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Vermont's Principal Shortage

Vermont and the Nation's Shortage

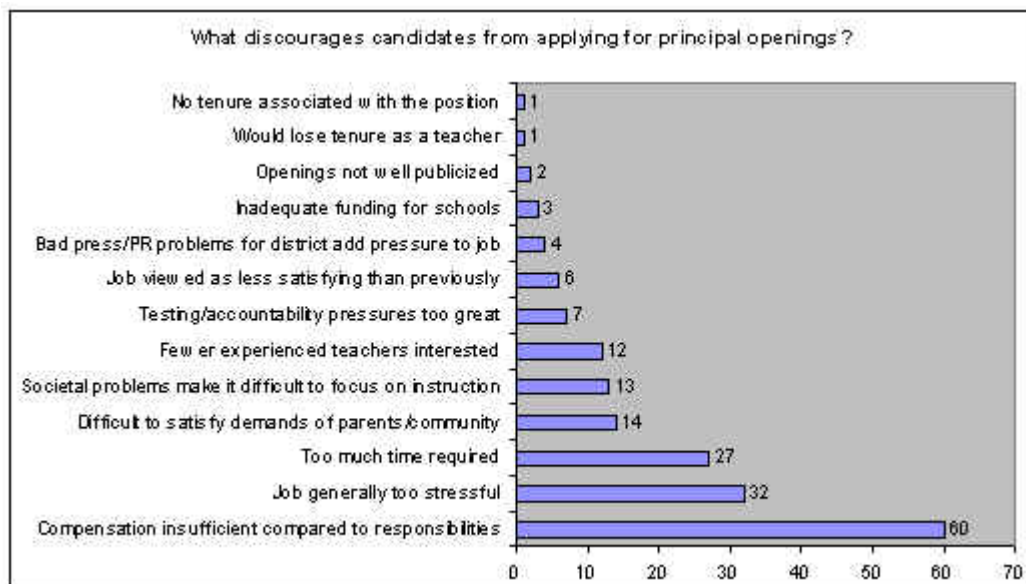
Across the nation, qualified applicants have become scarce for the position of Principal. Rural schools face even harder times attracting applicants; with smaller budgets rural districts are unable to compete with suburban schools. Curtis Rose, assistant director of the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, said the problem is critical, "Some districts can't even find one applicant for an opening. It's definitely a seller's market" (McKay 1999). The shortage affects city schools as well. At the beginning of the 1999-2000 school year 195 of public schools in New York City opened without a principal, "the highest vacancy rate in five years" (Natt 1999). Research compiled by the National Center for Policy Analysis reported that of the 403 school districts surveyed nationally, almost half said they were having trouble filling the position of principal in the 1998-1999 academic year (National Center for Policy Analysis).

Vermont is not immune to the shortage. Many Vermont schools began the 1999-2000 academic year "scrambling to fill principals' position" (Allen 1999). The high rate of turnover is not unique to principals either. Glover Vermont Principal Jeffrey Lindgren left after four years of leadership; the three-member school board of Glover was completely replaced by the time he left his four-year term. Lindgren said, "The boards change and their ideas change and their beliefs change, and when that happens, it's hard to suddenly change and go in their direction . . . It's very frustrating" (Allen 1999).

Causes of the Shortage

The position of Principal has evolved over the past decades; this has put more stress on individuals and made the job less appealing for the relatively low amount the position pays. At the same time the position is becoming more demanding. A great amount of new responsibility has been placed on principals. The average workday and work year has also been extended. The typical workday of principals begins at 7 a.m. and ends at 7 p.m. They work an average of 54 hours per week and they are contracted for an average of 240 days a year. In contrast, teachers are contracted for 180/190 days per year and their workday is dramatically shorter (Warchol and Batts 2000). Principals are expected to attend PTA meetings, sporting events, plays, community meetings, and many other activities outside of school hours.

This situation is compounded by the narrowing gap between the salaries of veteran teachers and principals. Jane Gibson Natt, in her article "Faced With Principal Shortages, Districts Look Inward" relates that, "Salary and work hours of principals would not seem to be a problem—until those quality-of-life factors are compared with the same for teachers. Principal salaries range on average from \$57,704 to \$82,891...However veteran teachers are not far behind in salary—with some earning \$55,000 to \$60,000 a year..."(Natt 1999). In addition to the changing demands of the position and the relatively low compensation compared with the level of stress, some point to a lack of qualified candidates.



However, findings show that there are more than adequate numbers of qualified candidates, they just are not applying for the openings. In an article on the shortage in Pennsylvania, Gretchen McKay states that, "It's not as if educators don't have the credentials. In Pennsylvania, 5,242 people earned elementary and secondary principal certificates between 1995 and 1999. That's 26 percent more than the number of certificates issued between 1989 and 1994." (McKay 1999) A 1998 survey conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals found that of the 403 respondents, 33% characterized candidates for the position of principal as having excellent educational preparation. Respondents felt that 59% of candidates had adequate preparation and only 8% of the candidates were found to have inadequate educational preparation (Educational Research Service 1998). These findings indicate that other factors are the cause of the shortage, including the rise in the number of principal positions and the retirement of many baby boomers.

According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals the number of public school principal positions rose 2.2% from 1987-88 to 1993-94. They also expect the number of assistant principal positions to grow between now and 2005. Principal and assistant principal job openings between now and 2005 will most likely be the result of retirements, as over 37% of principals are over age 50 (Educational Research Service 1998). Increases in student enrollment may also be contributing to the shortages of principals and teachers. The National Government Association relates that there was an increase of more than half a million students from the 1998-99 to the 1999-00 school year, and that the increases will continue resulting in an increase from 47 million in 1999 to 48 million in 2008 (Curran, Abrahams, and Manuel 2000). One important factor in the shortage is that prospective candidates are discouraged for a number of reasons, primarily lack of compensation. The National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals found a variety of reasons for the shortage.

