

ISSUE BRIEF

# Where Do Minority Principals Work?

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The principal, or headmaster, of a school is tasked with providing a vision for campus efforts and engaging school and community resources in promoting student achievement. In U.S. schools, where approximately 30 percent of the enrolled students in 1990–91 were racial-ethnic minorities, principals also must be skilled in incorporating this diversity into rich and supportive climates for learning. Principals who themselves are members of racial-ethnic minority groups may bring special insights and talents to these tasks, and they may serve as role models for staff and for students in distinctive ways. Minority principals may also serve as important role models in low-minority schools (i.e., schools with fewer than 20 percent minority students enrolled) by bringing distinctive perspectives that may not have been present otherwise. For these reasons, it is important to examine the overall numbers of these professionals in the schools and to know something about the types of schools in which they are working.

Overall in 1990–91, there were about 12,600 minority principals in the nearly 105,000 schools in the United States. How are minority principals distributed between public and private schools? Within each sector, are higher percentages of these principals found at certain school levels? Are they distributed evenly across geographic locations? Are minority principals more likely to work in schools serving high percentages of minority students? Data from the 1990–91 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), provide answers to these and other questions by describing the types of schools in which minority principals work.

**Proportionally, in 1990–91, more minorities worked as principals in public versus private schools.**

In 1990–91, there were approximately three times as many public as private schools, but almost eight times as many minority principals worked in public as in private schools (table 1). For example, 88 percent of all minority principals worked in the 79,885 public schools in the United States. In contrast, 12 percent of all minority principals worked in the 24,690 U.S. private schools that year.

**Table 1. Total number of public and private schools and the number and percentage of minority principals working in these schools: 1990–91**

	Total schools	Number of minority principals	Percentage distribution of minority principals
Public	79,885	11,096	88.0
Private	24,690	1,514	12.0

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1990–91 Schools and Staffing Survey (School and Administrator Questionnaires).

**Table 2. Percentages of minority principals working in central city, urban fringe, and rural public and private schools: 1990–91**

	Percent of schools	Percent of minority principals
Public		
Central city	23.4	50.4
Urban fringe/large town	26.1	24.9
Rural/small town	50.5	24.7
Private		
Central city	32.2	53.3
Urban fringe/large town	35.0	29.6
Rural/small town	32.8	17.2

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1990–91 Schools and Staffing Survey (School and Administrator Questionnaires).

**In 1990–91, minority principals in both public and private schools were concentrated in central cities.**

In 1990–91, approximately one-quarter of all public and about 32 percent of all private schools were located in central cities. However, about half of all minority principals in both public and private schools worked in central city locations (table 2). In contrast, about one-half of all public schools and about one-third of all private schools were located in rural areas, but only about one-quarter of public minority principals and about 17 percent of private minority principals worked in rural locations. For public and private schools in

urban fringe locations, the distribution of minority principals corresponded closely to the distribution of schools in these areas.

**In 1990–91, minority principals were concentrated in schools where 50 percent or more of the students enrolled were minorities.**

High-minority schools (i.e., schools with 50 percent or more minority students enrolled) made up about 22 percent of the public schools and about 14 percent of the private schools in 1990–91 (table 3). Almost 70 percent of all public school minority principals worked in high-minority schools that year. Similarly, 60 percent of the minority principals working in private schools worked in high-minority schools. In contrast, about 11 percent of all public school minority principals worked in schools that had low minority enrollment (approximately 57 percent of all schools).

**Table 3. Percentages of minority principals working in public and private schools with varying levels of minority enrollments: 1990–91**

	Percent of schools	Percent of minority principals
<b>Public</b>		
High minority (≥50%)	21.8	69.3
Medium minority (20–49%)	20.9	19.6
Low minority (<20%)	57.3	11.1
<b>Private</b>		
High minority (≥50%)	14.3	60.0
Medium minority (20–49%)	17.5	15.3
Low minority (<20%)	68.2	24.7

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1990–91 Schools and Staffing Survey (School and Administrator Questionnaires).

**In 1990–91, minority public school principals were slightly overrepresented in elementary schools.**

In both public and private schools in 1990–91, the largest percentages of minority principals were found in elementary schools (table 4). In public schools, more minority principals worked at the elementary level than would be expected based solely on the distribution of schools at that level. On the other hand, fewer minority principals worked in public secondary schools than would be expected based on the percentage of these schools. Among private schools in 1990–

91, minority principals were distributed roughly proportionally at the elementary, secondary, and combined levels based on the relative percentages of schools at these levels.

**Table 4. Percentages of minority principals working in elementary, secondary, and combined public and private schools: 1990–91**

	Percent of schools	Percent of minority principals
<b>Public</b>		
Elementary	70.3	76.2
Secondary	24.7	19.8
Combined	5.1	4.1
<b>Private</b>		
Elementary	62.6	66.4
Secondary	9.9	10.0
Combined	27.5	23.6

NOTE: Details may not add to totals due to rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1990–91 Schools and Staffing Survey (School and Administrator Questionnaires).

**Discussion**

In 1990–91, minority principals in both public and private schools were concentrated in central city locations and in schools with high percentages (i.e., 50 percent or higher) of minority enrollments. In contrast, minority principals were less likely to work in rural areas, relative to the percentage of schools in those areas. Are the patterns of concentration similar for minority subgroups (e.g., for black and Hispanic principals)? Do these patterns differ by region of the country, and have they changed over time? Further analyses of the SASS data, from 1987–88 to the just-released 1993–94 data, can provide answers to these questions. Other related questions to be explored with other databases bear on principal recruitment policies in school districts, the locales within which aspiring or current principals live, and the desire of aspiring or current principals to work in particular types of schools or locales.

Related Publication:

Choy, S.P., Henke, R.R., Alt, M.N., Medrich, E.A., and Bobbitt, S.A. (1993). *Schools and Staffing in the United States: A Statistical Profile, 1990–91*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES Report No. 93–146).

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This **Issue Brief** was prepared by Robert Rossi and Shannon Daugherty, American Institutes for Research. To obtain standard errors or definitions of terms for this **Issue Brief**, or to obtain additional information about the Schools and Staffing Survey, contact Charles H. Hammer (202) 219–1330. To order additional copies of this **Issue Brief** or other NCES publications, call 1–800–424–1616.