



Vermont Principals' Association
Supporting Learners and Leaders

Vermont Principals' Association
2018 School Leaders' Survey Summary

The mission of the Vermont Principals' Association is *to support school leaders to improve the equity and quality of educational opportunities for all students.*

Thank you for your interest in the VPA's 2018 school leaders' survey summary. In the following pages, you will find data, feedback, and commentary about . . .

1. Principal turnover and longevity
2. The lifestyle of the school leader
 - a. The work week
 - b. Leadership challenges
 - c. Sense of impact
3. School leaders' support system
 - a. Preparedness for the job
 - b. Mentoring
 - c. Performance reviews
 - d. Professional learning needs and interests
4. An update on the VPA's Equity Initiative

Over the past three years, the VPA's full-benefit membership numbers have increased by 20%. We are pleased to say that 95% of Vermont's 315 Principals, 17 Career and Technical Education (CTE) Directors, and 103 Assistant Principals are active members of their state professional organization. We also have members, with access to a partial set of benefits, who are retired Principals, aspiring Principals, Superintendents and/or in other school leadership roles.

The VPA now has almost 500 individual members.

This annual survey, initiated in 2015, helps us* understand the world and lifestyle, needs and interests, and the changing dynamics and priorities that effect Principals' and Assistant Principals' leadership—and ultimately the equity and quality of educational opportunities available to Vermont's students.

We know that, generally, school leaders come to their positions because they love learning . . . and leading. We also know that they are pulled in many directions, work long days, spend more and more time “putting out fires,” are doing more with less, and STILL love their work. **Let's start this summary off with a huge THANK YOU.**

*VPA staff and committee members, school leaders, VPA partner organizations, the legislature, and more

1. Principal Turnover and Longevity

Every spring, the VPA begins a *new leader spreadsheet* to track school leaders who retire, change position, and/or change school. There are forty-three schools currently on that list for the next school year. When the final numbers come in to start the 2019-2020 year, we expect approximately 20% of our schools will have new leadership (this includes Principal and Assistant Principal transitions).

There is nothing wrong or surprising about this: we know that change is the only constant, that life happens, opportunities appear, educators are ambitious and seek growth, etc. And, if it helps, school leaders are not that unlike other professionals. Adults born between 1957 and 1964 (now 55 to 62 years old), [held twelve jobs during their career](#). (*Almost half of those job changes occurred before we turned twenty-four!*)

Vermont's turnover rate appear to be similar to the national rate. This [recent research review](#) by the Learning Policy Institute and NAASP considers the impacts of principal turnover, as well as the contributors to turnover and longevity.

The VPA would of course love to see Vermont's turnover rate decline. In the meantime, our interest is in making sure leadership transitions are as smooth as possible, and that new leaders are prepared and feel supported. We know that strong and consistent leadership is essential for our schools, our students and our communities.

How many years have you been Principal and/or CTE Director at THIS school? (N=154)

- 34%, first or second year
- 22%, third or fourth year
- 16%, fifth, sixth or seventh year
- 11%, eighth or ninth
- 16%, tenth or more

In how many schools have you served as Principal or CTE Director? (N=153)

- 38% One
- 33% Two
- 17% Three
- 11% more than three

How many total years have you served as Principal, CTE Director or Head of School? (N=151)

- Sixty-two percent of the Principals and CTE Directors who responded have been leading schools for eight or more years

The VPA interprets this a number of ways:

1. Continue doing many of the things we do: the VPA Executive Director is available to members 24/7, provide a strong mentor program, encourage members—and especially *new* leaders—to participate in the Waddington Education Leadership Program and the Leadership Academy, make the summer Leadership Academy as much

about camaraderie, connections, school team-time, and peer-to-peer learning, as it is about the content, keep the focus on equity, and keep the issues that matter on our front burner;

2. Notice that we have an extraordinary wealth of experience, wisdom, stories and leadership right here, available to us, and YOU – and develop ways to strengthen and share that;
3. Be open to ideas and suggestions for how the VPA can even better help Principals and Assistant Principals start off prepared, find the support they need when they need it, get past the three-year hump, and stay.

