

The Chicago Panel on School Policy
Climate Analysis Survey



A Principal's Day

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Chicago Panel on School Policy conducted a survey of Chicago Public School (CPS) principals during the 2001 school year. The purpose was to contribute to the informed constructive dialogue regarding the important role of principals – those at the front lines of education – in improving schools to better educate students.

Principals were sent surveys via fax or mail. Some surveys were conducted over the telephone. An impressive 72% of CPS principals took time to respond on topics such as resources, time, motivations, career strategies, and retirement.

Data collection and actual comments revealed an overwhelming number of principals were so busy with activities and administration that they had no time left for articulating the vision, creating shared leadership and planning the evolution of their schools. Theirs is a day consisting of interactions with students, parents, and teachers, telephone calls, paperwork, financial and facilities management, among other duties. Some of the issues the survey revealed include:

- ▶ On average, a CPS principal works nine hours a day, 54 hours per week.
- ▶ Within five years, over 29% of principals who answered the survey will retire.
- ▶ While much of the day is spent on interpersonal relations with students, staff, and parents, there is very little time left to deal with budget issues.
- ▶ Assistant principals are in high demand.

In an effort to understand the job of a principal, the Chicago Panel asked the 586 principals of CPS to share their thoughts and insights into the experience of running a Chicago public school and the impact this important position has on their lives.

INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt that school systems across the country, including Chicago, are facing educational crises on many fronts. Enrollments are up, budgets are flat, teacher recruitment and retention are causes for concern and principals are retiring or leaving the profession in droves. The principal's role is complex; expectations are high and accountability drives every action. Unfortunately, many people are reluctant to make education a career choice because the pressures to get the job done are staggering.

In today's climate, it clearly falls to school principals to thoughtfully and effectively maneuver through the controversies and challenges surrounding the improvement of education for children. Their numbers are dwindling – Baltimore lost thirty-four of its 80 principals during the late '90s. New York City started the 2000-2001 school year with 165 uncertified principals. In the next decade, 40% of the principals now in jobs in the United States will retire.¹ Across the country, school districts are worried about the critical shortage of qualified candidates able to serve as school principals.

A PRINCIPAL'S DAY

What is a principal? In the strictest dictionary definition, a principal is the most important, consequential or influential, a person who has controlling authority or is in a leading position. Undeniably Chicago's public school principals are all that and more. They are leaders, mentors, teachers, administrators, guides, financiers, architects, visionaries, role models, surrogate parents, and friends.

Principals are the binding force that can make or break a school, committed to helping their students and serving their communities. They are always on call, jacks/jills-of-all-trades, dealing with one crisis only to be faced with another. In terms of baseball, think of a principal as playing every infield and outfield position and being the team manager. They are expected to be experts in school law, curriculum

1. Online NewsHour. "Principal Shortage", May 24, 2001. www.pbs.org/newshour/

planning, supervision of instruction, community relations, human resources, student and staff relations, and administration (Fullan 1991). And this is just a partial list of a job where the knowledge base is always increasing and changing.

On average, a principal in Chicago works nine hours a day and 54 hours per week. A secondary-school principal performs an average of 149 tasks a day with constant interruptions (Martin and Willower 1981). Principals feel frustrated with the time demands of their job and the stress it produces.

There is no such thing as a typical day for a principal. What may be important one hour, may not be the next. Much of the day is devoted to maintaining what is already in place: student discipline, staff, supplying resources, parent involvement, and central office satisfaction. Unfortunately, this leaves out the many other duties a principal is responsible for and assumed to have completed on a daily basis.

The Chicago Panel conducted this **Climate Analysis Survey** to assess the complex and changing realities of principals' time. A primary goal was to document the multifaceted role of Chicago public school principals. This survey explored the extent to which principals are able to devote time and attention to the implementation of the school vision, instructional leadership and curriculum development.

The principals were questioned about the following issues:

- ◆ career strategies
- ◆ time
- ◆ Activities
- ◆ vacation
- ◆ resources
- ◆ motivation
- ◆ retirement
- ◆ Instructional Leadership

This survey provided a snapshot, from the principals' perspective of their role, responsibilities, time demands and workload. It explored the extent to which they feel they are free to attend to their primary leadership responsibility of articulating, implementing, and institutionalizing the school's vision. Strong principal leadership – particularly in curricular and staff development – is the cornerstone of an improving school. This survey provided a picture of principal's workload and contributes to efforts to improve schools for children by advocating for quality educational leadership. It gives voice to key issues identified by the men and women working, sometimes seven days a week, in the education trenches.

BACKGROUND

The Chicago Public School (CPS) system – third largest in the nation – is a unique example of the struggle to improve urban education. Recognized as complex and comprehensive in its approach to school reform, CPS' s organizational structure and instructional climate powerfully dictate its restrictions for educational achievement.

