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The View from the Principal's Office: Results from the IERC Principals Survey

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Executive Summary

This report summarizes the results of the Illinois Education Research Council's (IERC) survey with Illinois principals conducted in November 2010. The purpose of the survey, and of this report, is to help researchers, policymakers, and practitioners better understand the work that Illinois principals do and their preferences and priorities regarding this work. We received responses from 877 participants who were serving as public school principals in Illinois schools during the 2010–11 school year. While not generalizable to the state as a whole, the findings presented in this report are representative of approximately one fifth of the state's public school principals, and provide a glimpse into their work and preferences.

Summary of Findings

Job Satisfaction & Work Preferences

We found a strong correlation between job satisfaction and principals' perceptions of their ability to influence school change. We found quite high levels of job satisfaction amongst principals overall, but respondents who said they had a lot of influence over school change were much more likely to be satisfied with being the principal at their current school compared to those who reported having only some influence or a little to no influence at all. In fact, the ability to influence change was among the most appealing aspects of the principalship, behind only instructional leadership and internal relations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the least appealing aspects of the principalship were stress and work hours.

Principals in our study preferred to work in schools with the most advantaged student populations, and they tended to sort themselves into the types of schools that they most prefer. As with most workers, principals tend to prefer employment environments that provide supportive management and the resources needed to complete one's job successfully, such as safe schools with good facilities and supportive parents. While our survey respondents in general indicated they would least prefer to work in schools with low test scores and high proportions of at-risk students, principals who were working in high poverty and high minority schools tended to prefer such settings. Thus, it seems that principals prefer to work where they feel there is the best match between their skills and experiences and the needs of the school community.

A combination of factors influenced respondents' decisions to leave their previous principalship, which suggests that the turnover issue cannot be addressed simply by tackling a single problem. Many of the job aspects that draw principals to specific positions—school culture, salary, central office support, the ability to influence change—also have the potential to drive principals away if they are unsatisfactory. Moreover, our respondents report that almost a third of their most recent attrition decisions were made for reasons other than their own personal choice—either they were asked to take over another school, their contract was not renewed, or their school was closed or consolidated. This indicates that principal reassignment practices are quite widespread throughout Illinois, and we anticipate this to increase as a result of new state and federal reforms placing more emphasis on principal performance.

Priorities & Professional Practices

Many principals have not heeded or are actively resisting policymakers' strong and repeated messages about the central importance of improving student

test scores. When asked to rate which measures of their schools' success were most important, standardized test scores and gains in student test scores ranked near the bottom of principals' lists. This result is quite surprising in the current test-based accountability era, with pressures for increasing student standardized test scores. Instead, principals indicated that the single most important measure of their schools' success was school climate. This may suggest a desire for researchers and other stakeholders to broaden their definitions of school success to include measures such as the quality of the teaching and learning environment. It may also show an area where principals and policymakers are aligned in thought, as Illinois' proposed Performance Counts initiative (http://performancecounts.org) suggests the implementation of statewide teacher and student surveys to capture information on school conditions to help assess instructional climate.

There is some tension between how principals use their time and their perceptions of the value of their efforts, and this tension may be the crux of the problem in today's principalship. Principals value internal relations and feel they are effective at these tasks, but they spend more time on administration and management. They spend the most time on instruction and value it the most, but do not feel very confident in their effectiveness in this area and are most likely to distribute these tasks to other school leaders. Meanwhile, recent research (Grissom & Loeb, 2009; Horng, Klasik, & Loebe, 2009) has identified organization management as most important for improving student achievement, and our respondents ranked these tasks second in terms of time use and efficacy, but in the middle in terms of perceived importance. One set of job tasks these principals seem to agree on, though, is external relations, which ranked last in terms of time spent, importance, and effectiveness.

Principals feel most confident in their abilities to perform the tasks they typically encounter through their education programs and previous work experiences—but performance in some key areas could be improved by strengthening principal preparation, mentoring, and evaluation. Principals see themselves as most effective in handling internal relations and least effective in external relations. This is not particularly surprising given that preparation programs and principals' own prior work experiences tend to be much heavier on the former than the latter. Despite the recent emphasis on instructional leadership and evidence-based practice, less than half of the principals saw themselves as very effective in conducting teacher evaluations or using data; and despite stagnating budgets and an increasing need for entrepreneurial leadership, few principals see themselves as very effective at fundraising and external relations. Principals felt least confident in their abilities to plan and execute professional development for prospective principals. Given the aging of the principal population and increasing numbers of young, less experienced principals in Illinois (Brown & White, 2010), succession planning and the sustainability of reform efforts may be an emerging concern in the state.

Human Resource Management

Relationships, soft skills, and first-hand experience are more valued during the teacher hiring process than data from screening instruments or information about prospective teachers' academic backgrounds or past teaching performance. When deciding whether to hire a prospective teacher, respondents tended to focus on personality traits and skills specific to the needs of the school, such as a prospective teachers' ability to work well with others, general pedagogical skills, work ethic, teaching philosophy, and caring and compassion. In contrast, the principals responding to this survey placed a lower priority on a prospective teacher's own academic history and track record of success with improving student achievement, which research suggests might be better indicators of teacher quality. Similarly, interviews and recommendations were viewed as the most useful teacher hiring tools, while screening instruments, college grades, and advanced degrees were considered the least useful. It is worth noting, however, that principals in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) rated the research-based indicators substantially higher than other principals in the state.

Most teacher evaluation systems in Illinois do not include any measures of student achievement and, where they are included, they do not count for much. Instead, classroom observations and other measures of teaching practice are viewed as considerably more useful in teacher evaluations than student achievement results or input from other

stakeholders. The state's new Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA) will require that student academic growth be "a significant factor" in all teacher evaluations by the 2016-17 school year. Current teacher evaluation systems, in contrast, tend to emphasize the quality of classroom instruction, classroom climate, planning and preparation, and teacher professionalism, and principals reported that classroom observations and teaching artifacts such as portfolios and lesson plans were the most useful tools for teacher evaluation. Gains in student achievement in the teacher's classroom account for less than 7% of the teacher evaluation rating on average and are not used at all in 51.5% of respondents' schools, indicating that PERA will demand much greater emphasis on student achievement growth than is reflected in current practice.

Despite frequent criticisms, there are some promising features of the teacher evaluation systems currently used by Illinois principals. Almost half of principals report performing formal teacher observations using highly-detailed evaluation rubrics. The vast majority of principals report using a system that distinguishes more than two teacher performance categories. Almost all principals evaluate their veteran teachers at least once every two to three years. Our respondents report making frequent use of teacher evaluation results, for both summative and formative purposes. And, while our respondents admit that they rarely rate teachers in the lowest performance category, they report making much more distinction between high and average performance than suggested in the popular media.

Conclusions & Implications

Our findings on principals' job preferences and turnover decisions are important to consider as states and districts struggle with recruiting and retaining the most talented principals in the most challenging schools. Due to constrained budgets, strategies for attracting principals and reducing turnover may need to focus on systemic issues—such as stronger central office support, increased principal autonomy, and positive school culture—which influence principals' decisions to stay in or leave their position. We find that nearly one-third of the most recent school changes amongst our respondents was due not to their personal choice, but to reassignment. Principals, like other professionals, tend to sort themselves into the types of work environments they most prefer and where they feel they are most likely to be successful, and mismatches via reassignment may serve to exacerbate turnover issues.

Our data on Illinois principals' priorities, time use, and efficacy revealed important findings about the complexity of the profession. Distributed leadership, instructional leadership, improved time management, organizational leadership, and strategic human resources management are each proffered as potential solutions to this dilemma, but there is little consensus amongst pre-service and in-service program providers, researchers, professional organizations, and policymakers about where the principal's efforts should be focused. Principals in our survey seem to have a desire to prioritize instructional leadership, but some of our findings raise questions as to whether they have the time and preparation they need to do so effectively. Further, it is not even clear that this alone is the right priority—since recent research suggests that instructional leadership must be coupled with increased competency in and prioritization of organizational management to lead to school improvement (Grissom & Loeb, 2009)

With reforms to the state's principal preparation programs and teacher evaluation systems looming, our survey can provide some timely baseline data to guide the impact of these initiatives. The recent enactment of these reforms will affect the principalship in ways we cannot predict, and our findings on principals' job satisfaction, teacher evaluation practices, self-efficacy, and reasons for leaving should be regularly revisited to help determine the impact of the recent policy changes and to inform future policy changes. We highlight potential areas for improvement—evaluating and coaching teachers, using data to improve instruction, external relations, and utilizing distributed leadership—that have implications for targeting ongoing improvements in preparation programs, as well as with professional development, mentorship initiatives, and principal evaluation.

While some of our findings on principals' teacher hiring and evaluation practices counter common misperceptions, in general, they point to a dire need for improved human resource management practices. Chicago Public Schools' experiences have shown that, with extensive training and institutional investment, demonstrable changes are feasible, and these findings have important implications for work of the Performance Evaluation Advisory Committee (PEAC) in determining model evaluation and training systems for Illinois.

Our survey revealed an apparent disconnect between principals and policymakers with regard to the importance of student test scores in judging the success of schools and teachers. With the increased emphasis on using student assessment results and value-added models to measure success, a major paradigm shift will need to occur to reconcile this misalignment. If we want principals to embrace and succeed in a new era of test-based accountability, we can begin to address this through the redesigned preparation and evaluation programs.

Finally, this study has shed light on the real challenges that they face on the job. Principals are asked to juggle multiple roles—instructional leadership, organizational management, internal and external relations—all on top of day-to-day administrative demands, leading to high stress and long work hours. Yet, as a whole, they are overwhelmingly satisfied with their jobs, especially in situations where they have strong opportunities to influence school change. It is our hope that these findings will provide policymakers and the public with a better understanding of the important role principals play in leading teaching and learning and to identify strategies to support their continuous improvement.

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Introduction

This report summarizes the results of the Illinois Education Research Council's (IERC) survey with Illinois principals conducted in November 2010. The purpose of the survey, and of this report, is to help researchers, policymakers, and practitioners better understand the work that Illinois principals do and their preferences and priorities regarding this work. We believe the findings presented in this report are important, timely, and enlightening. The survey is important because principals have a significant, though largely indirect, impact on school quality and student outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Recent research has found that many of the principal practices addressed in this survey have a demonstrated effect on student achievement (Grissom & Loeb, 2009; Horng, Klasik, & Loeb, 2009; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003).

This survey is also timely, as several state and national education reform efforts and policy interventions are occurring that position the principalship as a key lever to reform. Research shows that quality leadership is an essential component of any school reform effort directed at improving student learning (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides 1990; Leithwood et al., 2004; Peterson & Finn, 1985). In Illinois, legislation to redesign principal preparation programs was passed in Spring 2010 (see Public Act 096-0903) and the Illinois Performance Evaluation Reform Act of 2010 (or PERA) was passed to develop new rigorous performance-based evaluation systems for teachers and principals (see Public Act 096-0861). At the federal level, principal performance has become a national priority through Race to the Top's emphasis on "great teachers and leaders" and the School Improvement Grant program's turnaround mechanisms requiring the replacement of school leaders.

Finally, we feel the findings are enlightening because, frankly, little systematic knowledge is available about the daily practices and priorities of principals on a broad scale and across the various contexts of a large state. Our findings serve to take the pulse of Illinois principals and provide a first look at the variety of procedures and preferences that impact the work and decisions of these leaders. Local and state officials will find the results of this survey provide illuminating data to inform their responsibilities with these new pressing national and state education reforms.

This report begins with a description of the study methodology—the survey instrument, participants, and processes. Next, we present and analyze the results of the survey. In doing this, we first address principals' job satisfaction and work preferences, followed by an analysis of principals' priorities and their professional practices, with an emphasis on strategies for hiring and evaluating teachers. The report concludes with a summary of these findings and a discussion of the implications.

Methodology

The Survey Instrument

Our survey asked current Illinois principals to respond to questions regarding job satisfaction and preferences, leadership priorities and time distribution, efficacy on various job tasks, degree of shared leadership, and management of human resources, with an emphasis on teacher hiring and evaluation policies and practices. A full copy of the survey is available on the IERC website (http://ierc.siue.edu/). Questions for our survey were modeled, with permission, from the principal surveys conducted by the School Leadership Research project at Stanford University's Institute for Research on Education Policy and Practice (see, e.g., Grissom & Loeb, 2009; Horng, Klasik, et al., 2009). Additional survey items were created by the IERC and informed by previous studies of principal leadership and human resources management practices (Balter & Duncombe, 2005; Balter & Duncombe, 2006; DeAngelis, 2003; DeArmond, Gross, & Goldhaber, 2008; Gruber, Wiley, Broughman, Strizek, & Burian-Fitzgerald, 2002; Harris, Rutledge, Ingle, & Thompson, 2010; Rutledge, Harris, Thompson, & Ingle, 2007; Schiff, 2001; Strauss, Bowes, Marks, & Plesko, 2000). Early drafts of the survey

were piloted with a group of aspiring Illinois principals currently enrolled in graduate coursework at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. Draft survey items were also reviewed by several IERC board members as well as representatives from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Illinois Principals Association (IPA). While feedback from these groups was incorporated into the final versions of the survey and the report where appropriate, the IERC is ultimately responsible for the content of this survey and the analyses presented in this report, and the views and any errors represented therein belong solely to the IERC.

The Survey Participants

The survey was sent to all current Illinois public school principals as of Fall 2010. Principal contact information was gathered through a data-sharing agreement with the IPA supplemented with directory data available publicly via the ISBE website.[1] All total, we attempted to contact 5,959 individuals whom we initially identified as current Illinois principals. E-mail records indicate that 89% (5,321) of those surveys reached their intended recipient. We received responses from 971 participants, 916 of whom indicated that they were, indeed, serving as principals in Illinois schools during the 2010-11 school year. Ninety-six percent of the respondents (877 individuals) were public school principals, while four percent (39) were employed at private schools in Illinois. Thus, the findings presented in this report are representative of approximately 21% of the state's public schools (877 of 4,094).