2. The Lifestyle of the School Leader

The Work Week

Here is a summary of the data from the most recent two years:

Role	School Year 2018	School Year 2017	Summer 2018	Summer 2017
Principal	57.6 hrs/wk (N=152)	54.4 hrs/wk (N=119)	38.0 hrs/wk (N=152)	37.6 hrs/wk (N=119)
Assistant Principal	55.3 hrs/wk (N=24)	52.8 hrs/wk (N=26)	35.4 hrs/wk (N=24)	35.0 hrs/wk (N=26)

Comments about the work week:

- *“Work/personal life balance has always been a struggle.”*
- *“I am working significantly more this year due to changes in our systems, including consolidation.”*
- *“It can be hard to quantify when you add in the time spent at home or time spent reading or researching outside of school hours.”*
- *“Varies from week to week: depends on budget season, sports, etc.”*
- *“I’m here for games at night during the winter, Saturdays in the fall, and board meeting days can be a 12 to 14-hour day in itself.”*
- *“Summer” means July*

Leadership Challenges

In 2017, this survey identified four major challenge areas to school leadership: time, trauma, governance and doing more with less.

	THE GREATEST CHALLENGE TO MY LEADERSHIP	A SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE TO MY LEADERSHIP	A MODERATE CHALLENGE TO MY LEADERSHIP	AN INSIGNIFICANT CHALLENGE TO MY LEADERSHIP	NOT A CHALLENGE TO MY LEADERSHIP
Time Use, Availability & Management	21.65% 42	36.60% 71	32.99% 64	6.19% 12	2.58% 5
Dealing with Trauma	19.59% 38	34.54% 67	33.51% 65	9.79% 19	2.58% 5
Governance, Change & Lack of Support	13.99% 27	21.24% 41	34.72% 67	19.69% 38	10.36% 20
Doing More with Less	18.04% 35	29.90% 58	34.54% 67	13.92% 27	3.61% 7

In 2018, we got a little more detail:

Comments about challenges to leadership:

- *“All we do is ‘more.’ We ask the classroom teacher and the school to do too much.”*
- *“Governance change is significant, but not lack of support.”*
- *“There just isn’t enough time in the day – but I still love the job!”*
- *“Little autonomy or control over the school budget.”*

Sense of Impact

We asked, *how are you feeling about your ability to affect change, and your ability to lead (rather than manage; be proactive rather than reactive)?*

Principals: On a scale of 1 to 8	<u>2015</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017 (N=118)</u>	<u>2018 (N=152)</u>
<u>Ability to affect sustainable change:</u>	5.86	6.04	5.85	5.88
<u>Ability to lead:</u>		5.76	5.72	5.87
Assistant Principals: On a scale of 1 to 8			<u>2017 (N=27)</u>	<u>2018 (N=24)</u>
<u>Ability to affect sustainable change:</u>			5.31	5.54
<u>Ability to lead:</u>			5.38	5.36

Comments about initiating and sustaining change in schools:

- *A distributive leadership model helps with systemic change;”” I have a great leadership team and THEY are making the difference.*
- *The staff is innovative and proactive, and the pre-K to 12 structure and small school size make change easier to achieve.*
- *It is important to realize that sometimes change takes several years. When it happens, it is wonderful!*
- *Due to boundary issues and lack of clear governance, change is not embraced or supported.*
- *It is hard to make sustainable change when there are strong personalities opposing it.*
- *A lot of the job is ‘putting out fires” - “Being fully staffed would help us be more intentional and proactive.*
- *This is my big question in my second year. I have trust and credibility with most people – how do I build on that to tackle some thorny issues?*

Comments about the ability to lead (vs manage):

- *I think my ability to lead is high . . . the opportunity to implement proactive, intentional and thoughtful leadership is undermined by the unexpected day-to-day. I can’t seem to develop a system that allows me to strike an effective balance of instructional leadership with management and discipline.*
 - *We have built some solid structures to be proactive BUT the need is changing rapidly which is taxing the system.*
 - *This year has been crisis management from the start. I don’t feel very intentional. – School admin has to be the fire brigade first; change agents second. New fires every day.*
 - *I often do not have time to reflect on meetings or events before I am dealing with something else.*
 - *Small schools require much leadership that is management. – Principals do EVERYTHING in a small school.*
-

3. School Leaders' Support System

Preparedness for the job

If getting new leaders over the three-year hump, and/or helping them find a situation that works, are our goals, knowing more about how to prepare for this job is essential. So, we asked, *on a scale of 1 to 8, with 8 meaning "completely prepared," how well prepared were you when you began your current position?* Interestingly, there doesn't appear to be a significant difference between the whole group of respondents and those in their first few years.