During the last two decades, CPS has experienced two major reform efforts: in 1988 the state legislature created local school councils (LSCs) making them accountable for many issues including principal selection and the use of discretionary funds. In 1995, the legislature moved again giving Chicago's mayor control of the schools but continuing to allow LSCs to retain many of their responsibilities. Both waves of reform have been sweeping in nature, creating a wide range of consequences as well as many new initiatives. The schools, while needing to stay within increasingly tighter budget constraints, continue struggling to prioritize and implement the demands of both reform efforts.

In Spring 2002, CPS was divided into six geographic regions with approximately 100 schools in each. 588 principals work in 600 schools; several serve at more than one school. Of the 437,618 children attending Chicago public schools, approximately 85.4% are considered low-income and 13.5% are categorized as having limited English proficiency.²

2. Statistics collected from the demographics page of the Chicago public schools website.

METHODOLOGY

In January 2001, the Panel queried all CPS principals via fax with a written survey. Follow-up responses were completed by phone. Ninety-one percent of the surveys were returned by fax, eight percent completed by phone, and one percent completed and mailed to the Panel.

This survey sought their perspective on their time, workload, role and responsibilities. Seventy-two percent (421) of the 586 principals in the Chicago public school system responded to the questionnaire. Of the 421 principals, twelve acknowledged sent back the questionnaire but declined to comment about their role, leaving 409 who participated. Response rates were comparable across the six regions and linked to the CPS school type breakdown.

Principal participation in the survey		
Number who were surveyed	586	
Number who responded	421	72%
Number who participated	409	70%
Number who declined to participate	12	2%

Survey response breakdown by school type and region								
REGION	SCHOOL TYPE							Total
	Early Childhood: P, K, 1-3	Elementary: P, K, 1-6	Middle: 4-8, 5-8, or 6-9	School: P, K, 1-8	High School	Alternative Placement Centers (APCs)	Charters	
One	1	8	4	47	10	3	1	74
Two	1	7	6	52	3	2	1	72
Three	1	7	7	28	10	2	2	57
Four	5	9	8	46	6	2	0	76
Five	2	5	3	45	7	4	0	66
Six	3	7	1	41	8	3	1	64
Total	13	43	29	259	44	16	5	409

WHY BECOME A PRINCIPAL?

I wasn't planning to be a principal.

The principal was called to fill a vacancy at central office. I stepped up and helped out.

I was on a mission to become a principal.

The Myth: People want to become principals because of the short workday, lots of time off, and little or no responsibility because teachers do all the work.

The Reality: Many who are now principals had not chosen it as a profession. Those who saw past the fringe benefits recognized the good they could do.

More than half of the principals who responded to the survey did not set out to take on the role. When asked if they were propelled into the situation, many answered yes. Others who had not considered this a career choice were pushed and prodded by principals they respected. They were recommended by principals who knew what it took to perform the job, saw leadership potential in them and had faith in their abilities. Mentoring relationships with former principals were instrumental in supporting the decisions of current principals to take leadership roles in their schools.

Told by a very effective principal that I would be good.

I was pulled kicking and screaming every step of the way by a former principal.

Some principals were encouraged by other teachers to apply. In several cases where there was a vacancy, assistant principals were invited by their LSCs to lead the school. Several former teachers felt the school reform efforts begun in the late 1980s presented them with opportunities that were previously unavailable. One principal said the Reform Act of 1988 had made the job more appealing. Others thought that the reform movement had empowered them with confidence to do the job right.

Thought I could do a better job ... liked the tenets of school reform.

Less than 15% planned to be principals. However, those who did went after the position with relish. One principal said it was the ‘*ultimate goal*,’ still another wanted a new challenge. A few saw it as a natural progression, a next step on the career ladder. Others saw it as a mission, a goal from the start of their education careers, a profession they always wanted to be involved in. Three cited strong religious convictions that led them to seek out the job. Several other people went after the position in an effort to do the job better than their predecessors.

I hated my principal and saw the damage a bad principal could do.

WHAT WAS MOST IMPORTANT IN HELPING YOU BECOME A PRINCIPAL?

Practical experience.

Serving as an assistant principal.

Shadowing a principal and being mentored.

The Myth: Teachers are the only people who want to be principals.

The Reality: People use many different channels to become principals. Being a successful teacher does not guarantee that one will make a good school leader.

The survey listed eight programs and activities; principals were asked to rate them by the level of importance it had in their decision to take the job.

The Importance of Job Preparations Skills

Skill	Number of principals	Percent who responded “highly important”
On the job experience	336	82
Teaching experience	253	62
Education	209	51
Continuing education courses	91	22
LAUNCH/LIFT/CASL/IAA ³	87	21
Workshops	69	17
Professional Readings	68	17
Other	66	16

* The percentages do not add up to 100% because principals could list more than one skill they found “highly important.”

