
D.C. Public School Principals Share Challenges, Concerns

A survey about improving outcomes for all students

Conducted by Untold Research for the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor

September 4, 2018



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1350 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W.
Washington, DC 20004
The Hon. Phil Mendelson
Chairman, Council of the District of Columbia
The Hon. David Grosso
Chairman, Committee on Education

Dear Chairman Mendelson and Councilmember Grosso:

On January 17, 2018, the State Board of Education voted to ask the Office of the D.C. Auditor (ODCA) to “examine the institutional conditions and culture that have allegedly created an education system that prioritizes appearances and outcomes data over genuine improvement.” On February 21, 2018, Education Committee Chairman David Grosso sent a letter to Mayor Muriel Bowser asking for a comprehensive review of the promotion and graduation issues in the District’s public schools, going beyond the audit conducted for the Office of the State Superintendent of Education by Alvarez & Marsal which focused on high schools. He asked that the additional review cover attendance and promotion issues in elementary and middle schools.

What follows is a research memorandum on a survey of District of Columbia Public School principals designed to provide answers to at least some of the questions posed by the State Board and the Chairman of the Education Committee. The research firm Untold Research sent a survey to each of DCPS’s 108 elementary, middle, and high school principals; 47 participated in the survey resulting in a 43% response rate. This was followed by confidential in-depth interviews with principals and other education professionals. The survey included questions arising from the Alvarez & Marsal audit to probe whether principals across the system experience undue pressure to promote students. It included questions mirrored in a 2012 national survey of principals by MetLife. One finding: while 20% of principals nationally say they feel “under great stress” almost every day, among the DCPS principals who responded to this survey, 54% say they feel “great stress” almost every day.

The survey highlights principal concerns with the impact of 1-year employment contracts for principals which remain as a vestige of the D.C. Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority, the “control board” brought in when the District was close to bankruptcy. In 1996, the Authority removed the superintendent and elected Board of Education, replacing the board with appointed Trustees who implemented the 1-year contracts.¹ In addition, 72% of respondents cited funding as their greatest concern: not the amount of funding per se but, rather, that they are not able to allocate funds for priority needs at their local schools.

¹. See 5 DCMR § E520. The Emergency Transitional Education Board of Trustees, pursuant to the authority set forth in D.C. Code § 31-101 et seq. (now codified at Title 38) and the November 15, 1996, order of the District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority (commonly referred to as the D.C. Control Board) promulgated the regulations on December 12, 1997 (final rulemaking published at 44 DCR 7536, 7537). The regulations are still in effect.

The survey findings present a series of challenges for policymakers ranging from undue pressure to burdensome paperwork to a lack of sufficient time to build camaraderie among teachers and within the local school community. There is no question that principals are a key to academic success for students. In the District, as elsewhere, theirs are critical voices in the continuing effort to improve outcomes for District of Columbia children.

We hope by giving voice to DCPS principals through a confidential survey and interviews, we are contributing useful information for policymakers as they address the ongoing work of education reform.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kathy Patterson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kathy" and last name "Patterson" clearly distinguishable.

District of Columbia Auditor

cc: D.C. Councilmembers

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Date: August 10, 2018
To: Kathy Patterson, D.C. Auditor
From: Untold Research
RE: Findings from quantitative and qualitative research on DCPS principals

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

To better understand the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of DCPS principals, Untold Research sent an online survey to 108 elementary, middle and high school principals; 47 principals participated, yielding a response rate of 43%. The quantitative data collection period began May 23 and concluded June 6, 2018. While the number of responses certainly yields reliable data, in some cases, such as analyzing across school types, findings should be considered more qualitative in nature. Demographic information on the survey participants can be found on page 13.

To supplement the quantitative findings, five individual interviews were also conducted with principals and educational professionals. This qualitative data collection period began June 8 and concluded June 20, 2018.

Unless otherwise noted, any reference to principals in these findings means the principals who responded to this survey, not all DCPS principals.

Comparison data is provided by *The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership* (2012), which also gathered quantitative data on principals (n=500) of grades K-12 across the country. This data was collected October 9 through November 9, 2012, via telephone interviews.

“DCPS is yet to acknowledge the unreasonable pressure that 1-year contracts and the IMPACT evaluation system (for all staff) puts on schools. Until that is addressed, there will continue to be a culture of pressure/indifference to bend and violate policies to hit data metrics and targets. A narrow focus on graduation requirement monitoring misses the bigger picture and root cause of the problems facing DCPS.” – DCPS principal

KEY FINDINGS

- Funding concerns, from lack thereof to mandated allocations, cause principals the most amount of stress and frustration, which they experience far more than their peers across the country.
- One-year principal contracts are a destabilizing force throughout DCPS that reportedly stifle administrator creativity and drive high volumes of turn over.
- There is a sense the pressure created by the 1-year principal contracts combined with the national publicity surrounding DCPS improvements and subsequently-determined goals contributed to a district-wide culture of passing students regardless of academic performance.
- A principal's opinion of the Central Office is largely dictated by their experiences with their Instructional Superintendent and those at the high school level who feel the Central Office is more of an impediment than a support are more likely to have lower Insight scores.
- By and large, principals feel the graduation and promotion requirements should not be one-size-fits-all and need to consult with individual principals to determine appropriate and realistic goals, taking into consideration the school's population, resources, and needs.
- Principals feel to be an effective school leader, one must work well with the school community, however, strong majorities report not having near enough time to spend with teachers or the school community due to onerous volumes of reports and other paperwork.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Adequate funding is far and away DCPS principals' greatest concern. Principals expressed great frustration with not necessarily the amount of funding, but the strings attached to it and the ways in which the funds are allocated. Seven in ten (72%) principals say they want more control over their school's finances. The needs of each school are different and principals report being unable to fund positions and programs relevant to the success of their respective schools.

For example, one principal talked about the stipulations put on his funding as not aligning with the needs of his school. He is required to have a part-time Spanish teacher on staff which "does not bear the educational impact we'd like to have" on the students. The principal concedes full immersion language programs are outstanding, but in his school, a reading specialist position would better serve his students: "It's great if you can learn a second language, but I want everyone leaving here with a strong English language holding." Instead, this principal feels he could fully fund all the programs to make his school and student population successful if he was given a pot of money to distribute as he saw fit instead of having to abide by pre-determined expenditures.

Perhaps even more frustrating for principals is the inequitable support given by each school's PTAs. PTAs in affluent areas of the city raise surpluses of money to supplement district funding, affording those schools more advanced offerings and services. Meanwhile, the PTAs of schools with more low-income students are less successful in fundraising, making the funding gap between schools across the district even greater.

