

This executive summary is not intended to replace the complete report. For full details, including methodology, author and collaborator credits, references, and data, please refer to z.umn.edu/mnps23-24.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: 2023 SURVEY

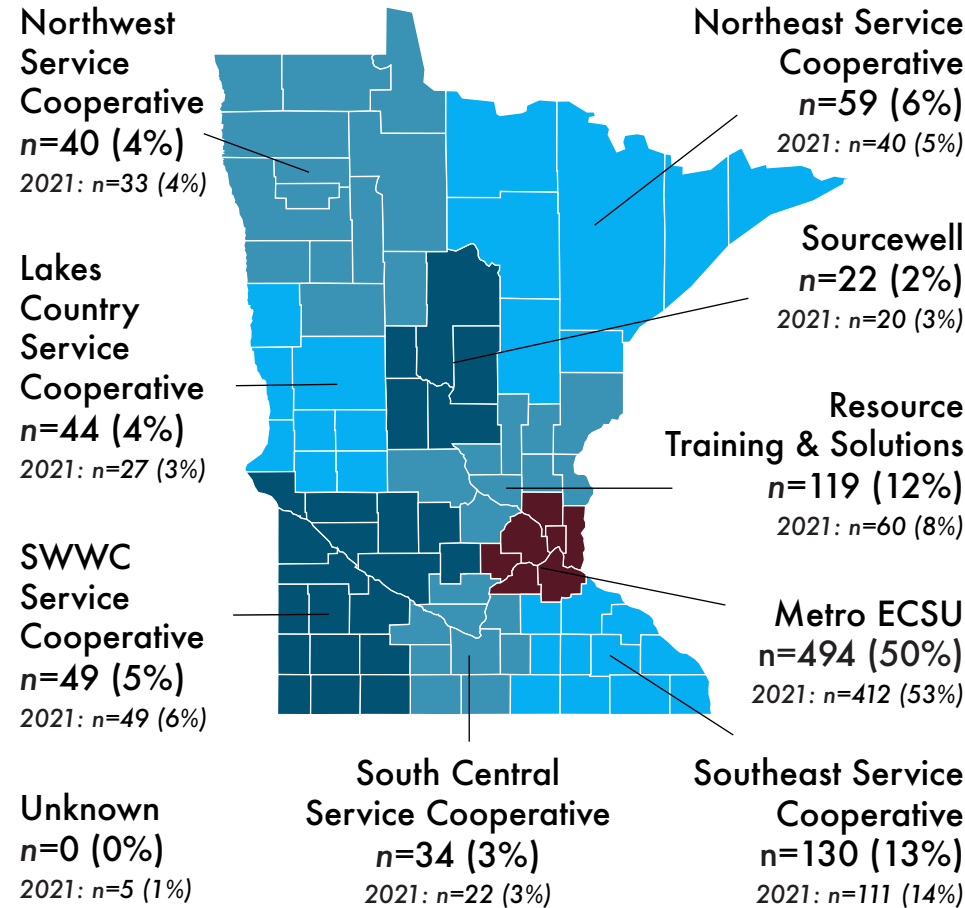
Over 2,400 school leaders in Minnesota were invited to take the second biennial Minnesota Principals Survey (MnPS) in November 2023. Generously funded by The Minneapolis Foundation and The Joyce Foundation, the MnPS seeks to elevate the voices of principals, assistant principals, and charter school leaders across the state. The survey was originally developed in 2021 by researchers at the Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota in collaboration with a diverse group of educators and partners, and updated in 2023 in response to a shifting educational context and feedback from survey users. Topics new to the survey in 2023 were student and staff mental health and wellbeing, and recent legislative changes.

Nearly 1,000 school leaders took the 2023 MnPS, with an overall response rate of 41% (up from 34% in 2021). Among respondents:¹

- 50% were from Greater Minnesota and 50% were from the seven county Twin Cities metropolitan area.
- 50% worked in secondary schools, 47% worked in elementary schools, and 2% worked in other kinds of schools (e.g., K-12 schools).
- 92% worked in district schools and 8% worked in charter schools.
- 71% were principals, directors, or co-directors; 26% were assistant or associate principals; and 3% had other roles.
- 89% were White, 9% were Black, Indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC), and 2% preferred not to disclose their racial/ethnic identity.

This Executive Summary presents select findings from the 2023 MnPS. We encourage readers to view the full report for additional details about our methodology and findings. In the coming months, we will publish a Tableau dashboard where users will be able to explore MnPS survey data and disaggregate findings by school- and principal-level variables. Additional “Policy & Practice Briefs” will be produced based on findings from follow-up focus groups, which will be conducted in Summer 2024. All MnPS reports, supplemental materials, and links to our Tableau dashboard will be available at <https://carei.umn.edu/mnps>.