Responses to this survey were confidential but not anonymous. That is, while we will not identify any individual respondents or their schools in this or any other report, we are able to link their responses to various school characteristics, such as geographic data and student demographics. Because our survey respondents do not constitute a random sample of Illinois school principals, we do not attempt to generalize our findings to this population and caution readers to avoid doing so. When we compared the survey respondents to the most recently available population data for Illinois public schools and principals (see Appendix 1), we found the two groups were quite similar in terms of age, locale, school level, average school enrollment, and percent of students in poverty. However, due to both difficulty in contacting principals and differential response rates, our sample included a larger proportion of white principals, and smaller proportions of African American principals and principals from Chicago. We interpret these findings for what they are—the self-reported views and interpretations of approximately one-fifth of public school principals in Illinois—and we believe our results can serve as a glimpse into Illinois principals' work and preferences and provide a starting point from which to launch further investigations.

The Survey Process

Participants were initially contacted about the survey in November 2010 via an e-mail providing information about the purpose of the study, their rights as research subjects, and information about the researchers. This introductory contact also indicated that two participants who completed the survey would be randomly selected to receive $500 Amazon.com gift cards in appreciation for their time and as an incentive for their effort in completing the survey. A second e-mail sent to all participants a week later contained a hyperlink to the online survey, directions for participating, and notification of the deadline for completing the survey. Paper copies of the survey were available by contacting the researchers, though no subjects availed themselves of this resource. Two additional reminder e-mails were sent prior to the survey deadline. Throughout our contact with all participants, and on the cover page of the survey itself, subjects were reminded that their participation was voluntary, that the survey was for research purposes only, and that their responses would remain confidential.

As is typical in online research studies, we are aware that many of these attempted contacts were unsuccessful based upon the volume of e-mails that was returned to us due to incorrect e-mail addresses or e-mails that were perceived as spam or otherwise undeliverable. The research team worked to address these problems, locate correct e-mail addresses, and contact these subjects. In response to these issues, we sent an e-mail notifying subjects that the survey deadline would be extended

[1] See www.isbe.state.il.us/research/xls/dir_ed_entities10.xls and www.isbe.state.il.us/foia/excel/fy2011/11-057_doc.xls

in order to ensure that all potential participants had adequate time to complete the survey. The survey closed in late November 2010 and the two Amazon.com gift card winners were selected, notified, and rewarded in December 2010. The results of the survey are discussed and analyzed below.

Principals' Job Satisfaction & Work Preferences

Satisfaction

Our first set of questions asked principals to indicate their level of satisfaction with various work experiences on a four-point scale from satisfied to dissatisfied. We asked them to rate their satisfaction with their experiences as a principal in general, as principal at their current school in particular, and as an assistant principal and a teacher, where applicable. Figure 1 summarizes their responses.

Overall, these principals indicated that they were most satisfied with their previous work experience as teachers (78.8% satisfied), but they were still overwhelmingly satisfied with being a principal, both in general (72.2%) and at their current school (74.2%). These high levels of satisfaction held true even when we examined the responses by different subgroups. We did not find any substantial differences in responses based on school level, principal experience, or school size. Compared to principals elsewhere in the state, Chicago principals tended to be even more satisfied with their current jobs, with the principalship in general, and with their experiences as assistant principals (where applicable), though they also tended to be less satisfied with their previous tenure as teachers. Principals in non-Chicago urban areas, on the other hand, tended to be less satisfied with the principalship in general and at their current school.

The Most and Least Appealing Aspects of the Principalship

Next, we wanted to know what particular aspects of the principal job were most and least attractive, so we asked principals to rate various elements, using a five-point scale, from very appealing to very unappealing. Figure 2 displays these job aspects from most appealing to least appealing, according to respondents' mean ratings.

More than half of our principals cited instructional tasks (66.1% very appealing), internal relations (61.5%), and the ability to influence change (54.1%) among the most attractive aspects of the job, indicating that principals prefer those aspects of their job that most directly relate to student learning and interpersonal relationships. The appeal of these job aspects may also help explain why

Figure 1. Job Satisfaction

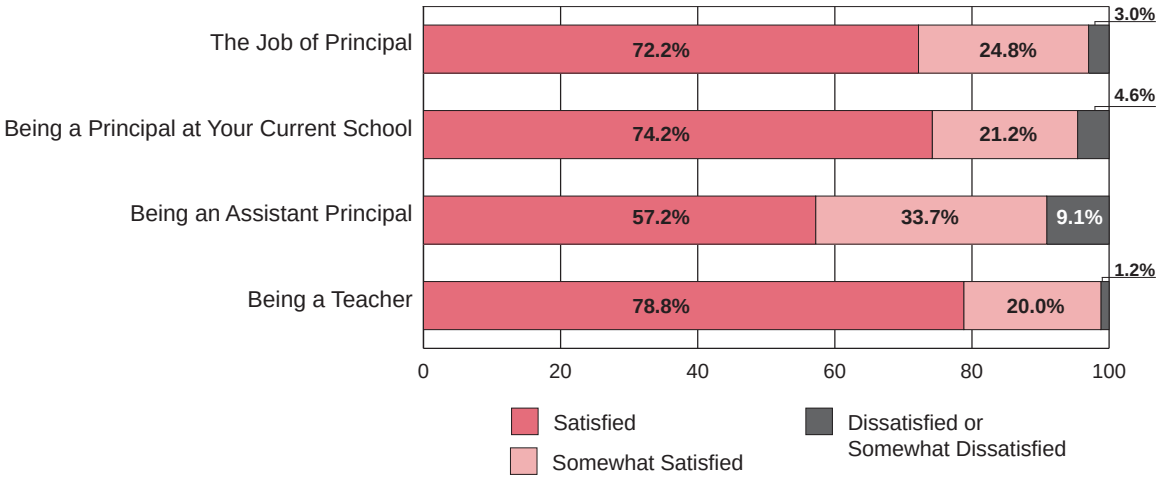
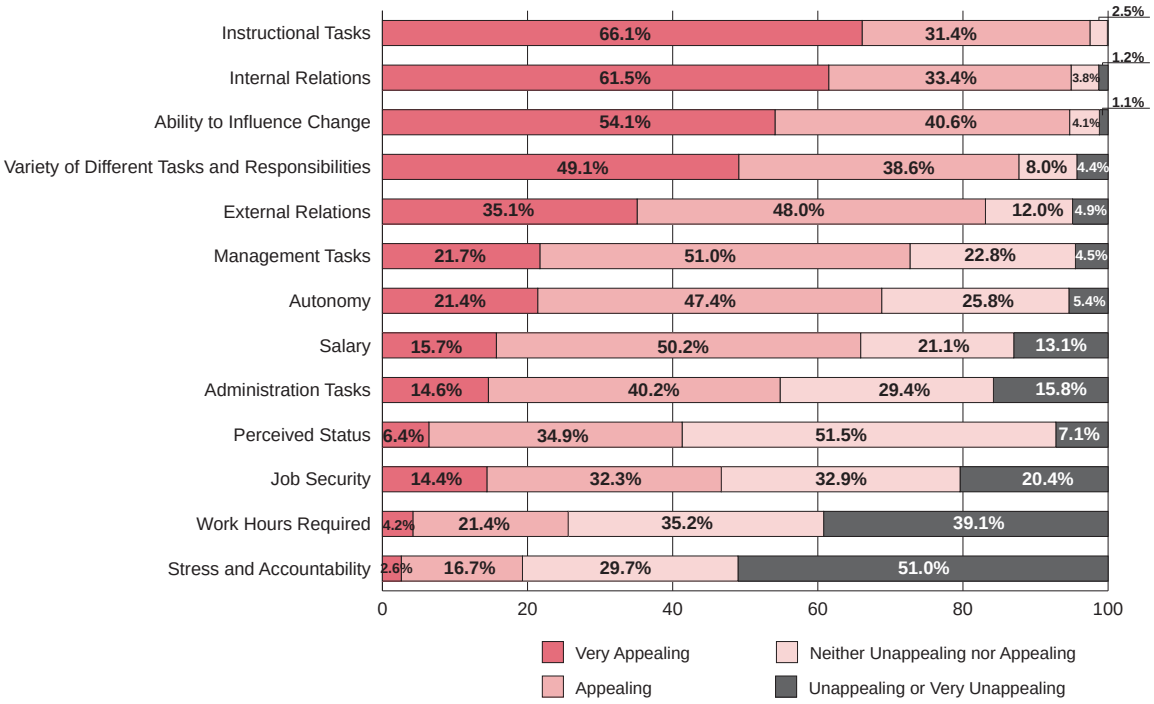


Figure 2. Appeal of Principal Job Tasks



almost all respondents cited high levels of satisfaction in their previous jobs as teachers (see Figure 1). Other aspects of the principal job that respondents found most appealing included the variety of tasks and responsibilities (49.1% very appealing), external relations tasks such as fundraising or building relationships with the district office (35.1%), and management tasks, such as overseeing the organization and functioning of the schools (21.7%).

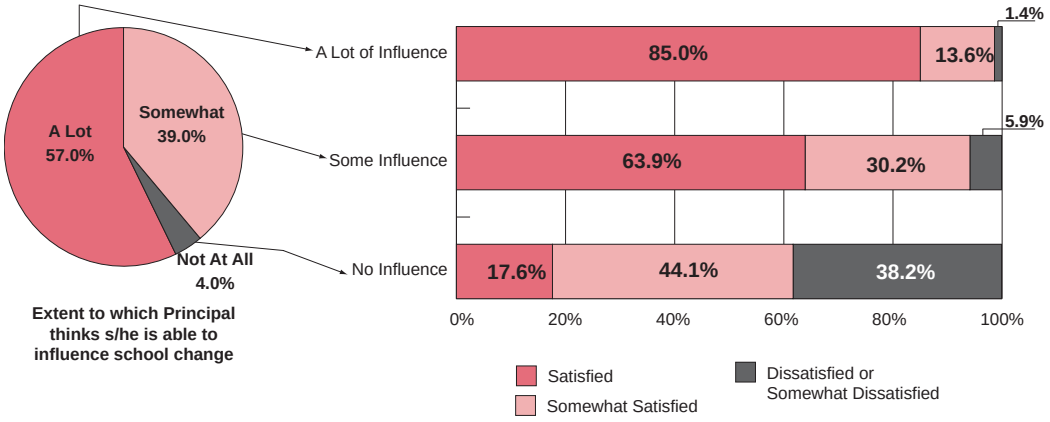
We found that respondents' opinions were split with regard to the appeal of perceived status of the principalship (41.4% appealing or very appealing), job security (46.7%), and administrative tasks such as complying with regulations and administering standardized tests (54.8%). We were somewhat surprised to learn that, compared with more experienced principals, those in their first year on the job found the administrative tasks, work hours, and stress associated with the principalship more appealing than did experienced principals (not shown).

Perhaps not surprisingly, we found that the least appealing aspects of the principalship were stress (only 19.3% rated this appealing or very appealing) and the number of hours worked (25.6%). In fact, 9.1% of principals rated "too many hours" and 11.7% of principals rated "too much stress and responsibility" within their top three reasons for leaving their position (see Figure 8). Long work hours are also one of the reasons given by teachers for not wanting to become school principals (Howley, Andrianaivo, & Perry, 2005).

We also asked principals to estimate the amount of time they spend, overall, on school-related tasks in the typical week. Similar to some executives in other fields (Brett & Stroh, 2003), the principals in our survey reported working an average of 61.9 hours per week, but respondents who stated their work hours were unappealing or very unappealing tended to work slightly longer hours per week (62.9). This is consistent with the practitioner-based publications citing common concerns among principals that increases in managerial responsibilities have resulted in more hours required to complete their work and less time spent on instruction. (Chirichello, 2003; Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Shen & Crawford, 2003).

As noted above, the ability to influence change was appealing or very appealing to almost all principals (94.7%, see Figure 2). To investigate this further, we asked principals to what extent they believed they were able to influence change in their schools. In Figure 3 we show that over half of principals (57.0%) believe

Figure 3. Perceived Influence and Satisfaction with Being Principal at Current School

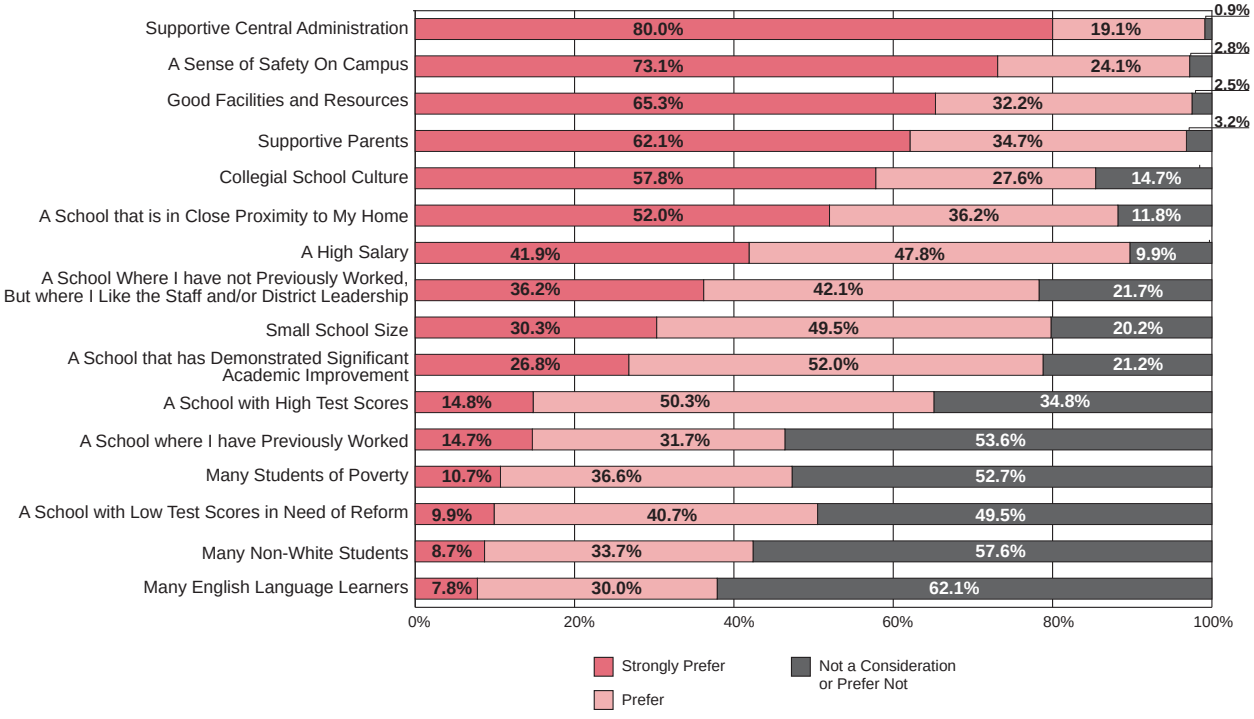


they have "a lot" of influence over school change, while only 4.0% feel they have little or no influence. However, when we examine our respondents by their degree of satisfaction as a principal at their current school, we find a strong relationship between influence and satisfaction. Respondents who said they had a lot of influence over school change were much more likely to be satisfied as a principal at their current school (85.0%) compared to those who reported having only some influence (63.9%) or a little or no influence at all (17.6%).