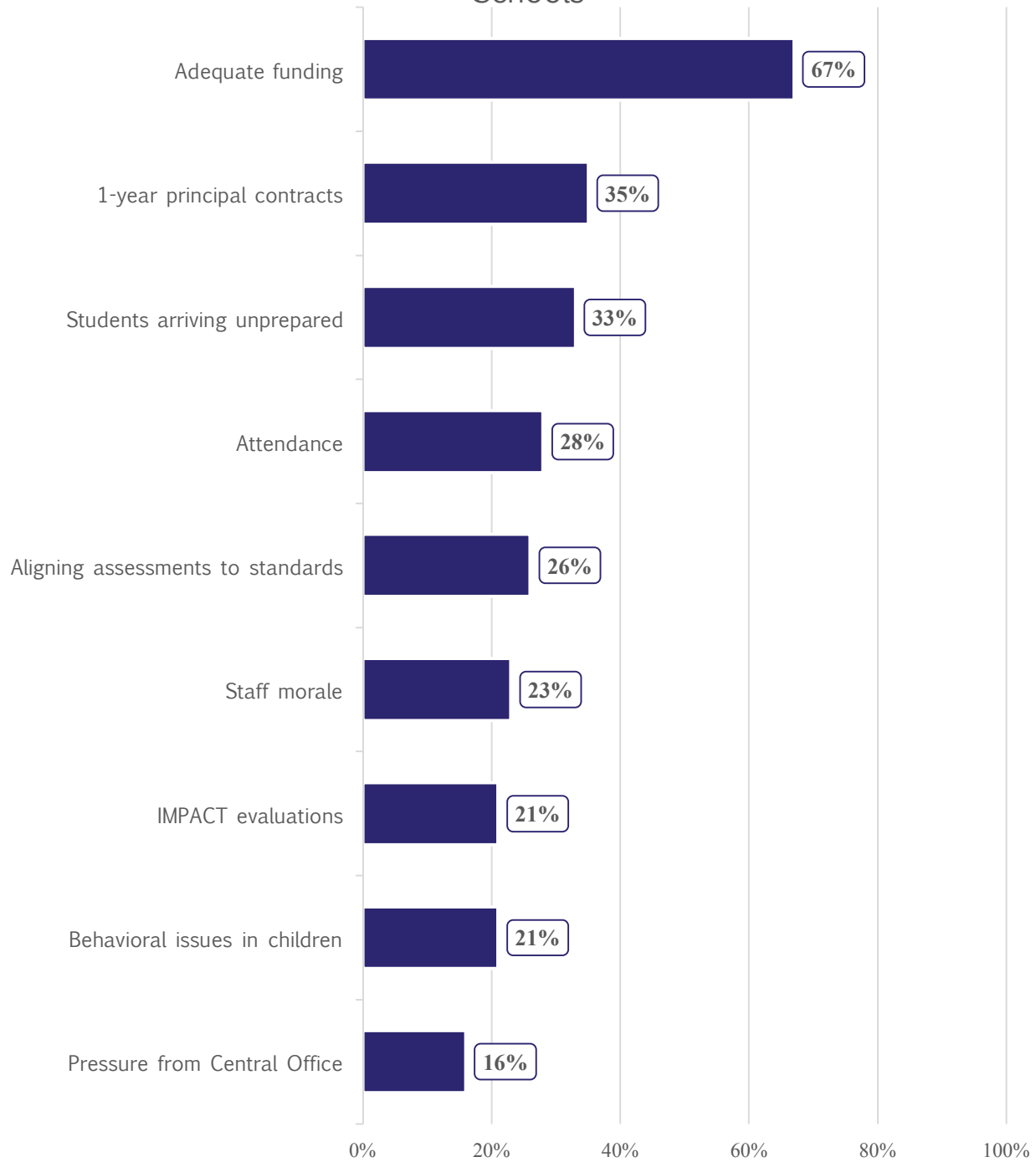
Another funding-related concern is how per student funds remain at a school even after a student transfers, placing a greater strain on schools receiving students part way through the school year. This is a particular problem for comprehensive schools who often take in students from charter schools that keep the money even after a student transfers.

One-year principal contracts are also of great concern and, upon further investigation, a likely contributor to overall stress and limited success of DCPS principals. Experienced educational professionals say it takes between 4-7 years to change a school and the 1-year principal contracts, make it nearly impossible for principals to implement policies and procedures that bring about meaningful change. Reform requires tough and often unpopular decisions; with the prospect of losing one's job each year, few principals feel comfortable enough to steer their schools in bold directions fearing career-ending repercussions.

"Given my experience, we never have enough money. Really, every year, we're a high performing school, we've done very well. Yet, every year, come budget time, we have to cut. It's frustrating. We've grown in enrollment, yet every year we're still having to fight." – DCPS principal

"Core issues of inequity in the District are not addressed. They don't talk about them directly or at all. The problem hasn't been named, and when you don't name a problem you don't have a chance to change it. Students are not getting an equitable education across our city and that's a problem that needs to be addressed throughout the District." – DCPS principal

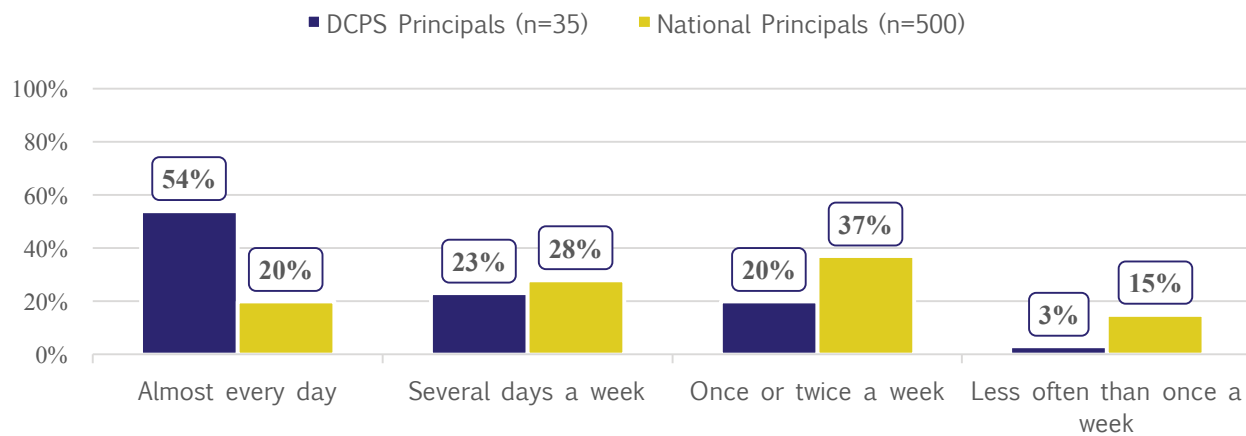
Greatest Concerns Facing DCPS Principals in their Schools



“This job is a 24-hour/7-day per week job. We are under constant scrutiny for each decision that we make and are under pressure to produce higher achievement results each year. I find Central Office to be non-responsive and frustrating. Directives are often issued with little to no consideration for how schools will implement and no attention is paid to the amount of support that schools need. Each year we face budget cuts and are expected to do more with less.” – DCPS principal

DCPS principals who responded to this survey report feeling great stress significantly more frequently than their national peers. This is undoubtedly a contributing factor for the two-thirds (67%) who say they are “very likely” (40%) or “fairly likely” (27%) to leave their current principal role within DCPS in the next five years and seek a similar position elsewhere. At the high school level, principals are twice as likely (80%) than the average DCPS principal to admit they are “very likely” to leave within five years. When probed, reasons for this fell into four main, but overlapping categories: lack of support from the Central Office; lack of job security; lack of a work/life balance; and, overall, unrealistic expectations from DCPS leadership.

