Principal Follow-Up Survey (PFS)

Website: https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/
Updated: November 2018

1. OVERVIEW

The Principal Follow-up Survey (PFS) is a follow-up survey of elementary and secondary school principals who participated in the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) (see the SASS chapter for details on SASS). PFS has been conducted since 2008 for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) by the U.S. Census Bureau in the school year following the SASS data collection. The 2008–09 PFS consisted of all principals interviewed in the 2007–08 SASS. The 2012–13 PFS consisted of all principals interviewed in the 2011–12 SASS and included a concurrent validation study to substantiate the 2012–13 PFS responses by reinterviewing the principals directly. Following the 2011–12 administration, SASS was redesigned and renamed the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS). The NTPS was redesigned with a focus on flexibility, timeliness, and integration with other ED data (see the NTPS chapter for details on NTPS). Unlike previous administrations of SASS, the 2015–16 NTPS did not include private schools, principals, or teachers. As a result, the 2016–17 PFS includes only public school principals.

Purpose
The purpose of the 2008–09 PFS was to provide the attrition rate for principals in K-12 public and private schools, assess how many principals in the 2007–08 school year still worked as a principal in the same school in the 2008–09 school year, how many had moved to become a principal in another school, and how many had left the principalship. The purpose of the 2012–13 PFS was to provide the attrition rate for principals in K-12 public and private schools, assess how many principals in the 2011–12 school year still worked as a principal in the same school in the 2012–13 school year, how many had moved to become a principal in another school, and how many had left the principalship. The goal of the 2016–17 PFS was to provide the attrition rate for principals in K-12 public schools, assess how many principals in the 2015–16 school year still worked as a principal in the same school in the 2016–17 school year, how many had moved to become a principal in another school, and how many had left the principal profession altogether. PFS is designed to produce national estimates for principals in public schools.

Components
The 2008–09 PFS was composed of two questionnaires: the Principal Status Form for Public Schools and the School Head/Principal Status Form for Private Schools. Each form consisted of two questions: question 1 asked about the current occupational status of the principal who had been the principal during the previous school year, when the SASS data were collected (i.e., 2007–08); question 2 collected the name of the previous year’s principal.

The 2012–13 PFS was composed of four questionnaires: the Principal Status Form for Public Schools, the School Head/Principal Status Form for Private Schools, the Principal Status Form for Public School Principals, and the School Head/Principal Status Form for Private School Principals. The Principal Status Form for Public Schools and the School Head/Principal Status Form for Private Schools were the same as the two questionnaire forms used in the 2008–09 PFS.
The Principal Status Form for Public School Principals and the School Head/Principal Status Form for Private School Principals consisted of one question, and were used for both the regular PFS and the validation study. Question 1 was the same as question 1 on the Principal Status Form for Public Schools and the School Head/Principal Status Form for Private Schools, with minor wording changes to reflect addressing the principal directly rather than any respondent at the school. The response options for the current occupational status for the PFS were used to divide the principals into four general categories: stayers, movers, leavers, and other (see Key Concepts for definitions).

The validation study information was collected on the Principal Status Form for Public School Principals and the School Head/Principal Status Form for Private School Principals. However, the response options were classified into six main categories (rather than four): stayers, movers, and 4 groups of leavers. “Stayers” and “Movers” were defined the same as above. Group 1 of “Leavers” were principals who were no longer principals in 2012–13, but were still working in a school. Group 2 of “Leavers” were principals who were no longer principals in 2012–13, but who were still working in the field of education. Group 3 of “Leavers” were principals who were no longer principals in 2012–13, but who were working in another occupational field. Group 4 of “Leavers” were principals who were no longer principals in 2012–13, and not working.

Periodicity
PFS has been conducted three times: twice (in the 2008–09 and the 2012–13 school years) as a follow-up to SASS and once (in the 2016–17 school year) as a follow-up to NTPS.

Data Availability

2. USES OF DATA

Data from PFS are used for a variety of purposes by Congress, state education departments, federal agencies, private school associations, and educational organizations. PFS can be used to research issues related to principal attrition and mobility. Stayers, movers, and leavers can be profiled and compared in terms of principal experience, working conditions, job satisfaction, and incentives and disincentives for remaining in or leaving the profession. PFS also provides a measure of national principal attrition and updates information on the education, training, and career paths of principals. In addition, sampled principals can be linked to SASS or NTPS data to determine relationships between local district and school policies and practices, school characteristics, and teacher attrition and mobility.

