



Chicago's Fight to Keep Top Principals



About The Chicago Public Education Fund

The Chicago Public Education Fund (The Fund) is a nonprofit organization working to increase the number of great public schools in Chicago by supporting talented principals and enabling effective educator teams to reinvent classroom learning. Our current efforts seek to more than double the number of top principals in Chicago's public schools by 2018 and to enable the city's best educators to redefine what's possible for our schools and students.

Visit thefundchicago.org for more information.

Executive Summary



Chicago is losing its best school leaders. Four out of every ten of the city's top public school principals tell us they plan to leave in the next three years. History says we should take them seriously; that number is consistent with the number of principals who *did* leave in the last three years.

Rapid principal turnover has real implications for all of us – especially our students. Principal departures are associated with declining student achievement, which can persist for up to two years.¹ Like leaders in all industries, principals are also uniquely influential in the retention or turnover of their best team members. Even through times of transition or resource reduction, great principals keep great teachers.² This benefits students, schools and communities.

So how can we ensure great principals stay longer?

Get out of their way.

7 in 10 principals say reducing compliance is one of the top three ways to improve their job satisfaction.

Principals are the instructional leaders of their buildings. They want to spend their time coaching teachers, observing learning in classrooms, and working with students and families, but they are often bogged down by paperwork and slowed by district demands. Spending more time on teaching and learning can help principals improve their schools;³ it can also make them happier – and more likely to stay.

Help them leverage the tools they already have.

40-50% of principals feel unable to organize school resources in ways that advance school goals and priorities, despite having the authority to do so.

State and district policies grant Chicago principals significant control in creating a school budget, schedule and curriculum. Too many principals feel unable to meaningfully use the flexibility they have, and this leads to frustration. More actionable tools and targeted coaching can help all principals lead change in their schools and help newer principals experience success sooner.

Support their individual development.

Principals are 3 times more likely to rate a development opportunity as “excellent” if they choose the activity.

Like every other professional, principals need personalized support in order to develop and learn new skills. Unfortunately, the current professional development model too often follows a one-size-fits-none approach. Principals find this demoralizing and demotivating: less than 25 percent rate current offerings as “very good” or “excellent.” When asked for suggestions on how to improve, principals’ most common request is for more responsiveness to their individual needs. By personalizing professional development for principals, we can increase their satisfaction and help them become more effective.

Challenge them to stay.

6 out of every 10 Chicago principals leave before the end of their fifth year – around the time data suggest principals reach their peak effectiveness.

Currently, only a few dozen Chicago principals are recognized for their excellence and challenged to expand their impact each year. If we want our principals to stay – through year five and beyond – we must act urgently to grow programs that keep top leaders engaged. Expanding leadership opportunities to new schools or new roles and creating meaningful chances for peer-to-peer learning can help top leaders stay and redefine what's possible for students.

How we define top principals:

We start with student outcomes. We look at principals with at least two years of experience whose students grew on standardized tests more than those at similar schools. School culture matters, too. We identify strong learning climates based upon the Consortium for Chicago School Research's 5Essentials.

Recommendation 1

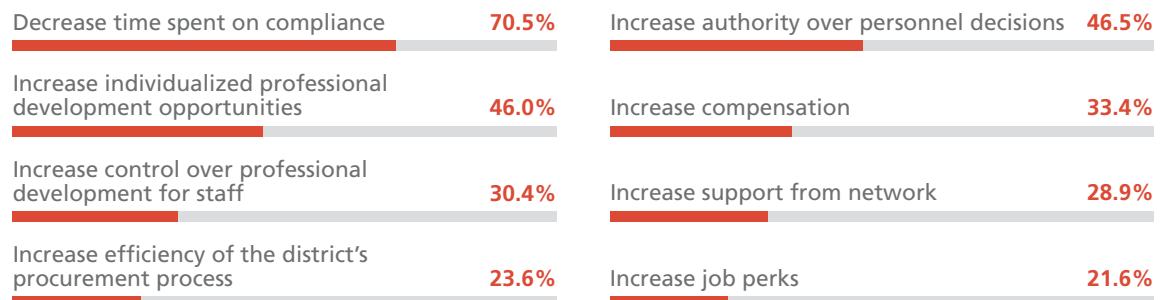
Get Out of Their Way

Principals are the instructional leaders of their buildings, but compliance – tasks like completing forms and fulfilling data requests – takes their time and attention away from teaching and learning. **Just 45 percent of principals say they spend the majority of their time supporting instruction.**

We have to help principals spend their time where it matters most: in classrooms, with teachers and students.

