

Principal Attrition and Mobility

Results From the 2021-22 Principal Follow-up Survey to the
National Teacher and Principal Survey

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First Look—Summary Report

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Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Selected Findings	3
References	5

Introduction

This report presents selected findings from the 2021-22 Principal Follow-up Survey (PFS). The PFS is a longitudinal component of the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS),¹ which is a nationally representative survey of public² and private K-12 schools, principals, and teachers in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Both the NTPS and the PFS are developed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) within the U.S. Department of Education, and data are collected on behalf of NCES by the U.S. Census Bureau.

NCES conducted the 2021-22 PFS as a follow up to the 2020-21 NTPS to provide attrition and mobility information about principals in K-12 public and private schools. The purpose was to assess how many principals from the 2020-21 school year still worked as a principal in the same school during the 2021-22 school year (“stayer”), how many had moved to become a principal in another school (“mover”), and how many were no longer working as a principal (“leaver”).

The 2021-22 PFS sample included all principals interviewed in the 2020-21 NTPS. The sample included about 6,500 public school principals and about 1,800 private school principals, for a total sample size of about 8,300 principals. In January 2022, a Principal Status request form was sent to schools for which a completed 2020-21 NTPS Principal Questionnaire had been returned. Any knowledgeable person at the school was asked to complete the form by indicating the current occupational status of the previous year’s principal. If the PFS form was not completed and returned by someone at the school, an attempt was made to collect the data directly from the school’s 2020-21 principal, starting in March 2022, using a slightly different form. In addition, in May 2022, Census Bureau analysts conducted research about nonresponding principals on school and district websites, local news websites, and professional networking websites to identify the principal’s current (2021-22) occupation. Data collection for the Principal Status Form continued until June 2022. The PFS had a response rate of about 99 percent for public school principals, and about 95 percent for private school principals.

To facilitate analysis, PFS data are appended to the 2020-21 public and private NTPS School Principal data files to create the Public School Principal Status Data File and the Private School Principal Status Data File. The 2020-21 NTPS data can produce state-level and national estimates for principals in public schools, and national, regional, and affiliation estimates for principals in private schools. The combined data files of NTPS principal and PFS data can be linked with other NTPS data files (school and teacher data files) using the school identification number to provide a detailed picture of U.S. elementary and secondary schools and their staff.³ Using the NTPS data in conjunction with the PFS data allows detailed analysis of attrition and mobility by different school and principal characteristics.

¹ NTPS is a redesign of the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). NTPS was introduced in the 2015-16 school year and administered again in 2017-18 and 2020-21.

² Public schools include traditional public and public charter schools.

³ See Volume 1 of the *User’s Manual for the 2020-21 National Teacher and Principal Survey*, Petraglia et al. 2023a, for detailed information about merging data files and selecting the appropriate unit of analysis on merged files.

The purpose of this First Look is to provide summaries of the new data collected using tables of descriptive information. Selected findings presented in the tables and text show the range of information available in the 2021-22 Public and Private School Principal Status data files. Findings presented in the text do not include all differences between groups and do not emphasize any one issue. Results shown in this report are not causal. Many of the variables in the report relate to one another, but only simple comparisons are presented, which do not account for all possible relationships. More information about the PFS can be found at <https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/overview.asp?OverviewType=6>.

For readers interested in appendixes with estimate and standard error tables, definitions of terms used in the findings and tables, and additional information about the survey from which the findings are drawn, please see the “View full report” link at <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2023046>.

