



PRINCIPALS' PERSPECTIVES ON POLICY:  
**What Education Leaders Seek  
Through Policy**

February 2022



AMERICAN INSTITUTES FOR RESEARCH® | [AIR.ORG](https://www.air.org)

## Authors

Lois Kimmel and Tara Zuber  
Center on Great Teachers and Leaders at AIR

## Acknowledgments

*The research could not have been completed without the 188 principals that participated in focus groups and their work to support schools. The authors thank L. Earl Franks, NAESP executive director; Danny Carlson, NAESP associate executive director, policy and advocacy; and Kaylen Tucker, NAESP associate executive director, communications for supporting study conceptualization, recruitment, and writing. We thank Stephanie Banchemo at the Joyce Foundation for her support and work with principals. We are also grateful to the project's research team: Marina Castro, Crystal Darby, Patricia Garcia-Arena, and Kandis Kuklinski from the GTL Center at AIR.*

## Introduction

---



Many elementary school principals entirely reimagined their day-to-day jobs as they adapted to changes between March 2020 and June 2021 and beyond. The *Leaders We Need Now* series captures perceptions of principals, from discussions and data collection in focus groups, on schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2021 and the resulting changes that could be temporary or could become permanent because they represent a new or better way of working. In [\*Leaders in the Tumult: Schooling Innovations and New Perspectives From a Year Interrupted\*](#), principals highlighted the significant changes in their professional lives in 2020 and 2021, especially new personal perspectives on schooling and innovations in schools (Clifford & McConnochie, 2021b). In [\*Evolution of the Principalship: Leaders Explain How the Profession Is Changing Through a Most Difficult Year\*](#), principals reported changes in how they spend their time, with an increasing focus on crisis management and community care (Clifford & McConnochie, 2021a).

In this brief, the third and final brief in the *Leaders We Need Now* series, principals share their thoughts about the influences that policymakers have on the daily work of staff in schools and about specific policy actions that policymakers should consider when determining their education policy agendas. More specifically, this brief identifies five policy-related themes and ideas from principals that can support policymakers' next steps as they make their education policy agendas, including investments in the principal professional pipeline, enhanced social-emotional supports for students and teachers, reimagined funding allocation formulas, and reformed comprehensive testing.

Policymakers at all levels play critical roles in ensuring the success of schools and school leaders. Their decisions impact the environment that supports, develops, and sustains success for school principals (Gates et al., 2019; Davis, 2016; Manna, 2015). Policymakers at the district, state, and federal levels have formal and informal powers to identify and train aspiring principals and to support those already on the job. They set policy agendas, consider policy levers, and address contextual factors (Manna, 2015). This brief focuses on policy levers at the state and federal levels and occasionally at the district level.

## Context

---



**The American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) conducted a large-scale qualitative study with 188 elementary school principals.** The study explored the evolution of the school principal position during a time in 2020–2021 when schools were confronted with the COVID-19 pandemic and when America commanded renewed efforts to address social justice.

The study sample was geographically distributed, including respondents from 43 states. From a demographic standpoint, principals in the focus groups included more females (63%), non-Hispanic Whites (84%), and new principals (28%) (i.e., fewer than 3 years of experience) than the respective national averages. The Appendix presents more information about the study methodology.

During the focus group sessions, a slide flashed on the screen that read, “If you had the ear of a policymaker, what should states, districts, and others do differently to support future principals?” The principals discussed this question in their focus groups, touching on such topics as the educator workforce, student testing, educator preparation, and others. The following common themes emerged from the results of the focus groups.

## Theme #1. Principal Pipelines and Workforce Incentives

---

**Focus on the principal pipeline and succession.** Principals shared that they expect job stress to lead to higher educator turnover for years to come. Many principals are concerned about retaining the educator workforce and recruiting new principals. According to the principals, teachers saw the conditions that school leaders experienced during 2020–2021 and are now deciding whether they really want to pursue a principalship. Principals shared concerns about succession planning. They want to know who will take their places when they retire. One principal shared concerns about the future: “If we’re not leaving a legacy [for others to lead], then we’re setting up ourselves to fail in the long run.”

