

## Characteristics of Public and Private School Principals

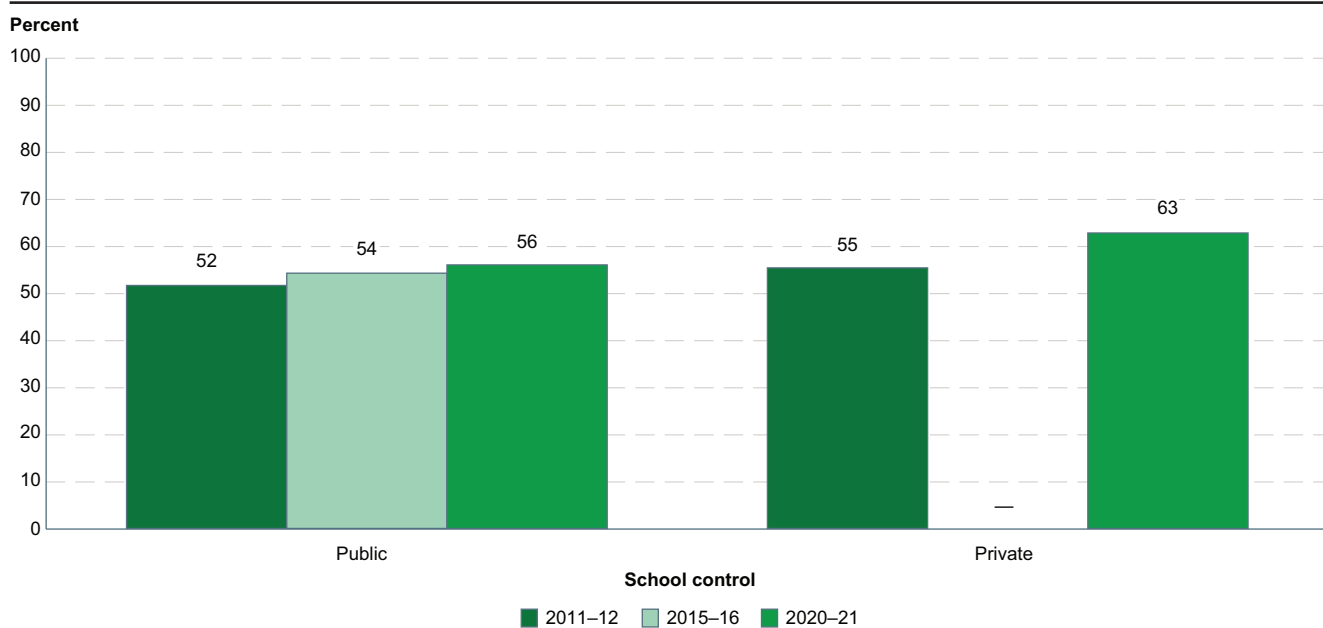
*Females made up a higher percentage of elementary and secondary school principals in 2020–21 than in 2011–12, for both public schools (56 vs. 52 percent) and private schools (63 vs. 55 percent). Lower percentages of public and private school principals had 20 or more years of experience in 2020–21 compared with a decade ago.*

The National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) collects information about principals in public and private elementary and secondary schools across the

United States. This indicator examines the demographics, experience and educational attainment, and salaries of these principals.

### Principal Demographics

**Figure 1. Percentage of female principals in public and private elementary and secondary schools: School years 2011–12, 2015–16, and 2020–21**



— Not available.