Principals	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017 (N=118)</u>	<u>2018 (N=152)</u>
<u>Feeling prepared for the job:</u>	5.57	5.49	5.46
Principals in their first, second or third year:			<u>2018 (N=33)</u>
			5.39
Assistant Principals		<u>2017 (N=27)</u>	<u>2018 (N=24)</u>
<u>Feeling prepared for the job:</u>		5.08	5.38

What has helped:

Transition meetings, support of the previous principal, having a mentor, a collegial network, on-the-job training, shadowing, coaching, qualities like reflectiveness, trust and instinct, a background in union and policy leadership, and education/degree/coursework (shout outs to Rowland, St. Mike's, Snelling, Woodruff/Castleton, Waddington, UVM, Graybeard Educators, Inc)

What would have helped:

- *All of the above, plus specific knowledge on truancy, risk assessment, EPT, MTSS, SPED evaluation/referral*
- *More knowledge about the community I was entering*
- *AOE support: list of things needed, surveys, reports, expectations re work flow and time management*
- *More on conflict management, human dynamics, giving feedback and negotiation skills*
- *Clarity of roles and responsibilities*
- *Time for collaboration and relationships*
- *More on trauma, restorative practices, conscious discipline*
- *More on law, budget, strategic planning, governance*
- *Less theory; more real-life experiential learning*

Mentoring

What is Act 20? "When a district hires a principal or career center director who has not been employed previously in that capacity the superintendent shall ensure that the new principal or director receives mentoring supports during at least the first two years of employment." To view Vermont title 16 Section 245, [you can find it here](#).

Of the 128 Principals and CTE Directors who responded to our question about whether they had a mentor during their first and second years, and for how long, 24% reported that they did not have a mentor at all during their first two years as a

school leader. The shared comments encourage us to provide more clarity about the process. More information about requesting or becoming a mentor [is here](#).

The good news is that sixty-two percent of those respondents had a mentor for more than six months. Five percent had a mentor for less than six months. Comments and suggested mentorship structures:

- *My mentor was amazing. I don't think I would have survived without his guidance.*
- *Helped provide a sounding board in a position that is sometimes an echo-chamber*
- *It is a rough learning curve and having a mentor is extremely helpful*
- *First year: focus on operations and procedures and management within the system. Second year: broad level instructional leadership*
- *Meet regularly (once a month for a couple of hours), schedule meetings and try to do them in person*
- *Combination of 1:1 mentoring and small group facilitated by one of the mentors, to include principals with more experience. Training principals is the work of ALL school leaders*
- *...it would be powerful for the mentor to be present enough to observe the principal performing their various roles and responsibilities, and then give feedback and reflect with the principal on how to improve the practice*

While a couple of the sixty-four who responded to the second half of the question (how was the experience?) reported a *less-than-helpful* experience, 6% found it *moderately helpful*, and most (82%) found having a mentor a *very helpful* process. Comments:

- *I would suggest a vetting process to insure the mentoring is high quality*
- *I only wish that it didn't end after my second year!*
- *Mentors should be from the same district and/or nearby – face-to-face is critical*
- *My mentor is so valuable! We meet weekly – he has been a great resource, sounding board, and cheerleader!*
- *It is important that a mentor should be someone who is well-matched so that a meaningful relationship can develop.*
- *My mentor continues to give generously of her time in support of my work. I am incredibly grateful to her*
- *Shout outs to awesome mentors: Larry Fliegelman, Andy Paciulli, Nancy Mark, Jay Nichols, and many others who went unnamed.*

Performance Reviews

Seventy-two percent of Principals and CTE Directors (N=150) and 71% of Assistant Principals (N=24) who responded to this question in 2019 had received a performance review within the past two years; 28% and 29%, respectively (nearly a third), had not.

