

## 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 public and private educational institutions. As the professionals tasked with effectively managing thousands of colleges, universities, primary and secondary schools and other educational organizations, school administrators must react quickly to keep up with changing educational standards and expectations.

This fact sheet reviews general workforce information about school administrators, their educational background, diversity, wage trends, union benefits, the role of school administrators in educational achievement and the challenges they face on the job.

### Administrators and Students

In 2018, there were approximately 938,000 school administrators working in the United States, including 460,000 principals and other administrators at elementary and secondary schools, 299,000 administrators at colleges and universities, 95,000 at child and day care providers and more than 50,000 working at trade schools and other educational service providers.<sup>2</sup> This represents a 26 percent increase from the number of school administrators in 2013 and an 11 percent increase from 2008.<sup>3</sup>

Full-time equivalent students per FTE non-instructional staff member in postsecondary institutions <sup>4 5</sup>			
	1995	2005	2015
Public	8.6	9.0	9.2
Private Nonprofit	5.6	5.8	5.8
For-profit	18.6	18.3	17.5

Student to administrator Ratio in 1000 largest public school districts, by locale <sup>1</sup>	
Distant Rural	247.2
Fringe Towns	269.3
Fringe Rural	272.0
Large Cities	273.3
Remote Towns	280.2
Mid-Size Cities	285.2
Distant Towns	290.3
Large Suburbs	295.6
Small Suburbs	297.5
Small Cities	309.3
Mid-Size Suburbs	324.7
<b>Average:</b>	<b>290.7</b>

- In comparison, 56.6 million students attended elementary and secondary schools as of fall 2018, including 50.7 million public school students and 5.9 million private school students. Elementary and secondary school enrollment grew 2.1 percent over the past five years and three percent over the past decade.<sup>6</sup>
- In higher education, enrollment has decreased 12 percent since peaking in 2010 and now stands at 17,839,330 full- and part-time students at all types of degree-granting institutions.<sup>7</sup>

## Education and Experience

- Many K-12 school districts and private schools require principals, assistant principals, and other administrators to have at least a master's degree in education administration or a related field. The most recent National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) reported that only 2.3 percent of public school K-12 principals had a bachelor's degree or less. 61.3 percent had a master's degree and 36.5 percent had a professional diploma, doctorate, or other professional degree. Significantly higher percentages of principals working in charter schools (9.5 percent) and schools with less than 100 students (8.3 percent) had only a bachelor's degree.<sup>8</sup>
- In higher education, where administrator positions range in responsibility and seniority, there is a higher percentage of bachelor's degree holders (28.5 percent), though master's and other graduate and professional degrees are still common. Administration jobs at day care centers and preschools are the least likely to require advanced degrees, and significant numbers of these jobs may not require bachelor's degrees at all.<sup>9</sup>
- Most public school principals and administrators need at least a few years of experience as teachers before moving into school leadership positions.<sup>10</sup> On average, public school principals have 12.2 years of teaching experience, and private school principals have 13.9.<sup>11</sup>
- 18.5 percent of all master's degrees granted in 2015-2016 were in education, second only to business degrees. While not all recipients entered administrative positions afterwards, this number is likely influenced by the degree requirements shared by administrators and teachers in many states.

## Demographics of School Administrators

- 14.2 percent of school administrators are African-American, 10.6 percent identify as Latino, and 3.8 percent are Asian-American or Pacific Islander.<sup>12</sup>
- Overall, about two-thirds of school administrators are women. However, women make up 88 percent of day care and preschool administrators and only 52 percent of administrators for business, technical and trade schools.<sup>13</sup>
- In public schools, women make up 54.2 percent of principals. But they are most likely to be in these positions in elementary schools, where they are 67.7 percent of principals.