**Improve financial incentives.** Principals shared a need for policymakers to improve the financial incentives, such as pay, that are used to help recruit educators to the workforce and to retain the best ones. Principals repeatedly mentioned that their salaries are inadequate, especially considering the responsibilities they endured during 2020–2021. Additionally, the salaries of educators have not kept up with inflation (National Education Association, 2021). Although not mentioned by the principals, increased salaries or “premium pay” for principals and other staff are an allowable use of funds under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). One principal shared that teachers have commented about being able to make as much as principals by teaching summer school. This makes teachers less inclined to join the administration. Another principal asked policymakers to “reimagine” the principal role to ensure that expectations are aligned with pay.

Policymakers could also consider other financial incentives, such as student loan forgiveness and service scholarships. Although not mentioned by the principals, legislation for student loan forgiveness has been previously



introduced in Congress. These types of incentives would help to recruit and retain teachers in underserved rural and urban communities (Podolsky & Kini, 2016).

**Improve principal pipelines.** Principals reported that many teachers have poor views of the role of principal as a job they might like to pursue, particularly with the job stress experienced during 2020–2021. Principals shared the need to encourage policymakers to improve principal pipelines, including opportunities and incentives for teacher-leaders and financial incentives for educators who want to pursue administrative certifications.

Although not discussed by principals in this study, policymakers can also make licensing requirements more flexible or establish additional pathways to the principalship through alternative or residency routes. According to The Wallace Foundation (2021), investing in principal pipelines that are comprehensive and connected is an effective, feasible, and affordable way to develop and support new and aspiring principals and to attract a more diverse workforce.

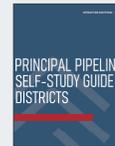
Federal, state, and district leaders should think about racial diversity when establishing policies about programs for investing in the educator workforce. Research suggests that Black principals are more likely than White principals to hire teachers of color, which is often associated with higher levels of academic achievement among students of color. Similar research suggests that Black principals also decrease mobility among Black teachers (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019).

**Support principals with additional personnel.** Principals noted a need for principal mentors or coaches to support and retain new principals in the profession. According to one principal, principal coaches would mean new principals are “not just thrown into [the principalship] like I was, and that you actually have somebody that can stand alongside you.” Although not specifically mentioned by principals, policymakers can use Title II, Part A funds to support principal coaches, mentors, and supervisors. Coaches and

mentors can provide principals with knowledgeable and valuable feedback to help them meet the challenges of their position. Additionally, principals who perceived they have more autonomy over personnel decisions, noted that they are less likely to leave the principalship or their schools than those who perceive they have less autonomy (Levin & Bradley, 2019).



## Additional Resources



**Principal Pipeline Self-Study Guide for Districts (2021)** | This guide offers help, based on the research evidence, to districts who are looking to create and operate a principal pipeline. | <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/principal-pipeline-self-study-guide-for-districts.aspx>



**Strong Pipelines, Strong Principals: A Guide for Leveraging Federal Sources to Fund Principal Pipelines (2021)** | This guide helps school districts identify federal funding streams to support principal pipelines. | <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/strong-pipelines-strong-principals-a-guide-for-leveraging-federal-sources-to-fund-principal-pipelines.aspx>



**School Leadership Toolkit** | This toolkit poses key questions and provides insight on developing strong principal pathways and pipelines. | <http://schoolleadershippolicytoolkit.com/pathways-pipelines/>



## Theme #2. Testing and Accountability

**Consider the social-emotional impact of schools on student development.** Principals want policymakers to consider a broader range of factors for school performance, beyond testing. According to the principals, the current focus on testing does not consider the social-emotional needs of students. One principal stated, “I think right now we need to worry about the social and emotional well-being of our students.” Focusing on social-emotional health is difficult, especially when schools must dedicate a lot of time and resources to testing. One principal said, “I think we need to focus on the [social-emotional learning] pieces and catching the kids up, but maybe not with such a microscopic focus on a standardized test.” One principal summarized the sentiment of several others, saying, “The accountability and some of the rigor, let’s put that aside because we really need to make sure that the kids are feeling comfortable and happy, and we can get them through this.” Research indicates that social-emotional learning factors can be used in accountability systems (Perez, Jr., 2018; Melnick et al., 2017).

