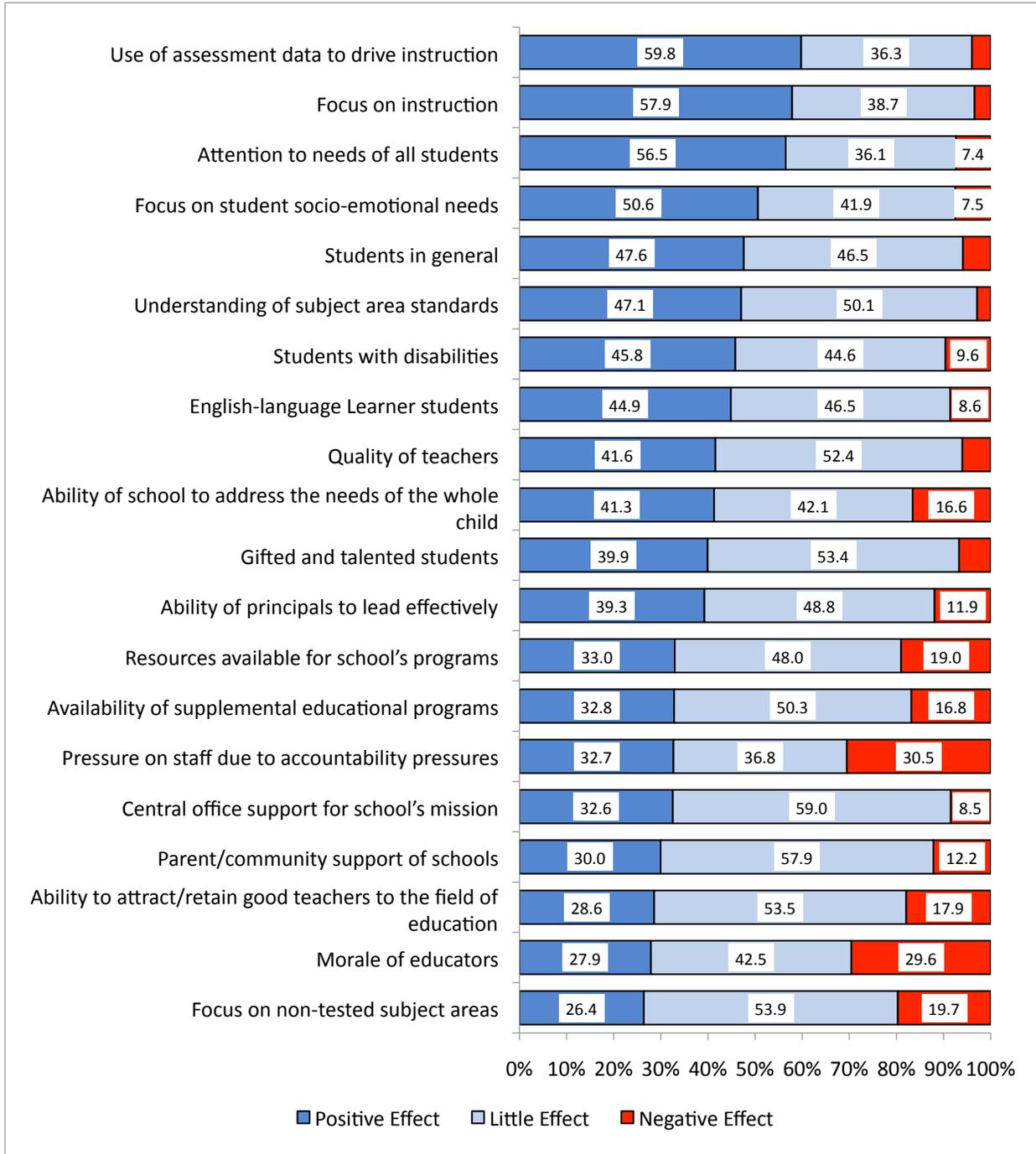


Figure 6.1. Principal perceptions of the potential impact of the Every Student Succeeds Act.

## Differences by Principal Experience

We also compared responses for all 18 areas by principal experience. Principals were placed into three groups: those with less than 5 years of experience, those with 5–14 years of

experience, and those with 15 or more years of experience as a principal. In general, the most experienced principals (those with at least 15 years of experience) tended to hold more negative perceptions about the impact of ESSA than novice principals (those with fewer than 5 years of experience as a principal). This was similar to the results for the 2008 study that asked principals to share their perceptions about the impact of NCLB.

Because of the sample sizes and our calculations of statistical significance, we only report on areas with at least a 10-percentage-point difference between groups.

Of the 18 areas, only two areas had differences of at least 10 percentage points (see Table 6.1). With respect to ESSA’s impact on the focus on student socioemotional needs, a greater percentage of novice principals (less than 5 years of experience) than experienced principals (15 or more years of experience) predicted ESSA would positively affect the focus on student socioemotional needs. Interestingly, novice and experienced principals also differed on their perceptions about whether ESSA would have a positive or negative effect on nontested subjects. A greater percentage of novice than experienced principals perceived that ESSA would have a positive effect on nontested subjects; conversely, a greater percentage of experienced than novice principals thought ESSA would have a negative effect on nontested subjects.

Table 6.1  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Potential Impact of the Every Student Succeeds Act: Impact Areas With a Substantial Difference by Principal Experience*

Area and response	Total	Years as a principal		
		< 5	5–14	15+
Focus on student socioemotional needs				
Positive effect	52.7	57.8	53.4	47.1
Little effect	39.5	36.1	39.5	42.4
Negative effect	7.8	6.1	7.1	10.5
Focus on nontested subject areas				
Positive effect	26.4	34.0	25.5	21.5
Little effect	53.2	46.3	56.5	53.5
Negative effect	20.4	19.7	18.0	25.0

### Question: What is the perceived impact on students?

Principals were asked to predict the effect of ESSA on students based on various statements. For two of these statements, the majority of respondents predicted ESSA would have a positive

impact. Specifically, respondents thought ESSA would have a positive impact on the attention to the needs of all students as well as on the focus on student socioemotional needs.

For four statements, an equal percentage of respondents perceived ESSA would have a positive effect or little effect on students. Specifically, an equal percentage of respondents perceived ESSA would have little effect on students in general, students with disabilities, English language learners, and the ability of the school to address the needs of the whole child. Finally, about 40% of respondents predicted ESSA would have a positive effect on gifted and talented students, whereas 53% of respondents thought ESSA would have little effect on these students (see Table 6.2). It is important to note that the percentage of respondents who predicted ESSA would have a positive effect is far greater than the percentage of respondents who predicted that ESSA would have a negative effect for all six areas. Indeed, for five of the six areas, fewer than 10% of respondents thought ESSA would have a negative effect across all five statements. The only statement for which over 10% of respondents predicted ESSA would have a negative effect is the ability of the school to meet the needs of the whole child. Specifically, almost 17% of respondents predicted ESSA would have a negative effect on a school's ability to address the needs of the whole child.

Table 6.2  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Potential Impact of the Every Student Succeeds Act on Students*

Statement	Positive effect	Little effect	Negative effect
Attention to needs of all students	56.5	36.1	7.4
Focus on student socioemotional needs	50.6	41.9	7.5
Students in general	47.6	46.5	5.9
Students with disabilities	45.8	44.6	9.6
English language learner students	44.9	46.5	8.6
Ability of school to address the needs of the whole child	41.3	42.1	16.6
Gifted and talented students	39.9	53.4	6.7

## Comparison of NCLB and ESSA

Finally, there were substantial differences between the perceptions of the 2008 respondents about the impact of NCLB on students and the 2018 respondents about the impact of ESSA on students. As shown in Table 6.3, respondents were generally more positive about the effect of ESSA than the effect of NCLB. The only exception to this generalization is the impact of NCLB on attention to all students. Most strikingly, respondents were much more positive about the

potential effect of ESSA than the effect of NCLB on English language learner students and the ability of the school to address the needs of the whole child. Although we do not know the reasons for this disparity, we surmise that ESSA’s inclusion of a separate assessment for English language learner students and ESSA’s push to have states include a variety of noncognitive outcomes in their school accountability systems may explain the difference.

Table 6.3

*Comparison of the Percentage of Respondents Indicating the Impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) on Students*

Statement	NCLB		ESSA	
	Positive effect	Negative effect	Positive effect	Negative effect
Attention to needs of all students	63.8	16.7	56.5	7.4
Students in general	48.6	17.6	47.6	5.9
Students with disabilities	35.0	36.7	45.8	9.6
English language learner students	28.7	33.7	44.9	8.6
Ability of school to address the needs of the whole child	21.3	43.6	41.3	16.6

### A Retrospective Look at the Focus on Student Achievement and Standardized Testing From 1927 and 1998

Principals’ concern with student learning and supporting the improvement of teacher practices has been included in the reports since the reports have been available. Reports focused on student learning and achievement and demonstrated these were primary leadership responsibility areas for different types of principal roles (e.g., supervising and teaching). More recently, studies have focused on testing and concerns about student learning. The 1928 report did not comment on standardized testing data. The accountability movement would not take place until approximately 70 years later. The accountability movement was relatively new in 1998, but already there was evidence of the stress that accompanied the testing expectations. The 1998 report stated,

Principals in schools that fail to meet the minimum performance levels may receive warnings and mandates to ensure that significant progress is made toward meeting these standards within some specified period of time (usually one to three years). Such mandates create tremendous pressure, and they are considered a threat to job security by about 20 percent of the respondents. (Doud & Keller, 1998, p. 70)

Today, the reports indicate a primary focus on testing and test scores and meeting state and federal accountability requirements.

**Question:** What is the perceived impact on principals?

Finally, about 39% of respondents predicted that ESSA would have a positive impact on a principal's ability to lead effectively. In comparison, only about 12% thought ESSA would have a negative impact on a principal's ability to lead effectively. There was no substantial difference in perceptions by principal experience.

# Chapter 7:

## The Principalship: Conditions of Employment

While principals focus on creating positive learning environments for students and working conditions for teachers, principal working conditions affect their morale and effectiveness. Amid a wide array of working conditions for principals, this chapter focuses on some specific conditions such as salary, benefits, time commitment, contracts, and evaluation. These areas have been included in the NAESP surveys since 1928 because they play an important role in the lives of principals.

**Question:** Do you have a contract with your school district? If so, what are the terms of your contract?

In 2018, 91.3% of respondents stated that they had a contract. This was about the same percentage as in 2008. The 2008 results indicated that less experienced principals (those with less than 5 years of experience as a principal) were more likely to have a contract than more experienced principals (those with 15 or more years of experience as a principal). However, there were no differences by years of experience as a principal for 2018 respondents.

Between 2008 and 2018, the time length of contracts decreased such that the majority of the contract terms shifted from 2 or more years in length in 2008 to 1 year in length in 2018.

Table 7.1 shows the vast majority of the 2018 respondents with a contract had a 1-year contract (57.5%). Less than 10% of respondents had a contract for over 3 years. Comparing the responses between 2008 and 2018 showed a clear shift to shorter contracts. Specifically, about 40% of the 2008 contracts were for 3 or more years, compared to only 22% of the 2018 contracts. At the other end of the continuum, only about 39% of the 2008 contracts were 1 year in length, compared to nearly 58% of the

2018 contracts.

Table 7.1  
*Length of Contract, 2008 and 2018*

Year	1 year	2 years	3 years	> 3 years
2008	39.4	19.3	10.8	30.1
2018	57.5	18.3	15.8	8.4

### Question: What areas are addressed in your contract?

The 2018 NAESP 10-year survey asked respondents to identify if any of the following five areas were included on their contract: salary, benefits, duties, expectations, and evaluation. As shown in Table 7.2, nearly all of the respondents indicated that salary was in their contract, and nearly 80% indicated benefits were included in their contract. Two thirds of the respondents confirmed duties were included in their contract. About half of respondents reported that specific expectations for the principal were included in the contract as well as the evaluation metrics. There were no differences in the areas included in the contracts by years of experience as a principal or gender.

From 2008 to 2018, a much greater percentage of respondents indicated that specific areas were included in the contract language. For example, the percentage of respondents indicating salary was included in contract language increased from about 79% to 92%, while the percentage reporting the inclusion of fringe benefits increased from about 57% to 78%.

Table 7.2  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Areas Included in Formal Contract*

Addressed in contract	Survey year		Change 2008 to 2018
	2008	2018	
Salary	78.6	92.1	13.5
Benefits	56.5	78.3	21.8
Duties	n/a	66.6	n/a
Expectations	48.1	50.6	2.5
Evaluation	37.9	49.6	11.7

From 2008 to 2018, there were increases in the percentage of respondents indicating the inclusion of specific areas in the contract, especially with respect to salary (92.1% in 2018) and benefits (78.3% in 2018).

**Question:** Do you have a written job description? If you have a written job description, are you held accountable and evaluated using it?