Reported Frequency of Feeling Under Great Stress



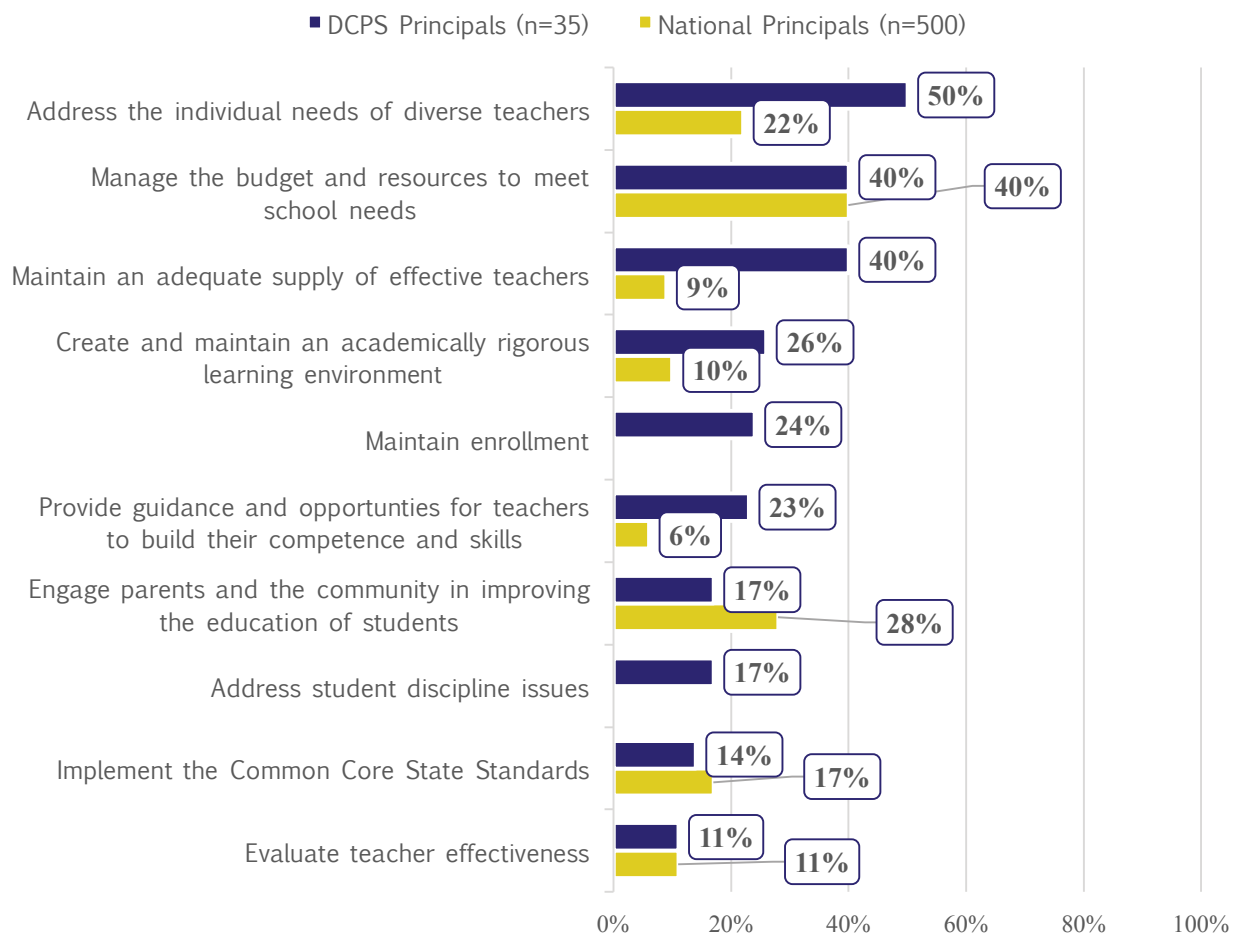
Principals find nearly all elements of their job more challenging than their national peers.

First and foremost, one-half (50%) of DCPS principals say it is very challenging to address the individual needs of diverse teachers, more than double the rate of principals across the country who say the same (22%). Another main struggle for DCPS principals is to maintain an adequate supply of effective teachers; principals are more than four times as likely to say this is very challenging for them (40%) than other principals (9%). Perhaps because of the annual goal setting by the District, one-quarter of principals find it very challenging to create and maintain an academically rigorous learning environment (26%) and provide guidance and opportunities for teachers to build their competence and skills (23%), significantly more than principals across the country (10% and 6%, respectively).

Just because these DCPS principals are on par with national principals when it comes to managing the budget and resources to meet school needs (40% and 40%, respectively), does not mean it should be ignored; this is cited as a very challenging aspect of the job for two in five principals.

Challenges Faced by Principals

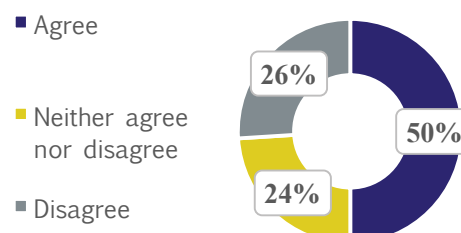
- % saying "Very challenging" -



To help cope with these challenges, a majority of DCPS principals feel the Central Office has been a support (57%) and two-thirds (68%) say they get the right amount of support from their Instructional Superintendent, but both vary greatly based on the grade level. Every surveyed high school principal said the Central Office is an impediment (100%) and two in five (40%) say the Instructional Superintendent interferes too much.

Regardless, **one-half (50%) of principals feel DCPS has a culture of passing students regardless of academic performance.** A majority of principals blame this on DCPS's aggressive graduation and promotion goals (56%), which some perceive as stemming from city lawmakers' repeated public statements on the District being the fastest-improving in the nation.¹ Some believe the hype preceded the reality, increasing the pressure to create results that fit the pre-established narrative.

"I believe there is a DCPS-wide culture of passing students regardless of academic performance."

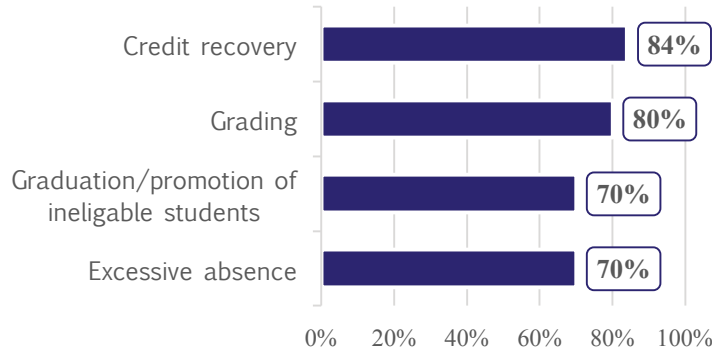


Therefore, these lofty, perhaps currently unachievable, goals of high graduation and promotion rates coupled with the threat of losing one's job due to the 1-year contract may have created a perceived sense of pressure to pass or promote undeserving students. However, this pressure is not felt by all administrators, as just as many say they feel a great deal of pressure (31%) as say they feel none (31%), but this does vary by grade and income level as more than four out of five (83%) high school principals and two in five (41%) principals of low-income schools report feeling a great deal of pressure.

Principals were candid in explaining how this pressure manifested itself in covert ways. For example, while requests were not made to blatantly change a failing grade to a passing grade, some teachers were encouraged to give students who didn't turn in work a 50% instead of a 0%, thus reducing the change of an overall failing grade in the class. Understandably, this was not appreciated by some and **one-quarter (24%) of principals know DCPS teachers who have left their positions because of undue pressure around grades, absences, and/or promotions.**

¹ Brown, Emma, et al. ["It Was Hailed as the National Model for School Reform. Then the Scandals Hit."](#) *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 10 Mar. 2018

"A lack of support and oversight from the Central Office contributed significantly to system-wide policy violations related to..."
 -- % saying "Agree" --



Another example of this pressure is expressed by the three in four high school principals who say the Central Office encouraged use of credit recovery for original credit at their schools. Furthermore, a strong majority of principals at all grade levels agree a lack of support and oversight from Central Office contributed significantly to system-wide policy violations related to credit recovery (84%), grading (80%), graduation/promotion of

ineligible students (70%), and excessive absences (70%).

