

STRIVING FOR SUCCESS: EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN MINNESOTA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Adults wield tremendous influence in the lives of children. As a child enters school, educators play an important role. Alongside families, they instill values – curiosity, ethics, achievement and a sense of what is possible.

Although there is some understanding of what it means to prepare, recruit and retain high-quality teachers in our schools, there is less understanding of what it means to do the same for principals. The Minneapolis Foundation, in partnership with the McKnight Foundation and the Joyce Foundation, sought to learn about the experiences of Minnesota principals. What do they see as the supportive conditions necessary to help their schools succeed? What do they see as the barriers and opportunities to achieving success in their roles?

The foundations invested in a landscape scan, conducted by Education First, which confirmed that existing data about the experiences of Minnesota principals is limited. Grounded in the belief that principals know what they need, and that we need to listen to and learn alongside our principals, the foundations partnered with Seiche, a strategy and creative consultancy focused on social impact, to learn about the lived experiences of Minnesota principals, especially as it relates to their job preparation and professional development.

In August 2019, Seiche conducted an online survey of Minnesota principals (see Appendix H). To gain deeper knowledge and perspective, Seiche conducted small group listening sessions and individual calls with principals and superintendents from all regions of the state in October and November 2019 (see Appendices C–F).

From both engagement processes, two key findings on licensure and professional development emerged:

01

LICENSURE PROGRAMS DO NOT FULLY PREPARE PRINCIPALS FOR ON-THE-JOB REALITIES.

- Principals believe more in-school preparation would better prepare them for their role.
- Master Principal designation could help principals identify high-quality mentors.

02

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES EXIST, BUT PRINCIPALS FIND THOSE OPPORTUNITIES CHALLENGING TO ACCESS.

- Principals seek informal, unstructured networking in their professional development.
- Principals value sustained, intensive professional development but find it challenging to access without strong support from superintendents.
- Principals value professional development, but find it difficult to prioritize.
- Principals seek professional development that feels relevant to their day-to-day work.

Additionally, principals believe that positive school cultures are critical to student success. They also believe that providing instructional leadership and coaching is critical to the success of teachers. Both are challenging to achieve, however, because of other significant and competing demands of the job, which can include managing mental health crises in their buildings, completing time-intensive compliance and reporting requirements, and addressing staffing shortages and challenges.

The following report features an examination of these key findings.



A high-angle, blue-tinted photograph of four people sitting in a circle on the floor in a library. They are looking at papers and discussing them. The background shows bookshelves filled with books.

| KEY FINDINGS

LICENSURE PROGRAMS DO NOT FULLY PREPARE PRINCIPALS FOR ON-THE-JOB REALITIES.

PRINCIPALS BELIEVE MORE IN-SCHOOL PREPARATION WOULD BETTER PREPARE THEM FOR THEIR ROLE.

Participants felt that licensure programs could better prepare them for the roles and responsibilities of a principalship. Principals noted that when they became teachers, their most valued learning experience was their time as a student teacher. Many wished there was an equivalent for principals where, under the supervision of a qualified mentor, aspiring principals could practice critical aspects of the job in real-life school situations, including:

- Providing instructional leadership to teaching staff
- Conducting confidential human resources conversations
- Leading parent and community member conversations
- Adequately managing office, building and teaching staff

Relatedly, more than 80 percent of survey respondents felt they had major influence in hiring new, full-time teachers of their school and in evaluating those teachers (see Appendix H, figs. 13 & 15). However, only 51 percent of respondents “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that their professional development program for aspiring principals prepared them in human resources leadership (see Appendix H, fig. 6).

Superintendents concurred, noting that significant learning happens on-the-job for new principals. Superintendents felt that licensure programs provide principals with theoretical, rather than practical, understandings of the roles that principals will hold in schools.

Specifically, superintendents wished principals received more in-school preparation in:

- Financial management
- Change management
- Time management
- Curriculum management and schedule development
- Collaborative leadership
- Social emotional learning
- Proactive conflict management
- Communication skills
- Providing effective feedback
- Helping principals understand how and when to delegate – and to whom – so they can focus on instructional leadership

MASTER PRINCIPAL DESIGNATION COULD HELP PRINCIPALS IDENTIFY HIGH-QUALITY MENTORS.

While preparation and licensure programs provide theory-based learning, principals also want practical preparation relating to community, change and instructional management. Principals are expected to be expert managers – while also serving as the facilitators between district offices, staff, parents, students and community members.

This concern extended to the principal pipeline and mentorship opportunities. Reflecting on how they came to be principals, principals felt that the individualized attention of a mentor was essential to their professional advancement. However, there is no formal pipelining program for principals; whomever is seen as having leadership quality is singled out, typically by others who hold leadership positions. Some principals voiced concern that they may be continuing systems of inequity, despite good intentions (“*You don’t know what you don’t know.*”).

When reflecting on the practicum experiences during their licensure process, principals valued the opportunity to choose their mentor. That said, several principals noted that a “Master Principal” designation could help aspiring principals identify potential mentors. Similar to Master Teachers, Master Principals would be recognized as holding expertise in coaching, evaluation, change management and excelling at sustaining a positive school culture.

Regarding mentorship, superintendents felt it was important for principals to select their own mentors and agreed that there should be clear requirements for who could serve as a mentor. Superintendents felt that “master-level” principals exhibited the following attributes and skills:

- Excellent relational skills (active listening, direct and clear communicator)
- Excellent classroom and building management (schedule building, building management, instructional leadership)
- Vulnerability and authenticity (building trust and buy-in)
- Willingness to engage (e.g. not asking principals to do something they themselves would not do)



I wish there was the equivalent of student teaching for aspiring principals - the degree programs are theoretical, so when you start your principalship, it feels like trial by fire and you give ineffective feedback until you have more experience.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES EXIST, BUT PRINCIPALS FIND THOSE OPPORTUNITIES CHALLENGING TO ACCESS.

In both the survey and interviews, principals believed that access to professional development that meets a principal's specific needs is important. Moreover, principals held strong preferences for the structure of their professional development, including:

- Opportunities that include both formal and informal networking
- Sustained, intensive opportunities that build on each other, rather than one-off workshops or webinars
- Additional options for in-person, peer-led professional development



PRINCIPALS SEEK INFORMAL, UNSTRUCTURED NETWORKING IN THEIR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

Participants in all conversations emphasized the benefits of informal, unstructured conversation with peers. When starting out as new principals, many created their own networks of support with peers and mentors, which helped (and continue to help) them manage the demands of the job. Two participants noted that they call each other every morning and check in for 30 minutes.

Several other principals noted that they call former superintendents who initially encouraged them to pursue principalships, even though they no longer work in the same district. Others gather weekly or monthly for breakfasts, book clubs or coffee with colleagues.

While more than 75 percent of survey respondents indicated that they have a mentor or the opportunity to connect with peer principals, almost 60 percent noted that they sometimes, never or rarely collaborate with other principals on challenging work tasks. In other words: collaboration takes more than an existing relationship; it also requires time. Principals have a variety of opportunities to engage with their peers – either through regional peer-to-peer networks, professional associations or professional development networks – but they may feel they do not have the time to engage with those networks as often as they would like.

Principals noted that at events, conferences and trainings, they prefer to have a balance of structured and unstructured time. They saw state and regional gatherings as opportunities to develop and maintain informal support networks, while also engaging with peers outside of their district. These gatherings provide principals with time for peer conversations about emerging issues in their schools (e.g. vaping or how to support the mental health needs of students and staff). However, once back in their schools, even if a principal has the time to turn to their peer-to-peer network with a question, many believe they do not have the time to respond.

For charter leaders, the Minnesota Department of Education's Charter Leaders Network was mentioned as a valued opportunity to establish peer networks, learn from each other and discuss what feels most urgent to them in a safe and supportive space.



Photographer Credit: Bruce Silcox

PRINCIPALS VALUE SUSTAINED, INTENSIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, BUT FIND IT CHALLENGING TO ACCESS WITHOUT STRONG SUPPORT FROM SUPERINTENDENTS.

Participants in all conversations emphasized the benefits of informal, unstructured conversation with peers. When starting out as new principals, many created their own networks of support with peers and mentors, which helped (and continue to help) them manage the demands of the job. Two participants noted that they call each other every morning and check in for 30 minutes. Several other principals noted that they call former superintendents who initially encouraged them to pursue principalships, even though they no longer work in the same district. Others gather weekly or monthly for breakfasts, book clubs or coffee with colleagues.

In contrast, the Minnesota Principals Academy (MPA) received numerous positive comments in conversations and the survey. Principals believe that the MPA helps “fill in the gaps” between their theoretical licensure programs and their day-to-day realities. Several noted that it helped them develop systems thinking approaches that help them better shape school culture and strengthen student achievement. The program provides connection to peers and is an intensive, sustained program that builds on skills throughout the two-year period of participation. MPA also provides action-focused and research-informed approaches principals can implement as they perform their day-to-day responsibilities.

Even so, principals perceive that their access to professional development hinges on the willingness of their superintendent to allow them to participate, or even tell them about professional development opportunities. For example, while principals highly valued their experience in the intensive, two-year Minnesota Principals Academy, many noted that the time away from their buildings was challenging. To participate, principals needed the clear and strong support of their superintendent.

Superintendents were divided on the benefits of having principals leave school buildings for professional development. Some viewed principals as managers of their school building, while others viewed them more as instructional coaches and education leaders. For example, some superintendents feel that they cannot spare a principal for an intensive professional development or leadership-focused program. Others believe the opposite – that developing principals is vital to building success, ensuring a quality school environment and building a supportive culture for students, teachers, staff and families.

PRINCIPALS VALUE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, BUT FIND IT DIFFICULT TO PRIORITIZE.

Principals are aware of online programs and trainings, in-person programs and organizations for professional development, but they believe that they do not always have the time to engage with them. Principals also care about the professional development of their teachers, wanting to offer more departmentalized opportunities, but find it challenging to accomplish across many subjects.

Survey respondents were divided regarding the amount of time provided for professional development. 43 percent of respondents “strongly agreed” (8%) or “agreed” (35%) that they have an appropriate amount of time for professional development, while 45 percent “disagreed” (34%) or “strongly disagreed” (11%).

Superintendents agreed that principals have many demands on their time but emphasized that good time management and prioritization skills are critical to any administrator’s role. It is important to note that the superintendents with whom we spoke primarily worked in larger districts where support staff (e.g. assistant principals, directors of programs, etc.) were also present. These superintendents believe that principals should not be holding all of the roles, and that a principal’s ability to trust support staff and to delegate effectively was critical.



Superintendents also pointed out that “not enough time” is frequently used as an excuse to avoid what a superintendent may view as necessary culture change. That said, administrators – like principals – want to provide more support than they feel able to do effectively. When budgets get tight, professional development is among the first line items to get cut and least likely to be reinstated. Likewise, superintendents may not feel they have the time to support principals.

PRINCIPALS SEEK PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT FEELS RELEVANT TO THEIR DAY-TO-DAY WORK.

Given these time constraints, principals usually seek out professional development opportunities that are perceived as delivering the strongest, most direct day-to-day benefits. For example, principals were very pleased with the 21st Century Office training provided by the Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association (MESPA). The principals attend the training in partnership with their secretarial staff and collaboratively develop an effective management strategy for their own offices. Principals viewed this training was particularly effective because it was led by their peers (“They know and understand our needs!”), the subject matter was focused and direct and there were clear and immediate benefits to their day-to-day workflow. Principals want to create and sustain thriving school environments for their students, staff and teachers.

“

As a black woman, I still have things to learn about equity. But I can't grow if I have to continually sit through basic introductions to equity concepts.

“ Time management is an issue –
principals need the equivalent of an
operations director to free up our time to
focus on being instructional coaches for
our teachers...Most of our time is tied up
with meetings or with discipline issues
and we aren't given the time we need to
be instructional coaches. ”



PRINCIPAL EXPERIENCE: SCHOOL CLIMATE

School and community contexts affect the types of professional development that principals seek. Principals want increased connection with other principals, as well as the time and space to think deeply and implement culture, systems and mindset changes (e.g. bringing an equity lens to school culture) for the benefit of their students. That said, many perceive increased demands on their time – managing mental health crises in their buildings, completing time-intensive compliance and reporting requirements and addressing staffing shortages and challenges. Many of these challenges present as unfunded mandates, where principals and their staff conduct work for the benefit of students and their families, but it is work for which schools do not receive payment or compensation.

MENTAL HEALTH

Principals across the state, regardless of school enrollment, community size or grade level, noted an overwhelming demand for mental health services in their schools. Principals frequently intervene to provide support during student mental health breakdowns, ensuring that the school day for other students goes relatively uninterrupted. Frequent and unexpected interventions make it challenging for principals to serve as instructional coaches or focus on creating a thriving school culture.

Similarly, superintendents believe that additional mental health support for schools is critical. Specifically, they seek:

- Tools to help parents understand mental health diagnoses
- Training to help principals manage conversations with staff, parents and students about mental health
- More staffing (e.g. counselors, mental health specialists, paraeducators and behavioral interventionists) for mental health support in schools, so the responsibility does not fall so heavily on principals.



I'm like a triage nurse...The mental health component is the biggest challenge. If a kid is melting down, they aren't in a learning place. It takes maybe 40 minutes for a kid to calm down – and a teacher has to keep teaching; there are other kids in their classroom. I can't take that teacher out of the classroom. So I sit with the kid, which means I can't do the teacher observations. There's not enough mental health support.

COMPLIANCE

Compliance requirements also weigh heavily for principals. Many view paperwork as focused on compliance and accountability, rather than on impact. Both principals and superintendents viewed compliance reporting as an area where they have very little autonomy. They would prefer to work collaboratively with state agencies to identify necessary changes, and then work together to implement those changes.



The size of a district or school also impacts how a principal views reporting requirements. In larger districts, principals often have director level support staff who hold reporting responsibilities (e.g. special education directors). In small districts, the principal may be the only administrator in a building and holds sole responsibility for compliance reporting.

Superintendents concurred and expressed frustration with the statewide focus on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) and state mandates, which they viewed as causing excessive stress for principals, teachers and students.



Every time there is a new mandate, it's not like an old one goes away. Somehow we keep balancing it...We're not equipped to be a thriving school. We have too many unfunded mandates.

STAFFING CHALLENGES

Recruiting and retaining qualified staff is challenging for principals. Principals want more diverse and qualified applicants for open teaching and staff positions, but believe that the number of applicants has significantly decreased over the past ten years. They attributed this decline to several factors, including:

- Lack of affordable, desirable housing in their area
- Teacher licensure barriers
- Inadequate funds

As previously discussed, principals feel a crushing need for social services in their schools. However, they do not feel they have the budgets or full-time equivalent hours (FTEs) to hire paraeducators, mental health specialists and behavioral interventionists.



We don't have attractive, affordable housing anymore...and now we can't attract and retain the substitutes, specialists and interventionists we need, let alone teachers.

| APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: SURVEY APPROACH

The Minnesota Principal Experience online survey was shared with more than 1,500 principals in Minnesota. Between August 5 and August 16, 2019, 171 principals (11%) shared confidential responses. The survey was divided into six sections:

- Experience and Training
- Goals and Decision-Making
- Professional Development
- Succession Planning and Support
- Demographic Information
- Contact Information (Optional)



Principals took an average of 15 minutes to respond to the survey. Each section had a specific purpose:

— EXPERIENCE AND TRAINING

The purpose of this section was to learn about the tenure of current principals, in addition to learning more about the positions and experiences that principals held before becoming principals. This section also surfaced whether principals participated in training programs and whether they were satisfied with those training programs.

— GOALS AND DECISION-MAKING

In this section, we learned more about how principals describe their jobs. We learned about the level of autonomy and influence they have on certain decisions. We also learned whether they receive feedback from their managers, whether that feedback is helpful (if available) and whether principals have the support they need to execute the mission of their school, charter or district.

— PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This section described the types and quality of professional development opportunities that principals have experienced. We learn about their career goals, whether the professional development available to them maps to those goals and what support would be beneficial.

— SUCCESSION PLANNING AND SUPPORT

This section helped us learn how long a principal plans to remain in their position and what would most improve their experience. We also learned about their succession plans, career goals and ability to coach teachers/assistant principals toward leadership opportunities.

— DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

This section captured demographic information about respondents, as well as school and community information. Rather than making this section optional, we included a “prefer not to say” option in all identity-related questions.