Responses by Minnesota Service Cooperative Region



Center for
Applied Research and
Educational Improvement

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

1. School-level information was unknown for 1% of respondents; as such, percentages may not add to 100% for all school-level variables.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- We learned a lot about the state of the principalship in Minnesota through the 2023 MnPS, as we did in 2021. While principals’ perspectives varied in important ways, the following “key takeaways” represent overarching themes in the data. We found that principals:
1. **Feel their jobs are unsustainable...** Consistent with 2021 survey findings, principals told us that their job responsibilities far exceed the time they have available to fulfill them, leading to stress, burnout, and, in some cases, intentions of leaving the principalship.
 2. **...and yet, demonstrate slight improvement in some measures of wellbeing.** For instance, leaders reported working an average of 1.6 hours less per week than they did in 2021—though they’re still working an average of 57 hours per week. Principals were slightly more likely to agree that their workloads were sustainable and that they were generally satisfied with being a school leader than they were in 2021.
 3. **Don’t have enough time for instructional and community-engaged leadership.** Principals shared they must sacrifice time they would like to spend (and are expected to spend) on instructional leadership and community engagement to attend to administrative tasks (e.g., filling staffing shortages) and respond to urgent student needs (e.g., student dysregulation). This finding was also very consistent with 2021 MnPS data.
 4. **Engaged less frequently in some culturally responsive school leadership practices than they did in 2021.** Specifically, a smaller percentage of principals reported developing culturally responsive teachers and including families in school-level decisions on a monthly or more frequent basis than they had in 2021. At the same time, principals were more likely to engage monthly or more often in the analysis of student data to identify academic and disciplinary disparities than they were in 2021.
 5. **Lost confidence in their ability to carry out many leadership activities.** The MnPS asks school leaders to report how much confidence they have in their ability to carry out 49 different leadership activities, in light of their own capabilities and available resources. The percentage of principals who reported having sufficient confidence decreased for 47 out of those 49 leadership activities between 2021 and 2023.
 6. **Perceive student mental health as their single greatest challenge.** Almost all (94%) principals *agreed or somewhat agreed* that student mental health challenges represent a major barrier to student learning at their schools. Principals believed that the student mental health challenges they witnessed at school were primarily caused by student trauma, social media engagement, and the mental health challenges of caregivers.
 7. **Are frustrated with unfunded mandates and a lack of state guidance to meet their requirements...** Many principals felt that the perspectives of school leaders were not heard during the last legislative session. They expressed that new regulations required significant staff time to implement without commensurate increases in staffing. Furthermore, they reported needing timely and clear guidance from MDE on how to implement new policies, including The READ Act and legislation around non-exclusionary discipline.
 8. **...and as such, demand more funding from the legislature.** Principals report needing more staff to support students experiencing mental health crises; more staff to free up teachers’ time for problem solving, professional learning, and collaboration (or more paid time without student supervisory responsibilities); and more reliable access to substitute teachers. Such changes require meaningful increases in funds for personnel.
 9. **Foster wellbeing at school by authentically listening, building relationships, and demonstrating care.** With the mental health challenges of students and staff at an all-time high, according to MnPS respondents, principals find success in building resilient school communities by prioritizing the more human elements of their work: giving students, staff, and families voice; nurturing genuine connections; and asking “How can I help?”
 10. **Love their jobs despite the challenges.** While this sentiment was not universal, that 86% of principals reported being satisfied with their jobs suggests that, despite the many and significant challenges they face, principals view their roles as fulfilling and meaningful. In the words of one principal, “It’s a REALLY DIFFICULT job, that I wouldn’t trade for anything.”

Below, we summarize findings from each section of the 2023 survey, which further explain these ten key takeaways. We present findings on principals’: careers, preparation and licensure, working conditions, professional development, leadership self-efficacy and needed supports, engagement in culturally responsive practices, perceptions of state and district policy and supports, and perspectives on student and staff mental health.

CAREER INFORMATION

Participants had worked as school leaders in any capacity for an average of 10.9 years, and had worked in their current roles for an average of 6.2 years. More than a third (36%) had been in their roles for 2 years or less. Primary factors for pursuing their current position included *opportunity for impact, location, and ties to the surrounding community*.

Principals reported anticipating staying in their roles for an average of 6.7 years. Similar to the results of the 2021 survey, nearly two-thirds of participants (64%) expected to remain in their roles for 6 years or less. One in five principals expected to be in their roles for only 2 years or less. Top factors influencing principals’ decisions to stay in their roles included factors such as *opportunity for impact, staff culture, and compensation*.

