

**An Examination of K-5 Principal Time and Tasks to Improve  
Leadership Practice**

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**Abstract**

*This study highlights the high rates of attrition among school leaders that result from increased demands on school principals. This article reports on a unique university and school district partnership that worked together in action-based, community-engaged research to address the time allocation and tasks in the daily life of principals. The findings highlight the complex and changing roles in the daily work of school principals. Moreover, this study serves as a model for community engagement and exemplifies how universities and districts can work together to improve school leadership.*

## Need for the Study<sup>4</sup>

Several principals in a school district near a state university with a large education college felt overwhelmed with the quantity of work derived not only from their own schedules, but also from the expectations of the district, parents, and faculty. In this school district, one principal approached the superintendent asking for help. This superintendent turned to the university and asked to build a partnership with a school faculty member and candidates in the university's Educational Administration cohort to collect information through action-based, community-engaged research. This partnership was not the first of its kind, but it was the first for this class of administrative credential students. They were excited to be exposed to the methodology of research, to practice the work needed for Institutional Review Board approval, and to have the chance to discuss this topic with acting principals in the field. This project would satisfy a one-unit field study course for these 11 graduate students.

The superintendent was aware of the great challenge for districts to attract and retain effective school leaders. In a district such as this one with many Title I schools, Quinn (2002) indicates there is a high-turnover rate of principals who are facing the additional challenges of students in poverty. The MetLife (2013) nationwide survey of school principals found that 75% of principals believed the job had become too complex. Job satisfaction among principals has decreased 12% since 2008, from 68% to 59%. This issue may be due to the increased accountability demands placed on schools, the costly needs of special populations, and the concept that the principal's main job is to be the school's instructional leader (Pounder, Galvin, & Shepherd, 2003; Winter & Morgenthal, 2002). Moreover, longevity among principals is diminishing. Studies in various states and districts indicate that annual principal turnover rates are in the range of 12–30% (Battle & Gruber, 2010; Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2011; Dhuey & Smith, 2011; Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Guarino, & Brown, 2006). Of the principals who leave the principalship, 62% do so for reasons other than retirement (Battle & Gruber, 2010).

These statistics show a lack of tenure for principals; in this study, the heartfelt cry of the local principal to the superintendent created an urgency to collect data on what principals are engaged in during their workday. This information could lead to further discussion pertaining to the question, What tasks and timelines do K-5 principals in a North County School District (NCSD)<sup>5</sup> engage in during work? These answers might help district leaders to form decisions and policies regarding principal schedules, pressures, and staffing to support the time-challenged principals.

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<sup>4</sup> Thank you to the candidates in the Master of Arts in Educational Administration program who contributed to this research: Kari Auerbach, Emily Chamow, Jed Clark, Dianne Cox, Gabriel Ginez, Amy Glancy, April Jacoby, Solomon Katz, Alexa Scheidler, Shehan Sirimanne, and Amanda Tsoi.

<sup>5</sup> This is a pseudonym.

## Literature Review

### The Changing Role of Principals

The role of the principal has been evolving over the years. The concept of the principal as a building manager has given way to a model in which the principal is an aspirational leader, a team builder, a coach, and an agent of visionary change (Alvoid & Black, 2014). There have been increasing layers of responsibilities for principals (Cooley & Shen, 2003). Wells (2013, p. 335) observes:

Across America, principals are charged with leading schools with diminished resources, increased expectations for student achievement, changing demographics, and increased accountability and connectivity, often referred to as “24/7” access from central office personnel, parents, students and school board members.

Clearly, the role of the principal continues to expand and new responsibilities are added; however, few are deleted (Walker, 2009). Whereas principals with a staff of several assistant principals can often assign instructional leadership to a colleague, elementary principals do not have the same luxury (Sherman & Crum, 2007). How can K-5 (elementary school) principals effectively balance all the demands? Have the expectations concerning tasks and timelines changed in accordance with those changing roles?

“Superhero principals,” defined as preternaturally driven leaders who buck bureaucracies, work around the clock, and circumvent endless barriers to create oases of high performance in the midst of dysfunctional systems have become something of a motif in our national education narrative (Ikemoto, Taliaferro, Fenton, & Davis, 2014). Though commendable, is it realistic to have this superhero expectation for all administrators?

