

Vermont Principals' Association 2017 Education Leaders' Survey Summary

Thank you to those who completed VPA's third annual Education Leaders' Survey. The survey link was shared with our growing mailing list of over 850 Vermont school leaders. We received 181 completed surveys, a slight increase (16) from last year.

Participation by Category:

| | | |
|--------------------------------|-----|---|
| Principals | 67% | (same as last year) |
| CTE Directors | 4% | (almost half of the state's career & technical education directors) |
| Assistant/Associate Principals | 15% | |
| Athletic Directors | 3% | (thank you – VPA will likely conduct an AD-specific survey) |
| Others | 11% | (these included four Superintendents, two Special Ed and two Curriculum Directors, and one each, Directors of Technology, Operations and Student Affairs. |

Section I below considers responses by Principals and Assistant Principals only (self-assessments, leadership pipeline and evaluation). Section II considers all data (challenges to leadership, professional development interests, networks of support, stories from the field).

SECTION I: PRINCIPALS & ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS (82% of responses)

Tracking Self-Assessments over time:

| On a scale of 1 to 8 | PRINCIPALS | | | ASST PRINCIPALS |
|--|-------------------|-------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| | <u>2015</u> | <u>2016</u> | <u>2017 (N=119)</u> | <u>2017 (N=26)</u> |
| <u>Feeling prepared for the job:</u> | | 5.57 | 5.49 | 5.08 |
| <u>Ability to affect sustainable change:</u> | 5.86 | 6.04 | 5.85 | 5.31 |
| <u>Ability to lead</u> (rather than manage; be proactive rather than reactive): | | 5.76 | 5.72 | 5.38 |

Principal Pipeline, Lifestyle and Turnover:

We asked about one's position prior to the Principal-ship, and two questions about one's length of time as a Principal: the number of years at their current school AND the number of years as Principal at any school. We asked about the average number of hours worked during the school year and the average worked during the summer. We also asked how Principals prepared for their position: what helped and what would help now.

Take-away One: *Principals come to the profession from teaching. Or... Teachers may become Principals.* It is not surprising - but it's worth noting – that most of Vermont's Principals started their career as teachers. This is a case for providing leadership development for teachers, paying attention to and mentoring aspiring leaders

around you. The VPA is very interested in keeping the ‘pipe-line’ to the Principal-ship alive with passionate, skilled and thoughtful education leaders. Thank you to those who connected us to aspiring leaders. Feel free to send contact info for others as you think of them (to lwheatley@vpaonline.org)

Take-away Two: *Staying is hard.* We know that strong and consistent leadership in a school serves everyone there *and* student learning. While it is heartening to see that Principals are *committed to the profession* over the long haul, it appears that *leading one school* for a long haul is a challenge. Is this unique to the profession? Maybe not – most people change jobs twelve times in their career. The impact of this trend might be unique, however, in education leadership. The VPA will be taking a look at the impact of and contributors to turnover in Vermont school leadership.

Take-away Three: *Supporting ‘new’ Principals and Assistant Principals is essential.* Given that there are between 70 and 80 leaders new to their school each school year (out of around 300 public schools), supporting these transitions in leadership is a critical need and opportunity.

Take-away Four: *Let’s celebrate longevity!* Lots of Principals DO stay!

| Been a Principal in THIS School (N=121) | | | | Been a Principal in ANY School (N=115) | | | |
|--|---------------|---------------------|---------------|---|---------------|---------------------|---------------|
| <u>Year</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>Year</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>Year</u> | <u>Number</u> | <u>Year</u> | <u>Number</u> |
| One | 18 | Seven | 8 | One | 9 | Seven | 10 |
| Two | 13 | Eight | 8 | Two | 8 | Eight | 9 |
| Three | 20 | Nine | 5 | Three | 10 | Nine | 7 |
| Four | 6 | Ten | 3 | Four | 5 | Ten | 4 |
| Five | 13 | Eleven | 2 | Five | 12 | Eleven | 4 |
| Six | 11 | Twelve | 8 | Six | 7 | Twelve | 3 |
| | | More than 12 | 6 | | | More than 12 | 27 |

Take-away Five: *Principals (and Assistant Principals) are ALWAYS on.* Last year’s question about hours worked per week did not differentiate between the school year and the summer. Principals claimed to average 57.6 hours per week (N=106), with a few working 80, and offered comments like, “Haha!! As many as it takes!” and “Really?” Assistant Principals (N=29) averaged 54.3 hours/week.