— CONTACT INFORMATION (OPTIONAL)

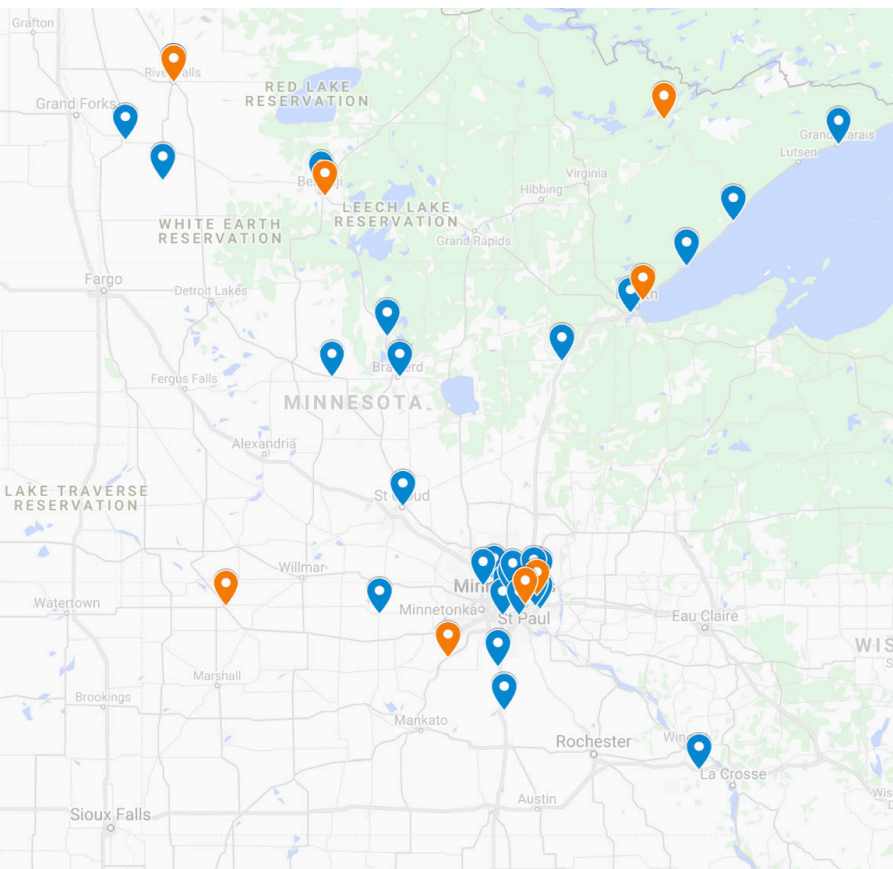
In this final section, we gauged interest in October 2019 listening sessions and gathered contact information for future outreach. More than 50 individuals indicated interest in participating in a listening session. To maintain confidentiality, the contact information gathered in this section was not affiliated with a respondent’s previous answers.

APPENDIX B: EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS

Prior to launching the survey, Seiche conducted 10 conversations with education stakeholders, each lasting approximately 30 minutes, to hear their perspectives on survey outreach, engagement and line of questioning.

- Dave Adney*, Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals
- Gary Amoroso, Minnesota Association of School Administrators
- Mike Brown, Minnesota Department of Education
- Bobbie Burnham, Minnesota Department of Education
- Cay Kimbrell, Minnesota Comeback
- Rashida Kimbrue*, The Chicago Public Education Fund
- Joann Knuth, Minnesota Association of Secondary School Principals (retired)
- Jon Millerhagen*, Minnesota Elementary School Principals Association
- Ann Mitchell*, Minnesota Department of Education
- Katie Pikel, Minnesota Principals Academy

**Indicates stakeholder was offered an opportunity to provide feedback on draft survey questionnaire.*



APPENDIX C: LISTENING SESSION PARTICIPATION

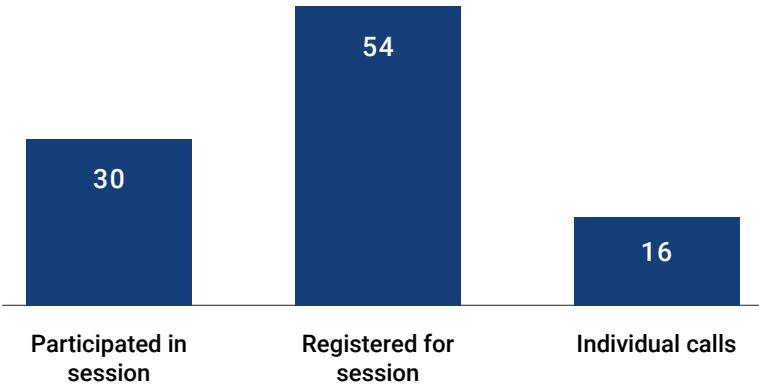
46 principals and nine superintendents participated in conversations during October and November 2019. Here is a map of listening session and individual call participation. Blue markers indicate the district location of a participating principal(s) and orange markers indicate the district location of a participating superintendent(s).

Fig. 1 | Map of listening session and call participants

PRINCIPAL PARTICIPATION

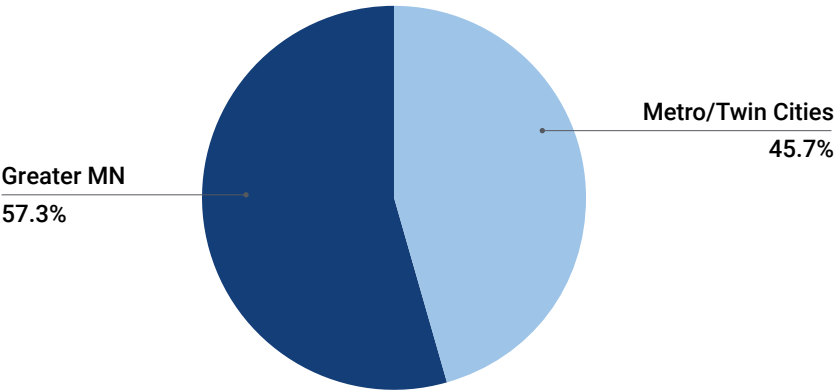
54 principals registered to attend a listening session and 30 attended (57% participation rate; see fig. 2 below). Another 16 individual, 30-minute phone calls were conducted with principals across the state (35% of the total participation).

Fig. 2 | Principal participation in listening sessions and individual calls



Overall, 21 principals (46%) were at metro-area schools and 25 (54%) were at schools in greater Minnesota (see fig. 3 below).

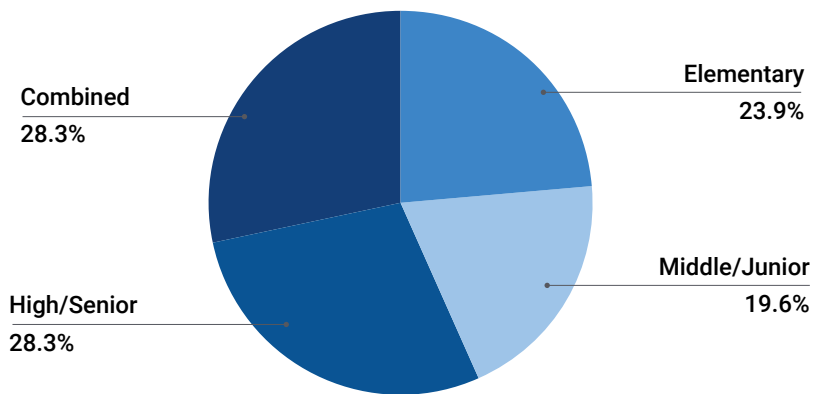
Fig. 3 | Geography of participating principals



Of the principals who participated in either a session or an individual call, 24 were female (52%) and 22 were male (48%). Five individuals identified as people of color (11%).

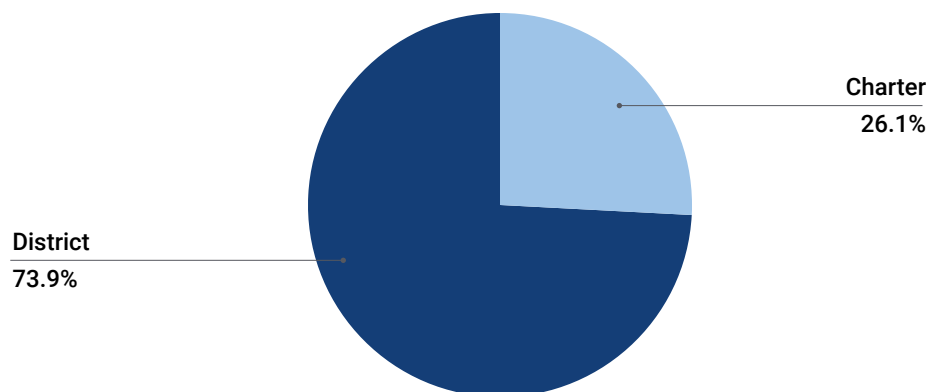
There was fairly even participation among principals at different grade levels, with 11 serving at elementary schools, nine at middle or junior-high schools, 13 at senior or high schools and 13 at combined pre-K/K-12 schools (see fig. 4 below).

Fig. 4 | School grade levels of participating principals



12 principals served at charter schools (26%) and 34 were at district schools (74%; see fig. 5 below).

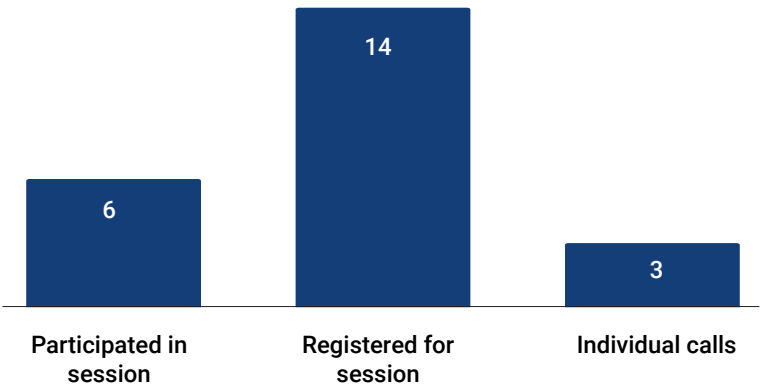
Fig. 5 | Charter and district principal participation



SUPERINTENDENT PARTICIPATION

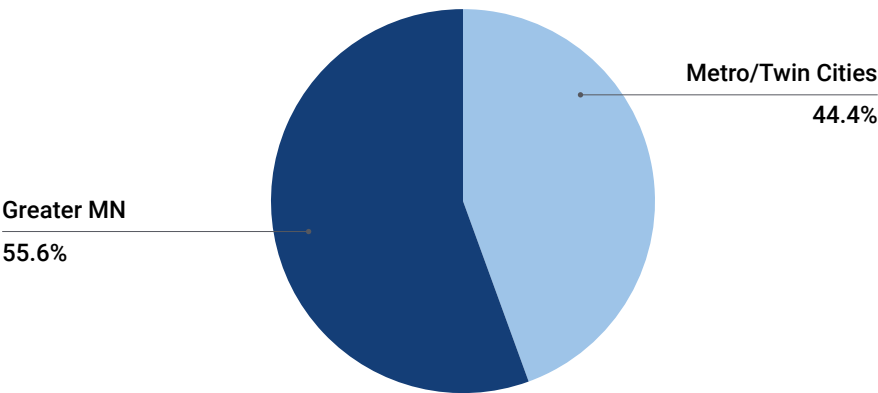
14 superintendents registered to attend a listening session and six attended (43% participation rate; see fig. 6 below). Another three individual, 30-minute phone calls were conducted with superintendents across the state (33% of the total participation).

Fig. 6 | Superintendent participation in sessions and individual conversations



Of the superintendents who participated, four (44%) were at metro-area schools and five (56%) were in greater Minnesota (see fig. 7 below).

Fig. 7 | Geography of participating superintendents



Two participants were female (22%) and seven were male (78%). Three superintendents (33%) identify as people of color (two females, one male).

APPENDIX D:

LISTENING SESSION APPROACH

LOCATIONS

Principal listening session locations were chosen to provide variety in geography, community size, racial/ethnic diversity and income status. Seiche reviewed student enrollment information in Minnesota, including overall number of students enrolled in a district, racial and ethnic composition, percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch and English language learning program participation. Seiche recommended the following locations for listening sessions with principals:

- Bemidji*
- Duluth
- Mankato
- Marshall*
- Minneapolis
- Moorhead
- Staples
- St. Cloud
- St. Paul
- Thief River Falls
- Winona*

After additional conversation with principals, Bemidji, Marshall and Winona were removed as session locations. Principals in those areas voiced concerns about the lengthy travel time required to attend a session. To reach principals in those areas, Seiche held individual phone calls with interested principals.

It is worth noting that principals across the state faced barriers to participating in this process. Specifically, the time required to travel to and participate in a two-hour listening session, as well as the unexpected and urgent demands on their time, posed challenges for principals.

For listening sessions with superintendents, we partnered with the Minnesota Association of School Administrators to host two sessions: one in Duluth at the end of MASA's statewide conference and one in St. Paul at the MASA office. Seiche also conducted three phone conversations with superintendents who were unable to attend an in-person session. Similar to principals, superintendents faced barriers to participation in the form of time away from their office, travel distances and the unexpected and urgent demands of their job.

Future processes should consider prioritizing individual, 30-minute phone calls with principals and stakeholders rather than two-hour listening sessions. While the in-person sessions provided an opportunity for connection, trust building and deep conversation, there were certainly barriers to participation.

FACILITATION

Facilitation guides for both the principal and superintendent sessions were deeply informed by the earlier survey results (see Appendix E & F for full facilitation guides).

The survey raised several questions that required additional conversation – especially around job satisfaction, principal licensure and preparatory programs, ongoing professional development and the roles and responsibilities held by Minnesota principals.

In the sessions and individual conversations with principals, we sought to learn more about the opportunities and gaps in their training and professional development, as well as to learn about barriers to participating in professional development opportunities.

The sessions also served as a method for ground-truthing survey results. As a first-year process, trust was still being developed with participants. The openness and candor an individual brings to their responses can be influenced by a variety of factors, including: a) their relationship to and understanding of external funders; b) the stakeholder from whom they heard about the project and; c) their relationship with other district administrators, including superintendents.

With superintendents, we hoped to learn about the opportunities and gaps in principal licensure and professional development from the perspective of individuals who support principals in districts. Conversations with superintendents were also grounded in the survey findings.

All listening sessions consisted of two sections:

- A 50-minute facilitated conversation
- Rose, Bud, Thorn – a design thinking activity

For Rose, Bud, Thorn, session participants were asked to think about the professional development opportunities they have accessed and what has made those opportunities effective – or not. Each participant was asked to spend five minutes writing their responses on color-coded Post-It Notes aligned to each category:

- Rose = A highlight or something positive, or professional development that is working well.
- Bud = Something new or just emerging, or professional development a participant is looking forward to or sees potential in.
- Thorn = A challenge or something that is not going well, or professional development that needs improvement or significant changes.

Roses, buds and thorns were then discussed as a whole group. For a visual analysis of responses, see Appendix G.

APPENDIX E:

PRINCIPAL SESSIONS FACILITATION QUESTIONS

SESSION PURPOSE

Delve deeper into the perspectives and needs of principals across Minnesota while building a trusting and open discussion space.

QUESTIONS

Satisfaction

One of the things that surprised us in the survey was that 91% of principals reported that they are extremely satisfied or satisfied with their role as principal. That's really high job satisfaction!

- Does that resonate with your experience?
 - If so, how?
 - If not, why not?
- What would keep you satisfied and engaged as a principal?
- What could increase your satisfaction with the role?

Responsibilities

We heard from survey respondents that you, as principals, have a lot of demands on your time. That's not surprising, but we did want to learn more about some of those demands.

- What are some of the compliance requirements taking up your time that you think could be changed or simplified?
- Do you feel supported by your superintendent / district officials?
 - If yes: what does that support look like?
 - If no: Why not?

Support

Here's another interesting finding – 75% of survey respondents said that they didn't have the opportunity to participate in any training or development program for aspiring principals.

- When you started, did you feel prepared for what a principalship would ask of you?
 - What helped you prepare for the role?
 - What, in retrospect, do you wish that you had?
- How do you seek support today, especially when you're facing a difficult challenge in your school?
 - Do you feel you have peer or mentor principals to whom you can turn to for support, or advice?
 - Would that be helpful?
 - If so, why?
 - If not, why not?

Vision

We know that each school across Minnesota has its own vision. We want to know if you, as a principal, have what you need to meet this vision for your students?

- If not, what is standing in the way?

Satisfaction

Are you more satisfied this year compared to last year?

- Why, or why not?

Curriculum

Do you feel supported in implementing new curriculum standards?

Evaluation

How are you evaluated – and how would you like to be evaluated?

What else is important for me to know that I have not yet asked about?

ROSE/BUD/THORN EXERCISE

Professional Development opportunities for principals. What's working well (Rose), what opportunities do you see (Bud) and what is not working well (Thorn).

APPENDIX F: STAKEHOLDER SESSIONS FACILITATION QUESTIONS

SESSION PURPOSE

Delve deeper into the potential needs of principals while building a trusting and open discussion space for education stakeholders and district administrators.

QUESTIONS**Support**

We'd like to hear more about how each of you work with principals in your district, and what makes for effective (or ineffective!) relationships with principals.

- How, specifically, do you work with principals?
- What makes for an effective relationship with a principal in your district?
- What makes relationships with principals less effective or challenging?

Professional Development

Let's talk about the professional development of principals.

- From your perspective as someone who works with principals, what types of professional development seem to be working well?
- Are there other types of professional development for principals that you wish existed?
 - If so, what would that be?

Succession

In the August survey, we asked principals what roles they held prior to becoming principals. 92 percent had been teachers, with 50 percent of those having taught for ten or more years.

