

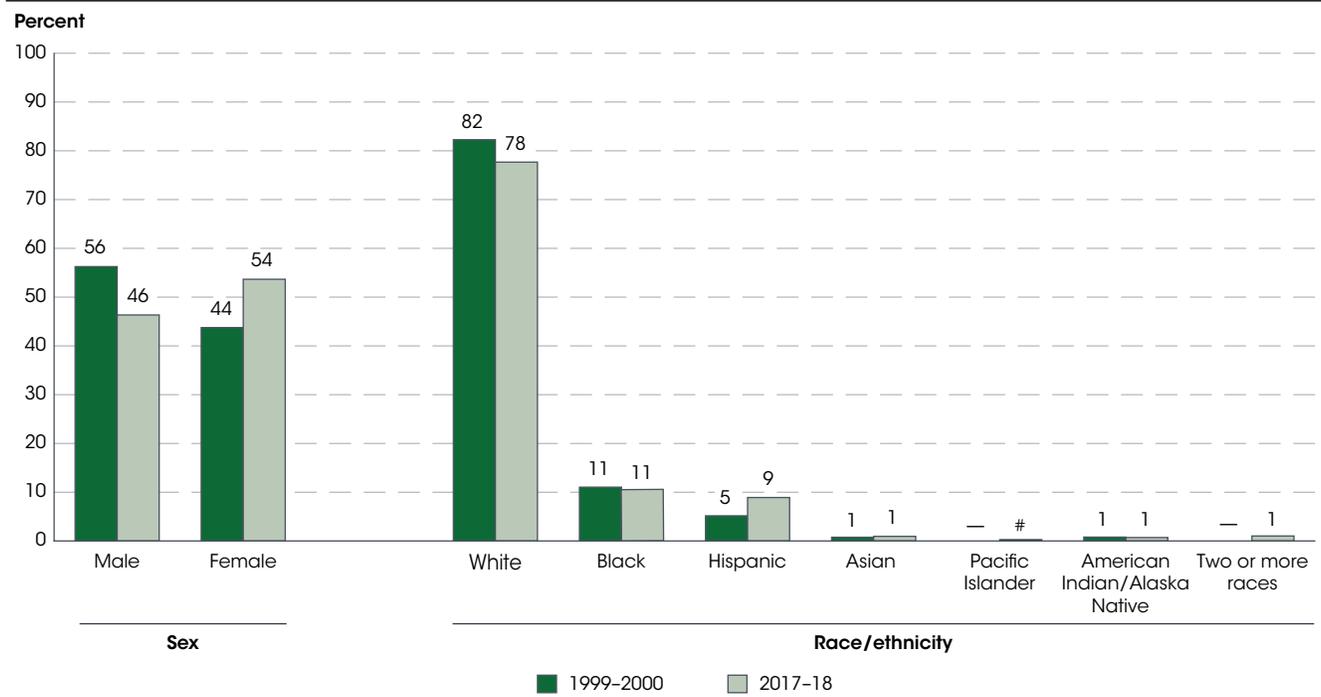
# Characteristics of Public School Principals

*The percentage of public school principals who were female in 2017–18 (54 percent) was 10 percentage points higher than in 1999–2000 (44 percent). The percentage of public school principals who were White was lower in 2017–18 than in 1999–2000 (78 vs. 82 percent). In contrast, the percentage who were Hispanic was higher in 2017–18 than in 1999–2000 (9 vs. 5 percent).*

During the 2017–18 school year, public schools in the United States employed 90,900 principals: 68 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 2017–18 was about 8 percent higher than in 1999–2000 (83,800), while the number of public schools in 2017–18 (98,500) 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 2017–18**



— 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. Separate data on principals who were Asian, Pacific Islander, and of Two or more races were not available in 1999–2000. In 1999–2000, data for principals who were Asian included principals who were Pacific Islander, and principals of Two or more races were required to select a single category from among the offered race/ethnicity categories (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian/Alaska Native). Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

