Leading Leaders: Helping Principals Grow

Association of Metropolitan School Districts
November 3, 2023
Our Team

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Executive Director of Educational Leadership
University of Minnesota

Dr. Peter Olson-Skog
Superintendent
District 197
Access This Presentation
Engaging our Preconceptions

Step 1) Make a t-Chart

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Engaging our Preconceptions

Step 2) On the left side, use single words or short phrases to describe what your principals do.

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Step 3) Of the things principals do/tasks you listed, **circle those you think are most important.**

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Step 4) On the right side, list potential barriers for principals to do the things that are most important.

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The state of the ‘Principalship’ in Minnesota
Through funding from the Joyce Foundation and the Minneapolis Foundation, CAREI developed a statewide survey of principals to elevate their voices in Minnesota while informing multiple stakeholders including (but not limited to) policymakers, school boards, principal licensure and professional development programs, and organizations like MESPA and MASSP that support Minnesota principals.
Survey Administration

● Every principal and AP, and Charter Leader in MN sent a person-specific email

● 2023 Survey launches November 1

● Report of findings of 2021 survey at z.umn.edu/MNPS22
2021 Survey Topics

- Career Information
- Job Satisfaction
- Preparation and Licensure
- Professional Development
- Working Conditions
- Influence
- Educational Ecosystem
- COVID-19 and School Transformation

- Culturally Responsive School Leadership
- Leadership Self Efficacy and Needed Supports
  - School Improvement
  - Management and Decision-making
  - Culture and Climate
  - Instructional Leadership
THE MINNESOTA PRINCIPALS SURVEY

2023 Survey Topics

- Career Information
- Job Satisfaction
- Preparation and Licensure
- Professional Development
- Working Conditions
- Influence
- Educational Ecosystem
- **Mental Health & Wellbeing**
- 2023 Legislative Changes

- Culturally Responsive School Leadership
- Leadership Self Efficacy and Needed Supports
  - School Improvement
  - Management and Decision-making
  - Culture and Climate
  - Instructional Leadership
Respondents - 2021

34% response rate (779/2,323)

District: 92%
Charter: 7%

Elementary: 49%
Secondary: 48%

Principals / Directors: 71%
Assistant Principals: 26%

Female: 49%
Male: 50%

BIPOC: 13%
White: 87%
Next Step: Follow-Up Focus Groups - 2022

**Participants**

- Twin Cities leaders (2 groups)
- Greater Minnesota leaders (2 groups)
- Elementary leaders (1 group)
- Secondary leaders (1 group)
- Leaders identifying as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) (1 group)
- Leaders identifying as Female (1 group)
- Early-career leaders (1 group)

**Topics**

- Professional development
- Instructional leadership
- Culturally Responsive School Leadership
- Staff and student mental health
- Community-Engaged Leadership*
- State accountability
- Supervisor support
- Group-specific questions
• 79% of respondents feel their primary role is to be an instructional leader...

• However, only 61% of respondents report their supervisor ensures they have the time to do so.

• Only 46% of respondents agreed that their current workload is sustainable.
Experiences missing from Preparation Programs and Internship

1. Facilitating conversations about equity
2. Addressing staff culture challenges
3. Developing and evaluating non-teaching staff
4. Scheduling experience
5. Engaging families and community members
6. Addressing student discipline challenges
7. Developing and evaluating teachers
Job Satisfaction

Percent of respondents who, when thinking about their work experience over the past three months, “Agreed” or “Somewhat agreed” with...

“I am generally satisfied with being a leader at this school.”

- Overall: 83%
- Greater Minnesota: 81%
- Metro Area: 84%
- Elementary: 85%
- Secondary: 80%

Top elements that most contribute to satisfaction at work:

1. Relationships with students: 68%
2. Relationships with staff: 60%
3. Seeing students grow socially and emotionally: 48%
4. Seeing students grow academically: 37%
# Professional Development

## Type of PD Engaged In Most Often

1. Presentations at scheduled school / district meetings
2. Networking with other educational leaders
3. Other workshops or trainings
4. State or local conferences
5. MESPA provided opportunities
6. Other cohort-based learning experience
7. MASSP provided opportunities
8. Formal coaching
9. Formal mentoring
10. National conferences
11. Minnesota Principals Academy
12. Doctoral coursework

## Rank of Usefulness of PD Experiences

1. Minnesota Principals Academy
2. Networking with other educational leaders
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# Professional Development