Work Preferences

Next, we asked respondents to tell us the types of schools at which they would most prefer to work as principals. School types for this item were based on various different school characteristics, such as student population and school culture. We follow Horng, Kalogrides, and Loeb's (2009) reasoning that this allows us to examine principals' preferences rather than placement decisions by the district, which may influence the actual distribution of principals. Figure 4 presents principals' preferences in descending order.

Figure 4. Principals' Preferences for School Characteristics



Similar to Horng, Kalogrides, et al. (2009), we found that principals in our study preferred to work at schools with the least challenging conditions. Principals most preferred to work in schools with safe environments (73.1%), good facilities and resources (65.3%), and supportive parents (62.1%), and least preferred to work in schools with low test scores (9.9%) or schools with many English language learners (7.8%), non-white students (8.7%), or poor students (10.7%). But several other school characteristics that were unrelated to the communities which they serve also emerged among respondents' preferences, and point to some ways that principals can be attracted to schools serving more challenging student populations. A supportive central administration (80.0%), a collegial school culture (57.8%), and high salaries (41.9%) were each particularly appealing to our respondents. A relatively large proportion of respondents (18.5%) also said that they would prefer not to serve as a principal at a school where they had previously worked, though further research is needed to determine why this is the case.

To investigate the relationship between job placement and principals' preferences, we compared these responses to the type of school in which each principal currently works. Table 1 shows how principals' preferences differ across various school settings.

As shown in Table 1, the principals in our study appear to have been able to sort themselves to work in schools that match their preferences. This is most evident when looking by school level, where 71.9% of elementary/middle school principals prefer to work in elementary school settings and 82.4% of high school principals prefer to work in high school settings. Viewing the data by school sector, we again find that principals tend to be employed in the types of schools that they

Table 1. Principals' Preferences, by Current Work Setting

	Percentage Who Strongly Prefer Working At A...		
School Level	**Elementary School**	**Middle School**	**High School**
All Principals	58.9	22.5	21.8
Principals at Elementary/Middle Schools	71.9	26.4	7.8
Principals at High Schools	5.1	6.4	82.4
School Sector	**Charter School**	**Magnet School**	**Private School**
All Principals (including Private)	6.3	8.5	7.9
Principals at Charter Schools (N=6)	100.0	*	*
Principals at Magnet Schools (N=43)	*	35.9	*
Principals at Private Schools (N=39)	*	*	71.8
Principals at Non-Charter, Non-Magnet Public Schools	6.0	7.2	4.7
School Characteristics	**School with Many non-White Students**	**School with Many English Language Learners**	**School with Many Students of Poverty**
All Principals	8.7	7.8	10.7
Principals at High Minority Schools	22.6	20.3	25.9
Principals at Low Minority Schools	*	4.1	4.6
Principals at High ELL Schools	16.7	19.5	20.1
Principals at Low ELL Schools	3.2	3.2	3.0
Principals at High Poverty Schools	15.9	13.7	19.8
Principals at Low Poverty Schools	6.1	5.1	4.6
School Locale	**Urban School**	**Suburban School**	**Rural/Small Town School**
All Principals	13.0	34.4	34.4
Principals in Chicago Schools	67.6	8.8	*
Principals in non-CPS Urban Schools	23.3	40.9	22.2
Principals in Suburban Schools	8.0	53.3	21.8
Principals in Small Town Schools	*	9.3	59.8
Principals in Rural Schools	5.4	17.0	59.2

*= too few to report

prefer—100% of our small sample of charter school principals, 35.9% of magnet school principals, 71.8% of private school principals would prefer to work in their current sector. When we separate principals by the student populations of their current work settings, we again see that principals' work environments appear to match their preferences. Those who strongly prefer working with specific student populations tend to be employed in schools that serve large proportions of such students, while those who do not prefer to work with at-risk students tend to be employed at schools with few such students. We find similar results for school locale, where principals in Chicago (67.6%), small towns (59.8%), and rural areas (59.2%) all tend to strongly prefer their current settings. However, principals in non-Chicago urban schools most prefer suburban settings (40.9%) and are evenly split in their preference for urban schools (23.3%) and rural/small town schools (22.2%), and a sizeable proportion of suburban principals would strongly prefer rural/small town schools (21.8%). These differences may be partly attributable to principals' personal interpretations of the location of their current schools as compared to the census definitions we used to classify school locales. That is, many principals working in areas classified as "urban" by the census may seem quite suburban to the individuals who live and work there, and vice-versa.

We also examined these data to see if they were related to principal race and gender, and some of the differences we found are highlighted in Table 2. As has historically been the case, we found larger proportions of female principals who preferred to work at elementary schools (71.7% for women versus 43.6% for men), and larger proportions of male principals who preferred to work at the middle and high school levels (27.8% and 33.8% respectively, for men, compared to 18.0% and 11.7% for women). We found Hispanic school leaders are more likely than their counterparts of other races to prefer schools that serve many English language learners and students in poverty (48.1% and 38.5%, respectively, for Hispanics versus 10.0% and 21.7% for black principals and 6.1% and 8.7% for White principals). While white principals and black principals valued safe schools and parental support, Hispanic principals more strongly preferred these school characteristics (88.9% for Hispanics compared to 68.9% for Blacks and 73.0% for Whites). Lastly, white principals more strongly preferred to work in schools close to their home (54.1%), compared to Hispanic (34.4%) and black (38.5%) principals.

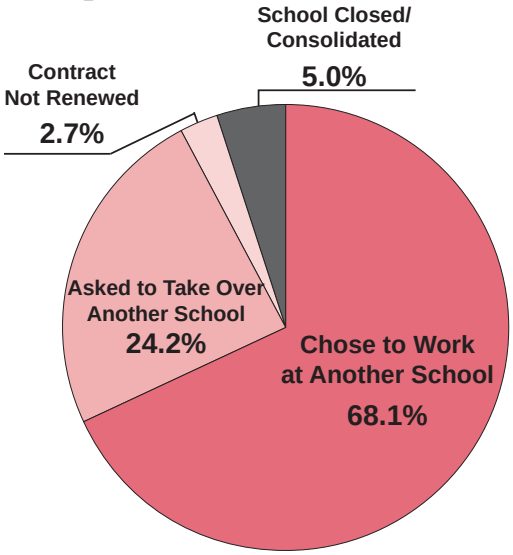
Reason for Leaving

For principals who had previously worked at another school (n=339), we also asked a series of questions dealing with their decision to leave the prior school. First, we asked this subset of respondents to indicate the

Table 2. Principals' Preferences by Race and Gender

	Percentage Who Strongly Prefer Working At A…				
Principal Race	**School with Many English Language Learners**	**School with Many Students of Poverty**	**School with a Sense of Safety on Campus**	**School with Supportive Parents**	**School in Close Proximity to My Home**
All Principals	7.8	10.7	73.1	62.1	52.0
Hispanic	48.1	38.5	88.9	74.1	34.4
Black	10.0	21.7	68.9	56.7	38.5
White	6.1	8.7	73.0	62.2	54.1
Principal Gender	**Elementary School**	**Middle School**	**High School**		
All Principals	58.9	22.5	21.8		
Female	71.7	18.0	11.7		
Male	43.6	27.8	33.8		

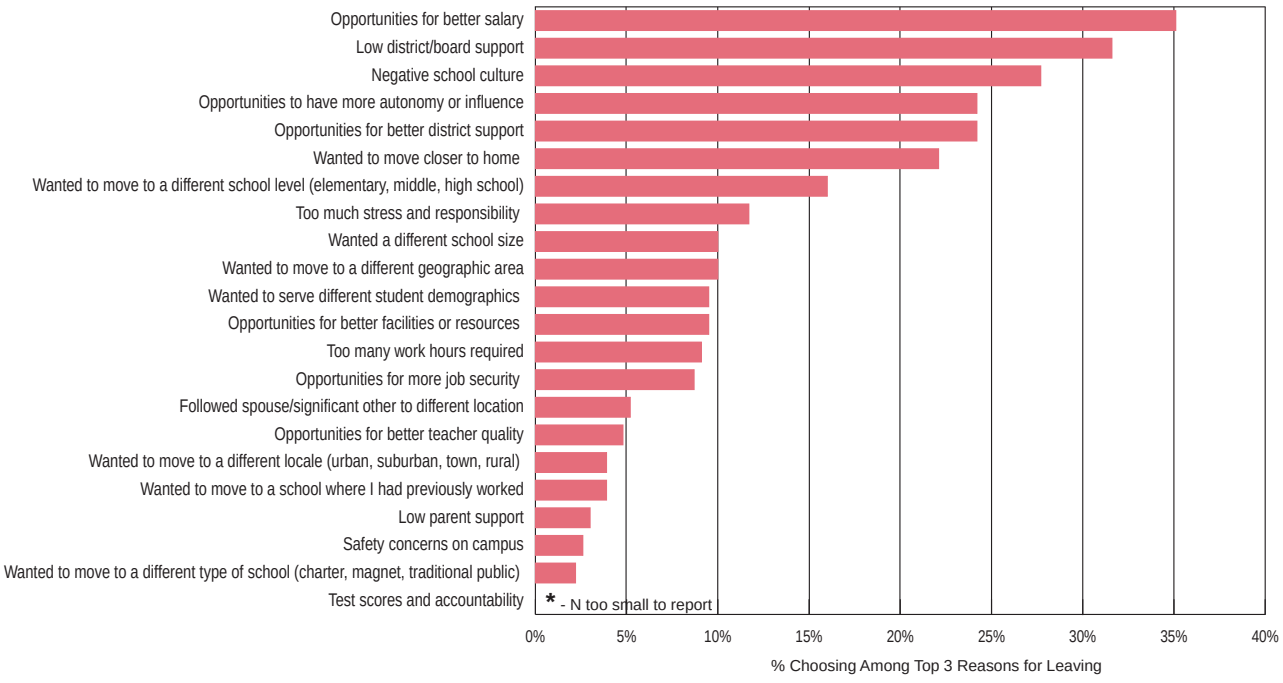
Figure 5. Decision to Leave Previous Principal Position



primary reason for their departure. As shown in Figure 5, only about two thirds (68.1%) of the most recent exit decisions by our respondents were reported to have been the result of the principal's personal choice. In the remaining 31.9% of attrition events, this decision was imposed upon the respondents, either by being asked to take over another school (24.2%), having their contract non-renewed (2.7%), or having their school closed or consolidated (5.0%). In contrast, other researchers have found that it is fairly unusual for principals to be reassigned to another school by the district (Horng, Kalogrides, et al., 2009), though we suspect with the focus of current federal and state reforms, this trend may be changing

Next, those principals who chose to work at another school (n=231) were asked to identify the three most important reasons for this decision. Figure 6 displays our findings in order from the most to least important overall and shows that many of the job aspects that draw principals to specific schools, such as culture, salary, central office support, and the ability to influence change, also have the potential to drive principals away if they are lacking or unsatisfactory. However, the wide variety of responses also suggests that no single reason stands out as the most critical factor in principals' decisions to leave their schools. This indicates that a combination of factors influences principal attrition, and that turnover cannot be addressed simply by tackling a single issue. This is important for state policymakers and district leaders to understand as they develop incentives to attract highly effective principals to hard-to-staff schools. That is, while financial incentives may be one important factor, money alone may not be sufficient for high quality principals to be attracted to and retained in the most challenging schools.

Figure 6. Reasons for Leaving Previous Principal Position



Comparing principals' reasons for leaving with their reported preferences from the previous section can help shed light on the relationship between these issues and how strongly principals' preferences play out in their actual decision-making. For example, even though high salaries ranked near the middle of the pack with regard to job preferences, the most common reason principals chose to leave their prior position was the opportunity for a better salary, with 35.1% of respondents naming this amongst their three most important reasons for leaving. Other common reasons for leaving mirrored principals' preferences more closely—nearly one-third (31.6%) of principals left due to low district/board support (80.0% said they strongly preferred to work in a school with supportive central administration), 27.7% left due to a negative school culture (57.8% said they strongly preferred to work in a school with a collegial culture), and 22.1% left in order to work closer to their home (52.0% strongly preferred to work in a school that is in close proximity). On the other hand, school safety, good facilities, and involved parents were among principals' strongest preferences, but the lack of these factors was not very commonly cited as reasons for leaving. These combinations of responses indicate that, while some factors—such as safety—may be very important, they may not vary enough from school to school to warrant leaving one's current job. In contrast, other factors that are not the most important—such as salary—might vary more widely or more often, and are thus more commonly associated with principals' decisions to leave their schools.

Summary: Principals' Job Satisfaction & Work Preferences

There is a strong correlation between job satisfaction and principals' perceptions of their ability to influence school change. We found quite high levels of job satisfaction amongst principals overall, but respondents who said they had a lot of influence over school change were much more likely to be satisfied with being the principal at their current school compared to those who reported having only some influence or a little to no influence at all. In fact, the ability to influence change was among the most appealing aspects of the principalship, behind only instructional leadership and internal relations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the least appealing aspects of the principalship were stress and work hours.

Principals in our study preferred to work in schools with the most advantaged student populations, and they tended to sort themselves into the types of schools that they most prefer. As with most workers, principals tend to prefer employment environments that provide supportive management and the resources needed to complete one's job successfully, such as safe schools with good facilities and supportive parents. While our survey respondents in general indicated they would least prefer to work in schools with low test scores and high proportions of at-risk students, principals who were working in high poverty and high minority schools tended to prefer such settings. Thus, it seems that principals prefer to work where they feel there is the best match between their skills and experiences and the needs of the school community.