Despite this grim outlook, principals feel some Central Office tools are helpful. The Instructional Culture Insight survey is used by more than 1,300 schools across the country—including DCPS—to improve their talent management practices and build schools that are exceptional places for teaching and learning. **Two-thirds (67%) of the respondents find the Insight surveys and responses useful in creating a strong learning environment.** To see if there is a pattern between the high school Insight report scores and the survey responses, the index percentile ranking and the index scores for each of the eleven assessment areas were examined. In general, principals who think the Central Office is more of an impediment than a support have more areas in need improvement based on their Insight report, which could signal a disconnect between Central Office and the leadership in each of these schools. Beyond this structured opportunity, there is a strong interest among the DCPS community in providing feedback through other means as a majority (53%) of principals agree there should be additional avenues for teachers and staff to lodge complaints or offer information anonymously.

A majority of principals (66%) say the IMPACT requirements limit their opportunity to be a creative leader for their school, including all of the high school principals (100%) and most of the elementary school principals (71%). There is a sense the success of IMPACT lies at the feet of the individual Instructional Superintendent – those who adopt a coaching model and support principals throughout the year build good relationships and their guidance is better received than from those who merely perform the required assessments. While principals do see value in the IMPACT requirements, most believe it is not flawless. As one respondent said, “The next chancellor should be someone who can fairly assess if IMPACT is still the right way to evaluate our teachers and staff.”

When it comes to setting the school’s promotion goals, a plurality of principals feel they should have more say (40%), while nearly as many say they have enough (36%). Again, this does vary by grade level as two-thirds of high school principals (67%) say they don’t have enough and none (0%) say they currently have enough. A lot of their concerns stem from unrealistic goal setting and a one-size-fits-all approach; there is a sense that because the principals know their

students and the academic environment best, they should at least be consulted in crafting the graduation and promotion requirements for their school.

“Principals have the best context of factors that will impact promotion such as ELL, Special ed population, students entering below grade level, etc. and there should be space for them to share the context. A one size fits all approach does not take into account factors that would severely impact a school's ability to meet a prescribed goal.” – DCPS principal

“Crafting these goals should be contextualized with the principal at the school level based on conversations about a wide variety of factors and possibly change from year to year. The previous model of a static minimum expectation for % increase year to year is so obviously flawed it's embarrassing. More focus should be placed on the effectiveness of intervention systems in both a subjective and objective way to determine the effectiveness of school teams.” – DCPS principal

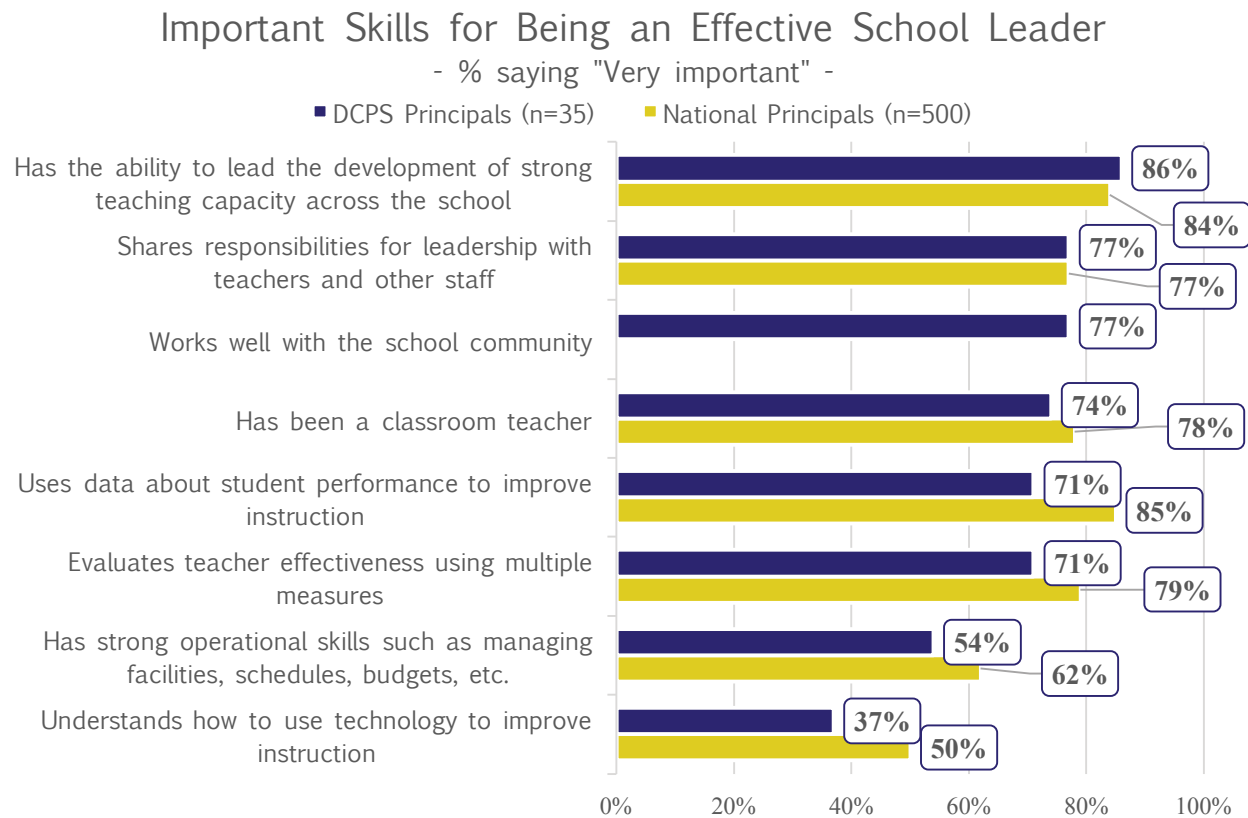
“For years, people have been pressured to have graduation goals that are unrealistic based on their school's previous performance. Goals are arbitrarily created based on rates of improvement that people not working in schools want to boast to celebrate district-wide progress. A strict district-wide policy is a double-edged sword that will significant impact our most underserved and low performing children in the district concentrated in high poverty schools.” – DCPS principal

Principals align closely with their national peers when it comes to their prioritization of important skills for being an effective school leader. A majority of both cohorts believe the ability to lead the development of strong teaching capacities across the school is very important (86% DCPS principals; 84% national principals) as is sharing leadership responsibilities with teachers and other staff (77% DCPS principals; 77% national principals).

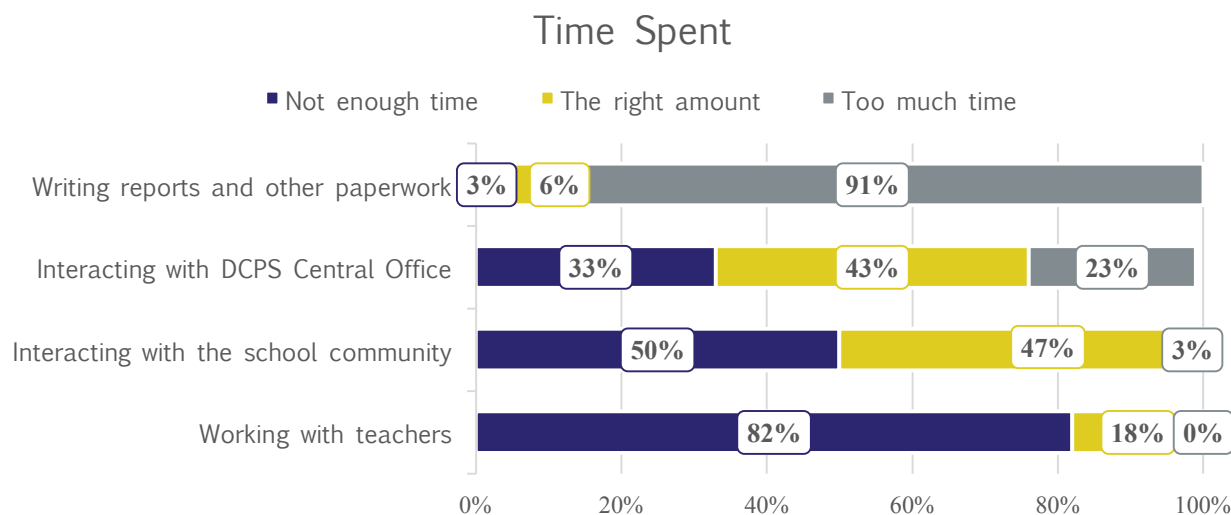
Principals find working well with the school community to be a very important aspect of their job (77%), followed closely by being a former classroom teacher (74%). Fortunately, all principals who participated in the survey were a classroom teacher (100%) before becoming an administrator – four in five of whom taught for five or more years (82%).