3. KEY CONCEPTS

Some of the key terms used in PFS are described below. For descriptions of other terms, please refer to Documentation for the 2012–13 Principal Follow-Up Survey (Cox and Cox, 2015).

Leavers. School principals who were no longer principals in the school year after the SASS or NTPS administration.

Movers. School principals who were still principals in the school year after the SASS or NTPS administration, but had moved to a different school.

Stayers. School principals who were principals in the same school in the year after the SASS or NTPS administration as in the year of the SASS or NTPS administration.

Other. School principals who had left their school that was surveyed in the year of SASS or NTPS administration, but for whom the school was unable to provide sufficient information to determine a mover or leaver status in the year after the SASS or NTPS administration.

4. SURVEY DESIGN

Target Population
The target population for the 2008–09 PFS included principals in public, private, and BIE-funded schools, with students in any of grades K-12 or in comparable ungraded levels, which were in operation in school year 2007–08. All public, private, and BIE school principals who replied to a 2007–08 SASS principal questionnaire were included in the 2008–09 PFS sample.

The target population for the 2012–13 PFS included principals in public, public charter, and private schools, with students in any of grades K-12 or in comparable ungraded levels, which were in operation in school year 2011–12. All public and private school principals who replied to a 2011–12 SASS principal questionnaire were included in the 2012–13 PFS sample; therefore, any discussion of PFS methodology builds upon the preceding SASS methodology.

The 2016–17 PFS target population included principals in public and public charter schools with students in any of grades K-12 or in comparable ungraded levels and in operation in the 2015–16 school year. All public schools whose principal replied to the 2015–16 NTPS principal questionnaires were included in the PFS sample. For details on sampling at all levels of NTPS, see the Survey Documentation for the 2015–16 National Teacher and Principal Survey (Cox et al., forthcoming).

In SASS, the sampling frame for public schools and BIE schools was an adjusted version of the NCES Common Core
of Data (CCD), and the sampling frame for private schools was a modified version of the NCES Private School Universe Survey (PSS). The sampling frame for the SASS principal questionnaire consisted of the principal of each sampled school in the SASS sample. The same sampling frame was used for NTPS, except that the 2015–16 NTPS did not include private schools.

**Sample Design**

All public (for SASS and NTPS) and private (for SASS only) school principals who replied to a SASS or NTPS principal questionnaire were included in the PFS sample. In the 2007–08 SASS, the principal of each sampled school was automatically selected. Altogether, 12,910 school principals were sampled. The 2008–09 PFS sample included all principals who completed SASS interviews in eligible schools. A total of approximately 9,480 schools were contacted for this survey; 2,700 eligible schools were not included because the principal did not respond to the Principal Questionnaire during the 2007–08 SASS; and 730 schools were deemed ineligible for 2007–08 SASS and not included in 2008–09 PFS.

In the 2011–12 SASS, the principal of each sampled school was also automatically selected. Altogether, 14,000 school principals were sampled (11,000 public and 3,000 private). The 2012–13 PFS sample included all principals who completed SASS interviews in eligible schools. A total of approximately 9,230 schools were contacted for this survey; 4,765 eligible schools were not included because the principal did not respond to the Principal Questionnaire during the 2011–12 SASS. However, only 9,230 schools were contacted for this survey; approximately 10 schools that completed a SASS interview were deemed ineligible from the 2011–12 SASS because their district refused participation after the SASS and were not contacted during the 2012–13 PFS.

The validation sample for the 2012–13 PFS consisted of 690 principals. The sample was divided between those principals in the same job (“stayers”) and those reported to be doing something else (“nonstayers”). The nonstayers were stratified by the major status category, whose values were as follows:

- 1 = Working as a principal at another school;
- 2 = Working in a K-12 school but not as a principal;
- 3 = Working in K-12 education but not at a school;
- 4 = Working outside of K-12 education; and
- 5 = Not working (including retired, deceased, on leave).

Each of these status categories was allocated an approximately equal sample. As responses were received, validation study cases were selected for sample on a flow basis. Of the 690 cases, approximately 190 cases were not attempted for validation because no home contact information was provided in SASS. There were an additional 50 cases that were not interviewed for the validation study because they refused or otherwise could not be contacted.