**Minimize testing requirements.** Principals perceive that standardized tests are overemphasized. One principal shared: “I feel like we’ve gone overboard and have an excess of [testing].” Another principal wondered if schools could “forget about testing for a little while,” pointing out that there are “other ways of acquiring data than standardized tests.” The principals are not against accountability, but they pointed out that schools conduct other tests that provide more immediate results on such issues as learning loss, for example: “I do believe that we need the data, and assessments are important, but basing the totality on that one day, that one test . . . I think they [policymakers] need to back off a little bit on that.”

## Theme #3. Principal and Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

**Enhance on-the-job coaching and professional development for principals.** Principals emphasized the need for more professional learning opportunities for school leaders and noted the disconnect between their academic coursework and their actual practices. They cited the importance of job-embedded practicum, job shadowing, and onsite coaching opportunities that serve as learning experiences and are not evaluative in nature. According to one principal, “Remembering to prioritize my professional growth so that I understand the changes that are occurring within the educational [system], so that I can be innovative in meeting the needs of each of our students . . . is really crucial. . . . Sometimes professional learning looks different than sitting down and going to a webinar.”

**Consult with principals for professional development topics.** Principals know their professional development needs the best. As described in the second brief in this series, *Evolution of the Principals: School Leaders Tell How the Profession Is Changing Through a Difficult Time*, principals want better preparation for crisis and change management. Additionally, a survey of 407 principals conducted by the Learning Policy Institute and National Association of Elementary School Principals found that principals want more professional development, particularly related to whole child education and leading equitable schools. Principals also reported barriers to professional development opportunities, including time, funding, and coverage for leaving the building to attend professional development sessions (Levin, et al., 2020). Funding from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief fund; Title II, Part A; and Title I can provide avenues to improve professional development for school leaders.



**Leverage student teachers and support new teachers.** Principals identified a particular need to better understand how to leverage student teachers and support new teachers in the first few years after their preparation. This may be important after the COVID-19 pandemic, because new teachers will have missed out on critical student placement assignments that evidence shows are key for success (Choate et al., 2021). Although not highlighted by principals in this study, principals play key roles in the implementation of promising practices around mentoring and induction (Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, 2019b). Mentoring and induction can benefit the professional growth of new teachers and, in turn, improve the outcomes of students (Center on Great Teachers and Leaders, 2019a).



## Additional Resources



### **CEEDAR Center's Roadmap for Educator Preparation Reform**

**Reform** | “This planning framework is intended to guide and support educator preparation programs (EPPs) through the process of integrating evidence-based and high-leverage practices within and across coursework and field experiences. The roadmap highlights the major guidelines that EPPs should consider throughout the reform process and provides supporting facilitation guidance, examples, resources, and tools from EPPs that have engaged in and benefited from this process.” |

<https://cedar.education.ufl.edu/roadmap/>



### **Understanding and Addressing Principal Turnover: A Review of the Research**

**of the Research** | This comprehensive review found five main reasons why principals leave the profession: inadequate preparation and professional development, poor working conditions, insufficient salaries, lack of decision-making authority, and high-stakes accountability policies. Principals are more likely to remain when they are highly prepared. |

<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/nassp-understanding-addressing-principal-turnover-review-research-report>



## Theme #4. Honoring, Recognizing, and Listening to Principals

**Publicly honor principals and school leaders.** Principals want to be honored, recognized, and heard. Principals have been doing their everyday jobs and other responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, which, as one principal explained, have been “magnified tenfold” by the pandemic. Principals reported how they have worked in their schools to ensure that students continue to succeed during the pandemic. For example, one principal said that principals are responsible for “the entire wellbeing of the school, not only the students, but the grounds, the maintenance, the safety. That’s been a big challenge . . . and it falls on us to make sure [our staff are] cleaning properly, and [that teachers and students’] technology is working. . . . I don’t think everybody understands just how much of it has been our responsibility.”

