



INFORMATION CAPSULE

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PRINCIPAL TURNOVER

At a Glance

Recent studies indicate that school districts are facing increasing rates of principal turnover. Frequent principal changes deprive schools of the leadership stability they need to succeed, disrupt long-term school reform efforts, and may even be linked to increased teacher turnover and lower levels of student achievement. This Information Capsule summarizes the principal and school characteristics that affect turnover rates; the career choices principals make after they leave the principalship; and the reasons principals most frequently leave their schools. Suggestions for reducing principal turnover are also reviewed. Finally, data on principal experience, turnover, and vacancies in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) are provided. Analyses conducted by the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research found principals with less experience, higher rates of principal turnover, and more principal vacancies in low-income, high-minority, and low-achieving M-DCPS schools. However, the researchers concluded that these findings may not have been influenced as much by students' income level, ethnicity, or achievement level as by other undesirable features of schools that enroll these students, such as a counterproductive school climate and inferior working conditions.

While research has long documented the large number of beginning teachers leaving the classroom after three or four years, no national studies on principal turnover were identified during a search of the literature for this Information Capsule. Studies conducted within individual states, however, have concluded that the rate of principal turnover has become alarmingly high.

A recent study on principal turnover in the state of Texas found that the average principal tenure from 1996 through 2008 was less than five years and that the length of tenure decreased as the school level increased (4.96 years at elementary schools, 4.48 years at middle schools, and 3.83 years at high schools). Only about half of newly hired principals stayed on the job for three years and 70 percent left within the first five years (Fuller & Young, 2009).

In North Carolina, Gates and colleagues (2004) found that only 48 percent of new principals were working as principals within the state after six years. More recently, Miller (2009) found that half of North Carolina principals left their schools within four years. During the 12 school years included in her study, the average school was led by approximately three different principals. There was substantial variation across schools in the number of principal transitions; some schools had a single principal, while others had seven principals.

Researchers from Advocates for Children and Learning (2007a, 2007b) examined middle school principal turnover in Baltimore City Public Schools and Prince George's County Public Schools. In Baltimore, 90 percent of middle schools had at least one principal change within a five-year period; 80 percent of middle

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schools had two or more principal changes during the five years; and half of the middle schools experienced three or more principal changes. Turnover rates were almost as high in Prince George's County, where 79 percent of middle schools had at least one principal change during the five-year period and 57 percent had two or more principal changes. One school had five principal changes over a five-year period.

Papa, Lankford, and Wyckoff (2002) studied principal tenure in New York State schools over a 30-year period. They found that two-thirds of beginning principals left the principalship within six years. Weinstein and associates (2009) followed the founding principals at New York City high schools and determined that after 10 years, they remained in only 16 percent of the schools. The data also indicated that founding principals were likely to remain during the first four years of the school's existence and then leave. The average tenure for these principals was 3.4 years.

In a study of principal retention in 416 Washington State schools, Plecki and associates (2005) found that only 36 percent of the schools in their sample had the same principal for each year during a five-year period (from 1998-99 to 2002-03). After five years, the percent of principals still working at the same school was similar at all three school levels: 35 percent at elementary schools, 40 percent at middle schools, and 36 percent at high schools. The researchers also reported that 63 percent of principals stayed within the district over the five-year period, but not always as principals.

Studies conducted in Illinois and Missouri reported similar findings. In Illinois, only 38 percent of new principals were found to be working as principals within the state after six years. In Missouri, half of the principals were no longer working as such in the state after five years (Viadero, 2009; Ringel et al., 2004).

Why is Principal Turnover a Problem?

A growing body of research indicates that a high level of principal turnover presents serious challenges for schools. First, it denies schools the leadership stability they need to succeed. Experts agree that it takes new principals at least five years to develop the skills and strategies needed to increase student achievement, generate parent involvement, and support teachers (Fuller & Young, 2009; Weinstein et al., 2009; Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; Ringel et al., 2004; Holloway, 2001). In addition, veteran principals report less difficulty managing their workloads than new principals and greater ability to negotiate for more authority and school resources (Adamowski et al., 2007; Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2002).

Second, studies have found that the stability of the principal provides continuity to school improvement efforts and that principals must remain in a school for at least five years to effect large-scale changes. Research shows that when principals leave after a year or two, major school improvement efforts are less likely to succeed (Fuller & Young, 2009; Hill & Banta, 2008; Stoelinga et al., 2008; Texas Association of School Boards, 2008; Partlow, 2007; Akiba & Reichardt, 2004). Weinstein and colleagues (2009) noted that in many school districts, principalships often operate as a rotating position in which a new principal is placed at a school for two or three years before being moved to a different school in the district or promoted to a position in the district's administration. They concluded: "This constant mobility prevents constructive improvements from taking hold within individual schools."

Third, studies have reported a high correlation between principal and teacher turnover. In other words, schools with high levels of principal retention tend to have higher levels of teacher retention (Fuller & Young, 2009; Miller, 2009; Weinstein et al., 2009; Hill & Banta, 2008; Stoelinga et al., 2008; Texas Association of School Boards, 2008). Plecki and colleagues (2005) analyzed teacher and principal retention in 416 Washington State schools from 1998-99 to 2002-03. They found that a larger number of principal changes at a school over a five-year period was correlated with higher rates of teacher turnover.

