



Compensation and benefits can be used to attract and retain effective principals in hard-to-staff and low-performing schools, yet there are no current bonuses or incentives for principals to lead these schools. Principals are also no longer eligible for advanced and doctoral degree salary supplements. In addition, principals (and other educators) hired after January 21, 2021, will not receive health benefits in retirement. These changes in policy make leading a small and low-performing school less attractive to aspiring principals.

Results from the survey of North Carolina principals conducted for this study indicated that 24% of responding principals identified compensation as the major factor that would cause them to leave their principal roles in the next three years and approximately 28% (n=720) of responding principals “strongly agreed” or “somewhat agreed” with the statement “If I could get a higher-paying job, I’d leave education as soon as possible.” In addition, 24% (n=690) of responding principals reported that as a result of the new principal compensation policy (which eliminates consideration of a principal’s experience in favor of pay based on school performance), they would “seek to retire as soon as possible,” “leave to obtain principalship in another school,” or “leave the principalship.” When asked about North Carolina’s compensation policy, 44% (n=490) of responding principals reported that they “oppose” or “strongly oppose” the policy.

Exhibit 42 below compares base salaries of teachers with a bachelor’s degree, teachers with a master’s degree and certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS), and assistant principals with a master’s degree. Based on the teacher salary schedule, some school administrators choose to stay on the teacher salary schedule. For example, principals interviewed for the study pointed out that teachers with a master’s degree and NBPTS certification earn more than assistant principals with a master’s degree. Given the additional responsibilities required of assistant principals, it will be difficult to attract higher-paid teachers into demanding administrator positions when they may earn less in the new role.

**Exhibit 42. Annual salaries of teachers and assistant principals, 2018–19**

Years of experience	Teacher (bachelor’s degree)	Teacher (master’s degree + National Board certification)	Assistant principal (master’s degree)
0	\$35,000	N/A	\$41,650
2	\$37,000	N/A	\$44,030
4	\$39,000	N/A	\$46,410
6	\$41,000	\$50,020	\$48,790
8	\$43,000	\$52,460	\$51,170
10	\$45,000	\$54,900	\$53,550
12	\$47,000	\$57,340	\$55,930
14	\$49,000	\$59,780	\$58,310
16	\$50,000	\$61,000	\$59,500
18	\$50,000	\$61,000	\$59,500

Years of experience	Teacher (bachelor's degree)	Teacher (master's degree + National Board certification)	Assistant principal (master's degree)
20	\$50,000	\$61,000	\$59,500
22	\$50,000	\$61,000	\$59,500
24	\$50,000	\$61,000	\$59,500

Source: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2018)

### ❖ Finding #8: Working conditions influence principal retention.

Other working conditions experienced by principals in their schools and districts also influence whether they will take a principal position and decide to stay (Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011; Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, & Ikemoto, 2012; Loeb, Kalogrides, & Horng, 2010; Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012). These conditions include workload, job complexity, and disciplinary environment, as well as the availability of school resources, such as money and staff, and relationships with students, families, teachers, and district administrators. Some research has also found that principals' job decisions are related to the amount of support they receive from the district and the autonomy they have for making personnel and resource allocation decisions. Compensation and working conditions are all important for recruiting, developing, and retaining principals (Fuller, Young, Richardson, Pendola, & Winn, 2018; Farley-Ripple, Raffel, & Welch, 2012).

Our research and that of others also demonstrates that principals who understand how to create conditions for distributed leadership in their schools and who value and know how to involve teachers in shared decision-making also have a strong, positive impact on school effectiveness and teacher retention. Other research conducted as part of this project demonstrates that North Carolina has a relatively inexperienced principal workforce, especially in high-poverty schools, as well as a principal workforce that does not feel well prepared to recruit and retain teachers or to lead school change efforts (Berry, Bastian, Darling-Hammond & Kini, 2019). Ensuring principals have favorable working conditions, including the professional development, coaching, and support they need to grow and the staff resources they need, such as instructional coaches to support the teachers, is essential.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings described above, four overall areas for action are recommended to ensure access to effective school principals for all schools.

### ❁ 1. Update the state's principal preparation and principal licensure requirements.

- » Update the state's school administrator preparation standards so that they align with the National Education Leadership Preparation standards from the National Policy Board for Educational Administration.

- Require principal preparation programs to demonstrate that they are preparing their students to meet these standards.
- » Require principal preparation programs to develop candidates’ capacity for effective instructional leadership, including leading education that is standards-based, personalized, culturally responsive, and attentive to children’s social, emotional, and academic development. Require the programs to also develop principals’ capacity to support developmental transitions across school levels, from Pre-K through high school, and to engage families and the community.

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## 2. Continue to expand access to high-quality principal preparation programs.