In light of changing expectations, it is important for districts to reevaluate how principals spend their time and prioritize the roles they must fill on a daily basis. The increase in the principals’ responsibilities and the incongruence between what instructional leaders want to do and what they have time to do may create serious consequences for school leaders (Walker, 2009).

### Time Management

It is important to reflect on how principals manage the various job-related tasks and demands placed upon them. Research outside education suggests that effective time management skills may help principals meet job demands, reduce job stress, and improve performance (Grissom, Loeb, & Mitani, 2013).

Principals have noted that they were spending an increasing amount of time on managerial tasks as opposed to instructional leadership tasks (Shen & Crawford, 2003). For the majority of principals, employee supervision and office work were the two management areas that continued to garner the most time. The time spent performing these tasks reduces the amount of time principals can spend on teacher development, student achievement, and school culture (Walker, 2009).

## **Support**

With regard to time management, experience may help. Research shows that time spent on administrative tasks decreases by roughly 13% as principals gain more experience (Hornig, Klasik, & Loeb, 2010). This may be due to the fact that principals with longer tenure in the same schools appear to delegate more (Grissom, Loeb, & Hajime, 2013). This information indicates that principals require supports from all levels including parent leaders, administrative assistants, assistant principals, resource teachers, school leaders, and district leaders. Newer principals have reported that sometimes they do not feel adequately supported in their roles by their school districts (Alvoid, 2014). Support from superintendents is important for all principals, but it is especially important for principals who have less experience in their current school districts (Chang, Leach, & Anderman, 2015).

## **Professional Development**

Building leadership capacity in others requires effort, unique insight, and explicit skills. Specific training and support systems can allow principals to perform more effectively. It is important for districts to develop systems and policies that will give principals the authority and support that they need to appropriately train their staff, and that will also provide principals with ongoing opportunities for feedback and development (Wells, 2013).

Slater (2008) discusses the importance of training principals in the methods of building capacity, which require the principal to share leadership with others. School reform may be achieved and sustained more effectively when improvement is not dependent on one person but is a shared responsibility among staff, students, and parents.

## **Technology to Assist Principal Time Schedules**

The Northwestern University School of Education has developed electronic applications that capture the activities and allocation of time across workdays. One such tool, the Principal Experience Sampling Method, instructs principals to use handheld computers to report the activities they are performing any time the device beeps during the day. Another web-based tool called The End of the Day Log captures how school leaders allocate their time across nine leadership domains: building operations, finances, community or parent relations, school district functions, student affairs, personnel issues, planning/setting goals, instructional leadership, and professional growth. Using a calendar interface, school leaders report how much time they spent on each domain during each hour of the school day (Northwestern University, 2017). This tool helps leaders to be aware of their actions and to better allocate their time. Often, principals are not able to pinpoint what they have done when they sit down and reflect at the end of the day. With the vast array of activities, interruptions, and outside influences they experience at work, many principals may see their day as a blur.

## **Principal Activities**

Camburn et al. (2014) conceived of principal leadership practice as a series of actions taken by principals to influence people, processes, and organizational structures. According to these

scholars, principals exercise influence through nine domains of responsibility: (a) building operations, (b) finances, (c) community or parent relations, (d) school district functions, (e) student affairs, (f) personnel issues, (g) planning and setting goals, (h) instructional leadership, and (i) professional growth. Further, they organized the domains into five broad areas: school management, instructional leadership, planning and setting goals, boundary spanning, and personal development (Camburn et al., 2014).

Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013) found that principals spent an average of 12.7% of their time on instruction-related activities. Brief classroom walkthroughs were the most common activity, accounting for 5.4% of principals' time use; formally evaluating teachers accounted for 1.8% of principals' time; informally coaching teachers to improve their instruction occupied 0.5% of their time; and 2.1% of their time was spent developing the educational program and evaluating the school curriculum.