Policymakers can provide greater recognition of principals for the hard work they do. For example, policymakers at all levels can visit schools in their states or districts to listen to principals and highlight the work of school leaders, such as special recognition during National Principals Month in October (U.S. Senate, 2021).

**Consult with principals about new legislation.** Principals are a special constituent group with a vested interest in education and in the success of students in their schools. One principal stated, “I’d like to see policymakers include [school] administrators on those committees when they are making decisions.” Principals repeatedly emphasized the importance of policymakers and leaders trusting principals, opining “have trust and belief in us” and “trust in us because we’ll get the job done.” Gathering feedback from principals on legislation could improve policy ideas, increase buy-in from educators, and provide more justification for new policies.



### Additional Resource



**The Pre-K-8 School Leader in 2018: A 10-Year Study** | This study, the ninth in a series of 10-year studies, examines the various situations, struggles, and experiences that principals face each day and at different points in their careers. According to this study, social-emotional learning is a top concern for elementary school principals. | <https://www.naesp.org/resources/publications/a-10-year-study-of-the-principalship/>

## Theme #5. Funding and Resources

**Plan for funding changes.** Principals are grateful for the federal funds that were allocated as part of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding passed by Congress to support their teachers and students during 2020–2021. But they also reported feeling anxious because the manner in which the funding was released means that it cannot be used to sustain long-term reform. On average, principals who participated in the focus groups expressed concerns about being able to sustain change past a “funding cliff”—that is, when additional funds are no longer available. For example, funding through the American Rescue Plan must be obligated by the end of September 2024. As one principal explained, “I would hope that we just don’t feel like it’s a buffet for 1 to 2 years and then we have to go back [to business as usual]. . . . It’s just brutal.”

**Support blended and virtual education.** Principals in the focus groups recognized that districts may offer fully virtual schooling for specific populations of students, and many principals are preparing for this potential reality. According to one principal, “The pandemic really forced a shift in learning in terms of different models of learning, whether it be . . . blended in-person or virtual, and so . . . our district certainly understands that that’s not going away.” Adding a virtual component to schooling comes at a cost. Another principal said, “The funding needs to be able to reflect that if we’re going to run a virtual school in addition to our brick-and-mortar schools, we need to find a way to do that through extra support.”

**Support needs for remediation of learning loss.** Principals pointed out that they will likely need to provide remediation for all students to help them recover from learning loss. One principal said, “There’s core instruction that has been missed by everyone.” Other principals in the spring 2021 focus groups mentioned summer school as a remediation option. One principal noted that summer school will likely have to be offered “at every single elementary school.” Other principals mentioned enlisting aides and interventionists to provide tutoring, run small group instruction, and handle interventions.