This year we asked two questions: one about hours worked during the school year and one about hours worked during the summer, hoping to get a more accurate average and maybe some relief.

2017 Work week:

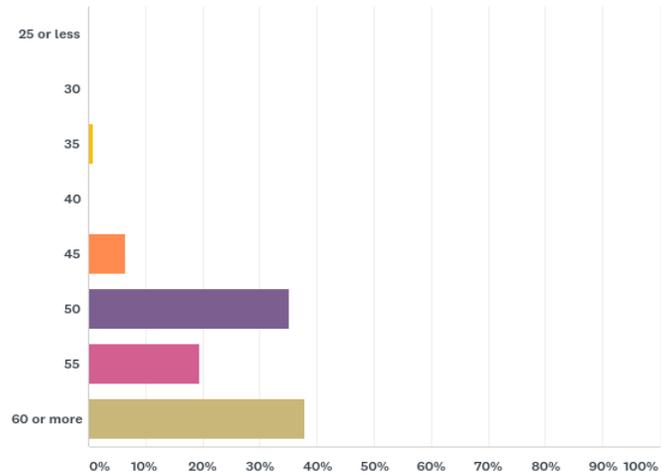
- **Principals** (N=119) averaged 54.4 hours per week during the school year and 37.6 hrs/wk during the summer. (charts above)
- **Assistant Principals** (N=26) averaged 52.8 hours per week during the school year and 35.0 hrs/wk during the summer.

Comments about the work week:

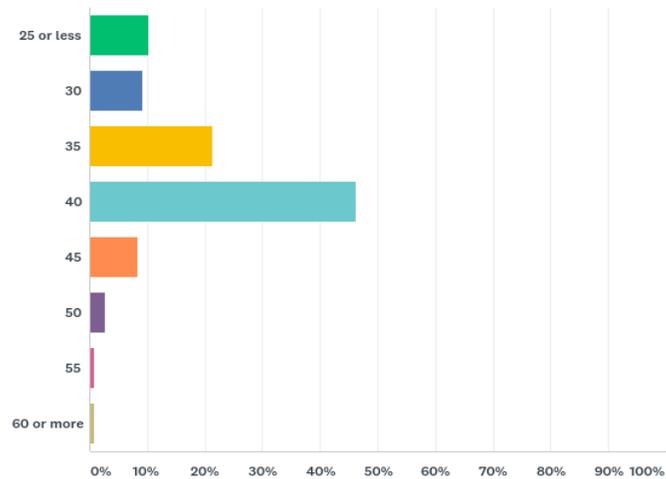
- *“In order to stay even with emails and phone calls, I need to address them each morning and evening as well as on weekends.”*
- *“7am-4pm daily w/many nights out and/or weekend sports/arts events. It adds up quickly.”*

- *“Some weeks I work more like 45 and some weeks more like 55-60 when I have board meetings and student events I want to attend.”*
- *“Typically, around 12 hours a day plus a few hours of work on the weekend.”*
- *And, refreshingly, “If you love your job is it ever really “work”?”*

Q11 On average, how many hours per week do you work during the school year?



Q12 On average, how many hours per week do you work during the summer?



Performance Review – does it happen and, if so, is it thorough?

83% of Principals had received a performance review within the past two years; 17% had not. The VPA appreciates Superintendents who value this process – it truly makes a difference. A majority of the 65 comments reflect a useful, thorough and productive process. Those who expressed otherwise are free to contact the VPA Executive Director for guidance on how to improve this process.

58% of Assistant Principals had received a performance review within the past two years; 42% had not. Of the twelve comments, four were positive, two APs were new to the position this year, and the other half expressed a desire for strengthening the process. Room for improvement?

SECTION II: The following information is based on the full set of responses received. The questions seek to understand how the VPA can serve a range of education leaders in Vermont. The data and comments are reviewed for themes and priorities.

Networks of Support:

The Vermont Principals' Association is a support organization. It's right there in our mission...VPA, "*supporting school leaders to improve the equity and quality of educational opportunities for all students.*" Given the extent of your demanding and complicated work, however, we are fine knowing that we are only ONE of the places you turn. Here's where you go in order of frequency:

1. Colleagues (74% said 'most often' or 'frequently' and no one said 'never')
2. Friends & Partner(s)
3. Superintendent (Principals turn here more often than others)
4. Technology ('sometimes' was most common and only 10% said 'never'!)
5. The VPA (neck-in-neck with #4, 'sometimes' was most common)

It appears that there are formal and informal networks available to you in Vermont and most of you know how to use them. Responses noted the value of their administrative team, a regional professional group, a mentor, scholarly articles, fellow students (Waddington, graduate school), *mom* and/or a walk 'with a beer in the woods with my dog.'