3. LAUNCH—Leadership Academy and Urban Network for Chicago; LIFT—Leadership Initiative for Transformation; CASL—Chicago Academy for School Leadership; IAA—Illinois Administrators’ Academy

On the job experience

Eighty-four percent chose 'on the job experience' as the most important factor. Several discussed the importance of being an assistant principal before taking the next step. They felt it was useful to work with a good principal who knew what needed to be done to run a school. They were able to learn from the issues assigned to them such as staffing, working with students and parents, and responding to central office and budget issues. Others felt that being able to job shadow was helpful in getting first hand experience. They believed this knowledge gave them the ability to become just as effective as the principals who mentored them. One thought it was great to be able to take on different roles at the school - teacher, administrator, or disciplinarian.

Teaching experience

Sixty-three percent chose the importance of 'teaching experience.' They felt it was useful to work with students, parents, and other teachers. While learning to become a principal, they could listen to the thoughts and concerns of those with whom they would eventually be working. Principals acknowledge that these relationships contribute to an improving school.

Education

Through graduate studies, such as psychology, finance and management, many principals reported gaining the skills necessary to help their students and run their schools. Fifty-three percent of those who answered rated education highly important.

After 'on the job experience', 'teaching experience', and 'education', the percentages of what principals thought was highly important in helping them dropped significantly. Twenty-three percent chose LAUNCH/LIFT/CASL/IAA as helpful in their development. However, as some commented, these programs did not exist when they decided to become a principal. They felt the continuation of these programs would be a benefit to others who wished to lead schools. This was the same attitude held by others who chose continuing education courses (23%), workshops (17%), and professional readings (16%) as having an impact in their development.

Among those who chose 'other', one pointed to management and business skills acquired at a previous job as helpful in dealing with facilities and budget at the

school. Several commented on previous job experiences as integral in helping them understand all aspects of a principal's job. One felt coaching experience was helpful in making a strong motivational leader, a strategist and a consensus builder. Another cited life experiences as useful in dealing with and understanding the community.

HOW MANY HOURS, INCLUDING EVENINGS AND WEEKENDS, DO YOU WORK PER WEEK?

[This job] is never ending. I am always thinking about it.

This is a vocation, not just a job.

It's my home away from home.

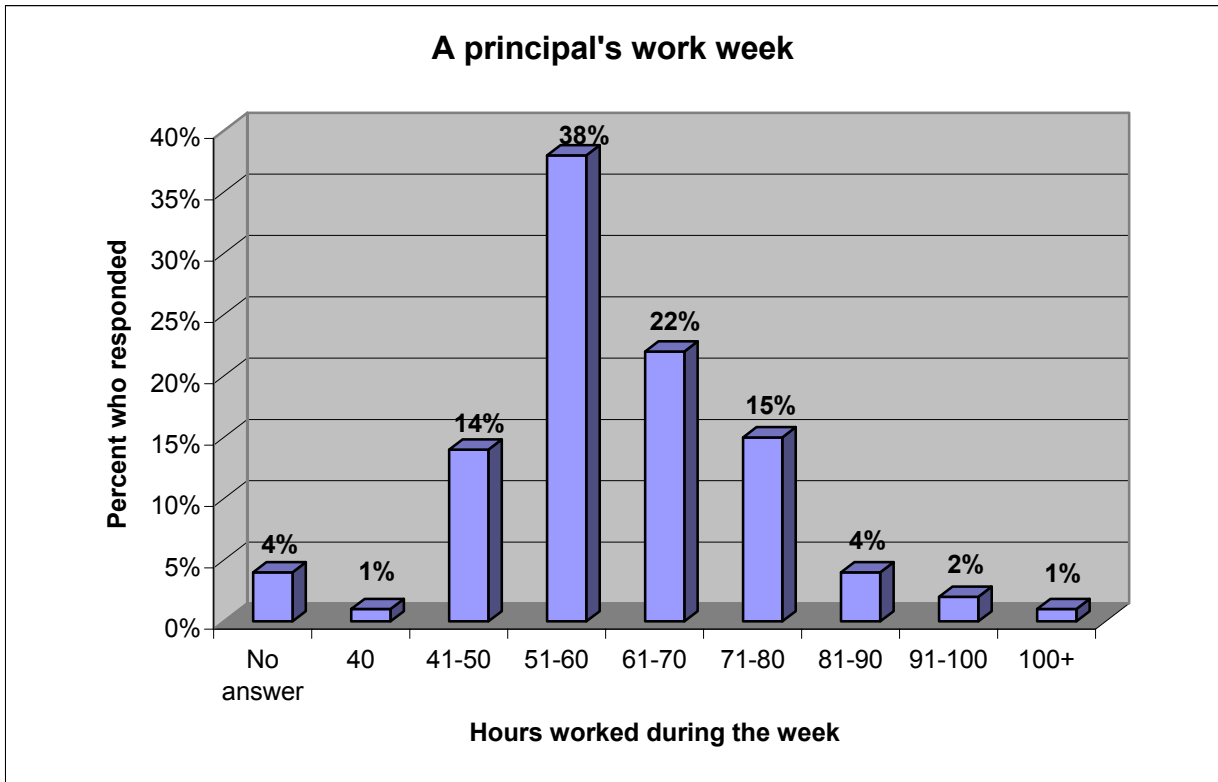
The Myth: Many outside of the profession see the education of America's children as an easy 9-5 job. They view the principal as a caretaker, one who makes sure the building is neat, the teachers teach, and the students learn. Once the students leave for the day, a principal's work is done.