Principals rank the 3 most important ways to improve their job satisfaction:

More than 70 percent of all principals say that reducing compliance will improve their job satisfaction, by far the top choice among all eight options.



To better understand how principals spend their time, we asked our Educator Advisory Committee members to describe their typical day.

Principals spend almost as much time on compliance as they do working directly with teachers.



Average Time Spent on Compliance Each Day



Average Time Spent with Teachers Each Day

One-fifth of exiting principals cite district demands and mission misalignment as their primary reason for leaving.

Recommendation 2

Help Them Leverage the Tools They Already Have

State and district policies grant principals in Chicago significant control over their school resources. **Nearly half of all principals say they are unable to meaningfully use this flexibility.** They do not feel empowered to develop their budget or schedule to dynamically meet needs, and they do not feel equipped to meet higher standards for instruction. Principals, especially new ones, often lack the technical experience required to manage limited resources *strategically*.

To help principals make the most of their resources, we must provide them with coaching and tools they can use.

Nearly 50% of principals can benefit from budgeting tools.

- Principals control approximately 45 percent of the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) budget. Currently, only one in 10 principals strongly agrees that she has the support to leverage these resources to improve teaching and learning in her building.
- CPS should consider increasing the share of resources under principals' control and provide targeted budgeting tools to assist them.

Budget



40% of principals need help creating a schedule that allows for adequate teacher collaboration and professional development.

- School schedules are complex puzzles of required instructional minutes, staff capacity and facilities. Principals must navigate these limitations to provide all students the opportunities they need to succeed.
- Expert support for principals can help them unlock time for teacher collaboration, student intervention and academic enrichment.

Scheduling



58% of principals want support implementing the Common Core State Standards.

- Principals and their teachers are charged with creating and modifying a strong curriculum that both meets their students' unique needs and aligns with more rigorous Common Core State Standards.
- Principals need access to, information about and choices among quality resources that effectively support instruction and enable teachers to better prepare students to meet these new standards.

Instruction



Without individualized support, principals are left to figure out too much on their own.

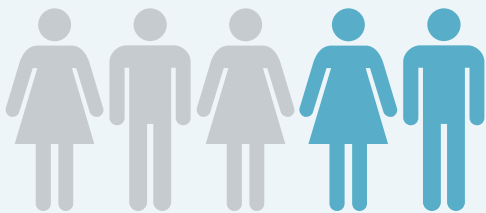
Recommendation 3

Support Their Individual Development

Principals want frequent feedback from their managers and the ability to choose from differentiated professional development opportunities. So much so that **they are 3 times more likely to rate a development opportunity “excellent” if they choose it themselves**. Unfortunately, the traditional model too often offers just one option, meeting few principals’ needs.

If we’re serious about supporting and retaining our school leaders, we must enable them to choose their own professional development.

Just 48% of principals rate professional development provided by their CPS or charter networks positively.



2 out of 5 principals seek development opportunities from providers outside of their district or charter network.

About half of Chicago principals agree or strongly agree that they receive regular support and feedback from their immediate manager to improve their practice.



21.9%	Strongly Agree
33.6%	Agree
17.4%	Neutral
12.4%	Disagree
14.7%	Strongly Disagree

Principal responses are *highly* dependent on their manager. In one CPS network, almost 20 percent of principals reported receiving regular feedback to improve their practice, compared with nearly 90 percent in another network.

All principals should receive regular feedback from their managers, as well as growth opportunities that are differentiated for them.

Nearly one-quarter of exiting principals cite insufficient support from their supervisors as their primary reason for leaving.

Recommendation 4

Challenge Them to Stay

Each day, hundreds of top principals across the city strive to do more for their students. Like most top-performers, they are motivated by new challenges and continual learning, and **they work with their teachers and students to light the path to world-class public schools.**

We must empower principals by providing opportunities that allow them to keep learning while redefining what's possible for students in all our schools. Specifically, top Chicago principals ask for:



Lori Campbell
Marshall High School

Increased flexibility to make decisions

"Schools need dynamic leaders, and those leaders need cultivation to become their very best. I need to be free to make the decisions that improve my school, but I also need a network of peers to share ideas. ISP has given me both that flexibility and that network."