Marshall (2008, p. 18) indicates that principals perform many different roles, namely:

- Mission: Giving staff members and students a clear sense of direction.
- Climate: Making the school a safe place that runs smoothly.
- Alignment: Meshing curriculum and assessments with state standards.
- Resources: Getting teachers the tools they need to be effective.
- Instruction: Nurturing the best possible teaching in every classroom.
- Hiring: Using every vacancy to bring in excellent teachers.
- Interim assessments: Using data to continuously improve teaching.
- Collaboration: Fostering constant sharing of ideas and resources.
- Results: Keeping supervision, professional development, and teams focused on outcomes.
- Parents: Maximizing family support of students' education.

Because there is no consensus about the roles and responsibilities of the principal, school leaders are often overwhelmed by the possibility of having to do it all. According to Alvoid (2014, p. 3), "These changing expectations, coupled with insufficient training and support, have led many principals to the conclusion that the job is no longer sustainable."

## **Methodology**

The study took a multi-phased approach to provide better insight into the demands elementary principals face and the way they allocate their time on daily activities in a school district near a state university on the West Coast. The district is a suburban, middle-sized K-12 public school system. The demographics indicate that 60% of the students are Hispanic, and 25% are English learners. In addition, there are many students in poverty in this district, with more than half the students qualifying for free and reduced lunch and 10% considered homeless.

The team of researchers set out to gather qualitative and quantitative information from 18 K-5 principals currently working in the North County School District. Eleven of the 18 principals completed the survey. The team organized quantitative survey data by the number of hours per week that each principal spent on named tasks and calculated the mean scores. They also identified trends in hours spent on certain tasks.

The graduate student researchers collected qualitative data by shadowing four elementary principals during their school workday. The researchers carried clipboards with a research-based list of principal tasks, and they put a check mark on the chart every five minutes to indicate the

task the principal was engaged in and the time duration. Based on these observations, the team developed a frequency chart showing the principals' activities.

Additional qualitative data were gathered through interviews with six principals. The team analyzed the qualitative data to look for recurring themes in the time allocation and tasks of the K-5 principals. It was then analyzed, coded, and triangulated with data derived from the survey and from shadowing to determine patterns and themes.

Table 1  
*Tools and Analysis Used for Data Collection*

<b>Data Collected</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>Tools</b>	<b>Analysis</b>
Survey	11	Digital survey with open response	Tally chart, median score
Shadowing	4	Task check-off sheet	Frequency chart, total score
Interview	6	List of guiding questions	Transcriptions and coding

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

#### **Survey**

**Introduction.** In fall 2016, a team of CSUSM researchers sent an online survey to 18 principals from the North County School District (NCSD) in order to answer the research question: What tasks and timelines do K-5 principals in NCSD engage in during work? Eleven principals participated in the survey. The resulting data were tallied and analyzed for median scores and patterns indicating how the surveyed administrators spent their time during their day-to-day responsibilities.

**Survey questions.** The survey was sent digitally and included 43 tasks that previous research had suggested a principal might engage in at work. The principals were asked to indicate how many hours per week they spent on specific tasks in the following areas:

- Administration
- Organizational management
- Instructional leadership
- Program development
- Internal relations
- External relations
- Other

**Survey results.** The following data are based on the average number of hours spent on each task on the survey.

The top 10 principal tasks vary from 4.5 hours per week to 8.5 hours per week. The most time-consuming task for K-5 principals is meeting special education requirements.

Table 2  
*Top 10 Time-Consuming Tasks for K-5 Principals*

Task	Hrs/wk
Fulfilling special education requirements (e.g. meeting with parents, compliance).	8.5
Developing relationships with students	7.6
Developing and monitoring a safe school environment	6.8
Preparing or conducting classroom observations/walk-throughs	6.5
Managing student services (e.g. records, reporting, activities)	6.3
Supervising students (e.g. lunch duty)	5.8
Using data to inform instruction	5.7
Preparing, implementing, and administering standardized tests	5.4
Developing an educational program across the school	4.9
Email, fax, call, or paperwork when topic or recipient is uncertain	4.5

*Note.*  $N = 11$ .

In the survey, principals reported very high numbers of hours spent on tasks. After totaling the estimated hours for each task, weekly work hours for the principals ranged from a low of 83.1 to a high of 207.5. The average estimated time that principals indicated they worked per week was 163.3 hours—that is, a 32.7-hour workday! This perception was uniformly present. If one were to assume a 40-hour work week for the principals, the 163-hour work week estimation was more than four times that amount. Overall, there was a sense of massive amounts of workload and the pressing need to address a large variety of tasks each day. The survey data were culled from personal perception and may present a confounding variable in this study.