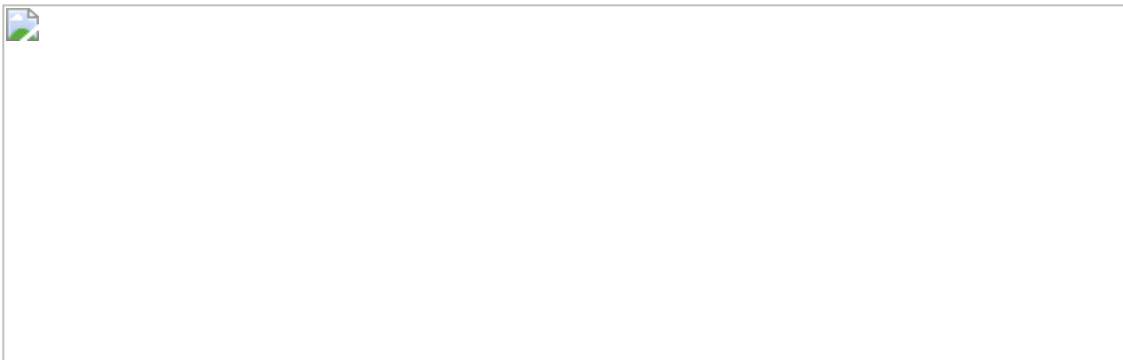
Solving the Shortage

Three approaches to attracting and retaining qualified Principals are increased monetary support, job support and encouragement, and leadership training. While compensation seems to be the most easily identifiable issue for the Principal shortage, the latter two issues create more long-term problems.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals supports a School Leadership Initiative, a colleague networking organization set up to improve the morale of Principals, encouraging on-going job development. The ten expectations for the program are:

- Share information and experiences that have worked for them
- Visit exemplary programs and watch good teachers at work

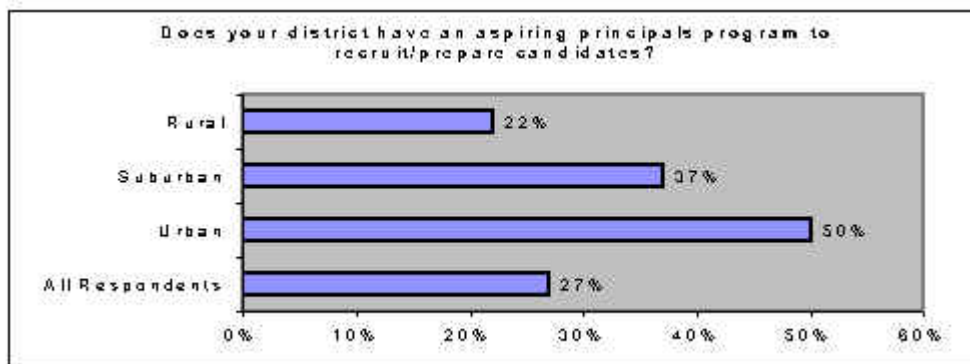
- Learn to use technology in the classroom and for administrative purposes
- Learn research-based methods and understands how to use this data to drive decisions on instructional programs to maximize student learning
- Find ways to support and encourage staff to provide more effective instruction
- Learn how to work with a more diverse student body
- Determine the latest and most effective ways to keep schools safe
- Learn the skills to work with site-based management teams
- Find out how to create schools where students feel welcomed and challenged
- Develop the skills to engage parents and the community in their schools and the education of their students



Educational Research Services for National Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals

Another approach to solving the shortage focuses on grooming candidates for the principalship and retaining newly hired principals. The American Association of School Administrators gives examples:

- Harvard University – Harvard established the Principals' Center in 1981, the first center dedicated to the professional development of school leaders.
- National Association for Elementary and Secondary School Principals – In 1987 NAESP and NASSP established the National Principals Academy as an "umbrella for the organization's professional development activities."
- Toledo Public Schools, Toledo Association of Administrative Personnel, and the University of Toledo – Formed a partnership to create the Urban Leadership Development Program, a mentoring program for aspiring principals
- Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, KY and the University of Louisville – Created the Principals of Tomorrow which allows participants to serve as administrative interns in the school district
- Old Dominion University and Norfolk Public Schools – Provide the Principal Leadership for Urban Schools (PLUS) program. Candidates are provided the opportunity to gain on the job experiences specific to situations and problems occurring in school districts.
- University of Las Vegas and the Clark County School District– Created the UNLV/CCSD Collaborative Principal Preparation Program, allowing participants who successfully complete the program to apply for the district's Leadership Training Program, which prepares them for administrative positions within the district.



In order to solve the Principal shortage many school districts are turning to programs designed to identify and groom potential leaders. More emphasis is being placed on mentoring and support programs for new principals. Recognition of outstanding principals, encouraging talented people to prepare for and apply for the Principalship, and attempting to decrease the disparity between the amount of authority granted and responsibility expected of Principals, are needed steps in solving the Principal shortage. Greater monetary compensation for principals should also be considered in attempts to solve the shortage. The high level of responsibility and time demands compared with the financial compensation is the most apparent cause of the shortage and should not be entirely overlooked in the efforts to create a larger pool of qualified candidates.

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