It is troubling to see that 25% of the Principals/CTE Directors who DID have a performance evaluation (N=106) found it 'a little bit' or 'not at all' helpful, AND another 30% felt it was only 'moderately' helpful. Less than half of the school leaders reporting felt that their performance review had been 'very' or 'extremely' helpful. While the numbers are smaller (18 rated their experience), Assistant Principals were generally happier with the process.

Issues appear to be authenticity, feedback that truly gets to the heart of the job, feedback relies on too few stakeholders, too little contact with supervisor, unclear and/or changing criteria.

First, let's acknowledge the school leaders who are getting this kind of productive and timely support from their supervisor (and others). Fantastic! Then, let's acknowledge that there is still room for improvement – [suggestions welcome](#).

Professional Learning Needs and Interests

The top areas of professional learning interest continue to be:

<i>Leadership, Building Healthy School Communities</i>	leading change, strategic planning, continuous improvement, supervision, managing conflict, managing time, using data, motivating personnel, building collaborative teams, resilient staff and culture
<i>Trauma & Equity</i>	emergency management, budgetary implications, poverty, restorative and conscious discipline, achievement gap, understanding bias/racism
<i>Proficiency-Based Learning & Grading</i>	implementation, assessment, scheduling

The VPA is using this information to connect members to high quality professional learning opportunities. We have prioritized these areas of need and address them through the Waddington Leadership Program, our Equity Initiative, topic-specific workshops, our Leadership Academy, and by partnering with many other organizations to get principals, CTE Directors, and assistant principals the training and information they want and need. There is a shared calendar of trainings and events at our website. The VPA Equity Initiative will be expanding the availability of resources around this issue over the next eighteen months.

VPA's Equity Initiative

In 2018, the Vermont Principals' Association launched a multi-year equity initiative with the goals of increasing equity literacy among school leaders and strengthening statewide collaboration among organizations concerned with education equity.

Our members, namely Vermont principals and assistant principals, understand that schools must be able to provide emotional support to students so that they can learn and succeed. It is well documented that every day students arrive at school having suffered adverse childhood experiences. Of primary importance to building leaders and staff is to ensure that the school environment does not add trauma to their lives and learning. A school where equity is the top priority is a trauma-informed environment where every student is safe, matters, and can thrive.

To get a sense of how inequity is expressed in Vermont schools, we included two questions in our 2017 membership survey. The responses are what led to this initiative. Four areas of inequity were identified in that survey: poverty & privilege, resources, mindset and capacity, and curriculum & instruction.

How do you experience Inequity in your school?

1. Poverty & Privilege— by far the most commonly referenced ‘experience’ of inequity. How it shows up:

- a. Readiness - when students from poverty start school with fewer language and social skills and/or some history of trauma. Or, when students from rural, small and/or poor schools come to high school with less exposure to extracurricular activities, less familial support and guidance, and an academic history possibly colored by prejudice.
- b. Opportunities and Access – Students in lower-income situations have fewer opportunities for interesting/enriching classes; students with means have more after school and summer opportunities; students who need additional challenges don’t always get them; FRL students are over-represented in discipline data; unequal access to PreK, transportation, Special Education eligibility, housing, food security, technology at home, support at home, more.

2. Mindset & Capacity

- a. Barriers to CTE: bias, transportation in some cases, Directors not included in some state and regional meetings.
- b. “All” doesn’t mean “ALL”: the complete separation of Special Ed and Regular Ed, that students should be sorted or tracked, some staff hold beliefs about the ability of, and expect less from, kids in poverty, and some have limited understanding of MTSS.
- c. Race & Gender – conscious and unconscious bias and operations
- d. Other: Parents of means are squeaky wheels, some families do not see the value of education, some families are not welcome – or are uncomfortable – in the school.

3. Resources— For supplies, for field trips, enrichments and extensions, for bus monitors, to train para-educators, to hire para-educators, to train staff to support kids with behavior challenges, between schools in the SU, between schools with HS choice and those without, pay between high school and elementary school teachers, support from the AOE, Special Ed, for PreK, to help with kids in trauma, more.

4. Curriculum & Instruction—quality & quantity. Most often mentioned issues:

- a. The range of practices, skill and motivation among teachers varies
- b. Some schools feel like ‘training grounds’ for beginning teachers.
- c. Materials and instruction are not consistent between schools.