On the other side of the scale, principals spent the least amount of time on the following ten items.

Table 3  
*Ten Least Time-Consuming Tasks for K-5 Principals*

Task	Hrs/wk
Communicating with district for resources	2.3
Fundraising	2.1
Engaging in self-improvement	2.1
Personal time	1.9
Networking/interacting	1.8
Counseling staff on interpersonal relations	1.7
Interacting with staff on non-school topics	1.7
Working with the local community	1.6
Planning supplementary programs	1.4
Counseling out teachers	.7
Teaching students	.5

*Note.*  $N = 11$ . The survey data were possibly skewed by respondent #8 who listed either 5, 10, or 15 hours a week for nearly all 43 tasks except Developing Relationships, for which the respondent indicated 30 hours a week. Because of the small number of participants, respondent #8 was left in the sample, but a closer look at each item with #8 removed might give additional insight.

## Shadowing

**Introduction.** Four principals were shadowed at their school sites for half a day by Educational Administration graduate students. The checklist researchers developed for shadowing contained the same seven overarching themes and the catch-all category of “other” as the survey. The themes were: administration, organizational leadership, instructional leadership, program development, internal relations, external relations, and other. Under each theme were various subtopics, for a total of 43 observable characteristics. Graduate researchers took a clipboard with the list and marked a box every five minutes to indicate the activities that they observed the principal doing.

**Observation matrix themes analyzed.** Data were analyzed for each of the seven themes.

**Administration.** In the area of administration, special education student requirements were the most frequently observed tasks (15 times). This confirms the survey results showing that tasks associated with special education requirements were the most time-consuming for the principals.



**Organizational leadership.** Under the theme of organizational leadership, networking with other principals was the most frequently observed task (8 times). However, networking with principals was one of the least-demanding tasks indicated on the survey, ranking 36 out of 43 tasks.

**Instructional leadership.** Planning or facilitating professional development was a highly observed skill (11 times) in instructional leadership. One principal was clearly involved in teacher observation during the shadowing, and this skill was reported seven times on that occasion.

**Program development.** Three principals were involved in program development in specifically planning after school or summer school programs during the shadowing experience (for a total of 20 times). One principal was involved in developing a program across the school (7 times). Program development, a category that incorporated several types of programs, was the most frequently observed activity of the four principals (see Table 4). In the principal survey, program development was in the top 10 time-consuming tasks, ranking ninth.

**Internal relations.** All principals were observed conducting classroom walk-throughs during the shadowing (11). Principals engaged in a variety of internal relations during the shadowing, being observed in nearly every category. In the survey, developing relationships with students was the second highest priority, with an estimated 7.6 hours per week.

**External relations.** There were only two total external relationships observed, and both were with district offices. This contrasts to the comments made in the interviews, where the time spent on district initiatives was perceived to be high. It could be that these interactions were not scheduled on the days of the shadowing so that observers could see the activities principals engaged in with students, teachers, and around the site.

**Other.** Two principals were engaged in emails, calls, or paperwork for a total of 10 observations. From the interviews, it seems that principals respond to emails and phone calls after hours. They also take paperwork home.

**No activity observed.** There were tasks that no principals were observed doing. Many of these are seasonal or are required only in certain contexts. These are:

- Student testing
- Attendance issues
- Coaching teachers
- Teaching students
- Evaluating curriculum
- Counseling staff
- Interacting with external community/organizations
- Communicating on district resources
- Fundraising