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The combination of the Transforming Principal Preparation Program and the long-established Principal Fellows scholarship program provides North Carolina with an effective approach to having a strong pipeline of qualified and well-prepared principals. Both should be expanded to ensure a sufficient number of new principals; the NCPAPA estimates that the state needs approximately 300 new principals each year.<sup>24</sup>

- » Expand the number of fellowships available through the Principal Fellows program as needed to attract a sufficient number of aspiring principals to meet the future needs of the state.
  - Actively recruit diverse candidates to apply to be Principal Fellows.
- » Continue to expand the TP3 while maintaining high standards for participating programs and the paid internship requirement. In doing so:
  - Maintain and expand the TP3’s focus on preparing principals who are able to serve as transformation leaders of low-performing, high-poverty schools in both rural and urban communities.
  - Provide support for the improvement of other existing principal preparation programs to meet the TP3’s standards.
  - Set the goal of having each school district partner with at least one of the TP3-funded programs.
  - Actively recruit minority candidates to the TP3-funded programs and seek to establish TP3-funded programs in minority-serving universities in order to address the need to diversify the school leadership workforce.

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## 3. Expand the professional learning opportunities for current principals and assistant principals.

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Programs currently offered by the NCPAPA, such as Distinguished Leadership in Practice and Future Ready Leaders, should serve as models to be expanded, scaled, and/or replicated throughout the state.

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<sup>24</sup> Confirmed in correspondence with NCPAPA Executive Director Shirley Prince.

- » Provide a grant program, similar in some ways to the TP3, to support the development or expansion of professional learning opportunities for current principals and assistant principals. These programs should incorporate the elements of effective school leader preparation, as described in the findings.
- » Create a formal statewide mentorship program for beginning assistant principals and principals. The program should provide opportunities for veteran principals on sabbatical or recently retired principals to coach beginning school administrators.
- » Apply at least some of the optional 3% set-aside allowed under ESSA Title II to provide professional development to school and district leaders, as is being done in other states, such as Maryland and Massachusetts (Espinoza & Cardichon, 2017).

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#### 4. Revise the principal and assistant principal salary structures and improve working conditions to make these positions more attractive to qualified educators, especially those in high-need schools.

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The current compensation system for school leaders works against the state’s meeting the *Leandro* requirement of a qualified principal in every school. We recommend revising the principal salary structure so that it ensures an adequate level of compensation competitive with other jobs requiring similar skills and training, provides a more dependable set of expectations for compensation, and creates incentives, rather than disincentives, for working in high-need schools. We also suggest that the state consider whether other compensation incentives are needed to offset disincentives that may have been created by elimination of retiree health benefits and pension benefits for leaders hired after 2021.

This system needs substantial revision, including the following actions:

- » Ensure the salaries for assistant principals and principals are, in all cases, higher than the same individual would receive as a teacher.
- » Provide incentives for school leaders to work in high-need schools, including:
  - A meaningful supplement for principals who take a position to turn around a persistently failing school
  - Protection against principals having a salary reduction if they go to work in low-performing, hard-to-staff school in order to enable multiyear efforts to improve these schools
- » Reward school leaders for their school’s progress on broader indicators beyond student achievement on standardized assessments, as recommended in this report in the Accountability Recommendations section, including indicators related to teacher recruitment and retention, school working conditions, opportunities to learn, and student achievement growth.
- » Improve working conditions for school leaders by taking the following actions:

- Provide principals with more autonomy to allocate resources, including funding and personnel assignment to address a school’s needs.
  - Scale up the use of staffing models, such as Advanced Staffing and Opportunity Culture, to distribute instructional leadership in schools serving economically disadvantaged students (these models reduce the workload on principals and build teachers as instructional leaders to support their peers).
  - Increase the number of nurses, counselors, social workers, and psychologists available in schools so the principal has access to professionals who are trained to address students’ physical and mental health and out-of-school issues that impede students’ learning.
  - Develop superintendents’ and other district leaders’ capacity to create a strong professional culture and collaborative learning environments across the district and school boards.
- » Partner with the NCPAPA and the North Carolina School Superintendents’ Association to help strengthen district leadership that builds strong working conditions for principals and other staff.
  - » Use licensing and accreditation levers, plus improvement grants to programs and professional development funding, to leverage strong principal learning for standards-based, culturally responsive, trauma-informed leadership that can attend to social, emotional, and academic development that can support success in high-poverty schools. Professional development and training for principals should be available to help principals adopt school models, such as a community schools model, that are successful with high-need children.<sup>25</sup>
  - » Ensure, through preparation and professional development, that principals are prepared to create collaborative learning environments for teachers, which can enhance effectiveness and stem turnover in the teaching force.
  - » Create mentoring, induction, and coaching opportunities for the existing principal workforce, as some states have done. In Delaware, for example, the state leadership academy, which operates out of the University of Delaware, provides mentoring for beginning principals and coaching for veterans. In Georgia, the Georgia Leadership Institute provides these supports.

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25 Community schools are public schools that partner with families and community organizations to provide well-rounded educational opportunities and supports for students’ success.