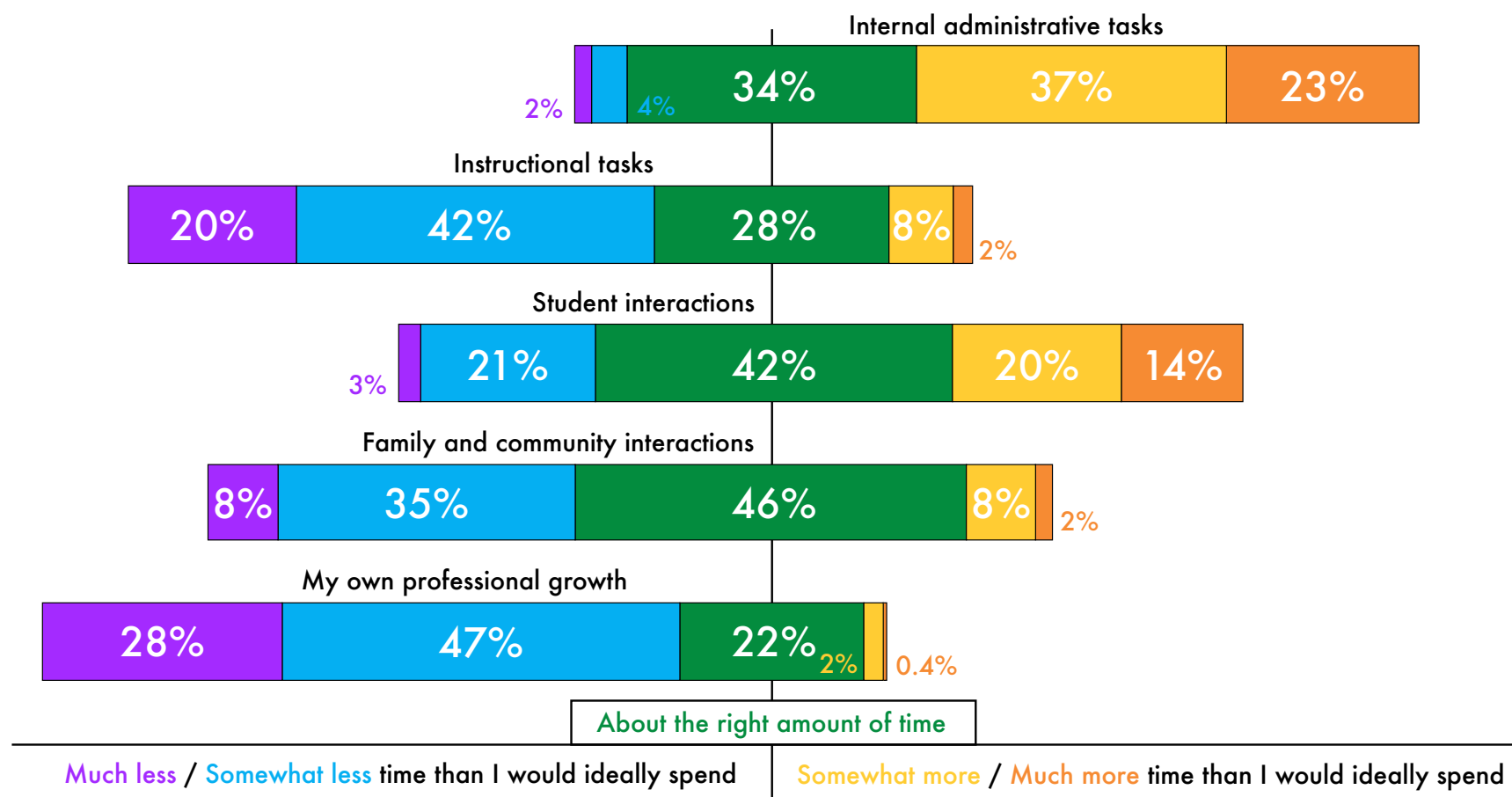
Retirement was most frequently reported as respondents’ next career step with 32% selecting this option. Eight percent (8%) plan to move into a role outside of public education, up from 5% in 2021. Nearly a quarter (23%) were undecided.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Multiple survey questions asked about the nature, intensity, and subjective quality of principals’ work lives. Key findings from this section of the survey included the following:

- Principals reported spending an average of 57.0 hours working per week, down slightly from 58.6 hours in 2021.
- Just over half (52%) of 2023 respondents *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* that their workloads are sustainable, an increase from 46% in 2021.
- When asked how they spend their time with regard to various leadership tasks, 62% reported they spend *much less* or *somewhat less* time on instructional tasks than they would like. Conversely, 60% of respondents indicated they spend *somewhat more* or *much more* time on internal administrative tasks than they would like. This pattern is consistent with 2021 findings.
- 77% of respondents *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* with the statement, *My primary role as an administrator is to be an instructional leader*. However, only 58% of respondents *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* with the statement, *My supervisor ensures I have the time to be an instructional leader*.
- 98% of principals reported spending their personal funds on their schools. On average, principals who reported using personal funds for school purposes spent \$777 per year.
- Agreement with three statements about the appropriateness and adequacy of compensation, healthcare benefits, and retirement benefits fell from 2021 to 2023.
 - 54% of principals *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* with the statement, *My compensation is appropriate for the work I do in 2023*, compared to 64% in 2021.
 - 69% of principals *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* with the statement, *My healthcare benefits are adequate* compared to 76% in 2021.
 - 62% of principals *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* with the statement, *My retirement benefits are adequate* compared to 77% in 2021.
- 86% of 2023 participants *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* that they were generally satisfied being a leader at their school, compared to 83% in 2021. Top factors contributing to principals’ job satisfaction included *relationships with students*, *seeing students grow socially and emotionally*, and *relationships with staff*.

Time spent on various leadership tasks



Examples of tasks within each category

- Internal administrative tasks:** personnel issues, scheduling, reports, budgeting, operational meetings
- Instructional tasks:** curriculum, instruction, assessment, PLC meetings, data analysis, classroom observations
- Student interactions:** academic guidance, discipline, seeking student voice, relationship building
- Family and community interactions:** attending events, seeking parent or community input
- My own professional growth:** self-reflection, attending PD, reviewing research, reading, networking

PREPARATION AND LICENSURE

We asked principals a series of questions about their administrative licensure and leadership preparation experiences. Nearly all respondents (98%) had completed an administrative licensure program, with license holders having completed their programs between 1990 and 2023. Preparation and licensure perceptions among those who reported completing their licensure programs in 2018 or later included the following:

- Principals felt most prepared to *apply the code of ethics for school administrators, understand the role of education in a democratic society, and share leadership with teachers and staff.*
- Principals felt least prepared to *recruit and retain staff, address emergency and crisis situations, formulate a site improvement plan, and manage facilities.*
- The proportion of program completers who reported insufficient preparation in several domains of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) was far less than it was in 2021. We suspect this may be because respondents to these items had completed their licensure programs within the past 5 years, when content related to CRSL may have been more prevalent, whereas respondents in 2021 included all licensure program completers dating back to the 1990s.
- Top content reported as missing from administrative licensure coursework included *special education due process, staff recruitment and retention, teacher development and evaluation best practices, and school finance.*
- Top experiences reported as missing from administrative licensure internships included *addressing student discipline challenges, developing and evaluating non-teaching staff, and budgeting experience.*