Of those responding to this question, 80% stated that they had a written job description. This was about the same percentage of respondents as in 1998 and 2008. With respect to individuals reporting having a written job description, 79% reported that all principals in the district received the same base contract, whereas the remaining 31% responded that principals in their district received different base contracts. This was similar to the results from the 2008 survey.

Of those individuals with a written job description, about 70% indicated that they are evaluated on their job description included in the contract. This was almost identical to the 2008 results.

There was no significant difference in being evaluated based on the job description between respondents reporting the same base contract and different base contracts. Further, we found no differences in results by years of experience as a principal or by gender.

**Question:** How many months or days are included in your contract?

As shown in Table 7.3, the length of contracts for principals has gradually increased over the last 60 years. For example, 83% of contracts were less than 11 months in 1958, whereas only about 24% of the 2018 contracts were for less than 11 months. At the other end of the spectrum, only 12% of contracts in 1958 were for 12 months, compared to 50% of contracts in 2018.

The length of principal contracts has increased steadily over time such that 50% of respondents in 2018 reported having a 12-month contract, compared to only 12% in 1958.

Table 7.3  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Contract Length by Survey Year*

Year	< 10 months	10 months, less than 11 months	11 months, less than 12 months	12 months
1958	20.0	63.0	5.0	12.0
1968	21.4	47.2	13.9	17.9
1978	7.0	43.8	19.2	30.0
1988	5.7	40.0	21.5	32.8
1998	2.1	41.5	16.0	40.4
2008	4.0	24.6	24.3	47.1
2018	1.8	23.9	24.2	50.1

**Question:** Taking into consideration the time you typically arrive at school in the morning and leave in the afternoon, how much time (excluding evenings and weekends) do you spend at school each weekday? How many additional hours do you spend in school-related activities each week during the academic year?

The overall average number of hours spent per week on school-related activities while in the school building was 52.8. The average number of hours per work spent on school related activities outside of the school building was 7.8. The overall total number of hours worked on school-related activities per week was 60.6. This was about the same number of hours worked—58.6—as reported by principals in a national study of principals by the NCES (2017).

As shown in Figure 7.1, the average number of reported hours for a workweek has increased steadily over the last 90 years—from 44 in 1928 to 61 in 2018.

The average number of school-related work hours per week has increased 17 hours from 1928 to 2018. The average workweek during the school year in 2018 was 61 hours.

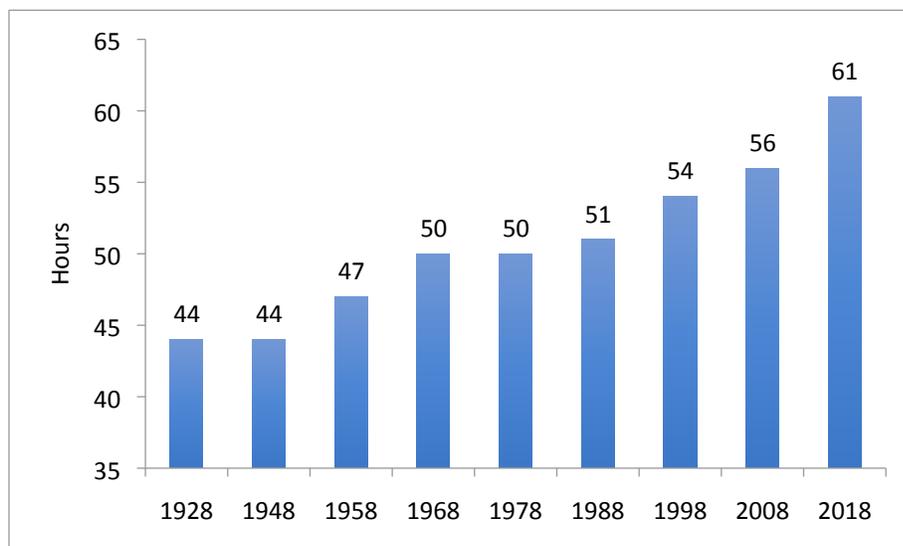


Figure 7.1. Average hours in a principal's workweek, 1928–2018.

As shown in Table 7.4, the median number of hours spent at school during the academic year was 50, and the median number of hours spent outside of school during the academic year was 5. Overall, respondents reported that the median total number of hours spent on their jobs—either inside or outside of their building—was 66.

Note that the numbers of hours inside and outside the school do not necessarily sum to the total hours spent on performing job duties. This is because the analyses of each set of responses are independent from the other analyses.

Respondents at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of hours reported spending 45 hours inside the school, 2 hours outside the school, and a total of 50 hours performing their job duties during the academic year. At the other end of the continuum, respondents at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile of hours reported spending 60 hours inside the school, 20 hours outside the school, and a total of 75 hours per week performing their job duties (see Table 7.4).

The average number of school-related work hours per week *outside of the school building* was almost 8 hours for the 2018 respondents—an increase of 1 hour over the last decade.

Table 7.4  
*Time Spent Inside and Outside of the School Building During the Academic Year*

Percentile of respondent	During school year		
	Inside school	Outside school	All hours
10	45	2	50
25	50	3	53
50	50	5	60
75	60	10	66
90	60	20	75

**Question:** How many additional hours do you spend in school-related activities each week outside the academic year? How many additional hours do you spend in school-related activities each week outside the academic year?

As shown in Table 7.5, the median number of hours spent inside at school outside of the academic was 40. The average number of hours was 34. The median number of hours spent not at school outside of the academic year was 4. Overall, respondents reported that the median total number of hours spent on their jobs outside of the regular academic year was 42; the average was 40.

Table 7.5  
*Time Spent Inside and Outside of the School Building Outside of the Academic Year*

Percentile of respondent	During school year		
	Inside school	Outside school	All hours
10	8	0	11
25	30	1	35
50	40	4	42
75	40	10	48
90	45	14	56

There was, however, a very wide range in the reported number of hours performing job duties. Outside of the academic year, respondents at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile reported spending 8 hours in their school, 0 hours outside of their school, and 11 hours total performing their job duties.

Alternatively, respondents at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile reported working 45 hours in their school, 14 hours outside of their school, and 56 hours total.

The average school-related work hours per week *outside of the academic year* was 40. Responses ranged widely.

### Question: What is your salary as a principal?

Respondents were asked to report their salary. It is important to note that the reported salaries are not adjusted by cost of living. Because respondents live in a wide array of locations with varying costs of living, caution must be used in interpreting the results presented in this section.

The median reported salary of all respondents was \$92,250, and the average salary was \$96,271, as shown in Table 7.6. The average salary is skewed upward by a handful of principals reporting salaries greater than \$150,000.

Not surprisingly, the reported median and average salaries increased with years of experience. Specifically, the median salary for less experienced principals (those with less than 5 years of experience) was \$90,000, whereas the median salary for the most experienced principals (those with 15 or more years as a principal) was \$100,000. The differences for average salaries were somewhat smaller.

Table 7.6  
*Reported Salaries by Years as a Principal for National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Surveys*

Measure	Total	Years as a principal		
		< 5	5–14	15+
Median	\$92,250	\$90,000	\$92,000	\$100,000
NAESP 2018 average	\$96,271	\$94,756	\$95,832	\$98,257
NCES 2017 average	\$94,600	\$88,000	\$95,500	\$100,400

*Note.* NCES data from *Characteristics of Public Elementary and Secondary School Principals in the United States: Results From the 2015–16 National Teacher and Principal Survey*, by S. Taie, R. Goldring, and M. Spiegelman, 2017, Washington, DC: NCES.

As a check on the validity of the results from this study, we compared the NAESP survey average salaries to the NCES (2017) survey average salaries for all principals and by years of experience as a principal. The comparisons by years of experience are not directly comparable, as the NCES experience ranges were less than 3 years, 3–9 years, and 10 or more years. However, the NAESP results are fairly similar to the NCES results, thus suggesting that the NAESP results are relatively accurate and generalizable across the United States.

Comparing salaries over time is incredibly difficult. Such comparisons not only must factor in the effects of changes in the cost of living, but also must consider where respondents live, as individuals in metro areas have greater salaries than individuals living in rural areas. This would require adjusting each respondent’s salary by actual location—information we did not collect. However, the results suggest that the salaries earned by principals have increased over time, and this supposition is supported by data from the NCES (Hill, Ottem, & DeRoche, 2016). Thus, evidence suggests principals now work more hours than previously and also are paid slightly more than before.

Table 7.7 documents the distribution of median salaries across selected ranges of pay. At the top end of the distribution, about 44% of respondents reported earning at least \$100,000 per year, with 23% earning at least \$110,000 per year. At the other end of the spectrum, 8.5% of respondents indicated they earned less than \$70,000 per year. An additional 13.7% reported earning between \$70,000 and \$80,000.

Table 7.7  
*Percentage of Respondents for Selected Median Salary Ranges*

Salary range	Percent
< \$70,000	8.5
\$70,000–79,999	13.7
\$80,000–89,999	21.6
\$90,000–99,999	12.1
\$100,000–110,000	23.0
> \$110,000	21.1

Results suggest principals are working more hours than ever before—and are also earning more money than ever before.

Similar to years of experience as a principal, salary also appears to be associated with the size of the school, as shown in Table 7.8. Indeed, the median salary of principals in schools with the lowest student enrollment was \$88,000, compared to \$100,000 for principals of schools with the greatest school enrollment. Of course, schools with the greatest student enrollment are often located in urban areas, which have higher costs of living and thus higher salaries for all occupations.

Table 7.8  
*Median Salary by School Enrollment*

Student enrollment	Median salary
1–300	\$88,900
301–400	\$90,000
401–600	\$92,000
> 600	\$100,000

**Question:** To what degree does your salary compensate you adequately for the time and effort required to do your job well?

As shown in Figure 7.2, exactly 50% of respondents agreed at some level that their salary adequately compensated them for the time and effort necessary to do their job well. Of course, this also means that 50% of respondents disagreed that their salary adequately compensated them.

More specifically, about 27% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, whereas 30% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. Although the overall respondents were evenly split between some level of agreement and some level of disagreement, the overall distribution suggests more principals are disenchanting with their adequacy of pay than satisfied.

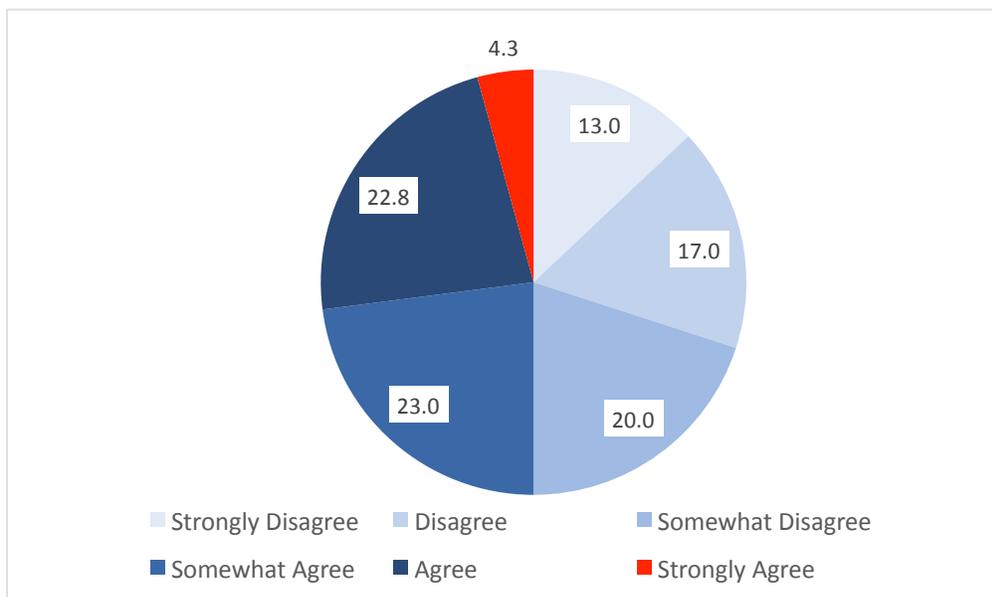


Figure 7.2. Adequacy of salary relative to time and effort required for the job.

Although not definitive, the data in Table 7.9 suggest salary level is associated with perceptions of adequacy of the pay. Specifically, greater median salary appears positively associated with the level of agreement with the adequacy of pay. In short, the greater the pay, the stronger the agreement that the pay adequately compensated principals for their time and effort.

Table 7.9  
*Median Salary by Adequacy of Pay*

Does salary adequately compensate you?	Median salary
Strongly disagree	\$90,000
Disagree	\$84,250
Somewhat disagree	\$91,500
Somewhat agree	\$96,500
Agree	\$95,000
Strongly agree	\$98,000

**Question:** Does your district have merit or incentive pay for principals in addition to the typical step increases? If your district has merit pay, is any portion of it based on the achievement of students in the principal's school?

Only 10.5% of respondents reported that their district had adopted some form of merit pay. This was down from about 17% in 1998 and 15% in 2008.