Compared to their national peers, principals believe using student performance data to improve instruction is less important (71%, compared to 85%), which complements their views on how a one-size-fits-all evaluation model does not adequately serve the schools within the District of Columbia. The importance of using technology to improve instruction is another departure for principals from their national counterparts (37%, compared to 50%), which may be a result of the funding restrictions facing principals in the District which makes utilization of such technology simply not a realistic option for most.

According to principals, another important element of being an effective school leader is sharing experiences, best practices, and lessons learned, yet, currently, there is no formal channel for such knowledge exchange across schools and Wards in the District.



Despite believing that working well within a school community is the most important aspect of their job, a majority of principals feel they do not have enough time for this. **Nearly all feel they spend far too much time writing reports and doing other paper work (91%) and not enough time working with teachers (82%).** Every high school principal (100%) says they do not spend enough time interacting with the school community, as do four in five (83%) principals of alternative-format schools, seven in ten (71%) principals of schools with 50% or more low-income students, and two-thirds (67%) of middle school principals.



Furthermore, a majority of principals would like to have more control over the curriculum and instruction at their schools (61%) – particularly at the high school (83%) and elementary school (71%) levels -- as well as have more control when it comes to removing teachers (54%). Among those who are familiar with the additional monitoring instituted in the 2017-2018 school year to ensure only qualified students graduate, one-half (50%) of principals feel the changes will be effective. The one-in ten (11%) who feel nothing will change feel a number of alternatives would be more impactful.

“Put systems in place that don't specify seat hours if a student can show mastery of content.” – DCPS principal

“Competency based assessments through which students can demonstrate their mastery of the standards.” – DCPS principal

“Create a standard elementary grading policy to ensure that student mastery is being reported consistently across the district. Create a standards-based report card at all levels.” – DCPS principal

Some principals feel promotion should be more closely tied to standardized demonstrations of content mastery yet are torn when it comes to the amount of time students spend on test preparation. Nearly one-half (47%) of principals feel their students spend the right amount of time on test prep, with only one-third (32%) saying too much time is spent on this. However, high school principals (50%) are much more inclined to believe too much time is spent on test prep.

CONCLUSIONS

While experiences are different across the District, the passing or graduation of undeserving students likely resulted from a perfect storm of false inflation and promotion of DCPS achievements resulting in unachievable goals and pressure to meet these requirements for fear of losing one's job due to 1-year contracts. The pervasive sentiments of being set up to fail, overburdened, and saddled with unrealistic goals with tremendous, career-impacting consequences is contributing to an unstable feeling among the principals in this survey. One-year principal contracts stifle professional creativity, create unpredictable work environments, and drive good administrators out of the District.

There are a number of important funding issues currently facing DCPS principals; the most prevalent challenges revealed by this research include: (1) per student funding that does not follow a student should he or she change schools; (2) restrictions placed on principals when it comes to allocating their budgets as they see fit; and (3) unaddressed or acknowledged inequalities existing across schools and Wards which contribute to great disparities in the quality of educations available to students.

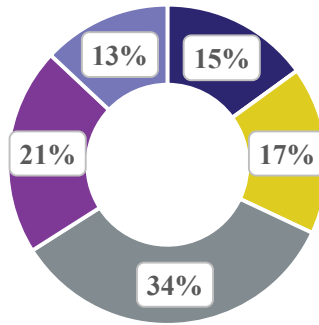
Principals shoulder tremendous administrative responsibilities which prevent them spending time with teachers and their school communities – an aspect they regard as the most important part of their job but something for which they currently do not have enough time. Most want increased opportunities to knowledge share with their fellow administrators as well as anonymously provide information to the Central Office without fear of repercussions.

Principals feel they should have more say in setting their school's promotion and graduation goals, as currently, none say they have enough. The greatest concern among this group is that a one-size-fits-all does not account for the important differences and needs experienced school to school.

DEMOGRAPHICS

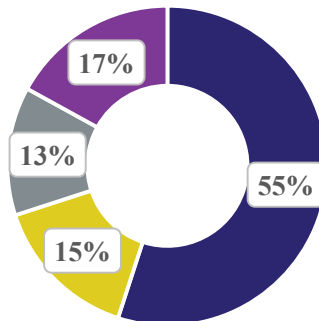
Years of Experience as a DCPS Principal

- First year
- Second year
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 10+ years



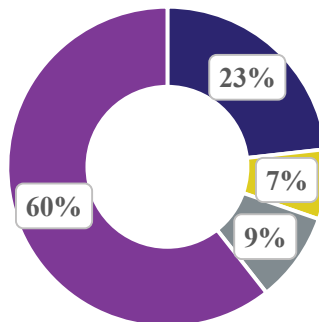
School Level

- Elementary school
- Middle/junior high school
- High school
- Other type of school



Percentage of Low-income Students in School

- Less than 25%
- 25-50%
- 51-80%
- More than 80%





Appendix A
District of Columbia Public School Principal
Survey 2018

Q1. How long have you been a DCPS principal? (n=47)	
	Percent
This is my first year	15%
This is my second year	17%
3-5 years	34%
6-10 years	21%
More than 10 years	13%
Total	100%

Q2. Please select the type of school of which you are the principal. (n=47)	
	Percent
A high school	26%
A middle school/junior high	15%
An elementary school	55%
Other	4%
Total	100%

Q3. Before becoming an administrator, were you ever a classroom teacher? (n=47)	
	Percent
Yes	100%
No	0%
Total	100%

Q4. For how long were you a classroom teacher? (n=45)

	Percent
1-2 years	2%
3-4 years	16%
5-10 years	58%
More than 10 years	24%
Total	100%

Q5. In your current school, how many of your students are considered low-income? Select your best estimate. (n=43)

	Percent
Less than 25%	23%
25-50%	7%
51-80%	9%
More than 80%	61%
Total	100%

Q6. Thinking back over the past five years, overall, has the DCPS Central Office been more of an impediment or a support? (n=43)

	Percent
Impediment	43%
Support	57%
Total	100%

Q7. Thinking about your current school, please select the three items below that are of greatest concern to you. Please make up to three selections. (n=47)

	Percent
Adequate funding	67%
1-year principal contracts	35%
Students arriving unprepared	33%
Attendance	28%
Aligning assessments to standards	26%
Staff morale	23%
Impact evaluations	21%
Behavioral issues in children	21%
Pressure from Central Office	16%

*Figures don't add up to 100% because respondents could select more than one option

Q8. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? I believe there is a DCPS-wide culture of passing students regardless of academic performance (n=38)

	Percent
Agree	50%
Neither agree nor disagree	24%
Disagree	26%
Total	100%

Q9_1. How much do you feel each of the following factors contribute to a culture of passing students? *Empathy for the extreme needs of DCPS students* (n=33)

	Percent
A great deal	24%
Somewhat	58%
A negligible amount	9%
Not at all	9%
Total	100%

Q9_2. How much do you feel each of the following factors contribute to a culture of passing students? *Aggressive graduation and promotion goals* (n=32)