The Reality: Most educators view the responsibility of educating children and young adults as a life long commitment and long-term career objective. For them education is the driving force in their lives and those who don't get involved are missing out. For principals, the day does not end when the students walk out the door; the end of the school day is a chance to catch up on work that needs to be done.

CPS principals labor long and hard hours. They make efforts to fulfill administrative and leadership responsibilities, often resulting in limited time for personal, familial and external professional obligations. Principals work extensive hours to lead schools and provide a strong foundation for students, teachers, staff, parents, and community. They are daytime teachers, administrators and vision keepers as well as night and weekend mentors, coaches, facilitators, directors, and community advocates. It is not surprising to find that workdays for principals rarely end at 5 PM.

Teaching is my life.

Too much to do ... I can't get it done in 24 hours.



Principals were asked how many hours during the week they worked. They gave a range of 40 – 100 hours per week. Only one percent of those questioned said they were able to complete their responsibilities in the standard 40-hour, full-time allotment. On the other hand, eighty-two percent spend more than 51 hours a week working to improve their schools. Thirty-nine percent of principals worked between 51-60 hours a week. Twenty-two percent of those questioned worked between 61-70 hours a week and twenty-two percent worked more than 71-80 hours a week. Three percent of those surveyed worked over 90 hours a week.

Time was a major factor on many principals' minds. One commented that there was too much to do to get the job done in the span of a day and another mentioned not being able to complete all of the projects given.

The harsh reality is that principals have many demands put upon them with little time during the day to get everything done. They report that free weekends are a luxury and personal time nothing more than a seldom realized dream.

WHAT ARE THE TOP FIVE ACTIVITIES THAT CONSUME THE DAY?

The Myth: A principal only has to worry about the students being in the school building with teachers teaching them.

The Reality: Today's principals are not only expected to be instructional leaders and experts in curriculum development, but also possess superior business, organizational, and management skills. All of these skills and more are needed to attend to administrative, budgetary, and facility duties, as well as work with CPS regional and central offices.

Principals were given a list of fifteen activities and asked to rank the five that consumed most of the day. The five chosen most frequently were:

Interpersonal relations – 98 principals: They felt dealing with staff and students on a personal – not business level – occupied a large portion of the day.

Administrative duties – 96 principals: They spent a large part of the day taking care of paperwork from staff and central office, making phone calls, writing letters, hiring teachers, evaluating staff, purchasing supplies, setting up and conducting workshops.

Meeting with students – 40 principals: Time is spent talking with students about schoolwork and concerns, handling discipline issues and monitoring student attendance.

Meeting with staff – 32 principals: Talking about students, discussing concerns about workloads, and finding out what the students and teachers need. Rapport with teachers is critical in improving schools.

Building community relations – 28 principals: This included informing the public about the school, being involved in community events and projects and bolstering parent and community involvement in the school.

Instructional leadership and curriculum development, two of the cornerstones of a principal's position did not make the top five. Many felt that the activities they performed have brought them to the breaking point. Some believe they are overworked and underpaid. Others say that the recognition for those who do a good job is almost nonexistent, leaving them to question why they continue. Another felt having so much to do made the job overwhelming.

HOW MANY VACATION DAYS DID YOU TAKE THIS YEAR?