Although fewer principals in 2018 reported being involved in a merit plan than in the past two decades, a far greater percentage of those in merit plans reported that the plan focused on measures of student achievement. Indeed, only about 20% of respondents from 1998 and 2008 reported that student achievement was a measure in their merit plan, compared to about 45% in 2018.

A decreasing percentage of respondents indicated their district has a merit pay plan for principals—only 10% of principals in 2018 reported being involved in a merit plan.

While the prevalence of merit pay plans has decreased over the last two decades, the merit plans are more likely to include measures of student achievement than in the past.

The measures included in the merit pay plans, as reported by the small percentage of principals employed in districts using merit pay, are shown in Table 7.10. Of the four options provided respondents, almost 33% reported that their merit pay was based on student academic growth measures, and about 22% noted that their merit pay plan was based on the overall percentage of students scoring proficient or above. In addition, another 14% of respondents indicated that the change in the percentage of students scoring proficient or above was a measure included in the merit pay plan. The majority of respondents, however, reported that some other measure was included in their merit pay plan.

Table 7.10  
*Measures Included in Principal Merit Pay Plans*

Merit pay measure	% respondents
% proficient	21.9
Change in % proficient	14.1
Growth	32.8
Other	54.7

**Question:** What type of tenure, if any, do you have in your school district?

As shown in Figure 7.3, the majority of respondents in both 2008 and 2018 indicated that they had some form of tenure. Specifically, about 56% of respondents in both years reported having some form of tenure. Tenure as a professional employee was the most frequently mentioned (37%) type of tenure in both years. In this type of tenure, an individual would be guaranteed employment in a professional position if removed from the principalship.

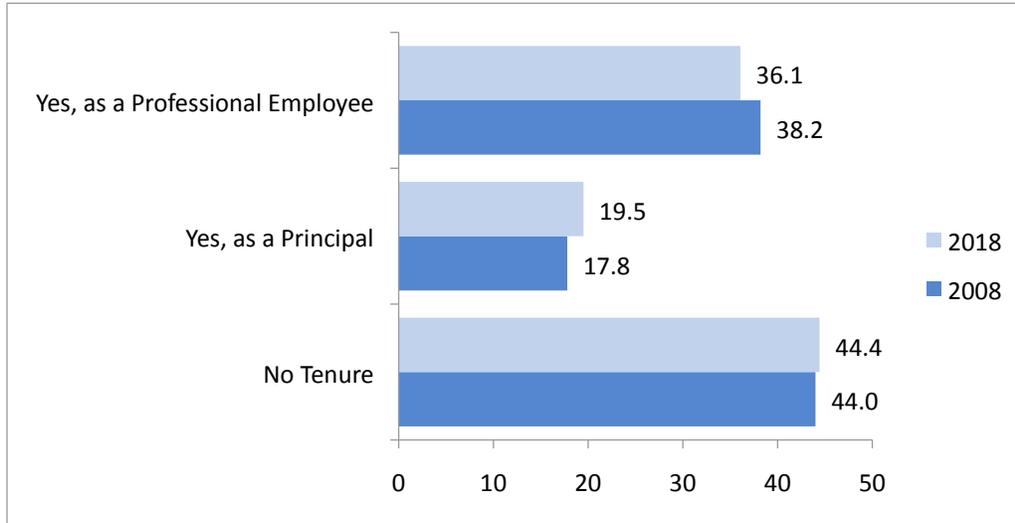


Figure 7.3. Percentage of respondents indicating type of tenure, 2008 and 2018.

The 2018 responses differed by years of experience as a principal, with a greater percentage of less experienced principals than other principals reporting tenure as a professional employee (Table 7.11). Further, a much greater percentage of the more experienced principals than other principals reported tenure as a principal. This suggests that tenure as a principal may be in decline as an option in school districts around the country. More research, however, would be needed to confirm this.

Table 7.11

*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Type of Tenure, by Years as Principal*

Type of tenure	Years as a principal		
	< 5	5–14	15+
No tenure	39.5	49.8	40.1
Yes, as a principal	16.8	16.5	27.2
Yes, as a professional employee	43.7	33.7	32.7

### Question: How often are you formally evaluated?

The vast majority of respondents (86.1%), as shown in Table 7.12, reported that they were evaluated every academic year. Another 9.3% of respondents noted that they were evaluated every 2 to 3 years, while 4.1% of respondents said that they were rarely or never evaluated.

Table 7.12  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Frequency of Evaluation by Year*

Frequency of evaluation	Survey year				
	1978	1988	1998	2008	2018
Once a year	68	85	76	80	86
Once every 2–3 years	10	8	13	12	9
Rarely or not at all	22	8	11	8	5

**Question:** How are student performance results taken into account in your evaluation?

In the last 10 years, almost all states adopted new systems for evaluating principals. Moreover, most of these systems included some measure of student performance. Figure 7.4 documents the student performance measures—if any—included in the performance evaluations of respondents. The sum of the responses exceeds 100% because multiple measures could be included in a performance evaluation.

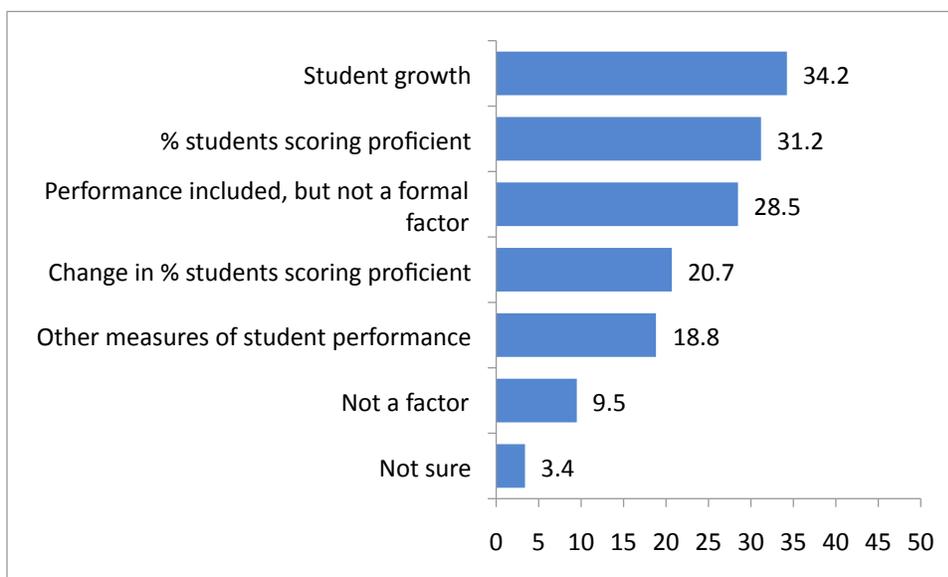


Figure 7.4. Percentage of respondents indicating student performance measures included in evaluation.

The two most frequently mentioned measures were student growth (34.2%), such as value-added measures or student growth percentiles, and the percentage of students scoring

proficient or advanced (31.2%). These were the only two measures garnering more than 30% of respondents.

The next two most frequently cited measures were both mentioned by between 20% and 30% of respondents. Specifically, 28.5% of respondents noted that student performance was included in their evaluation but was not a formal factor, and 20.7% reported a measure was the change in percentage of students scoring proficient or advanced.

Finally, three responses were mentioned by less than 20% of respondents. Specifically, almost 19% of respondents said that other measures of student performance were included in their evaluations, 9.5% noted student performance was not a factor in their evaluations, and 3.4% were unsure if any student performance measures were included in their evaluation.

### Question: From whom are opinions about your performance normally solicited?

Various individuals may provide input on the evaluation of a principal. As shown in Table 7.13, the most frequently mentioned individual from whom an opinion was solicited was the superintendent (64.6%). Three other responses were mentioned by at least 40% of respondents: teachers (45.3%), “myself” (41.9%), and assistant/associate superintendents (41.0%). Both other central office personnel and parents were mentioned by about 29% of respondents, whereas about 16% of respondents mentioned students, and 8% mentioned other community members.

Table 7.13  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Individuals Providing Opinions in Performance Evaluation*

Individuals involved in evaluation	%
Superintendent	64.6
Teachers	45.3
Myself	41.9
Asst./assoc. superintendent	41.0
Other central office	29.3
Parents	28.6
Students	15.8
Other community members	8.0

*Note.* Respondents could indicate more than one option, so total is over 100%.

**Question:** Is goal setting a routine part of your evaluation process? Are you held accountable for progress toward meeting these goals?

As shown in Table 7.14, there was a substantial increase in the number of respondents reporting that they participated in goal-setting as a routine part of their evaluation process. Specifically, about 76% of respondents reported participating in the goal-setting process in 2008, as compared to almost 91% of respondents in 2018.

Table 7.14  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Goal Setting Included in Evaluation*

Goal setting in evaluation	2008	2018
No, goal setting is not included	23.8	9.7
Yes, but not held accountable for meeting goals	20.2	29.3
Yes, and held accountable for meeting goals	56.0	61.0

Furthermore, the percentage of respondents participating in goal setting and held accountable for the goals they set also increased from 2008 to 2018. Thus, clearly there has been a push for more principals to participate in the goal-setting process and to have the goals developed from the process be included as part of their formal evaluation.

**Question:** Do you have the opportunity to use portfolio assessment as part of your evaluation?

As shown in Figure 7.5, almost 41% of respondents reported that they had an opportunity to use portfolio assessment as part of the overall evaluation strategy. This percentage was substantially greater than the percentages for both 1998 (34.3%) and 2008 (29.8%). Thus, while previous sections have identified an increase in the use of student performance measures as part of the evaluation of principals, the findings from this question show an increase in the use of authentic assessment approaches, such as the use of portfolios.

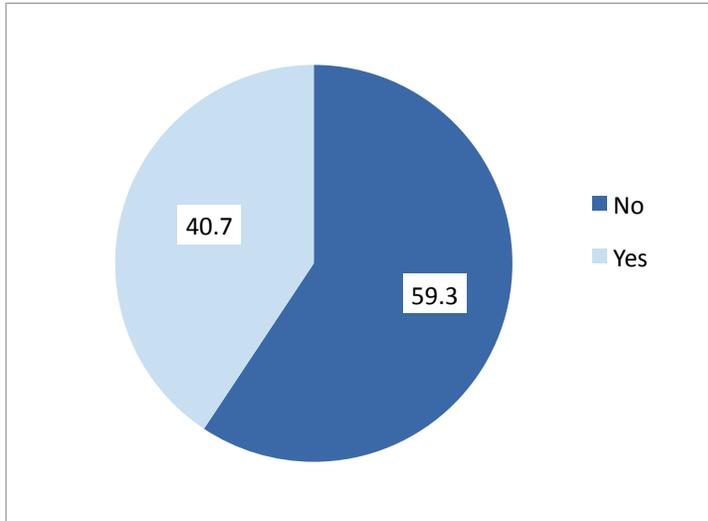


Figure 7.5. Portfolio assessment as part of evaluation.

### Question: How would you describe your morale?

About 50% of respondents reported having either high or very high morale, whereas only about 10% of respondents noted that their morale was either low or very low (Table 7.15). The perceptions of morale differed slightly by years as a principal. Most importantly, only about 7% of less experienced principals reported having low or very low morale, compared to about 11% of other principals reporting low levels of morale.

Table 7.15  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Level of Morale*

Level of morale	Total	Years as a principal		
		< 5	5–14	15+
Very high	12.3	10.9	12.2	13.7
High	38.3	41.2	36.1	39.7
Moderate	39.2	41.2	40.4	35.6
Low	7.7	2.5	9.4	8.9
Very low	2.5	4.2	2.0	2.1

### A Retrospective Look at School Climate and Faculty Morale in 1948

From the 1948 report:

The forward thinking principal has discovered that staff improvement comes thru [sic] understanding, confidence, encouragement, and respect for personalities. He knows that his practices must exemplify the relationships which he expects to encourage among children and classroom teachers. (National Educational Association, 1948, p. 12)

**Question:** How frequently are you commended—by personal comment or in writing by the superintendent or other central office administrators—for something you have done as a principal?

Surprisingly, as shown in Figure 7.6, almost 84% of respondents reported that they had been commended by their superintendent or someone else from central office once a month or never. Only 4.3% of respondents reported receiving some form of commendation at least once a week.