Miller (2009) examined the impact of principal turnover on teacher turnover in North Carolina public schools from 1994-95 through 2005-06. She found that the percent of teachers who left their school at the same

time the principal left and the percent of teachers who left their school following the first year with a new principal were both significantly higher than the school's baseline teacher turnover rate. Miller conceded that, although statistically significant, the increase in teacher turnover rate was small; for example, in a school with approximately 40 teachers, her estimates suggested the loss of one additional teacher due to the principal's departure. While these data did not explain the exact reasons for increased teacher turnover when the principal left a school, Miller hypothesized that a portion of the increased turnover arose from principals and teachers moving simultaneously to another school within the same district.

Fourth, research suggests a link between principal stability and student outcomes (Branch et al., 2009; Fuller & Young, 2009; Viadero, 2009; Vanderhaar et al., 2006; Akiba & Reichardt, 2004). Miller (2009) examined the relationship between principal transitions and students' test scores (statewide reading comprehension and mathematics tests at the elementary level and end-of-grade tests at the middle school level) in North Carolina schools. She found that principal transitions were associated with changes in student achievement. Test scores in the first two years of the new principal's tenure were low, compared both to prior scores under the old principal and subsequent scores under the new principal. Student performance began to rebound, returning to pre-transition levels, by the end of the fourth year under the new principal.

Weinstein and colleagues (2009) studied principal turnover in New York City high schools. They found that the transition from founding principal to immediate successor led to only a small decrease in the percent of students graduating, but the change from the founding principal to the third principal was associated with larger decreases in graduation rates. Similar results were found for the percent of students dropping out of school and the percent of students passing the English and Mathematics Regents examinations.

Finally, high turnover among principals is financially costly for districts and schools, requiring them to spend additional resources on recruiting, hiring, and training new principals. In addition to these direct costs, the district's investment in building an individual's leadership capacity is lost when he or she moves to another district or state or leaves the principalship entirely (Fuller & Young, 2009; Chapman, 2005).

Summary of Findings

Do School and Principal Characteristics Play a Role in Principal Retention Rates?

Studies conducted on principal turnover in Colorado, Illinois, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas are reviewed in the next section. In summary, findings from these studies indicated:

- In some cases, elementary schools have greater principal stability than middle schools or high schools.
- Principal retention rates are strongly influenced by students' levels of academic achievement, with principals more likely to leave low-achieving schools.
- Students' income level and ethnicity appear to have a much smaller impact on principal retention rates than student achievement levels.
- Researchers have found higher rates of principal turnover in rural and small town districts and in schools with larger student enrollments.
- Principals' ethnicity appears to have little impact on their retention rates. However, when the ethnicity of the principal matches the ethnicity of the largest ethnic group in the school, the principal is more likely to remain in the school.

- Age may play a role in principals' length of stay in the position. Individuals who are 40 to 44 years old have been found to stay at their schools for a longer period of time.
- No differences have been found between male and female retention rates at the middle and high school levels, but female principals tend to stay longer than male principals at the elementary school level.
- Principals' certification test scores appear to have little relationship to their retention rates.
- Principals who are promised increased compensation to assume another job are more likely to leave their schools.

Do School and Principal Characteristics Play a Role in Principal Retention Rates?

Certain principals appear more likely to leave their schools than others. Studies in Illinois, North Carolina, and Texas found that principal retention rates varied significantly across school levels, with elementary school principals having a longer tenure than middle school and high school principals (Fuller & Young, 2009; Gates et al., 2004; Ringel et al., 2004). As noted earlier, however, Plecki and colleagues (2005) found no significant differences between principal turnover rates at Washington State elementary, middle, and senior high schools.

Most researchers have concluded that principal retention rates are influenced by students' levels of achievement. In a study of principal retention rates in Texas public schools, Fuller and Young (2009) found that principals at the highest-achieving elementary and middle schools had the longest tenure and principals at the lowest-achieving schools had the shortest tenure. At the high school level, however, no differences were found in the retention rates of principals at the highest- and lowest-performing schools.

Partlow (2007) studied principal turnover at 109 randomly selected Ohio elementary schools over a seven-year period. She attempted to determine if contextual variables within the school, such as student mobility, student-teacher ratio, building enrollment, and student achievement, predicted principal turnover. Findings indicated that the only variable that significantly predicted principal turnover was the percentage of students at the school who received passing scores on the state's fourth grade reading and mathematics achievement tests. As the percentage of students passing the tests increased, the frequency of principal turnover decreased.

Akiba and Reichardt (2004) studied the career paths of Colorado principals and assistant principals and found that school achievement level predicted the turnover of female administrators, but not male administrators. Female principals and assistant principals were more likely to leave low-achieving schools, while there was no significant relationship between school achievement and male administrators' tenure.

In some studies, the income level and ethnic composition of schools have been found to affect principal turnover. Fuller and Young (2009) reported that principals in high-poverty Texas schools had shorter tenure than principals in low-poverty schools. In both Illinois and North Carolina, researchers found that principals in schools with large proportions of minority students were more likely to leave the principalship than those in other schools (Gates et al., 2004; Ringel et al., 2004). In North Carolina, however, Gates and colleagues (2004) discovered that when the ethnicity of the principal matched the ethnicity of the largest ethnic group in the school, the principal was more likely to remain in the school. Contrary to the findings of most other researchers, Akiba and Reichardt's (2004) study of Colorado principals and assistant principals

found no relationship between school administrators' retention rates and the percentage of low-income or minority students attending the school.