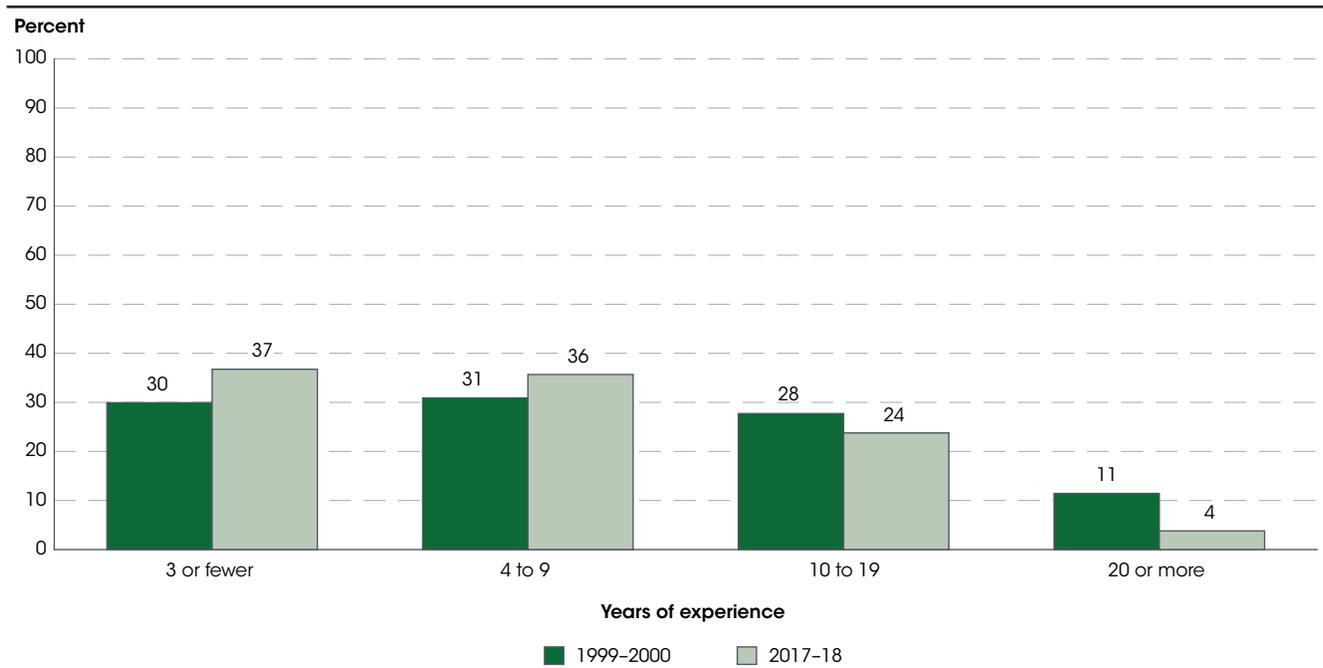
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Principal Data File," 1999–2000; and National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Principal Data File," 2017–18. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 212.08.

Forty-six percent of public school principals were male and 54 percent were female in 2017–18. The percentage of public school principals who were female was 10 percentage points higher in 2017–18 than in 1999–2000 (54 vs. 44 percent).

In 2017–18, about 78 percent of public school principals were White, 11 percent were Black, and 9 percent were Hispanic. Those who were of Two or more races, Asian, 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 lower in 2017–18 than in 1999–2000 (78 vs. 82 percent).<sup>1</sup> In contrast, the percentage who were Hispanic was higher in 2017–18 than in 1999–2000 (9 vs. 5 percent). The percentages of principals who were Black were 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 2017–18**