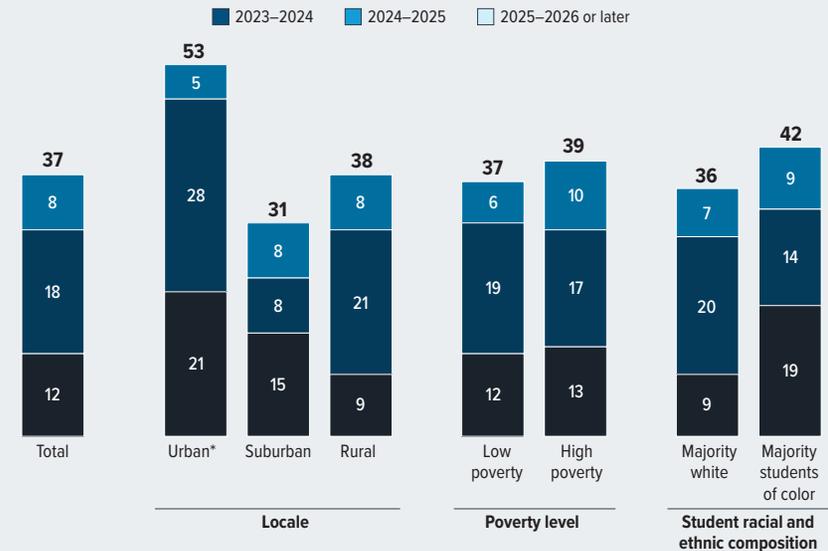
## Additional Resources

**Funding for the Long Term** | Principals are worried about the arrival of the fiscal cliff. According to a 2021 RAND report, “[n]early 4 in 10 districts anticipated a fiscal cliff in the next 3 or 4 years as federal COVID-19 aid expires. Many in this group have already modified their spending plans to mitigate the effects of such an event” (see chart at right) (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2021). | [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA956-3.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA956-3.html)

Another report recommends that principals start to weigh in on how money is spent now (Roza & Anderson, 2021). | <https://www.naesp.org/blog/5-ways-principals-can-make-federal-relief-money-matter-more-for-their-students/>

Policy makers, especially at the district level, when making decisions about the allocation of funds, should listen to input from principals and use data to support their decisions.

**Percentage of Districts That Anticipate Hitting a Fiscal Cliff and the School Year in Which They Expect It to Occur**



Source: Diliberti and Schwartz (2021).

Note: Bars may not sum to total because of rounding.

\*The percentage of district leaders in that subgroup who anticipate a fiscal cliff is statistically different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from the overall percentage of district leaders.

## Conclusions

---



The COVID-19 pandemic has brought new challenges for principals and highlighted or exacerbated existing ones. The principals in these focus groups explained the support they hope to receive. Principals see each day what schools require, and right now, they need political action at all levels. Principals want policy makers to listen to their input and perspectives.

“

*I worry about some colleagues and people in other districts, and I just think it's really important for our policymakers to make sure that we're not expecting administrators to do it all without connection and support.*

”

—Principal in focus group

Principals want to reopen, respond, and reimagine schools to meet current and future challenges. To do this, they need supports and resources around the five themes laid out in this brief:

- ◆ Principal pipelines and workforce incentives;
- ◆ Testing and accountability;
- ◆ Principal and teacher preparation and professional development;
- ◆ Honoring, recognizing, and listening to principals; and
- ◆ Funding and resources.

Principals are among the most important school-based factors that affect student outcomes. Students and teachers depend on education leaders and policymakers to support principals and help principals succeed.

## References



Center on Great Teachers and Leaders. (2019a). Evidence-based practices to support equity: A GTL Center snapshot. [https://gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/EvidenceBasedPractices\\_MentoringInduction.pdf](https://gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/EvidenceBasedPractices_MentoringInduction.pdf)

Center on Great Teachers and Leaders. (2019b). Module 5. The role of the principal in mentoring & induction. In: *Mentoring and Induction Toolkit 2.0*. <https://gtlcenter.org/technical-assistance/toolkits/mi-toolkit/module-5>

Choate, K., Goldhaber, D., & Theobald, R. (2021, March 22). *The effects of COVID-19 on teacher preparation*. Phi Delta Kappan. <https://kappanonline.org/effects-covid-19-teacher-preparation-choate-goldhaber-theobald/>

Clifford, M., & McConnochie, J. (2021a). *Evolution of the principalship: Leaders tell us how the profession is changing through a most difficult year*. National Association of Elementary School Principals. <https://www.naesp.org/resources/research-reports/leaders-we-need-now/evolution-of-the-principalship-leaders-explain-how-the-profession-is-changing-through-a-most-difficult-year/>