Table 4  
Shadowing Summary

		A	B	C	D	Total
<b>Administration</b>						<b>29</b>
1a	Managing student Services (e.g., records, reporting, activities)				2	2
1b	Managing student discipline		5		3	8
1c	Supervising students (e.g., lunch duty)	2				2
1d	Managing schedules (for the school, not personal schedule)	1			1	2
1e	Fulfilling compliance requirements and paperwork (not including special education)					0
1f	Preparing, implementing and administering standardized tests					0
1g	Managing students attendance-related activities					0
1h	Fulfilling special education requirements (e.g., meeting with parents, compliance)	5			10	15
<b>Organizational Management</b>						<b>24</b>
2a	Managing budgets, resources			1	3	4
2b	Managing non-instructional staff				1	1
2c	Maintaining campus facilities	1				1
2d	Developing and monitoring a safe school environment	1	2			3
2e	Dealing with concerns from staff		3	1		4
2f	Hiring or dismissal of personnel			1	2	3
2g	Interacting or networking with other principals	5			3	8
2h	Managing personal, school-related schedule					0
<b>Instructional Leadership</b>						<b>20</b>
3b	Formally evaluating teachers and providing instructional feedback	7				7
3c	Informally coaching teachers to improve instruction or teaching in general					0
3d	Planning or facilitating professional development for teachers		3	6	2	11
3e	Planning or facilitating professional development for prospective principals					0
3f	Teaching students (e.g., tutoring, after school)					0
3g	Implementing required professional	1				1

	development					
3h	Using data to inform instruction			1		1
<b>Program Development</b>						<b>36</b>
4a	Utilizing school meetings (e.g., School Site Council, committees, staff meetings)	2			1	3
4b	Planning or directing supplementary, after-school, or summer school instruction		1	16	3	20
4c	Developing an educational program across the school	7			3	10
4d	Evaluating curriculum					0
4e	Using assessment results for program evaluation and development	1		2		3
<b>Internal Relations</b>						<b>31</b>
5a	Interacting socially with staff about school-related topics (e.g., “shop talk”)			2		2
5b	Interacting socially with staff about non-school-related topics		2			2
5c	Developing relationships with students		2		3	5
5d	Counseling students and/or parents		2		1	3
3a	Preparing or conducting classroom observations/walk-throughs	4	1	5	1	11
5e	Attending school activities (sports events, plays, celebrations)		3			3
5f	Communicating with parents	1	2			3
5g	Counseling staff (about conflicts with other staff members)					0
5h	Informally talking to teachers about students, not related to instruction		1		1	2
<b>External Relations</b>						<b>2</b>
6a	Working with local community members or organizations					0
6b	Utilizing district office meetings or other communications initiated by the district office	1		1		2
6c	Communicating with district office to obtain resources for school (initiated by principal)					0
6d	Fundraising					0
<b>Other</b>						<b>13</b>
7a	In transition between activities	1	1			2
7b	Email, fax, call, or paperwork		6		4	10
7c	Personal time (e.g. breaks, lunch, personal call)			1		1

7d	Engaging in self-improvement/professional development					0
TOTAL		40	34	37	44	155

*Note. Four principals (A–D) were observed. A tally mark was made every five minutes to document the activity underway.*

**Summary.** Principals were engaged in a variety of activities across all tasks of the job. The most activity was seen in the areas of program development and internal relations. The most frequent observations were planning programs, planning professional development, and planning/conducting classroom walkthroughs.

## Interviews

**Introduction.** Six participants were randomly selected for an interview among 18 K-5 principals in the North County School District. The interviews included eight prompts, and they ranged between seven and 37 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and there was no identifying information connected to them. The interview questions were:

1. What's the best part of your day?
2. What typically takes up most of your time?
3. About how many classrooms do you visit each week?
4. What does a classroom visit, formal or informal, look like to you?
5. Outside of the contracted school day, how much time do you spend on job-related tasks, and what are they?
6. Tell me about the types of interruptions, positive or negative, you encounter on a day-to-day basis.
7. What dictates your time and tasks that you feel you have little control over?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your time and tasks at work?

## Data and Analysis

### Visibility on Campus

Overall, the interviews revealed that the principals were splitting their time between many different tasks and roles. When asked about the best part of their day, all participants mentioned some form of interaction with students, parents, or teachers. These principals love people, and especially students! Principal 4 said: “Because my favorite part of education was teaching, I love it when I’m actually interacting with the kids.” Visibility on campus before school, during recess/lunch, and after school were important, but the principals also prioritized classroom visits, as this is where they said they would get the opportunity to see the students learning. All the principals indicated that they visited “every classroom, every week” at least with an informal drop-in. Two principals shared their system to ensure they would make it into each classroom every week. Principal 5 said: “It is important for me to see what’s going on in the classroom. That is the most important part of the day: the teaching and the learning.” Being visible to parents, teachers, and students was something that every principal valued, and they indicated

they might spend as much as three hours per day on campus interacting with students at recess, lunch, drop-off, and pick-up times.