A combination of factors influenced respondents' decisions to leave their previous principalship, which suggests that the turnover issue cannot be addressed simply by tackling a single problem. Many of the job aspects that draw principals to specific positions—school culture, salary, central office support, the ability to influence change—also have the potential to drive principals away if they are unsatisfactory. Moreover, our respondents report that almost a third of their most recent attrition decisions were made for reasons other than their own personal choice—either they were asked to take over another school, their contract was not renewed, or their school was closed or consolidated. This indicates that principal reassignment practices are quite widespread throughout Illinois, and we anticipate this to increase as a result of new state and federal reforms placing more emphasis on principal performance.

Principals' Priorities & Professional Practices

Priorities

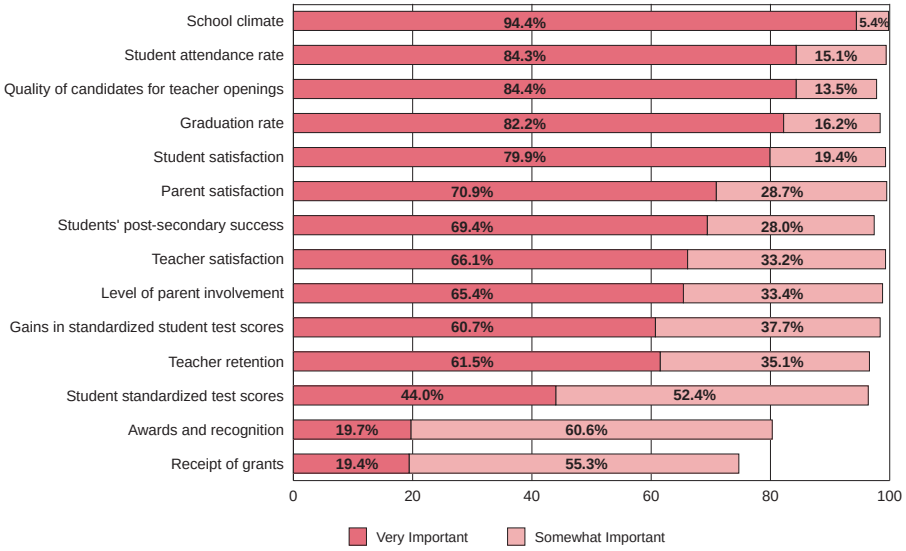
Measures of School Success. We presented principals with fourteen potential indicators of school success and asked them to rate how important each were on a three point scale—very important, somewhat important, or not important (a "not applicable" option was also provided for measures such as graduation rate that might not pertain to certain school settings). The potential indicators of success ranged from easily quantifiable measures, such as student attendance and standardized test scores, to more complex and difficult-to-measure characteristics, such as school climate and the quality of teacher candidates. These choices were derived from the research literature on school improvement and reflect those measures that various researchers and policymakers have traditionally used to judge the success of schools. Responses are summarized in Figure 7, which displays principals' ratings of these indicators in order from most- to least- important (by mean rating), and provides some evidence as to which indicators respondents view as more (or less) indicative of their schools' success.

As shown in Figure 7, 12 of the 14 potential choices presented in the survey were rated between "very important" and "somewhat important" on average, and 11 options were viewed as "very important" by at least 50% of respondents, suggesting that principals consider these measures to be quite meaningful in evaluating their schools. The single most important measure of success was school climate, with 94.4% of respondents rating this as a "very important" indicator of success. Extensive research by the Consortium on Chicago School Research (Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, & Luppescu, 2006) has shown that certain elements of schools' teaching and learning environments—such as professional capacity and student-centered learning climate—are closely tied to school improvement, and it is clear that these principals recognize the importance of these "essential supports."

On the other end of the spectrum, principals rated receipt of grants and awards and recognition as less important than the other indicators of success. Though these indicators are still considered "somewhat important" on average, we also see that 19.7% (awards and recognition) and 25.3% (receipt of grants) felt these measures were not important.

Students' standardized test scores were also near the bottom of principals' lists, with less than half (44.0%) of respondents saying that these are a "very important" indicator of school success. This result is quite surprising in the current era of high-stakes testing and pressure for increasing student standardized test scores. The value-added approach to measuring student achievement (gains in student test scores) did not fare much better, finishing at fifth from the bottom (10th overall) relative

Figure 7. Importance of Measures of School Success



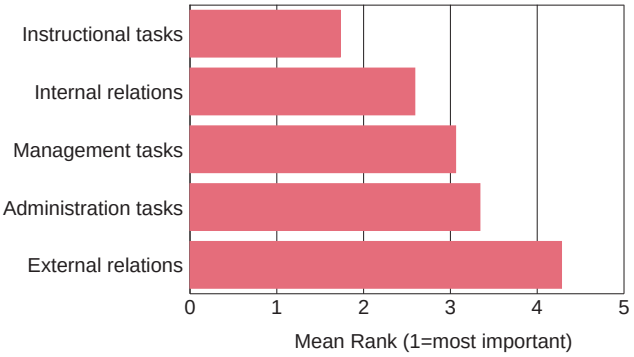
to other indicators of success. Given that these measures are typically considered by researchers and stakeholders to be the most important—and sometimes the only—indicators of school success, these results may signal that many principals have not heeded policymakers' strong and repeated messages about the central importance of improving test scores. Another explanation may be that these principals are actively resisting policymakers' and researchers' emphasis on test scores as the sole indicator of student achievement by stating that other measures are equally, if not more, important.

Job Tasks. Next, we asked principals to rank five categories of job tasks in order of importance. The job task classifications were modeled (with permission) on those used by the School Leadership Research project at Stanford University (see, e.g., Grissom & Loeb, 2009; Horng, Klasik, et al., 2009) and were defined in this survey as follows:

> **Management:** tasks that involve overseeing the organization and functioning of the school in pursuit of longer-term goals, such as managing budgets and hiring teachers.
>
> **Administration:** routine duties executed to comply with state or federal regulations, such as maintaining and reporting student records or administering standardized tests.
>
> **Instruction:** activities that support or improve the implementation of curricular programs in the classroom, such as planning staff development or informally coaching teachers.
>
> **Internal Relations:** tasks related to building strong interpersonal relationships within the school, such as working with staff, students, and parents to resolve conflicts.
>
> **External Relations:** activities that involve working with external stakeholders, such as fundraising or building relationships with the district office or community organizations.

The School Leadership Research team found a positive association between time spent on management activities and improved student achievement (Horng, Klasik, et al., 2009). Perhaps surprisingly given the recent emphasis on instructional leadership, they also found that time spent on instructional tasks has little to no relationship with student achievement gains. Results from our survey are shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Importance of Job Categories



As shown in Figure 8, our respondents rated instructional tasks as most important by a clear margin, with a mean ranking of 1.73. The second most important category according to these principals was internal relations, with a mean of 2.59. These were followed by management tasks and administration tasks, with means of 3.06 and 3.34, respectively. Finally, external relations was clearly the least important aspect of the job according to these principals, with a mean of 4.28. Despite the emphasis in recent years on the principal serving as a link to the outside community (for example, as part of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards), it appears that these principals still focus on the school itself as their primary domain of influence. Although Horng, Klasik, et al. (2009) found management tasks most important with regard to improving student achievement, our principals ranked these in the middle. Both elementary/middle and high school principals rated instructional tasks highest by far, which suggests a common approach to the job regardless of school level.

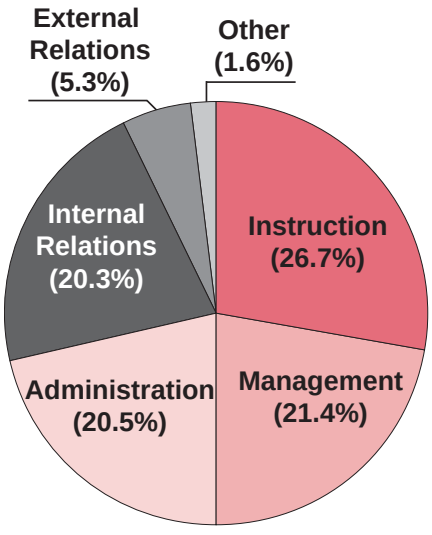
Time Use. We also asked principals to describe the proportion of their time that they spend on each of these job categories during a typical week, and their answers are summarized in Figure 9. Responses to this set of items confirm the primacy of instructional tasks, which principals say occupied over a quarter (26.7%) of their work time, on average. Management,

administration, and internal relations each constituted about 20% of principals' time on average, while only 5.3% was devoted to external relations (and 1.6% related to other duties). These results are consistent with research on the national School Administration Management (SAM) project, which reported a baseline mean of 32% of principals' time was spent on instruction (Turnbull, Haslam, Arcaira, Riley, Sinclair, & Coleman, 2009). However, Horng, Klasik, et al. (2009) found principals in Miami-Dade County Public Schools spent less than 10% of their time on instruction-related tasks and almost one-third of their time (30%) carrying out administrative duties. (Both Turnbull et al. 2009, and Horng, Klasik, et al., 2009 used observational data, while we rely on principal self-reports.) In an earlier question on this survey, we found that the average typical principal work week lasts 61.9 hours. Converting this proportional time distribution into hours, we find that principals spend about 16.6 hours each week on instruction, 13.3 hours on management, 12.7 hours on administration, 12.5 hours on internal relations, 5.3 hours on external relations, and 1.6 hours on other tasks.

Comparing respondents' prioritization of job tasks (Figure 8) with their reports of how they actually distribute their time (Figure 9), we see slight differences between what principals consider valuable and what they must actually spend time doing. Our respondents indicated that they valued instructional tasks most highly and reported spending the largest single proportion of their time on tasks in that category, and they rated external relations as the least important of the five categories and report spending a relatively small proportion of their work week on such tasks. However, their priorities and time usage seem to clash when it comes to the remaining job classifications—principals say they value internal relations more than management and administration, but report spending less time on the former and more on the latter two.

Thus, there appears to be some tension in principals' perception of proportional time spent, the value of their efforts, and the overall time invested in their jobs. This tension may be the crux of the problem in today's principalship. If, indeed, instruction is to be valued as the most important work of schools, then there should be a way to devote more time, attention and expertise to the learning process and less on the more routine and bureaucratic aspects of the principal's role, which still account for a large portion of the principal's time and focus. Thus, Grissom and Loeb (2009) reconceive instructional leadership as "combin[ing] an understanding of the instructional needs of the school with an ability to target resources where they are needed, hire the best available teachers, provide teachers with the opportunities they need to improve, and keep the school running smoothly" (p. 32).

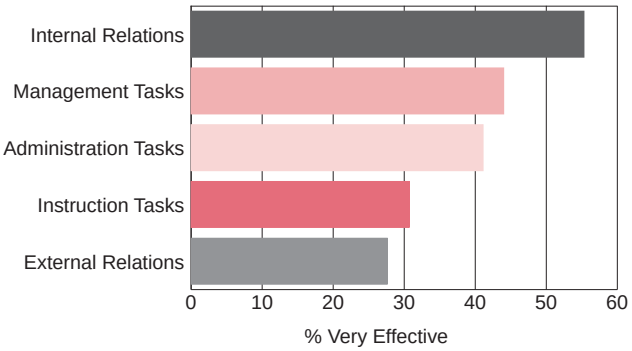
Figure 9. Principal Time Use



Professional Practices

Efficacy. Next, we asked principals to rate their own effectiveness in 38 different job tasks across the five broad work categories described above (management, administration, instruction, internal relations, and external relations). They were asked to rate themselves using a four-point scale ranging from "very effective" (1) to "ineffective" (4). The responses for the five broad job categories are summarized in Figure 10, and more detailed results for the individual job tasks are discussed below.

Figure 10. Effectiveness by Job Category



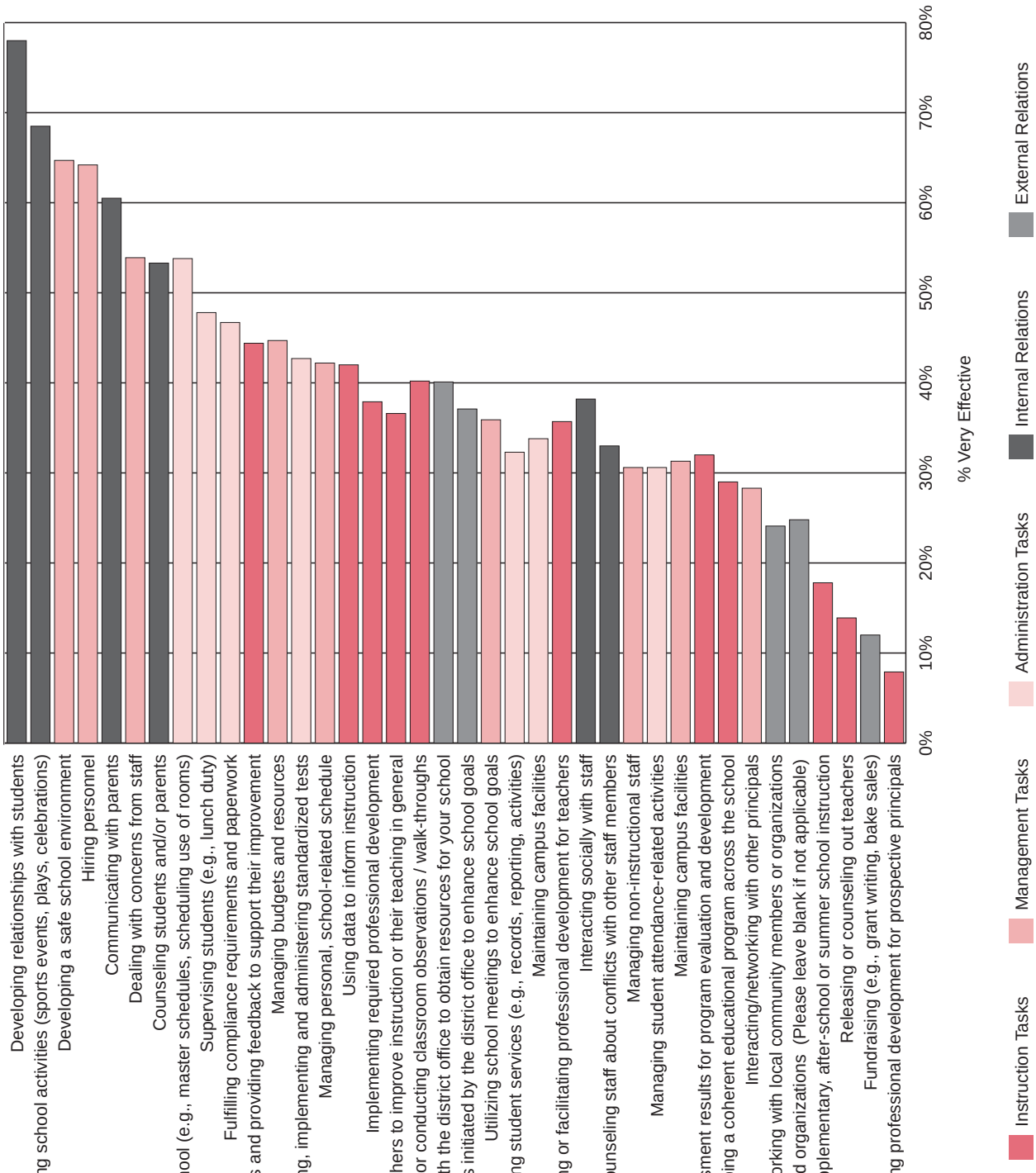
Comparing across these five categories, principals see themselves as most effective in handling internal relations (over 50% very effective). This is not particularly surprising since most principals come from the teacher ranks and are practiced in establishing relationships with students, teachers, and parents. Principals rated themselves second and third most effective in the management (about 45% very effective) and administration (about 40%) tasks. They rated themselves as somewhat less effective in instruction (about 30% very effective). Note that instruction here refers to the supervision of instructional tasks (e.g., evaluation, coaching, and professional development) rather than the implementation of instruction in the classroom, with which they might feel more comfortable. Finally, they rated their performance least effective in the area of external relations (less than 30% very effective). It is perhaps not surprising that principals view external relations as their weakest area, given that this topic is not typically addressed in principal preparation programs, and many new principals have little experience in this area when they take on the job.

