FACT SHEET 2016

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS: AN OCCUPATIONAL OVERVIEW

From college deans to high-school principals to private day-care directors, school administrators are tasked with providing essential educational, curricular, and financial leadership, as well as ensuring the smooth day-to-day operations of our nation’s education institutions.

This fact sheet outlines: general workforce information about school administrators, their education, their diversity, prevailing wages and wage differences, union benefits for school administrators, the role of school administrators in student achievement, and their everyday challenges.

General Information

- In 2015, there were approximately 928,000 education administrators in the U.S. This broad category includes administrators at all levels of public and private education including, pre-school and day care, K-12, technical and vocational training, and post-secondary education.\(^1\)
- This figure represents a 10.5 percent decrease in the number of education administrators since 2010. The number of administrators has fluctuated significantly in the past decade, by as much as 90,000 and as little as 7,000 per year.\(^2\)
- In the 2013-2014 school year there were approximately 50 million children enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools and an additional 5.4 million children enrolled in private elementary and secondary schools.\(^3\) While the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) predicts public school enrollment to grow by three percent to 51.4 million by the 2025-2026 school year, this does not necessarily correlate to equivalent employment growth among school administrators.\(^4\) Programs aimed at expanding early childhood or post-secondary education, changes to school and district structures, or budgetary contraction are only some of the factors that may affect the number of job opportunities for school administrators in the future.

Education and Experience

- In K-12 education, many states and districts require administrators, including principals, assistant principals, and district administrators to have a master’s degree in education administration, educational leadership, or a related field. The 2011-2012 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) reported that less than two percent of public K-12 principals had a bachelor’s degree or less as their highest degree earned, and 62 percent had a master’s degree.\(^5\)
• In private K-12 schools, 31 percent of principals had a bachelor’s degree or less as their highest degree earned, while approximately half held a master’s degree.6

• Post-secondary administration occupations are also likely to require a relevant master’s degree. Preschool and childcare center directors however, are more likely to require only a bachelor’s degree.7

• Many K-12 principals were classroom teachers prior to taking administrative positions. In 2007-2008, the average years of prior K-12 teaching experience for public school principals (excluding assistant principals) was 12.7 years, while for private school principals the average was 10.2 years. These averages include those who did not teach prior to taking administrative positions. Men, on average, had fewer years of teaching experience than women did, in both public and private K-12 schools.8

• Approximately 21.9 percent of all master’s degrees granted in 2012-2013 were in education, a number rivaled only by master’s degrees in business.9 While recipients are not limited to those entering administrative careers, this number is likely influenced at least in part, by certification requirements for both teachers and administrators in many states.

Demographic Data
• In 2015, 13.4 percent of education administrators were Black or African American, 3.8 percent were Asian, and 9.3 percent were Hispanic or Latino.10

• While the majority of all educational administrators in 2015 were women (65.7 percent), other sources suggest that women are concentrated in some occupations within the field more than others.11
  o In 2011-2012, 52 percent of public K-12 school principals were women. However, this distribution was not constant across public school types. In public primary schools, for example, 64 percent of principals were women; however, in public middle schools, only 42 percent were women and in public high schools, only 30 percent were women.12
  o This varied concentration may explain, in part, the persistent wage differential between men and women in this field. In 2015, the median weekly earnings for women in education administration were 21 percent lower than those for men.13

• In higher education, women accounted for just 26 percent of college presidencies, while minorities accounted for 14 percent in 2012.14

Wages and Benefits
• The mean annual wage for elementary and secondary administrators was $92,940 in 2015. For the same year, the mean annual wage was $102,610 for postsecondary administrators and $46,760 for preschool and childcare center administrators.15

• Benefits and wages for principals vary significantly depending on geography and the size and level of the institution in which they work. In 2011-12, principals in the Mid-East region of the U.S. averaged much higher salaries than other regions, while the Southwest reported the lowest average salaries. Senior high school principals also reported higher average salaries than primary or middle school principals.16
The 2011-12 SASS also reported that the base salaries for suburban K-12 principals were higher than those for principals in city, town, or rural schools. Cities had the second highest base salaries while rural schools had the lowest. These differences could be a function of differences in tax bases, cost of living, and/or labor market forces.


Similar patterns emerge in post-secondary administration. Post-secondary or higher education administration is a broad occupational group that includes hundreds of distinct job titles. A 2014-2015 study of administrative compensation by the College and University Professional Association of Human Resources reported that salaries for post-secondary administrators ranged from less than $56,000 for campus Greek life administrators to over $492,213 for chief administrators in university hospitals or medical centers.

Administrators in doctoral and master’s granting programs generally report higher average salaries than those with similar jobs titles in bachelor’s degree or two-year programs.

The Union Advantage

In 2015, 18.8 percent of education administrators were union members.

On average, school administrators who belong to unions have higher salaries and better benefits than those who do not. In 2015, school administrators who belonged to unions reported a mean weekly wage of $1,707, while non-union administrators earned $1,386.

The American Federation of School Administrators (AFSA), established in 1976, is the leading union representing public school principals, vice principals, administrators, and supervisors. In addition to offering professional and occupational services, the AFSA offers member benefits, insurance, and a scholarship program.

The AFSA offers four types of direct benefits and one group benefit. Direct benefits include automatic enrollment in a retiree accidental death insurance plan and coverage of $10,000 at
no cost. Other direct benefits include: a legal action trust (provided members are not found guilty of criminal charges), occupational liability coverage of up to $1,000,000, and disability coverage of $1,500 per month, for up to $15,000. The group benefit covers accidental death and dismemberment for active members.\textsuperscript{23}

- School administrators belonging to unions can also increase their skills and efficiency by attending union-sponsored workshops and seminars. For example, Local 1 of AFSA, the Council of School Supervisors & Administrators in New York, offers a variety of professional workshops and seminars aimed at improving educational leadership, from conflict resolution and student achievement strategies to data technology.\textsuperscript{24}

### K-12 School Administrators: Changing Roles and Challenges for the Future

Federal policies and initiatives, including the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (formerly No Child Left Behind) and President Obama’s Race to the Top grant program, have focused attention on the role of educators on student performance. Despite the often polarizing climate around education reform, education administrators, while not always the center of the debate, remain an essential factor in ensuring student success.