**Data Collection and Processing**

The 2008–09 PFS, 2012–13 PFS, and 2016–17 PFS utilized a primarily mail-based collection methodology, with telephone follow-up for nonrespondents. The 2012–13 PFS also utilized e-mail follow-up for nonrespondents. The U.S. Census Bureau was the data collection agent.

**Reference dates.** Data items refer to principal status at the time of questionnaire completion.

**Data collection.** In the spring of the year of the survey administration, an introductory letter and a Principal Status Form were mailed to sampled schools in the previous year’s SASS or NTPS. On this form, an eligible respondent including any school employee knowledgeable about the current status of last year’s principal was asked to report (1) the current occupational status and (2) the name of last year’s principal. Approximately two weeks after initial mailings, a reminder letter and a second copy of the Principal Status Form were mailed to all sampled schools to remind them to complete and return the questionnaire. Following these contacts, telephone nonresponse follow-up of schools was conducted. At all stages of data collection, procedures were in place to remail questionnaires by request.

Because a total of 830 schools were located in districts identified as special procedure districts in the 2007–08 SASS, which required district approval prior to allowing their schools to participate in surveys, an introductory letter and a sample copy of the Principal Status Form was mailed in February 2009 to 18 of these special districts. Data collection for the 2008–09 PFS began in March 2009 with the mailing of an introductory letter and the Principal Status Form to sampled schools in the 2007–08 SASS. In March 2009, a reminder letter and a second copy of the Principal Status Form were also mailed to all sampled schools. Telephone nonresponse follow-up of schools was conducted from March through April 2009. Although all follow-up was completed prior to May, mailed questionnaires were accepted through early June 2009.

Data collection for the 2012–13 PFS began in March 2013 with the mailing of an introductory letter and the Principal Status Form to sampled schools in the 2011–12 SASS. In March 2013, a reminder letter and a second copy of the Principal Status Form were also mailed to any outstanding sampled schools. Telephone nonresponse follow-up of schools was conducted in April 2013. Although all follow-up to the schools was completed prior to May 2013, mailed
questionnaires were accepted through early June 2013. In May 2013, any outstanding principals from the initial mailing to the schools in March 2013 were mailed an introductory letter and the Principal Status Form directly to the principal’s home. Telephone nonresponse follow-up directly to the principal’s home was conducted from May to June 2013.

A validation study was conducted with the 2012–13 PFS. As completed school-level questionnaires were received, principals were sampled to be a part of the validation study. In April 2013, an introductory letter and a Principal Status Form were mailed to the sampled principal’s home for the validation study. These packages were mailed weekly until the beginning of May 2013, as eligible principals were sampled. An email reminder was sent to nonresponding validation study principals. Telephone nonresponse follow-up directly to the principal’s home for those selected for the validation study was conducted from April to June 2013. Mailed questionnaires were accepted through early June 2013.

Data collection for the 2016–17 PFS began in early March 2017. An introductory letter and the Principal Status Form (i.e., the survey questionnaire) were mailed to the sampled schools. The letter introduced the survey and asked the school to complete and mail the questionnaire in the return envelope. The letter was addressed to the principal, or if the principal’s name had not been provided during the 2015–16 NTPS data collection, it was addressed to the “School Principal/Administrator.” Eligible respondents included any school employee with knowledge of the 2015–16 principal’s employment status.

To ensure the validity of responses collected from schools, the PFS Home Contact Operations was conducted. Once complete Principal Status Forms were returned by schools, principals determined to be “non-stayers” based on school responses were assigned to a validation study group. Between early April and mid-May, the appropriate public Principal Status Form was mailed to the homes of these subsampled principals and the data collected was used to validate the form returned by the school. For additional information on the PFS validation study, see Survey Documentation for the 2016–17 Principal Follow-up Survey (Khouri, forthcoming).

Nonresponse follow-up followed each stage of data collection. In mid-March 2017, a reminder letter and second copy of the Principal Status Form were mailed to any outstanding sampled schools. In early May 2017, any outstanding principals from schools that did not respond to the initial mailing in March were mailed an introductory letter and the Principal Status Form, sent directly to the principal’s home. In instances where a school or principal had provided a principal’s e-mail address, initial contacts and reminders were sent via e-mail. Telephone nonresponse follow-up was conducted from mid- to late April for schools and from late May through early June for principals. Mailed questionnaires were accepted through the middle of July 2017.