Clifford, M., & McConnochie, J. (2021b). *Leaders in the tumult: Schooling innovations and new perspectives from a year interrupted*. National Association of Elementary School Principals. <https://www.naesp.org/lwnn-leaders-in-tumult/>

Davis, J. (2016). *Improving university principal preparation programs: Five themes from the field*. The Wallace Foundation. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/improving-university-principal-preparation-programs.aspx>

Diliberti, M. K., & Schwartz, H. L. (2021). *The K–12 pandemic budget and staffing crises have not panned out—yet: Selected findings from the Third American School District Panel Survey*. RAND Corporation. [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA956-3.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA956-3.html)

Gates, S. M., Baird, M. D., Master, B. K., & Chavez-Herrerias, E. R. (2019). *Principal pipelines: What public school districts report doing and what they want to do to improve school leadership*. RAND Corporation. [http://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RR2666.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2666.html)

- Grissom, J. A., & Bartanen, B. (2019). Strategic retention: Principal effectiveness and teacher turnover in multiple-measure teacher evaluation systems. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(2), 514–555. <https://doi.org/10.3102%2F0002831218797931>
- Levin, S., & Bradley, K. (2019, March 19). *Understanding and addressing principal turnover: A review of the research*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/nassp-understanding-addressing-principal-turnover-review-research-report>
- Levin, S., Leung, M., Edgerton, A. K., & Scott, C. (2020, October 27). *Elementary school principals' professional learning: Current status and future needs*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/elementary-school-principals-professional-learning-report>
- Manna, P. (2015). *Developing excellent school principals to advance teaching and learning: Considerations for state policy*. The Wallace Foundation. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/developing-excellent-school-principals.aspx>
- Melnick, H., Cook-Harvey, C., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Encouraging social and emotional learning in the context of new accountability*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/encouraging-social-emotional-learning-new-accountability-report>
- National Education Association. (2021). *Teacher pay and student spending: How does your state rank?* National Education Association. <https://www.nea.org/resource-library/teacher-pay-and-student-spending-how-does-your-state-rank>
- Perez, Jr., Z. (2018). *Response to information request*. Education Commission of the States. [https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/State-Information-Request\\_Social-Emotional-Learning.pdf](https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/State-Information-Request_Social-Emotional-Learning.pdf)
- Podolsky, A., & Kini, T. (2016). *How effective are loan forgiveness and service scholarships for recruiting teachers?* Learning Policy Institute. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/how-effective-are-loan-forgiveness-and-service-scholarships-recruiting-teachers>
- Roza, M., & Anderson, L. (2021, July 27). *5 ways principals can make federal relief money matter more for their students*. National Association of Elementary School Principals. <https://www.naesp.org/blog/5-ways-principals-can-make-federal-relief-money-matter-more-for-their-students/>
- U.S. Department of Education. (2021, May). *Frequently asked questions: Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Programs, Governor's Emergency Education Relief Programs*. Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. [https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/05/ESSER.GEER\\_FAQs\\_5.26.21\\_745AM\\_FINALb0cd6833f6f46e03ba2d97d30aff953260028045f9ef3b18ea602db4b32b1d99.pdf](https://oese.ed.gov/files/2021/05/ESSER.GEER_FAQs_5.26.21_745AM_FINALb0cd6833f6f46e03ba2d97d30aff953260028045f9ef3b18ea602db4b32b1d99.pdf)
- U.S. Senate. (2021, October 26). S. Res. 428. *117th Congress (2021–2022): A resolution recognizing October 2021 as “National Principals Month.”* U.S. Congress. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-resolution/428/text>
- The Wallace Foundation. (2021). *Evidence-based considerations for COVID-19 reopening and recovery planning: The role of principal leadership in school recovery and reopening*. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Wallace-Foundation-Brief-Importance-Principal-Lead-COVID-19-Reopening-Recovery-w-Annotated-Bib-March-2021.pdf>

## Appendix: About Our Methods

The Joyce Foundation and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) Foundation provided financial support for staff at WestEd and the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) to conduct this research study. The Joyce Foundation and NAESP Foundation funded the project to explore how schools and principalship changed through the 2020–2021 school year because policies and professional learning may need to change as well. The goal of the research project was to listen to practitioners, identify common themes, and provide a narrative based on principals' perspectives.