Current Opportunities:

Independent Schools Principal Program (ISP)

ISP provides successful, experienced principals with the opportunity to run their schools with limited oversight and management from CPS central office and more flexibility to innovate.

Principals served: 28 since 2015



Alfonso Carmona
Healy Elementary

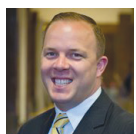
Meaningful interactions with peers for learning and support

"Being a principal is a lonely job, and sometimes the solutions you need come from your colleagues, not central office. The Fellowship helped me dive back into what leadership is all about. Having those conversations with my colleagues and business professors elevated my professional development and added tremendous value to my learning."

Chicago Principals Fellowship

The Fellowship is a rigorous, year-long executive leadership program designed by Northwestern University to support and retain top public school principals citywide.

Principals served: 41 since 2014



Scott Frauenheim
CICS West Belden

Robust opportunities to innovate teaching and learning

"As a leader, programs like Breakthrough Schools: Chicago challenge me to model behaviors and transform my practices to reflect my expectations for my team and to show what innovation should look like in classrooms. I implemented flipped meetings and personalized professional development to give teachers more agency and ownership, resulting in significant professional gains."

Breakthrough Schools: Chicago

Breakthrough Schools: Chicago is a local-national partnership awarding competitive planning and implementation grants that allow innovative principals to begin re-shaping their schools to better meet student needs.

Principals served: 23 since 2014



Armando Rodriguez
Goode STEM Academy

Expanded options to demonstrate leadership

"After leading an elementary school for nine years, I was ready for a new challenge. I gained perspective on how my skill set might be applicable in a new school environment through the Chicago Principals Fellowship. When the opportunity arose to lead a high school, I saw it as a logical next step in my career."

Master Principal Program

Top principals want to pilot new approaches that expand their leadership in Chicago, including coaching and mentoring other principals or leading in more challenging school settings.

Principals served: A pilot could serve up to 15

One-third of exiting principals leave because they are seeking new career opportunities.

Conclusion

A Challenge for Chicago: Keep Our Top Principals

Over the last three years, almost half of Chicago principals quietly disappeared. Without fanfare, they made the decision to retire or resign from their roles. Among current principals, 44 percent – many of them top performers – plan to go just as quietly in the next three years. If this pattern holds, it will cost the 150,000 students and 7,000 teachers in their schools dearly. What's more, it will undercut the progress our city has made to ensure every school is led by a great principal.

Since 2013, the number of great principals in Chicago has increased by 33 percent – from about 150 to more than 200. With the right investment of time, talent and resources, the city remains on track to 350 principals by 2018. This is the result of the hard work of so many in the school, nonprofit and funding communities; uniting to recruit stronger talent, to help high-potential principals develop and achieve more, and to encourage principals to pioneer innovations that redefine what's possible for the students we serve.

If we want to accelerate our progress toward 350 and move beyond it, we must address the urgent challenge of keeping our top principals in schools for longer. Short of that, we'll merely replace existing strong principals with new ones, unable to advance from a place where little more than half our students have access to great leaders in their schools.

To serve every student well, we must minimize the time principals spend on compliance, help them leverage their school resources, meet their individual development needs, and provide challenging opportunities that keep them engaged. That work cannot be done alone.

But it can be done.



Chicago can be the best city in America to lead a public school.

The future of our public schools and the fabric of our great city depend on it.

How You Can Help:

Parents and community members can recognize great principals in their schools. Thank principals for their tireless work or ask how you can support them – no effort is too small.

Nonprofits can continue to improve professional training and resources for principals. Modify your offerings to ensure all principals receive the personalized support they need.

CPS and charter networks can remove unnecessary burdens on principals' time, recognize principal achievement and growth in meaningful ways, and plan for effective succession of school leaders.

Philanthropies can accelerate principal quality efforts. Build on investments in principal training by expanding funding to include individualized support and retention efforts.



About This Report

In 2014, we began surveying all of Chicago's district and charter school principals with one goal in mind: to understand what they need to continue improving and stay engaged in their jobs. We complement these surveys with principal focus groups and exit interviews, ensuring we hear detailed suggestions and grasp the intention behind the feedback offered.

Over six weeks in the summer of 2015, we conducted our second citywide survey of principals. This report summarizes what 423 of them had to say.