While we are reassured by the low number of people saying they had *nowhere* to go for support* and understanding that sometimes there just is nowhere to go, given the demanding nature of this work, we aim to see these numbers decrease. (*3.6% most often, 5% frequently and 7.1% sometimes)

Please remember that one of the benefits of VPA membership is that you can call the Executive Director at any time. Jay Nichols can be reached at VPA at 802.229.0547 and/or his cell, 802.782.4629.

Professional Development Interests

Four major, often overlapping areas of professional development can be identified from the comments:

1. Leadership Leading change, building teams and school climate, strategic planning, time management, meeting facilitation, conflict management, budgeting and effective resource allocation
2. Staff Development Developing leaders, morale and building school culture, coaching, effective supervision & evaluation
3. Trauma-Informed Schools Schoolwide practices for caring culture and positive discipline, safety, working with traumatized students, restorative practices
4. Proficiency Based Learning Student-led learning

5. Other PD areas of interest:

- Equity, diversity, cultural competency
- Digital leadership – technology for self, school and students
- Community engagement, telling our story, ‘Branding’
- Policy and Law
- Curriculum – development, alignment with assessments

Challenges to Leadership

Four major, often overlapping themes emerge from these comments, as well:

1. Time Use Many time-related comments were about how their time is appropriated. For whatever reasons, many leaders spend more time than they’d like responding to crises/putting out fires, with discipline issues, caring for a few high-needs students, and caring for the building. It is clear that they’d like more time to effectively lead and supervise, for staff to adjust to new things, and for reflection, research, planning and innovation.
2. Trauma The community’s struggles show up with a student at the school door. Neglect, poverty, hunger, substances and more are limiting students ability to be present and learn and taxing the resources available to provide education.
3. Change ...without the time to do it well. There is a desire for clearer vision and greater support from Vermont’s governing agencies and legislature as school leaders absorb the new requirements/laws, prepare and bring staff along, and find and make use of best practices.
4. Doing More with Less Money and Staff. See #1, 2 & 3.

Comments:

“We are asking teachers to cover a broad range of age groups with little expertise in providing a structure that works for differentiating. We don’t always take into account developmental needs of students when we group them and we expect them to flourish socially and academically. In addition, when we ask non-instructional staff to cover in areas, such as the playground, we forget they don’t have the same background knowledge around PBIS or Responsive Classroom and therefore we are putting out fires, and that takes time. In order to provide PD that meets those challenges, I have to pay them extra (for their extra time) and ask them to have some buy-in.”

“Continued discipline challenges with 5% of the student population eat up a huge amount of time and energy. Most of the challenges stem from poverty, trauma and SES factors. Traditional discipline does not generally work and other support structures take a lot of time, energy and money (to train personnel)”

“Act 46, admin turnover, lack of SU clarity so that we can reflect, adjust and move forward effectively...it seems we’re often muddling forward with the SBAC publicity sapping the innovative boldness required to try new things.”

“...we need more time in our daily schedule to address the deep emotional issues of our high risk population (75% free & reduced lunch). The academic demands constrict our schedule and the governance of the district makes it

difficult for my school to do anything significantly different than the other elementary schools in the district. I'd like more autonomy for our teachers to explore and take risks. While I understand the need to be 'research or evidence-based,' new, innovative approaches come from an instructional environment where teachers are provided latitude and respected as professionals looking to hone their craft. I am more interested in commitment than in compliance."