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

One section of the survey captured principals’ experiences with and perceptions of their own professional development (PD). Key findings from this section included the following:

- Principals were most likely to report having participated in the following types of PD during the 2022-23 school year: *presentations at scheduled school or district meetings, networking with other educational leaders, and other workshops or trainings*, the same top responses as in 2021.
- Principals rated the following types of PD as most useful: *networking with other educational leaders, Minnesota Principals Academy, and other cohort-based learning experiences.*
- Principals rated the following types of PD as less useful: *presentations at scheduled school or district meetings, formal mentoring, and doctoral coursework.* However, most respondents (76%, 84%, and 85%, respectively) did view these forms of professional development as either *moderately* or *very useful*.
- As in 2021, the PD type with the lowest usefulness ratings—*presentations at scheduled school or district meetings*—is also the type participated in most.
- 64% of principals *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* with the statement, *My performance evaluations help me to grow in my leadership practice.*
- 80% of principals *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* with the statement, *I am satisfied with the opportunities I have to grow as a leader in my role.*
- 91% of principals reported having access to professional development funds from their employers.
- Top barriers to participating in PD included *feeling obligated to be in the school building, limited time, and limited staff coverage.*

“What types of Professional Development did you participate in during the 2022-23 school year?”

	2021	2023
Presentations at scheduled school or district meetings	70%	73%
Networking with other educational leaders	66%	65%
Other workshops or trainings	57%	65%
State or local conferences	30%	42%
MASSP provided opportunities	26%	35%
MESPA provided opportunities	28%	31%
Other cohort-based learning experience	26%	25%
National conferences	7%	18%
Formal mentoring	9%	14%
Formal coaching	11%	12%
Minnesota Principals Academy	7%	7%
Doctoral coursework	5%	5%

“How would you rate the usefulness of each type of professional development you participated in during the 2022-23 school year?”

Percent responding “moderately useful” or “very useful”

	2021	2023
Networking with other educational leaders	98%	97%
Minnesota Principals Academy	100%	96%
Other cohort-based learning experience	95%	94%
MESPA provided opportunities	87%	93%
Formal coaching	93%	93%
State or local conferences	92%	92%
MASSP provided opportunities	90%	91%
Other workshops or trainings	87%	90%
National conferences	96%	88%
Doctoral coursework	92%	85%
Formal mentoring	98%	84%
Presentations at scheduled school or district meetings	78%	76%

LEADERSHIP SELF-EFFICACY AND NEEDED SUPPORTS

Several survey questions were designed to answer questions about school leaders’ self-efficacy, or the degree to which they feel capable of carrying out their work in light of their own capabilities and available resources. Key findings from this section were as follows:

- In 2023, 89% of respondents *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* with the general statement *I can be successful as a leader at this school*, compared to 90% in 2021.
- Principals’ reported self-efficacy decreased in 47 of 49 leadership activities from 2021 to 2023, with an average decrease in the percentage reporting *sufficient* or *more than sufficient* confidence of 7 percentage points.
- The largest decreases in self-efficacy from 2021 to 2023 were in *engaging families in school-level decision-making* and *engaging students in school-level decision-making*, both of which saw a 17 point drop in the percentage of principals reporting having sufficient or more than sufficient confidence in these areas.
- Among these 49 activities, respondents reported the highest level of self-efficacy in the following five leadership activities: *explaining administrative decisions to staff*, *engaging staff in school-level decision-making*, *facilitating decision-making in teams*, *setting meaningful student learning goals*, and *establishing discipline practices*—all activities pertaining to management and decision-making.
- Conversely, respondents reported the lowest level of self-efficacy in the areas of *creating culturally responsive assessments*, *addressing staff mental health challenges*, *engaging families in school-level decision-making*, *addressing student mental health challenges*, and *designing culturally responsive curriculum*—with mental health and culturally responsive practices being clear themes.

- Of all 49 leadership activities included on the survey, *addressing student mental health challenges* was the most frequently selected activity identified as posing the single greatest challenge to school leaders, by far. When asked what would most help school leaders address this challenge, top themes among responses included:
 - Funding to hire more mental health staff.
 - Better access to mental health resources for students, staff, and families.
 - Training and professional development for principals and staff (e.g., initiating conversations about mental health, trauma-informed practices).

“Students are mentally imploding the minute they get off the bus and we don’t have the staff on hand to deal with it.”

“We are in a post-pandemic mental health crisis with more... mental health needs than ever. We need more help and more training for all staff around how to best support our students.”

- The next most frequently selected “single greatest challenges” were: *establishing a robust Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)*, *addressing staff mental health challenges*, *supporting instruction in all content areas taught at my school*, *communicating about race, gender, and culture with families and community members*, and *engaging families in school-level decision-making*.

