

Executive Summary

Promoting the Principalship A Maine Principals' Association White Paper

Principals, superintendents, teachers, and university instructors contributed to this report. The discussions were both rich and powerful and noted the alarming disconnect between the number of building administrators approaching retirement and the shortage of teachers, though often qualified, degreed and certified, wanting or willing to become principals. Contributors to this report developed beliefs as to why many of those teachers are not interested or willing. Perhaps more importantly, strategies were developed for the Maine Principals' Association, administrator preparation programs, state government, veteran principals, aspiring principals, superintendents, school boards and the public to address these issues.

In the words of one principal, "It's the package, not the individual issues." No single reason evolved as to why this generation of teachers does not aspire to the principalship in sufficient numbers.

From both research and conversation, four major concerns rose above all others. Time, stress, expectations and financial considerations consistently topped every list.

Time is a huge factor. Practicing principals reported working 60, 70, and even 80 hours some weeks. The school day is a fulltime job. Adding additional hours per day for committee meetings, athletic and activities events, school board meetings, etc., saps energy and enthusiasm and often creates personal relationship issues at home. Even daytime meetings, though more convenient, can force principals to spend evenings and weekend "clearing the desk." Those who are principals feel trapped by time and those with potential to be administrators don't wish to become trapped.

Stress from the pressures of the principalship is an issue for principals as well as for those who might aspire to the position. There are many different stress factors, usually the result of unrealistic expectations either external or self induced. Stress can be a good motivator to a point but should not interfere with the ability to do the job effectively.

The third major issue is one of expectations. There are expectations placed on the principal by students, parents, staff, superintendents, school boards and communities. Unfortunately, there is often little agreement among and within those constituencies as to what the expectations are. Add the expectations that the principal holds for him/herself and we create a recipe for disaster. In trying to please everyone we satisfy no one including ourselves.

Salary is an issue but benefits may be as important. Principals feel "under appreciated" when salaries, health insurance benefits, etc., do not represent an increased work year prorated at a minimum to the salary and benefits of veteran teachers. Inadequate Maine state retirement benefits and health insurance coverage are detriments to principals entering or remaining in the profession.

Other findings include:

- If time and expectations were appropriately addressed, stress and finances might become less of a concern
- The principal is the single most important individual in a successful school. The superintendent is the most important individual in determining the success of the principal
- Principals feel prepared for the theoretical aspects of leadership but are often unprepared about the reality of the job.

Recommendations include:

- Active principals must promote the principalship in a positive manner
- Principals, superintendents and boards must reach mutual agreement concerning the time necessary to achieve reasonable, professional responsibility
- Ever-changing professional development needs must be supported including a formal induction and mentoring program
- The superintendent directs the board in policy decisions and both provide support and opportunity for the principal to lead the school
- Principals, superintendents, and school boards establish clear, measurable expectations and define them in writing. The culture of the community must be a clear match with the skills, beliefs, and personality of the principal
- The principal must be provided with fiscal and human resources in order to be both educational leader and building manager
- Salary, benefits, paid dues, and multi-year contracts should all reflect the importance of the position of principal
- State government should address inadequacies in state retirement and health insurance benefits

The Maine Principals' Association and administrator preparation programs share many common opportunities to prepare aspiring administrators and to support those presently serving as active principals. Opportunities need to be provided for professional development resulting in alternate pathways to certification. Training needs to be offered around issues of time and stress management. Formal programs for a three to five year induction process must be developed with a quality, funded, mentoring program in place and available to every new principal. The MPA and administrator preparation programs should work to provide the best of both theory and reality to aspiring principals in all regions of the state. More consideration must be given to providing professional development appropriate to the different phases of a principal's career. At least three phases meeting the needs of induction, continued growth, and veteran principals should be considered. Experienced principals, together with superintendents and boards, should give increased consideration to the value of sabbaticals.

For those many principals who lead their students, staff, and communities to success, there is no better career! The variables described in this report lead to a broad list of issues not easily solved by any one of us. All concerned must accept the challenge of ensuring that, within five years, every principal opening will result in a large number of quality, qualified applicants from which to select the principal who is just right for that school and community.

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