- Does this resonate with your experience?
- Do you think that people – particularly teachers – preparing to become principals receive adequate preparation for those roles?
 - If so, why?
 - If not, why not?
- What types of professional development would be helpful for teachers preparing to becoming principals, in your opinion, as administrators?

Vision

If you could flip a switch and change just one thing in your district, what would that change be?

Time/Resources

What do you hear from your principals about what compliance requirements are taking up their time?

- What is standing in their way, and what opportunities do you see?

Community

How connected to your community are your schools?

- What do you hear from your communities about education?
- What do you wish you were hearing from them?

What else is important for me to know that I have not yet asked about?

ROSE/BUD/THORN EXERCISE

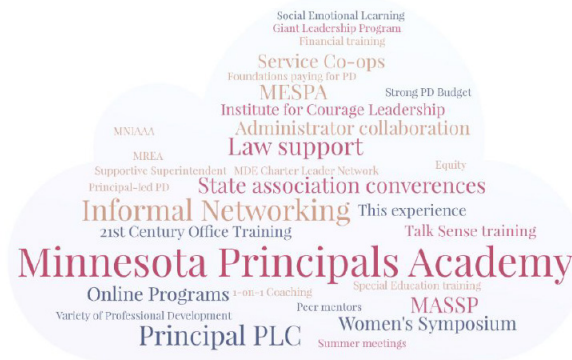
Professional Development opportunities for principals. What is working well (Rose); what opportunities do you see (Bud); what do you wish existed or what is not currently working well (Thorn).

APPENDIX G: ROSE, BUD, THORN ACTIVITY

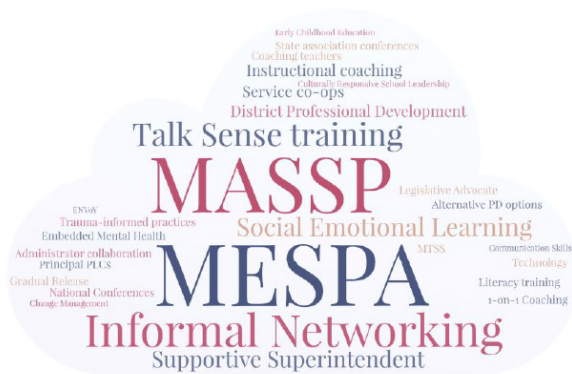
VISUAL ANALYSIS

Following are word clouds created from the combined Rose, Bud, Thorn responses of each session. The size of a word or phrase indicates how often it came up in the activity.

ROSES



BUDS



THORNS



Word clouds created using wordart.com

APPENDIX H: SURVEY VISUAL ANALYSIS

EXPERIENCE & TRAINING

1. My first year as a principal was: (Answered: 162 | Skipped: 9)

2. Before you became a principal, did you hold any of the following school positions?
(Answered: 171 | Skipped: 0)

Fig. 1
Respondent's first year as principal

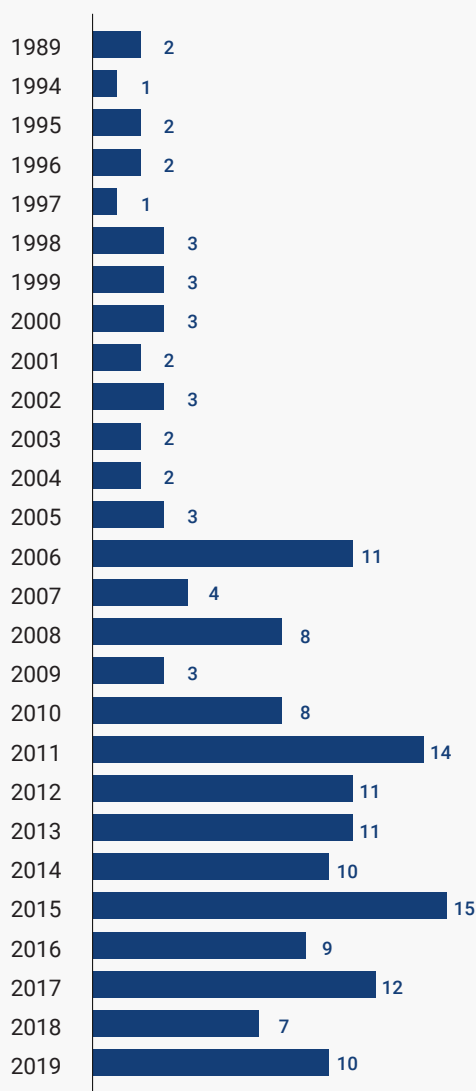
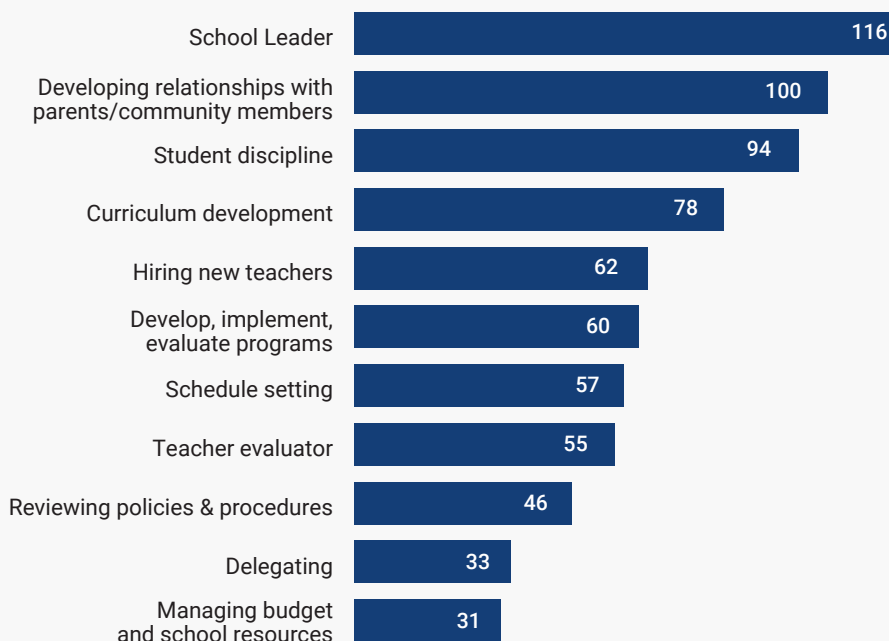


Fig. 2
Roles held by principals prior to current position

Role	Number of Respondents
Teacher	158
Department head or chair	56
Assistant principal	54
Dean	52
Mentor teacher	39
Instructional Coach	32
Curriculum Specialist or Coordinator	20
Counselor	12
Paraprofessional	5
Activities Director	5
Resident principal	3
Board Chair or Member	3
Local Union position	3
ALC Coordinator or Lead teacher	2
Athletic Director	2
Library media specialist/ Librarian	2
Technology Director or Coordinator	2
Special Education Coordinator	2
Technology Integration Specialist	2

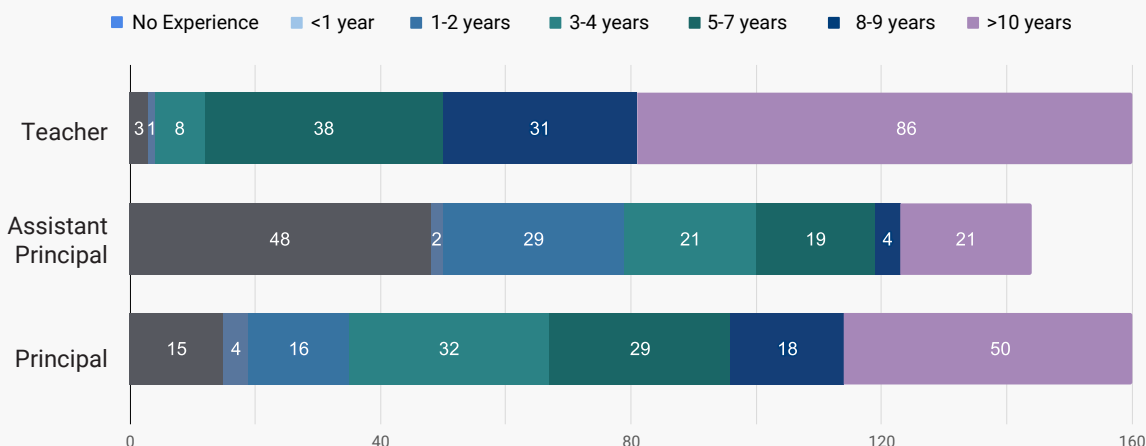
3. Which of the four following experiences did you have before taking a principal role that were most impactful to your preparation? (Answered: 169 | Skipped: 2)

Fig. 3 | Four most impactful experiences in preparing for becoming a principal



4. My total years of experience in each category (teacher, assistant principal, principal): (Answered: 171 | Skipped: 0)

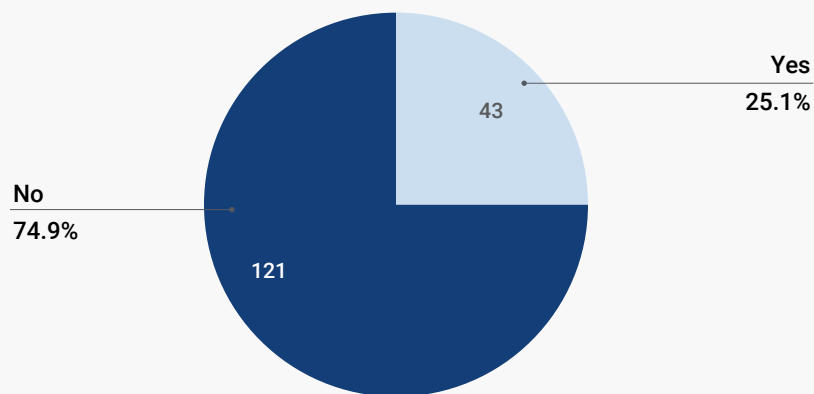
Fig. 4 | Total years experience in a role (teacher, assistant principal or principal)



5. Before you became a principal, did you participate in any district, school or community-based training or development program for aspiring school principals?

(Answered: 171 | Skipped: 7)

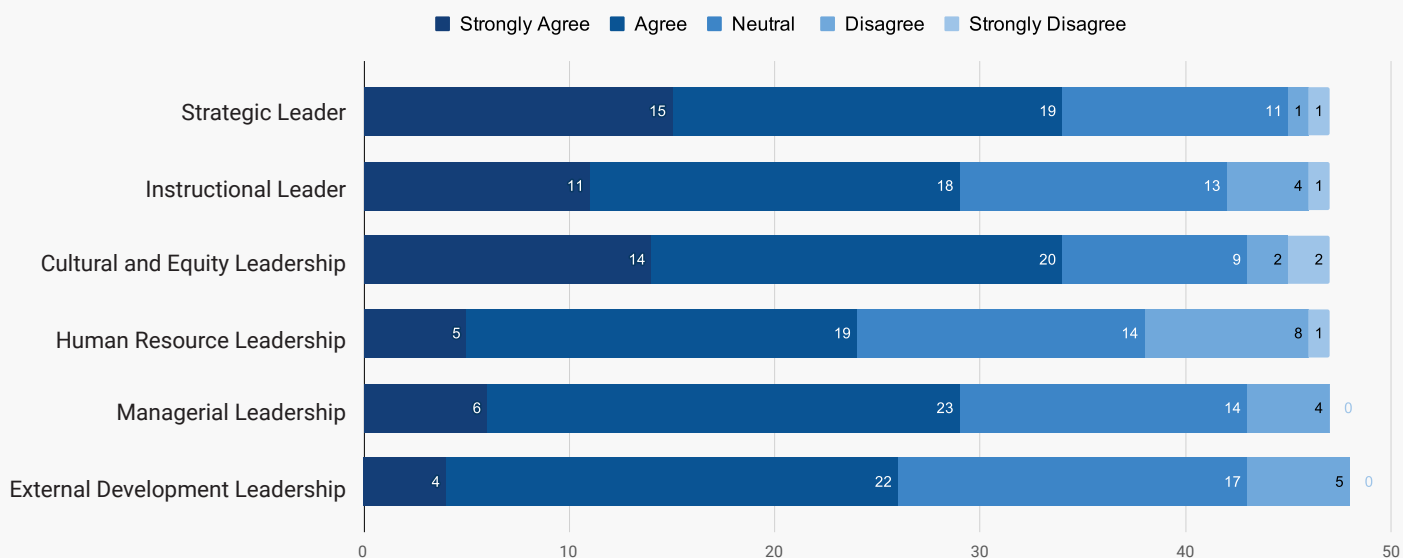
Fig. 5 | Participation in a training or development program prior to becoming a principal



6. IF YES: Regarding the training or development program in which you participated:

(Answered: 47 | Skipped: 124)

Fig. 6 | Perceived effectiveness of professional development program/training for leadership roles