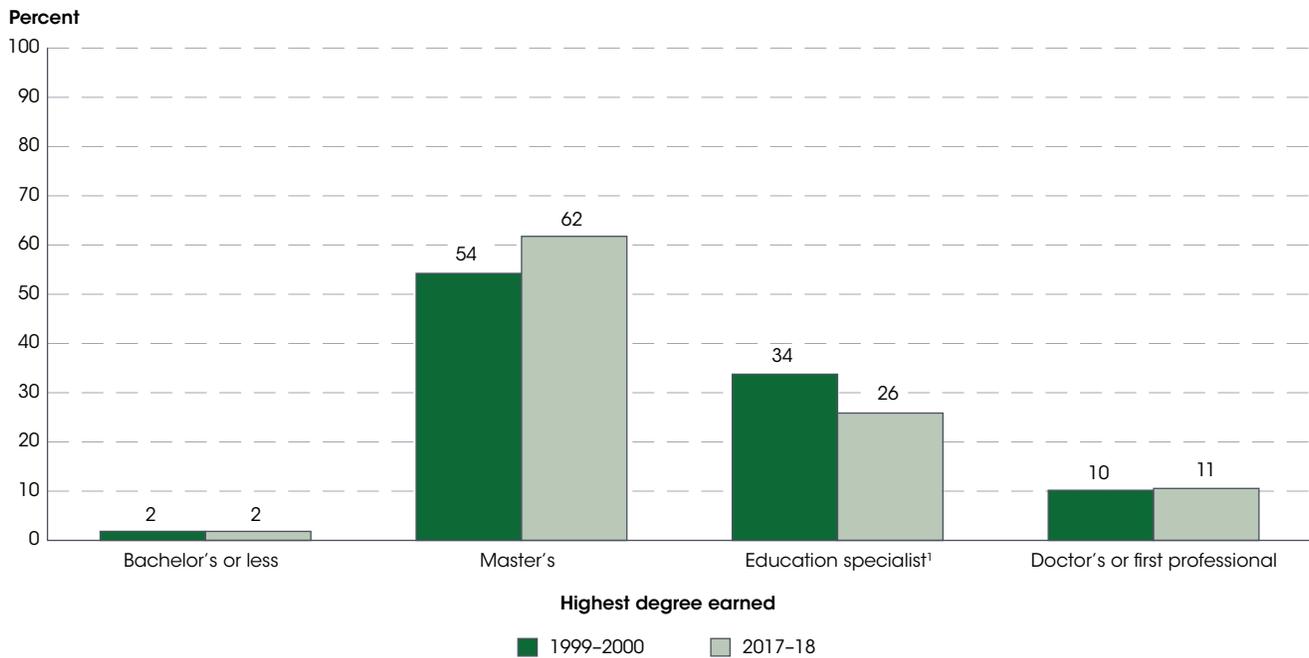


NOTE: Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time principals rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent principals. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Principal Data File," 1999–2000; and National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Principal Data File," 2017–18. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 212.08.

In 2017–18, about 37 percent of public school principals had 3 or fewer years of experience as a principal, 36 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. Higher percentages of principals in 2017–18 than in 1999–2000 had 3 or fewer years of experience as a principal (37 vs. 30 percent) and 4 to 9 years of experience as a principal (36 vs. 31 percent). In contrast, lower percentages of principals in 2017–18 than in 1999–2000 had 10 to 19 years of experience as

a principal (24 vs. 28 percent) and 20 or more years of experience as a principal (4 vs. 11 percent). Also, higher percentages of principals in 2017–18 than in 1999–2000 were under 40 years of age (17 vs. 10 percent) and 40 to 44 years of age (20 vs. 13 percent), and a lower percentage of principals in 2017–18 than in 1999–2000 were 50 to 54 years of age (18 vs. 32 percent). The percentages of principals in 2017–18 who were 45 to 49 (23 percent) and 55 or over (22 percent) were not measurably different from the corresponding percentages in 1999–2000.

**Figure 3. Percentage distribution of public school principals, by highest degree earned: 1999–2000 and 2017–18**



<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.

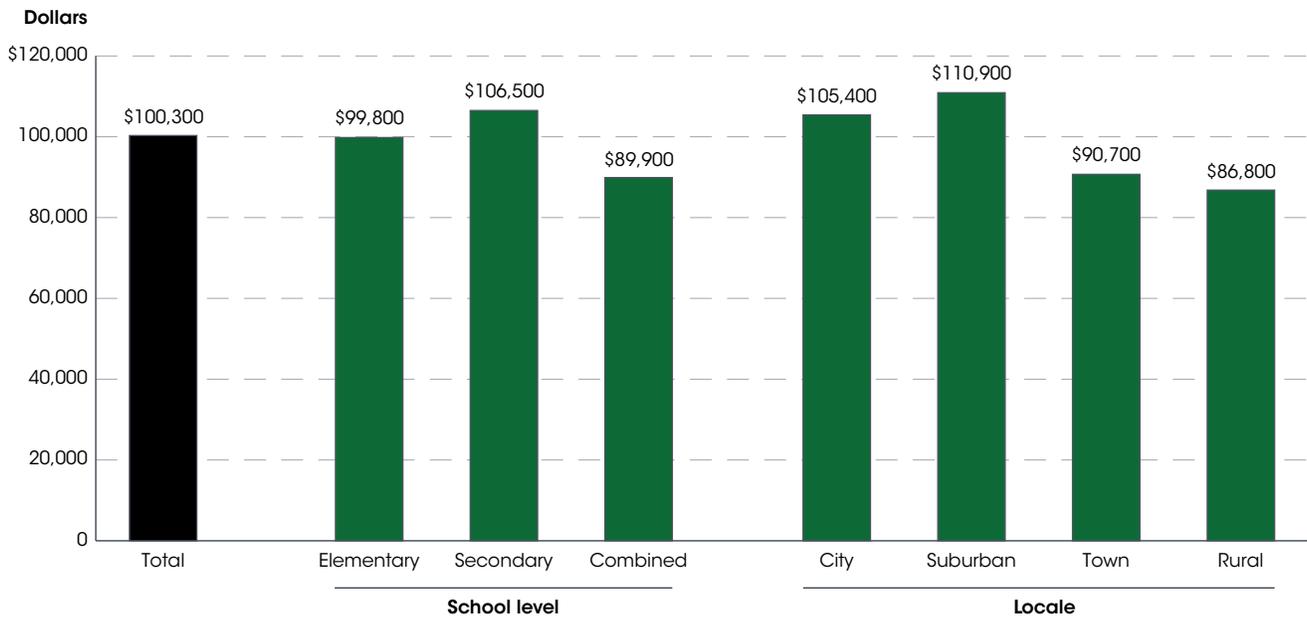
NOTE: Data are based on a head count of full-time and part-time principals rather than on the number of full-time-equivalent principals. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.