Branch and colleagues (2009) compared the impact of student achievement, income, and ethnicity on principal tenure at Texas schools. They found that student achievement had a much stronger influence on principal retention rates than student income level or ethnicity. Students with the lowest achievement rates were more likely to have new principals and less likely to have principals that had been at their current school at least six years. Differences in levels of principal experience were smaller between low- and high-income schools and even smaller when schools with different ethnic compositions were compared.

Fuller and Young (2009) reported that principals in rural and small town districts had slightly higher turnover rates than principals in suburban or urban districts. They found very little difference in retention rates between schools in urban, suburban affluent, and suburban poor districts. Akiba and Reichardt (2004) found that Colorado principals and assistant principals were significantly more likely to leave large schools than small or middle-sized schools.

Some studies have examined principal characteristics as predictors of retention rate. Fuller and Young (2009) found that principals' own ethnicity did not appear to substantially influence their retention rates. They also found that principals' age had only a small impact on retention rates. The shortest tenures were for principals who were less than 30 years old and over 55 years old. Newly hired principals between 40 and 44 years of age had the longest tenure. Akiba and Reichardt (2004) found that female and non-White principals and assistant principals were more likely to leave their schools at a younger age and to retire earlier, compared to male and White administrators at the same ages.

Fuller and Young (2009) found that female principals had longer retention rates at the elementary school level. At the middle and high school levels, there were essentially no differences in the retention rates of male and female principals. They concluded that principals' gender influenced retention rates only at the elementary school level.

Fuller and Young (2009) also concluded that principals' certification test scores had little impact on their retention rates. Principals in the top quintile of test-takers had greater retention rates at the elementary school level. At the middle and high school levels, however, differences in retention rates were relatively small.

Not surprisingly, Akiba and Reichardt (2004) found that principals and assistant principals were more likely to leave their schools when there was an expected increase in compensation for transferring to another education-related position.

Where Do Principals Go When They Leave?

Studies have traditionally found that a significant portion of principal turnover is due to principals moving to other schools, within or outside of their districts. Akiba and Reichardt (2004) examined the career paths of Colorado principals and assistant principals who left their schools between 1999 and 2001. They found that the majority of principals and assistant principals moved to other schools within their own district or in another Colorado district. Principals and assistant principals retiring or assuming non-education related positions were not considered to be a major factor contributing to school administrator attrition rates.

Papa, Lankford, and Wyckoff (2002) followed cohorts of individuals who became principals in New York State public schools for the first time between 1990 to 1992. They found that six years later, 34 percent of principals were working at the same school; 23 percent were working as principals in a different school; 20 percent had assumed another administrative position; two percent were teachers; and 22 percent had left the New York State educational system. These findings lent support to Akiba and Reichardt's (2004)

conclusion that most principal turnover was due to principals moving to other schools, since the majority (57 percent) of individuals in Papa and colleagues' study were still employed as principals at their original or another school.

In contrast, Fuller and Young's (2009) more recent study of Texas principal turnover concluded that approximately 90 percent of the principals who left their schools actually left the principalship altogether. They contended that the problem is not simply one of principals moving from one school to another, but rather the large number of principals leaving the profession. Most of the principals in their study left to take a job in central administration, changed careers, or retired.

Fuller and Young (2008) also studied the future career paths of Texas principals who left the principalship entirely. They found that after one year, 45 percent of former principals were unemployed; 32 percent were working in central office positions; 15 percent were working as assistant principals or other school professionals; and 8 percent were teaching. After five years, only 10 percent of former principals had returned to the job of principal. Fuller and Young (2008) also analyzed principals' career paths, depending on the type of school at which they had worked: low-performing, average-performing, or high-performing. They reported that one year after leaving the principalship, former principals were more likely to assume central office positions if they had worked at high-performing schools. Former principals from the lowest-performing schools were more likely to become assistant principals or other school professionals, compared to principals who had worked at average- and high-performing schools.

In summary, studies have not yet provided a definitive answer as to whether most principals who leave their schools move to other schools or if they leave the principalship entirely. Some studies found that a significant portion of principal turnover was due to principals moving to other schools, within or outside of their districts. Other studies found that most principals who left their schools actually left the principalship altogether.

Why do Principals Leave Their Jobs?

Studies indicate that several factors contribute to high levels of principal turnover. First, the job has become increasingly complex and diverse. Principals are expected to be instructional leaders, business managers, data analysts, community engagement experts, parent liaisons, and fund raisers. In addition, schools are enrolling greater numbers of economically disadvantaged students and students whose primary language is not English (Fuller & Young, 2009; Miller, 2009; Texas Association of School Boards, 2008). Fuller and Young (2009) stated that "the [principal's] job has outgrown the ability of one person to handle it."

Another reason some principals leave the position is the amount of time required to meet the demands of the job, including weekend and evening hours that interfere with personal and family time (Chapman, 2005; Muir, 2005; Pounder et al., 2003; Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2002). A Public Agenda survey of 909 randomly selected public school principals found that 83 percent of respondents indicated that the demands of their job forced them to make serious compromises in terms of their family and personal lives (Farkas et al., 2001).

Other factors that research has found to be at least partially responsible for the high rates of principal turnover are the stress associated with high-stakes testing and accountability (Fuller & Young, 2009; Viadero, 2009; Hill & Banta, 2008; Akiba & Reichardt, 2004; Hoffman, 2004) and dissatisfaction with the perceived lack of decision-making autonomy (Bottoms & Fry, 2009; Fuller & Young, 2009).