7. My overall satisfaction as a principal is: (Answered: 164 | Skipped: 7)

Fig. 7 | Overall satisfaction with role as a principal

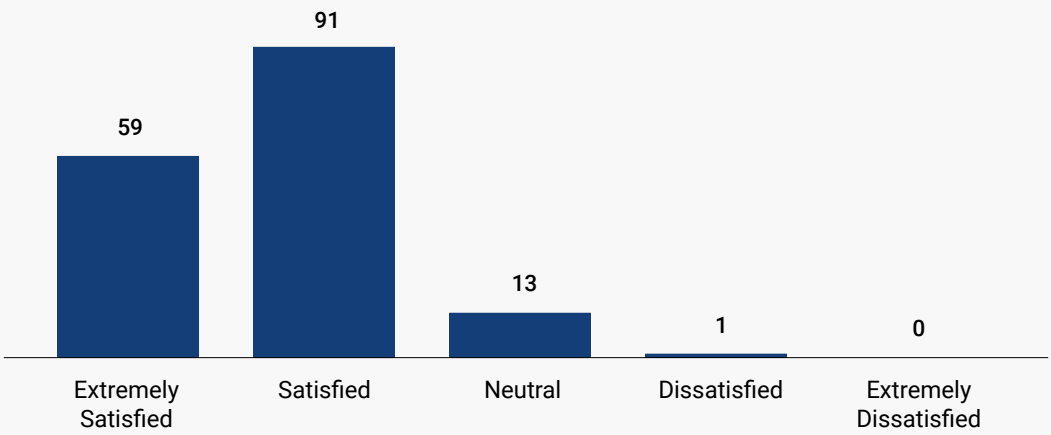


Fig. 8 | Overall satisfaction with role, by gender

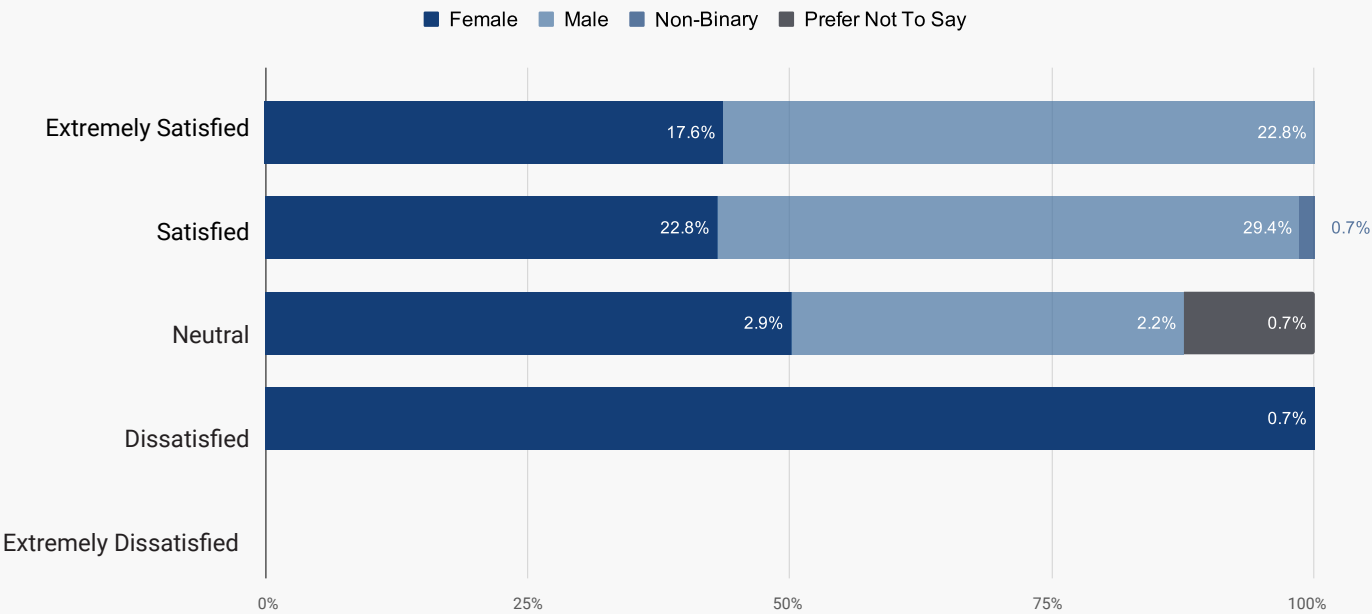


Fig. 9 | Overall satisfaction with role, by school community size

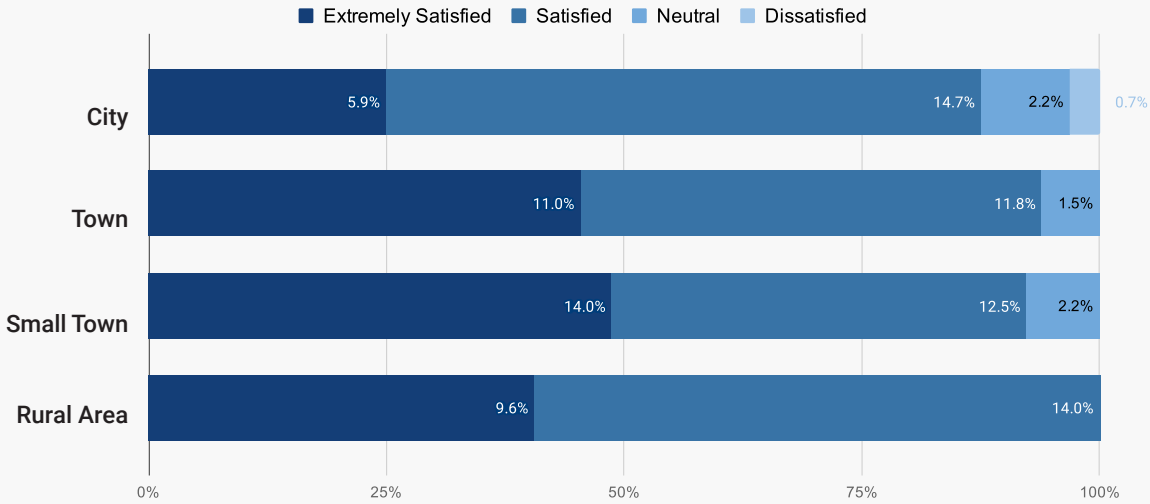


Fig. 10 | Overall satisfaction with role, by ethnicity

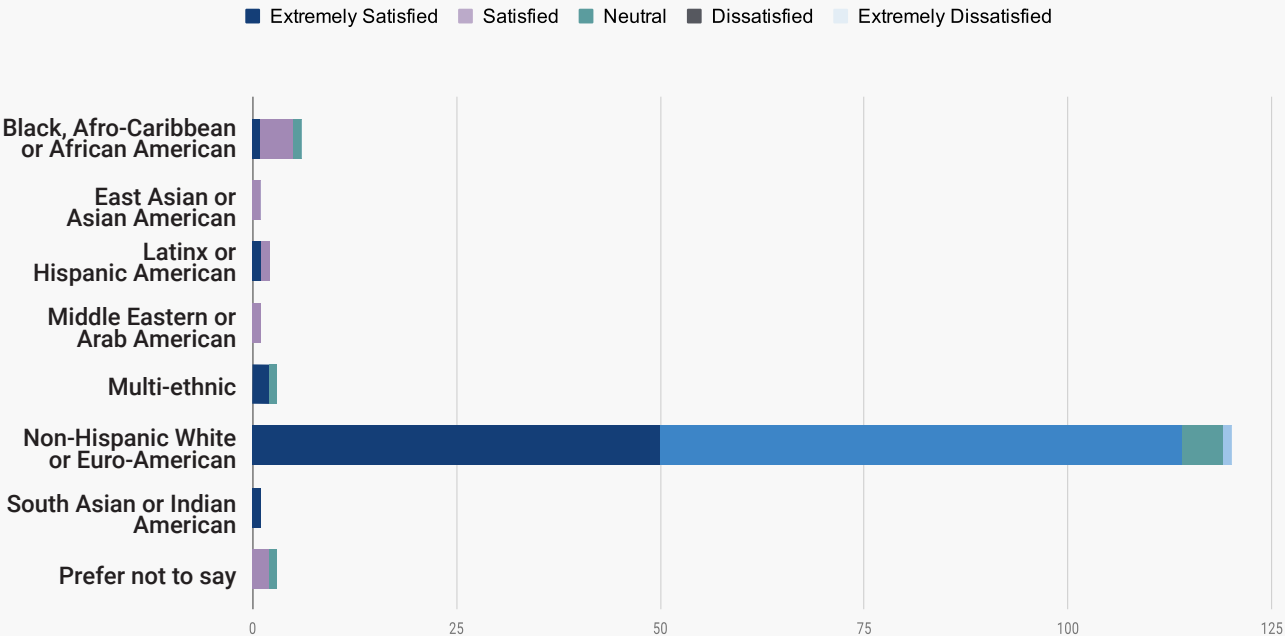
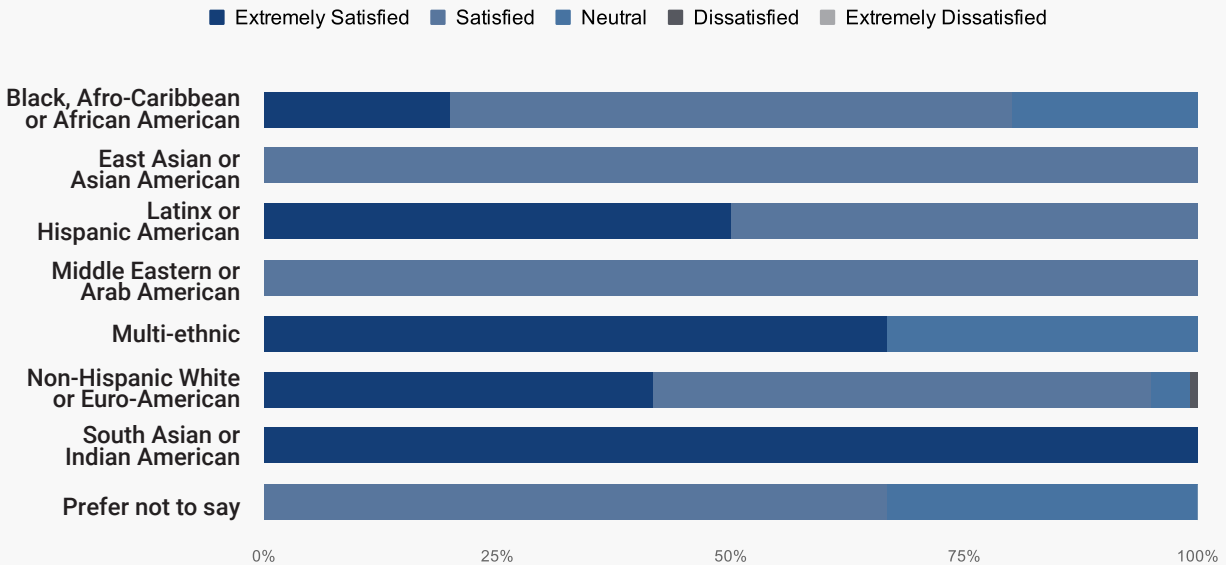


Fig. 11 | Overall satisfaction with role, by ethnicity (percentage view)



8. Additional comments?

21 respondents provided additional comments. Many commented on the challenge of being a principal and the joy of building relationships with students, staff and parents. Several respondents provided reflections on how their position or their perception of their role has changed:

- “The more years I am in this position, the more I realize I am a middle manager. Trying to lead my building of amazing teachers and students with either lack of support from the district with finance or positions or the district mandates the path for the building without building buy-in.”
- “The speed at which information travels through social media has changed our jobs.”

Several comments related to challenges at the district level:

- “I believe my district can do more to support and mentor new principals...More support for coaching, evaluating and mentoring staff is needed to get them to the next level.”
- “I would be extremely satisfied except I have had four Superintendents in seven years, which has been a challenge to moving forward.”
- “Principals seem to be expected to ‘just know’ but rarely are they offered quality professional development that isn’t tied to a district initiative.”

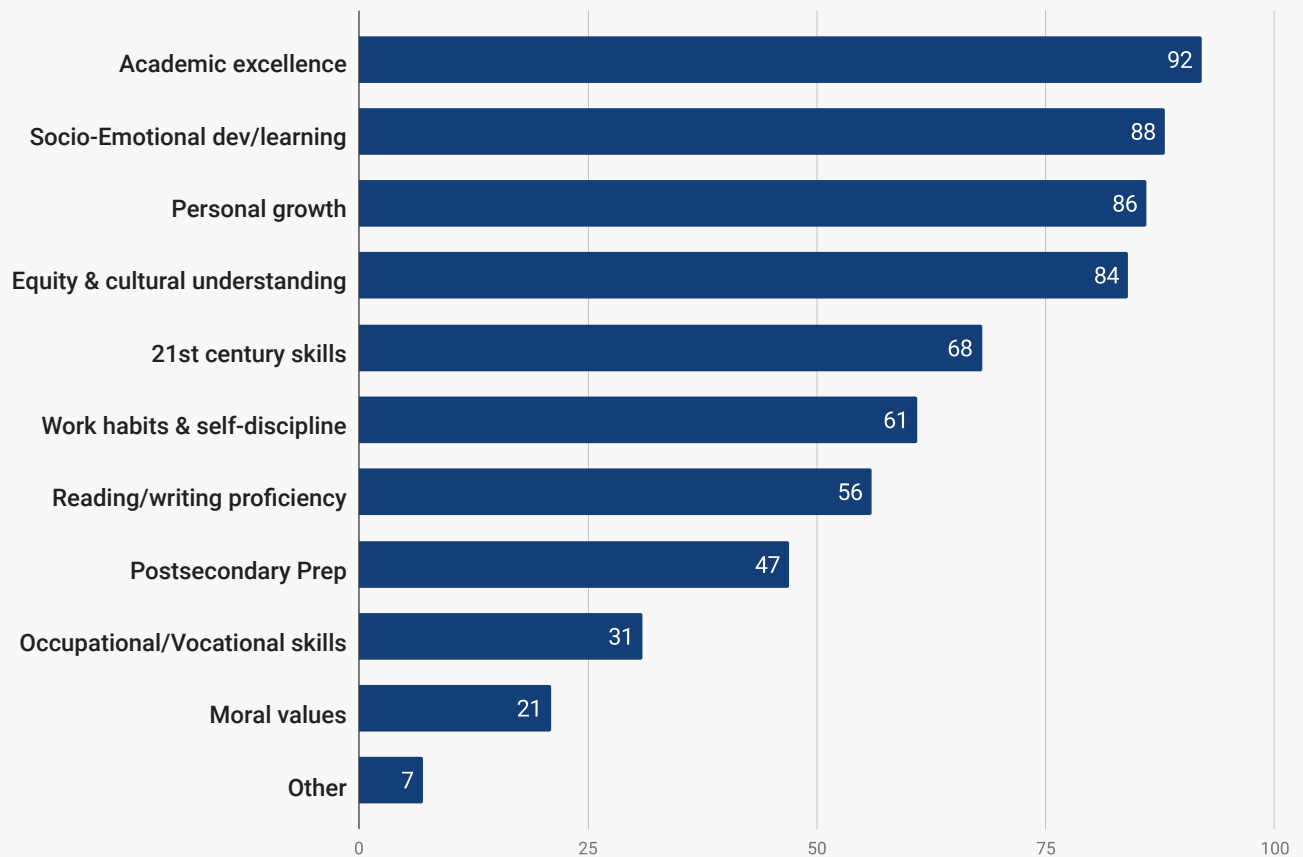
GOALS & DECISION MAKING

9. Which of the following goals are most important to your overall role as principal?

- Instructional coaching that drives reading and writing proficiency in my school.
- Encouraging academic excellence.
- Preparing students for postsecondary education.
- Promoting occupational or vocational skills.
- Promoting good work habits and self-discipline.
- Promoting personal growth (self-esteem, self-knowledge, etc.)
- Promoting socio-emotional development and learning
- Promoting specific moral values
- Advancing equity and promoting cultural understanding
- Promoting 21st century skills and/or personalized learning
- Other (specify).

(Answered: 154 | Skipped: 17)

Fig. 12 | Ranking of most important goals to overall role as a principal



10. How much influence do you feel you have as a principal in decisions concerning the following activities?

- Setting performance standards for students at their school;
- Establishing curriculum at their school;
- Determining the content of in-service professional development programs for teachers of their school;
- Evaluating teachers of their school;
- Hiring new, full-time teachers of their school;
- Setting discipline policy at their school;
- Building community connections to their school; and
- Deciding how their school budget will be spent.

(Answered: 154 | Skipped: 17)

Fig. 13 | Perceived influence in decisions regarding school activities

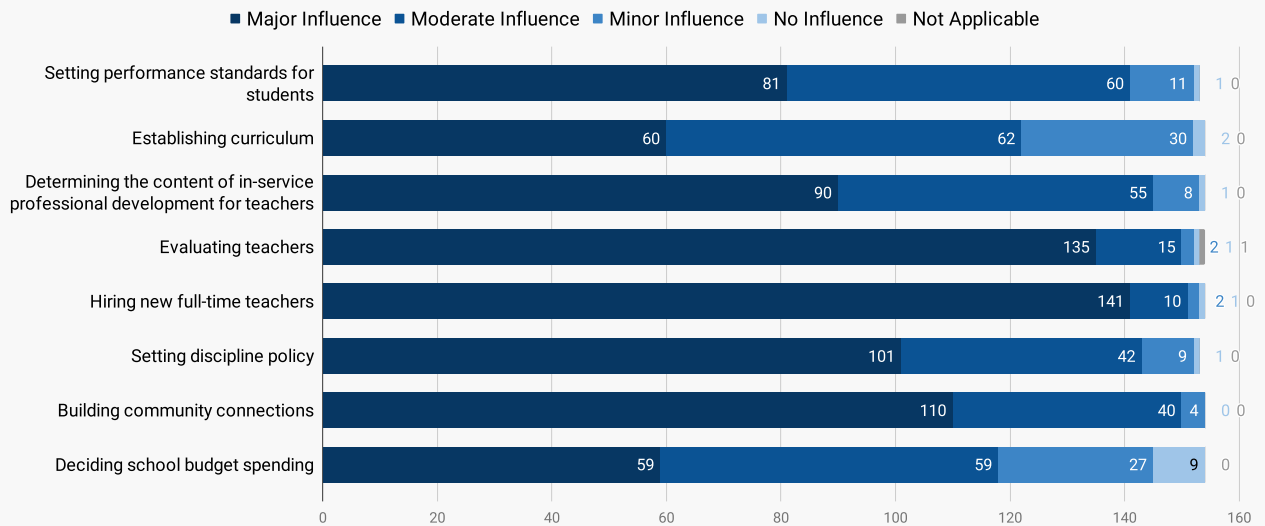
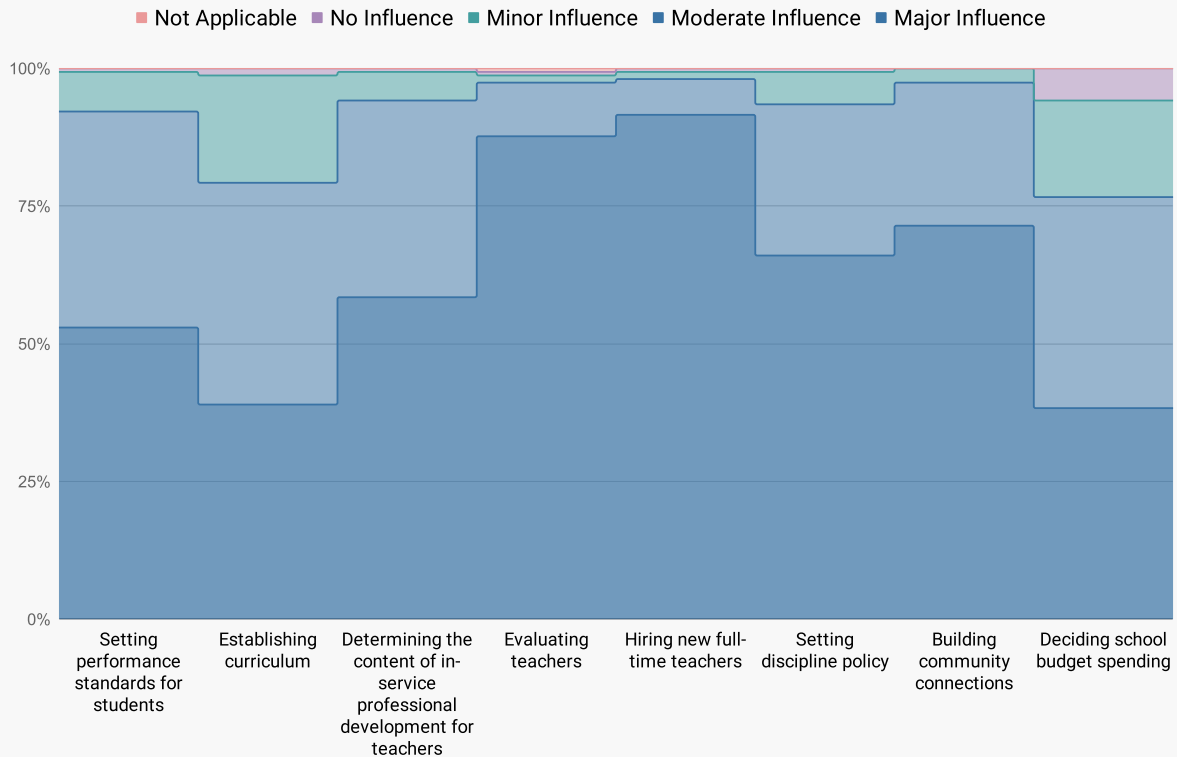


Fig. 14 | Perceived influence in decisions regarding school activities by percentage



11. Please respond to the following statements using a scale of Strongly agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly disagree or N/A:

- In the past year, I received regular support from my immediate manager to improve my practice.
- The support and feedback I received from my immediate manager is key to improving my performance as a principal.
- I have the autonomy I need to improve teaching and learning in my school building.
- I have the support I need to execute my district's/charter's vision and deliver on the goals in my school.
- Within the budget I am given, I have the flexibility to allocate resources to achieve my school's goals and priorities.
- I received my budget with sufficient time and information to plan for the school year ahead.
- I have a mentor or the opportunity to connect with peer principals.