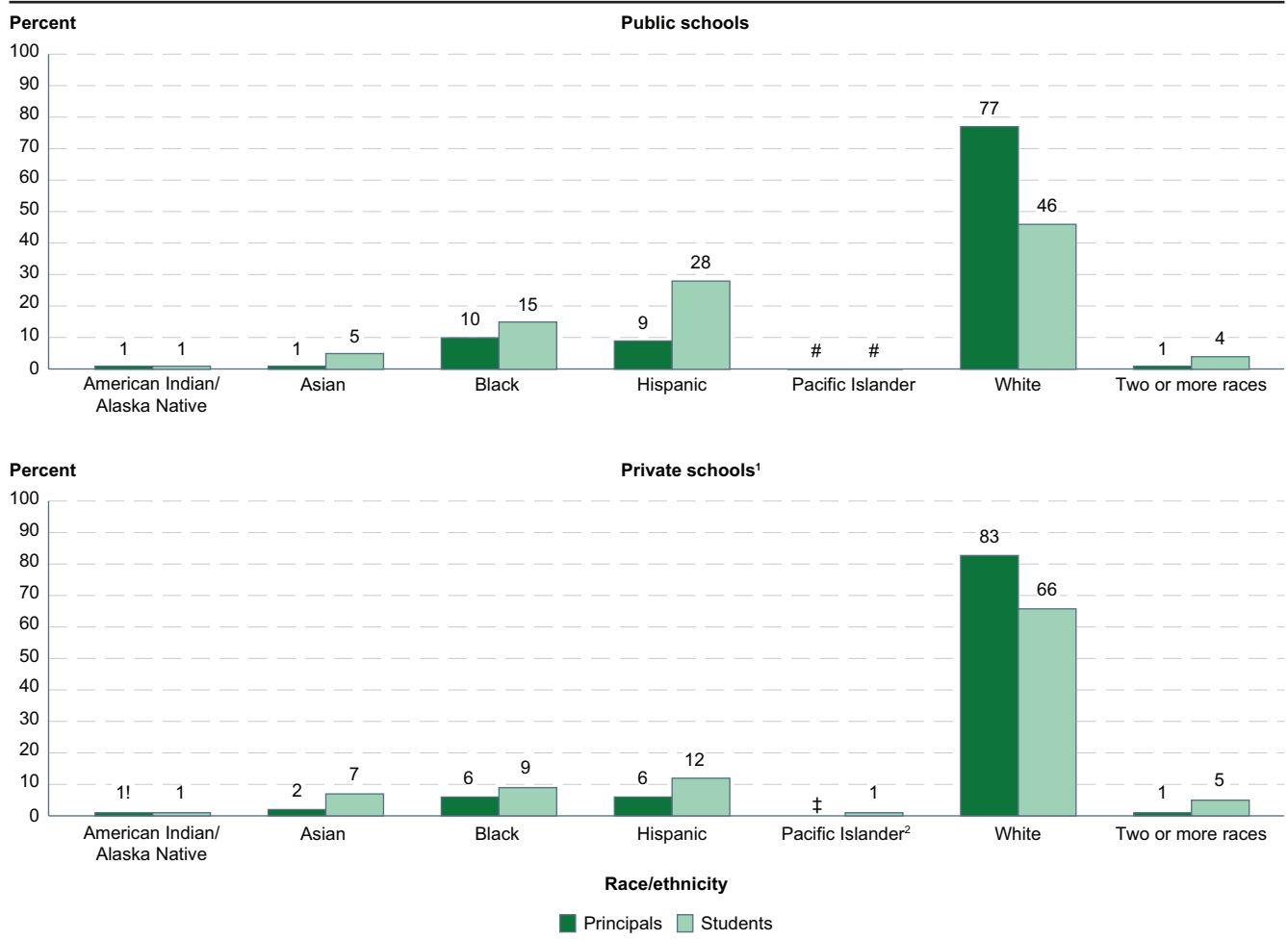
NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time principals rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent principals. Principals were asked whether they were male or female. The questionnaire did not use either the term “gender” or “sex.”

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public School Principal Data File” and “Private School Principal Data File,” 2011–12; National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), “Public School Principal Data File,” 2015–16 and 2020–21; and NTPS, “Private School Principal Data File,” 2020–21. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 212.08.

In 2020-21, the majority of public and private school principals were female.<sup>1</sup> Females made up a higher percentage of elementary and secondary school principals in 2020-21 than in 2011-12, for both public

schools (56 vs. 52 percent) and private schools (63 vs. 55 percent). In 2020-21, a higher percentage of private school principals than of public school principals were female (63 vs. 56 percent).

**Figure 2. Percentage distribution of principals and student enrollment in public and private elementary and secondary schools, by race/ethnicity: School year 2020–21**



# Rounds to zero.

! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.