Selected Findings

- Among all public school principals in 2020-21, approximately 80 percent remained at the same school during the following school year (“stayers”), 6 percent moved to a different school (“movers”), and 11 percent left the principalship (“leavers”). In addition, 3 percent of principals were from schools that reported the principal had left, but the school was unable to report the current occupational status of the principal (“other”) (Table A-1).
- Among all private school principals in 2020-21, approximately 83 percent remained at the same school during the following school year (“stayers”), 2 percent moved to a different school (“movers”), and 10 percent left the principalship (“leavers”). In addition, 5 percent of principals were from schools that reported the principal had left, but the school was unable to report the current occupational status of the principal (“other”) (Table A-1).
- Among the 9 percent of 2020-21 public school principals with a salary of less than \$75,000, 76 percent remained at the same school during the 2021-22 school year, 7 percent moved to a different school, and 13 percent left the principalship. Among the 33 percent with a salary of \$115,000 or more, 81 percent remained at the same school during the 2021-22 school year, 6 percent moved to a different school, and 10 percent left the principalship (Table A-2).
- Among the 62 percent of 2020-21 private school principals with a salary of less than \$75,000, 81 percent remained at the same school during the 2021-22 school year, 3 percent moved to a different school, and 10 percent left the principalship. Among the 13 percent with a salary of \$115,000 or more, 85 percent remained at the same school during the 2021-22 school year, 3 percent moved to a different school, and 8 percent left the principalship (Table A-2).
- Among the 27 percent of 2020-21 public school principals of schools where less than 35 percent of students were approved for free or reduced-price lunches, 81 percent remained at the same school during the 2021-22 school year, 5 percent moved to a different school, and 11 percent left the principalship. Among the 40 percent of principals of schools where 75 percent or more of students were approved for free or reduced-price lunches, 77 percent remained at the same school during the 2021-22 school year, 7 percent moved to a different school, and 12 percent left the principalship (Table A-3).
- Among the 94 percent of 2020-21 public school principals who agreed strongly or somewhat with the statement “I am generally satisfied with being principal at this school” in the 2020-21 school year, 81 percent remained at the same school, 6 percent moved to a different school, and 11 percent left the principalship in 2021-22. Among the 17 percent of public school principals who agreed strongly or somewhat with the statement “I think about transferring to another school” in the 2020-21 school year, 71 percent remained at the same school, 12 percent moved to a different school, and 13 percent left the principalship in 2021-22 (Table A-4).
- Among the 92 percent of 2020-21 private school principals who agreed strongly or somewhat with the statement “I am generally satisfied with being principal at this school” in the 2020-21

school year, 84 percent remained at the same school, 2 percent moved to a different school, and 9 percent left the principalship in 2021-22. Among the 14 percent of private school principals who agreed strongly or somewhat with the statement “I think about transferring to another school” in the 2020-21 school year, 73 percent remained at the same school, 9 percent moved to a different school, and 12 percent left the principalship in 2021-22 (Table A-4).

- Among the 36 percent of public school principals who indicated in 2020-21 that they plan to remain a principal as long as they are able, 84 percent remained at the same school, 5 percent moved to a different school, and 7 percent left the principalship in 2021-22. Among the 12 percent of public school principals who indicated in 2020-21 that they plan to remain a principal until a more desirable job opportunity comes along, 68 percent remained at the same school, 10 percent moved to a different school, and 18 percent left the principalship in 2021-22 (Table A-5).
- Among the 58 percent of private school principals who indicated in 2020-21 that they plan to remain a principal as long as they are able, 86 percent remained at the same school, 2 percent moved to a different school, and 6 percent left the principalship in 2021-22 (Table A-5).
- Among the 58 percent of public school principals who were spending 60 hours or more per week on school-related activities in the 2020-21 school year, 80 percent remained at the same school, 6 percent moved to a different school, and 11 percent left the principalship in 2021-22. Among the 48 percent of private school principals who were spending 60 hours or more per week on school-related activities in the 2020-21 school year, 86 percent remained at the same school, 3 percent moved to a different school, and 7 percent left the principalship in 2021-22 (Table A-6).
- Among the 31 percent of public school principals who reported in the 2020-21 school year that student bullying occurred at least once a month or more often during the 2019-20 school year, 79 percent remained at the same school, 6 percent moved to a different school, and 11 percent left the principalship in 2021-22. Among the 13 percent of private school principals who reported in the 2020-21 school year that student bullying occurred at least once a month or more often during the 2019-20 school year, 78 percent remained at the same school, 2 percent moved to a different school, and 11 percent left the principalship in 2021-22 (Table A-7).
- Among the 92 percent of public school principals who reported in the 2020-21 school year that they had a major influence on evaluating teachers, 79 percent remained at the same school, 6 percent moved to a different school, and 11 percent left the principalship in 2021-22. Among the 82 percent of private school principals who reported in the 2020-21 school year that they had a major influence on evaluating teachers, 83 percent remained at the same school, 2 percent moved to a different school, and 10 percent left the principalship in 2021-22 (Table A-8).

References

Petraglia, E., Green, J., Taie, S., Ferg, R., Hubbell, K., Salinas, V., Greene, A., and Lewis, L. (2023a). *User's Manual for the 2020-21 National Teacher and Principal Survey Volumes 1-4* (NCES 2022-061 through 2022-064). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.