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Feeling obligated to be in the building: 68%
Limited time: 63%
COVID-19-related constraints: 59%
Budget constraints: 17%
Geographic distance from opportunities: 12%
Time Spent on Tasks by Type

- **Internal administrative tasks**: personnel issues, scheduling, reports, budgeting, operational meetings
- **Instructional tasks**: curriculum, instruction, assessment, PLC meetings, data analysis, classroom observations, coaching
- **Student interactions**: academic guidance, discipline, seeking student voice, relationship building
- **Family and community interactions**: formal and informal interactions, attending events, seeking parent or community input
- **My own professional growth**: self-reflection, attending PD, reviewing research, reading, networking with other administrative colleagues

**Response options**
- Much less time than I would like
- Somewhat less time than I would like
- About the right amount of time
- Somewhat more time than I would like
- Much more time than I would like
Principal Leadership Responsibility Areas

- School Improvement
- Management & Decision-making
- Culture & Climate
- Instructional Leadership
Average Level of Confidence by Area of Leadership

Response Options
1: Little to none
2: Insufficient
3: Sufficient
4: More than sufficient

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<th>Area of Leadership</th>
<th>Average Confidence</th>
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<td>School Improvement</td>
<td>3.03</td>
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<tr>
<td>Management &amp; Decision-making</td>
<td>3.12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culture &amp; Climate</td>
<td>2.90</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructional Leadership</td>
<td>2.86</td>
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Principals are in the middle. We get pressure from staff and families to meet their needs. We get pressure from [district] staff to implement with little opportunity for input. It can be overwhelming to have such pressure from both directions with limited support. Where I work, things are not very transparent and the vision is clear but not implemented very well. We admire the challenges we face with limited direction to move forward to overcome those challenges. We rest on the past history of the district.
THE MINNESOTA PRINCIPALS SURVEY

Recommendations
THE MINNESOTA PRINCIPALS SURVEY

Practice & Policy Briefs

INTRODUCTION

The Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota conducted the first biennial Minnesota Principals Survey (MPS) in November and December 2021 to "elicit principal voice" in Minnesota education policy and better understand the working conditions, concerns, and needs of Minnesota school leaders. Over the next 600 potential, Ontario Minnesota school leaders participating in the survey across the state. The results of the survey, the findings of which can be accessed at https://carei.umn.edu.

To better understand school leader's experiences and solicit their ideas, we conducted a series of focus groups with 40 Minnesota principals in November 2022. The purpose of the Policy and Practice Briefs series is to summarize our findings and recommendations from the survey and follow-up focus groups in five focus areas: professional development, instructional leadership, culturally responsive school leadership, community engagement, leadership, and staff student mental health.

This executive summary highlights key findings and selected recommendations in each of these areas, as well as overarching recommendations across the series, which can be accessed in full at https://carei.umn.edu/MPS-

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

As indicated on the 2021 MPS, the type of PD participated in most frequently by principals—professional presentations at scheduled school or district meetings (75% of respondents)—was rated least useful. Interestingly, two of the top five of PD school leaders participated in most frequently—the Minnesota Principals Academy (MPA) (90% of respondents) and doctoral coursework (90% of respondents)—were rated among the most useful. We asked focus group participants why they thought some forms of PD were more useful than others, and what might help them to better access high-quality PD.

Key Focus Group Findings

- Participants noted that PD experiences such as MPA, doctoral coursework, and other forms of networking were especially useful because they involved sustained learning with peers, and often included access to relevant research findings that addressed their specific challenges.
- In order to leave school to attend PD, principals emphasized the need for a reliable backup plan as others credit MPA principals’ essential responsibilities as well as personal comfort with declining.

Selected Recommendations

- For Policymakers: Ensure the 135 clock hour for principal re- licensure are meaningful, and address content areas in which principals indicate low self-efficacy (e.g., Culturally Responsive School Leadership, Instructional Leadership).
- For System Leaders: Invest in developmental approaches to principal learning that are ongoing and collective in nature (e.g., PLCs, collaboratively engaging in processes of practice versus traditional "sit and get" PD).
- For Building Leaders: Invest in developing a delegation structure that allows you to be out of the building and secure your supervisor's buy-in.
- For Principal Preparation and PD Providers: Ensure that professional learning programs leverage high-impact strategies such as on-on-one support, learning communities, and job-embedded learning.

