Challenges for School Leadership

A Survey of Teachers and Principals

Conducted for:
MetLife, Inc.

Survey Field Dates:
Teachers: October 5 – November 11, 2012
Principals: October 9 – November 9, 2012

In-depth Telephone Interview Dates:
Thought Leaders and Policy Experts in Education: August 14 – August 17, 2012

Project Directors:
Dana Markow, Ph.D., Vice President, Senior Consultant
Lara Macia, Research Manager
Helen Lee, Senior Project Researcher
Harris Interactive

Report Date:
February, 2013
Major Findings

Principals take responsibility for leadership of their schools.

➤ Nine in 10 (89%) principals say that ultimately a principal should be held accountable for everything that happens to the children in a school; 74% of teachers agree in 2012, compared with 60% in 1989.

The job of principal is becoming more complex and stressful.

➤ Three-quarters (75%) of principals feel the job has become too complex.
➤ Seven in 10 (69%) principals say the job responsibilities are not very similar to five years ago.
➤ Job satisfaction among principals has decreased nine percentage points in less than five years, to 59% very satisfied from 68% very satisfied in 2008.
➤ Half (48%) of principals feel under great stress several days a week.
➤ Only about four in 10 principals say they have a great deal of control over curriculum and instruction (42%), and making decisions about removing teachers (43%).

Teachers take leadership in schools and think principals are doing a good job.

➤ Half (51%) of teachers have a leadership role in their school, such as department chair, instructional resource, teacher mentor, or leadership team member.
➤ Half (51%) of teachers are at least somewhat interested in teaching in the classroom part-time combined with other roles or responsibilities in their school or district, including 23% who are extremely or very interested in this option.
➤ Eighty-five percent of teachers rate the job their principal is doing as excellent or pretty good.
➤ Nearly all principals (98%) rate the teachers in their school as doing an excellent or pretty good job.
➤ Most teachers (69%) say they are not at all interested in becoming a principal.

The biggest challenges leaders face are beyond the capacity of schools alone to address.

➤ More than half of principals (53%) and teachers (56%) report that their school’s budget has decreased in the past 12 months.
➤ Half (50%) of teachers and 40% of principals say managing the school budget and resources to meet school needs is very challenging; overall, 86% of teachers and 78% of principals say this is challenging or very challenging for school leaders.
More than seven in 10 educators identify addressing the individual needs of diverse learners (83% of principals; 78% of teachers) and engaging parents and the community in improving education for students (72% of principals; 73% of teachers) as challenging or very challenging for school leaders.

Principals and teachers have similar views on academic challenges, but diverge somewhat on their priorities for leadership.

- A majority of educators say implementing the Common Core State Standards (67% of principals; 59% of teachers), creating and maintaining an academically rigorous environment (64% of principals; 62% of teachers), and evaluating teacher effectiveness (53% of principals; 56% of teachers) are challenging or very challenging.
- Principals are most likely to say it is very important for principals to be able to use data about student performance to improve instruction (85%) and to lead development of strong teaching capacity across the school (84%) to be an effective school leader.
- Teachers are most likely to say it is very important for a principal to have been a classroom teacher (79%) and give less importance to leading the development of strong teaching capacity across the school (69%) and using data about student performance to improve instruction (53%).

Teacher satisfaction continues to decline.

- Teacher satisfaction has declined 23 percentage points since 2008, from 62% to 39% very satisfied, including five percentage points since last year, to the lowest level in 25 years.
- Half (51%) of teachers report feeling under great stress several days a week, an increase of 15 percentage points over 36% of teachers reporting that level in 1985.
- Less satisfied teachers are more likely than very satisfied teachers to be in schools where budgets declined in the last 12 months (61% vs. 47%) and to identify maintaining an adequate supply of effective teachers (58% vs. 43%) and creating and maintaining an academically rigorous learning environment (66% vs. 56%) as challenging or very challenging for school leaders.
- Less satisfied teachers are more likely to be located in schools that had declines in professional development (21% vs. 14%) and in time for collaboration with other teachers (29% vs. 16%) in the last 12 months.
- Nearly all teachers (97%) give high ratings to other teachers in their schools.

Challenges cited by educators are greater in high-needs schools.

- More principals find it challenging to maintain an adequate supply of effective teachers in urban schools (60% vs. 43% in suburban schools and 44% in rural schools) and in schools with two-thirds or more low-income students (58% vs. 37% in schools with one-third or fewer).
- Principals in schools with at least two-thirds low-income students are more likely than those with one-third or fewer to say that engaging parents and the community in improving the education of students (86% vs. 46%) is very challenging or challenging.
Principals who feel great stress several days a week are more likely to work in schools where no more than some students are performing at or above grade level in English language arts or math (57% vs. 43% of those in schools where most students perform at or above grade level).

In schools with at least two-thirds low-income students, 37% of principals and 27% of teachers say that most of their students are performing at or above grade level. In contrast, in schools with one-third or fewer low-income students, 91% of principals and 83% of teachers say that most of their students are achieving at this level.

Teachers and principals in schools with more than two-thirds low-income students are less likely than those in schools with one-third or fewer low-income students to give their teachers an excellent rating (48% vs. 73% for teachers; and 51% vs. 75% for principals).

Educators are confident about implementing the Common Core, less so about its potential for increasing student success.

Nine in 10 principals (93%) and teachers (92%) say they are knowledgeable about the Common Core.

Nine in 10 principals (90%) and teachers (93%) believe that teachers in their schools already have the academic skills and abilities to implement the Common Core in their classrooms.

Teachers and principals are more likely to be very confident that teachers have the ability to implement the Common Core (53% of teachers; 38% of principals) than they are very confident that the Common Core will improve the achievement of students (17% of teachers; 22% of principals) or better prepare students for college and the workforce (20% of teachers; 24% of principals).

A majority of teachers (62%) and a smaller proportion of principals (46%) say teachers in their schools are already using the Common Core a great deal in their teaching this year.