Some researchers have also found that salary plays a role in principal turnover. Under many school district pay scales, new principals earn little or no more than experienced teachers. When principals

don't earn more money than veteran teachers, the monetary benefits of working as a principal don't outweigh the additional time commitments and stress associated with the position (Fuller & Young, 2009; Viadero, 2009; Chapman, 2005; Hoffman, 2004; Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000). In addition, experts emphasize the importance of providing extra financial compensation to principals who agree to work in high-need, low-performing schools (Texas Association of School Boards, 2008; Cortese & von Zastrow, 2006; Lashway, 2003a; Mitgang, 2003).

Ninety principals attending a leadership summit were asked what challenges discouraged individuals from pursuing the principalship (Kennedy, as cited in Institute for Educational Leadership, 2000). Respondents identified the following five reasons:

- changing demands of the job, including increased accountability, responsibility for raising students to high standards without adequate support, and legal and special education issues;
- salary;
- time required to meet the demands of the job;
- lack of parent and community support and negativity of the media and the public toward schools; and
- lack of respect.

Similarly, Hewitt and colleagues (2008) surveyed 391 Arkansas teachers who were identified as either leaders at their school or as having strong leadership potential, but who stated that they had no desire to become a school principal. The top five reasons why teacher leaders reported they did not want to assume the principal's job were:

- testing and accountability pressures;
- high levels of stress associated with the position;
- amount of time that must be devoted to the job;
- societal problems that make it difficult to be an instructional leader; and
- difficulty satisfying the demands of parents and the community.

How Can Principal Turnover be Reduced?

Researchers have suggested the following policies and practices to help reduce principal turnover:

Job Sharing

Studies show that, even in the highest performing schools, principals spend up to 75 percent of their time on administrative tasks such as arranging bus schedules and supervising custodians, and too little time on instructional leadership (The Wallace Foundation, 2010). To ease the burden on overworked principals, some school districts have turned to job sharing, or dividing tasks between two leaders who possess skills in different areas, such as instructional supervisors and business managers. When schools establish job sharing arrangements, the instructional supervisor works closely with teachers on curriculum and instructional delivery issues and oversees teacher evaluations, community relations, and staff development. The business manager is responsible for administrative functions such as the school budget process, purchasing, payroll, facilities management, data management, transportation coordination, management of non-instructional personnel, and compliance with district, state, and federal regulations. To finance the extra position, some principals use money in their budget to hire a business manager instead of an assistant principal (Boris-Schacter & Langer, 2002; Hertling, 2001).

The national School Administration Manager (SAM) project is funded by The Wallace Foundation, a non-profit charitable foundation. The SAM project was designed to give principals more time to focus on instructional leadership instead of management responsibilities. SAMs allow principals to spend more time focusing on student learning, teaching practices, and school improvement, while also ensuring that

the demands of managing the school are met. Principals meet with SAMs for 30 minutes each day to track their time, organize their schedules, and identify barriers to spending time on instructional tasks. One hundred eighty principals in nine states currently participate in the national SAM project. In the initial program design, the SAM was a new staff member. However, in response to local concerns about the cost of a new position, schools were allowed to add SAM responsibilities to an existing position. In these schools, SAMs continued to perform some or all of their existing job duties and also met with their principals to discuss time use, but were not expected to take on additional management tasks (The Wallace Foundation, 2010; Turnbull et al., 2009).

An independent evaluation of the national SAM project concluded that, among the 75 principals who participated in the project for at least one full year, the time devoted to instruction-related tasks increased by an average of 58 minutes per day and the average length of time spent in school shortened by 31 minutes per day. The percent of time principals devoted to instructional tasks increased significantly, from a mean of 32 percent to a mean of 45 percent. Further analysis indicated that the change in time use was only significant when a new SAM position was added at the school. There was no significant increase in time spent on instructional tasks when the SAM continued to occupy another job. The evaluators concluded that these results were due to the fact that the number of tasks delegated to SAMs affected the amount of time principals were able to devote to instructional tasks. They found that principals who delegated five management tasks to SAMs (student discipline, student supervision, managing non-teaching staff, managing school facilities, and interacting with parents) significantly increased the time they spent on instructional tasks. In schools where fewer of these managerial tasks were delegated to SAMs, principals' time use did not change significantly (Turnbull et al., 2009).

Networking and Mentoring

Researchers have concluded that expanded opportunities to interact with peers increase principal retention rates. Zellner and colleagues (2002) noted: "Principals often feel like isolated links in the chain of command, caught somewhere between students, teachers, parents, and the district office." Studies have found that most districts offer isolated professional activities, such as principal meetings and conferences, that don't provide principals with continued, sustained support over time. Instead, it is recommended that principals have opportunities for ongoing professional renewal with peers in the form of retreats, summer institutes, seminars, peer support groups, university/school collaboratives, and business partnerships (Weinstein et al., 2009; Muir, 2005; Zellner et al., 2002; Oberman, 1996).

Most principals report that they are provided with few networking opportunities. For example, surveys administered to over 1,000 principals by Kentucky and Tennessee State Leadership Redesign Task Forces, in collaboration with the Southern Regional Education Board, revealed that 70 percent of Kentucky principals and 52 percent of Tennessee principals identified "opportunities for networking and collaboration" as a condition needing "substantial improvement" (Bottoms & Fry, 2009). The Educational Research Service's (2000) review of the research found that principals frequently request opportunities to network with other principals to exchange ideas, evaluate the demands of their jobs, and discuss how to implement change at their schools.