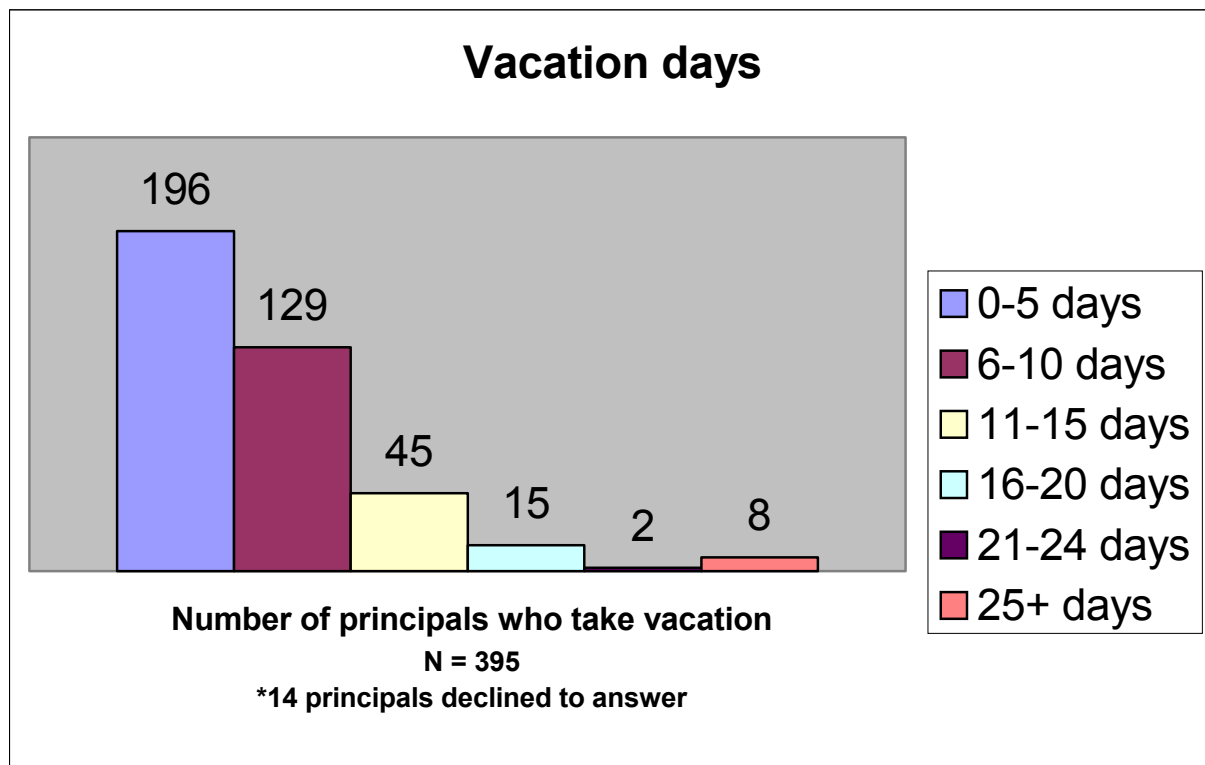
Sometimes [I am] too busy and concerned to take time off.

I take vacation days during Christmas break.

I do enjoy my job but it is hard to take vacation time.

The Myth: Principals and teachers have an abundance of vacation days due to the combination of their accrued fifteen days per year, holidays, and summer months. Those three months, June, July, and August are considered to be the best benefit of any education job.

The Reality: A few CPS principals take some time off to recuperate. However, the majority used the three summer months to complete work from the previous year and fully prepare for the next. Once the school year begins, almost all of the plans must be in place.



Personal time, sleep and leisure activities all contribute positively to productivity, negotiation skills and efficiency. However, staff meetings, budget issues, facilities management, and parent concerns keep many from taking much needed vacations.

The Panel asked how many vacation days principals took during the year. An alarming 196 Chicago principals (49%) took less than a week of vacation during the school term. Fifty-one of those reported never taking a day; sixty-one reported taking between one to three per year; and eighty-four used four to five days.

*The Board places so many demands that vacations are difficult to take.
Responsibilities negate vacation.*

Many of those who didn't take vacation noted that they had to forfeit it. Principals report that in the current education climate, school responsibilities take precedence over personal time. They may choose to work through their vacation rather than take time off. Only eleven percent of the 409 principals who answered reported being able to benefit from their yearly vacation accrual. But according to the Panel's findings, even those who did take vacation days did not use them for leisure or pleasure activities but to accomplish personal business (i.e. doctors appointments, family emergencies, pending school business).

*I don't have time to take off. I haven't had the time.
It creates too much work for me when I return.
The stress and paperwork are overwhelming.*

WHAT RESOURCES ARE NEEDED TO BE AN EFFECTIVE PRINCIPAL?

The most important resource for any principal is experience.