‡ Reporting standards not met. Either there are too few cases for a reliable estimate or the coefficient of variation (CV) is 50 percent or greater.

<sup>1</sup> The latest principal data available for private schools were for 2020–21, whereas the latest student enrollment data available for private schools were for 2019–20. Due to the misalignment in data years, readers should interpret the private school comparison with caution. In particular, readers should keep in mind that unknown changes to private school enrollments during the pandemic may have affected the overall racial/ethnic distribution of students in private schools, if the data had been available for 2020–21.

<sup>2</sup> The percentage of Pacific Islander private school principals was omitted from this figure, as the estimate did not meet reporting standards.

NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time principals rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent principals. The public school student data are from the 2020–21 Common Core of Data (CCD), and the private school student data are from the 2019–20 Private School Universe Survey (PSS). The principal data are from the 2020–21 National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS). For more information on which CCD and PSS schools are eligible to participate in the NTPS, please see <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2022/2022111.pdf>. Because the data are from different sources and years, readers should interpret the comparisons with caution. For public schools, enrollment data for students not reported by race/ethnicity were prorated based on the known racial/ethnic composition of a state by grade to match state totals. For private schools, race/ethnicity was not collected for prekindergarten students and percentage distribution is based on the students for whom race/ethnicity was reported. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), “Public School Principal Data File,” 2020–21; and “Private School Principal Data File,” 2020–21; Common Core of Data (CCD), “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education,” 2020–21 Preliminary; Private School Universe Survey (PSS), 2019–20. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 203.50 and 212.08; *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, 205.30.

In 2020-21, of all public school principals,

- 77 percent were White;
- 10 percent were Black;
- 9 percent were Hispanic; and
- 1 percent or less each were of Two or more races, Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander.

The percentage of public school principals who were White was lower in 2020-21 than in 2011-12 (77 vs. 80 percent), while the percentages who were Hispanic and Pacific Islander were higher in 2020-21 (9 and 0.3 percent, respectively) than in 2011-12 (7 and less than 0.1 percent, respectively). There were no measurable differences between 2011-12 and 2020-21 in the percentages of public school principals who were of other racial/ethnic groups.

In 2020-21, of all private school principals,

- 83 percent were White;
- 6 percent were Hispanic;
- 6 percent were Black;
- 2 percent were Asian; and
- 1 percent each were of Two or more races and American Indian/Alaska Native.<sup>2</sup>

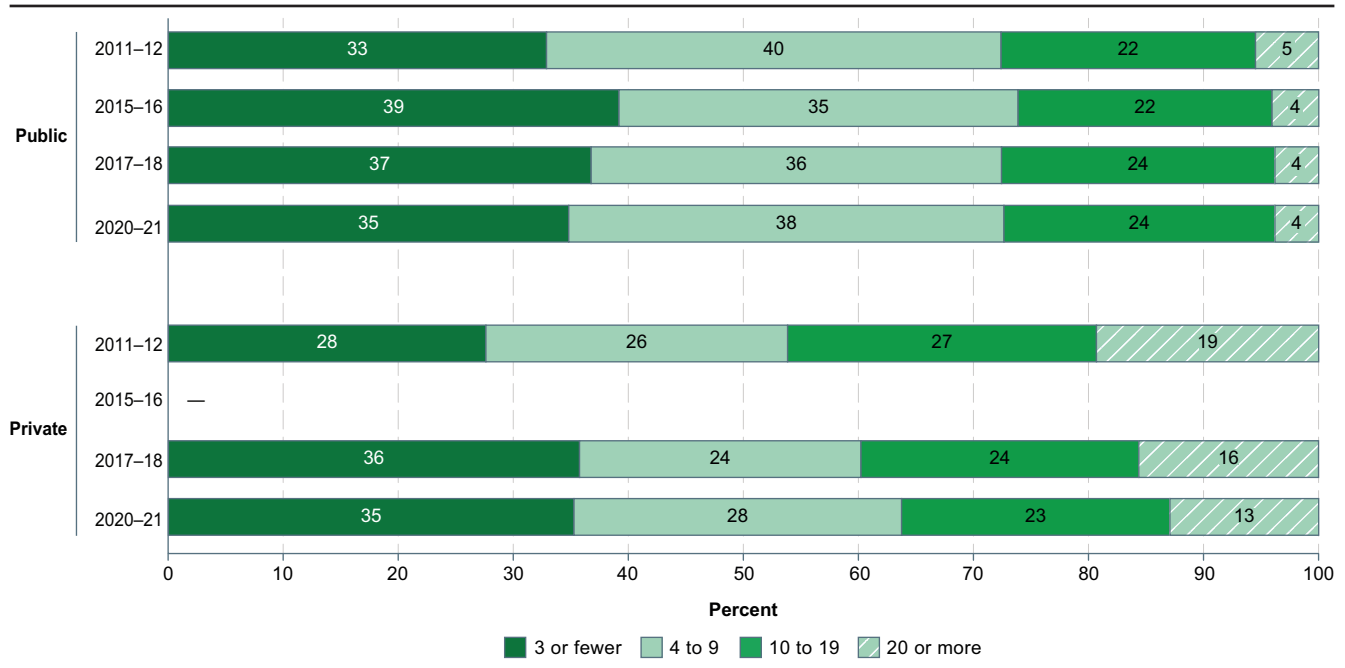
Changes over time in the racial/ethnic composition of the population of private school principals were similar to