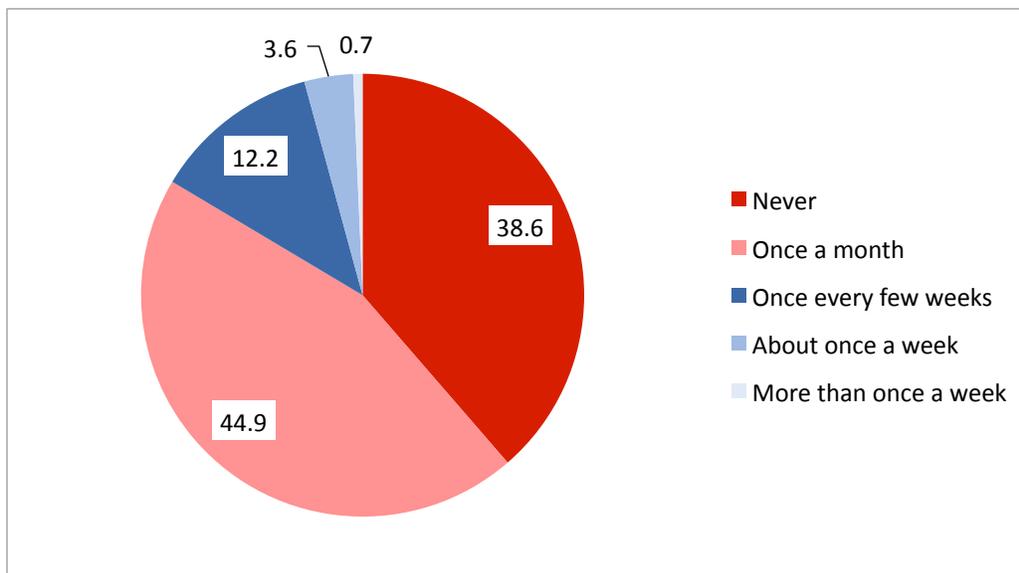


Figure 7.6. Percentage of respondents indicating frequency of commendation.

There were no differences by years of experience as a principal. However, as shown in Table 7.16, a greater percentage of female (41.3%) than male (32.8%) respondents reported never

receiving a commendation. At the other end of the spectrum, a lower percentage of female (3.4%) than male (6.8%) reported receiving some form of commendation at least once a week. Although more research would be needed to make a definitive conclusion, the evidence from this survey suggests that female principals are less likely than male principals to be commended by superintendents or central office personnel.

Table 7.16  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Frequency of Commendation, by Gender of Respondent*

Frequency	Male	Female
Never	32.8	41.3
Once a month	46.3	44.7
Once every few weeks	14.1	10.6
About once a week	5.1	3.1
More than once a week	1.7	0.3

Not surprisingly, as shown in Table 7.17, there appears to be a positive relationship between the frequency with which an individual is commended and the morale of the individual. In short, the more frequently principals report being commended, the greater the level of morale. For example, 47% of those being commended at least once a week reported very high morale, compared to only 5.6% of respondents who reported never being commended.

Table 7.17  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Level of Morale, by Frequency of Commendation*

Level of morale	Frequency of commendation			
	Never	Once a month	Once every few weeks	Once a week or more
Very high	5.6	13.2	20.3	47.4
High	29.8	45.1	40.6	36.8
Moderate	48.5	35.3	32.8	10.5
Low	11.1	5.5	6.3	5.3
Very low	5.1	0.9	0.0	0.0

## Summary

Consistent with the results of prior surveys, the results from this survey indicate that 9 out of 10 principals have a written contract. The majority of such contracts have a term of only 1 year, which continues a decades-long trend of principal contracts having a shorter time frame. Indeed, about 57% of respondents reported being under a 1-year contract—an increase of 18 percentage points since 2008. Moreover, by 2018, less than 10% of principals reported having a contract that exceeded 2 years.

The areas covered by principal contracts also changed over the last decade. In general, principal contracts in 2018 were much more likely to include specific areas—especially salary and benefits—than in prior years. Moreover, at least 50% of respondents noted that job duties, expectations, and evaluation plans were included in their contract.

With respect to job descriptions, 80% of respondents indicated having a written job description, nearly identical to the percentage in prior years. Of those with job descriptions, about 70% reported being evaluated on the specific items in the job description.

While the length of contracts has decreased over time, the number of months per year that principals are contracted to work has increased over time. Specifically, half of principals in 2018 reported having a contract that covers the entire calendar year, compared to only 12% of principals having a 12-month contract in 1958.

Principals are working not only more months out of the year, but also more hours per week. Indeed, the 2018 respondents indicated working nearly 61 hours per week. This included an average of nearly 8 hours per week on school-related activities outside of the school building. The total number of hours worked per week was an increase of 17 hours per week since 1928 and 5 hours per week since 2008. Outside of the formal academic year, respondents also reported working an average of 40 hours per week.

Results suggest that the average salary of a principal is somewhere around \$93,000 per year. More than 44% of respondents reported making greater than \$100,000 per year, with most of such individuals having greater levels of experience as a principal. The average salary for respondents is a slight increase in salary over previous years, which would be expected given the increase in time spent by principals over the last decade.

With respect to perceived adequacy of salary, 50% of respondents agreed at some level that their salary adequately compensated them for their time and effort; the other 50% disagreed at

some level. In general, those with greater salaries were more likely to perceive their pay to adequately compensate them for their time and effort than those with lower salaries.

Only about 10% of respondents indicated participating in a merit pay plan, which was a decrease in the percentage participating in such a plan in 2008. Of those with a merit pay plan, almost half stated that the merit pay plan included measures of student achievement.

About 56% of respondents indicated that they had some form of tenure. This was consistent with the percentages in prior survey years. The most common form of tenure was professional tenure, which guarantees an individual a professional job within the education system if the individual loses the principal position.

Almost 9 out of 10 respondents noted that they were evaluated annually. The percentage of respondents indicating being evaluated every year has increased nearly 20 percentage points since 1978. Over one third of respondents noted that some measure of student achievement is included in their evaluation. Moreover, 56% reported they participate in goal setting and are held accountable for the goals set in their plan. In addition, nearly 41% of respondents indicated the opportunity to use a portfolio approach in their evaluation plan.

About 50% of respondents indicated that their morale was high or very high. Only about 10% of respondents indicated low or very low morale. Not surprisingly, morale was associated with the frequency by which principals were commended by the superintendent or someone else in the central office. The more frequently a principal was commended, the higher the level of morale.

Specifically, with respect to being commended, nearly 39% of respondents reported never being commended, and another 45% reported being commended only about once a month. Alternatively, only about 4.5% of respondents reported being commended at least once a week.

# Chapter 8:

## The Principal's Professional Learning

Research has demonstrated that leaders play a critical and measurable role in school effectiveness (Coelli & Green, 2012; Dhuey & Smith, 2014; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). Moreover, principals are second only to teachers in their impact on student learning. Leithwood et al. (2004) estimated that about 25% of the total school effects can be attributed to principal leadership. Despite the critical role that principals play in student learning and school effectiveness, very little resources and attention are dedicated to principals' professional learning. According to Peterson and Kelley (2009), principal professional development is often fragmented and rarely focuses on the needs of school leaders as they move to new contexts or through the various stages of their careers.

In this chapter, we share what respondents to the NAESP 10-year study identified as key needs for their professional learning as well as the modes through which they would prefer to receive professional development. This requirement is based on decades of research consistently finding that, of all factors located within a school, teachers have the strongest influence on student outcomes (e.g., Rockoff, 2004; Seashore Louis et al., 2010), and principals have the second strongest influence.

Principals identified improving student performance as the key area in which they most needed professional development.

**Question:** In which of the following areas do you feel you are in need of professional development?

In the 2018 NAESP 10-year study, principals were presented with 27 leadership challenges and asked to identify the areas in which they needed professional development (see Table 8.1). The

top five challenges identified as high need areas for professional development were, from the highest identified need, the following:

- Improving student performance (18.3%);
- Improving staff performance (15.8%);
- Understanding and applying technology (12.8%);
- Time management (12.4%); and
- Using social media effectively (11.9%) and school improvement planning (11.8%), tied in fifth place.

When considered with categories identified as moderate need, the top five shift somewhat to the following:

- Improving student performance (70.7% combined),
- Improving staff performance (67.1% combined),
- School improvement planning (53.7% combined),
- Planning and implementation of curriculum goals (53.7% combined), and
- Assessment/evaluation of instructional program (52.6% combined).

In contrast, the most commonly identified areas in which responding principals felt professional development were not needed were the following:

- Effective fiscal administration (low need: 53.3%; no need: 18.8%),
- Working with special interest groups (low need: 52.6%; no need: 20.8%),
- Negotiating school politics (low need: 49.2%; no need: 19.7%),
- Negotiating district politics (low need: 48.1%; no need: 20.2%), and
- Negotiating community politics (low need: 46.9%; no need: 21%).

These results are somewhat different than those reported 10 years ago. In 2008, the top five areas identified for professional development, from the highest identified need, were (a) understanding and applying technology, (b) visioning and staff improvement, (c) improving staff performance, (d) differentiating instruction, and (e) developing a professional learning community.

Principals pointed to school-level (67.1%) and district-provided (64.9%) opportunities as the strategies they most likely would use to address their own professional development needs.

Table 8.1  
*Percentage of Respondents Reporting Perceived Needs for Professional Development*

Area of need	High need	Moderate need	Low need	No need
Improving student performance	18.3	52.4	25.6	3.7
Improving staff performance	15.8	51.3	28.7	4.2
Understanding and applying technology	12.8	39.2	38.2	9.9
Time management	12.4	30.6	41.3	15.6
Using social media effectively	11.9	36.6	39.7	11.8
School improvement planning	11.8	41.9	38.2	8.2
Differentiating instruction	10.8	40.0	40.1	9.1
Monitoring faculty/student social media issues	10.1	30.3	48.4	11.3
Dealing with diversity/multicultural issues	9.2	31.6	44.7	14.5
Developing a professional learning community	8.4	38.5	41.2	11.9
Building partnerships with businesses and agencies	8.4	32.1	43.8	15.6
Conducting effective teacher evaluations	8.2	32.4	45.9	13.5
Negotiating district politics	8.2	23.5	48.1	20.2
Developing/maintaining a positive school climate	7.9	39.3	39.8	12.9
Assessment/evaluation of instructional program	7.9	44.7	39.5	7.9
Negotiating community politics	7.9	24.2	46.9	21.0
Planning and implementation of curriculum goals	7.6	46.1	37.7	8.7
Supervision of instructional program	7.4	40.0	43.4	9.2
Conducting effective classroom observations	7.4	32.1	47.4	13.1
Negotiating school politics	7.4	23.7	49.2	19.7
Managing organizational change	7.2	35.5	44.7	12.6
Effective fiscal administration	6.9	21.0	53.3	18.8
Assessment/evaluation of staff	6.7	29.9	50.9	12.4
Visioning	6.4	35.3	45.9	12.4
Assessment/evaluation of students	5.6	35.3	47.2	11.9
Use of effective communications and presentations	5.2	28.9	48.9	17.0
Working with special interest groups	4.7	21.8	52.6	20.8

## Question: What strategies are you most likely to use to address your own professional learning needs?

When asked which strategies they were most likely to use to address their professional learning needs, respondents identified the following five strategies as either highly or moderately likely (Table 8.2):

- Participation in school-level opportunities (highly likely: 67.1%; moderately likely: 26.9%),
- Participation in district-provided opportunities (highly likely: 64.9%; moderately likely: 30.6%),
- Reading journals and books (highly likely: 51.8%; moderately likely: 40%),
- Face-to-face networking with fellow professionals (highly likely: 49.1%; moderately likely: 43.7%), and
- Attendance at state association conferences (highly likely: 45%; moderately likely: 37.8%).

Interestingly, little has changed since 2008; the survey respondents in that year identified these same professional development strategies. Also like in 2008, respondents indicated they were unlikely to enroll in either a graduate or nondegree program to support their professional learning. Also of interest, over 10% of respondents indicated that they had no access to the use of a mentor.

## Question: Have you participated in any online development programs? If yes, what is your assessment of the experience?

More than half of respondents (56.3%) indicated they had participated in online development programs. Unlike in 2008 when this same question was posed, there was little difference in participation by years of experience. Similarly, gender did not seem to be a factor impacting participation either, as shown in Table 8.3. However, gender was a factor in how positively participants rated their online experience.

Women tended to rate their experiences as highly positive more often (64.1%) than men (48.5%). More experienced principals were slightly less taken with their online experiences

Principals responding to the 2018 survey reported an increase in online professional development.

than their less experienced counterparts and more likely to say they were unlikely to try it again. In explaining why they were unlikely to try online professional development programs again, respondents commented, “It is very difficult to replace the in-person experience,” “I strongly prefer the personal experience,” and “Only if required. Impersonal.”