Figure 11 shows more detail of principals' self-rankings of job task effectiveness. The results are presented in ascending order of mean (from most to least effective), with the proportions of principals who felt they were very effective displayed for each item. The individual tasks are color-coded to correspond with their job category.

Overall, principals felt most effective at developing relationships with students, with 78.0% of respondents saying they were very effective at this internal relations activity. Three management tasks (developing a safe school environment, hiring personnel, and dealing with concerns from staff) and three additional internal relations activities (attending school activities, communicating with parents, counseling students and/or parents) occupy the next six positions in terms of principals' self efficacy, with between 68.5% and 53.3% of respondents saying that they felt they were very effective in performing these duties. In fact, the only other task at which more than half of the principals felt very effective was managing schedules for the school (from the administration category) at 53.8%. Interestingly, with regard to internal relations, these principals seem to feel more confident in their abilities to deal with students and parents than with staff—only 38.2% felt they were very effective interacting socially with staff, and only 33.0% felt very effective counseling staff about conflicts. It is important to note here that conflict resolution is not addressed frequently in most principal preparation programs except in the context of a course in collective bargaining and negotiations.

In contrast, principals often receive specific training from their districts with regards to instructional leadership topics such as assessment practices and teacher evaluation systems. And per Illinois law (Public Act 84-126), all Illinois principals are also required to take an Illinois Administrator Academy course before they can administer any evaluations. Perhaps for these reasons, our respondents felt more comfortable with tasks such as formally evaluating and providing feedback to teachers and using data to inform instruction, relative to other areas of instructional leadership. Nonetheless, still less than half of the principals saw themselves as very effective at these tasks (44.4% for conducting teacher evaluations and 42.0% for using data). Thus, despite the emphasis on instructional leadership and evidence-based decision making in preparation programs and professional

Figure 11. Job Task Effectiveness Rankings



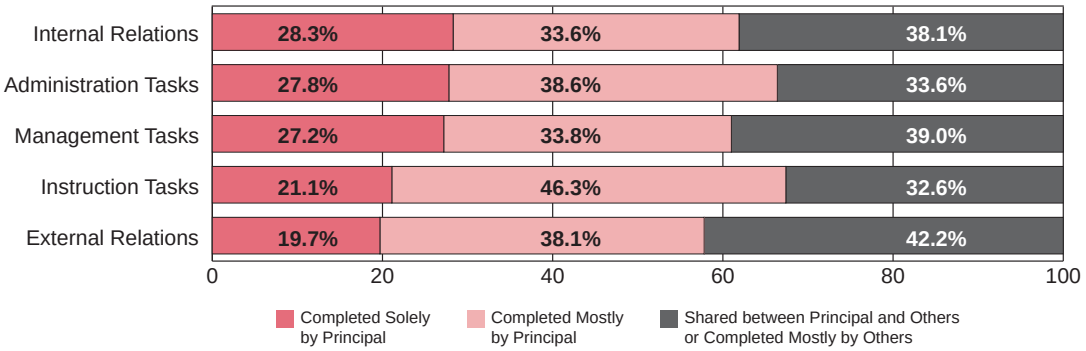
development, relatively small proportions of principals in this group expressed feelings of strong competence in these crucial aspects of the job.

Instruction and external relations tasks dominated the activities at which principals felt least effective. The only task from a job category other than instruction or internal relations with fewer than 30% of principals feeling very effective was "interacting/networking with other principals" (management) at 28.3%. With regard to instruction, principals report the least confidence in their abilities to: use assessment results for program evaluation and development (with 32.0% feeling very effective), develop a coherent educational program across the school (29.0%), plan or direct supplementary instruction (17.8%), counsel out teachers (13.9%), and facilitate professional development for prospective principals (7.9%). Of all the duties presented in this section of the survey, principals felt least confident in their abilities to plan and execute professional development for prospective principals. Given the aging of a significant portion of the principal population and increasing numbers of young, less experienced principals in Illinois (Brown & White, 2010), succession planning and the sustainability of reform efforts are clearly an emerging issue in the state, and principals' perceived weaknesses in this area present cause for concern.[2]

In the realm of external relations, principals felt least effective: working with local community members or organizations (with 24.1% saying they are very effective), working with early childhood organizations (17.8%),[3] and fundraising (12.0%). Recent legislation (Public Act 096-0903) created a P-12 principal certificate, as many districts in the state have district-funded early learning programs located in the schools. To comply with this change, principal preparation programs will be required to include content on early childhood education with the goal of assisting principals in understanding the field of early childhood, including how to work more effectively to early childhood organizations and aligning early learning into the K-12 curriculum.

Shared Leadership. Spillane (see, e.g., Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) and others have written extensively about shared (or distributed) leadership, a concept which means taking full advantage of all the leadership expertise within a school. To explore this topic, we asked principals about their practices in sharing leadership responsibilities across the five job categories described above. For each category, principals were asked whether the given tasks were completed solely by themselves, mostly by themselves, shared between themselves and others, or completed mostly by others. Their responses are summarized in Figure 12.

Figure 12. Shared Leadership



[2] For an overview of these issues in the charter school sector—and how they can be addressed by schools in any sector—see Campbell (2010).

[3] Principals who said this task was not applicable to their situation were excluded from these results.

Despite the recent emphasis on shared leadership, these responses seem to indicate that most principals believe the "buck stops" at their office door. In all five categories (management, administration, instruction, internal and external relations), the principals saw themselves as being mostly responsible for these tasks, on average. Between 19.7% (external relations) and 28.3% (internal relations) of respondents saw themselves as solely responsible for each of the tasks. Only in the category of instruction did they see any significant sharing of the responsibility.

Differences by Principal Age

Finally, we re-examined the data on principals' priorities and practices across the four principal age quartiles. Throughout the survey, we found remarkably little variation in response patterns by age group which might reflect the nature of administrator preparation and the influence of on-the-job mentoring by veteran administrators. Nonetheless, we did identify one trend that might reflect differences across the various generations of principals. As might be expected, the oldest (and presumably the most experienced) principals tended to rate themselves as more effective in most tasks across all five categories. The few exceptions to this trend were in managing schedules, using assessment results for program improvement, communicating with parents, and interacting socially with staff. In each of these tasks, it is conceivable that technology might play a major role, and thus we suspect that older principals' who are less comfortable with computers might perceive themselves to be hindered in these areas.

Summary: Principals' Priorities & Professional Practices

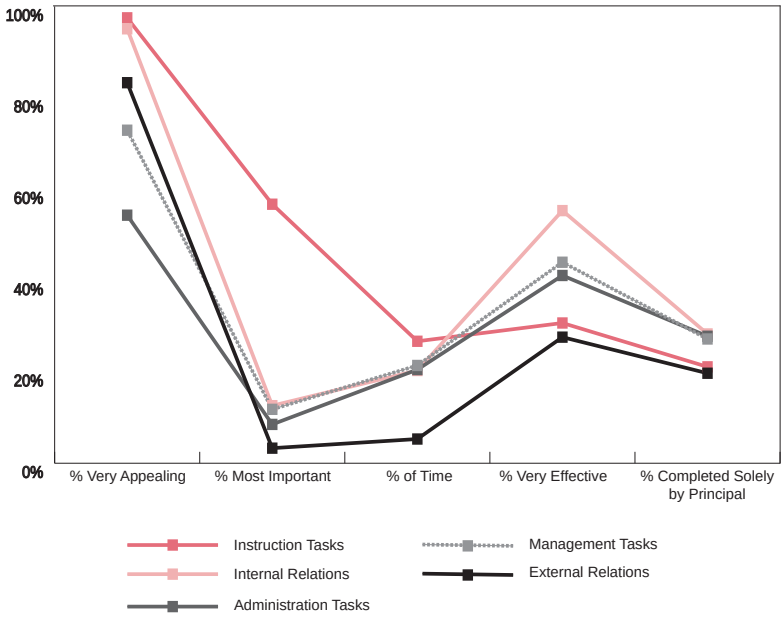
Many principals have not heeded or are actively resisting policymakers' strong and repeated messages about the central importance of improving student test scores. When asked to rate which measures of their schools' success were most important, standardized test scores and gains in student test scores ranked near the bottom of principals' lists. This result is quite surprising in the current test-based accountability era, with pressures for increasing student standardized test scores. Instead, principals indicated that the single most important measure of their schools' success was school climate. This may also suggest a desire for researchers and other stakeholders to broaden their definitions of school success to include measures such as the quality of the teaching and learning environment. It may also show an area where principals and policymakers are aligned in thought, as Illinois' proposed Performance Counts initiative (http://performancecounts.org) suggests the implementation of statewide teacher and student surveys to capture information on school conditions to help assess instructional climate.

There is some tension between how principals use their time and their perceptions of the value of their efforts, and this tension may be the crux of the problem in today's principalship. Principals value internal relations and feel they are effective at these tasks, but they spend more time on administration and management. They spend the most time on instruction and value it the most, but do not feel very confident in their effectiveness in this area and are most likely to distribute these tasks to other school leaders. Meanwhile, recent research (Grissom & Loeb, 2009; Horng, Klasik, et al., 2009) has identified organization management as most important for improving student achievement, and our respondents ranked these tasks second in terms of time use and efficacy, but in the middle in terms of perceived importance. One set of job tasks these principals seem to agree on, though, is external relations, which ranked last in terms of time spent, importance, and effectiveness.

Principals feel most confident in their abilities to perform the tasks they typically encounter through their education programs and previous work experiences—but performance in some key areas could be improved by strengthening principal preparation, mentoring, and evaluation. Principals see themselves as most effective in handling internal relations and least effective in external relations (Figure 13). This is not particularly surprising given that preparation programs and principals' own prior work experiences tend to be much heavier on the former than the latter. Despite the recent emphasis on instructional leadership and evidence-based practice, less than half of the principals saw themselves as very effective in conducting teacher evaluations or using data; and despite stagnating budgets and an increasing need for entrepreneurial leadership, few

principals see themselves as very effective at fundraising and external relations. Principals felt least confident in their abilities to plan and execute professional development for prospective principals. Given the aging of the principal population and increasing numbers of young, less experienced principals in Illinois (Brown & White, 2010), succession planning and the sustainability of reform efforts may be an emerging concern in the state.

Figure 13. Summary of Job Tasks Ratings



Principals and Human Resource Management

This final section offers a snapshot into how teacher hiring and evaluation currently look in Illinois schools. Considering the impending efforts intended to strengthen principal quality and teacher evaluation in the state and recent research findings on the relationship between these practices and improved student achievement (Grissom & Loeb, 2009), these data will be especially important to exploring the state of the art in Illinois prior to the implementation of these reforms.

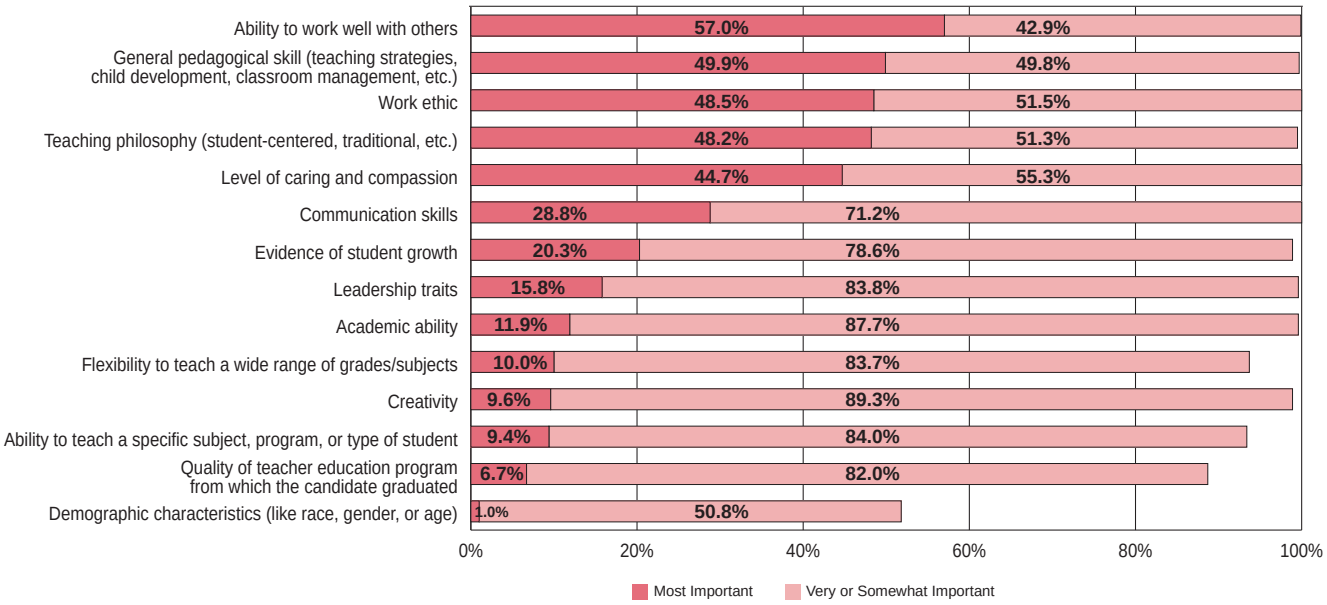
Teacher Hiring

We asked principals to rate the characteristics they consider most important when deciding whether to hire a prospective teacher at their schools. Fourteen prospective teacher characteristics were presented, and principals were allowed to select up to three as most important, with the remainder rated from very important to not at all important. The results are summarized in Figure 14.