NAESP is a member organization that represents approximately 17,000 elementary school administrators in the United States. The research team sought to conduct focus groups with member principals of NAESP via a geographic distribution by state.

AIR researchers pursued a three-step process for convening the sample (Exhibit A.1):

1. The research team identified a sample pool of 5,452 current principals from among the approximately 17,000 members of NAESP. This sample was identified based on proportional geographic representation across states.
2. The research team invited the 5,452 identified principals to (a) respond to a brief online survey designed to collect demographic information that supplemented extant data from NAESP and (b) select a convenient date and time for the focus groups.
3. The research team convened 1-hour, online focus groups with 188 principals from NAESP. A total of 36 focus groups were conducted. Individuals completing focus groups received a

\$25 electronic gift card. Fifty-eight percent of survey completers also attended focus groups.

### Exhibit A.1. Process for convening the sample

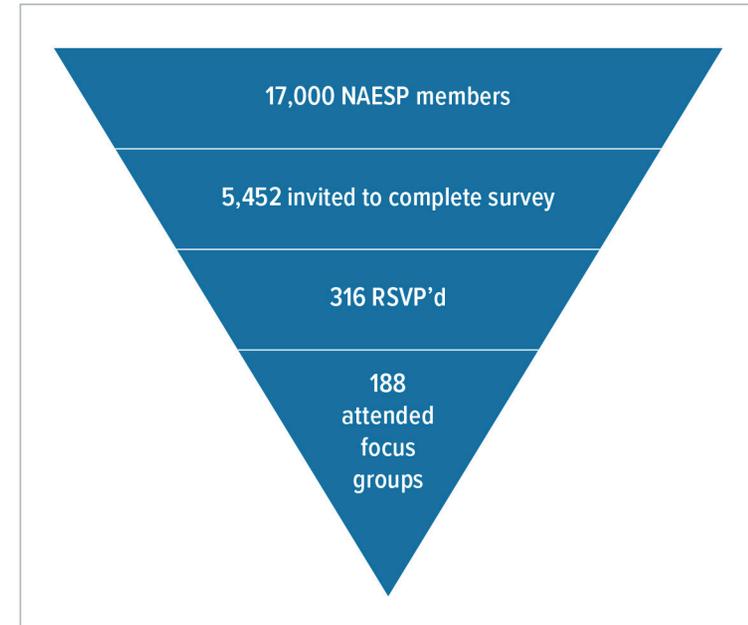


Exhibit A.2 presents the demographic information of the sample. State location is provided by NAESP's member database, and the demographic data of principals are self-reported via the survey.

Findings should be understood to represent the ideas, experiences, and perspectives of only the principals included in the study. The sampling method, response rate, and self-selection of survey respondents and focus group participants place limited generalizability on the results of the research.

Furthermore, the reader should not consider findings applicable to secondary schools, because middle and high school principals are not represented in the data. Similarly, perspectives from assistant principals

and teachers are not included in the data. Although focus group data are geographically distributed, not all states are represented, and the sample includes a higher percentage of rural principals than the national average.