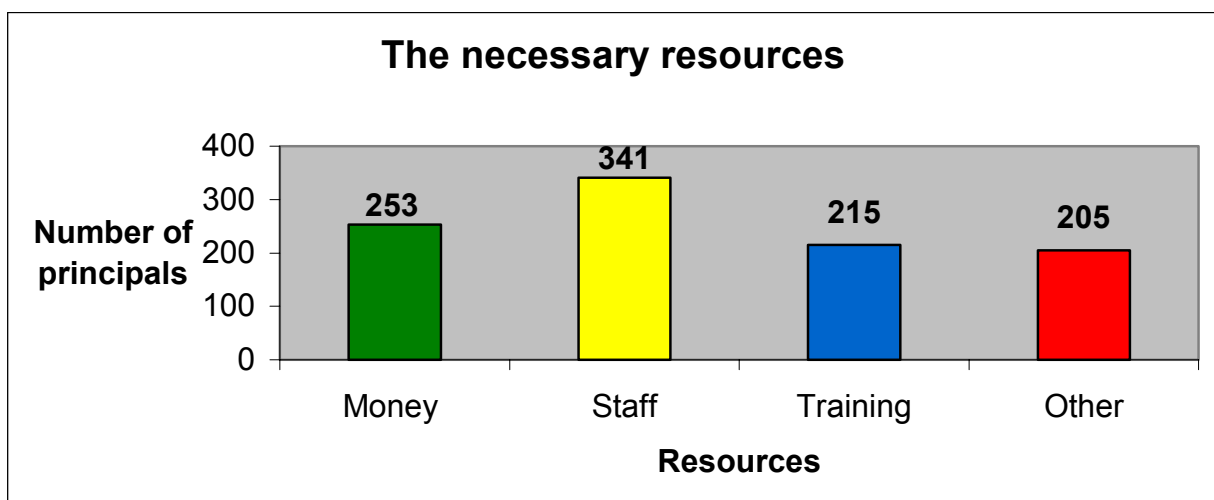
Qualified staff willing to work in an academically challenged school greatly influences the effectiveness of the principal and the school.

More time to spend in classrooms.

The Myth: Schools have everything they need.

The Reality: The availability of adequate and appropriate resources can be crucial in supporting or inhibiting principals as they implement a school's vision and goals. They feel they work in schools with few supplies for students, with uncertified teachers, and little or no support from CPS. Principals commented that the resources have been doled out as if each school were the same regardless of individual needs.

The Panel asked what resources were most needed. Principals were given four choices – staff, money, training or other. They could choose as many as they wished. A line for additional comments was also included.



Staff

341 principals chose staff as the resource they needed to be effective. They commented on the need for quality teachers who shared in the school's vision. Several worked in schools without assistant principals, leaving them to carry out all the duties including discipline, staff advising, and chaperoning school events. They wanted people with professional backgrounds on the roster – counselors, social workers, music instructors, and administrators – having them would be key to the good operations of schools. Qualified and knowledgeable staff, (counselors trained in child psychology, music instructors with music backgrounds) would ensure the success of students.

Quality staff makes effective principals.

It is important to have staff who share your vision.

Full time assistant principal to handle discipline.

Money

Money as a key resource was chosen by 253 principals. Lack of funds has always been a problem, not just for schools in Chicago but across the country. Stories of teachers buying their own supplies and paying their own expenses have been widely publicized in the news and on television (see the Panel's recently published survey on Teacher Volunteerism for more details). Principals were concerned about their school's budget, the need for new programs, and acquiring teacher incentives.

[I need] money for technology, textbooks, and expenses.

Money to increase the school budget and to implement extra school programs.

Training

Principals believed professional development for themselves and their staffs makes them better at their jobs and in the long run better equipped to help students. Training was chosen by 215 of those who answered.

More time for teacher/staff development and creative activities.

Need a mentor ... for both old and new principals.

Top quality, trained staff make all the difference.

Other

205 chose 'other' as a much needed resource. A number of principals discussed the need for support on the professional, curricular and external level. They talked about cooperation from CPS as imperative in establishing an improving school. But many cited encountering roadblocks, interference, and unanswered phone calls. A few principals wished that CPS would trust them to do the job. Four asked for well-trained and understanding local school councils to help gain the support of the parents and communities. Space issues were on the minds of many principals. Overcrowded buildings with little or no room for programs such as reading, math, computer labs and art, and money for reduced class sizes were discussed. Supplies, technology, parent involvement, and more time were also written in this category.

More time and less paperwork.

More instructional materials.

Parent involvement ... good parent-school relationships.

WHAT RESOURCE IS MOST LACKING?

Support from school [in the form of] networking with other principals.

Adequate facility.

Seriousness, not just talk in technology – critical wiring upgrades.

The Myth: With so much money being poured into education, principals at public schools lack for nothing.

The Reality: The lack of quality resources for public schools has been well publicized. For example, many schools didn't have the technology necessary to prepare students for the future.

Not surprisingly, many of the resources listed as lacking appeared in the 'other' category of the previous question. Principals reported the need for a multitude of professional, material and organizational resources to be effective leaders at their schools. They were outspoken about the many resources needed: support, money, time, staff, educational supplies, space, autonomy, technology, and parent involvement.

Principals indicated that support was most lacking. Two types of assistance from CPS were considered important, emotional and practical. Many felt they'd been stranded at schools with little help from the system, the staff or the community. They believed their roles as principals were defined in the vaguest of terms and those outside the school had no understanding of the job.