those observed for public school principals. For instance, the percentage of White private school principals was lower in 2020-21 than in 2011-12 (83 vs. 87 percent), while the percentage of Hispanic private school principals was higher in 2020-21 than in 2011-12 (6 vs. 3 percent). The percentage of private school principals who were of Two or more races was also higher in 2020-21 than in 2011-12 (1 percent vs. less than 1 percent).

The distribution of principals by race/ethnicity differed between public and private schools. Higher percentages of public school principals were Hispanic or Black, while higher percentages of private school principals were White or Asian. This pattern was also true of public and private school students—higher percentages of public than private school students were Hispanic (28 vs. 12 percent) and Black (15 vs. 9 percent), while higher percentages of private than public school students were White (66 vs. 46 percent) and Asian (7 vs. 5 percent). Looking at the racial/ethnic composition of the principal population and of the student population, in both public and private schools as a whole, the proportion of principals who were White was higher than the proportion of students who were White, whereas the proportions of principals in other racial/ethnic groups were generally lower than the proportions of students in those groups.<sup>3,4</sup>

**Principal Experience and Educational Attainment**

**Figure 3. Percentage distribution of principals in public and private elementary and secondary schools, by years of experience as a principal: School years 2011–12, 2015–16, 2017–18, and 2020–21**



— Not available.

NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time principals rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent principals. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), “Public School Principal Data File” and “Private School Principal Data File,” 2011–12; National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), “Public School Principal Data File,” 2015–16, 2017–18, and 2020–21; and NTPS, “Private School Principal Data File,” 2017–18 and 2020–21. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 212.08.

In 2020-21, of all public school principals,

- 35 percent had 3 or fewer years of experience as a principal;
- 38 percent had 4 to 9 years of experience;
- 24 percent had 10 to 19 years of experience; and
- 4 percent had 20 or more years of experience.

A lower percentage of public school principals in 2020-21 than in 2011-12 had 20 or more years of experience (4 vs. 5 percent). There were no measurable differences between 2011-12 and 2020-21 in the percentages of public school principals who had fewer years of experience.