(Answered: 154 | Skipped: 17)

Fig. 15 | Level of agreement or disagreement, per statement, regarding perceived support or autonomy in principal role

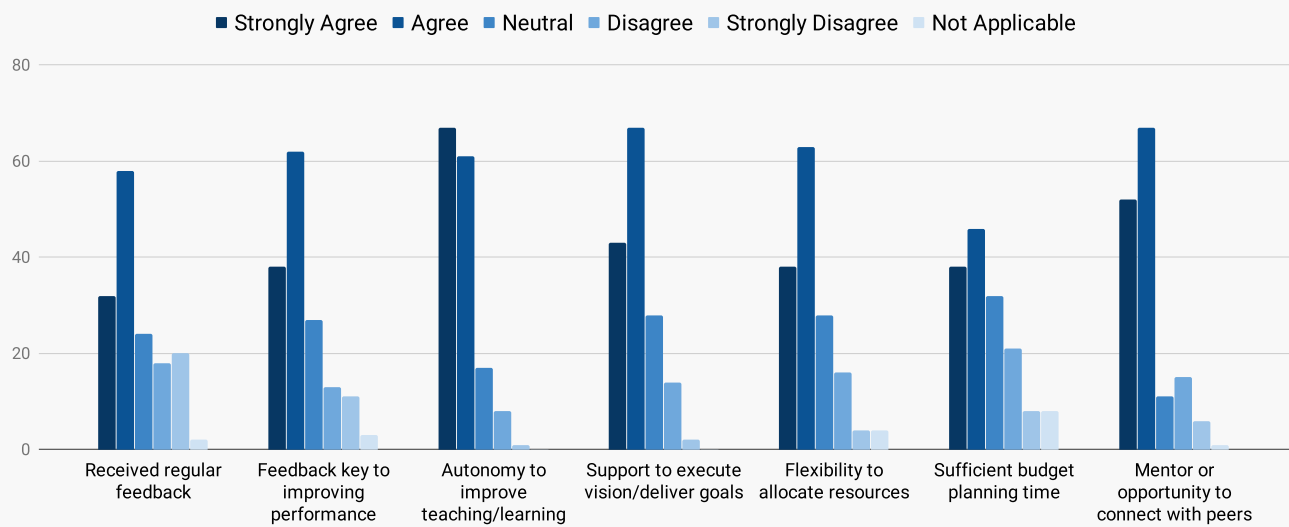
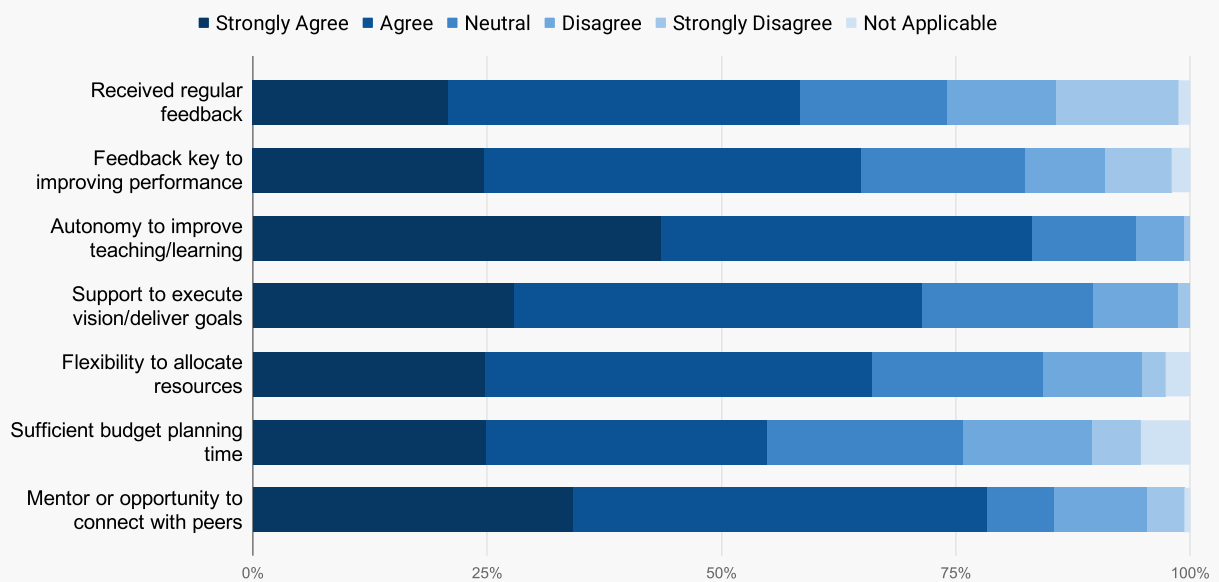


Fig. 16 | Level of perceived support or autonomy, by percentage

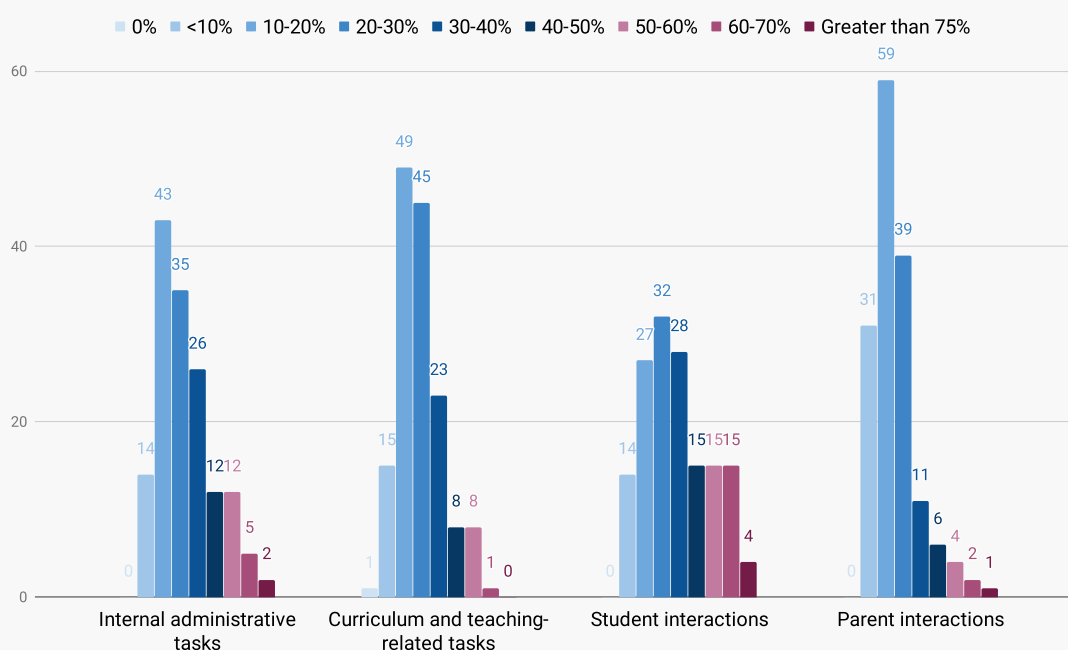


12. On average, throughout the school year, what percentage of time do you estimate you spend on the following tasks in your school?

- Internal administrative tasks, including human resource/personnel issues, regulations, reports, school budgets.
- Curriculum and teaching-related tasks, including quality of curricular resources, implementation of standards, classroom observations, mentoring teachers.
- Student interactions, including discipline and academic guidance.
- Parent interactions, including formal and informal interactions.

(Answered: 153 | Skipped: 18)

Fig. 17 | Estimated percentage of time allocated, per activity



13. Please indicate how frequently you engaged in the following activities in your school during the 2018-19 school year.

- I collaborated with teachers to solve classroom discipline problems.
- I observed instruction in the classroom and provided feedback based on those observations.
- I took actions to support cooperation among teachers to develop new teaching practices.
- I reviewed school administrative procedures and reports.
- I collaborated with principals from other schools on challenging work tasks.
- I worked on a professional development plan for my school.
- I worked with teacher(s) at my school to develop professional development for them.
- I worked on a professional development plan for myself.

(Answered: 152 | Skipped: 19)

Fig. 18 | Frequency of activity, by response volume

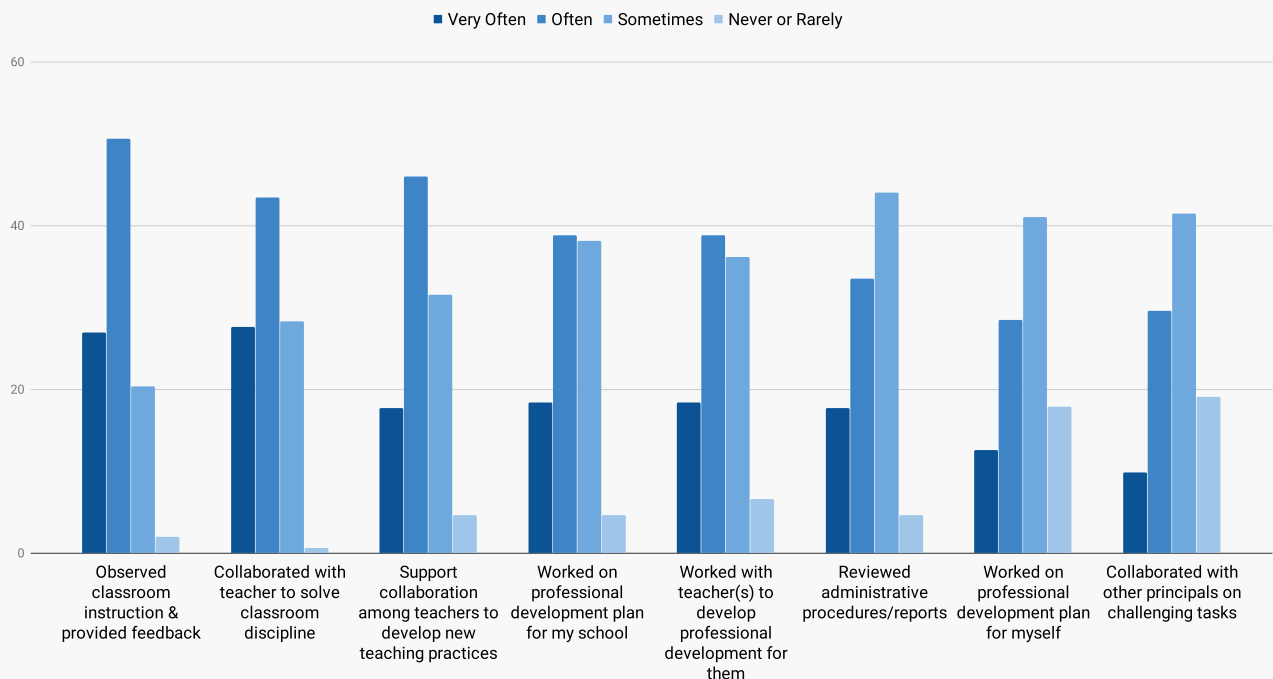
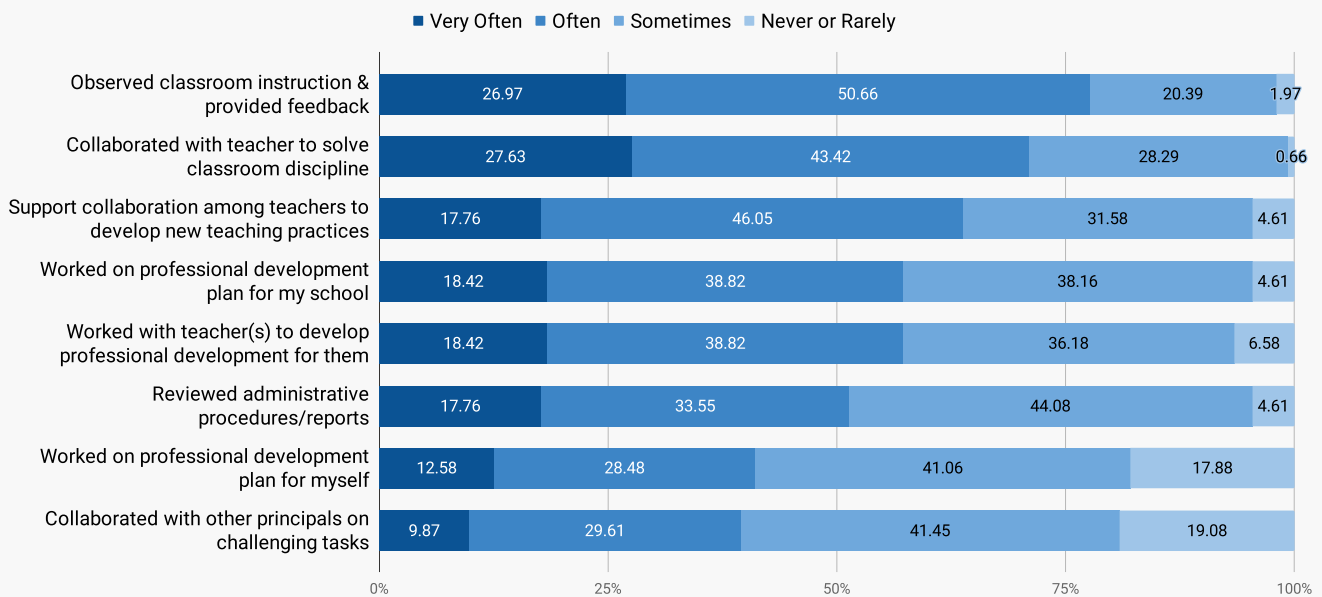


Fig. 19 | Frequency of activity, by percentage



14. Additional comments?

Five respondents provided additional comments. Three noted their time is frequently dedicated to logistics, management or administrative tasks rather than professional or leadership development.

- “Logistics always win over professional development. It should be the other way around.”
- “My ‘management’ duties far exceed my ‘leadership’ opportunities.”
- “Administrative (email, paperwork, etc.) takes up a large percentage of time.”

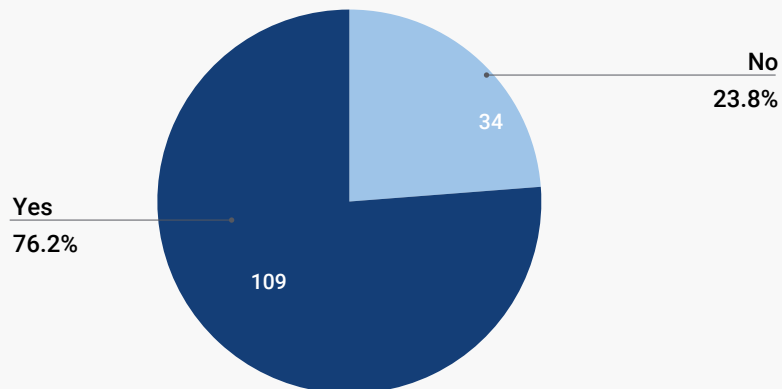
Another felt that the professional development program they participated in was meaningful, but found it difficult to carve out the time to attend.

- “I was fortunate to be able to participate in the Minnesota Principals Academy. This was the most profound professional development I have been a part of. However, the workload and time away from the building was exceptionally stressful for the building and staff.”