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

A majority of Minnesota school leaders (82%) told us on the 2021 MPS that they spend at least time that they would like on instructional tasks like curriculum, instruction, assessment, and PLC meetings), and a similar proportion (80%) reported spending more time than they would like on non-administrative tasks like personnel issues, scheduling, and reports. Furthermore, seventy-nine percent (79%) of all respondents also told us that they felt their primary role was...
Across all of these, principals tell us 4Ts need to be addressed:
Principals told us they spent more time than they would like on administrative tasks and less time than instructional leadership and family and community engagement; that there is not enough time for their own professional growth or engagement in policy influence and that daily ‘urgent’ tasks (e.g., finding substitute teachers, responding to mental health crises) take time away from more strategic tasks like teacher coaching and curricular alignment.
Better training is needed, especially in instructional and culturally responsive leadership. On one hand, leaders felt their licensure programs had prepared them well to carry out the management and decision-making aspects of their jobs. On the other hand, respondents lacked confidence in instructional leadership.
Principals wanted their supervisors to trust and support them—to ‘have their backs’ when needing to make an unpopular decision or lead an uncomfortable conversation.
More than half of principals report their workloads are not sustainable. Investments in high-quality, sustained professional development, fundamental restructuring of the use of time and resources, and sustained support will all need to take place. Our recommendations center the transformations that could take place in order to ensure the role of school leader is truly transformational.
Two Overarching Recommendations

Synthesizing 770 responses to a 70-question, comprehensive survey about the principalship along with the feedback of 49 leaders in 9 focus groups into a brief set of recommendations is not simple; however, a lengthy list would not be useful, either. Therefore, our overarching recommendations each address four critical needs communicated through the survey and focus groups by principals: Time, Trust, Training, and Transformation—the four Ts.

Time. Over and over again, principals conveyed time as an issue. In the survey, they told us they spent more time than they would like on administrative tasks and less time than they would like on interpersonal leadership and family and community engagement. They told us there is not enough time for their own professional growth or engagement in policy influence. In focus groups, they reiterated that daily “urgent” tasks (e.g., finding substitute teachers, responding to mental health crises) take time away from more strategic tasks like teacher coaching and curriculum alignment.

Training. Overwhelmingly, principals told us they needed more and better training. On one hand, leaders felt their licensing programs had prepared them well to carry out the management and decision-making aspects of their jobs. On the other hand, respondents lacked confidence in instructional leadership—the aspect of their job that nearly 90% said was their primary role—specifically as it relates to culturally responsive instructional practices. They are feeling obligated to be in their buildings, limited time, and a lack of access to high quality, research-based professional development as obstacles to their own growth and improvement as leaders.

Trust. Principals report high levels of job satisfaction and that they feel their work is valued by the staff at their school; however, they also expressed frustration about leading amidst community divisions and facilitating conversations about gender identity and race. Principals wanted their supervisors to trust and support them—to “have their backs” when needing to make an unpopular decision or lead an uncomfortable conversation.

Transformation. The role of the principal is immense, and more than half of principals tell us that their workloads are unsustainable. While 90% of leaders tell us they feel that they can be successful leading their schools, to support their sustainability may require transforming key aspects of the principalship. Investments in high-quality, sustained professional development, fundamental restructuring of the use of time and resources, and sustained support will all need to take place. Our recommendations center the transformations that could take place in order to ensure the role of school leader is truly transformational.

RECOMMENDATION 1: DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH TO INITIAL TRAINING, INTERNSHIP, AND ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Both the MiPS Principal Survey data and the follow-up focus groups highlight a need for a developmental approach to principals’ initial training and internship experiences and to their ongoing professional development. The vast majority of those entering the principalship have certification and experience in education. However, those experiences and their credentials are varied, giving some more experience in literacy and others more experience in mental health. We urge that candidates’ prior credentialing and experiences should be accounted for in the crafting of their initial training programs, thus allowing for an approach that meets their content and developmental needs. This approach can and should be carried through into the internship experience, which we feel should be significantly broadened as well as into the ongoing professional development experiences of licensed administrators.

Initial Training. Our survey data demonstrates that leaders feel their initial preparation programs solely prepared them in areas that largely fell into the category of management and decision-making while they report feeling less prepared in areas like instructional and culturally responsive school leadership. Licensed Minnesota principals are highly credentialed with a minimum of 60 credits beyond their bachelor’s degree and a demonstration of entry level competency in 36 competencies per Minnesota Administrative Rule 3522.0510. However, 58% of principals reported “culturally
Developmental Approach to Initial Training, Internship, and Ongoing Professional Development

Initial Training
- A more personalized approach to coursework within the competencies.