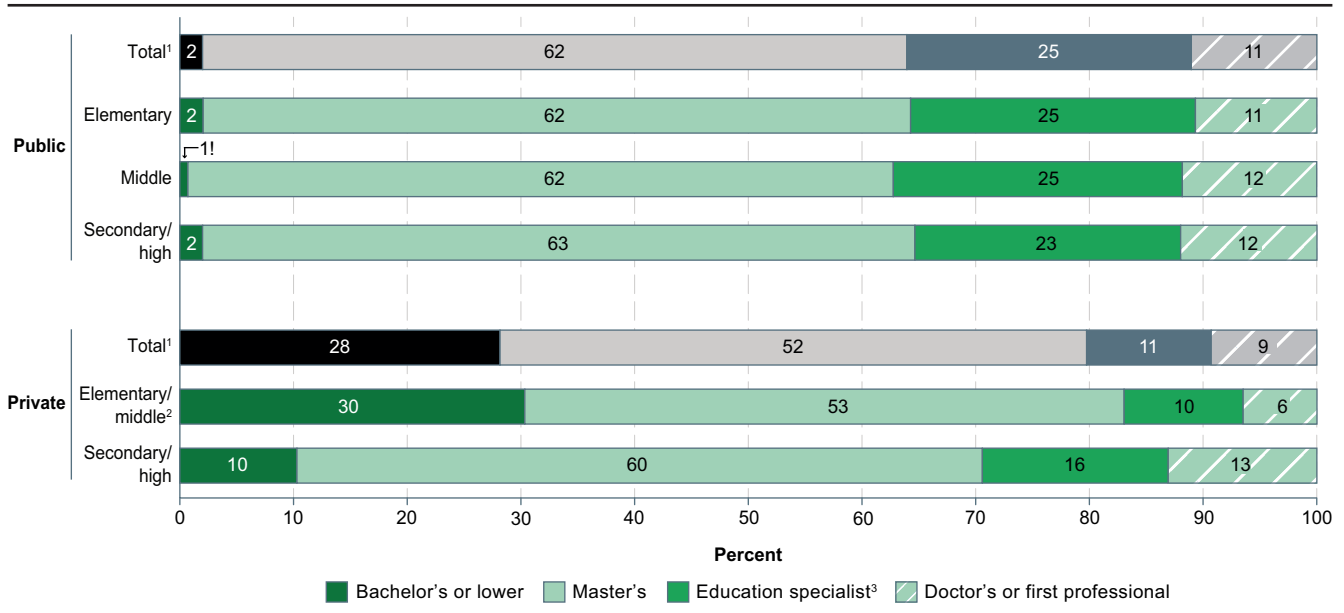
Overall, private school principals were less experienced in 2020-21 than in 2011-12. Specifically,

- a higher percentage had 3 or fewer years of experience (35 vs. 28 percent); and
- a lower percentage had 20 or more years of experience (13 vs. 19 percent).

In 2020-21, the percentages of private school principals with 4 to 9 (28 percent) or 10 to 19 (23 percent) years of experience were not measurably different from 2011-12.

In general, private school principals had more years of experience than public school principals. In 2020-21, a higher percentage of private school principals than of public school principals had 20 or more years of experience (13 vs. 4 percent). Conversely, a higher percentage of public school principals than of private school principals had 4 to 9 years of experience (38 vs. 28 percent).

**Figure 4. Percentage distribution of principals in public and private elementary and secondary schools, by school level and highest level of educational attainment: School year 2020–21**



! Interpret data with caution. The coefficient of variation (CV) for this estimate is between 30 and 50 percent.

<sup>1</sup> Combined/other schools are included in the total but omitted from the figure as a separate category.

<sup>2</sup> Private elementary and middle school principals are combined for reporting purposes.

<sup>3</sup> Education specialist degrees or certificates are generally awarded for 1 year of work beyond the master's degree level. Includes certificate of advanced graduate studies.

NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time principals rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent principals. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Principal Data File," 2020–21; and NTPS, "Private School Principal Data File," 2020–21. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 212.10.