Change from 2021 to 2023 in percentage of respondents reporting *sufficient confidence* in 49 leadership activities

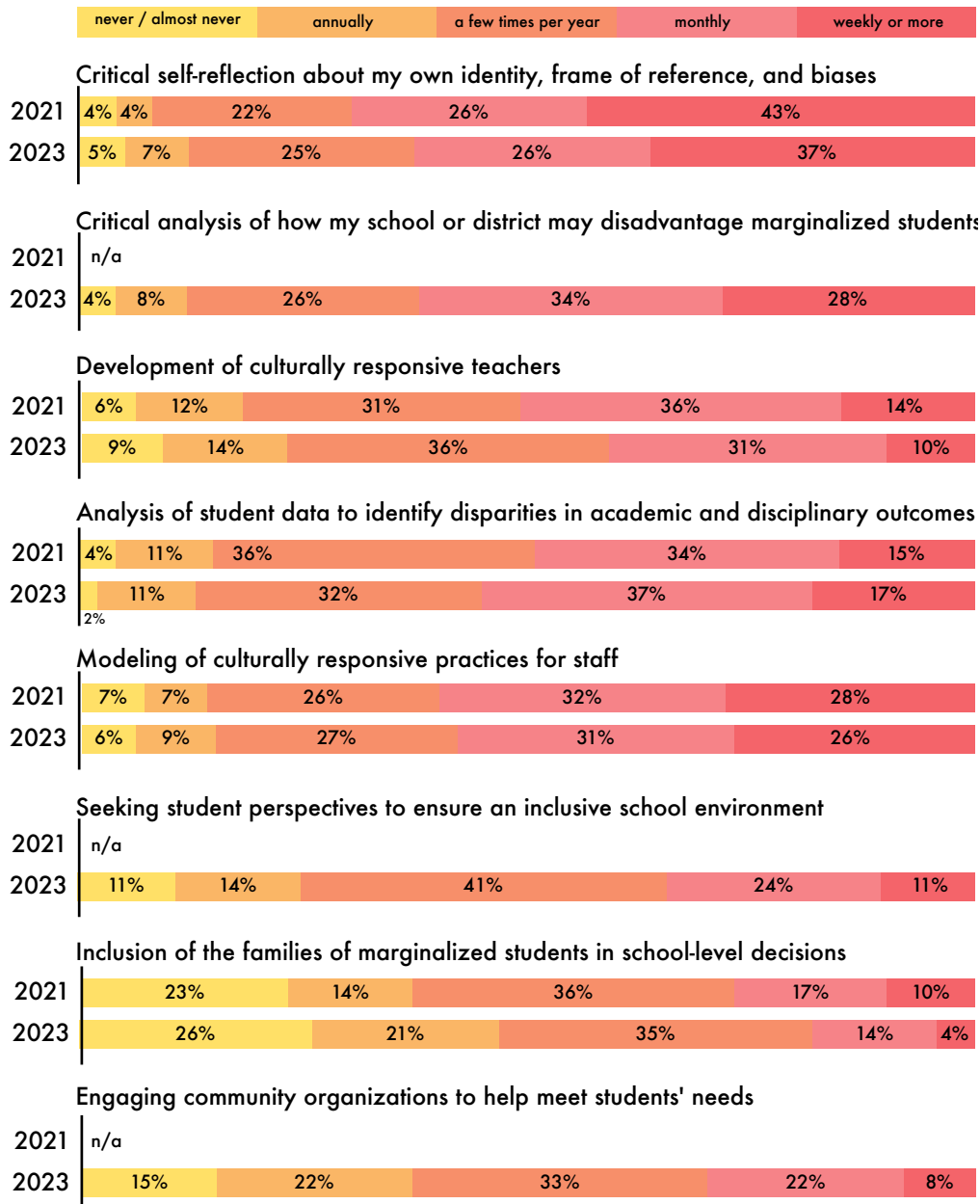
1%	Supporting culturally responsive pedagogy
0%	Balancing our school's emphasis on academics and social and emotional learning (SEL)
-1%	Creating culturally responsive assessments
-2%	Designing culturally responsive curriculum; Boosting staff morale; Explaining administrative decisions to staff; Facilitating professional development for teachers; Establishing a robust Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)
-3%	Critical self-reflection about my own identity, frame of reference, and biases; Evaluating teachers; Facilitating decision-making in teams; Ensuring all students' sense of belonging at school
-4%	Engaging staff in school-level decision-making; Coaching teachers; Facilitating conflict resolution; Establishing a vision for my school; Motivating a majority of my staff to implement changes; Setting meaningful student learning goals
-5%	Establishing discipline practices; Hiring new teachers; Designing professional development for teachers; Communicating about race, gender, and culture with families and community members; Ensuring all staff members' sense of belonging at school
-6%	Gathering and analyzing student-level data to personalize instructional supports; Collaborating with staff to implement a school improvement plan; Implementing changes with fidelity; Gathering and analyzing student-level data to personalize behavioral supports
-7%	Addressing staff performance concerns; Monitoring changes to our practice over time; Facilitating discussions with staff about race; Facilitating discussions with staff about gender identity; Supporting instruction in all content areas taught at my school
-8%	Evaluating programs and initiatives; Analyzing perception data from staff about school climate; Facilitating discussions with staff about sexual orientation
-9%	Explaining administrative decisions to families or community members; Motivating teachers to take responsibility for school improvement; Deciding how the school budget will be spent; Analyzing data to identify areas needing improvement; Motivating teachers to help each other improve instruction
-10%	Managing multiple initiatives simultaneously; Addressing staff mental health challenges
-11%	Analyzing perception data from students about school climate
-12%	Applying research-based approaches to school improvement planning
-13%	Analyzing perception data from families about school climate
-15%	Addressing student mental health challenges; Leveraging research findings to inform decision-making
-17%	Engaging students in school-level decision-making; Engaging families in school-level decision-making