Internship
- True internship that is year-long, paid, and placement with effective leaders.

Ongoing Professional Development
- Responsive to the needs of principals, be tied to evaluation, and CEUs should reflect requirements in broad categories like teachers.
A Different School Leadership Model

**Operational Leader**
Leads the operational systems and work of the school

**Instructional Leader**
Leads the teaching and learning work. The 'licensed' K-12 Principal

**Community Leader**
Leads the work that supports a humanizing culture of belonging in the school community
Do Principals Really Matter?

*Exploring the research behind this leadership role*
Impact of the principal

“Across six rigorous studies estimating principals’ effects using panel data, principals’ contributions to student achievement were nearly as large as the average effects of teachers identified in similar studies. Principals’ effects, however, are larger in scope because they are averaged over all students in a school, rather than a classroom.”

Studies demonstrate that schools with more effective principals have:

- Lower student absenteeism and chronic absenteeism.
- Higher teacher job satisfaction.
- Reduced teacher turnover, particularly of effective teachers.
- Better academic achievement among students

Replacing a below average elementary principal with an above average principal would result in an additional 2.9 months of math learning and 2.7 months of reading learning for students

So then, what do we know about how to help principals further develop as *instructional leaders*?
Dr. Olson Skog and Dr. LaDue’s work

BY THE NUMBERS...

4
DISTRICTS
Mid-sized, suburban, purposive and convenience sampling

14
PRINCIPALS
At least one elementary and one secondary, diversity of age, gender and experience

7
PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS
5 superintendents, 1 principal supervisor, 1 DO staff who shared supervision
We found...

A lot of **agreement** between principals and their supervisors on what principals need
We found...

A lot of **agreement** between principals and their supervisors on what principals need

Some interesting **differences**, too
We found...

A lot of **agreement** between principals and their supervisors on what principals need

Some interesting **differences**, too

Many **practical suggestions**
Their ideas fit (loosely) into 4 categories of superintendent (or designee) leadership:
THE MINNESOTA PRINCIPALS SURVEY

Leadership
Grounded in
Trust
THE MINNESOTA PRINCIPALS SURVEY

Collaborative Leadership
Focused on Instruction
Adaptive Personalized Leadership
THE MINNESOTA PRINCIPALS SURVEY

System Leadership For Coherence
## Leadership Grounded in Trust

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* = Heavier emphasis

P = Principals
S = Supervisors
Actions that ground leadership in trust

Personal Connections

• Regular, individual meetings
• Observe them in action
• Questions that are both personal and professional

Model

• Vulnerability
• Predictability
• Knowing your impact
Actions that ground leadership in trust

Personal Connections

• Regular, individual meetings
• Observe them in action
• Questions that are both personal and professional

Model

• Vulnerability
• Predictability
• Knowing your impact
“I’ve come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather.”

- Haim Ginott
Collaborative Instructional Leadership

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Actions to collaborate on instructional leadership

Learn together, then co-create

- Vision
- Definition
- Standards & Expectations
# Adaptive Leadership

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Adaptive Leadership Actions

Needs-based learning

• Separate evaluation and feedback
• Co-create rubrics

Engage principal voice in decision making

• Two-way conversations
• Create strengths-based district leadership opportunities at the district level
Adaptive Leadership Actions

Needs-based learning
- Separate evaluation and feedback
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Systems Leadership Actions

System Coherence Definition
• Why, Loose/Tight, Roles

Leadership Development
• Frameworks beyond Instructional Leadership (e.g. CRSL)

District Office Support
• Alignment
• Differentiation (e.g., Elementary Compared to Secondary)
Systems Leadership Actions

System Coherence Definition
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**Systems Leadership Actions**

**System Coherence Definition**
- Why, Loose/Tight, Roles

**Leadership Development**
- Frameworks beyond Instructional Leadership (e.g., CRSL)

**District Office Support**
- Alignment
- Differentiation (e.g., Elementary Compared to Secondary)
Activity: Talk with a partner or two (Zoomers will be put into breakout groups)

What is an action you might take based on these findings?

What questions do you have?
So now what?

As a state: principals have told us they need better support and better tools. To provide that, our focus needs to include a system of professional development for principal supervisors as well.
Something you might consider

Minnesota Principals Support Academy
Fall 2023
More info: z.umn.edu/MN-PSA