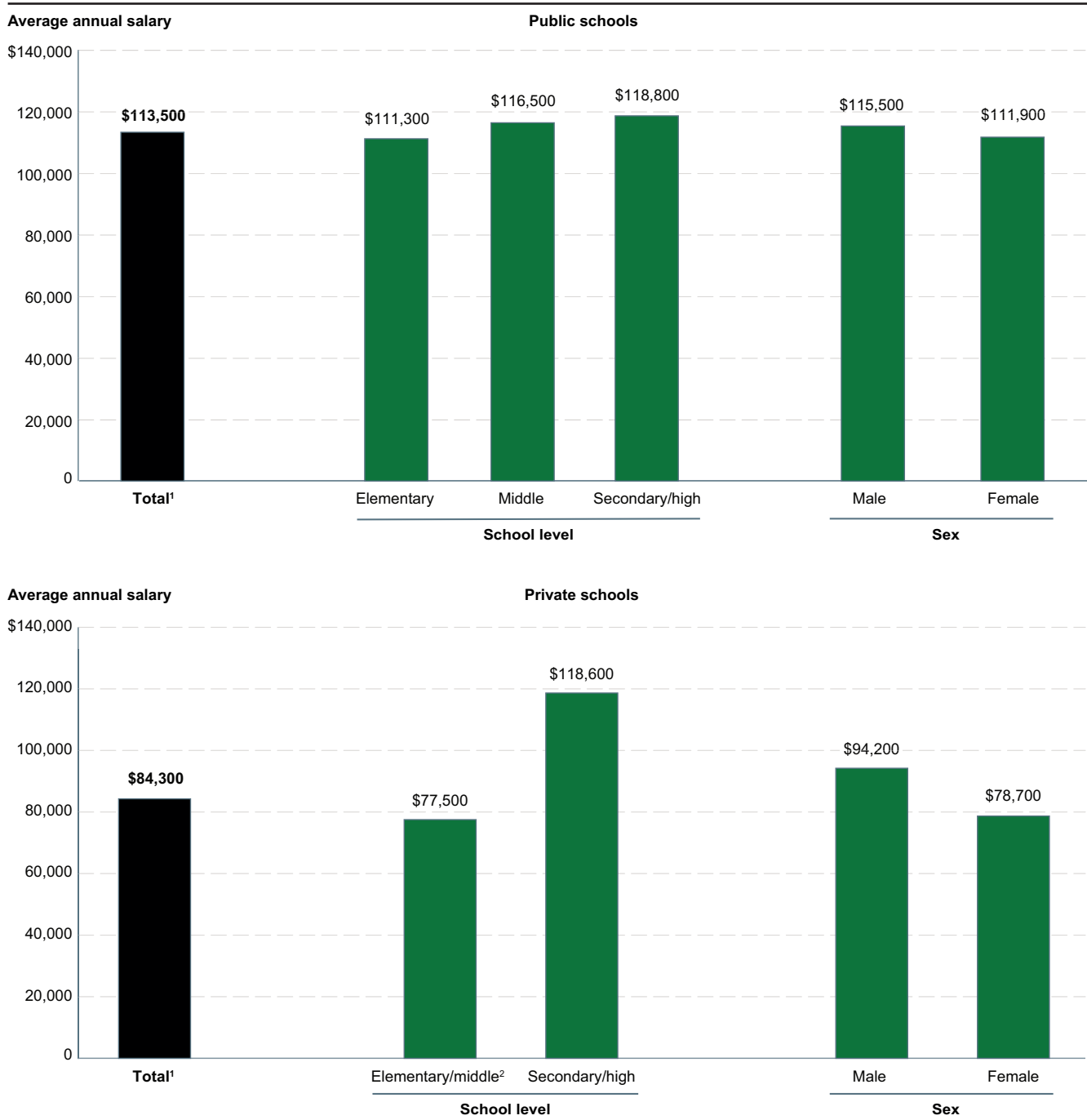
Overall, public school principals had higher levels of educational attainment<sup>5</sup> than did private school principals in 2020-21. While the percentage who held a doctor's or first professional degree was not measurably different between public (11 percent) and private (9 percent) school principals, higher percentages of public school principals than of private school principals held a master's degree (62 vs. 52 percent) or education specialist degree<sup>6</sup> (25 vs. 11 percent) as their highest level of educational attainment. Conversely, a lower percentage of public than of private school principals held a bachelor's or lower degree (2 vs. 28 percent) as their highest level of educational attainment. For each degree level, there were no measurable differences between 2011-12 and 2020-21 in the percentage of public and private school principals who held the degree as their highest level of educational attainment.

In 2020-21, among private school principals, secondary/high school principals had higher levels of educational

attainment than elementary/middle school principals.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, higher percentages of private secondary/high school principals than of elementary/middle school principals held a doctor's or first professional degree (13 vs. 6 percent), education specialist degree (16 vs. 10 percent), or a master's degree (60 vs. 50 percent) as their highest level of educational attainment. Conversely, a lower percentage of private secondary/high school principals than of private elementary/middle school principals held a bachelor's or lower degree as their highest level of educational attainment (10 vs. 30 percent). Among public school principals, there were fewer measurable differences. The only measurable differences were that higher percentages of public elementary and secondary/high school principals (2 percent each) than of public middle school principals (1 percent) held a bachelor's degree or lower level of education as their highest level of educational attainment.