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

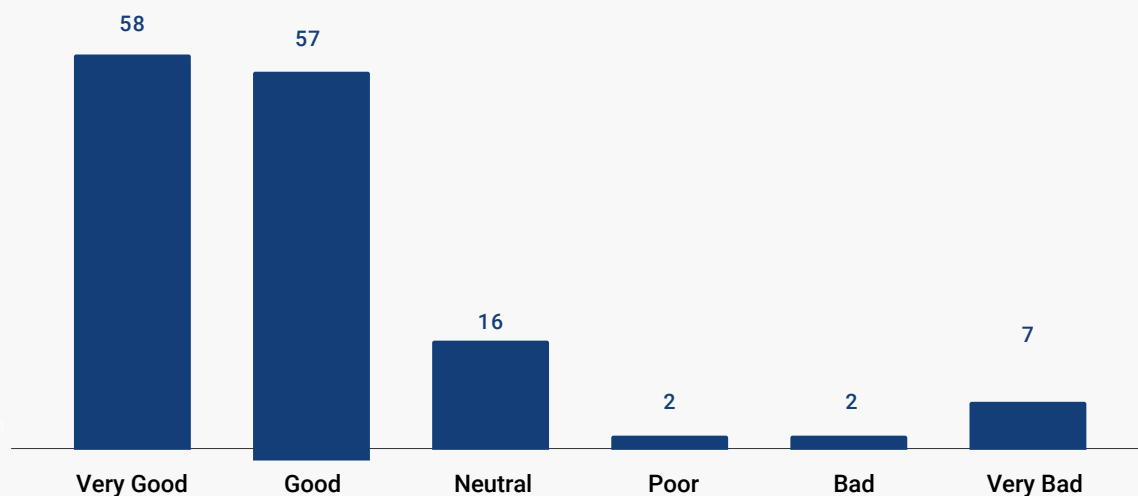
15. During the 2018-2019 school year, did you participate in any district, school or community-based training or development program? (Answered: 143 | Skipped 28)

Fig. 20 | Number and percentage of respondents participating in district, school or community-based training or development programs



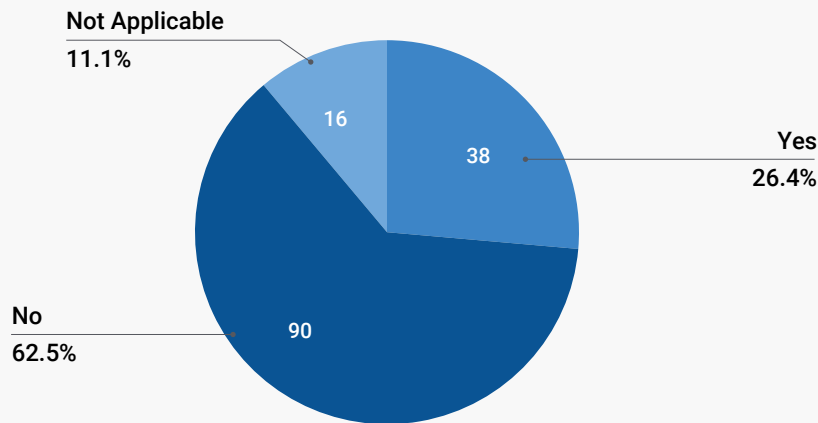
16. The quality of professional development I participated in as a principal during the 2018-19 school year was: (Answered: 142 | Skipped 29)

Fig. 21 | Perceived quality of professional development training or program attended by respondents



17. Was participation in professional development considered as part of your most recent evaluation? (Answered: 144 | Skipped 27)

Fig. 22 | Percent and number of respondents for whom professional development was, or was not, considered as part of their most recent evaluation



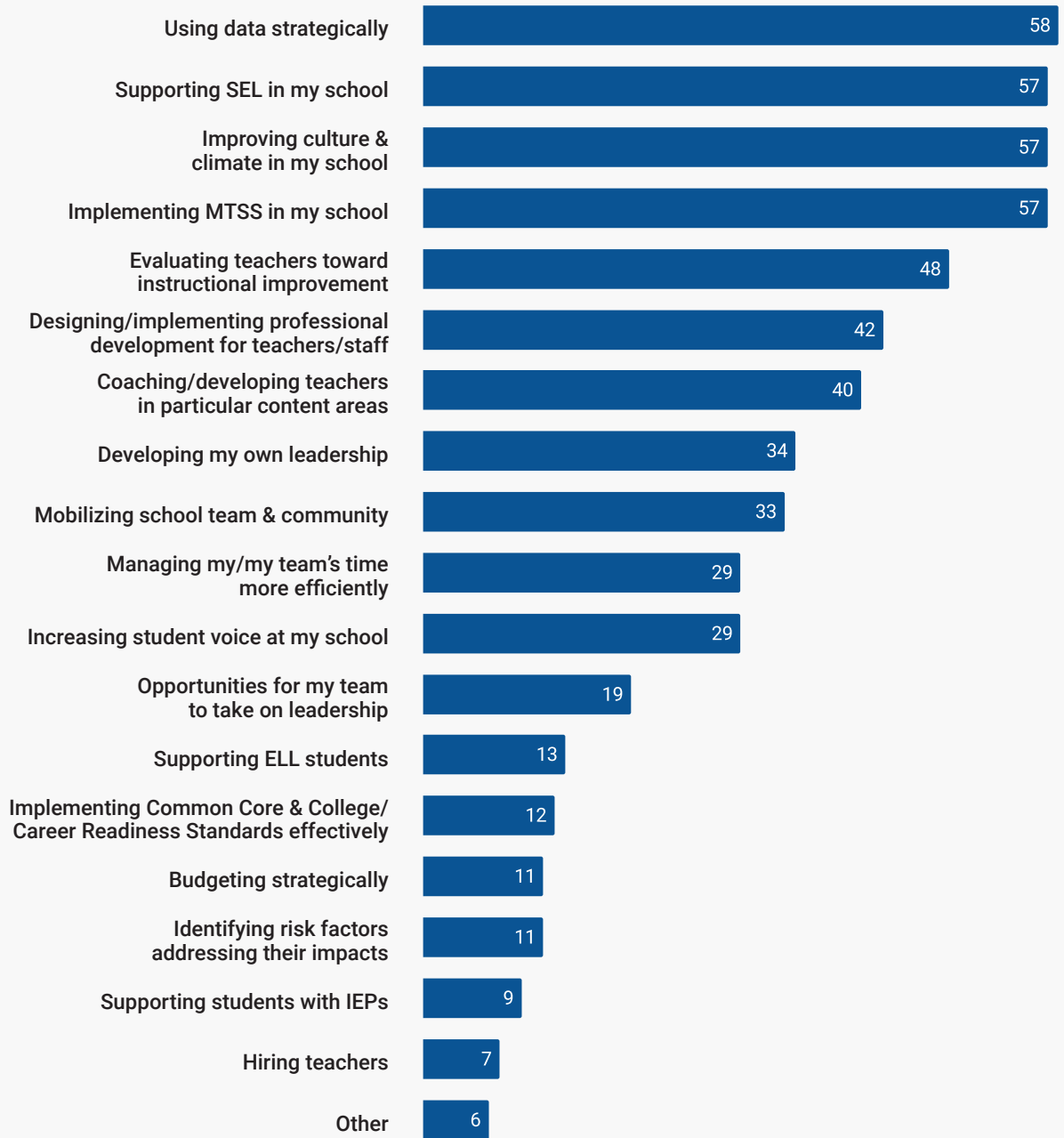
18. Please identify four professional development opportunities or supports that would be most impactful to you as a principal:

- Supporting social & emotional learning in my school
- Using data strategically
- Mobilizing my school team & community to improve student outcomes
- Developing my own leadership
- Coaching and developing teachers in particular content areas
- Managing my time and my team's time more efficiently
- Supporting students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)
- Improving culture & climate in my school
- Designing and implementing professional learning for my teachers & staff
- Opportunities for my team to take on leadership roles & responsibilities
- Supporting English language learning (ELL) students
- Implementing Multi-tiered System of Support (MTSS) in my school
- Budgeting strategically
- Evaluating teachers toward instructional improvement
- Implementing Common Core and College and Career Readiness Standards effectively
- Managing local school council or charter board relationships
- Hiring teachers
- Identifying risk factors (e.g. homelessness) and addressing their impact on students
- Increasing student voice at my school
- Supporting quality early childhood education
- Other (please explain)

(Answered: 143 | Skipped: 28)

Fig. 23

Professional development opportunities or supports considered most impactful by respondents

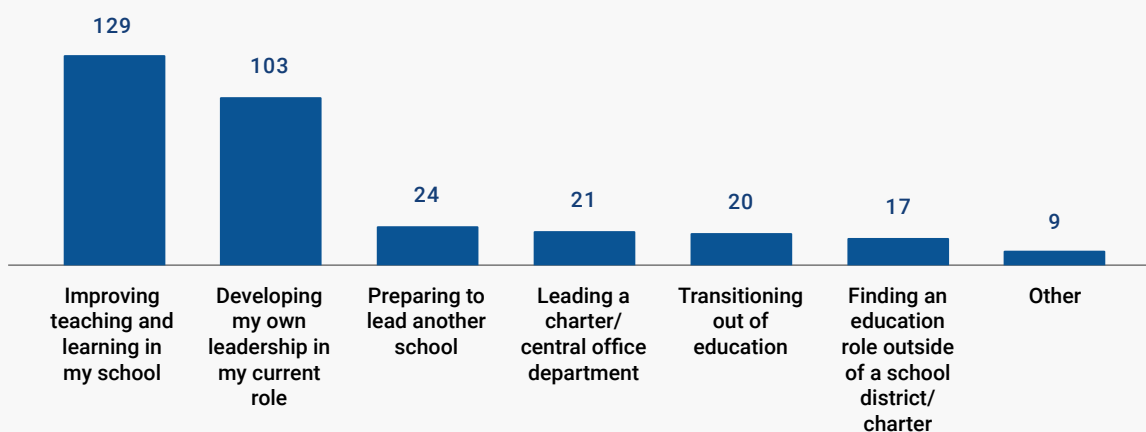


19. At this point in time, my career goals are:

- Improving teaching and learning in my school.
- Developing my own leadership in my current role.
- Preparing to lead another school.
- Leading a charter/central office department.
- Finding an education role outside of a school district/charter.
- Transitioning out of education.
- Other (please specify)

(Answered: 144 | Skipped: 27)

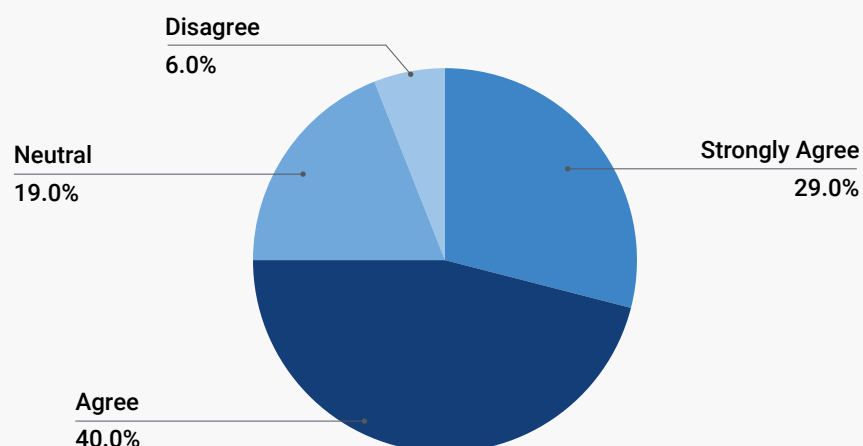
Fig. 24 | Respondents' current career goals



20. My existing professional development options are aligned to my current career goals.

(Answered: 143 | Skipped: 28)

Fig. 25 | Percentage of respondents who feel their professional development options are aligned – or not – with their career goals



**21. The most effective professional development for me includes the following features:
(Select up to four)**

- Multiple topics available at the same professional development session (e.g. a one-day session that includes discrete topics such as supporting early childhood programs, managing teacher development and creating strong culture)
- Vertical alignment of professional development sessions where each session builds on the previous one (e.g. a one-day series of sessions all focused on how to build effective school culture)
- Ability to choose my own option
- Expert or experienced presenters
- Direct learning/partnership with other principals
- Direct support from an external coach or expert
- Direct support from my manager
- Strong facilitation
- Short time period (one session to a few days)
- Long time period (whole school year)
- Ability to practice a new skill
- Regular team meetings and/or connection to the work I do with my team
- Other (please specify)

(Answered: 143 | Skipped: 28)

Fig. 26 | Elements identified by respondents that make professional development offerings most effective for them

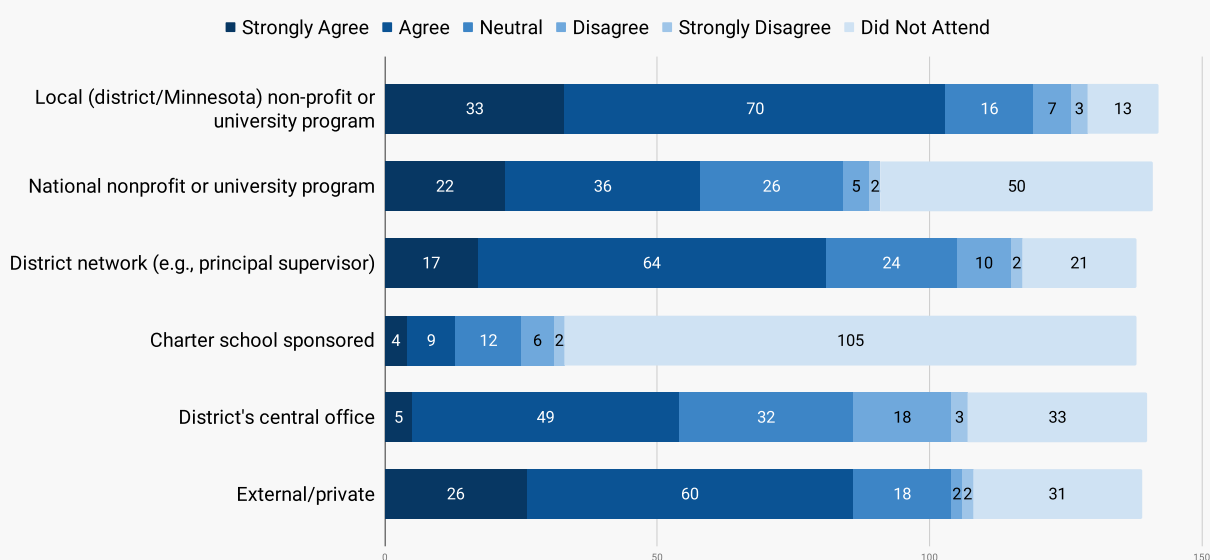


22. Rate the following professional development activities using the rating system below: I found the professional development activity changed my practice.

- Local (district/Minnesota) non-profit or university program professional development.
- National nonprofit or university program professional development
- District network (e.g. principal supervisor) professional development
- Charter school sponsored professional development
- My district's central office professional development
- External/private professional development

(Answered: 142 | Skipped: 29)

Fig. 27 | Perceived change in practice after receiving professional development activity

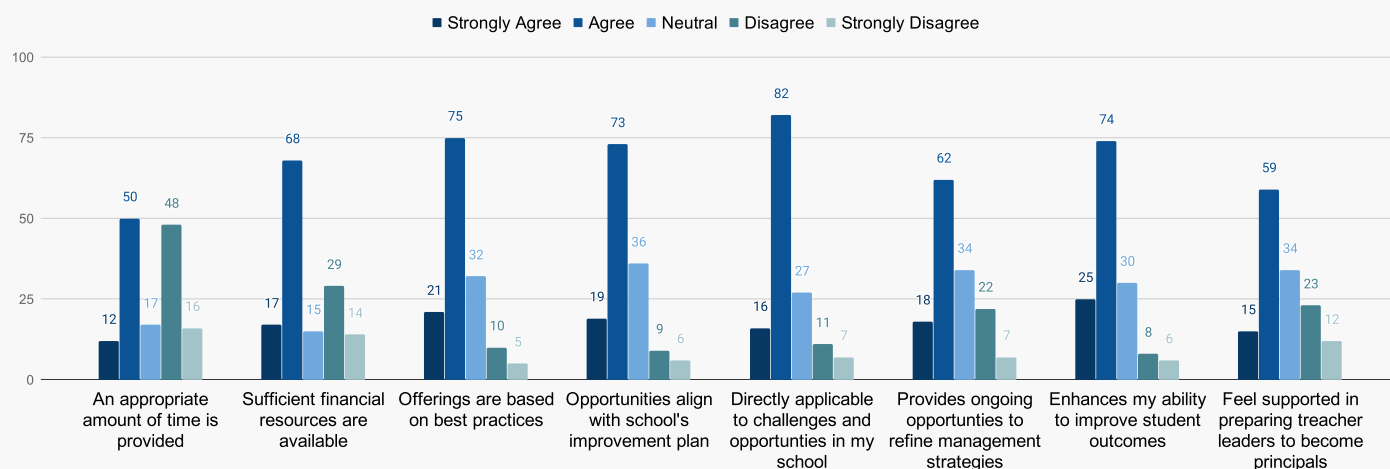


23. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about professional development for principals in your district?

- An appropriate amount of time is provided for professional development.
- Sufficient financial resources are available for professional development
- Professional development offerings are based on best practices.
- Professional development opportunities align with my school's improvement plan.
- Professional development is directly applicable to the challenges and opportunities my school faces.
- Professional development provides ongoing opportunities for me to refine management strategies.
- Professional development enhances my abilities to improve student outcomes.
- I feel supported in preparing teacher leaders to become principals.

(Answered: 143 | Skipped: 28)

Fig. 28 | Statements regarding professional development available to principals in districts



24. Additional comments?

Five respondents provided additional comments for this section. Three noted that their districts do not provide or offer professional development for principals.

- “My district does not directly provide staff development for principals. I have to seek out my own professional learning.”