Table 8.2  
*Percentage of Respondents Indicating Likelihood of Using Strategies for Their Own Professional Development*

Strategy	Highly likely	Moderately likely	Not likely	Not available
Participation in school-level opportunities	67.1	26.9	4.0	2.0
Participation in district-provided opportunities	64.9	30.6	3.4	1.2
Reading journals, books, etc.	51.8	40.0	7.6	0.7
Face-to-face networking with fellow professionals	49.1	43.7	6.4	0.8
Attendance at state association conferences	45.0	37.8	14.8	2.4
Attendance at national association conferences	30.6	34.3	30.1	5.0
Participation in national association conferences	28.9	37.0	28.6	5.6
Online networking with fellow professionals	23.2	45.0	30.1	1.7
Use of a mentor	19.0	33.6	37.1	10.3
Participation in online courses/events	16.3	43.0	38.5	2.2
Enrollment in a graduate program	12.6	16.0	66.2	5.2
Participation in university non-degree programs	5.0	22.4	64.9	7.7

Table 8.3  
*Percentage Respondents Indicating Participation in Online Professional Development Programs*

Participation	Total	Years as a principal			Gender	
		< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
Yes, have participated	56.3	57.6	55.0	57.5	54.6	57.9
No	43.7	42.5	45.0	42.5	45.4	42.1
Of those who said “Yes”:						
Highly positive, would do it again	57.2	57.1	59.4	53.6	48.5	64.1
Not so good, but willing to try again	38.9	39.0	37.6	41.2	46.4	33.7
Highly unlikely to try again	3.8	3.9	3.0	5.2	5.2	2.2

### A Retrospective Look at Professional Development Opportunities From 1928–2008

School leaders working on their own professional development have done so in varying ways. Some examples from prior reports are as follows:

- Taking summer school classes
- Instructing college/university courses
- Reading
- Professional organization membership or participation
- Attending meetings
- Home defense
- Professional writing opportunities
- Committee work
- Workshop and conference attendance
- Online opportunities

## Summary

The need to address the developmental needs of principals at various career stages is well documented in the literature (Petersen & Kelley, 2009). Responses to the 2018 NAESP 10-year study identify multiple areas of professional development need, including improving student performance, improving staff performance, understanding and applying technology, time

management, using social media effectively, and school improvement planning. States and districts must pay attention to what principals identify as their learning needs and use that information, along with the growing awareness of new models, to support principal learning throughout the career span. This information can be used to develop authentic, relevant, and high-impact professional learning opportunities for building-level educational leaders.

# Chapter 9:

## Concerns of Principals

How schools work and how they are led are subject to multiple and constantly shifting influences. Each of the previous NAESP 10-year reports has articulated the key concerns of practicing building-level leaders. Although many of the concerns reflect the values and events of a given decade, other challenges are more enduring. Increased emphasis on school effectiveness is prevalent in the current political context (e.g., Figlio & Loeb, 2011). This scrutiny has its roots in the widely publicized report, *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). According to the 1988 NAESP 10-year report,

The past decade has been a time of extraordinary change for elementary and middle school principals. No period in the history of education, even the “golden years” that followed the launching of Sputnik, has witnessed such an intense focus on school operations and program quality as that touched off by the publication in 1983 of the U.S. Department of Education’s *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Issued under the auspices of then Secretary of Education T. H. Bell, *A Nation At Risk* not only had an enormous impact in and of itself but touched off half a hundred additional reports, each focusing on promoting the specific agenda of the sponsor as a way to improve the nation’s schools.

The impact of these reports (and the actions they generated) came swiftly, and was astonishing in its scope. The call for change, largely rooted in a return to a solid intellectual and academic focus and heavily promoted as being necessary to the nation’s economic and political survival, resulted in the enactment of a range of new state mandates. ...

At any rate, through all of the upheaval and uncertainty that change engenders, elementary and middle school principals must “keep school.” They must work with the students who are in their classrooms, the teachers who are already on their staffs, the existing curriculum. They must face the reality of changing home and family structures, societal pressures, limited financial resources, and the host of other problems that are present in today’s schools. (Doud, 1988, pp. 123–124)

In those 10-year studies where NAESP included specific questions focused on the “concerns” of elementary and middle-school principals, readers are offered a glimpse into the challenges that principals faced over the years as well as how things have changed or, in some cases, remained the same over several decades.



### A Retrospective Look at Unions in 1962 and 1978

The first collective bargaining agreement between school officials and teachers was signed in 1962 (Loeb & Miller, 2006). It is unsurprising, then, that the 1978 report focused more attention on the membership, operations, and perceived impact of unions and collective bargaining.

In 1958, some of the challenges discussed in the report included a lack of clerical help, which principals felt impacted their ability to provide instructional support; a concern that principals would be expected to take responsibility for leading multiple schools; and dissatisfaction with preparation programs. In 1968, concerns continued with regard to clerical help as well as the lack of office space for school leaders. By 1978, clerical staff and space were displaced as key concerns by collective bargaining. While mixed opinions were reported, 43% of the responding principals felt teacher collective bargaining was having a negative effect on education quality, and an even higher percentage (62%) said it was having a negative effect on public opinion. Of those principals who had experienced a teachers' strike in their building, almost 50% felt that it had strained their relationship with their teachers.

As exemplified in the excerpt from the 1988 10-year study above (Doud, 1988), the decade between 1978 and 1988 bore witness to a heightened focus on educational effectiveness. This focus was reflected in the concerns expressed by respondents to the 1988 survey. Issues considered to be major problems included providing programs for underachievers, coping with state regulations and initiatives, effectively meshing instruction with special academic programs, and parent involvement.

With the increased focus on educational excellence came an evolution in the expectations for educational leaders. These expectations were captured in the 1996 ISLLC standards for school leaders, a set of standards that reframed leadership around six key areas: leading and navigating the school's (a) vision, (b) instruction, (c) operating and management systems, (d) family and community involvement, (e) ethics, and (f) educational politics. It is not too surprising, then, that by 1998 72% of respondents to the NAESP 10-year study ranked fragmentation of the principal's time first on the list of overall concerns (Doud &

Approved by NPBEA in 1996, the ISLLC standards were adopted or adapted by over 40 states. These standards were revised in 2008 and again in 2015, resulting in a change of name to the Practice Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL).

Keller, 1998). This concern was followed by three others that reflect the changing expectations for schools and school leaders in the absence of increased resources to support those changes: student assessment issues, students not performing up to potential, and inadequate financial resources.

By 2008, the focus on educational excellence had evolved into educational accountability. The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act as NCLB (2002) introduced high-stakes state accountability into public education. Instead of asking principals to identify challenges, the 2008 10-year study (Protheroe, 2008) provided a list of challenges and asked respondents, “How do principals in 2008 view these challenges?” The list of 58 concerns included in the survey instrument were identified by practicing principals and grouped in five domains: program related, students, faculty/staff, stakeholders, and management. Three program-related themes were ranked first among the 58 concerns, including providing a continuum of services for students at risk (78.7%), student assessment (71.5%), and instructional practice (69.6%). Other top concerns were the development of staff (68.3%), students not performing to their potential (67.8%), fragmentation of principal’s time (66.8%), financial resources (64.6%), increase in the number of students with emotional problems (63.15), including assessment results of students with disabilities in adequate yearly progress calculations (62.1%), teacher performance (59.3%), implementing state (54.7%) and federal (50.6%) mandates, and promoting instructional inclusion and collaboration (52.9%).

**Question:** To what extent is each of the items currently or potentially (within the next year) a concern in the school for which you are now responsible?

Twelve areas were identified as either of extreme or high concern in the 2018 NAESP 10-year study. These concerns, listed in Table 9.1, include the top three ranked concerns from 2008. However, the 2008 concerns (providing a continuum of services, student assessment, and instructional practices) did not rank in the top three in 2018. Rather, they were superseded by concerns regarding the increased numbers of students with emotional problems and mental health issues as well as students not performing to their level of potential.

The top-ranked concern for principals in 2018 was the increase in the numbers of students with emotional problems.

Table 9.1  
*Areas Characterized as an Extreme or High Concern by 50% or More Principals, 2018*

Area	% of principals
Increase in the numbers of students with emotional problems	73.7
Student mental health issues	65.5
Students not performing to their level of potential	62.3
Providing a continuum of services for students who are at risk	61.6
Student assessment	57.2
Student poverty	56.5
Instructional practices	55.8
Teacher performance/effectiveness	55.1
Professional development of staff	55.0
Fragmentation of principal's time	53.5
Management of student behavior	52.5
Financial resources	50.8

In the following five subsections, we provide a set of tables (Tables 9.2–9.6) through which we share more insight into respondents' perspectives in each of the five challenge domains: program related, students, faculty/staff, stakeholders, and management.

**Question:** To what extent is each of the following program-related issues currently or potentially (within the next year) a concern in the school for which you are now responsible?

Respondents to the 2018 NAESP 10-year survey identified a number of program-related issues as being of moderate, high, and extreme concern. Among those issues identified as extreme concerns were the increase in the number of students with emotional problems. Approximately 40% ranked this as an extreme concern, another 34% ranked it of high concern, and 19% ranked it of moderate concern (see Table 9.2).

Following behind concerns regarding the increased number of students with emotional problems were students not performing to their level of potential (22% ranked this an extreme concern, 40% as of high concern, and 27.5% as of moderate concern) and providing a continuum of services for students who are at risk (21% ranked this an extreme concern, 40.5% as of high concern, and 30% ranked it of moderate concern).

Interestingly, only one of these three issues was listed among the highest ranking concerns in 2008, providing a continuum of services for students at risk, which was ranked highest. The other two highest ranking concerns in 2008 were student assessment and instructional practice.

Table 9.2  
*Percentage of Principals Identifying Program-Related Concerns*

Area of potential concern	Level of concern				
	Extreme	High	Moderate	Low	None
Increase in the numbers of students with emotional problems	39.9	33.8	18.8	6.1	1.5
Students not performing to their levels of potential	22.1	40.2	27.5	9.0	1.1
Providing a continuum of services for students who are at risk	21.2	40.4	29.7	6.3	2.4
Declining or flat-lined standardized test scores	17.3	27.7	34.5	15.3	5.2
Student assessment	16.4	40.8	31.4	9.6	1.9
Special education program	14.2	31.6	33.2	17.7	3.3
Assessment results of students with disabilities for school accountability purposes	14.0	33.6	34.7	14.8	3.0
School involvement with delivery of social services	13.8	24.0	35.2	18.6	8.3
Instructional practices	13.7	42.1	32.8	8.9	2.3
Curriculum development	11.6	30.8	38.2	15.5	3.9
Ensuring inclusion/collaboration with respect to instruction of students with disabilities	10.7	33.0	32.8	19.4	4.1
Addressing the needs of a culturally diverse population	10.2	19.4	33.0	29.2	8.3
Education of English language learners	8.7	16.7	29.9	28.8	15.9
Implementing prekindergarten programs	6.5	14.9	23.6	24.0	31.0
English language learner program	6.5	15.7	28.6	32.3	17.0
Implementing extended-day programs/summer programs	6.1	14.0	30.3	29.9	19.7
Gifted and talented program	4.4	11.3	34.9	32.8	16.6
Education of gifted and talented students	3.3	14.9	38.4	31.6	11.8



### A Retrospective Look at Principals' Concerns About Their Schools' Physical Plant in 1928

In early surveys, a concern of principals and of the authors alike was the lack of physical office space for the individual serving as the school principal. Although the majority of principals in 1928 reported they had their own office, they expressed concern about having the appropriate amount of space and materials, such as a conference room available for “professional study as well as for private discussions” (National Education Association, 1928, p. 128). The office was clearly a pervasive concern as a 17-page chapter in the 1928 study focused on this area. In this chapter, “The Elementary School Principal’s Office,” principals’ offices were reported often to serve many purposes as a waiting room, storage, library, or even a medical room. The office or many offices were not conducive to fulfilling the needs of the position. Principals reported lack of supplies, such as bookshelves. In 2018, these concerns are not as readily reported, indicating that understanding and appreciating the structural needs that help principals meet basic work setting needs has led to these requirements being met.

This chapter in the 1928 report included data from principals about the office location, use, and materials. Sixteen different floor plans were presented offering an array of design options. The chapter also suggested that essentials of the office include a convenient location, at least two rooms, space suggestions, organization suggestions, and adequate heating and lighting. Suggested equipment included cork bulletin boards, teachers’ boxes, a desk, typewriter, trash cans, slide rule, and safe.

**Question:** To what extent is each of the following student-related issues currently or potentially (within the next year) a concern in the school for which you are now responsible?

In 2008, none of the student-related issues was identified as a major concern by a majority of respondents. This, unfortunately, is not the case with the 2018 NAESP 10-year survey. Respondents identified a number of student-related issues as being of moderate, high, and extreme concern. Among those issues identified by a majority of respondents as an extreme or high concern were the management of student behavior, student mental health issues, absenteeism, lack of effective adult supervision at home, and student poverty. Of these, student mental health issues garnered the most concern, with 33.4% of respondents describing

this as an extreme concern and 32.1 % as a high concern. An additional 25.3% rated it a moderate concern (see Table 9.3). This finding reflects the program-related concern regarding the increased number of students with emotional problems.