### **External Forces**

Principals know to expect the unexpected. Principal 2 said: “The positive thing about this job is that every day is different.” Visibility and an open-door policy added to the interruptions. However, none of the principals spoke of drop-in visits in a negative way, and many noted that those visits were helpful in reducing the amount of emails or more formal meetings because of the ability to address more quickly the needs of the student, teacher, or parent.

All principals spoke of the burden of outside forces taking away time. Everything from district initiatives to student discipline had to be accommodated, but at the price of doing less in instructional leadership or developing internal relationships.

### **Supportive Teams**

All of the principals indicated the benefit of having support and how they split the work between themselves and other professionals. Student discipline was not something that all principals discussed; however, the three that mentioned it noted that the support staff (counselors, psychologists, and community liaisons) made a big difference. Principals who encountered a higher number of student behavior issues had larger populations of special needs children, including some with emotional and behavior disorders. These students seemed to require extensive support from the principals, both in and out of the classroom.

### **Completing Paperwork**

In the interviews, the principals indicated that most of their time was taken with paperwork and clerical tasks. This result is in contrast to the surveys, where special education took up most of the principals’ time. Many principals found that clerical and managerial tasks prevented them from spending the amount of time they would have liked to spend in the classrooms, with students and teachers. Principal 3 said: “There’s the instructional leadership part and then there’s the managerial piece of it and what I think right now is that the managerial piece takes up most of the time.” Principal 6 said: “Paperwork is part of the job and it needs to be done, it just takes a lot of your time.” It could be that the special education meetings and reports require significant time as well. There is also an indication that there is a significant number of district meetings that may or may not be urgent and that, however, principals are required to attend. Principal 5 said: “If you are going to pull me out, for whatever, we know it's going to be needed. It's going to be necessary. It's going to be meaningful.” As principals strive to be visible on campus and present in the classrooms, off-campus meetings hinder their goals.

### **Long Workdays**

When asked about additional work hours spent outside of the job site, some principals reported “limiting” that additional time to two to three hours, sometimes leaving work unfinished. Others

reported working five to eight additional hours outside of the contracted day. Some reported struggling with delegation and working themselves on tasks that they believed others could do.

Table 5  
*Interview Coding and Themes by Participant*

#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	Summarized Themes
Love kids anytime	Loves kids	Loves kids and staff	Sees kids when burned out in office	Loves classroom, playground, preschool	Loves greeting students at drop-off in the AM	All love students anywhere, anytime
Special education behavior is time consuming	20% special education and loads of Indiv Educ Plan (IEP) meetings			Large group of emotional-needs children		Some have populations that are more demanding
Poverty, homeless, language, trauma, foster care, struggling	Teachers have in-class discipline strategies		Unscheduled interruptions constant, parents, managing adult needs		Excessive paperwork	All felt burdened by outside forces
Fewer visits because of certain classrooms with behavior issues	Visibility at recess, lunch, and classrooms; open-door policy	Visits classrooms looking for student engagement	Every room, every week	Class visits by tiers, indicating so many visits per week; visits are focused	Class visits calendared, each week, open door, visible	All prioritized visibility, open door, and class visits
Tired, stays at school till 6pm	Stays at school till 5pm	Works till 6pm	Works till 5pm, arrives at 6:30 am	Take things home and work evenings	Works at home	All work extra hours in the office or home
Problem-solving things like parking, books	Delegates in office, structured time for emails and phone	Interruptions are part of the job; pulled away for meetings	District initiatives and mandates, more district office departments asking for things	District departments micromanage, too much top-down	Delegates, creates systems, publicizes calendar	All expect interruptions, some felt District office department demands to be excessive

Knows less than teachers on special assignments about curriculum	Some groups are problematic	Compliance issues for the district need streamlining	District sends surveys, documents, and changes	Lots of clerical work, including evaluations of documents		All need tools and support
Community involvement, outside agencies				Trust me to do my job	Build relationships	Build trust and relationships

Note. N = 6.