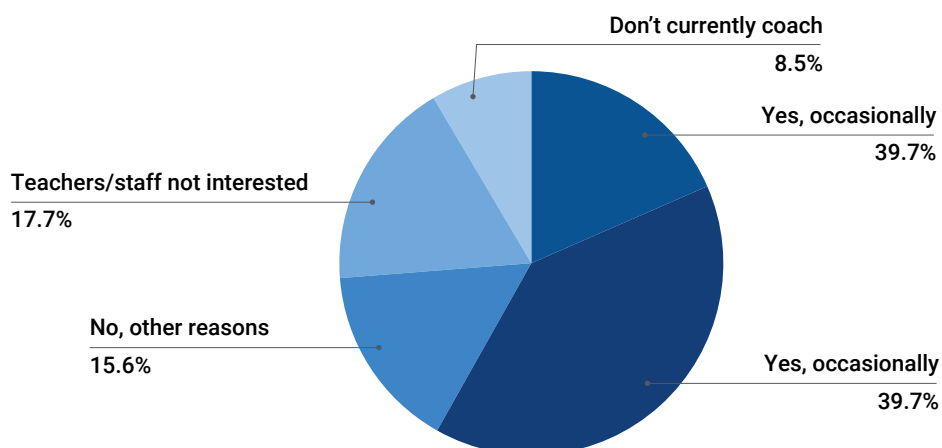
Another noted a desire for connecting with others in a similar role:

- “I am in the role of Pre-K to Grade 12 principal. Having professional development for that would be great since there aren’t that many of us out there to connect with.”

SUCCESSION PLANNING & SUPPORT

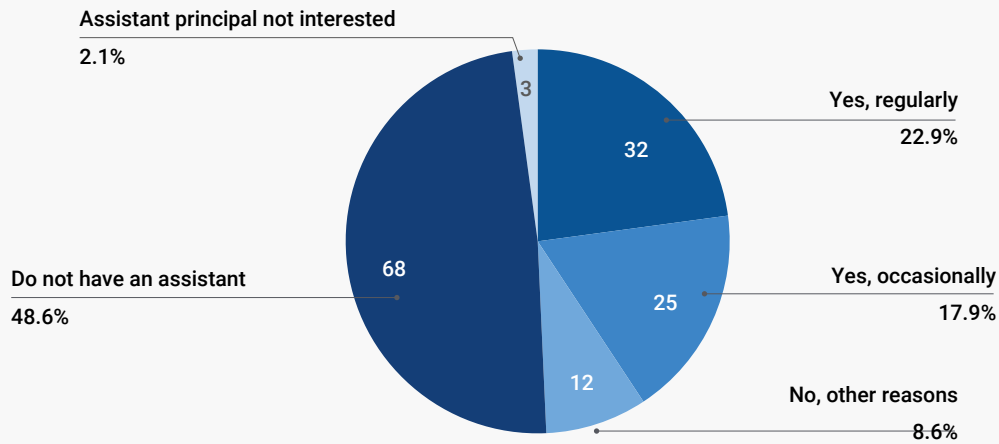
25. Do you regularly spend time coaching and developing teachers or other instructional staff toward an assistant principal role? (Answered: 141 | Skipped: 30)

Fig. 29
Frequency with which respondents spend time coaching and developing teachers or instructional staff toward an assistant principal role



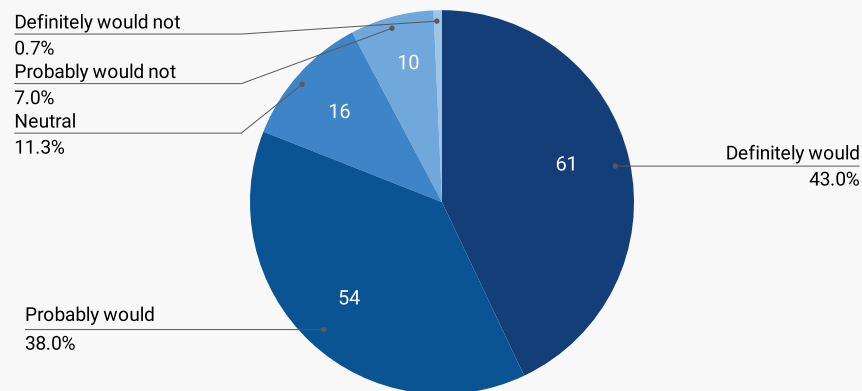
26. Do you regularly spend time coaching and developing your assistant principal toward the principalship? (Answered: 140 | Skipped: 31)

Fig. 30 | Frequency with which respondents are developing or coaching assistant principals towards the principalship



27. I would recommend the role of principal to a qualified friend or family member. (Answered: 142 | Skipped: 29)

Fig. 31 | Likelihood respondent would recommend the role of principal to a qualified friend or family member

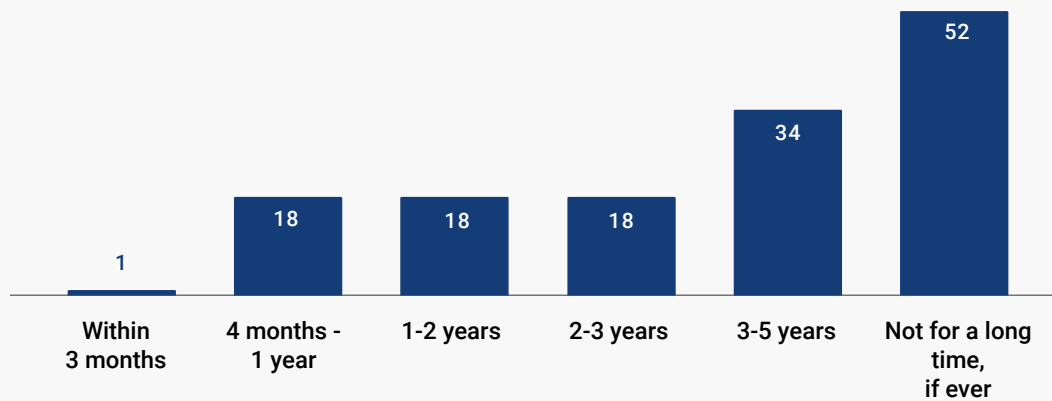


28. I am likely to look for a new job:

- Within 3 months
- In 4 months to 1 year
- In 1 to 2 years
- In 2 to 3 years
- In 3 to 5 years
- Not for a long time, if ever

(Answered: 141 | Skipped: 30)

Fig. 32 | Respondents' expected timeline for seeking a new job, if at all

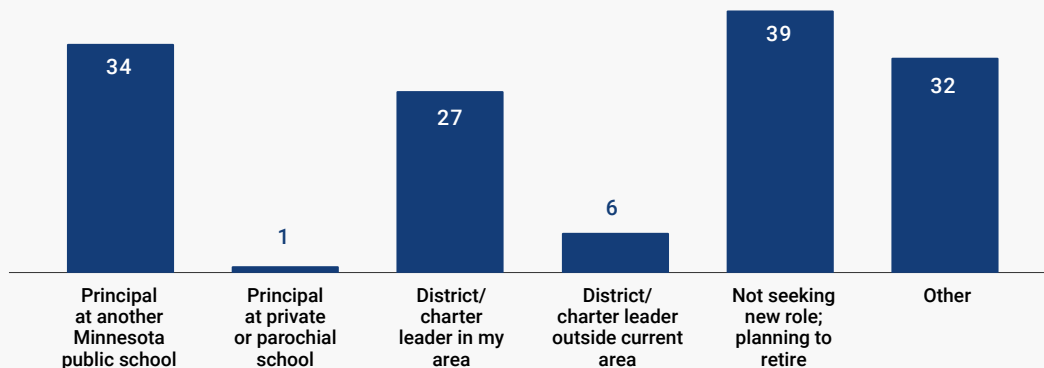


29. I am interested in a new role as a:

- Principal at another Minnesota public school
- Principal at a private or parochial school
- District or charter leader in my area
- District or charter leader outside of my current area
- I am not seeking a new role; I am planning to retire
- Other (please specify)

(Answered: 139 | Skipped: 32)

Fig. 33 | Respondents' interest in specific roles, including current role

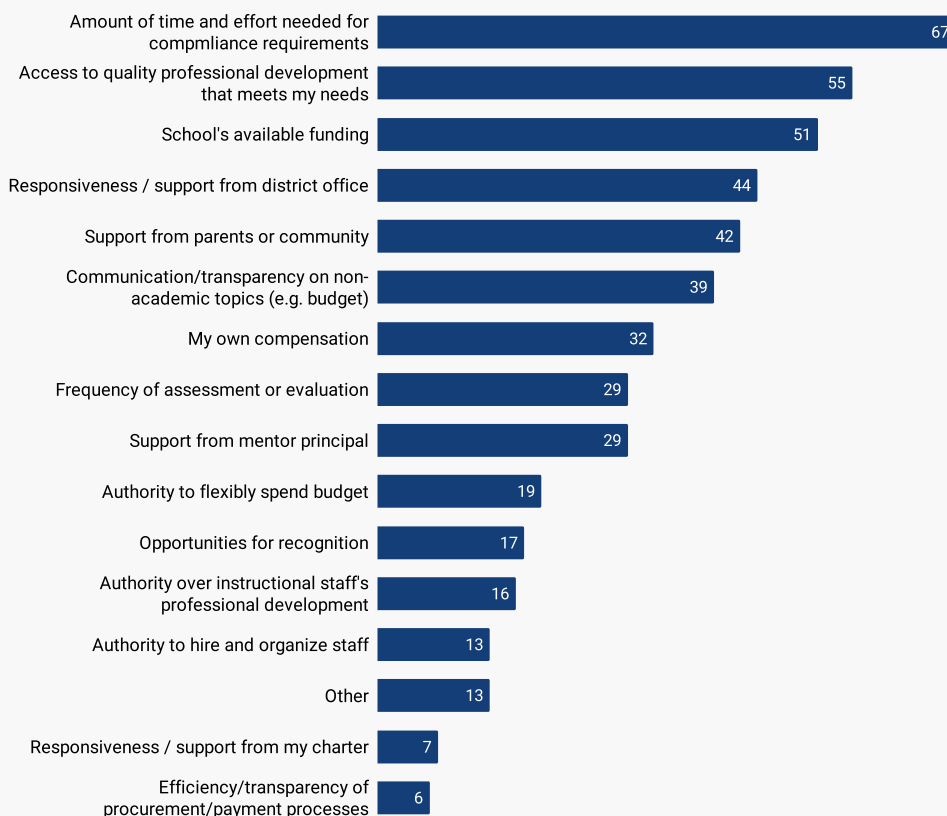


30. Please identify four aspects of being a principal that if changed, would most improve your experience as a principal:

- Communication and transparency on non-academic topics (e.g. budget).
- The amount of time and effort needed for compliance requirements.
- Access to quality professional development that meets my specific needs.
- Efficiency and transparency of procurement and payment processes.
- Responsiveness and support from my District Office.
- Responsiveness and support from my charter.
- My own compensation.
- Support received from parents or the community.
- My school's available funding.
- My authority to flexibly spend the dollars I have.
- My authority over my instructional staff's professional development.
- My authority to hire and organize my staff.
- The frequency of assessment or evaluation.
- Additional opportunities for recognition by my district or school.
- Support from a mentor principal.
- Other (please specify)

(Answered: 142 | Skipped: 29)

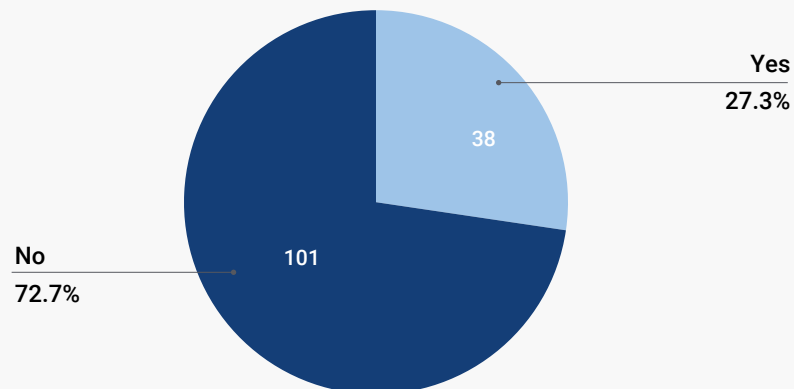
Fig. 34 | Aspects of the principal role that, if changed, would most improve their experience as principal



31. I have a plan to identify my successor and to develop them before I leave my school

(Answered: 139 | Skipped: 32)

Fig. 35 | Respondents with a plan to identify and develop a successor before leaving their school



32. Additional comments?

Five respondents provided additional comments. Two noted that their schools have processes for hiring leaders, and that they are not involved. One respondent noted that they were “developing a teacher to be my successor in a few years but they accepted an assistant principal position at another district.”

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

33. What is your school classification? (Answered: 142 | Skipped 29)

Fig. 36 | Grade levels in respondents' schools

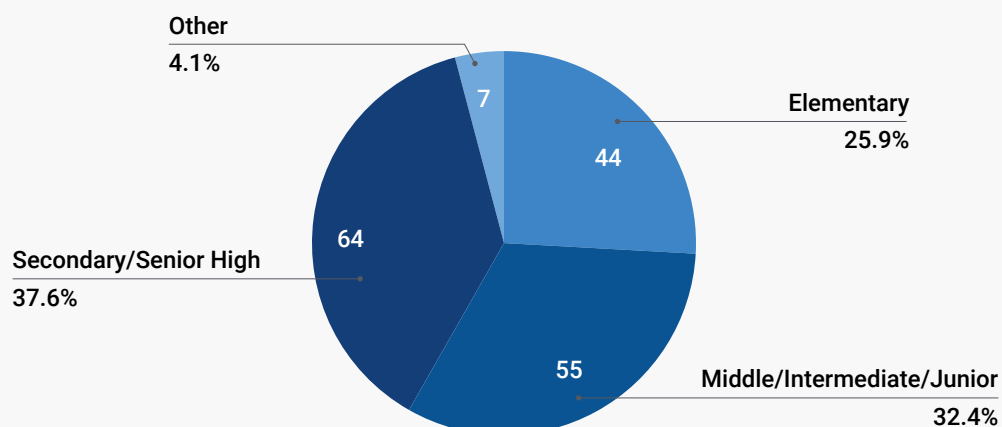
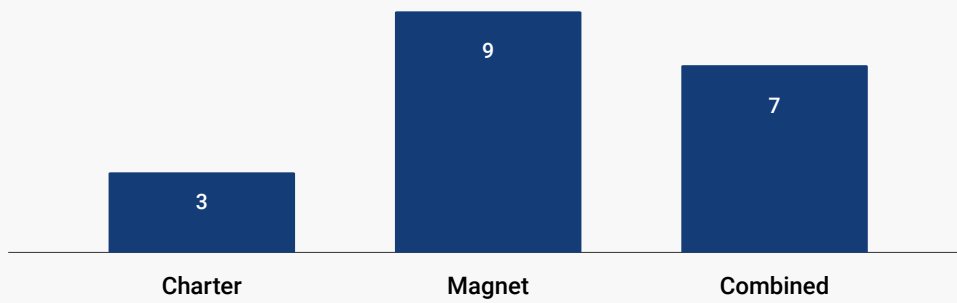
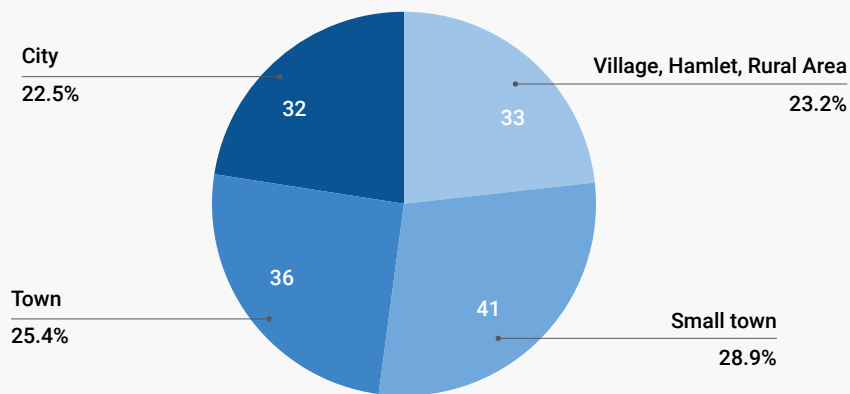


Fig. 37 | Other types of schools represented



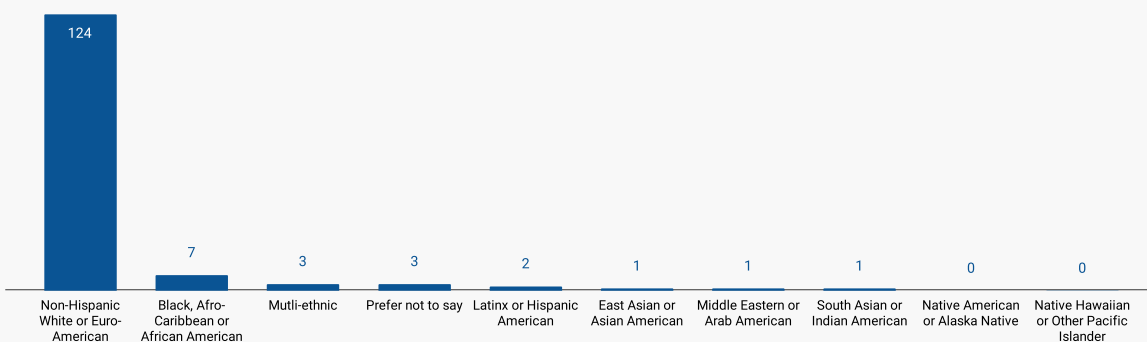
34. Which of the following best describes the community in which your school is located?
(Answered: 142 | Skipped 29)

