

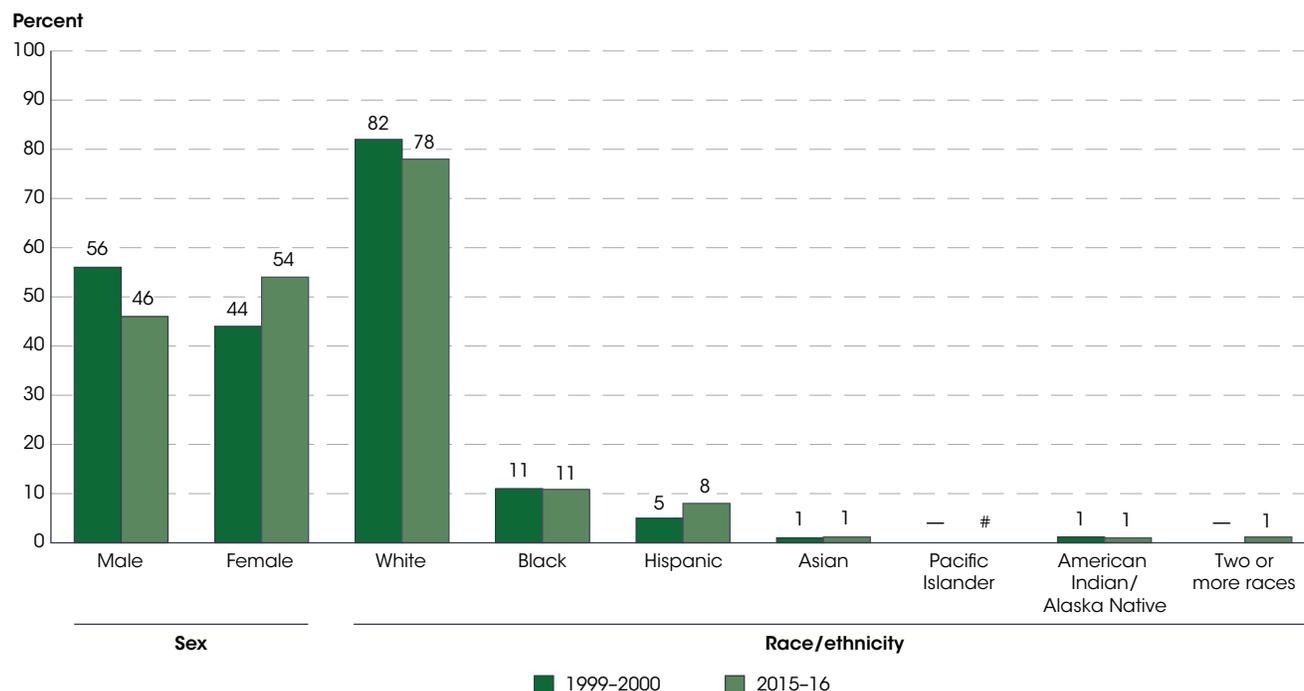
## Characteristics of Public School Principals

*The percentage of public school principals who were female in 2015–16 (54 percent) was 10 percentage points higher than in 1999–2000. The percentage of public school principals who were White was 4 percentage points lower in 2015–16 than in 1999–2000 (78 vs. 82 percent). In contrast, the percentage who were Hispanic was 3 percentage points higher in 2015–16 than in 1999–2000 (8 vs. 5 percent).*

During the 2015–16 school year, public schools in the United States employed 90,400 principals: 69 percent were elementary school principals, 22 percent were secondary school principals, and 9 percent were principals at combined elementary and secondary schools. The

number of public school principals in 2015–16 (90,400) was about 8 percent higher than in 1999–2000 (83,800), while the number of public schools in 2015–16 (98,300) was 7 percent higher than in 1999–2000 (92,000).

**Figure 1. Percentage distribution of public school principals, by sex and race/ethnicity: 1999–2000 and 2015–16**



— Not available.

# Rounds to zero.

NOTE: 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. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Data for 1999–2000 are only roughly comparable to data for 2015–16; in 1999–2000, data for principals of Two or more races were not collected as a separate category, and the Asian category included Pacific Islanders. 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," 1999–2000; and National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Principal Data File," 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 212.08.