The responses indicate that, when considering whether to hire a prospective teacher, principals tend to focus on personality traits and soft skills. The characteristics that they considered most important were a prospective teachers' ability to work well with others' (57.0%), followed by general pedagogical skills (49.9%), work ethic (48.5%), teaching philosophy (48.2%), and level of caring and compassion (44.7%). The least important information with regard to prospective teachers was demographic characteristics (such as race, gender, or age), which 48.2% of principals reported to be "not at all important" to their hiring decisions. The importance of teacher demographic characteristics was ranked low consistently across the state, including the regions with the most diverse student populations. While further research is needed to determine the precise meaning of this trend, these data are informative to the state's increasing attention to improving the diversity of the teacher pipeline as well as to claims that cultural competency is an important aspect of teacher quality.

The principals responding to this survey tended to place a lower priority on a prospective teacher's own academic history and track record of success with improving student achievement, which research suggests might be more valid indicators of teacher quality (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007; Rice, 2003; Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2008; Wayne & Youngs, 2003). Only 20.3% of respondents reported that a potential teacher's

Figure 14. Principals' Ratings of the Importance of Prospective Teacher Characteristics

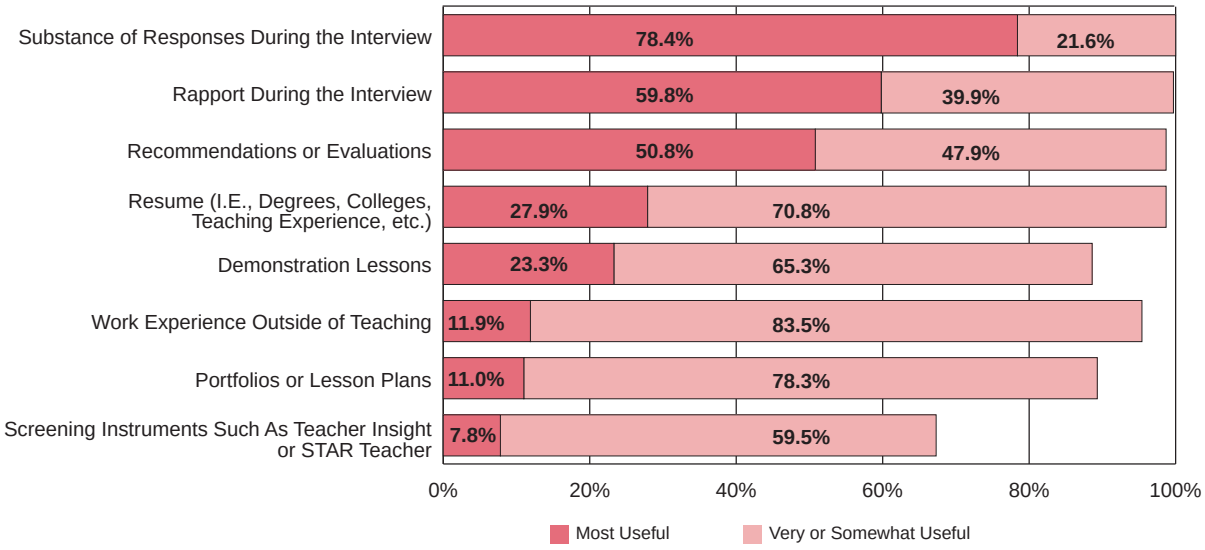


past evidence of student growth was among the top three most important characteristics to examine in determining who to hire—though this figure may have been depressed for principals who hire large numbers of beginning teachers, since first-year teachers would have no such value-added track record, and thus this item could not logically be placed among the most important characteristics when selecting new teachers. Nonetheless though, only 11.9% of principals chose academic ability and 6.7% selected the quality of the candidate's teacher education program as most important. It is worth noting, however, that principals in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) rated these research-based indicators substantially higher than other principals in the state. For example, only 9.3% of CPS principals felt that a prospective teacher's evidence of student growth was either somewhat or not important, compared to 19.0% of non-CPS principals. Similarly, 28.0% of CPS principals responding to this survey felt that prospective teachers' academic ability was among the three most important characteristics to consider, compared to 10.7% of non-CPS principals. CPS has been working with The New Teacher Project's Model Hiring Initiative since 2007 to help principals develop more valid rubrics for selecting teacher candidates, which may account for some of these findings (Aportela & Goetz, 2008; The New Teacher Project, 2011).

Hiring Tools. Next, we asked principals to rate the usefulness of eight different tools they could use to assess the quality of a prospective teacher. As with the previous item, principals were allowed to select up to three of these tools as most useful, while the remainder were rated from very to least useful. Principals' responses are displayed in descending order of usefulness in Figure 15.

As shown in Figure 15, respondents indicated that substance of prospective teachers' responses during the interview (78.4%) was the most useful tool when considering whom to hire at their schools. Rapport during the interview (59.8%) and recommendations/evaluations (50.8%) were also viewed as useful by more than half of the principals responding. These responses are generally consistent with the findings from other research on teacher selection (see Harris et al., 2010, for a review of the literature). On the other end of the spectrum, only 7.8% of principals rated screening instruments among the three most useful teacher hiring tools, while 32.7% of respondents felt these tools were not at all useful. This combination of responses indicate that relationships and first-hand knowledge are valued during the hiring process—the interview and the bonds established in previous working environments carry more weight than external instruments such as the Haberman Star prescreener, which some research suggests is a valid predictor of teacher effectiveness in some contexts (Rockoff et al., 2008).

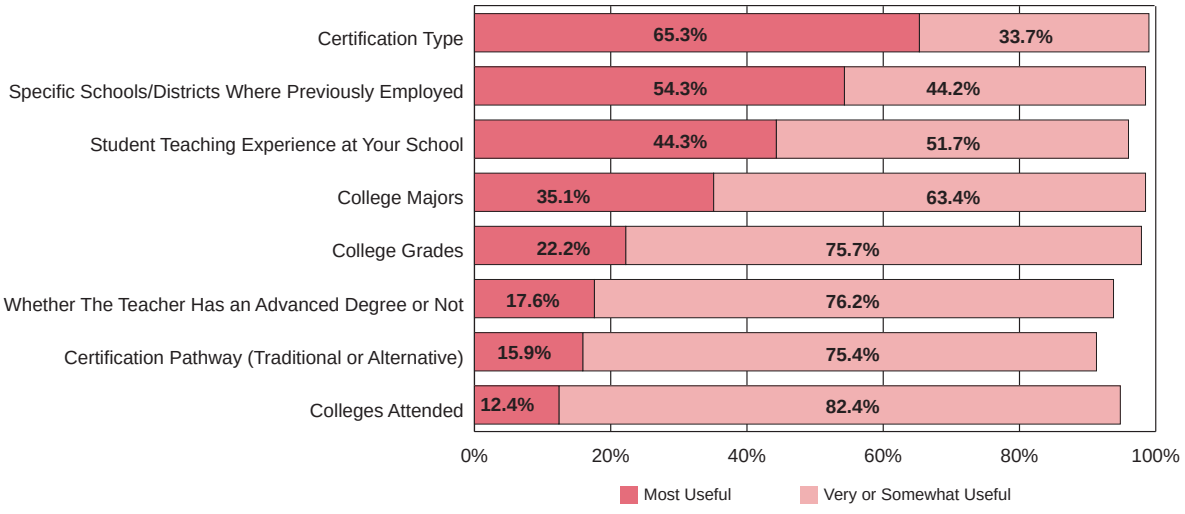
Figure 15. Principals' Ratings of the Usefulness of Teacher Hiring Tools



Teacher Resumes. For those principals who felt that resumes were among the top three most useful tools (n=211), we followed up by asking which particular aspect of the resume they found most useful in considering whether to hire a prospective teacher. Again, principals were asked to choose up to three aspects of the resume they found most useful, and then to rate the remaining items from very to least useful. Their responses are summarized in Figure 16.

For principals who consider resumes one of the most useful tools for evaluating potential teaching candidates at their schools, certification type (65.3%), specific schools or districts where the teacher was previously employed (54.3%), and student teaching experience at the principal's school (44.3%) were rated as most useful. The resume items rated as least useful were college grades (22.2%), advanced degree (17.6%), certification pathway (15.9%) and colleges attended (12.4%). In future research, it will be important to determine whether advanced degrees might actually serve as a handicap in obtaining teaching positions, since districts typically award salary stipends for such qualifications despite research findings that Master's degrees contribute little to teachers' abilities to improve student learning unless the Master's degree is in the same content as the area being taught (Goldhaber, 2007).

Figure 16. Principals' Ratings of the Usefulness of Resume Items



Teacher Evaluation

Next, we asked principals a series of questions about their teacher evaluation policies and practices. Their responses to these items provide a snapshot of the state of teacher evaluation in Illinois prior to implementation of the Performance Evaluation Reform Act (PERA). They illustrate some of the concerns that led to PERA, but also challenge some of the current perceptions of teacher evaluation in Illinois' schools. For each of these items, we asked principals to focus on their full evaluations for tenured teachers, as opposed to interim evaluations or those for beginning teachers, in order to try to achieve some degree of clarity and consistency in interpretation.

Components and Format. We began this section of the survey by asking principals to estimate the proportion of each teacher's evaluation rating that derived from each of seven elements. An eighth option of "other element" was allowed to ensure that proportions totaled to 100%, and principals could respond with 0% if the element was not incorporated into their school's teacher evaluation system. The responses are summarized in Figures 17 and 18.

Overall, principals reported that the quality of classroom instruction was the most prominent component of their evaluation systems, accounting for an average of 35.8% of each teacher's evaluation rating. Classroom management was the second most prominent element, accounting for 21.2% of each teacher's evaluation rating on average, followed by planning and preparation (14.5%) and teacher professionalism and professional development (11.8%). Each of these elements exhibited widespread use and were used in at least 89% of the respondents' schools. These elements are also common to many of the most popular, commercially available teacher evaluation systems—in fact, those used in this survey were adapted from Charlotte Danielson's *Enhancing Professional Practice: A Framework for Teaching* (1996).

As required by PERA, all district teacher evaluation plans must incorporate indicators of student growth as "a significant factor" by the 2016-17 school year. However, we find that very few of the most commonly used components of the respondents' teacher evaluation systems involve any measure of student achievement. Improvement in the whole school's achievement was the least utilized element of those options provided, accounting for only 3.5% of each teacher's evaluation rating on average and not used at all in 60.8% of respondents' teacher evaluation systems. Gains in student achievement in the teacher's classroom accounted for 6.6% of the teacher evaluation rating on average and was not used in 51.5% of respondents' schools, while average student achievement level in the teacher's classroom accounted for 4.1% of each teacher's rating on average and was not incorporated into 58.5% of the evaluation systems reported. It is clear that the new PERA policy requirements will demand much greater emphasis on the use of student achievement growth in teacher evaluation ratings than is reflected in current practice as evidenced by our survey respondents.

Figure 17. Elements Used in Teacher Evaluation

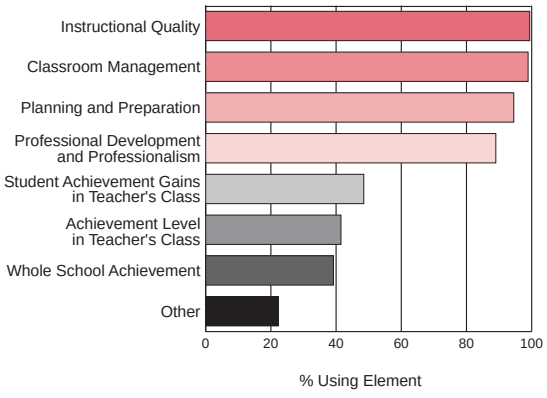
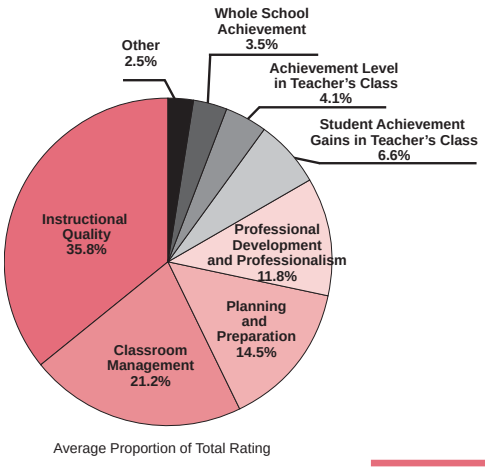


Figure 18. Average Composition of Teacher Evaluation Scores

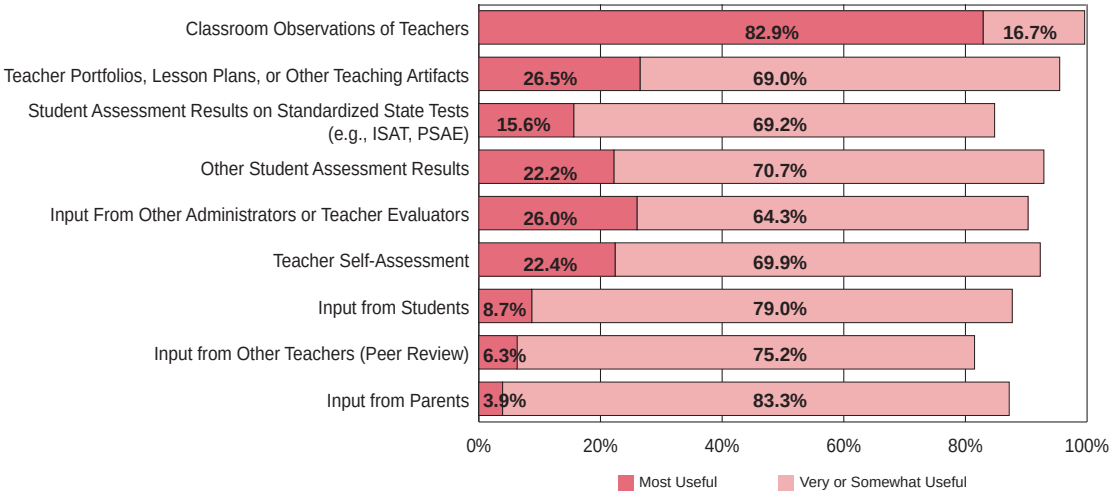


Somewhat remarkably, more than three quarters (77.7%) of the teacher evaluation systems utilized in respondents' schools did not incorporate any elements other than those listed in our survey item (classroom achievement gains, classroom achievement levels, school achievement gains, teacher professionalism, instructional quality, classroom climate, and planning and preparation). Other elements in evaluation instruments (as reported in open-ended responses) included professionalism criteria such as attendance (n=20) and criteria more reflective of the soft skills ranked high in the hiring process, such as teamwork (n=36) and communication skills (n=11). On average, these other elements accounted for only 2.5% of each teacher's evaluation rating.