Table 9.3  
*Percentage of Principals Identifying Concerns About Student Issues*

Area of potential concern	Level of concern				
	Extreme	High	Moderate	Low	None
Student mental health issues	33.4	32.1	25.3	8.1	1.1
Student poverty	25.7	30.8	28.8	12.2	2.6
Management of student behavior	20.9	31.6	33.0	13.1	1.5
Lack of effective adult supervision at home	20.5	29.0	31.4	16.1	3.1
Safety and security of students	16.6	25.8	34.9	18.6	4.1
Bullying through social media	12.6	18.5	33.4	26.8	8.9
Student homelessness	11.3	22.0	31.7	29.9	5.2
Emotional bullying	11.3	28.4	38.4	19.7	2.2
Child abuse	10.2	24.0	34.0	27.1	4.8
Student stress over self-identity	8.5	18.5	34.1	31.4	7.6
Use of hand-held technological tools in the classroom (e.g., cell phones, tablets)	7.0	14.6	31.7	34.5	12.2
Addiction to online options (video games, social media, etc.)	6.6	15.9	31.6	29.0	17.0
Absenteeism	5.7	17.0	41.7	31.9	3.7
Student physical health issues such as obesity, asthma, etc.	5.7	17.0	41.7	31.9	3.7
Physical bullying	5.5	15.7	40.6	33.0	5.2
Student intolerance of other students (race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, nationality, etc.)	4.4	10.3	32.5	39.3	13.5
Sexual harassment of students by other students	3.3	7.2	24.0	45.8	19.7
Inappropriate sexual behavior	2.6	7.9	21.0	43.2	25.3
Violence in schools	2.6	5.5	17.5	39.7	34.7
Use of drugs	2.4	3.9	14.8	38.2	40.8
Use of alcoholic beverages	2.0	3.5	14.9	36.7	42.8
Sexual orientation (including transgender students)	2.0	3.7	19.4	45.0	30.0
Vandalism	1.9	4.4	18.1	45.9	29.7
Gang activity	1.3	2.2	10.9	30.8	54.8
Use of tobacco products	1.1	2.2	13.7	38.4	44.7

Although no student-related issues were identified as a major concern by a majority of principals in 2008, the three top-rated student concerns were management of student behavior, safety and security of students, and bullying. Clearly the concerns regarding student populations have shifted over the last decade.

In addition to student mental health, respondents indicated highest concern for management of student behavior, absenteeism, lack of effective adult supervision, and student poverty.

**Question:** To what extent is each of the following faculty-staff issues currently or potentially (within the next year) a concern in the school for which you are now responsible?

Respondents to the 2018 NAESP 10-year survey identified only two faculty-staff issues as being a major concern: teacher performance/effectiveness and professional development of staff. Interestingly, these were the same concerns identified in the 2008 study. Specifically, 16.2% rated teacher performance/effectiveness as an extreme concern, and 38.9% identified it as a high concern. Similarly, 15.3% considered professional development as an extreme concern, and another 40% ranked it of high concern.

Interestingly, quite a few items appeared to be of no concern to the majority of principals responding to the 10-year survey: sexual harassment among the staff in the school, sexual harassment of students by staff, and the use of alcoholic beverages or drugs among the school staff. Furthermore, the majority of respondents rated 11 of the 16 items as being of little or no concern (see Table 9.4).

Similar to 2008, in 2018 principals identified only two faculty and staff issues: teacher performance and effectiveness and staff professional development.

Table 9.4  
*Percentage of Principals Identifying Concerns About Faculty-Staff Issues*

Area of potential concern	Level of concern				
	Extreme	High	Moderate	Low	None
Teacher shortages/difficulty in hiring qualified teachers	17.0	17.7	26.4	24.5	14.4
Teacher performance/effectiveness	16.2	38.9	33.6	10.0	1.3
Teacher/staff morale	15.5	26.6	38.8	16.2	3.0
Professional development of staff	15.3	39.7	32.5	11.3	1.3
Teacher resistance to improvement efforts	12.9	25.7	37.3	21.6	2.6
Teacher/staff mental health	10.9	26.6	36.4	22.5	3.7
Absenteeism	7.9	13.3	29.7	33.6	15.5
Safety and security of staff	6.6	13.1	29.3	37.1	13.8
Teacher turnover	5.5	10.0	18.8	34.3	31.4
Ability of faculty staff to engage in respectful interpersonal relationships with other faculty/staff	4.2	12.6	29.3	33.4	20.5
Teacher/staff health issues	3.9	9.8	33.0	39.7	13.7
Teacher intolerance of student differences (race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, nationality, etc.)	2.8	7.6	19.9	38.2	31.6
Teacher self-identity	1.5	4.6	13.8	31.8	48.2
Sexual harassment among the staff in the school	1.3	1.3	9.0	35.8	52.6
Sexual harassment of students by staff	1.3	1.1	8.1	30.6	58.9
Staff grievances filed through employee unions	1.3	4.2	10.7	38.6	45.2
Use of alcoholic beverages among the staff of the school	1.1	0.9	6.5	31.9	59.6
Use of drugs among the staff in the school	0.9	0.6	4.8	28.0	65.7

**Question:** To what extent is each of the following stakeholder issues currently or potentially (within the next year) a concern in the school for which you are now responsible?

In the area of stakeholder issues, respondents to the 2018 NAESP 10-year survey identified only one issue as being of major concern: financial resources. Approximately 25.1% ranked this as

an extreme concern, and another 25.7% ranked it of high concern (Table 9.5). The level of parental involvement was also of concern, though it was identified by just under a majority of respondents. Approximately 15.7% ranked this as an extreme concern, and another 29.7% ranked it of high concern.

Interestingly, both of these issues were identified in the 2008 study. Further, financial resources was identified as a major concern by just over a majority and parental involvement was identified by just under a majority of respondents. Worth noting, home schooling and public school alternatives along with the condition of the school’s physical facility were rated of little or no concern by the majority of participants.

Table 9.5  
*Percentage of Principals Identifying Concerns About Stakeholder Issues*

Area of potential concern	Level of concern				
	Extreme	High	Moderate	Low	None
Financial resources	25.1	25.7	33.2	9.8	6.3
Level of parental involvement	15.7	29.7	34.7	15.9	4.1
Public school alternatives (vouchers and choice programs)	14.4	16.8	24.2	26.0	18.6
Community support for public schools	9.8	26.2	34.7	23.8	5.5
Parent training/advocacy/education	8.7	20.5	38.4	24.5	7.9
Condition of the physical facility	7.4	14.2	26.8	33.2	18.5
Home schooling	0.9	5.2	18.5	47.2	28.2

**Question:** To what extent is each of the following management issues currently or potentially (within the next year) a concern in the school for which you are now responsible?

Respondents to the 2018 NAESP 10-year survey identified only one management issue as being of major concern: the fragmentation of their time. Approximately 22.5% ranked this as an extreme concern, and another 31% ranked it of high concern (see Table 9.6). This issue was also identified in the 2008 study, along with implementing state mandates and implementing federal mandates. Although these latter issues were identified as concerns, the level of concern did not compare to the fragmentation of time.

Interestingly, quite a few items appeared to be of no concern to the majority of principals responding to the 10-year survey, including decline in student enrollment, increase in student enrollment, inadequate availability of technology or support services, attendance at central office meetings, and the need to market the school to prevent student transfers.

Table 9.6  
*Percentage of Principals Identifying Concerns About Management Issues*

Area of potential concern	Level of concern				
	Extreme	High	Moderate	Low	None
Fragmentation of your time	22.5	31.0	27.7	13.7	5.2
Evaluation of teachers and staff	15.7	33.2	34.7	13.3	3.1
Implementation of state mandates	13.7	26.0	35.4	19.2	5.7
Implementation of federal mandates	12.2	24.5	35.4	21.4	6.5
Central office control of decisions that should be school based	10.3	15.3	27.7	31.0	15.7
Dismissal of incompetent staff	10.2	14.2	27.1	35.4	13.1
School facilities	9.8	14.8	27.1	31.9	16.4
Attendance at central office meetings	8.5	14.9	25.5	33.8	17.3
Demands for information from central office	8.1	18.6	29.5	31.9	11.8
Needs of different teachers (millennial teachers vs. older teachers)	7.9	20.7	37.8	26.0	7.6
Decline in student enrollment	6.8	14.0	21.0	29.5	28.6
Need to advertise/market your school as a way to combat students transferring	6.6	12.4	21.2	31.4	28.4
Increase in student enrollment	6.5	11.3	25.3	32.5	24.5
Inadequate availability of technology or support services	5.5	14.4	28.2	33.2	18.6
Wide range of different teacher abilities	5.5	18.8	36.0	33.2	6.5
Crisis management	5.4	14.6	34.3	38.0	7.8
Inadequate availability of staff training for technology use	5.4	16.1	35.2	31.0	12.4
Development of emergency procedures (e.g., active shooter)	4.6	14.9	31.2	35.4	13.8



### A Retrospective Look at Principals' Concerns Regarding Clerical Staff in 1928, 1958, 1968, 1998, and 2008

A second concern found throughout early reports was lack of paid clerical staff to support the work. Over 70% of principals in the 1928 data did not report working with a full-time paid clerk. Further, the authors were unimpressed with the expectations and skill-levels of the typical clerks who held these positions. The authors argue that more clerical work would be beneficial so

more time could be secured for supervision and other technical work by (1) reducing the number of reports and similar demands required of principals, (2) providing principals with assistance in accordance with their needs, and (3) training principals to make full use of the help provided and to capitalize on the free time secured" (National Education Association, 1928, p. 264).

By 1988, over 92% of schools had at least one full-time secretary or clerical assistant (Doud & Keller, 1988, p. 63).

A reason the clerical staff concern is threaded through these reports is likely linked to the distribution of time that a principal spends on differing aspects of the job, particularly administrative work. Principals throughout the studies commented on not having enough time to spend on elements of instructional improvement (e.g., National Education Association, 1958, p. 101; National Education Association, 1968, p. 51).

It may be useful to note that although the concern of not having a full-time secretary or cleric to assist in addressing the administrative concerns seemed to dissipate as the report became more recent, principals are still concerned about their allocation of time, as evidenced by the following 1998 segment: "Fragmentation of time was clearly the most pervasive *management issue* for respondents (72% identified this as a major concern)" (Doud & Keller, 1998, p. 73). The terms *secretary*, *clerk*, and *administrative assistant* are not included in the 1998 or 2008 reports. *Support staff* is a topic of data collection, however.

**Question:** Has your own sense of job security decreased in the last 3 years? If yes, what are some of the reasons why?

Identifying challenges and understanding workplace conditions are not only important for understanding the pressures educational leaders have faced over the years and their level of job satisfaction, but also can provide useful insight into their sense of job security. In the 2018 NAESP 10-year study, the majority of principals reported feeling about the same sense of job

security over the prior 3 years, with the sense of job security being higher in all categories for more senior principals. Gender did not provide any significant differences, though men appear to feel slightly more secure than women. In comparison to 2008 responses, principals appear to have a greater sense of job security today (see Table 9.7).

Table 9.7  
*Percentage of Principals Indicating Sense of Job Security Over the Prior 3 Years*

Rating	Total	Years as principal			Gender	
		< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
Feeling much more secure	5.1	2.4	4.3	8.8	8.1	4.1
Feeling more secure	12.3	15.3	13.6	7.5	11.5	11.5
Has stayed about the same	54.8	45.2	54.7	63.3	51.2	57.6
Feeling less secure	13.6	10.5	15.9	12.2	19.5	11.2
Feeling much less secure	7.9	7.3	9.3	6.1	5.2	8.1
Not applicable	6.2	19.4	2.3	2.0	4.6	7.5

**Question:** Relative to your own feelings of job security, indicate the extent to which each of the items listed is currently or potentially (within the next year) an area of concern.

In addition to sharing their feelings regarding their job security, principals were asked to comment on the concerns that impacted their sense of stability. Respondents were asked to rate 13 concerns, which in previous studies were correlated with principals' feelings of job security. None of the 13 areas was identified by a majority of respondents as threats to their job security. In fact, nine of the 13 concerns were considered of no concern to a majority of principals. The top-ranked issues were unsatisfactory student performance (36.7%) and accountability issues (36.5%), such as failure of school to meet state standards. The following comments reflect some of the concerns regarding accountability: "Pressure of maintaining a particular accountability label," "The district has removed and demoted a number of principals based on test scores alone," "There is constant pressure," "I'm held accountable for things that are outside of my control," and "The state testing program is in shambles, and yet this is used for accountability." After that, the percentage of principals' selection of the major concern option decreased sharply to the single digits (see Table 9.8).

Similar patterns were evident in the 2008 study, where none of the factors was identified by a majority of respondents, and accountability was identified as one of the top concerns by 40% of

respondents. Reaching back to 1998, only 20.9% of respondents identified accountability (i.e., failure to meet district or state standards) as a major concern.