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," 2017–18. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 212.08.

Most public school principals in 2017–18 had a postbaccalaureate degree as their highest degree: 62 percent had a master's degree, 26 percent had an education specialist degree, and 11 percent had a doctor's or first-professional degree. The percentage of principals who had a master's degree was higher in 2017–18 than in 1999–2000 (62 vs. 54 percent). In contrast, the

percentage of principals who had an education specialist degree was lower in 2017–18 than in 1999–2000 (26 vs. 34 percent). However, the percentages of public school principals in 2017–18 who had a bachelor's or lower degree (2 percent) or who had a doctor's or first-professional degree (11 percent) were not measurably different from the corresponding percentages in 1999–2000.

**Figure 4. Principals’ average annual salary at public schools, by school level and locale: 2017–18**



NOTE: Average annual salaries are reported in constant 2018–19 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,” 2017–18. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 212.10.

The average annual salary of public school principals (in constant 2018–19 dollars)<sup>2</sup> was higher in 2017–18 (\$100,300) than in 1999–2000 (\$99,500). The 2017–18 average salary for secondary school principals (\$106,500) was higher than the salaries for principals at elementary schools (\$99,800) and combined schools (\$89,900). The average annual salary of public school principals also varied by school locale. In 2017–18, it was highest in suburban areas (\$110,900), followed by cities (\$105,400) and towns (\$90,700), and lowest in rural areas (\$86,800).

In 2017–18, average salaries were lower for public school principals who were under 40 years of age (\$92,300) and from 40 to 44 years of age (\$99,200) than for principals in older age groups. Specifically, the average salaries for those who were either 45 to 49 or 50 to 54 were both \$102,400, and the average salary was \$103,600 for those who were 55 or over.

The average salary for public school principals also varied by sex and race/ethnicity. In 2017–18, female principals earned lower salaries than their male counterparts

(\$98,300 vs. \$102,700). Average salaries were higher for Asian (\$125,400) and Hispanic (\$105,100) principals than for Black (\$101,100), White (\$99,400), and American Indian/Alaska Native (\$86,700) principals. In addition, average salaries were higher for Asian principals than for Hispanic principals and principals of Two or more races (\$103,000).

In 2017–18, 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 Hispanic principals, a higher percentage of White principals were in rural schools. Average principal salaries were lower in rural areas than in other areas. After controlling for these and other principal characteristics, the male-female salary difference remained significant, while the White-Hispanic salary difference was no longer significant.<sup>3</sup>

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Separate data on principals who were Asian, Pacific Islander, and of Two or more races were not available in 1999–2000. In 1999–2000, data for principals who were Asian included principals who were Pacific Islander, and principals of Two or more races were required to select a single category from among the offered race/ethnicity categories (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, and American Indian/Alaska Native).

<sup>2</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>3</sup> A regression analysis was run using the National Teacher and Principal Survey Public School Principal Data File. 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 2019*, tables 212.08, 212.10, and 214.40; *Digest of Education Statistics 2017*, table 214.10; *Digest of Education Statistics 2005*, table 83

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

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**Glossary:** Elementary school; Public school or institution; Secondary school