Working with Various Constituencies

Schools and school leaders respond to a variety of constituency groups, and we imagine that negotiating them all well is potentially a challenge to leadership. Groups in order of most challenging to least:

| | | |
|----------------------|-----|--|
| Staff/Faculty | 22% | of respondents identified this as the most challenging |
| Parents | 22% | " |
| The public/community | 15% | " |
| Board | 13% | " |
| Agency of Education | 10% | " |
| Other | 9% | " |
| Skipped the question | 9% | |

This question does not aim to blame. *Rather, the comments illuminate challenges with complexity, change, culture and communication, and not necessarily with a particular group of people.* For example, here are some comments from this question:

Re Complexity & Change:

- *With the implementation of Act 46, there has been a 'distancing' created between the school and the SU board.*
- *I have a very supportive board – our vision, focus and direction are missing in our SU*
- *Clearly there is role confusion and school boards can micromanage. Act 46 will help with this.*
- *The changing demographic (of our students) needs support in a different way and staff are struggling with catching up to that change.*
- *Many teachers quickly form habits and beliefs based on their experiences in their first three years or teaching. Talking about change in educational practices can be met with resentment, rejection and resistance.*
- *Teachers become accustomed to doing their own thing and not being held accountable... Moving towards a proficiency based learning model and introducing more of a student-centered approach has not been well received by many faculty.*

Re Culture & Communication/ Telling our story:

- *The people at the agency are great! But, there is a lack of line authority and communication that occurs.*
- *Because of privacy laws and concerns, you can't always tell both sides of a story. Sometimes gossip is all there is.*
- *Seeing pieces of the situation does not afford them (parents) the best opportunity to understand. We want to share the positives while maintaining appropriate confidentiality. Negative stories get out and they are difficult to counter while maintaining privacy.*

- *Building bridges between the school and parents is slow, communication is often complicated.*
- *My challenge is how to help staff members see ‘the why’ of a student need or instructional shift, and to help them connect ‘the how’ to that why.*
- *As a general rule, parents see the school from the lens of what is best for their child. As a Principal, I have to see the school through the lens of what is best for all students. Those views do not always line up.*

How do you experience Inequity in your school?

This wide, open question, not surprisingly, drew a wide variety of responses. There were, however, themes that emerged as common experiences of inequity in schools:

Poverty & Privilege – by far the most commonly referenced ‘experience’ of inequity. How it shows up:

Readiness - when students from poverty start school with fewer language and social skills and/or some history of trauma. Or, when students from rural, small and/or poor schools come to high school with less exposure to extracurricular activities, less familial support and guidance, and an academic history possibly colored by prejudice.

Opportunities and Access – wealthy students have more after school and summer opportunities, kids in Tier 1 have fewer opportunities for interesting/enriching classes, students who need additional challenges don’t get them, FRL students overrepresented in discipline data, access to PreK, transportation, Special Education eligibility, housing, food security, technology at home, support at home, more.

Resources – For supplies, for field trips, enrichments and extensions, for bus monitors, to train para-educators, to hire para-educators, to train staff to support kids with behavior challenges, between schools in the SU, between schools with HS choice and those without, pay between high school and elementary school teachers, support from the AOE, Special Ed, for PreK, to help with kids in trauma, more.

Mindset & Capacity

Barriers to CTE: bias, transportation in some cases, Directors not included in some state and regional meetings

“All” doesn’t mean “ALL”: the complete separation of Special Ed and Regular Ed, that students should be sorted or tracked, some staff hold beliefs about the ability of, and expect less from, kids in poverty, and some have limited understanding of MTSS.

Race & Gender – conscious and unconscious bias and operations

Other: Parents of means are squeaky wheels, some families do not see the value of education, some families are not welcome – or are uncomfortable – in the school.

Curriculum & Instruction - Quality & Quantity – most often mentioned issues:

- The range of practices, skill and motivation among teachers varies
- Some schools feel like ‘training grounds’ for beginning teachers.
- Materials and instruction are not consistent between schools.
- Access to technology at home
- Other: class size, language courses, more courses, requiring all students to take the same

In closing:

The theme of the 2018 VPA Leadership Academy on July 31st, August 1st and 2nd is “Excellence Through Equity.” Co-editor of the book of the same name, Dr. Pedro Noguera, will be headlining our event at the Killington Grand Resort. In preparation for the Academy, or just because equity matters to you and in education, consider joining us for our Spring 2018 Statewide Educators’ Book Club. [*Excellence Through Equity: Five Principles of Courageous Leadership to Guide Achievement for Every Student*](#) is one of the books we’ll be discussing; Ta-Nahisi Coates’ [*Between the World and Me*](#), is another. Watch the [VPA website](#) for more info, out early 2018.

Thank you for your tremendous dedication and hard work. Thank you again for completing this survey AND/OR reading this summary. We hope you find it informative and useful. Please do share as you see fit. Questions and comments are welcome (contact info below)

The Vermont Principals’ Association appreciates your help as we support the profession by understanding it.
(12/12/17)

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