Table 9.8  
*Percentage of Principals Identifying Problems Currently or Potentially (Within the Next Year) Related to Job Security, 2018*

Problem	Total %	Years as principal			Gender	
		< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
Unsatisfactory student performance						
Major concern	36.7	37.9	39.2	31.3	32.8	39.3
Minor concern	43.1	42.7	41.1	46.9	47.7	40.2
Not a concern	20.2	19.4	19.8	21.8	19.5	20.6
Accountability issues such as failure of school to meet state standards						
Major concern	36.5	35.5	38.3	34.0	30.5	40.2
Minor concern	40.1	36.3	41.1	41.5	51.2	34.6
Not a concern	23.4	28.2	20.5	24.5	18.4	25.2
Conflicts with teachers						
Major concern	9.8	8.9	10.9	8.8	9.2	10.6
Minor concern	43.5	46.8	44.2	39.5	44.3	42.7
Not a concern	46.7	44.4	45.0	51.7	46.6	46.7
Conflicts with superintendent						
Major concern	11.2	7.3	11.6	13.6	12.6	10.9
Minor concern	24.6	21.0	25.2	26.5	27.6	22.7
Not a concern	64.3	71.8	63.2	59.9	59.8	66.4
Conflicts with parents						
Major concern	9.5	7.3	12.4	6.1	10.3	9.7
Minor concern	45.0	50.0	41.5	46.9	43.1	45.4
Not a concern	45.6	42.7	46.1	46.9	46.6	44.9
Conflicts with school-based advisory group						
Major concern	2.1	0.0	3.5	1.4	2.9	1.9
Minor concern	24.0	24.2	23.3	25.2	25.3	23.1
Not a concern	73.9	75.8	73.3	73.5	71.8	75.1
Lack of superintendent support						
Major concern	16.5	11.3	16.3	21.1	17.2	17.1
Minor concern	26.1	27.4	25.6	25.9	23.0	26.5
Not a concern	57.5	61.3	58.1	53.1	59.8	56.4
Superintendent/supervisor turnover						
Major concern	17.2	19.4	15.1	19.1	14.9	19.0
Minor concern	25.9	22.6	27.9	25.2	28.7	25.2
Not a concern	56.9	58.1	57.0	55.8	56.3	55.8

Problem	Total %	Years as principal			Gender	
		< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
Litigation						
Major concern	7.9	7.3	8.5	7.5	5.8	9.4
Minor concern	29.5	26.6	29.8	31.3	33.9	26.5
Not a concern	62.6	66.1	61.6	61.2	60.3	64.2
Reduction in force due to declining enrollment						
Major concern	12.1	12.1	12.4	11.6	9.8	13.7
Minor concern	29.5	28.2	28.7	32.0	30.5	27.7
Not a concern	58.4	59.7	58.9	56.5	59.8	58.6
Reorganization/consolidation of schools						
Major concern	10.2	8.9	11.2	9.5	8.1	11.8
Minor concern	20.2	20.2	19.4	21.8	21.3	18.7
Not a concern	69.6	71.0	69.4	68.7	70.7	69.5
Poor personal performance evaluation						
Major concern	5.7	4.8	7.0	4.1	8.6	4.4
Minor concern	19.5	18.6	19.8	19.7	22.4	17.8
Not a concern	74.9	76.6	73.3	76.2	69.0	77.9
Unpreparedness in some area of leadership						
Major concern	6.6	5.7	9.3	2.7	6.9	6.9
Minor concern	26.8	37.9	23.6	23.1	33.9	23.1
Not a concern	66.5	56.5	67.1	74.2	59.2	70.1

**Question:** Have you ever been named in a civil suit related to your position as principal? To what was the complaint related? Were you satisfied with the outcome?

As in past decades, very few principals indicated that they had been named in a civil suit. In 1998, 10.6% indicated that they had been named in a civil suit. This reduced to 4.5% in 2008 but has risen again to 10.44% in the 2018 study. The issues leading to the civil suit varied widely among the respondents, with the top two reasons involving special education issues and liability for student injury. Respondents were split over how satisfied they were with the outcome of the civil suit, with 41.97% indicated that they were satisfied, 15.12% indicating that they were somewhat satisfied, and 42.91% indicating that they were not satisfied.

Special education issues were the most common reason for a principal being named in a civil suit.

## Summary

Principals were asked to share their insight into five key areas of concern related to their work: program related, students, faculty/staff, stakeholders, and management. According to the data, 12 issues were identified as major issues of concern by a majority of respondents. These concerns included three related to student behavior and student emotional and mental health (an increase in the numbers of students with emotional problems and student mental health issues and management of student behavior), one focused on student demographics (student poverty), and three related to student achievement and supports (students not performing to their levels of potential, student assessment, and providing a continuum of services for students at risk). Two concerns focused on teaching (instructional practices and teacher performance/effectiveness), and one focused on professional staff development. Financial resources were also within the top 12 major concerns, as was the fragmentation of the principal's time.

Although the above list includes significant challenges for pre-K-8 principals, the majority of respondents reported feeling a fairly high sense of job security, which was also the case in 2008.

# Chapter 10:

## Future Career Intentions

Maintaining strong leadership in a school requires a committed and stable principal. It takes several years to build the trust, relationships, routines, and inner knowledge of the school, and research has shown that it takes 5–7 years for a principal to enact meaningful change (Fullan, 1991, 2002). When principals leave, schools not only undergo decreases in student achievement (Miller, 2013), but the transition to a new principal also often undermines the positive climate and social linkages that support both student and teacher success (Klingner, Boardman, & McMaster, 2013; Loeb, Kalogrides, & Horng, 2010).

Future career intentions of principals, examined in this chapter, are an important indicator of how satisfied current principals are, as well as how many principals are going to be leaving the position in the near future. Given that researchers often have raised concern at the difficulty in filling vacant positions and the high levels of turnover among principals (Loeb et al., 2010; Papa, 2007), it is important to understand the future employment intentions of currently employed principals.

### Question: What are your future intentions in the next 3 years?

From the 2018 NAESP 10-year study, shown in Table 10.1, 62% of principals indicated they were planning on remaining employed as a principal at their current school. Aside from staying in their current position, another 9% indicated their intention to move to a central office leadership role, specifically as an associate superintendent or superintendent. This was followed by intentions to move to central office for a nonassociate or nonsuperintendent position. Relatively few principals indicated that they were planning on transferring to a different school in either their own district (4%) or another district (6%). Finally, only 2% of respondents indicated they were planning on leaving education entirely, and just under 9% were planning on retiring.

Midcareer principals were more invested in their own districts and thereby wanted to stay in the system, whereas newer principals might have felt more mobile between districts.

Table 10.1  
*Percentage of Principals Indicating Future Intentions in the Next 3 Years*

Intention	All principals	Years as a principal		
		< 5	5–15	15+
Remain a principal at my current school	62.3	64.2	67.1	53.5
Become a principal at a different school in my current district	3.8	2.8	3.7	2.1
Become a principal at a different school in another district	5.8	11.0	3.7	4.2
Move into a central office role (not an associate superintendent or superintendent)	6.3	4.6	7.3	4.2
Move into a central office leadership role (associate superintendent or superintendent)	8.7	11.9	10.2	3.5
Become a higher education faculty member	1.9	0.9	0.4	5.6
Leave the formal education system	2.4	1.8	2.9	2.8
Retire	8.7	2.8	4.9	23.9

## Future Intentions by Principal Experience

Reported career intentions differed, however, by experience as a principal. Not surprisingly, a far greater percentage of respondents with 15 or more years of experience (24%) reported an intention to retire than either principals with less than 5 years of experience (3%) or principals with 5–14 years of experience (5%). In contrast, less experienced principals were more likely to indicate an intention to move into a central office role than more experienced principals. Specifically, about 16% of respondents with less than 5 years of experience and 17% of principals with 5–14 years of experience indicated their intention to move into some central office role. Finally, a greater percentage of respondents with fewer than 5 years of experience (11%) indicated they intended to become a principal in another school than either principals with 5–14 years of experience (4%) or principals with 15 or more years of experience (4%).

These results suggest midcareer and experienced principals are more invested in their own schools and districts and want to remain in their current system. Less experienced principals feel less attachment and commitment to their current school and district.

## Future Intentions by Total Education Experience

Results were fairly similar when disaggregated by total education experience, as shown in Table 10.2. For respondents with a total education experience (teacher, assistant principal, and

principal) of less than 20 years, moving to a central office leadership role as an associate superintendent or superintendent was the second most frequently reported intention (13%) after remaining in their current school (62%). The same held true for respondents with 20–27 years of total education experience. Principals with 28 or more years of total education experience most frequently indicated intentions to retire (21%).

Table 10.2

*Percentage of Principals Indicating Future Intentions in the Next 3 Years, by Years of Experience in Education*

Intention	Years in education		
	< 20	20–27	28+
Remain a principal at my current school	61.7	63.4	62.0
Become a principal at a different school in my current district	4.4	4.0	3.1
Become a principal at a different school in another district	8.7	6.3	2.1
Move into a central office role (not an associate superintendent or superintendent)	9.2	6.3	3.1
Move into a central office leadership role (associate superintendent or superintendent)	12.6	11.4	2.1
Become a higher education faculty member	0.5	1.7	3.7
Leave the formal education system	2.9	1.7	2.6
Retire	0.0	5.1	21.4

## Future Intentions by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

Future intentions were fairly consistent across gender and race/ethnicity as well, as shown in Table 10.3. Specifically, a slightly greater percentage of female than male respondents indicated intentions to remain in the education system; conversely, a slightly greater percentage of male than female respondents indicated intentions to leave education entirely. These very slight differences are explained by differences in age and experience between female and male respondents. Thus, the results suggest no substantial differences in intentions by gender.

Small numbers of respondents for specific racial/ethnic categories make comparisons across groups of respondents more complicated. Despite some apparent differences in future intention across racial/ethnic groups, a statistical analysis of the data suggests few real differences in the patterns of intention. Most importantly, there were no substantial

differences between respondents from different racial/ethnic groups with respect to stated intentions to remain at the same school.

Table 10.3  
*Percentage of Principals Indicating Future Intentions in the Next 3 Years, by Gender and Race*

Intention	Gender		Race			
	Female	Male	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White
Remain a principal at my current school	64.4	59.0	44.4	54.2	63.6	63.2
Become a principal at a different school in my current district	4.2	2.6	22.2	8.3	18.2	2.8
Become a principal at a different school in another district	5.3	6.3	0.0	4.2	0.0	5.9
Move into a central office role (not an associate superintendent or superintendent)	6.6	5.8	22.2	4.2	0.0	6.3
Move into a central office leadership role (associate superintendent or superintendent)	7.4	11.6	0.0	25.0	18.2	7.7
Become a higher education faculty member	1.9	2.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.2
Leave the formal education system	2.4	2.6	0.0	4.2	0.0	2.6
Retire	7.9	10.0	11.1	0.0	0.0	9.3

*Note.* Certain categories were omitted due to low response rates: transgender, Native American, mixed race, other race, and “prefer not to answer” responses.

## Future Intentions by Principal Morale

Finally, because a principal’s satisfaction with the current position influences future intentions (Tran, 2017), we examined future intentions by principals’ responses to the question, “How would you describe your current morale as a principal?” As shown in Table 10.4, the majority of principals with moderate to very high morale intend to stay at their current schools, compared to only 38% of respondents with low morale and 7% of respondents with very low morale. Interestingly, 29% of principals with very low morale intend to move into a central office position, but not into a role as associate superintendent or superintendent. A relatively large percentage of principals with very low morale also indicated they intend to move to another district (21%) or leave the education system altogether (21%). These results

demonstrate the importance of matching principals with a working environment that is supportive (Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005; Papa, 2007) and ensures high morale.

Table 10.4  
*Percentage of Principals Indicating Future Intentions in the Next 3 Years, by Principal Morale*

Intention	Current morale as principal				
	Very high	High	Moderate	Low	Very low
Remain a principal at my current school	67.1	70.7	60.4	38.1	7.1
Become a principal at a different school in my current district	2.9	2.7	5.9	2.4	0.0
Become a principal at a different school in another district	2.9	5.8	5.0	9.5	21.4
Move into a central office role (not an associate superintendent or superintendent)	2.9	3.6	7.7	11.9	28.6
Move into a central office leadership role (associate superintendent or superintendent)	15.7	7.6	7.7	9.5	7.1
Become a higher education faculty member	2.9	0.4	1.8	7.1	7.1
Leave the formal education system	1.4	1.3	1.4	9.5	21.4
Retire	4.3	8.0	10.4	11.9	7.1

### A Retrospective Look at School Administration in 1948, 1958, and 2008

Virgil Finn, a Virginia superintendent and member of the Editorial Committee for the 1948 report, offered the following insight:

The growth of the elementary school principal has been steady and the future looks bright. But the rate of growth and the quality of growth in the future will depend largely upon the principal's conception of the position, his preparation, his relationship with the other administrative officers, teachers, pupils, and parents, and his ability to not only keep pace with new developments in education, but to influence them constructively. (National Education Association, 1948, p. 268)

In 1958, 87% of the supervising (nonteaching) principals reported the lack of an assistant principal. In 2008, two thirds of the respondents still reported that they had no assistant principal in their buildings.

## Summary

Understanding principal career intentions is important for diagnosing trends in both job satisfaction and future shortages. The responses to the 2018 NAESP 10-year study demonstrate several important trends. First, while the majority of principals intend to stay in their current positions, moving to a position as associate superintendent or superintendent is the most cited move, aside from retirement. Second, these trends differ by where a principal is in her or his respective career as a principal and in overall education. Early-career principals intend to transfer out of district more often, whereas later career principals look for vertical moves within the district. Third, there were not any major differences in intentions by principal gender and race/ethnicity, although low response rates for certain groups might be part of this finding. Fourth, intentions differ greatly by the level of morale the principal has for the position. Principals with low morale most often intend to move to central office, but not into a leadership position. Moreover, very few of the principals with low morale intend to stay in their school, or even move to a school in the same district.