	Percent
A great deal	56%
Somewhat	28%
A negligible amount	3%
Not at all	13%
Total	100%

Q9_3. How much do you feel each of the following factors contribute to a culture of passing students? *Increasingly burdensome documentation required to fail students* (n=33)

	Percent
A great deal	15%
Somewhat	36%
A negligible amount	12%
Not at all	36%
Total	100%

Q10_1. Do you agree or disagree: A lack of support and oversight from central office contributed significantly to system-wide policy violations related to *grading* (n=30)

	Percent
Agree	80%
Neither agree nor disagree	10%
Disagree	10%
Total	100%

Q10_2. Do you agree or disagree: A lack of support and oversight from central office contributed significantly to system-wide policy violations related to *credit recovery* (n=25)

	Percent
Agree	84%
Neither agree nor disagree	8%
Disagree	8%
Total	100%

Q10_3. Do you agree or disagree: A lack of support and oversight from central office contributed significantly to system-wide policy violations related to *excessive absences* (n=30)

	Percent
Agree	70%
Neither agree nor disagree	13%
Disagree	17%
Total	100%

Q10_4. Do you agree or disagree: A lack of support and oversight from central office contributed significantly to system-wide policy violations related to *graduation/promotion of ineligible students* (n=30)

	Percent
Agree	70%
Neither agree nor disagree	23%
Disagree	7%
Total	100%

Q11. Have you ever been instructed to modify student records? (n=38)

	Percent
Yes	3%
No	97%
Total	100%

Q12. As a DCPS principal, how much pressure do you feel to attain high graduation or promotion rates each year? (n=26)

	Percent
A great deal	31%
Some	19%
Not very much	19%
None	31%
Total	100%

Q13. Are you aware of DCPS teachers who have left their positions because of undue pressure around grades, absences, and/or promotions? (n=38)

	Percent
Yes	24%
No	76%
Total	100%

Q14. Do you feel principals have enough, not enough, or should have more say in their school's promotion goals? (n=25)

	Percent
Enough	36%
Not enough	24%
Should have more	40%
Total	100%

Q15. How much control over the credit recovery program do you have at your school? (n=5)

	Percent
A great deal	20%
Somewhat	60%
A negligible amount	20%
Not at all	0%
Total	100%

Q16. How much did the central office encourage use of credit recovery for original credit at your school? (n=4)

	Percent
A great deal	25%
Somewhat	50%
A negligible amount	0%
Not at all	25%
Total	100%

Q18_1. For each of the following areas, which best describes your level of control? -- *Teacher schedules* (n=38)

	Percent
Complete	50%
Enough	32%
Some	16%
None	3%
Total	100%

Q18_2. For each of the following areas, which best describes your level of control? -- *Hiring teachers* (n=38)

	Percent
Complete	58%
Enough	34%
Some	8%
None	0%
Total	100%

Q18_3. For each of the following areas, which best describes your level of control? -- *Removing teachers* (n=38)

	Percent
Complete	16%
Enough	39%
Some	37%
None	8%
Total	100%

Q18_4. For each of the following areas, which best describes your level of control? -- *Curriculum and Instruction* (n=38)

	Percent
Complete	5%
Enough	32%
Some	55%
None	8%
Total	100%

Q18_5. For each of the following areas, which best describes your level of control? -- *Finances* (n=38)

	Percent
Complete	5%
Enough	29%
Some	61%
None	5%
Total	100%

Q19_1. For each of the following areas, would you like more, less, or about the same level of control? *Teacher schedules* (n=36)

	Percent
More	39%
Less	0%
About the same	61%
Total	100%

Q19_2. For each of the following areas, would you like more, less, or about the same level of control? *Hiring teachers (n=36)*

	Percent
More	39%
Less	0%
About the same	61%
Total	100%

Q19_3. For each of the following areas, would you like more, less, or about the same level of control? *Removing teachers (n=35)*

	Percent
More	54%
Less	3%
About the same	43%
Total	100%

Q19_4. For each of the following areas, would you like more, less, or about the same level of control? *Curriculum and Instruction (n=36)*

	Percent
More	61%
Less	0%
About the same	39%
Total	100%

Q19_5. For each of the following areas, would you like more, less, or about the same level of control? *Finances (n=36)*

	Percent
More	72%
Less	0%
About the same	28%
Total	100%

Q20. How familiar are you with the additional monitoring instituted in the 2017-2018 school year to ensure only qualified students graduate or are promoted? (n=36)

	Percent
Very familiar	19%
Somewhat familiar	50%
Not familiar at all	31%
Total	100%

Q21. Overall, how effective do you believe these changes will be in ensuring only qualified students graduate or are promoted? (n=18)

[IF Q20=VERY FAMILIAR OR SOMEWHAT FAMILIAR]	Percent
Effective	50%
Neither effective nor effective	39%
Ineffective	11%
Total	100%

Q23. In your job as school principal, how often do you feel under great stress? (n=35)

	Percent
Almost every day	54%
Several days a week	23%
Once or twice a week	20%
Less often than once a week	3%
Total	100%

Q24. Within the next five years, how likely it is that you will leave your job as a school principal within the District of Columbia and seek a similar position elsewhere? (n=30)

	Percent
Very likely	40%
Fairly likely	27%
Not too likely	27%
Not at all likely	7%
Total	100%

Q26. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? There should be additional avenues for DCPS teachers and staff to lodge complaints or offer information anonymously. (n=34)

	Percent
Agree	54%
Neither agree nor disagree	26%
Disagree	21%
Total	100%

Q27_1. In thinking about how you spend your time at work, do you feel you spend too much time, not enough time, or the right amount of time on each of the following? *Working with teachers* (n=34)

	Percent
Too much time	0%
Not enough time	82%
Right amount of time	18%
Total	100%

Q27_2. In thinking about how you spend your time at work, do you feel you spend too much time, not enough time, or the right amount of time on each of the following? *Writing reports and other paperwork* (n=34)

	Percent
Too much time	91%
Not enough time	3%
Right amount of time	6%
Total	100%

Q27_3. In thinking about how you spend your time at work, do you feel you spend too much time, not enough time, or the right amount of time on each of the following? *Interacting with the school community* (n=34)

	Percent
Too much time	3%
Not enough time	40%
Right amount of time	57%
Total	100%

Q27_4. In thinking about how you spend your time at work, do you feel you spend too much time, not enough time, or the right amount of time on each of the following? *Interacting with DCPS Central Office* (n=30)

	Percent
Too much time	23%
Not enough time	33%
Right amount of time	43%
Total	100%

Q28. In your opinion, do your students spend too much, not enough, or just the right amount of time on test preparation? (n=34)

	Percent
Too much time	32%
Not enough time	21%
Right amount of time	47%
Total	100%

Q29_1. How challenging is it for a school's leaders to do each of the following? -- *Provide guidance and opportunities for teachers to build their competence and skills* (n=35)

	Percent
Very challenging	23%
Challenging	49%
Not too challenging	20%
Not at all challenging	9%
Total	100%

Q29_2. How challenging is it for a school's leaders to do each of the following? -- *Address the individual needs of diverse learners* (n=34)

	Percent
Very challenging	50%
Challenging	44%
Not too challenging	6%
Not at all challenging	0%
Total	100%

Q29_3. How challenging is it for a school's leaders to do each of the following? -- *Manage the budget and resources to meet school needs* (n=35)

	Percent
Very challenging	40%
Challenging	40%
Not too challenging	20%
Not at all challenging	0%
Total	100%

Q29_4. How challenging is it for a school's leaders to do each of the following? -- *Engage parents and the community in improving the education of students* (n=35)

	Percent
Very challenging	17%
Challenging	49%
Not too challenging	26%
Not at all challenging	9%
Total	100%