Support would be nice. I've learned to manage without it.

[Lack of] Support and too much work with too little help.

They also commented on a feeling of distrust on the part of CPS to do their jobs effectively. They wanted a greater show of commitment and cooperation.

Central office isn't realistic in expectations of school.

Central office blames principals – there is a lack of support

A few mentioned the need for a more effective network of principals from across the city to discuss professional and personal issues. They believed such a network would promote a wealth of ideas. Many principals discussed a need for partnerships with other schools, i.e. elementary schools and high schools. Some commented on how external partners with a “well known reputation and documented results” would be helpful with resources and job opportunities for students.

WHY DOES A PRINCIPAL CONTINUE WORKING AT A SCHOOL?

I can make a difference ... the best seat in the trenches.

To touch the life of one child is invigorating and a great joy.

The children and community are very important to me.

It's what I do and who I am.

The Myth: Principals stay in their jobs because the money, hours and benefits are good.

The Reality: For principals, being motivated to lead and stay committed to schools can be attributed to many factors. To them, it seems like a thankless job with little support from CPS, the community or the staff of their own schools.

Therefore the Panel asked the logical question: Why stay?

Reasons for principals to stay

	Number of responses	Percent
Children	232	57
Money	77	19
Other	75	18
Recognition	12	3

N=396

Children

An overwhelming number (57%) reported staying for the children, saying the work was all for them. Those who chose children were emphatic in their commitment. These principals felt they could make a positive impact in the lives of public school students. For them, the struggles of the job were nothing compared to the difference they could make.

I am committed to the children.

Children are the reason!

Money

Nineteen percent of the principals chose money. Of those for whom it was a factor, the choice was tied to retirement goals and lifestyle choices. A principal reported staying because of a need to be employed and another discussed waiting for enough time to secure a comfortable pension. One principal pointed to being a single parent and the sole breadwinner as a reason to stay. Several principals thought what they were making was a good wage.

I am too far from the retirement age.

Because I need a job.

Other

Another 19% chose 'other' and wrote in comments. They discussed having pride and satisfaction in a job well done. A few commented that they could not imagine doing anything else – that teaching was all they wanted to do; education was their first and only love. Others enjoyed the task of leadership and being in charge of a school that ran well. Still others described being a principal and working in education as *a life-time goal ... a dream come true*.

I take great pride in my job... I try to do an excellent job.

I enjoy being a student/teacher motivator.

A few of the survey respondents who chose 'other' did not focus on the school or the children. One cited fear of the unknown as a reason to stay; one thought it was too late in life for a career change and another asked, *Where would I go?* Several were waiting for their contracts to expire or waiting for retirement benefits to begin. There were two responses from people who considered the job *just employment*. A few stayed because another job was not available.

Recognition

Recognition scored low on reasons to stay (3%); only two principals wrote about it. One discussed how rewarding the recognition from the children and parents was. The other stayed in the position in hopes of being recognized for what was accomplished.

WHEN WILL YOU RETIRE?

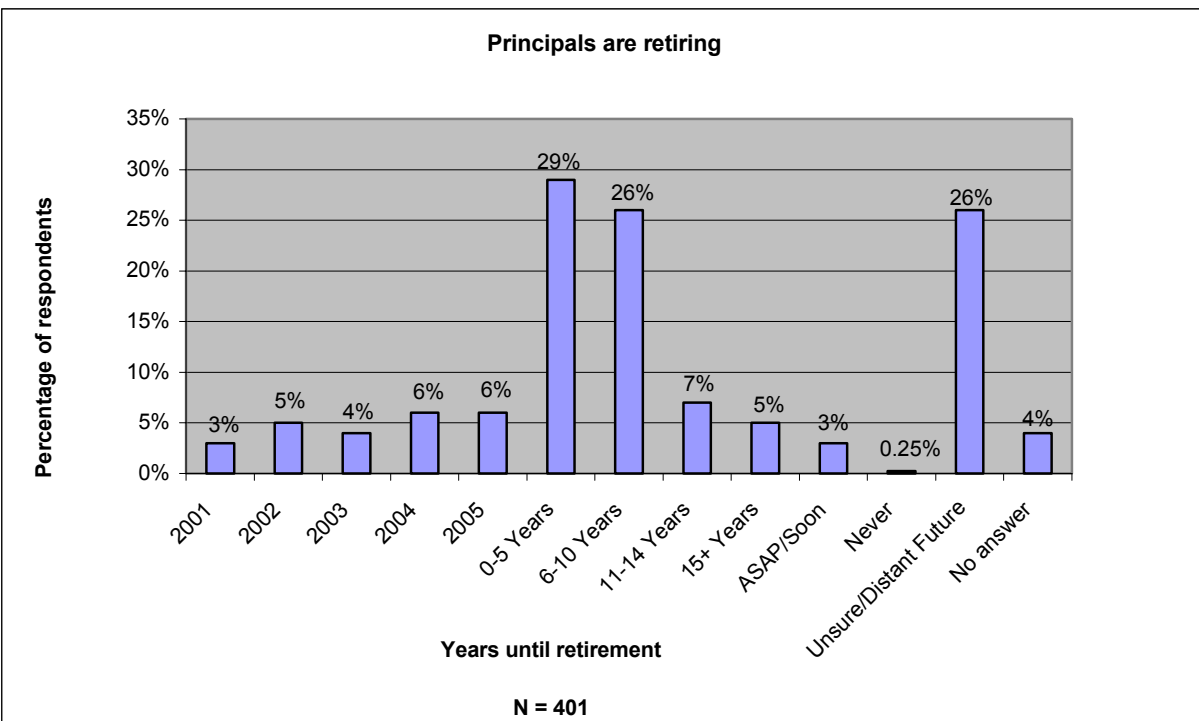
I've enjoyed my time, I'll miss it, but it's time to go.