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

One section of the survey pertained to school leaders’ culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) practices. Specifically, we sought to understand the frequency of their engagement in practices associated with the four domains of CRSL as described by Khalifa et al. (2016): critical self-reflection, developing culturally responsive teachers, promoting culturally responsive/inclusive school environments, and engaging students, families, and communities. We found the following:

- In the area of **critical self-reflection**:
 - 63% of respondents indicated that they engaged in *critical self-reflection about my own identity, frame of reference, and biases* at least on a monthly basis (compared to 69% in 2021).
 - 61% of respondents reported engaging in *critical analysis of how my school or district may disadvantage marginalized students* (a new item in 2023) on a monthly or more frequent basis.
- In the area of **developing culturally responsive teachers**:
 - 41% of respondents reported engaging in *development of culturally responsive teachers* at least monthly, down from 50% in 2021.
 - 55% of respondents indicated having engaged in *analysis of student data to identify disparities in academic and disciplinary outcomes* at least monthly, up from 49% in 2021.
- In the area of **promoting culturally responsive/inclusive school environments**:
 - 57% of principals reported *modeling of culturally responsive practices for staff* at least monthly, compared to 60% in 2021.
 - 34% reported *seeking student perspectives to ensure an inclusive school environment* (a new item in 2023) at least monthly.
- In the area of **engaging students, families, and communities**:
 - 18% of principals reported *engaging in the inclusion of the families of marginalized students in school-level decisions* at least monthly, far fewer than the 27% who reported doing so in 2021.
 - 30% of principals reported *engaging community organizations to help meet students’ needs* (a new item in 2023) at least monthly.
- 50% of respondents reported attending community events with students and their families *a few times per year* (compared to 49% in 2021), with about one in five indicating they did so *monthly or more* (21%, compared to 23% in 2021).

Approximately how often do you engage in the following culturally responsive school leadership practices?



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

STATE AND DISTRICT POLICY AND SUPPORTS

One section of the survey pertained to principals' perceptions of, and experiences with, accountability, support, and policy at both state and district levels. Key findings from this section included the following:

- 41% of respondents *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* that state accountability measures used to evaluate schools were reasonable, compared to 73% of district respondents that felt district accountability measures were reasonable.
- 72% of charter respondents *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* that charter authorizer accountability measures were reasonable.
- 84% of district respondents *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* that they feel supported by district leaders, as in 2021.
- 78% of charter respondents *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* that they feel supported by their charter authorizers, a decrease from 93% in 2021.
- 45% of principals *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* that they knew of several ways they could influence state policy, compared to 83% who *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* that they knew of several ways they could influence district policy.
- Most leaders wanted greater influence over state and district policy:
 - 76% of respondents *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* that they wanted greater influence over state policy, up from 70% in 2021.
 - 79% of district respondents *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* that they wanted greater influence over district policy, compared to 78% in 2021.
- 32% of principals have not sought to influence state policy in the past two years.
- The most common way principals reported seeking to influence state policy in the past two years was by *sending written communication to legislators*, with 48% of respondents selecting this option.
- 5% of principals have not sought to influence district policy in the past two years.
- The most common way principals reported seeking to influence district policy in the past two years was by *contributing as a member of a district-level committee*, with 82% of respondents selecting this option.
- *Lack of time* and *feeling my voice will not be heard* were the top two barriers to both state and district policy influence cited by principals.
- Principals were far more likely to report facing barriers to influence at the state level than at the district level, with 7% indicating they

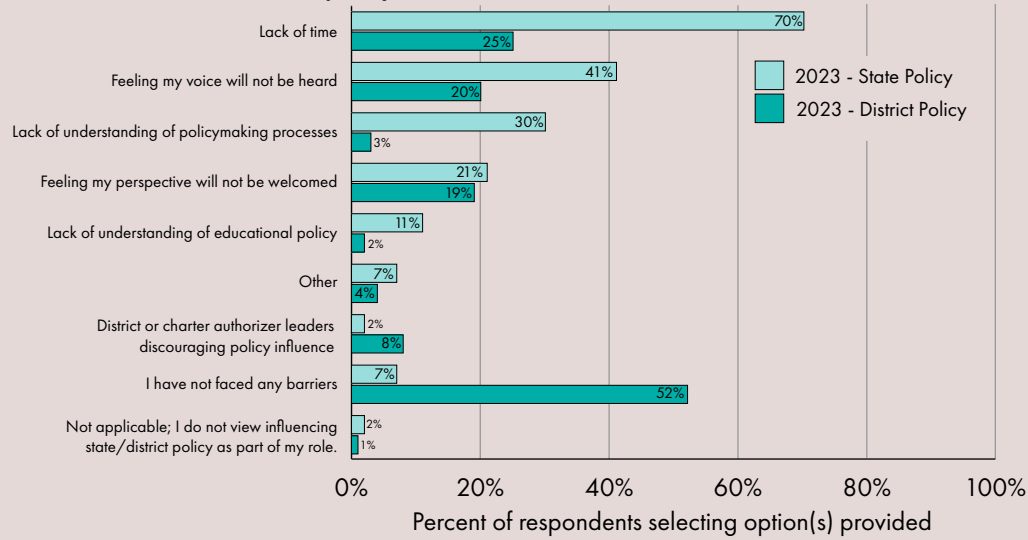
"I mostly need those that are making the recommendations to understand what it's like to be an elementary principal on a Tuesday. Some of the changes feel unrealistic at times, and the recommendations given thus far are so broad and vague that it's more frustrating than helpful (mostly around NED, Recess Detention and K-3 suspensions)."