Next, we asked principals to rate the usefulness of each of nine potential tools they might use in evaluating teachers. Respondents were allowed to select three items as most useful, with the remainder rated from very useful to not at all useful, and the results are summarized in Figure 19.

Principals reported that classroom observations were the most useful tool for teacher evaluation by a wide margin—82.9% of respondents chose this item among the top three most useful, while no other option garnered more than 26.5% of the vote. Teaching artifacts (such as portfolios and lesson plans) were considered second most helpful. On average, these two measures of teaching practice were viewed as considerably more useful in teacher evaluations than student achievement results or input from other stakeholders. Notably, input from students (8.7% most useful) or parents (3.9%) and peer review (6.3%) were considered less useful than input from other evaluators (26.0%) or teacher self-assessment (22.4%). The low perceived usefulness of student ratings is perhaps unsurprising considering its lower rating in usefulness as measures of school success (see Figure 7), but interesting in light of recent results from the Measures of Effective Teaching project showing that student ratings were useful predictors of teacher effectiveness (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, 2010).

Figure 19. Principals' Ratings of the Usefulness of Teacher Evaluation Tools



Given that classroom observations were overwhelmingly perceived as the most useful teacher evaluation tool, it is important that we investigate this practice in more detail. To do this, our survey probed further about the format of the classroom observation(s) involved in the teacher evaluation process by asking each principal to select which of four typical observation scenarios most closely matched that used in his or her school. The responses are displayed in Figure 20.

For the classroom observations that are most important in their teacher evaluations, we found that the plurality of principals (48.2%) report using a standardized and shared rubric with specific, behavioral descriptions of multiple performance levels. Twenty percent reported using unannounced observations such as walk-throughs, 17.3% reported using informal observations/interactions, and 14.2% reported using rubrics that did not have specific descriptions of performance levels. As these results show, highly detailed teacher evaluation rubrics, such as Danielson's "Framework" (1996), are now quite widely used for teacher evaluations. Though the inter-rater reliability of classroom observation ratings is often questioned, researchers working with Chicago schools piloting the Danielson Framework recently found that principals and trained evaluators used the rating scales with substantial consistency (Sartain, Stoelinga, & Brown, 2010).

Next, we asked principals several questions about the format of their teacher evaluation systems. Since PERA requires the biennial evaluation of tenured teachers in all Illinois districts by the 2012-13 school year, we asked principals how often tenured teachers at their schools underwent a full evaluation. Their responses are summarized in Figure 21.

The New Teacher Project (2010) argues that one of the weaknesses of current teacher evaluations is that they occur too infrequently, with many teachers going years before receiving any meaningful feedback on their performance. The data from our survey contradict this notion, as the vast majority of principals statewide (89.6%) report evaluating their veteran teachers once every two to three years. Annual teacher evaluations were more common in Chicago than elsewhere in the state—34.8% of CPS respondents said they evaluated their tenured teachers every year, compared to only 7.4% of non-Chicago principals.

Figure 21. Frequency of Evaluations

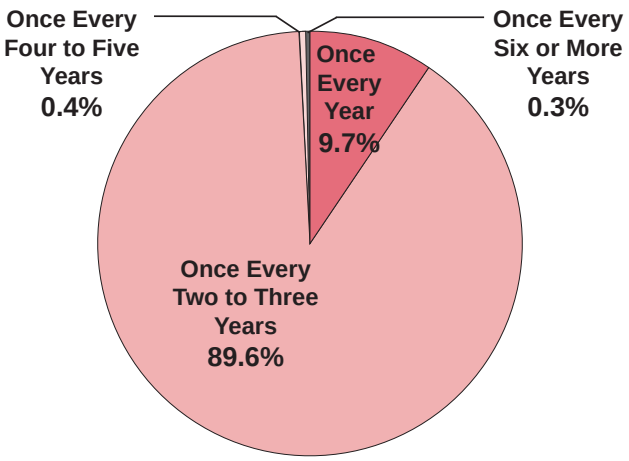
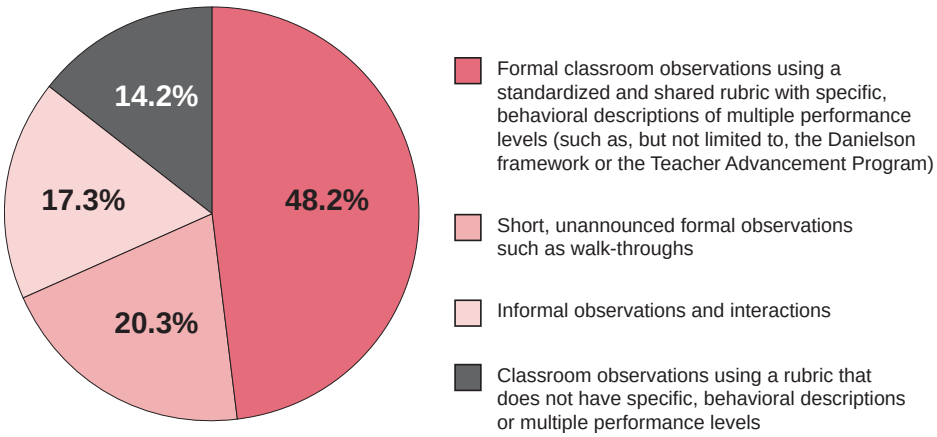


Figure 20. Classroom Observation Format



PERA also requires that districts' teacher evaluation systems distinguish four performance levels—excellent, proficient, needs improvement, and unsatisfactory. This policy aligns with the recommendations of The New Teacher Project's (2010), whose review of the research, indicated that successful teacher evaluation systems use four or five performance levels. More than three in five principals who responded to our survey, however, reported using evaluation systems that distinguished only two (7.3%) or three (55.1%) levels of teacher performance (Figure 22).

Evaluation Outcomes and Use. The widely-cited study by The New Teacher Project, *The Widget Effect* (Weisberg, Sexton, Mulhern, & Keeling, 2009), criticized existing performance evaluation systems for their inability to distinguish between effective and ineffective teachers. That study, which was noted in the PERA legislation, examined the evaluation systems in three of the largest Illinois districts over a five-year period and found that over 85% of teachers were rated superior or excellent while less than 1% were rated unsatisfactory (Weisberg et al., 2009). We were interested to see whether our survey data would support these findings, so we asked principals to estimate the proportions of their teachers' evaluation outcomes that typically fell into each of the performance levels used in their system.[4] The results for our sample of Illinois principals are described in Figure 23.

As Figure 23 shows, our results run somewhat counter to those discussed in *The Widget Effect*. While our survey supported the notion that a very small proportion of teachers (3.7%) are rated in the lowest performance category, our respondents' reported a much more even distribution between the highest (55.3%) and middle (41.0%) performance levels than the figures reported in *The Widget Effect*. While some of the difference in these findings may be attributable to different samples and definitions, they are likely also explained by our study's use of principal self-report data, as opposed the actual teacher evaluation results that were available to The New Teacher Project (TNTP).[5]

To investigate these differences further, we limited our sample to principals (n=95) from those districts included in *The Widget Effect,* re-defined our performance categories to more closely align with those used in that study, and re-analyzed our data. The resulting figures inched closer to those found by Weisberg et al.

Figure 22. Number of Performance Categories in Teacher Evaluation System

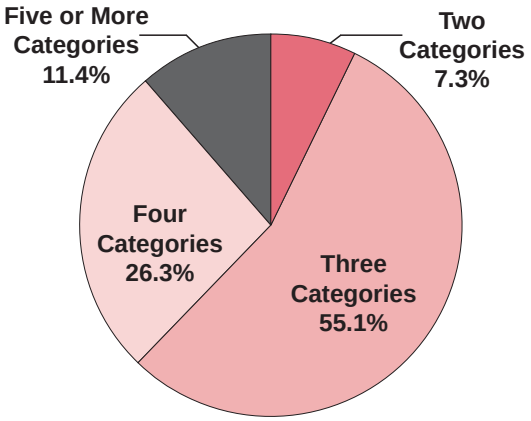
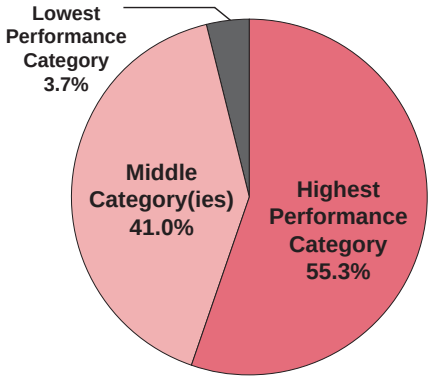


Figure 23. Proportions of Teacher Evaluation Outcomes in Each Performance Category



[4] For this item on the survey, principals who reported that their evaluation system uses two performance levels were asked to estimate distribution of teachers' scores across two categories (highest and lowest), principals who reported using three teacher performance levels were asked to estimate the distribution of teachers' scores across three categories (highest, middle, and lowest), and so on.

[5] TNTP examined three large districts from 2003–4 through 2007–8 while we include schools from 450 districts of all sizes over an indeterminate time period, and TNTP combined "excellent" and "superior" ratings in the highest category, while we specify only a single performance level in the highest category.

(2009)—with 71.5% of these principals' teachers now falling into the highest performance category(ies) on average, 23.5% in the middle category and 6.9% in the lowest category—but these findings still suggest either the distribution of teacher performance as measured by evaluations results have changed considerably over time or, more likely, that principal-reported data for questions such as this may be somewhat divergent from the reality of district records as examined by TNTP.

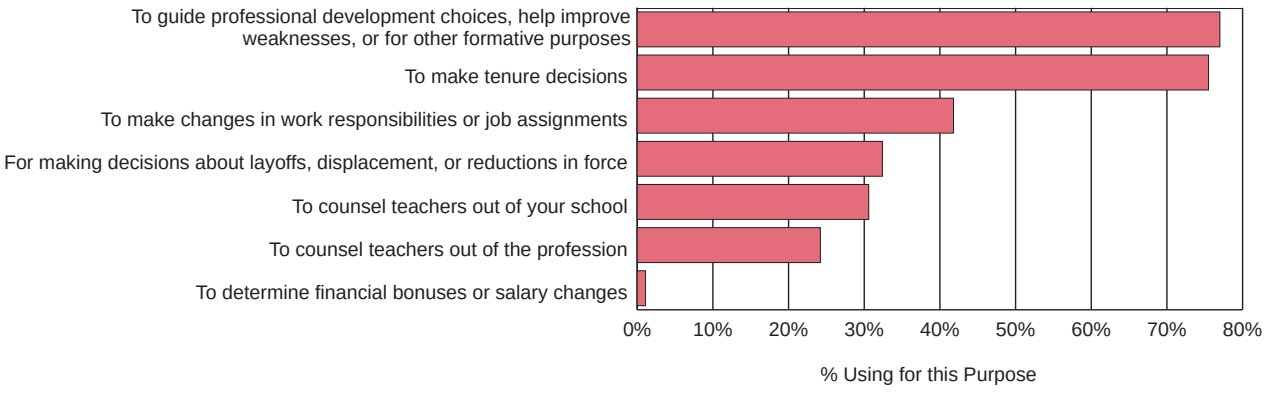
Another criticism commonly levied at current teacher evaluation systems is that they are rarely used to provide meaningful feedback or to help make decisions about teacher development, compensation, tenure, or promotion (The New Teacher Project, 2010). For that reason, we asked principals to report how the results of teacher evaluations were used in their schools. Eight potential uses were described and principals were allowed to select multiple items to reflect all of the policies and practices present in their schools. Survey responses are summarized in Figure 24.

The results reveal that teacher evaluations are most frequently used for formative purposes (guiding professional development was the most often used practice at 77.0%), but our respondents also report that evaluation results are frequently used for more summative purposes as well—teacher evaluations were used to help in tenure decisions in 75.5% of responding principals' schools, for changes in work responsibilities in 41.8% of the schools, and for decisions about reductions in force in 32.4% of the schools. Non-negligible proportions of principals also reported using evaluation results to counsel teachers out of their schools (30.6%) or out of the teaching profession altogether (24.2%). Very few principals (1.1%) reported using evaluation results to determine financial bonuses or salary changes, as in some merit pay plans.

Since principals in charter schools and private schools may have more flexibility to utilize teacher evaluation results in ways that are limited by collective bargaining agreements in traditional public schools, we wanted to see if our data revealed any differences between the practices reported in these sectors. Figure 25 explores the responses to the previous question in such a manner.

