

## VPA 2015 Membership Survey Summary

Thank you to those who completed the Vermont Principals' Association survey in the fall. A 22% response rate is wonderful for a *first annual*, and the willingness to be direct, honest and thorough is appreciated.

Yes, this is the **first annual** membership survey for the Vermont Principals' Association, a 100-year old evolving institution. As your state professional organization, we're here to support you. We want to be a truly useful resource and we're examining our priorities and services to better match your needs. We are looking at streamlining VPA-sponsored professional development, launching an on-line collaborative tool for innovation, increasing our services to elementary school leaders, clarifying our role in supporting a variety of administration leadership positions, and more. In order to do this effectively, we need to hear from you, so please do anticipate the second annual survey next fall and help us serve you.

The 2015 survey was sent to just over 700 email addresses (our database of Principals, Assistant, Associate and Aspiring Principals, Athletic Directors, Tech Center Directors, Heads of Schools and a few others). We received 154 completed surveys. Seventy-four percent of respondents were Principals, Heads of Schools or Tech Center Directors, 12% were Assistant Principals and 6% were Athletic Directors. Thank you too ALL who completed the survey.

### Highlights

#### **1. There is cause for celebration and concern in terms of change-making**

- One out of six of you (17%) feel that you CAN make "deep, positive and long-lasting change" in your school (chose 9 or 10 on 1 to 10 scale)
- Most of you (58%) feel that you are making a significant impact and are hopeful (7 or 8)
- One in four of you (25%) chose 6 or lower on the scale – struggling to make deep, positive change - and that's a concern

**2. You are deeply passionate about your work, super-productive, generally feeling good about how you are valued, and most of you worry.** Nearly everyone commented on the question about productivity, effectiveness, whether you are appreciated and valued, and your sense of hope vs. discouragement\*. THANK YOU

Here is a sample of your responses:

- *“some days I feel very frustrated and others I feel like I made a huge difference. The net seems to be positive.”*
- *“When there are low points, I go hang out with young learners.”*
- *“one has to be willing to baby step at times.”*
- *“effective, productive, undervalued, slightly discouraged.”*
- *“I’d say very productive but the expenditure of energy is unsustainable.”*
- *“it seems like policy makers have ignored all we know from the change literature of the past thirty years.”*
- *I am very productive, strongly supported, appreciated and valued, hopeful and often overwhelmed.”*

Some take-aways:

- Your passion is evident and your hope seems to feed that, and vice versa
- If school leaders are any one thing, they are productive. However, many comments reflect concern with whether that productivity best targets the things that are most important.
- Half of all of the comments had a clear and overall positive tone. The other half were split: one half reflecting a mix of hope and despair, the other expressing despair. There is clearly a need for greater connection and support between school leaders.
- There is a general concern for the unrealistic and unsustainable workload.
- Loudly heard as things you want:
  - more time with learners and ability to support faculty and staff
  - resources to match the needs
  - a greater appreciation by legislators for the research regarding education and change
  - greater understanding of your position and role, in the school, community and state. (Perhaps the VPA can do more PR for you, in addition to PD?)
  - There are signs of isolation, loneliness, and “working in a bubble.”

**3. You Identified These Top Professional Challenges and Leadership Issues of the Day** (note: not comprehensive or in any particular order, and some obviously overlap)

- Poverty, mental health and other social issues
- Doing more with less, being everything to everybody
- Time availability and management
- Budgeting

- Isolation
- Act 46 and other reforms, the legislature, the agency and school boards
- Teachers and Staff: quality, morale, how to support, supervision and evaluation

### **VPA Membership and Services**

The VPA is pleased that over 90% of survey respondents are current members of this professional organization.

**Annual dues are included in contracts** for more than half of respondents (61%). We hope that the rest of you will look into this option for the future. We promise to share this statistic with superintendents so that, at contract time, you can negotiate this– take something off your plate!

Of our current membership services, the Marshall Memo is most popular. And, what do you know... **Kim Marshall will be with us all day on Day 1 of the Summer Leadership Academy (8/2)!**

Also used most often: the Vermont Education Directory, Ken Page's informational e-blasts, the legislative reports and early notification of Professional Development opportunities. Please know that these will not go away and the VPA is evaluating how to best "serve" VT's education leaders. For example, we will likely identify very specific "VPA sponsored" professional development that best meets the needs of our membership. We will also be working to increase opportunities for greater collegiality among VT's education leaders, allowing the talented "network" of our membership to connect, share and learn.

Please know that the staff at the Vermont Principals' Association is proud of you; we admire your love for students, for learning and for leadership. We are also aware of the stresses and strains of providing educational leadership in conditions that for many would be untenable. It is our sincere intention to help you LEAD most effectively.

Your thoughts are always welcome and/or if you have any questions about this summary and/or the survey, please let me know. [lwheatley@vpaonline.org](mailto:lwheatley@vpaonline.org)

If you have suggestions for survey questions, please do share. What would YOU like to know about your peers?

Warmly, Linda Wheatley