"The K-3 suspension is difficult without additional funding for staff. I completely agree that suspensions actually make the situation worse. However, a change like this should have been connected to an increase in funds for mental health professionals in schools to help proactively support students."

- had not faced barriers to state policy influence compared to 52% reporting no barriers to district policy influence.
- We asked principals to report their familiarity with, extent of responsibility for, and self-efficacy in implementing ten policy changes enacted during the 2023 Minnesota legislative session. These changes pertained to: The READ Act, non-exclusionary discipline, K-3 suspension, recess detention, prone restraint and physical holds, pupil withdrawal agreements, ethnic studies requirement, American Indian culture and language requirement, personal finance graduation requirement, and the government and citizenship graduation requirement.
 - Respondents were most familiar with policy changes relating to **non-exclusionary discipline** and **prone restraint and physical holds**. These were also the two policy changes that principals were most likely to report having responsibility to implement.
 - Respondents were least familiar with policy changes relating to **American Indian culture and language** and **ethnic studies** requirements.
 - Principals who reported being primarily or partly responsible for implementing certain policy changes then reported their confidence in being able to implement those changes. Principals were most likely to report confidence in their ability to implement changes

THE MINNESOTA PRINCIPALS SURVEY

Barriers to state and district policy influence



Note. Respondents could select as many options as applicable, other than I have not faced any barriers and not applicable; I do not view influencing state/district policy as part of my role, which could not be

relating to **recess detention** and **prone restraint and physical holds**, and least likely to report confidence in their ability to implement changes relating to **American Indian culture and language** requirements and **the READ Act**.

- With respect to American Indian culture and language, leaders reported a need for teachers, access to curriculum, implementation requirements and timelines, classroom space, and professional development.
- With respect to the READ Act, leaders requested a wide range of needs including basic information about the legislation and its requirements, specific implementation strategies, curricular resources, support for implementing with secondary students and multilingual learners, and other resources, like money and time to hire and train staff.
- Across policy areas, principals reported **needing information, guidance, and support** to comply with recent legislation. They also needed time to plan, train their staff, and make necessary adjustments to local policies and practices. Many leaders reported needing funding, especially to fund staff that could support policy implementation. And finally, many respondents noted **frustration with new mandates**, especially those that did not come with additional funds or clear guidance from MDE.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MENTAL HEALTH

The 2023 MnPS included an “insert section” on mental health given the topic’s salience to principals, as indicated by findings from the 2021 MnPS as well as follow-up focus groups conducted in 2022 (Brogan et al., 2023; Pekel et al., 2022). Here, we summarize key findings from the mental health section, including questions on student mental health, staff mental health, and principal wellbeing.

With respect to **student mental health**:

- As described above, principals selected *addressing student mental health challenges* as the leadership activity posing the “single greatest challenge” to them more than any other activity in 2023.
- 94% *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* with the statement, *Student mental health challenges represent a major barrier to student learning at my school*.
- 45% *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* with the statement, *My school or district is able to provide adequate support for students experiencing mental health challenges*.
- The three most-selected perceived root causes of student mental health challenges were: *trauma experienced firsthand (primary trauma)* (74% of respondents selected this option), *student engagement with social media* (59%), and *mental health challenges of caregivers* (40%).
- Principals suggested policy and practice changes to address what they viewed as the root cause(s) of student mental health challenges:
 - To address **trauma experienced firsthand**, principals suggested: greater access to mental health providers such as therapists, counselors, and social workers; community support from county agencies and nonprofits; more expansive therapy options for

“[We need] more mental health professionals and support in the schools—and more money to pay for it!”

“[We need a] statewide ban of cell phones in schools. End the distractions in schools.”

“[We need] consistent and proactive support from the county/non-school entities for families who are struggling with mental health.”

students and families; and trauma-informed care training and implementation support for all staff.

- To address **student engagement with social media**, principals suggested: cell phone bans or limited use policies; parent/caregiver education and involvement; curriculum on the negative impacts of social media use; and legal and/or legislative action to prevent social media and technology companies from targeting children.
- To address **mental health challenges of caregivers**, principals suggested: increasing caregivers’ access to mental health services and more robust wrap-around services provided at school sites.

With respect to **staff mental health**:

- As described above, *addressing staff mental health challenges* was the third most-selected leadership activity posing the “single greatest challenge” to principals out of 49 possible activities.
- 70% of principals *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* with the statement, *Staff mental health challenges represent a major barrier to student learning at my school*.
- 43% of school leaders *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* with the statement, *My school or district is able to provide adequate support for staff experiencing mental health challenges*.
- The three most-selected perceived root causes of staff mental health challenges were: *challenging student behavior (e.g., disengagement, threats, verbal or physical attacks)* (81% of respondents selected this option); *inadequate time to fulfill work responsibilities* (65%); and *staffing shortages* (63%).
- Principals suggested policy and practice changes to address what they viewed as the root cause(s) of staff mental health challenges:
 - To address **challenging student behavior**, principals suggested: more staff to support students; revising or potentially repealing the non-exclusionary discipline policy; and more funding to support staff and student learning and development (e.g., de-escalation strategies).
 - To address **inadequate time to fulfill work responsibilities**, principals suggested: increased non-instructional staff time; a reorganization of the school day and year (e.g., transitioning to a four-day workweek); and more funding to support these and other changes.
 - To address **staffing shortages**, principals suggested: increasing the pay of teachers, paraprofessionals, and substitute teachers;

THE MINNESOTA PRINCIPALS SURVEY

“Non-exclusionary discipline is good in theory, when there is SEL support to teach alternate behaviors. We do not have the staff (too many students in need for our current staffing) or funds to provide the necessary support.”