Men make up 67.3 percent of high school principals and 59.6 percent of middle school principals.<sup>14</sup>

### Wages and Benefits

- Wages vary by industry for education administrators, with K-12 and higher education administrators making comparable salaries, and administrators of day care centers and preschools as well as technical and trade schools making significantly less.
- There is also a significant gender pay gap for education administrators overall. This can be partly explained by the overrepresentation of women in lower-paying sectors like child day care and preschool administration, as well as the underrepresentation of women in higher-paying administrative positions in higher education.<sup>16</sup>
- It is also important to note the pay differentials that exist within sectors. For example, high school principals make, on average, 7 percent more than elementary school teachers.<sup>17</sup> And within higher education, the occupational classification of education administrator encompasses a wide range of positions, from executive-level provosts, deans and vice-presidents to mid-level managers and administrators in smaller departments, including financial aid, admissions, registrar’s offices and student affairs.<sup>18</sup>

<b>Average Yearly Earnings for Education Administrators, by detailed industry, sex and union membership, 2018<sup>15</sup></b>	
<b>All Education Administrators</b>	<b>\$ 79,092.00</b>
Male	\$ 96,376.80
Female	\$ 73,002.80
<b>Elementary and Secondary Schools</b>	<b>\$ 81,052.40</b>
Male	\$ 79,762.80
Female	\$ 81,411.20
<b>Colleges and Universities</b>	<b>\$ 80,610.40</b>
Male	\$ 107,884.40
Female	\$ 64,396.80
<b>Child Day Care and Preschools</b>	<b>\$ 34,954.40</b>
Male	N/A
Female	\$ 34,954.40
<b>Union Members</b>	<b>\$ 97,130.80</b>
<b>Non Union Members</b>	<b>\$ 75,732.80</b>

### The Union Advantage

- In 2018, 15.2 percent of school administrators were union members.<sup>19</sup>
- On average, school administrators who belong to unions have higher salaries and better benefits than those who do not. In 2017, school administrators who belonged to unions reported a mean weekly salary of \$1,833, while non-union administrators earned \$1,491.<sup>20</sup>
- The union wage differential is even larger for those working in elementary and secondary schools, where 24.6 percent of administrators were union members in 2018.<sup>21</sup> Union administrators working in elementary and secondary schools reported average weekly earnings of \$2,048 while non-members reported average weekly earnings of \$1,372.<sup>22</sup>

- 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.<sup>23</sup>
- 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.<sup>24</sup>
- 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.<sup>25</sup>

### **K-12 Administrators: Changing Roles and Future Challenges**

Once viewed strictly as disciplinarians and operational managers, the role of K-12 principals and other administrators has changed significantly over the past decades. Driven by federal policies, the rise of high-stakes school testing and an increasing emphasis on school performance has brought new attention to the critical role that school administrators play in curriculum development, setting teaching standards, and building an environment conducive to high-quality education.<sup>26</sup>

*“Principals are expected to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations/communications experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, as well as guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives.”<sup>27</sup>*

- Most principals agree that their jobs have been changing dramatically. In a 2012 survey, 69 percent of principals said that their responsibilities have changed significantly over the previous five years and 75 percent of principals agreed that their jobs have become too complex.<sup>28</sup>
- The same survey found that job satisfaction among principals had fallen to 59 percent. Principals with higher job satisfaction were shown to feel better prepared for their responsibilities and were more likely to have participated in professional learning communities with other principals.<sup>29</sup>

The importance of having prepared, confident, and well-supported administrators cannot be overstated. Especially in lower-performing schools and schools with limited resources, effective leadership has the greatest impact in supporting positive educational environments.<sup>30</sup>

- A 2012 study of teachers in 11 Michigan and Indiana school districts emphasized the importance of administrators in the development and retention of new teachers. In fact,

the researchers found that the quality of the administrator-teacher relationship was the strongest predictor of teacher retention.<sup>31</sup> This finding is especially important since about one-third of new teachers change schools or quit teaching entirely during their first two years on the job. Recruiting, hiring and training their replacements is costly for school districts, draining resources from other priorities.<sup>32</sup>

- One of the main ways administrators impact student achievement is through shaping the school climate for teachers and students. University of Chicago researchers found that by fostering “safe, supportive environments with high, consistent and clear expectations for students,” all teachers and students are able to be much more successful on a collective level than they are individually without schoolwide support systems.<sup>33</sup>

### **Persistent Challenges Facing K-12 School Administrators**

With pressure increasing to raise test scores and meet other data-driven benchmarks, administrators have never faced higher expectations. Administrators are also expected to lead schools that can move quickly to tackle changing federal standards, budgetary shifts, rising safety concerns, and overcrowded classrooms - all while preparing students for a changing country and a global economy.