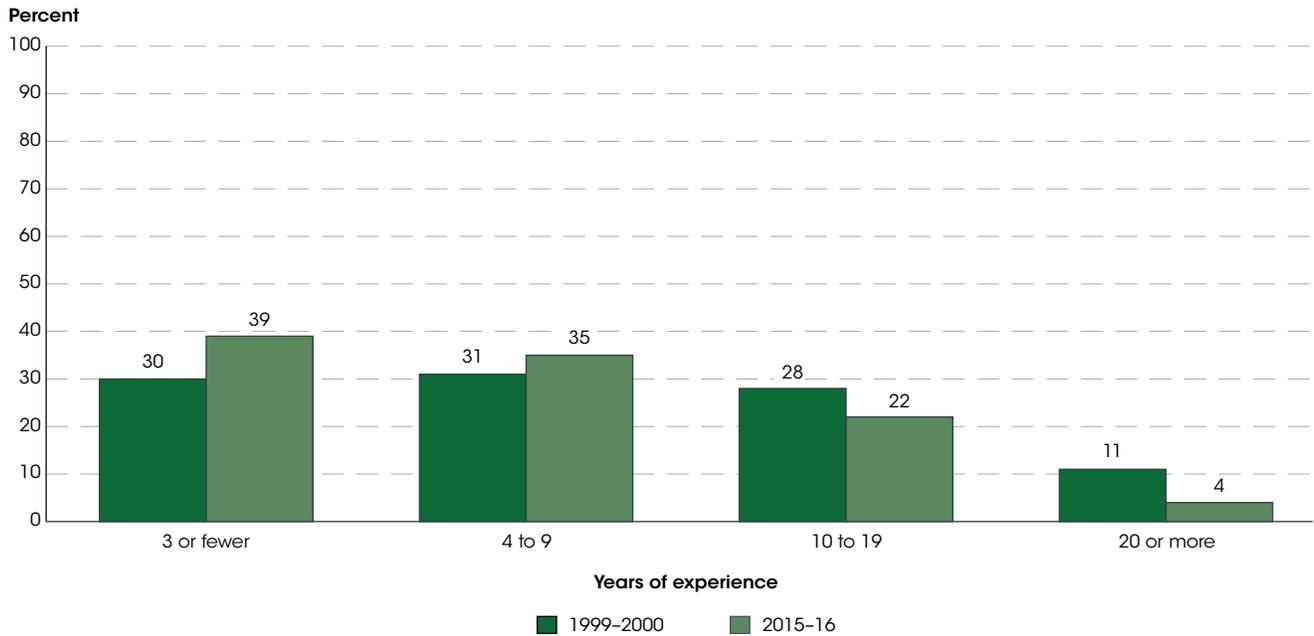
Forty-six percent of public school principals were male and 54 percent were female in 2015–16. The percentage of public school principals who were female was 10 percentage points higher in 2015–16 than in 1999–2000 (54 vs. 44 percent).

In 2015–16, about 78 percent of public school principals were White, 11 percent were Black, and 8 percent were Hispanic. Those who were Asian, of Two or more races, and American Indian/Alaska Native each made up 1 percent of public school principals, and those who were Pacific Islander made up less than 1 percent of

public school principals. The percentage of public school principals who were White was 4 percentage points lower in 2015–16 than in 1999–2000.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the percentage who were Hispanic was 3 percentage points higher in 2015–16 than in 1999–2000, and the percentage

who were Asian was also higher in 2015–16 than in 1999–2000 (the difference was less than 1 percentage point).<sup>2</sup> The percentage of principals who were Black was not measurably different across these two school years.

**Figure 2. Percentage distribution of public school principals, by years of experience as a principal: 1999–2000 and 2015–16**