Fig. 38 | Size of community where respondents' school is located



35. My ethnicity is best described as: (Answered: 142 | Skipped 29)

Fig. 39 | Ethnicity of respondents



36. What is your gender? (Answered: 142 | Skipped 29)

Fig. 40 | Gender of respondents

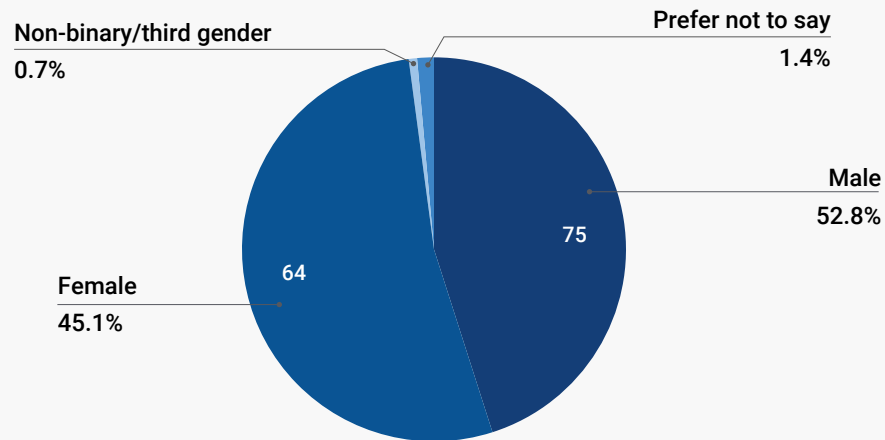


Fig. 41 | Gender and ethnicity of respondents

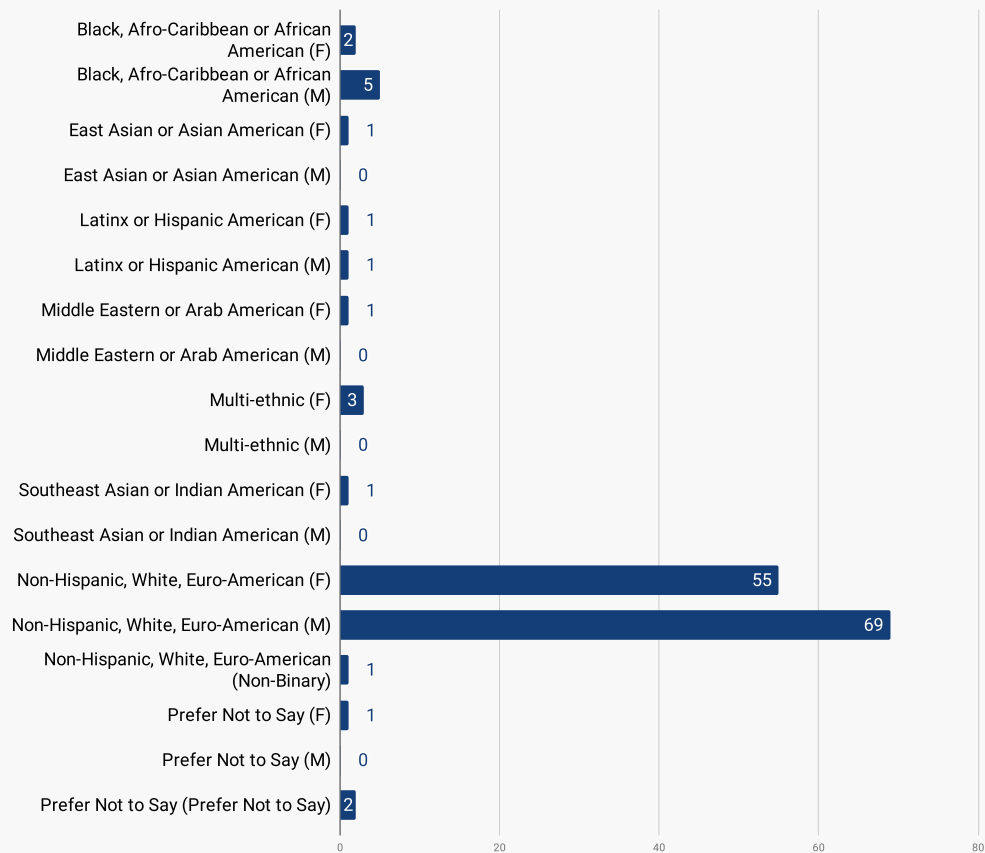


Fig. 42 | Gender and ethnicity of respondents organized by community size

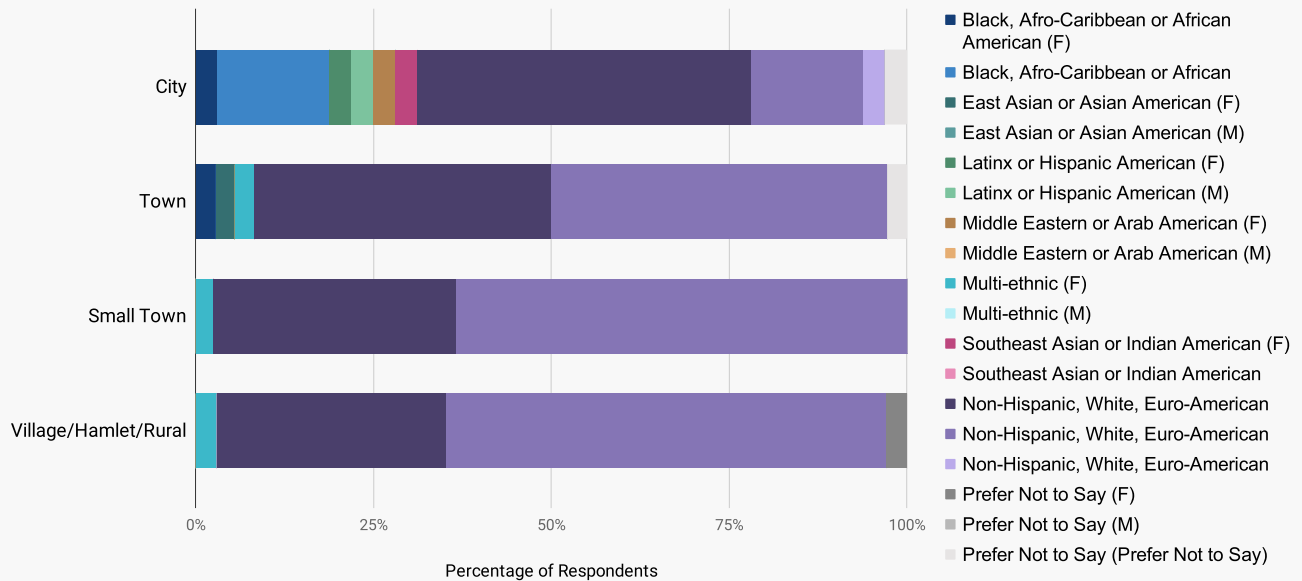


Fig. 43 | Ethnicity of charter school respondents

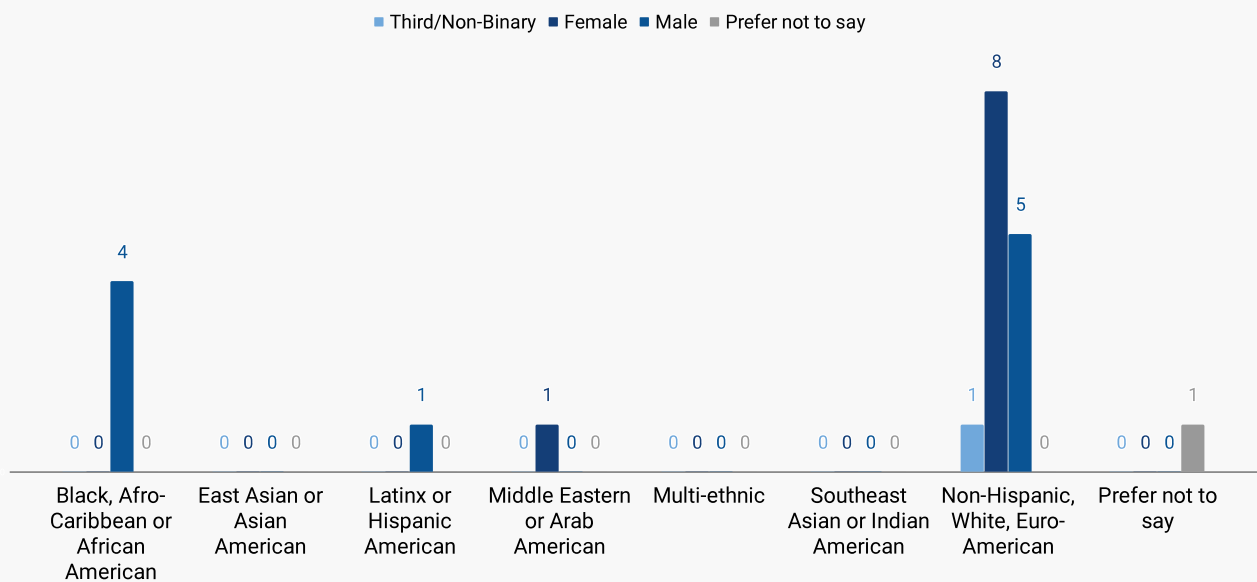


Fig. 44 | Gender and school grade level of respondents

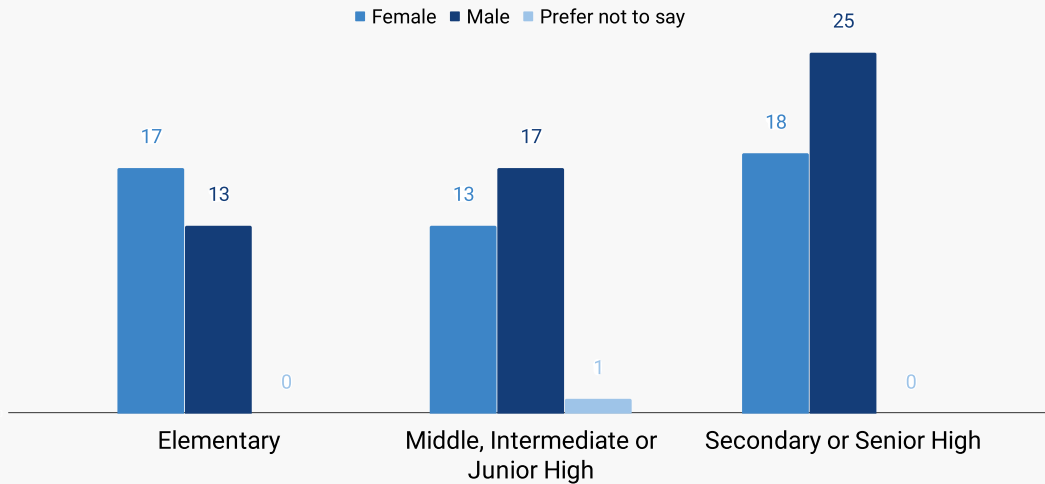
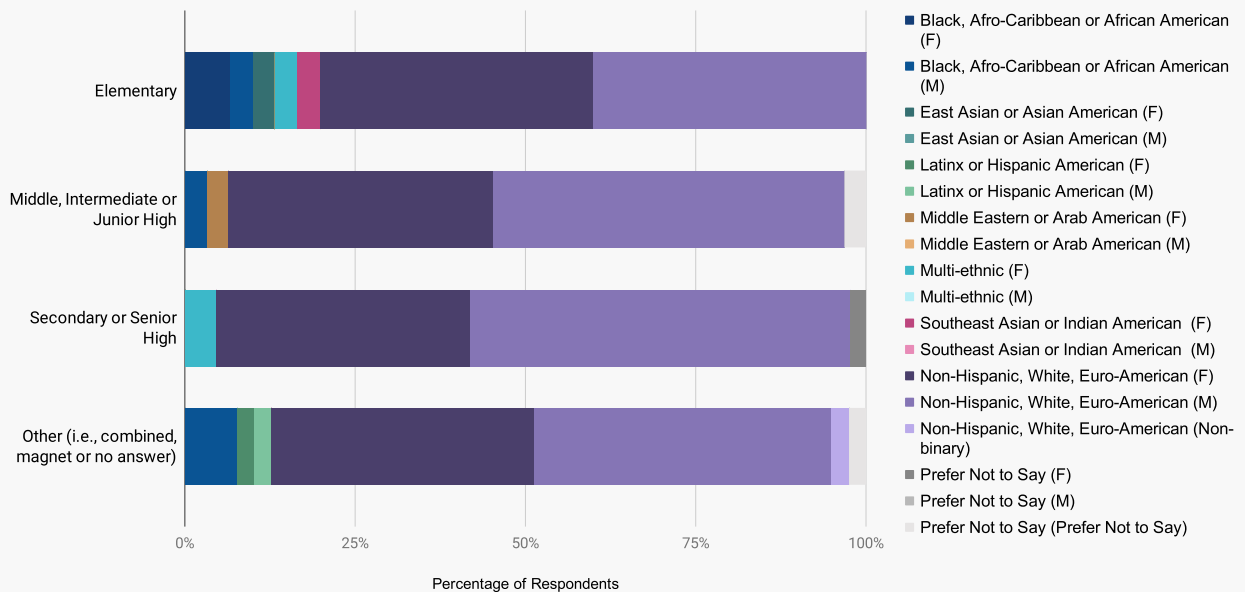


Fig. 45 | Gender and ethnicity of respondents organized by school grade level



37. Do you identify as transgender? (Answered: 141 | Skipped: 30)

No principals identified as transgender.

38. Additional comments?

One respondent offered an additional comment related to demographics:

- “As a first-year principal, I found it difficult to be seen among more experienced principals even though the messaging is saying we need more leaders of color.”

KEEP ME INFORMED (OPTIONAL)

39. I would like to receive information about attending an in-person listening session in my region this year. (Answered: 131 | Skipped: 40)

Fig. 46 | Percentage of respondents interested in attending a listening session

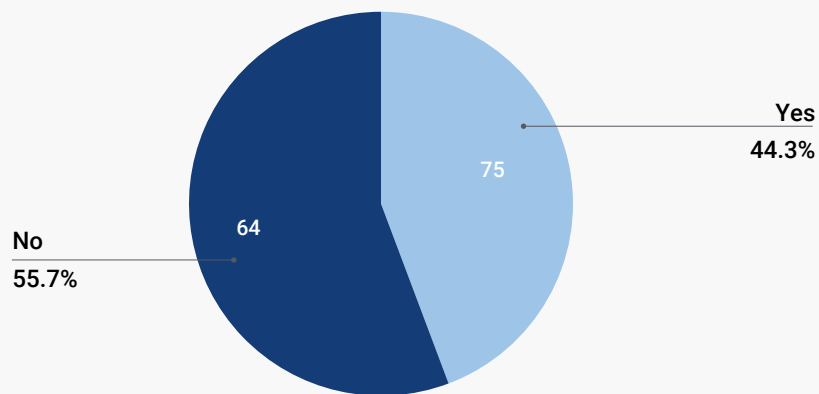
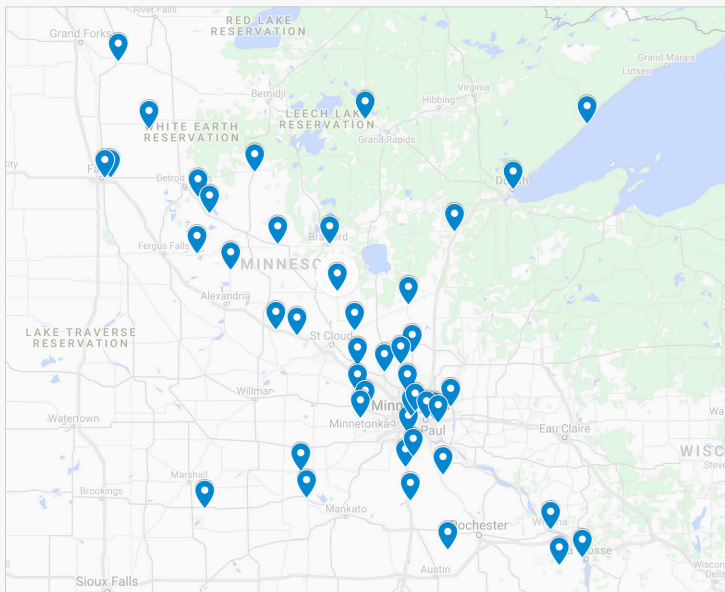


Fig. 47 | Cities of respondents interested in attending a listening session



40. Contact information

To maintain confidentiality, contact information provided will not be included in this report.