- Funding shortages have burdened administrators with making cuts in spending and has resulted in teacher and staff layoffs. School districts began cutting funding and teaching positions at the start of the great recession, and while many states and school districts have resorted some funding, 29 states were still funding schools at lower per-student rates than in 2008 as of August 2015.<sup>34</sup>
- Issues with school discipline further challenge school administrators. Previous studies have found that almost half of public school administrators believe they spend a disproportionate amount of time managing disciplinary issues.<sup>35</sup> And further analysis found that spending more time on school organization and management (staff and budget management) compared to school administration (including student discipline) is most closely linked to improving test scores and improving school climate ratings from staff and parents.<sup>36</sup>
- In the wake of tragic school shootings such as the ones at Sandy Hook Elementary School and Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School, student safety has grown to be a top issue for school administrators. AFSA has supported the demands of the student-led March for Our Lives movement, including universal background checks, as well as increased funding for mental health services in schools, among other proposals.<sup>37 38</sup>

*The Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO (DPE) comprises 24 national unions representing over four million people working in professional and technical occupations. DPE's affiliates represent teachers, physicians, engineers, computer scientists, psychologists, nurses, university professors, actors, technicians, and others in more than 200 professional occupations.*

For more information on issues impacting professional and technical employees, please see DPE’s website: [www.dpeaflcio.org](http://www.dpeaflcio.org).

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<sup>1</sup> Elementary / Secondary Information System, 2016-2017. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/elsi/tableGenerator.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Current Population Survey, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Over the last decade, year to year fluctuations in the number of school administrators have ranged as high as 110,000 and as low as 2,500.

<sup>4</sup> Student/Staff Ratio in Postsecondary Institutions over Time. College Board. Retrieved from: <https://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/student-staff-ratio-in-postsecondary-institutions-over-time>.

<sup>5</sup> This ratio includes many staff members who could be considered administrators and many who would be classified in other occupations. However, it paints a good picture of the differences in staffing levels at different types of institutions.

<sup>6</sup> Table 105.30: Enrollment in elementary, secondary and degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by level and control of institution. (2016). Digest of Education Statistics. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from: [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16\\_105.30.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d16/tables/dt16_105.30.asp)

<sup>7</sup> Current Term Enrollment – Spring 2018. (2018, May 21). National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. Retrieved from: <https://nscresearchcenter.org/currenttermenrollmentestimate-spring2018/>

<sup>8</sup> “Table 3. Percentage distribution of public school principals, by highest degree earned and selected school characteristics: 2015-16.” National Teacher and Principal Survey. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from: [https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/tables/Table\\_3\\_042717.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/tables/Table_3_042717.asp)

<sup>9</sup> Current Population Survey, 2018.

<sup>10</sup> “How to Become an Elementary, Middle or High School Principal.” Occupational Outlook Handbook. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/management/elementary-middle-and-high-school-principals.htm#tab-4>

<sup>11</sup> Hill, J., Ottem, R. & DeRoche, J. (2016, April). Trends in public and private school principal demographics and qualifications: 1987-88 to 2011-12. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from: <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016189.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Current Population Survey, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Table 2. Average and median age of public school principals and percentage distribution of principals, by age category, sex, and selected school characteristics: 2015–16. National Teacher and Principal Survey. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from: [https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/tables/Table\\_2\\_042717.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/tables/Table_2_042717.asp)

<sup>15</sup> Current Population Survey, January 2019. Reported weekly pay averages were multiplied by 52 to extrapolate yearly average salaries.

<sup>16</sup> Bichel, J. & McChesney, J. (2017, February). The gender pay gap and the representation of women in higher education administrative positions: The century so far. College and University Professional Association for Human Resources. Retrieved from: [https://www.cupahr.org/wp-content/uploads/cupahr\\_research\\_brief\\_1.pdf](https://www.cupahr.org/wp-content/uploads/cupahr_research_brief_1.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Table 4. Average annual salary for public school principals, by years of experience as a principal and selected school characteristics: 2015–16. National Teacher and Principal Survey. National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from: [https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/tables/Table\\_4\\_042717.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/tables/Table_4_042717.asp)



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