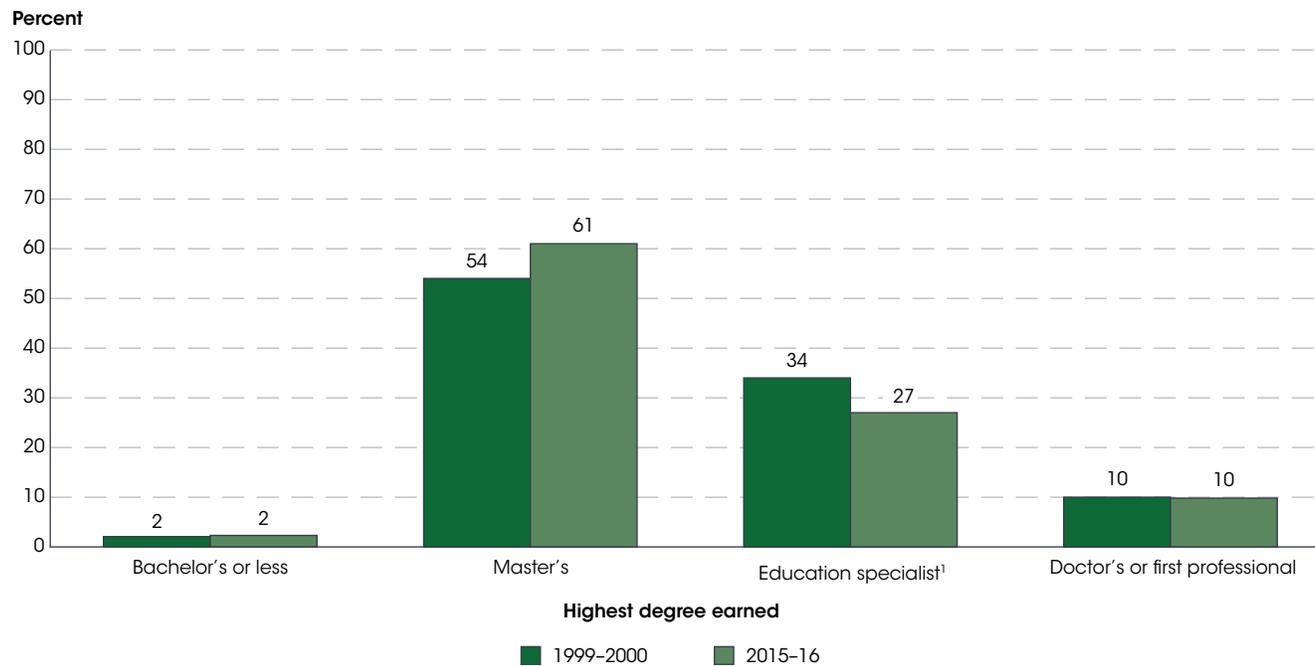


NOTE: Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time principals rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent principals.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Principal Data File," 1999–2000; and National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Principal Data File," 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 212.08.

In 2015–16, about 39 percent of public school principals had 3 or fewer years of experience as a principal, 35 percent had 4 to 9 years of experience, 22 percent had 10 to 19 years of experience, and 4 percent had 20 or more years of experience. Higher percentages of principals in 2015–16 than in 1999–2000 had 3 or fewer years of experience as a principal (39 vs. 30 percent) and 4 to 9 years of experience as a principal (35 vs. 31 percent). In contrast, lower percentages of principals in 2015–16 than in 1999–2000 had 10 to 19 years of experience as

a principal (22 vs. 28 percent) and 20 or more years of experience as a principal (4 vs. 11 percent). Also, higher percentages of principals in 2015–16 than in 1999–2000 were under 40 (19 vs. 10 percent) and 40 to 44 (21 vs. 13 percent), and lower percentages of principals in 2015–16 than in 1999–2000 were 45 to 49 (22 vs. 23 percent) and 50 to 54 (15 vs. 32 percent). The percentage of principals who were 55 or over was not measurably different across these two school years.

**Figure 3. Percentage distribution of public school principals, by highest degree earned: 1999–2000 and 2015–16**



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

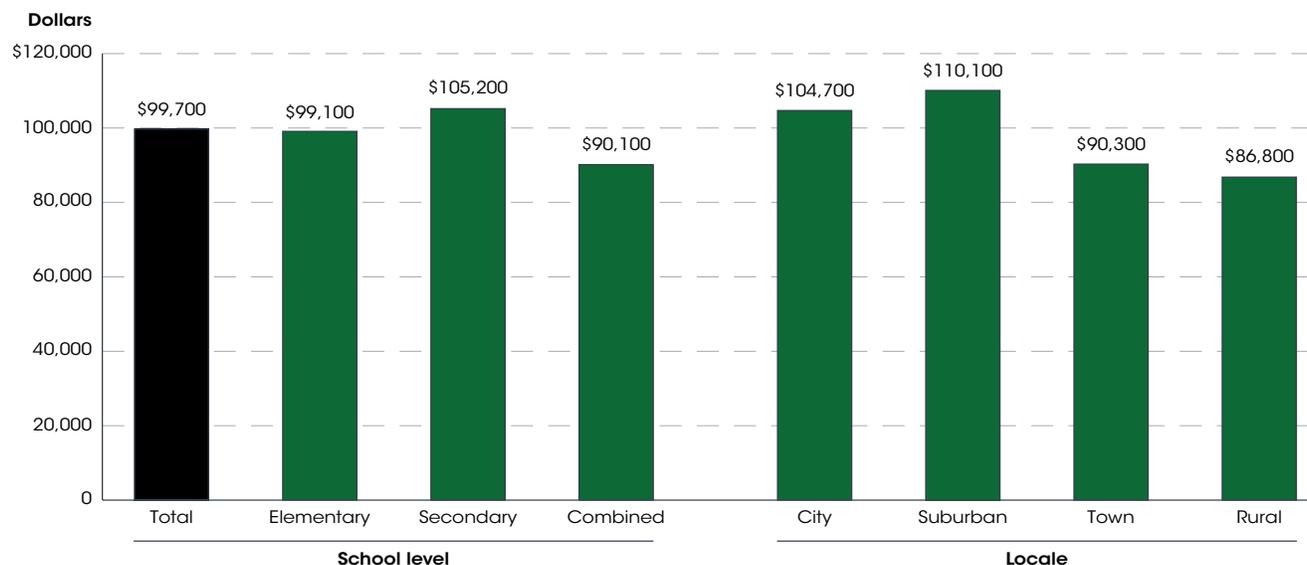
NOTE: Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time principals rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent principals. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Principal Data File," 1999–2000; and National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Principal Data File," 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 212.08.