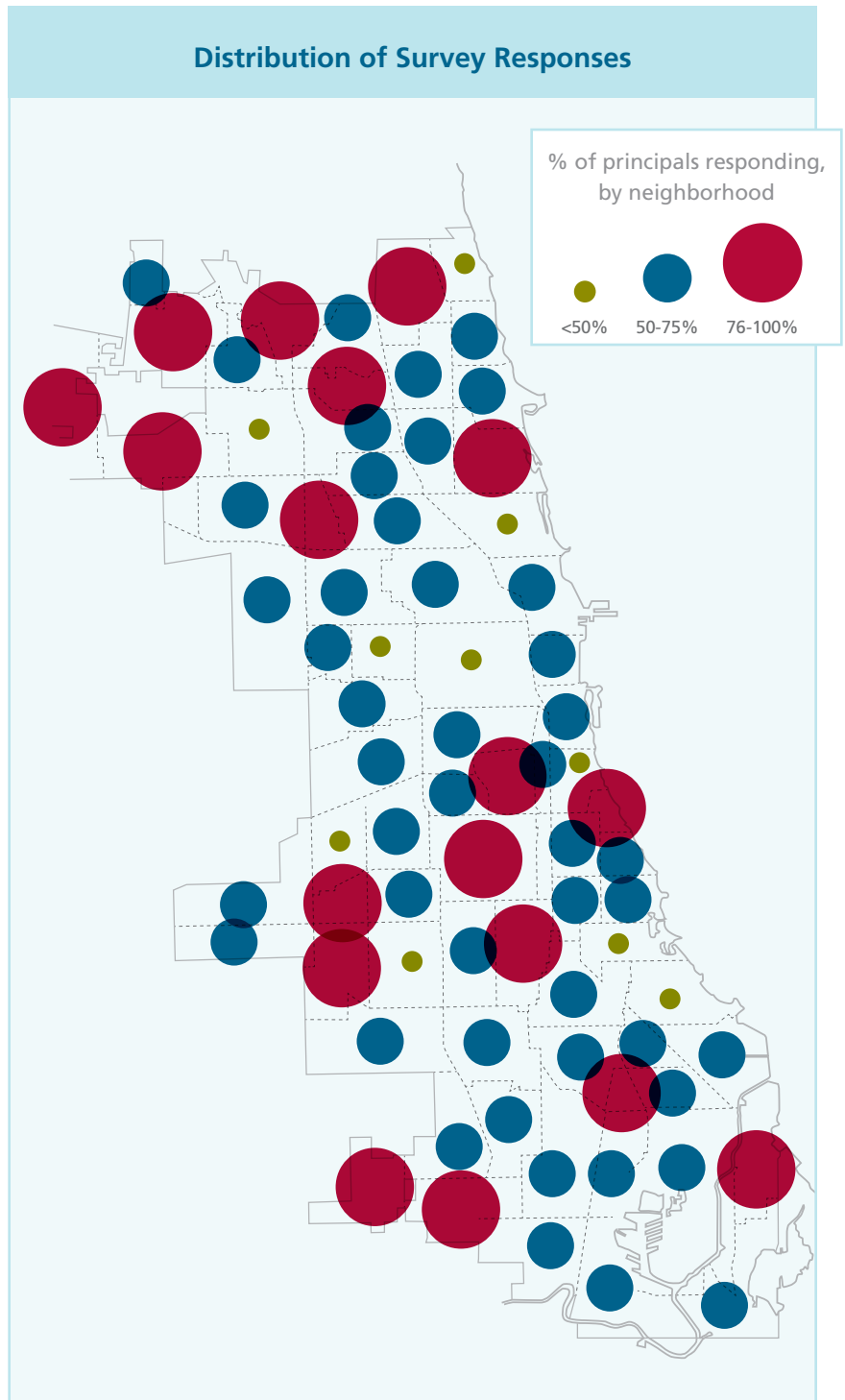
Who Took Our 2015 Survey?



423

RESPONDED OUT OF 650
PRINCIPALS CONTACTED

Distribution of Survey Responses





Acknowledgments

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Endnotes

1. Tyre, Peg. "Why do more than half of principals quit after five years?," *The Hechinger Report* (2015). <http://hechingerreport.org/why-do-more-than-half-of-principals-quit-after-five-years> [September 26, 2015].
2. New Leaders. *Leadership Matters* (2015). <http://www.newleaders.org/impact/leadership-matters/> [April 5, 2015].
3. Bryk, Anthony S., Penny Bender Sebring, Elaine Allensworth, Stuart Luppescu, and John Q. Easton. *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. Print.

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