

Principal Certified Personnel: Evaluation of the Internal
Pool in a Large Urban School District
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Applicant pools for principal vacancies are shrinking nationwide. Researchers have identified possible reasons for this phenomenon, including the pending retirements of "baby boomers," individuals leaving administrative positions for other types of employment in education or the more lucrative private sector, and the changed role of the principal. Today, the job of the principal is characterized by higher expectations related to student outcomes, a 60-80 hour work week, supervision of evening activities, mandated state and district paperwork, and the difficulty of getting veteran teachers to change their instructional methods.

The shortage of job applicants requires school districts to assess their internal pools of principal certified personnel. In this study, certified individuals from a large district responded to a survey measuring attraction to the job of principal, current job satisfaction versus expected satisfaction in the job of principal, barriers to pursuing the job, and recommended changes in the job. The population for this study was 251 principal certified personnel employed by the focal school district. The sample consisted of 194 individuals who responded to a mailed survey. The response rate goal for the research was 60%. The actual response rate (77.3%) exceeded the usual standard recommended for social science research.

Findings showed that few participants intended to apply for principal vacancies due to age (median = 51), lack of self-reported capability to do the job, and satisfaction with the current job. The participants perceived their job satisfaction would decrease on assuming the job of principal relative to factors such as time with family and job security. The participants perceived their job satisfaction would increase on assuming a principal job relative to factors such as salary and opportunity to experience varied activities. The highest rated reasons for earning principal certification were to expand career options and to assume a greater leadership role in the district. The highest rated recommended change in the job of principal was assignment of some principal job duties to other personnel. The highest rated barriers to pursuing a job as principal were satisfaction with the current job and

the item reading: "I would have inadequate authority given the high-stakes accountability demanded of me."

Some of the practical implications of this study include: (a) investing more financial and human resources in recruiting principals from outside the district; (b) increasing efforts to recruit principals internally through such methods as more aggressive mentoring of potential principals by individuals already holding the job; and (c) restructuring the job of principal to make it more attractive. The current and expected job satisfaction ratings indicate that principal certified personnel perceive the job of principal as resulting in sacrifices related to personal and professional factors such as vacation time, time with family, job security, and hours worked. The study participants singled out assignment of some principal job duties to other personnel as the most important change that could be made in the position of principal. Reassigning some duties (e.g., supervision of non-academic extracurricular activities and evening events) to administrative support personnel could have the dual impact of making the job of principal more attractive to potential job applicants and allowing principals, once in the job, to concentrate on the most important principal responsibilities such as curriculum, instruction, and student learning.