Q29_5. How challenging is it for a school's leaders to do each of the following? -- *Implement the Common Core State Standards* (n=35)

	Percent
Very challenging	14%
Challenging	34%
Not too challenging	46%
Not at all challenging	6%
Total	100%

Q29_6. How challenging is it for a school's leaders to do each of the following? -- *Create and maintain an academically rigorous learning environment* (n=35)

	Percent
Very challenging	26%
Challenging	46%
Not too challenging	20%
Not at all challenging	9%
Total	100%

Q29_7. How challenging is it for a school's leaders to do each of the following? -- *Evaluate teacher effectiveness* (n=35)

	Percent
Very challenging	11%
Challenging	26%
Not too challenging	51%
Not at all challenging	11%
Total	100%

Q29_8. How challenging is it for a school's leaders to do each of the following? -- *Maintain an adequate supply of effective teachers* (n=35)

	Percent
Very challenging	40%
Challenging	31%
Not too challenging	20%
Not at all challenging	9%
Total	100%

Q29_9. How challenging is it for a school's leaders to do each of the following? -- *Address student discipline issues* (n=35)

	Percent
Very challenging	17%
Challenging	46%
Not too challenging	29%
Not at all challenging	9%
Total	100%

Q29_10. How challenging is it for a school's leaders to do each of the following? -- *Maintain enrollment* (n=34)

	Percent
Very challenging	24%
Challenging	38%
Not too challenging	21%
Not at all challenging	18%
Total	100%

Q30_1. In order to be an effective school leader, how important is it that the school principal has the following experiences and skills? -- *Uses data about student performance to improve instruction* (n=35)

	Percent
Very important	71%
Important	29%
Not too important	0%
Not at all important	0%
Total	100%

Q30_2. In order to be an effective school leader, how important is it that the school principal has the following experiences and skills? -- *Has the ability to lead the development of strong teaching capacity across the school* (n=35)

	Percent
Very important	86%
Important	14%
Not too important	0%
Not at all important	0%
Total	100%

Q30_3. In order to be an effective school leader, how important is it that the school principal has the following experiences and skills? -- *Evaluates teacher effectiveness using multiple measures* (n=35)

	Percent
Very important	71%
Important	26%
Not too important	3%
Not at all important	0%
Total	100%

Q30_4. In order to be an effective school leader, how important is it that the school principal has the following experiences and skills? -- *Has been a classroom teacher* (n=35)

	Percent
Very important	74%
Important	26%
Not too important	0%
Not at all important	0%
Total	100%

Q30_5. In order to be an effective school leader, how important is it that the school principal has the following experiences and skills? -- *Shares responsibilities for leadership with teachers and other staff* (n=35)

	Percent
Very important	77%
Important	23%
Not too important	0%
Not at all important	0%
Total	100%

Q30_6. In order to be an effective school leader, how important is it that the school principal has the following experiences and skills? -- *Has strong operational skills such as managing facilities, schedules, budgets, etc.* (n=35)

	Percent
Very important	54%
Important	31%
Not too important	14%
Not at all important	0%
Total	100%

Q30_7. In order to be an effective school leader, how important is it that the school principal has the following experiences and skills? -- *Understands how to use technology to improve instruction* (n=35)

	Percent
Very important	37%
Important	31%
Not too important	29%
Not at all important	6%
Total	100%

Q30_8. In order to be an effective school leader, how important is it that the school principal has the following experiences and skills? -- *Works well with the school community* (n=35)

	Percent
Very important	77%
Important	23%
Not too important	0%
Not at all important	0%
Total	100%

Q31. How would you describe the support you receive from your Instructional Superintendent (n=31)

	Percent
Not enough support	23%
Too much interference	10%
Just about right	68%
Total	100%

Q32. How useful do you find the Insight surveys and responses in creating a strong learning environment? (n=33)

	Percent
Useful	67%
Neutral	21%
Not useful	12%
Total	100%

Q33. Some DCPS principals have said they feel the IMPACT requirements limit their opportunity to be a creative leader for their school. Do you agree or disagree with this position? (n=32)

	Percent
Agree	66%
Neither agree nor disagree	22%
Disagree	13%
Total	100%

*Some totals don't add to 100% due to rounding.

Questions 17, 22 and 25 were open end questions. Some open-end answers are not included because they could identify the participant and that would be in violation of the anonymity promised to the participants.

Q17. [IF Q16=A GREAT DEAL, SOME, OR A NEGLIBLE AMOUNT] Please describe in which ways you feel this pressure.

- We have felt this way to ensure that we were meeting graduation rates and promotion rate goals.
- We are constantly reminded of our targets.
- The hyper focus on outcomes communicates an "at any cost" or "by any means" expectation to principals who in turn are expected to communicate similarly with school staff.

Q22. [IF Q20=VERY FAMILIAR OR SOMEWHAT FAMILIAR] What changes do you feel would be more valuable or impactful to ensure only qualified students graduate or are promoted?

- Too much administrative requirements from Central Administration - no differentiation based on the school's previous performance
- There has to be some level of accountability with parents and students.
- The information needs to be provided to students at the beginning of the school year.
- Tardiness "on time arrival" should be tracked and reported on Progress Reports and in cumulative folders. Cumulative folders should be standardized (public & charter coordination). ACCESS RTI resources, programming and staff to support Tier 2 & 3 Interventions.
- Put systems in place that don't specify seat hours if a student can show mastery of content.
- Policies are only as effective as the people who are implementing them or the people who are monitoring the implementation. Furthermore, if a policy is not supported by central office, it will not be as impactful as it could be with the proper support.
- Not sure - new audits are helpful
- Not sure
- NA
- N/A
- Identifying and understanding the effects of generational poverty on the educational system and how best we, including the DC Government, can support families who are experiencing challenging situations outside of the school house.
- I don't know
- I do not have enough information
- Greater coordination and integration of services providers within DC. Students continue to slip through the cracks. There are failures on the part of other service providers and the schools become the scapegoats.

- Earlier standards (elementary) with a clear plan for social promotion
- DCPS is yet to acknowledge the unreasonable pressure that 1-year contracts and the IMPACT evaluation system (for all staff) puts on schools. Until that is addressed, there will continue to be a culture of pressure/indifference to bend and violate policies to hit data metrics and targets. A narrow focus on graduation requirement monitoring misses the bigger picture and root cause of the problems facing DCPS.
- Create a standard elementary grading policy to ensure that student mastery is being reported consistently across the district. Create a standards-based report card at all levels.
- Conversations from the start of the school year and clear expectations at ALL schools that is also communicated to ALL families in DCPS and DC Charters.
- Competency based assessments through which students can demonstrate their mastery of the standards
- Check in frequency
- Ensuring teacher quality and retention - addressing real needs of the students and the "why" behind their absences

Q25. [IF Q24=VERY LIKELY OR FAIRLY LIKELY] Please describe the factors that contribute to your desire to move to another school system.