Researchers also recommend that districts provide principals with skilled mentors. Mentors are usually fellow principals or other district administrators who were once principals. They provide colleagues opportunities to meet in non-evaluative settings and can answer questions about the budget, how to effectively observe and evaluate staff, protocol to be followed in emergencies, and a host of other subjects. They also help new principals understand the importance of developing critical job skills, such as time management, delegation of tasks, and how to communicate effectively with a variety of stakeholders (Hill & Banta, 2008; Texas Association of School Boards, 2008; Advocates for Children & Youth, 2007a; Curtis, 2007; Cortese & von Zastrow, 2006; Chapman, 2005; Muir, 2005; Hoffman, 2004; Zellner et al., 2002; Oberman, 1996).

Professional Development

Most researchers agree that districts can reduce principal turnover by providing professional development that focuses on the skills principals need to work with their students and staff. Professional development opportunities should be differentiated, depending on the individual needs of each principal and his or her school (Bottoms & Fry, 2009; Texas Association of School Boards, 2008; Muir, 2005; Hoffman, 2004; Zellner et al., 2002; Prince George's County Public Schools, n.d.).

Survey responses illustrate the importance principals place on professional development. The Educational Research Service's (2000) review of the research reported that principals repeatedly express a desire to augment their expertise and personal skills, but believe the current professional development activities at their schools are lacking. Public Agenda's survey of 909 randomly selected public school principals found that 95 percent of the respondents stated that improving the quality of professional development opportunities for administrators was an effective way to improve leadership in the nation's schools (Farkas et al., 2001). Adamowski and colleagues (2007) interviewed 33 elementary school principals from public and charter schools in three states. The majority of respondents indicated that they needed more training than they had received in the following areas: designing curriculum (75 percent), managing and analyzing data (63 percent), and communicating effectively (52 percent). Forty percent or more of the respondents also expressed a desire for additional professional development in making data-driven decisions; building a community of learners; evaluating classroom teachers; and evaluating curriculum.

Increased Autonomy

Experts suggest that more decision-making autonomy would keep principals on the job longer (Fuller & Young, 2009; Hill & Banta, 2008; Texas Association of School Boards, 2008). Adamowski and colleagues (2007) remarked on "how little authority . . . principals enjoy in key areas. Their budgets are essentially handed down to them, or at least strictly regulated from above. In most cases, the curriculum is determined for their schools, and they have little control over who works there." The Institute for Educational Leadership (2000) stated that very few principals are granted the autonomy needed to exert powerful leadership and noted that the principalship is usually constructed as a middle management position. The Institute concluded: "School leaders should remain accountable for helping their schools meet district and state goals, but they must have greater flexibility in crafting strategies to meet those goals."

Fuller and Young (2009) found that Texas principals often reported dissatisfaction with excessive interference from central office staff. In general, research indicates that principals express a desire for more autonomy in two major areas: personnel decisions and instructional decisions. In matters related to personnel, principals want the authority to hire teachers and staff, discharge unsuitable staff, and determine how many and what types of faculty and staff positions should be filled at their schools (Bottoms & Fry, 2009; Gray, 2008; Adamowski et al., 2007).

Many principals also believe they lack the authority to make instructional decisions. Decisions regarding selection of instructional materials and curriculum pacing and sequencing are often made at the district or state level, reducing the principal's instructional leadership role to "ensuring teacher fidelity to the district-set curriculum" (Adamowski et al., 2007). Bottoms and Fry (2009) found that principals in high-performing schools reported they had more flexibility to address the needs of students who had fallen behind in school, compared to principals in lower-performing schools.

Financial Incentives

Many researchers support the idea of providing financial incentives to attract and retain principals (Texas Association of School Boards, 2008; Advocates for Children & Youth, 2007a; Mitgang, 2003). The issue is not one of low principal salaries, but that the pay differential between principals and experienced teachers

in the building is often negligible. Therefore, the monetary benefits of working as a principal often don't outweigh the additional time commitments and stress associated with the position (Bottoms & Fry, 2009; Lashway, 2003a). A survey of 909 randomly selected public school principals conducted by Public Agenda found that 97 percent of the respondents agreed that increasing the pay and prestige of school administrators would be an effective way to improve leadership in the nation's schools (Farkas et al., 2001).

Researchers have concluded that additional compensation may be especially important for retaining principals at the most challenging schools (Texas Association of School Boards, 2008; Cortese & von Zastrow, 2006; Lashway, 2003a; Mitgang, 2003). Most analysts believe the incentives need to be substantial before they have an impact on principal recruitment and retention at hard-to-staff schools. Hanushek and colleagues (2001), for example, estimated that the differential would have to be as much as 20 to 50 percent over comparable positions at higher-performing, less challenging schools.

Since salary increases are not a viable option for most districts, experts have suggested providing principals with other incentives, such as tax credits; low-interest mortgages; reimbursement for doctoral or other educational programs; and financial support for sabbaticals (American Association of School Administrators, 2002; Hertling, 2001).

Induction Programs for New Principals

Experts maintain that a smooth transition into the principalship helps to ensure that principals will be successful in their jobs, leading to higher levels of satisfaction and longer tenures. Induction programs help new principals learn the skills they will need, such as developing long-range plans for raising student achievement, balancing a school budget, identifying strategies for hiring teachers, designing teacher and student schedules, and creating safe school environments. Programs should use a wide range of strategies, including leadership academies, study groups, workshops, conferences, retreats, peer coaching, partnerships with experienced principals, and one-to-one mentoring (Muir, 2005; Lashway, 2003b).