- In high performing schools, administrators play a crucial role in establishing high expectations for students and teachers, communicating a clear plan for student achievement and teacher cooperation, and making expectations for state and federal standards clear. They also work to create an environment where everyone has a stake in school improvement.\textsuperscript{25}

- As a rule of thumb, K-12 principals are expected to be highly dynamic individuals, who often anticipate unexpected daily events. Even so, principals have a set of roles and responsibilities that are now changing in response to the continuing changes to the nation’s education policies. The 2012 MetLife Survey of the American Teacher found that 69 percent of principals reported their job responsibilities were different than those they had five years earlier and 75 percent reported that they felt their jobs were too complex.\textsuperscript{26}

- In 2012, over half of principals surveyed also reported their budgets had decreased in the last 12 months. Increased expectations with shrinking resources may be two factors influencing the nine percent drop in job satisfaction during the same period.\textsuperscript{27}

- Principals have more of an impact on achievement in high-poverty schools with histories of low performance. A 2012 study found that the impact of principals, as measured by the value-added scores based on student test scores, was nearly twice as large in high-poverty schools as in low-poverty schools.\textsuperscript{28} It is important to consider, however, that standardized tests are a narrow measure of student achievement, and it may be difficult to quantify the full scope of principal influence on student learning.\textsuperscript{29}

- The same study found that a major percentage of this influence on student performance is a function of a given principal’s role in recruiting and retaining a quality teaching force in their school. While principals are not always directly involved in curricular decisions, their ability to function as effective leaders can translate to improved higher performance on high-stakes standardized tests.\textsuperscript{30}

- School administrators serve as a conduit between the district and the classroom. In the most effective relationships, the district provides strong guidance on curriculum and student achievement goals, which the school administration is able to share with teachers and implement in the school. Often using test scores to address the students’ academic needs,
administrators develop strategies and goals for overall academic improvement in the school.\textsuperscript{31}

- Additionally, principals and other school administrators are charged with the responsibility to engage parents and the community in improving student achievement. Schools with a greater connection to their community and increased parental involvement have recorded higher rates of student achievement.\textsuperscript{32}

- Finally, principals and other school administrators in well-funded schools can improve student achievement by obtaining resources to serve students and teachers, most importantly textbooks and classroom materials.\textsuperscript{33}

**Persistent Challenges Facing School Administrators**

As the school-age population increases, the U.S. Department of Labor predicts that education institutions will have to be increasingly flexible when dealing with changes in funding and student educational interests.\textsuperscript{34} These kinds of executive decisions will further increase the importance of school administrators. In addition to these long-term strategy decisions, administrators deal with, on a daily basis, changing federal education standards, budgetary shortfalls, overcrowded classrooms, and safety issues.

- States across the country have been providing less education funding per student since the start of the economic recession in 2008. According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 31 states spent less per student during the 2013-2014 school year than they did before the start of the recession. Of these states, 15 spent 10 percent less per student than they did before 2008. In some cases, where per student spending has increased, the increase was not large enough to offset spending cuts from previous years. Additionally, in 15 states, per student funding for the 2014 fiscal year is lower than it was in the 2013 fiscal year.\textsuperscript{35}

- Funding shortages have burdened administrators with making cuts in spending and has resulted in teacher and staff layoffs. School districts began cutting teaching positions at the start of the recent economic recession, and as of August 2013, school districts have eliminated 324,000 positions.\textsuperscript{36}

- Although many factors affect teacher retention, school administrators play a large role in ensuring teacher satisfaction and promoting teacher retention.\textsuperscript{37} Research has shown that higher principal turnover leads to greater teacher turnover, and that principal turnover has direct negative impacts on student and school-wide achievement.\textsuperscript{38}

- Issues with school discipline will further challenge school administrators, as 47 percent of them believe they already spend a disproportionate amount of time managing disciplinary issues, according to one Government Accountability Office study.\textsuperscript{39}

- Overall, 39 percent of public schools (approximately 32,300 schools) took at least one serious disciplinary action against a student—including suspensions lasting five days or more, expulsion, and transfers to specialized schools—for specific offenses during the 2009–10 school year. This is a seven percent decrease compared to the 2007-08 school year.\textsuperscript{40} Primary schools are less likely than middle or high schools to experience a violent incident. While 63 percent of primary schools experienced a violent incident during the 2009-10 school year, 91 percent of middle schools and 91 percent of high schools reported at least one violent occurrence.\textsuperscript{41}
In general, the percentage of principals reporting discipline problems was higher in large schools than in small schools. Thirty-four percent of principals at schools with 1,000 or more students reported that student acts of disrespect for teachers occurred at least once a week, whereas 17 percent of principals at schools with 300-499 students reported this discipline problem.42

The Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE) comprises 22 AFL-CIO unions representing over four million people working in professional and technical occupations. DPE-affiliated unions represent: teachers, college professors, and school administrators; library workers; nurses, doctors, and other health care professionals; engineers, scientists, and IT workers; journalists and writers, broadcast technicians and communications specialists; performing and visual artists; professional athletes; professional firefighters; psychologists, social workers, and many others. DPE was chartered by the AFL-CIO in 1977 in recognition of the rapidly growing professional and technical occupations.

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