### Exhibit A.2. Focus group principal demographics

Geographic distribution: 43 states (not included: Delaware, Louisiana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, and South Carolina)								
NAESP zones* representation: NAESP zones help to organize member services								
Zone 1	Zone 2	Zone 3	Zone 4	Zone 5	Zone 6	Zone 7	Zone 8	Zone 9
9%	11%	13%	12%	10%	8%	12%	13%	13%

Urbanicity			
City	Suburban	Town	Rural
9%	29%	25%	38%

Principal self-reported race						
Non-Hispanic/White	African-American	Latinx or Hispanic	East Asian or Asian	Middle Eastern	Native American	Other
84%	8%	3%	1%	>1%	>1%	3%

Principal self-reported gender		
Female	Male	Other
63%	36%	0%

**Years of experience as principal in the current school**

0–3 years	4–7 years	8–12 years	13–16 years	≥ 17 years
28%	34%	26%	7%	4%

**Years of experience as principal, regardless of school**

0–3 years	4–7 years	8–12 years	13–16 years	≥ 17 years
14%	24%	28%	16%	17%

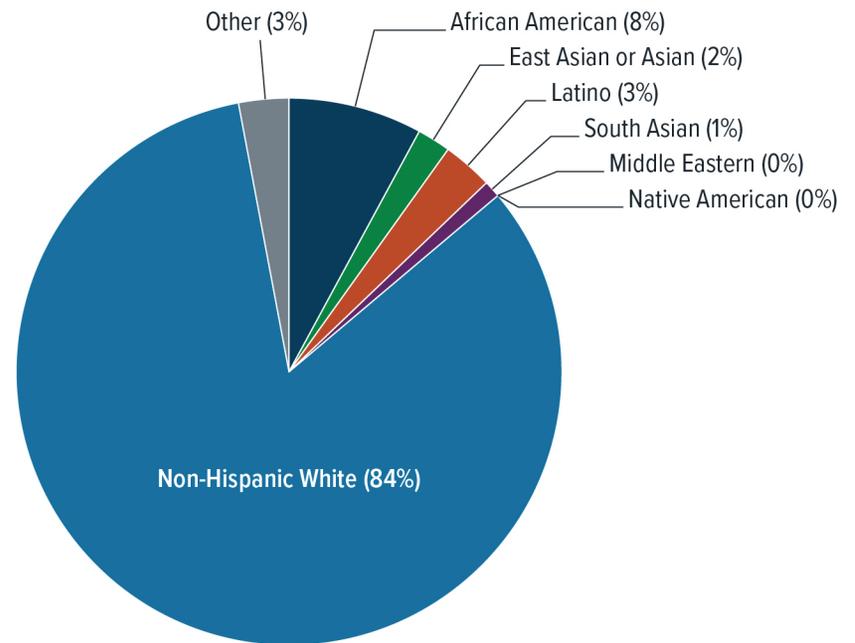
\*For the states in each zone, see <https://www.naesp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/NAESP-Zone-Map-2021.pdf>.

A total of 36 focus groups were convened. Focus groups were scheduled at various dates and times between March 2021 and May 2021. Focus group questions were prepared with input from NAESP and the Joyce Foundation. Three researchers led each focus group discussion. All focus group members participated in focus group discussions, but not all focus group members responded to each question.

Focus group discussions were transcribed and coded using Atlas.ti. Coding proceeded to build grounded themes through a comparative method. Themes were then categorized by school changes, changes to the principal profession, and policy recommendations. Quotes presented in each brief are associated with each theme, and the higher thematic categories are addressed by each of the three briefs.

Based on the demographic information of principals in the focus groups, the sample includes more female principals (63%) than the national average, more non-Hispanic White principals than the national average (Exhibit A.3), and more new principals (28% with less than 3 years of experience) than the national average.

**Exhibit A.3. Demographics of principals in the focus groups**





## About the American Institutes for Research

Established in 1946, with headquarters in Arlington, Virginia, the American Institutes for Research® (AIR®) is a nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization that conducts behavioral and social science research and delivers technical assistance to solve some of the most urgent challenges in the U.S. and around the world. We advance evidence in the areas of education, health, the workforce, human services, and international development to create a better, more equitable world. The AIR family of organizations now includes IMPAQ, Maher & Maher, and Kimetrica. For more information, visit [AIR.ORG](https://www.air.org).



**AIR® Headquarters**  
1400 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor  
Arlington, VA 22202-3289  
+1.202.403.5000 | **AIR.ORG**