**Principal Salary**

**Figure 5. Principals' average annual salaries at elementary and secondary public and private schools, by school level and sex: School year 2020–21**



<sup>1</sup> Combined/other schools are included in the total but omitted from the figure as a separate category.

<sup>2</sup> Private elementary and middle school principals are combined for reporting purposes.

NOTE: Data in this figure represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Average annual salaries are reported in constant 2021–22 dollars based on the Consumer Price Index, prepared by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, adjusted to a school-year basis. Some data have been revised from previously published figures.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), “Public School Principal Data File,” 2020–21; and NTPS, “Private School Principal Data File,” 2020–21. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 212.10.

In 2020-21, the average annual salary of public school principals was higher than that of private school principals (\$113,500 vs. \$84,300). At public schools, the average annual salary for principals was 1 percent higher in 2021-20 than in 2011-12 (\$113,500 vs. \$112,200, in constant 2021-22 dollars).<sup>8</sup> At private schools, the average annual salary for principals was 12 percent higher in 2020-21 than in 2011-12 (\$84,300 vs. \$75,500, in constant 2021-22 dollars).

In 2020-21, the average salaries of both public and private school principals varied by school level<sup>9</sup> and principals' sex. Among public school principals, the

average annual salary was highest for secondary/high school principals (\$118,800), followed by middle school principals (\$116,500) and elementary school principals (\$111,300). The average annual salary of female public school principals was lower than that of male public school principals (\$111,900 vs. \$115,500). Among private school principals, the average salary for secondary/high school principals was higher than that of elementary/middle school principals (\$118,600 vs. \$77,500). The average annual salary of female private school principals was lower than that of male private school principals (\$78,700 vs. \$94,200).

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Principals were asked whether they were male or female. The questionnaire did not use either the term “gender” or “sex.”

<sup>2</sup> The percentage of private school principals who were Pacific Islander was omitted, as the estimate did not meet reporting standards.

<sup>3</sup> The latest principal data available for private schools were for 2020-21, whereas the latest student enrollment data available for private schools were for 2019-20. Due to the misalignment in data years, readers should interpret the private school discussion with caution. In particular, readers should keep in mind that unknown changes to private school enrollments during the pandemic may have affected the overall racial/ethnic distribution of students in private schools, if the data had been available for 2020-21.

<sup>4</sup> The public school student data are from the 2020-21 Common Core of Data (CCD), and the private school student data are from the 2019-20 Private School Universe Survey (PSS). The principal data are from the 2020-21 National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS). For more information on which CCD and PSS schools are

eligible to participate in the NTPS, please see <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2022/2022111.pdf>. Because the data are from different sources and years, readers should interpret the comparisons with caution.

<sup>5</sup> Level of educational attainment refers to the highest degree earned.

<sup>6</sup> Education specialist degrees or certificates are generally awarded for 1 year of work beyond the master's degree level. This includes certificates of advanced graduate studies.

<sup>7</sup> Private elementary and middle school principals are combined for reporting purposes. Some data in this paragraph have been revised from previously published figures, due to corrections made to the school level variable in NTPS.

<sup>8</sup> For ease of comparison, all annual salaries in this indicator are reported in constant 2021-22 dollars, based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), adjusted to a school-year basis.

<sup>9</sup> Some data in this paragraph have been revised from previously published figures, due to corrections made to the school level variable in NTPS.

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**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, tables 203.50, 212.08, and 212.10; *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 205.30; *2020-21 NTPS*, web table A6; *2011-12 SASS*, web table A6.

**Related indicators and resources:** [Principal Turnover: Stayers, Movers, and Leavers](#); [Characteristics of Public School Teachers](#)

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**Glossary:** Combined/other school, Elementary school, Middle school, Public school or institution, Secondary/high school