Most public school principals in 2015–16 had postbaccalaureate degrees: 61 percent had a master's degree, 27 percent had an education specialist degree, and 10 percent had a doctor's or first-professional degree. The percentage of principals who had a master's degree was higher in 2015–16 than in 1999–2000 (61 vs. 54 percent). In contrast, the percentage of principals who had an

education specialist degree was lower in 2015–16 than in 1999–2000 (27 vs. 34 percent). However, the percentage of public school principals who had a bachelor's or lower degree did not differ measurably between 2015–16 and 1999–2000 (2 percent each), nor did the percentage of public school principals who had a doctor's or first-professional degree (10 percent each).

**Figure 4. Principals’ average annual salary at public schools, by school level and locale: 2015–16**



NOTE: Average annual salaries are reported in constant 2017–18 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.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), “Public School Principal Data File,” 2015–16. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 212.10.

The average annual salary of public school principals (in constant 2017–18 dollars)<sup>3</sup> was higher in 2015–16 (\$99,700) than in 1999–2000 (\$97,500). The 2015–16 average salary for secondary school principals (\$105,200) was higher than the salaries for principals at elementary school (\$99,100) and combined schools (\$90,100). The average annual salary of public school principals also varied by school locale. In 2015–16, it was highest in suburban areas (\$110,100), followed by cities (\$104,700) and towns (\$90,300), and lowest in rural areas (\$86,800).

In 2015–16 average salaries were lower for public school principals who were under 40 years of age (\$91,700) and from 40 to 44 years of age (\$98,900) than for principals in older age groups. For example, the average salary for those who were 45 to 49 was \$101,100, it was \$102,300 for those who were 50 to 54, and it was \$104,100 for those who were 55 or over. In addition, the average salary was lower for principals who were 45 to 49 than for principals who were 55 or over.

The average salary for public school principals also varied by sex and race/ethnicity. In 2015–16, female principals

earned lower salaries than their male counterparts (\$98,600 vs. \$100,900). Average salaries were higher for Asian (\$115,100), Hispanic (\$103,900), and Black principals (\$101,500) than for White principals (\$98,800). In addition, average salaries were higher for Asian principals than for Hispanic principals, Black principals, and principals of Two or more races (\$97,500).

In 2015–16, the differences observed in average principal salaries by sex and race/ethnicity were correlated with other related variables. For example, compared with male principals, a higher percentage of female principals were in elementary schools. As noted earlier, elementary school principals had lower average salaries than secondary school principals. Compared with Black and Hispanic principals, a higher percentage of White principals were in rural schools. Average principal salaries were lower in rural areas than in urban areas. After controlling for these and other principal characteristics, the male-female salary difference remained significant, while the White-Black and White-Hispanic salary differences were no longer significant.<sup>4</sup>

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Data for 1999–2000 are only roughly comparable to data for 2015–16; in 1999–2000, data for principals of Two or more races were not collected as a separate category, and the Asian category included Pacific Islanders.

<sup>2</sup> The percentage of principals who were Asian in 2015–16 (1.4 percent) was higher than the percentage in 1999–2000 (0.8 percent).

<sup>3</sup> Constant dollar estimates are based on the Consumer Price Index, prepared by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, adjusted to a school-year basis.

<sup>4</sup> A regression analysis was run using the NCES PowerStats tool. The dependent variable was the average principal salary; the independent variables were school locale and level and principal's highest level of educational attainment, years of experience as a principal, sex, and race/ethnicity.

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**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 83; *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, tables 212.08 and 214.10; *Digest of Education Statistics 2018*, table 212.10

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

**Glossary:** Bachelor's degree; Combined school; Constant dollars; Doctor's degree; Education specialist/professional diploma; Elementary school; Locale codes; Master's degree; Public school or institution; Racial/ethnic groups; Secondary school