- 1. Stress 2. Unrealistic expectations for student growth/progress/performance without coupling funding and supports to high needs schools 3. School segregation - Some schools are oversaturated with high needs students, not a healthy mix for students and staff 4. Too Political - Hard work isn't recognized by senior leadership, only some people are recognized based on who they know and what relationships they have with people in roles of authority and power. 5. Intensity of work - Principals have a shelf life that will survive, working in high needs schools is like living life in dog years - not sustainable with all the pressure in the district 6. We are DCPS - This is a farce. Schools are segregated and not diverse. It contributes to race and class issues between educators in the district and a lack of support for struggling schools. For example, when principals are recruiting teachers to high needs schools there are central office staff that will say "oh don't work there" to candidates interviewing for positions in certain schools. There is always someone in central office with a negative comment about a school in Ward 7 or 8. If we are all a part of the district we need to address the implicit bias and micro aggressions of people working in schools and also at central office. We can't be one district if people are not mature and aware of the challenges across the district and also everyone's collective responsibility to champion the vision for our kids - citywide. 7. Not valued/appreciated - Being a leader is a thankless job but not being appreciated by your district coupled with the day-to-day challenges is just too much.
- 1-year principal contracts, systemic belief that blaming and scapegoating adults will change student outcomes, failure to consider school or student contexts when setting targets or interpreting student performance data, lack of support from central office for principal autonomy. DCPS does an excellent job of setting mandates and expectations from central office and turning their backs on school-based staff when difficult questions or situations arise as a result.
- Burnout
- It seems as if the principal is responsible for every single function of the school district or challenge in the city. If test scores do not increase, the principal did not do enough regardless of the fact that we have no intervention specialists or even real tier 2 or 3 interventions. If the students do not come to school, the principal must not be creating a warm and nurturing environment even though the student satisfaction rate is at an all-time high. There is very little positive reinforcement for a job well-done, even if it is a small win. The daily stress level increases when you add to this the lack of job security, pay freezes due to performance, and the culture of fear perpetuated by recent changes in leadership of the District. In other school districts there is a clear-cut policy for almost all decisions that are made at the school level. This allows for less ambiguity and more clarity for parents, staff, and students. Policies and procedures seem to be fluid in DC Public Schools or you

cannot find a person to provide a clear-cut answer to the questions/challenges that arise during the year.

- Central office inexperience, changing goals, responding to difficulties with control over collaboration.
- I don't much free time at all for my family. I work 12-hour days and much of the weekends to keep up with emails, reports, paperwork, budgets, personnel and surveys. It is not healthy.
- I need to be able to know that I have a job from year to year. The one-year contract and the extra pressure by supervisors makes it almost impossible to remain in DCPS.
- Job security and development.
- Lack of job security. Too much time filling out forms versus getting into classrooms and meeting with students.
- Lack of support fiscally for the school and the lack of differentiation to ensure that all curricula fit school environments.
- Lack on autonomy/central office adjustment of expectation for my school.
- My desire is not necessarily to move to a different school system but to move out of the principal role in DCPS, which is extremely stressful and becoming burdensome to my health and lifestyle.
- Pressure
- Reduced level of autonomy -Demand of the IMPACT Teacher Evaluation System -School Modernization (w/ to additional staffing support during transitions to swing spaces. – Lack of support for Social Education Coordination – Staffing formula for at-risk.
- Retirement. My experience at DCPS has been good.
- Stress from not feeling supported in reaching goals that are set for you.
- The main factor would be the leadership: who will be the chancellor and what will the structure look like for the system
- This job is a 24-hour/7-day per week job. We are under constant scrutiny for each decision that we make and are under pressure to produce higher achievement results each year. I find central office to be non-responsive and frustrating. Directives are often issued with little to no consideration for how schools will implement, and no attention is paid to the amount of support that schools need. Each year we face budget cuts and are expected to do more with less.
- Too little support for a high need school and specific strategies to support students' interventions, scheduling, and safety and security supports.

Agency Comments

On August 10, 2018, we sent a draft copy of this report to DCPS for review and written comment. DCPS responded with written comments on August 24, 2018. Agency comments are appended in full to this report.

August 23, 2018

Kathleen Patterson
District of Columbia Auditor
717 14th Street NW, Suite 900
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Ms. Patterson:

DC Public Schools (DCPS) appreciates the opportunity to review and respond to your report dated August 10, 2018, regarding the principals' survey requested by the State Board of Education and conducted by the firm Untold Research.

DCPS is committed to recruiting, developing, and retaining a talented, caring, and diverse team of excellent educators. Strong leadership is a critical lever for establishing a positive school culture and accelerating student achievement. DCPS is committed to ensuring that our principals receive the supports they need to be successful and that our work as a district is informed by school leader voice and feedback. In DCPS' five-year strategic plan, *A Capital Commitment 2017-2022*, we made it a priority to ensure that our educators feel valued and empowered to grow professionally within DCPS, and our focus on this work has not waned.

DCPS appreciates the DC Auditor's effort to survey school leaders about their experiences and challenges in our school district. While this report provides important information from those surveyed (47 of 108 principals contacted responded to the survey, and 5 educators participated in an interview) regarding their experiences and challenges they identified related to funding, resources, and time, it is not comprehensive in nature. DCPS surveys all principals annually, and by doing so ensures an objective and comprehensive evaluation of the diverse principal experiences across our district.

In addition to the annual survey described above, DCPS has built systems and structures that intentionally give a voice within our school system. Through the Chancellor's monthly Principal Cabinet, principals raise issues for consideration and provide their input on the district's priorities. Leadership Academy events are held throughout the year, including a full week of programming during the summer, to provide school leaders with opportunities to collaborate and develop their professional practice. DCPS has also built a strong structure of principal supervisors to develop our school leaders and connect them with central office resources. This system provides for frequent touchpoints and individual coaching catered to each principal's needs. Additionally, DCPS collaborates with the Council of School Officers (CSO) through monthly meetings, trainings, and events throughout the year to advance supports for our school leaders.

DCPS has also created strong pathways to leadership that grow our educators as professionals and school leaders. New principals participate in monthly Professional Learning Communities and are assigned a principal partner. Each principal partner is a successful DCPS principal responsible for mentoring the new leader during their first year in the role. Through our home-grown Mary Jane Patterson Fellowship, DCPS prepares high-performing DCPS employees for principal positions in DCPS schools. Fellows complete a 30-month journey characterized by rich learning experiences including local and national school visits, executive coaching, and principal shadowing. DCPS leaders also have an

opportunity to earn an Executive Master's in Leadership through Georgetown University, which facilitates best-practice sharing across district and charter schools.

DCPS' sustained investment in human capital and our commitment to empowering our leaders have delivered results for our schools. [DCPS' 2017 Stakeholder Survey](#) found that 86 percent of school administrators agree or strongly agree that their school is a great place to teach and learn. In a survey at the end of School Year 2017-2018 focused on DCPS' personnel evaluation system, known as IMPACT, 78 percent of school leader respondents agree or strongly agree that IMPACT is an effective talent management tool for teachers. The same survey found that 98 percent of school leaders respondents stated they feel supported by the IMPACT team.

Because of our commitment to retaining and developing our leaders, DCPS remains a district where leaders want to work. In School Year 2017-2018, DCPS retained 95 percent of our best performing principals. The district's most effective principals are also eligible for bonuses of \$20,000 – \$30,000 for their work. This is a testament to our commitment to providing the resources, supports, and professional development that lead our principals to success and make the district a great place for educators to grow.

DCPS' vision is for all students to feel loved, challenged, and prepared to positively influence society and thrive in life. Our success is dependent upon our recruitment and retention of talented and caring school leaders who are committed to meeting the needs of every student. We look forward to continuing to invest in our school leadership in partnership with our city's leaders. Together, we can ensure that every school is led by a principal who feels valued and empowered to guarantee students reach their full potential through rigorous and joyful learning experiences provided in a nurturing environment.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to respond to your work.

Sincerely,



Amanda Alexander
Interim Chancellor
DC Public Schools

Cc: DC Councilmembers

About ODCA

The mission of the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor (ODCA) is to support the Council of the District of Columbia by making sound recommendations that improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability of the District government.

To fulfill our mission, we conduct performance audits, non-audit reviews, and revenue certifications. The residents of the District of Columbia are one of our primary customers and we strive to keep the residents of the District of Columbia informed on how their government is operating and how their tax money is being spent.

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