“[We need to] restructure the school day/year so that there is adequate time for professional development, reflection, and collaboration.”

“With the cost of living increases continuing to outpace salary/benefits increases, we continue to have less and less applicants for all positions.”

expanding pathways and opportunities for teacher licensure; and alleviating substitute teacher shortages by allowing paraprofessionals to sub or by funding full-time building substitutes.

With respect to **principal wellbeing**:

- 81% *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* with the statement, *Most days, I experience an overall sense of wellbeing as a school leader*.
- Top factors most detracting from principals’ wellbeing as school leaders included: *inadequate time to fulfill work responsibilities, staffing shortages, and challenging student behaviors (e.g., disengagement, threats, verbal or physical attacks)*.
- 52% of principals *somewhat agreed* or *agreed* with the statement, *My district is able to provide adequate support for school leaders experiencing mental health challenges*.
- When asked what lessons they had learned about fostering wellbeing in their school communities, top themes included the importance of: building relationships, listening and responding to needs, leading through positive messaging and modeling, and establishing schoolwide programming and practices intended to promote wellbeing.

“[Fostering wellbeing is] all about establishing trusting relationships with all stakeholders. If you have that you can work through all other things.”

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM EXPERIENCE AS A SCHOOL LEADER

As the final question on the survey, we asked leaders: *Is there anything else about your experience as a school leader that may be helpful for various education stakeholders to know—including local and state-level decision-makers?* Responses aligned with 7 major themes, which are summarized below in order of prevalence in the data.

Theme 1: Unsustainable Conditions for Teaching, Learning, and Leading

Consistent with open-ended comments from 2021, the most prevalent theme among open-ended comments was the perspective that the current conditions under which teaching, learning, and leading are taking place are not sustainable and require urgent action to improve.

“I am an extremely passionate educator who wants to be in this profession and make a difference but something has to give. I am barely surviving day to day operations and I know I can’t keep this up. It’s extremely disappointing because I know that education is where I always wanted to be and believe I thrive, but something has to give. It’s an impossible profession.”

Theme 2: Frustration with Legislative Process and Outcomes

Numerous principals cited frustration with what they viewed as unfunded, unclear, or unrealistic mandates.

“The people making laws aren’t at the ground level seeing how the changes affect schools. Making decisions in theory vs. practice are two VERY different things. More unfunded/underfunded mandates create stress and push people out of education.”

Theme 3: Positive Outlook or Perspective

While most open-ended comments revealed frustration, disappointment, and/or burnout with the current conditions facing Minnesota schools, a sizable minority of leaders conveyed a positive outlook or perspective on their jobs or on public education, generally. Many expressed that, despite its challenges, the principalship is a fulfilling job.

“This is an amazing profession that impacts the lives of so many students and families. Anyone in the position is blessed with opportunity, relationships, and an impact far greater than they know.”

Theme 4: Need for Fundamental Change in Education

Leaders used words and phrases such as “crisis,” “pivotal point,” “uncharted territory,” “underlying stress,” and “fundamental problem” to describe the urgency and gravity of their situations and why fundamental change is necessary. They also used words like “reinvent,” “reimagine,” “rethink,” “reorganize,” “overhaul,” and “shift paradigms” to highlight that the changes they seek are not incremental but dramatic.

“I think public education as we know it is about to fundamentally change. I don’t know when, why, or how but there’s an underlying stress that is about to break loose and we (as a state and perhaps even a nation) are going to have to make some big decisions if this thing we value is going to continue to exist.”

Theme 5: Feedback for District Administrators

Some principals commented specifically on the support they do or do not receive from district administrators. Some school leaders acknowledged that district leaders make it possible for them to do their jobs well. Others shared frustration regarding increased demands on principals’ time, ineffective PD, lack of sufficient mentoring, supervision by individuals without experience in the principalship, having little voice in district decisions, and lack of adequate support for principals from marginalized communities.

THE MINNESOTA PRINCIPALS SURVEY

“Being a Black leader in [a] mostly white community and among a white staff requires district leadership to understand how those racial dynamics impact mental health and create many barriers that are both passively and aggressively placed in the way by colleagues and the community. [District] leadership can’t believe their sympathy or empathy is enough, they have to act and they have to have a strategic plan to support, recruit and retain other Black leaders.”

Theme 6: Gratitude for the Opportunity to Provide Input

As in 2021, respondents shared gratitude for the opportunity to provide their perceptions of the principalship via the Minnesota Principals Survey.

“Thank you for asking about our perspective. We want to do this work and do it well for the students, families and staff we serve. However, as education is currently, I don’t know how we can continue to retain high-quality individuals without some change.”

Theme 7: Personal and Professional Reflections

A final theme from open-ended responses was the expression of personal or professional reflections regarding the principalship. These reflections included lessons learned about school leadership, core beliefs about work in education, and advice for others in school leadership positions.

“I believe in order to continuously be successful at this job, one needs to truly love people and know your work is for them!”