In interviews, former New York City high school principals indicated that on-going, sustained connections with other principals were critical when they first assumed the principalship. They also stated that it would have been helpful to shadow another principal for a few months before assuming the position themselves (Weinstein et al., 2009). Similarly, former Chicago Public Schools principals stated that they had experienced early difficulties resolving community, social, and political problems; dealing with the demands of parents; determining how to motivate students; and negotiating central administration (Oberman, 1996).

District Support

To lower turnover rates, experts say that school districts must provide principals with adequate central office support in the form of protection from community and political pressures and efficient processes in areas such as staffing, transportation, and maintenance (Bottoms & Fry, 2009; Hill & Banta, 2008; Texas Association of School Boards, 2008; Cortese & von Zastrow, 2006; Prince George's County Public Schools, n.d.).

Public Agenda's survey of 909 randomly selected public school principals found that only 37 percent of respondents stated they were happy with the respect and appreciation they got for doing their job (Farkas, 2001). The Southern Regional Education Board interviewed 22 high school principals in 17 states. Those at schools with the greatest increases in student achievement levels reported that they had collaborative working relationships with district staff (Bottoms & Fry, 2009).

Oberman (1996) interviewed former Chicago Public Schools principals and asked what the school system might have done to encourage them to stay. Over one-third of the former principals criticized the district for failing to recognize, support, and encourage their efforts. The majority of respondents indicated that

they might have been influenced to stay by more timely responses to their requests for assistance, more lead time for requested reports, more clarity in instructions, a reduction in paperwork, and improved relations between central administration and schools.

Cortese and von Zastrow (2006) and Oberman (1996) suggested that school districts publicly praise the dedication and accomplishments of principals who have achieved even partial success in their school improvement efforts. Oberman recommended that districts publicize cumulative progress through a variety of venues, such as newsletters, press releases, video clips on the community access cable station, and email messages.

Adequate Resources and Working Conditions

Studies indicate that inferior workplace conditions lead to higher rates of principal turnover (Bottoms & Fry, 2009; Fuller & Young, 2009; Advocates for Children & Youth, 2007a; Cortese & von Zastrow, 2006; Chapman, 2005; Lashway, 2003a; Mitgang, 2003). Surveys administered to over 1,000 principals in Kentucky and Tennessee revealed the importance they placed on working conditions. The majority of respondents in both states identified “needs-based resource allocation” and “adequate facilities and space” as areas requiring substantial improvement (Bottoms & Fry, 2009).

Hornig, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2009) stated that schools with high concentrations of poor, minority, and low-achieving students tend to have less desirable working conditions, including fewer resources, more safety and discipline problems, less parental involvement, more teacher and student turnover, and to be located further from staff residences. They concluded that these inferior working conditions may contribute to the higher turnover rates found in disadvantaged schools.

Local Note

Hornig, Kalogrides, and Loeb (2009) conducted a study of principal distribution and turnover in Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) for the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research (a research program affiliated with the Urban Institute with Duke University, Stanford University, University of Florida, University of Missouri - Columbia, University of Texas at Dallas, and University of Washington). Study data included administrative files on M-DCPS staff and students; surveys of principals and assistant principals; and publicly available school-level information from the Common Core of Data and from the Florida Department of Education. The researchers studied 373 schools and 552 principals over a six-year time frame (2003-04 through 2008-09 school years). The full report, *Principal Preferences and the Unequal Distribution of Principals across Schools*, is available at http://www.caldercenter.org/upload/Working-paper-36_FINAL.pdf. A summary of the report is provided below.

Principal Characteristics

During the six-year study period, thirty-eight percent of M-DCPS principals were Hispanic, 36 percent were Black, and 26 percent were White. The majority (70 percent) of principals held a master’s degree or higher. The average number of years of experience in the district was 22.37 and the average number of years of experience at the current school was 3.88. Principals averaged 17.7 years of experience in the district prior to becoming principal and remained principal at a given school for an average (median) of three years.

Principal Experience

Tables 1 through 4 compare the experience of principals in high- versus low-poverty M-DCPS schools (based on the percentage of students receiving free or reduced price lunch); high- versus low-minority schools; and high- versus low-achieving schools. As can be seen, principals in schools with more low-

income, non-White, and low-performing students were more likely to be first year principals, serve fewer years in their current school, and have fewer years of experience as a principal. They were also more likely to be temporary or interim principals.

Table 1. Means of M-DCPS Principal Experience, Low-Poverty vs. High-Poverty Schools

Principal Experience Level	Low-Poverty Schools	High-Poverty Schools
First Year Principal	11%	20%*
Years in Current School	3.07	2.48*
Years of Experience as Principal	4.75	3.43*
Years Worked in the District	22.80	20.85*
Temporary/Interim Principal	5%	17%*

*Statistically significant difference.

Table 2. Means of M-DCPS Principal Experience, Low-Minority vs. High-Minority Schools

Principal Experience Level	Low-Minority Schools	High-Minority Schools
First Year Principal	12%	21%*
Years in Current School	2.90	2.46*
Years of Experience as Principal	4.34	3.29*
Years Worked in the District	22.78	21.25*
Temporary/Interim Principal	7%	15%*

*Statistically significant difference.