I can't wait to leave.

Retirement is not in my thoughts.

The Myth: Principals only retire when their contracts expire.

The Reality: While much attention has been centered on the shortage of teachers in schools across the country, less has focused on the problem that exists at the school leadership level. Seasoned principals are leaving the education system in record numbers. They report that the stress of long hours, heavy workloads, and lack of recognition is taking its toll. Districts across the country are also reporting a critical shortage in qualified candidates. The increasingly demanding work schedule, diminishing salaries and lack of training programs are dissuading qualified candidates from considering the position as a desirable occupation.



The Panel asked principals when they planned to retire or were eligible for retirement. Chicago's results supported the national trend. In the next five years, 29% or 115 of the 409 principals who responded planned to retire. Between the time this survey was distributed and the end of the 2002 school year, 8% of those who answered will have retired.

A few principals discussed a lack of energy or even the desire to stay in the position. Several wished they could leave as soon as possible.

I'm getting tired and less resilient.

Many are waiting to collect what they perceive is a good retirement package, while others are seeking to re-establish some sort of balance in their personal lives. One expressed the need to take personal time, concerned that the hectic pace of the job had left time for little else. Another principal expressed a desire to work if the contract was extended but worried that the increased stress of the job would not be healthy.

Twenty-six percent of those surveyed were either unsure of their retirement plans or ineligible according to CPS policy.

Three answers provided upbeat responses. Two principals would continue to work at the position if their contracts were extended. If not, both would retire. A newly appointed principal enthusiastically replied, *NEVER ... I am very happy in my job.*

CONCLUSION

Increasing pressure is being put on principals to fulfill every detail of their jobs whether or not they have time for it. With this and the realities of the overwhelming amounts of work principals face each year, attention must be focused on the principals shortage that will have a major impact on Chicago as well as schools across the country. The US Bureau of Labor Statistics projects a 10-29% increase in vacancies for educational leaders through 2008.

What next?

- Can both formal and informal principal networks be strengthened to allow for better sharing of experiences, information, and concerns?
- What resources and training are needed to increase the number of assistant principals across the system?
- Can recognition about improving schools be as evenly distributed as it is about failing schools?
- Can new revenue sources be generated to improve salaries and benefits which will attract and keep the best candidates?
- Can time for continuing education and professional development be provided without sacrificing day-to-day operations?
- What more can be accomplished to promote respect for school leaders?
- What are the roles of a principal? Instructional leader? Building manager? Are expectations clear and achievable? Are sufficient resources available?
- Will more principal autonomy have an effect on student achievement?
- Should school days be lengthened to give principals and teachers more time to build rapport, plan, set goals and reflect?
- Should school leaders be required to take vacations?
- Who should be a principal? How should they be selected and trained?

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The Chicago Panel on School Policy

The Chicago Panel on School Policy was founded in 1982 as an independent, nonprofit agency working to improve the quality of public education for Chicago's children through advocacy, research and information dissemination. The Panel has consistently played an important role in framing the public discourse on school reform issues.

From its inception, the organization has been a driving force in the school reform movement in Chicago. The Panel helped create legislation that led to the development of local school councils under the School Reform Act of 1989. Objective longitudinal research was produced on such issues as teen pregnancy, drop-out rates, student mobility, local school councils and desegregation.

In 1996, the organization moved away from longitudinal research and expanded its focus to include more educational policies and practices, allowing the Panel a broader voice on school improvement issues. Through its Initiative Status Reports, Applications of Research and advocacy, the Panel helps define, support and advance effective educational practices. It operates with the oversight of a board of directors and both full and part-time staff.