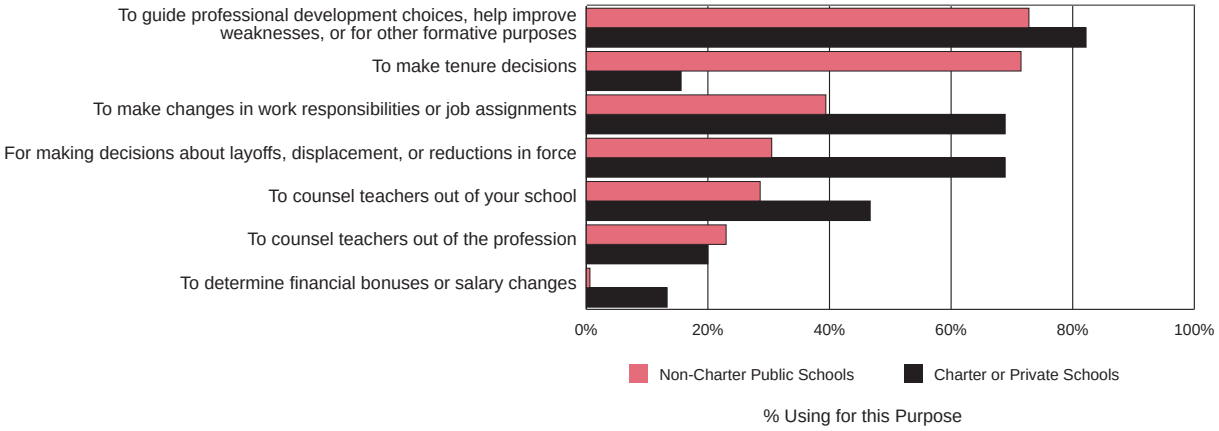
These responses reveal that principals at private or charter schools were substantially more likely to use teacher evaluation results for all of the listed purposes except counseling teachers out of the profession and tenure decisions (as indicated by numerous remarks made by such principals in the "additional comments" section of this survey, this is most likely because many charter and private schools do not grant teachers tenure). Most starkly, 68.9% of charter and private school principals reported using evaluation results for both making

Figure 24. Utilization of Teacher Evaluation Results, All Public Schools[6]



[5] Responses of "There are no rewards or consequences based on teacher evaluations" (26.2%) are omitted from this table due to apparent inconsistencies in interpretation of this item. Numerous principals marked both this item and other items which would constitute consequences, while those possibilities were intended to be read as mutually exclusive.

Figure 25. Utilization of Teacher Evaluation Results, by School Sector[7]



changes in teacher work responsibilities and making decisions about reductions in force (the comparable figures for principals in traditional public schools were 39.4% and 30.5%, respectively), and 13.3% of charter and private school principals reported using evaluations to determine teacher salary changes or bonuses (compared to only 0.6% of principals in traditional public schools). While the practices of the 45 charter and private schools reflected in this table are certainly not intended to be interpreted as representative of the more than 1,500 such schools in Illinois, they can serve to indicate the range and variety of ways that teacher evaluations are being utilized in all types of schools throughout the state.

Summary: Principals' Human Resource Management Practices

Relationships, soft skills, and first-hand experience are more valued during the teacher hiring process than data from screening instruments or information about prospective teachers' academic backgrounds or past teaching performance. When deciding whether to hire a prospective teacher, respondents tended to focus on personality traits and skills specific to the needs of the school, such as a prospective teachers' ability to work well with others, general pedagogical skills, work ethic, teaching philosophy, and caring and compassion. In contrast, the principals responding to this survey placed a lower priority on a prospective teacher's own academic history and track record of success with improving student achievement, which research suggests might be better predictors of teacher quality (Rice, 2003; Glazerman, Loeb, Goldhaber, Staiger, Raudenbush, & Whitehurst, 2010). Similarly, interviews and recommendations were viewed as the most useful teacher hiring tools, while screening instruments, college grades, and advanced degrees were considered the least useful. It is worth noting, however, that principals in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) rated the research-based indicators substantially higher than other principals in the state.

Most teacher evaluation systems in Illinois do not include any measures of student achievement and, where they are included, they do not count for much. Instead, classroom observations and other measures of teaching practice are viewed as considerably more useful in teacher evaluations than student achievement results or input from other stakeholders. PERA will require that student academic growth be "a significant factor" in all teacher evaluations by the 2016-17 school year. Current teacher evaluation systems, in contrast, tend to emphasize the quality of classroom instruction, classroom climate, planning and preparation, and teacher professionalism, and principals reported that classroom observations and teaching artifacts such as portfolios and lesson plans were the most useful tools for teacher evaluation. Gains in student achievement in the teacher's

[7] We group charter schools and private schools together here because we had too few responses from charter school principal to report independently. There are 45 charter and private schools altogether represented in this chart.

classroom account for less than 7% of the teacher evaluation rating on average and are not used at all in 51.5% of respondents' schools, indicating that PERA will demand much greater emphasis on student achievement growth than is reflected in current practice.

Despite frequent criticisms, there are some promising features of the teacher evaluation systems currently used by Illinois principals. Almost half of principals report performing formal teacher observations using highly-detailed evaluation rubrics. The vast majority of principals report using a system that distinguishes more than two teacher performance categories. Almost all principals evaluate their veteran teachers at least once every two to three years. Our respondents report making frequent use of teacher evaluation results, for both summative and formative purposes. And, while our respondents admit that they rarely rate teachers in the lowest performance category, they report making much more distinction between high and average performance than suggested in the popular media.[8]

[8] Further analyses suggest these differences may be attributable to our reliance on principal self-report data rather than district records.

Conclusions & Implications

While the results of our survey are not generalizable to the state as a whole, they still yield some very useful information that can be used to improve policy and practice for principals in Illinois. As stated at the beginning of this report, we believe our findings are important, timely, and enlightening, and we address our implications for policymakers, education organizations, universities, and school districts through these three lenses.

Our survey reveals several important findings that have immediate implications for reducing principal turnover. First, we find that nearly one-third of the most recent school changes amongst our respondents was due not to their personal choice, but to reassignment. Clearly this practice is more widespread than we had envisioned, and care must be taken to ensure alignment between a principal's preferences and competencies and the characteristics and needs of the school to which he or she has been assigned. It is important to remember that principals (like other professionals) will tend to sort themselves into the types of work environments they most prefer and where they feel they are most likely to be successful, so mismatches via reassignment may serve to exacerbate turnover issues. Our findings on principals' job preferences and turnover decisions are also important to consider as states and districts struggle with recruiting and retaining the most talented principals in the most challenging schools. For example, due to constrained budgets, strategies for attracting principals and reducing turnover may need to focus on systemic issues which strongly influence principals' decisions to stay or leave their position. These include stronger central office support, increased principal autonomy, and positive school culture.

Our data on Illinois principals' priorities, time use, and efficacy across job task categories revealed important findings about the complexity seemingly inherent in the profession. Pre-service and in-service program providers, researchers, professional organizations, and policymakers each offer often contradictory guidance as to where the principal's efforts should be focused. Distributed leadership, instructional leadership, improved time management, organizational leadership, and strategic human resources management are each proffered as potential solutions to this dilemma, but there is little consensus about what skills and job tasks are most important for school improvement. Principals in our survey seem to have a desire to prioritize instructional leadership, but some of our findings raise questions as to whether they have the time and preparation they need to do so effectively. Further, it is not even clear that this alone is the right priority—as Grissom and Loeb (2009) observe, the traditional conception of instructional leadership in isolation is unlikely to lead to school improvement, rather this must be coupled with increased competency in and prioritization of organizational management as well.

With policy-driven redesigns of the state's principal preparation programs and teacher evaluation systems looming, our survey results provide some timely implications to both guide and gauge the success of these reform initiatives. This survey provides invaluable baseline data as to the state of the art prior to implementation of these policies. The recent enactment of these reforms will affect the principalship in ways we cannot predict, and our findings on principals' job satisfaction, teacher evaluation practices, self-efficacy, and reasons for leaving could, and should, be regularly revisited to help determine the impact of the recent policy changes and to inform future policy changes.

In particular, our findings on the job tasks at which principals perceive themselves to be most and least effective have implications for institutions and individuals working to implement Illinois' new principal preparation program requirements. For example, our survey highlights potential areas for improvement in evaluating and coaching teachers, using data to improve instruction, grant-writing (and external relations in general), and utilizing distributed leadership. These findings may be useful for targeting ongoing improvements in preparation programs—as well as with professional development, mentorship initiatives, and principal evaluation.

In addition, our findings on principals' teacher evaluation practices serve to counter some common misperceptions about school-based practices in Illinois, particularly with regard to evaluation instruments and the frequency and consequences of teacher evaluation. In general though,

our findings point to a dire need for more strategic and more valid human resource management practices. Chicago Public Schools have been at the forefront of this movement not only within the state, but nationally, with their implementation of Danielson's teacher evaluation framework and TNTP's Model Hiring Initiative. Their experience has shown that, with extensive training and institutional investment, demonstrable changes to teacher hiring and evaluation practices are feasible. These findings have important implications for work of the state's Performance Evaluation Advisory Committee (PEAC), whose charge is to determine model evaluation systems in Illinois, as well as an evaluation training model for principals, teachers, and superintendents.

One of the more enlightening, if not entirely surprising, findings from our survey is the apparent disconnect between principals and policymakers with regard to the importance of student test scores in judging the success of schools and teachers. With the increased emphasis, at both the state and national level, on using student assessment results, and gains in test scores in particular, to measure school success and evaluate teachers, a major paradigm shift will need to occur among either principals or policymakers to reconcile this misalignment. If we want principals to embrace and succeed in a new era of test-based accountability, this can be addressed through the redesigned preparation programs and reinforced through revamped principal and teacher evaluation systems. Given the resources already devoted to statewide standardized testing, continuing development of more precise and sensitive assessment systems is also warranted in order to increase principals' confidence that these instruments can offer richer and more diagnostic information to help improve teaching and learning.

Finally, this study has also helped to shed light on the multifaceted roles that principals must play in schools and the real challenges that they face on the job. Principals are asked to juggle instructional leadership, organizational management, and delicate internal and external relations, all on top of day-to-day administrative demands, leading to high stress and long work hours. Yet, as a whole, they are overwhelmingly satisfied with their jobs—especially when thrust into situations where they have strong opportunities to influence school change. It is our hope that these findings will serve to provide policymakers and the public with a better understanding of the important role that principals play in leading teaching and learning and to identify strategies to support their continuous improvement.

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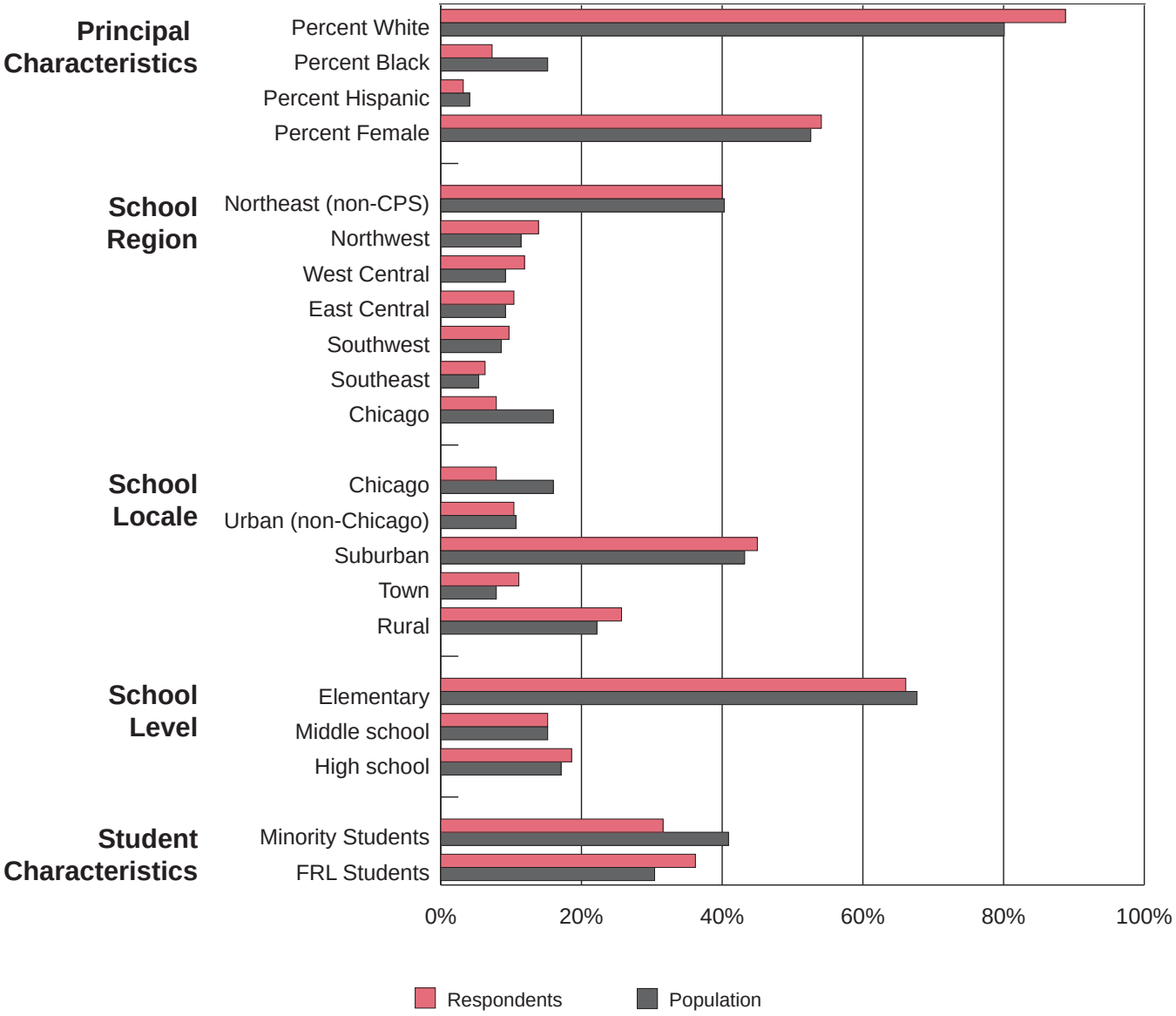
Appendix

Appendix 1: Comparison of Respondents with Most Recent Population Data for Illinois Principals



Mean School Enrollment: Respondents = 572.1 Population = 539.3

Mean Age: Respondents = 47.0 Population = 46.7

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