It is important that states and districts pay close attention to principals' future intentions so policymakers can anticipate transitions that may lead to shortages of school leaders. This includes carefully examining where principals are in their careers in order to anticipate the types of moves they may be inclined to pursue. In addition, given that intentions are related to several factors, including fit, working conditions, and satisfaction (Gates et al., 2006; Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014), state and district leaders must listen to principals' concerns and support them in ensuring positive morale in their role as a principal.

# Chapter 11:

## Conclusion and Implications

In this concluding chapter, we reflect on some of the key findings from the 2018 NAESP 10-year study, share respondents' thoughts regarding the future of the profession, and discuss implications. Principals responding to the 2018 10-year study conveyed the message that they find the work of leading schools to be gratifying. When asked if they would do it all over again, the majority agreed that they would, and 62.4% indicated that they would recommend the principalship as a career to others. However, their personal satisfaction was offset by their perceptions of the increasing difficulty of the job as well as their concern that public education is having an increasingly difficult time attracting good people to the profession and then retaining them.



### A Retrospective Look at Principal Commitment in 1998

Commenting on the NAESP 10-year reports, Sam Sava (1998) identified a common element connecting the studies over the years:

the degree to which principals believe in the work they do and derive enormous satisfaction from shaping the lives and futures of our nation's children. This powerful belief continues to make the K-8 principalship one of the most gratifying professions one can have. (p. x)

**Question:** In the last 3 years, how has the degree of difficulty changed with respect to completing your job in an effective manner?

Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that the job has become more difficult than 3 years prior (36.8% reported much more difficult; 43.2% reported somewhat more difficult). Principals felt that the level of difficulty was hampering their ability to be effective. At the same time, principals reported decreased level of support from the state (83%) and the public at large (70%). Further, state policies were negatively impacting working conditions (88%) and the ability of principals to be effective school leaders (72%).

In looking to the future, respondents were fairly skeptical about changes in these conditions. Only 32% believed that the public would become more supportive of public education over the next 5 years, and even fewer (20%) felt that state policymakers would become more supportive. Similarly, only 15% of the respondents felt that state policies would improve working conditions, and 19% believed that state policies would facilitate the efforts of principals to be effective school leaders.

Few respondents believed that state policies would improve working conditions or facilitate efforts of principals to be effective school leaders.

**Question:** Concerns have been expressed by educators and others about the ability of public education to continue to attract quality people to the position of elementary school principal. Do you share this concern?

Over 70% of respondents indicated that they were concerned about the ability of public education to continue to attract quality people to the position of elementary school principal. This is an increase from 63% in 2008. Like in 2008, those leaders with more experience were more likely to express concern. Additionally, women principals were more likely to hold this concern than men (see Table 11.1).

Table 11.1  
*Percentage of Principals who Share Concerns About the Ability of Public Education to Attract Quality Elementary School Principals*

Response	Total	Years as principal			Gender	
		< 5	5–14	15+	Male	Female
Definitely yes	37.4	34.7	36.8	40.8	35.6	40.2
Yes	32.7	29.0	33.7	34.0	35.1	31.2
No	27.4	34.7	27.1	21.8	28.7	25.2
Definitely no	2.5	1.6	2.3	3.4	0.6	3.4

When asked to comment on their responses, participants consistently pointed to three things: workload demands, time constraints, and compensation in the field of education. This is consistent with the comments provided in the 2008 study. Of the 225 comments provided, many speak to multiple issues, including the three most common themes mentioned above. The following comments, for example, reflect the concerns regarding workload and time:

- “Not having enough time to complete all the tasks assigned to a school principal, especially if the principal doesn’t have an assistant principal.”
- “Workload increase is causing early burnout.”
- “Additional roles that teacher take on beyond instruction (parent, nurse, social worker, clergy, etc.)”
- “It’s a huge job. While people are willing to take on some parts of the position, ... the added responsibilities due to budget cuts in other areas lead to stress among candidates.”
- “Folks do not understand the amount of time it takes to run an efficient, effective elementary. This is not a 9–5 or 7–3 job. This is full-time, all of the time.”

Similarly, comments reflected the degree of stress that accompanied increased demand and time constraints. The following comments provide some insight into this:

- “The pressure to meet everyone’s needs is huge and simply cannot be handled by one person in a day, month, or year.”
- “The public outcry against teachers is frustrating along with the high level of stress.”
- “This is a stressful job that is very time consuming. It takes time away from families, exercise, and enjoyment of life. The demands don’t match up with the pay we receive.”

Unfortunately, few leaders have outlets that they consider to be safe spaces for sharing their concerns regarding these and other pressures on themselves and their staff members. One respondent shared, “I am careful about who I speak to and what I share, as any sense that I may need help or advice may be seen as a weakness.” These comments, along with the insight they provided captured in other chapters, provide insight into a profession under tremendous stress—one in which leaders are asked to do more and more with less and less.

With regard to compensation, respondents noted that poor compensation played a key role in their ability to attract and maintain a high-quality staff. The following comments reflect only a small sample of the comments focused on this issue:

- “Low pay, long hours, high expectations for new teachers, demanding parents, lack of resources, etc.”
- “Demands of teachers in relation to equitable pay of duties.”
- “Salaries of school employees don’t match the salaries of professionals in other fields.”
- “Teachers love the profession but have to find alternative ways to supplement their income.”

Given that principals are drawn primarily from the teaching corps, the ability to attract and retain talent is critical. Respondents have identified challenges to attracting and retaining

talent, from the demands and stressfulness of the job to long hours and low compensation. These concerns are not new. Similar concerns were identified in previous 10-year studies, and yet concerted efforts to address the concerns have yet to materialize. This must change. If we are to assist principals in attracting and retaining talent as well as build a pipeline of quality future leaders, we must address these and other challenges that threaten the pipeline.

Closely related to the concerns regarding the compensation of school staff is the compensation offered to principals. As was the case with staff salaries, respondents did not feel that their salaries were adequate given the increased demands and levels of stress. Table 11.2 provides an overview of principals’ average compensation from 1956-57 through 2017-18. Principals’ pay has increased over time; however, when adjusted to 2018 values, salaries over the last 10 years have not kept up with the rate of inflation. In fact, when compared to salaries in 2007-08, current principals appear to have taken a pay cut. The adjusted worth of their salaries today is \$13,000 less than in 2007-08. This reverses a previous 50-year trend in which principals were compensated better each year than in previous years.

Table 11.2  
*Trend Data on Salaries, Workweek, and Contract, 1956-57 Through 2017-18*

Year	Salary		Avg. hours worked each week	% principals with a 12-month contract
	Unadjusted	Adjusted to 2018 value		
1956-57	\$6,600	\$60,144	47	12%
1966-67	10,200	78,032	50	18
1977-78	21,500	87,940	50	30
1986-87	39,988	87,251	51	33
1997-98	60,285	93,101	54	40
2007-08	84,506	101,023	56	47
2017-18	88,811	88,811	61	51

A related problem is salary compression. Many new principals and assistant principals are paid little more than they would have made as experienced teachers. Salary compression often serves as a disincentive to moving from teaching to a leadership position.

Education is a profession under tremendous stress—one in which leaders are asked to do more and more with less and less.

At the same time, the number of hours that principals work each week has increased over time. Whereas in 1956-57, principals worked, on average, 7 hours more than the traditional 40-hour workweek, a half a century later, principals were working 16 hours over the traditional 40-hour workweek. By 2017-18, this has increased to 61 hours per week. Coupling increased demands and stress with working 21 hours more than the traditional 40-hour workweek, one would expect a significant increase in salary; however, this simply isn't the case.

It is worth noting that along with increased time demands have come increases in the percentage of principals with 12-month, rather than 9-month, contracts. As noted in Chapter 1, *The Typical Elementary School Principal Today*, the typical principal has an employment contract with the district that addresses salary and fringe benefits as well as district expectations. Like salaries, the percentage of 12-month contracts has gradually increased over time, with the largest increase occurring between 1996-97 and 2007-08.

In addition to considering factors leading to a robust pipeline, it is important to consider findings related to the current pool of educational leaders and how we can support and retain them. Two key factors are professional development opportunities and relationships with principals' supervisors. Participants in the 2018 NAESP 10-year study did not consider the professional development opportunities available to them to be of high value. Efforts should be dedicated to understanding what sitting principals and assistant principals need with regard to their professional learning and support as well as to developing programs and opportunities that meet those needs. Consideration also should be given to the preferred modes of learning that principals indicate work best for them.

Although the majority of principals characterized their relationships with their supervisors, superintendents, and boards of education to be positive, principals also raised troubling concerns about the lack of understanding regarding their work and the complexities of their positions and work. They also described decreased support of public education by parents, local communities, and the state. These findings imply the need for outreach and engagement by state, district, and school leaders to increase awareness and support.



### A Retrospective Look at the Supervision of Leadership in 1948

Focusing on the relationship between the district central office and the school, the following observation was offered: "The working relationship between elementary-school principals and supervisors of instruction needs to be improved" (National Education Association, 1948, p. 13).

Given increased demands and increased stress with working 21 hours more than the traditional 40-hour workweek, one would expect a significant increase in salary; however, this simply isn't the case.

Fully 55% of respondents indicated that they plan to retire as soon as they are eligible to do so, and the other 45% indicated that they were either unsure (13%) or that they would wait a few years before leaving their positions. Of relevance to the near future, 35% of respondents do plan to retire by age 60, 55% of respondents plan to retire before age 70, and another 10% either are unsure of when they will retire or plan to retire after age 70. However, as discussed in Chapter 10, only 9% of respondents plan to retire within the next 3 years, and some respondents indicated that although they are already at or beyond retirement age, they continue to work as a leader. The majority of respondents (71%) planned to remain a principal either in their current school or a different school over the next 3 years, and another 14% plan to take a central office position. This is important to keep in mind with regard to attracting new leaders, building a pipeline, and supporting current leaders.

Over the last few decades, schools have operated in a climate of increased scrutiny and accountability. Respondents to the 2018 NAESP 10-year study provided thoughtful assessments of the impact of this on their students, staff, school cultures, and work. While recognizing the importance of focusing on student learning and meeting the needs of historically underserved student populations, principals are concerned about the level of stress accountability has placed on their schools, particularly given the decrease in relative resources over that same time.

The comparisons offered through the NAESP 10-year studies over time provide interesting and important insight into the elementary school principalship as well as insight into the current conditions of leadership, the challenges, and the opportunities principals embrace in carrying out their work. The 2018 data indicate a continuation of many of the trends identified in previous studies, such as the increase in the increasing diversity of the student populations that public schools serve, the increased percentage of female principals, and the increased number of hours that principals work each week. The data also provide insight into the need for a comprehensive approach to building a leadership pipeline that includes public perceptions of the field of education, recruitment of talent into the teaching profession, providing high-quality preparation and development opportunities for all educators, providing adequate resources for schools and professional compensation for school staff, and intentionally tapping and developing educational leaders. Not one of these steps is indispensable.

## Scope and Limitations of the Study

This was the second electronic survey associated with an NAESP 10-Year Study. The first step in the process involved survey development. We started with the questions that were included in the 2008 10-year study. We then modified some of the questions and added additional questions. After an internal review of the draft, we invited a sample of current principals review the draft and make suggested changes. The reviewers included nationally recognized principals attending an NAESP gathering in the fall of 2016. Following a thorough review of the instrument by current principals, we finalized the survey.

The great difficulty in conducting such a study is garnering responses from a group of principals and assistant principals who are representative of all leaders serving elementary schools and middle schools. To accomplish this, NAESP obtained what was thought to be a list of employed assistant principals and principals, and we merged that list with a list of NAESP members. We received relatively few responses overall. We expanded the invitation list repeatedly and continued to send email invitations. Eventually, we emailed all NAESP members and a significant proportion of the non-NAESP member list. Ultimately, we received less than a handful of responses from non-NAESP members, and thus we have no confidence that the list provided to NAESP was accurate.

Although the total number of 893 respondents represents slightly more than 10% of the NAESP population and about 1% of the elementary school principal population, we are quite confident the results of this survey are generalizable to NAESP members and somewhat confident the results generalize to all principals. We believe this to be true because the percentage of White respondents, percentage of female respondents, and the age of the respondents match the national averages for principals almost identically. In addition, characteristics such as average salary and future intentions of remaining a principal are close to national estimates for these variables. However, the sample has more years of experience than the average principal, and the distribution of respondents by locale (urban, suburban, town, and rural) does not match the distribution of U.S. public school principals by locale. Given this information, we recommend that readers interpret the findings somewhat cautiously, particularly when experience or locale of employment might influence perceptions.

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