Table 3. Means of M-DCPS Principal Experience, Low-Achieving vs. High-Achieving Schools*

Principal Experience Level	Low-Achieving Schools - Reading	High-Achieving Schools - Reading	Low-Achieving Schools - Math	High-Achieving Schools - Math
First Year Principal	23%	9%**	21%	7%**
Years in Current School	2.22	3.63**	2.37	3.77**
Years of Experience as Principal	2.84	5.47**	2.99	5.50**
Years Worked in the District	20.73	23.62**	21.28	24.12**
Temporary/Interim Principal	14%	5%**	15%	4%**

* Based on percentage of students in Achievement Level 1 on the FCAT Reading and Mathematics.

** Statistically significant difference.

Table 4. Means of M-DCPS Principal Experience, Based on School Performance Grades

Principal Experience Level	Schools with a Grade of A	Schools with a Grade of D or F
First Year Principal	13%	26%*
Years in Current School	3.43	1.97*
Years of Experience as Principal	5.08	2.47*
Years Worked in the District	23.34	20.24*
Temporary/Interim Principal	9%	14%*

*Statistically significant difference.

Principals in schools with more poor, minority, and low-performing students were also less likely to have a master’s degree and more likely to have attended colleges with lower average SAT/ACT scores and lower overall quality. The latter was based on a selectivity scale constructed by the researchers that included acceptance rate; percentage of freshmen with GPAs within certain ranges; and percentage of freshmen in the top 10, 25, and 50 percent of their high school class.

Principal Turnover

The probability of staying in the principal position at a given school throughout the year was lower for principals at low-performing schools. Approximately 80 percent of principals at the highest-achieving schools and 60 percent of principals at the lowest-achieving schools (based on the percentage of students scoring at Achievement Level 1 on the FCAT Mathematics) remained at their school after three years of service. After 10 years, virtually none of the principals in schools with the lowest-achieving students remained, compared to 40 percent of principals in schools with the highest-achieving students. Similar results were obtained based on FCAT Reading scores and school performance grades (A versus D or F) and when principals at high- and low-poverty schools and high- and low-minority schools were compared.

Each year, staff from M-DCPS’ Department of Research Services administer the School Climate Survey to a sample of parents, students, and staff. The survey gathers information on the perceptions these groups hold concerning their schools. Horng and associates were provided with data from the staff portion of the School Climate Survey. They combined the following four items into one scale and incorporated the scale scores into their existing data: “At my school I feel safe and secure;” “I believe children attending my school are receiving a good education;” “The overall climate or atmosphere at my school is positive and helps students learn;” and “What overall grade would you give to this school?”

Horng and colleagues examined the extent to which the school climate measure mediated the association between school demographics and principal turnover. When the school climate scale was added into their analyses, the magnitude of the relationships between principal turnover and the percent of poor, minority, and low-achieving students at a school was reduced in size and was no longer statistically significant. A one standard deviation increase in the school climate scale was associated with approximately a 20 percent decline in the odds of a principal leaving his or her current school. The researchers concluded that “the high rates of turnover in schools with poor, minority, and low-achieving student bodies may not necessarily be driven by these student characteristics but rather by the other undesirable features of schools that enroll these students,” such as a counterproductive school climate and inferior working conditions. They suggested that a positive school climate may be especially important for lowering principal turnover in schools with the highest concentrations of poor, minority, and low-achieving students.

Principal Vacancies

Tables 5 through 8 compare the number of principal vacancies and how these vacancies were filled at schools within M-DCPS. Hornig and associates found that schools with larger concentrations of poor, minority, and low-achieving students were more likely to have principal vacancies and to fill them with individuals who had not previously served as principals. In contrast, schools with larger proportions of affluent, White, and high-achieving students were more likely to have fewer vacancies and to fill them with individuals who had prior principal experience. One notable, and unexplained, exception is the comparison between schools receiving a performance grade of A compared to those receiving a grade of D or F. Schools receiving a performance grade of A actually had a larger number of principal vacancies than those receiving a grade of D or F. In addition, both types of schools filled 37 percent of their vacancies with experienced principals.

Table 5. M-DCPS Principal Vacancies, Low-Poverty vs. High-Poverty Schools

Number of Vacancies and How They Were Filled	Low-Poverty Schools	High-Poverty Schools
Number of Vacancies	52	106
Filled by Principal from Another School	61%	21%
Filled by Assistant Principal from Another School	15%	60%
Filled by Individual from Within the Same School	19%	16%

Table 6. M-DCPS Principal Vacancies, Low-Minority vs. High-Minority Schools

Number of Vacancies and How They Were Filled	Low-Minority Schools	High-Minority Schools
Number of Vacancies	75	113
Filled by Principal from Another School	51%	27%
Filled by Assistant Principal from Another School	35%	51%
Filled by Individual from Within the Same School	12%	19%

Table 7. M-DCPS Principal Vacancies, Low-Achieving vs. High-Achieving Schools*

Number of Vacancies and How They Were Filled	Low-Achieving Schools - Reading	High-Achieving Schools - Reading	Low-Achieving Schools - Math	High-Achieving Schools - Math
Number of Vacancies	54	118	43	115
Filled by Principal from Another School	33%	54%	26%	58%
Filled by Assistant Principal from Another School	47%	28%	52%	26%
Filled by Individual from Within the Same School	16%	15%	19%	14%

* Based on percentage of students in Achievement Level 1 on the FCAT Reading and Mathematics.