### Triangulation of Data

#### Introduction

The combination of surveys, shadowing, and interviews produced rich data to better understand the time allocation and tasks of K-5 principals in the North County School District. Given the small sample of participants selected from just one school district, triangulating the data may lead to more confidence in the results.

#### Discussion

In this study, the principals indicated in all forms of data collections that special education programs, student behavior, and meetings took up a vast amount of their time. In some schools, these tasks might be delegated; in others, the principal was assisted by a counselor, psychologist, or outside agencies. The mandates of special education in particular were seen to be large and of high priority.

The principals also indicated that their relationship with internal stakeholders, particularly students, was very important to them. They felt that being visible and spending time with students was not only imperative but gave them great joy and pleasure.

The principals were observed spending time on program development. One principal interview indicated that the district office had new departments that asked principals to respond to new initiatives. The time spent on program development and the district-wide expansion of programs may be connected. There was an overarching sense that to leave the site for district office meetings, principals wanted to have a very compelling reason. They like to be visible and responsive on their site. Further investigation is needed in this area.

School paperwork is not typically done during the school day, which is a time when principals like to be visible. Most principals stay at school late or take the paperwork home with them to complete.

The principals like to go into classrooms, and one even mentioned missing being a teacher. However, in this school district there was no indication of any opportunity for principals to teach students.

Table 6  
*Data Triangulation by Data Collection Tool and Tasks*

	Special Education	Relationships with students	District office needs	Program development	Teaching students
Survey	X	X	X	X	0
Interview	X	X	X	0	0
Shadowing	X	X	0	X	0

### Findings

This study was conducted to answer the research question: What tasks and timelines do K-5 principals in the North County School District engage in during work? The results were drawn from K-5 principals who completed a survey, participated in an interview, and were shadowed by Educational Administration master’s students. The school district was interested in finding out why some principals were experiencing stress over the time requirements and the tasks in their jobs. This is a summary of the key findings :

1. The contexts and experiences of the principals vary greatly from school to school.
2. All principals put a high priority on students, visiting classes, and being visible on campus.
3. The perception from principals is that they work around the clock...and more!
4. Principals spend the most amount of time complying with special education mandates, special education student behavior, and special education meetings.
5. All principals work additional hours to finish paperwork that cannot be completed during school hours.
6. Principals want district department initiatives to be streamlined and to require fewer off-campus meetings.
7. Principals vary in their abilities to create work systems that enhance job efficiency.
8. Principals want ongoing support.

The findings indicate that multiple settings affect the principals’ workload; that the principals have varied skills; and that district office demands require additional support, especially in the area of special education.

### Limitations

Although the research reached its goals, there were some overarching limitations. These limitations mostly focus on the responses principals gave to the time-on-task survey:

1. The over-exaggerated time-on-task survey results may be caused by the format of the survey instrument, which was open ended.
2. The over-exaggerated time-on-task survey results may be considered a confounding variable that limits the certainty of the findings in the research.
3. The surveys may have been completed by principals who had hopes of getting help in reducing their workload.
4. The lead researcher was a former principal and may have a bias towards reducing principal workload.



The limitations affected the way the data were analyzed; the list of the top and bottom 10 time-consuming activities can help get a sense of the items that took up the most time, but it does not necessarily indicate how much time.

### **Further Areas of Research**

The findings from the study indicate the need for further research on principal's tasks and time allocation to be used as a foundation for decisions that may support principals who feel stressed and overworked. Two questions that need to be addressed are:

1. What is the impact and benefit of district initiatives on school principals and their sites?
2. What strategies and resources for reducing principal tasks can be gleaned from research?

### **Summary**

This research recruited Educational Administration master's level students to gather data on the time allocation and tasks of K-5 principals using surveys, interviews, and shadowing. The results vary and may be confounded by some responses, but overall they indicate that not all schools have the same demands on their principals, nor do all principals have the same organizational and time-management skills. A deeper awareness of the strains associated with the role of the principal and of the role of the school district office leadership in supporting or hindering the principals' tasks and time allocation may increase the likelihood that principals will be content on the job, have balance in their lives, and remain in their positions longer.

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