- d. Access to technology at home
- e. Other: class size, language courses, more courses, requiring all students to take the same

In 2018, we tried to get a clearer picture of our school leaders’ experience of those four areas of equity work.

	THE MOST SIGNIFICANT EQUITY ISSUE IN MY BUILDING(S)	HIGH PRIORITY ISSUE IN MY BUILDING(S)	MODERATE ISSUE IN MY BUILDING(S)	LOW PRIORITY ISSUE IN MY BUILDING(S)	NOT AN ISSUE IN MY BUILDING(S)	TOTAL
Poverty & Privilege	30.32% 57	40.96% 77	23.40% 44	3.72% 7	1.60% 3	188
Resources	11.64% 22	34.92% 66	37.04% 70	14.81% 28	1.59% 3	189
Mindset & Capacity	13.83% 26	46.81% 88	29.79% 56	8.51% 16	1.06% 2	188
Curriculum and Instruction	10.58% 20	31.75% 60	41.27% 78	15.34% 29	1.06% 2	189

In response to this data, and to the statewide dialogue about equity currently underway and supported by Vermont legislative action over the last decade, the VPA is unrolling a series of summits, training, grants, and partnerships.

To date, the VPA equity initiative has offered two “Equity Summits,” each drawing about one hundred school leaders, students and partner organization representatives for courageous conversation about equity, inequity, bias, beliefs and values. A third summit is scheduled for May 24th, 2019, at the School for International Training in Brattleboro. [Details and registration link are here.](#)

Equity was the primary focus of the VPA 2018 Leadership Academy, *Excellence Through Equity*, and it will be the main focus of the 2019 Academy, *Leading for Equity*, at Stoweflake, July 30, 31 & August 1st.

The VPA now partners with over twenty education organizations and associations around the state. Our goal as a professional learning network for educators is to strengthen our collaboration, coordination of activities, and commitment to action on equity in education.

In addition to our own offerings, the VPA promotes equity-related trainings hosted by our partners. We are thrilled that thought leaders like Pedro Noguera, Ruha Benjamin, and Paul Gorski and his colleagues at the Equity Literacy Institute, are populating the professional learning opportunity calendars of Vermont educators and school administrators.

This fall, the VPA will formally launch the equity initiative by hiring a coordinator, hosting a training of trainers to develop an equity literacy consultation team, offering small matching grants to schools and districts to access the services of this team, continuing to strengthen the work of the equity partners network, and by increasing our own equity literacy.

THANK YOU to our members!

1. For your membership in the Vermont Principals’ Association

2. For the referrals of aspiring leaders. We followed up with all of them and many accepted our offer of a pro-rated aspiring membership.
3. For the offers to share exemplary practices of building equity in your school system
4. For showing up for yourself and your schools: Waddington, staying in your schools, your own PL, commitment to the profession
5. Thank you for your tremendous dedication and hard work. Thank you again for completing this survey AND/OR reading this summary. We hope you find it informative and useful. Please do share as you see fit. Questions and comments are welcome (contact info below)
6. Thank you to those who completed VPA's fourth annual Education Leaders' Survey. We received 200 completed surveys, a ten percent increase from last year (*which had a 16 percent increase from the year before*)!

Participation by Category:

Principals	76.5%	(up from 67% last year = 30 more Principal surveys. Thank you!)
CTE Directors	1.5%	(down from 4% last year; considering a CTE-Director-specific survey)
Assistant/Associate Principals	12.0%	(down from 15% last year and/but still a greater number. Thank you!)
Athletic Directors	3.5%	(VPA is still considering an AD-specific survey)
Others	6.5%	(these included four Superintendents, two Special Ed and two Curriculum Directors, and one each, Directors of Technology, Operations and Student Affairs.

In closing:

On July 1st, 2019, Mike McRaith, currently the Principal at Montpelier High School, will join the Vermont Principals' Association as Associate Executive Director. Welcome, Mike!

On August 1st, Linda Wheatley, currently VPA's Development Director (and survey coordinator) will begin as part time equity initiative coordinator. Responsibility for the survey will likely shift to Mike.

In the meantime, you can contact Linda with questions about the survey or the analysis, including suggestions for future survey questions. **What do YOU want to know about your colleagues and the state of the school leader?**

Linda Wheatley, Development Director lwheatley@vpaonline.org 802-535-8383