Table 8. M-DCPS Principal Vacancies, Based on School Performance Grades

Number of Vacancies and How They Were Filled	Schools with a Grade of A	Schools with a Grade of D or F
Number of Vacancies	113	62
Filled by Principal from Another School	37%	37%
Filled by Assistant Principal from Another School	42%	37%
Filled by Individual from Within the Same School	15%	24%

Schools with the highest percent of low-income, minority, and low-achieving students were also less likely to have principal vacancies filled by individuals with master’s degrees and more likely to have vacancies filled by principals who attended colleges with somewhat lower average SAT/ACT scores and lower overall quality.

Transfer Patterns

Hornig and associates compared the characteristics of sending and receiving schools among principals who transferred to another school within M-DCPS (Table 9). They found that the schools to which principals transferred had, on average, fewer free or reduced price lunch students and smaller proportions of minority and low-achieving students, as compared to their previous schools. There were, however, only small differences in the attributes of the teaching force at the sending and receiving schools, suggesting that teacher qualifications were not an important factor in principals’ decisions to transfer to another school.

Table 9. Differences in School Characteristics Among M-DCPS Transferring Principals

School Characteristics	Sending School	Receiving School
Percent Free or Reduced Price Lunch Students	73%	63%
Percent Minority Students	91%	87%
Percent Low-Achieving Students, Math*	27%	22%
Percent Low-Achieving Students, Reading*	33%	30%
Percent First Year Teachers at School	12%	13%
Average Teacher Years of Experience	9.7	9.9
Percent of Teachers with Master's Degree	32%	34%

* Based on percentage of students in Achievement Level 1 on the FCAT Reading and Mathematics.

Surveys were administered to 326 principals serving in M-DCPS during the 2007-08 school year to examine their preferences for the types of schools in which they would like to work. Respondents were asked to rate their preferences for 16 different school characteristics and to identify the one school characteristic that was most important to them. Principals’ top five rated school preferences were:

1. Sense of safety on campus;
2. Availability of school resources;
3. Good condition of school facilities;
4. A school with supportive parent participation; and
5. Collegial school culture.

The school characteristics principals rated as the least important factors influencing their preference of schools at which to work were: many students of poverty; many English language learners; and a “failing” school in need of reform.

Principal Tenure

In addition to the preceding findings reported by Horng and associates, staff from the District's Department of Research Services received data on principal tenure in M-DCPS from the Office of Human Resources. The Human Resources data file included 1,462 M-DCPS principals who left the position between 1981 and 2009. Analysis of these data confirmed that principal tenure in M-DCPS tended to be shorter for those working at lower-performing schools. The average tenure of principals who left schools receiving a performance grade of D or F was lower than the average tenure of principals who left schools receiving an A, B, or C. For example, the average tenure of principals who left schools earning a performance grade of A, B, or C in 2009 was 8.4 years, while the average tenure of principals who left schools earning a performance grade of D or F in 2009 was 7.3 years (Table 10).

Table 10. M-DCPS Principal Tenure*, Based on School Performance Grades

Performance Grade	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005
A, B, or C	8.4 years	8.6 years	8.6 years	8.5 years	8.7 years
D or F	7.3 years	6.5 years	7.3 years	6.5 years	6.9 years

*These figures cannot be directly compared to those provided by Horng and associates, as they represent the average tenure as principal in M-DCPS, not at a particular school.

Summary

Research indicates that principal turnover rates have become alarmingly high, with studies reporting that principals, on average, stay at their schools for less than five years and that 50 to 70 percent of principals leave the position entirely within five to six years. A growing body of research shows that high levels of principal turnover present serious challenges for schools, such as lack of leadership stability, disruption of long-term school improvement efforts, increased teacher turnover, and lower levels of student achievement.

Studies of principal turnover in several states have found that principals are more likely to leave low-performing schools. Students' income level and ethnicity also appear to have an impact on principal turnover, although to a lesser extent. Research has not yet provided a definitive answer as to whether most principals who leave their schools move to other schools within or outside of their district or if they leave the principalship altogether. When principals leave the position entirely, they do so for a variety of reasons, including the complexity of the job, the time required to meet the demands of the job, high levels of stress associated with the position, perceived lack of autonomy, and the often negligible difference between principal and teacher compensation.

Researchers have suggested several policies and practices to help reduce principal turnover, such as establishing job sharing programs that divide responsibilities between instructional supervisors and business managers; providing additional opportunities for principal networking, mentoring, and professional development; granting increased autonomy to allow principals more latitude in how they manage their schools; and providing adequate district support, resources, and working conditions.

Analysis of Miami-Dade County Public Schools data by the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research found that principals stayed at their schools for a median of three years. Principals in low-income, minority, and low-achieving schools were more likely to be first year principals, serve fewer years in their current school, and have fewer years of experience as principals. Principal turnover was more common in schools serving low-income, minority, and low-achieving students and principals tended to transfer to schools with lower concentrations of these students. In addition, more vacancies arose in less advantaged schools and these vacancies were more likely to be filled by individuals

with no prior principal experience. The researchers concluded, based on incorporation of School Climate Survey data into their analyses, that these findings may not have been influenced as much by students' income level, ethnicity, or achievement level as by other undesirable features of schools that enroll these students, such as a counterproductive school climate and inferior working conditions.

Note: A special thanks to Dr. Terry Froman for conducting the analysis on the Human Resources data file.

All reports distributed by Research Services can be accessed at <http://drs.dadeschools.net>.

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