**Editing.** The PFS data were converted from paper to electronic format using manual data keying and imaging technology. Responses were recorded; questionnaire data were captured; output files were reformatted in order to facilitate the remaining data processing and cleaning and were sent for data review. During data review, discrepancies were uncovered, researched, and resolved.

The 2008–09 PFS and the 2012–13 PFS classified cases into two categories either as completed interviews or as noninterviews. The 2012–13 PFS further classified out-of-scope cases into an additional category.

PFS data were subjected to a range of data quality reviews before release. General data quality checks for the PFS involved an examination of the individual responses, patterns of response, and summary statistics for variables to ensure internal consistency.

**Estimation Methods**

Estimates from PFS sample data were produced using weighting and imputation procedures.

**Weighting.** The general purpose of weighting is to scale up the sample estimates to represent the target survey population. Prior to the 2016–17 PFS, all responding SASS principals were included in the PFS, and since the PFS response rates were high, the SASS weights can be used to represent the target sample population. All units, respondents and nonrespondents to the PFS, were included in the file and no adjustments were made for nonresponse. Therefore, new weights were not calculated for the PFS, and data users should employ the SASS principal weights when analyzing the data files. For more information on SASS weighting, please refer to the Documentation for the 2011–12 Schools and Staffing Survey (Cox et al., 2016).

For the 2016–17 PFS, new weights were not calculated because the PFS instrument was sent to all schools whose principals were interviewed in NTPS. Therefore the 2015–16 NTPS public school principal weights should be used when analyzing the Public School Principal Status Data File, respectively. This weight, to be used on all principal status data files, is PFNLWGT. For more information on NTPS weighting, please refer to the Survey Documentation for the 2013–16 National Teacher and Principal Survey (Cox et al. forthcoming).

**Imputation.** SASS and NTPS are fully imputed datasets. No imputation is performed in PFS. The principal status created variables have missing values, which only occur when a
case is considered a noninterview in the PFS. These values are represented in the files as a \(-8\).

**Future Plans**
The next administration of PFS is planned for the 2020–21 school year as a follow-up to NTPS 2019–20.

**5. DATA QUALITY AND COMPARABILITY**

**Sampling Error**
Because the PFS is a subsample of the SASS or NTPS principal sample and the PFS nonresponse rate was extremely low, no new replicate weights were calculated for the 2008–09 PFS and the 2012–13 PFS. Instead, the 2007–08 SASS public, private, and BIE principal replicate weights and the 2011–12 SASS public and private replicate weights should be used when analyzing the public, private, and BIE principal status data files. For more information on the SASS replicate weights, please see the Documentation for the 2011–12 Schools and Staffing Survey (Cox et al., 2016).

**Nonsampling Error**

**Coverage error.** There is a potential for bias to be introduced into PFS because the PFS frame only includes principals who responded to SASS or NTPS.

**Unit nonresponse.** The unit response rate is the rate at which the sampled units respond by completing the questionnaire. For PFS, any questionnaire with question 1 answered was considered a complete interview. The weighted unit response rates were produced by dividing the base-weighted number of respondents who completed the questionnaires by the base-weighted number of eligible sampled cases. The base weight for each sampled unit is the inverse of the probability of selection.

The overall response rate represents the response rate to the PFS taking into consideration each stage of data collection. To be eligible for the PFS, it was necessary for the principal to have responded to the SASS or NTPS principal questionnaire. Thus, the overall unit response rate is the product of the sampled PFS unit response rate multiplied by the SASS or NTPS principal questionnaire unit response rate. The product of these values gives the cumulative nonresponse. The overall unit response rate was calculated using base-weights.

For the 2008–09 PFS, the overall weighted unit response rate for public and BIE school principals was almost 80 percent; the overall weighted unit response rate for private school principals was lower (70 percent). For the 2012–13 PFS, the overall weighted unit response rate was 73 percent for traditional public school principals, 70 percent for public charter school principals, and 65 percent for private school principals. For the 2016–17 PFS, the overall weighted unit response rate was 69 percent for traditional public school principals and 67 percent for public charter school principals.

**Item nonresponse.** The item response rate indicates the percentage of respondents who answered a given survey question or item. The weighted item response rate is calculated by dividing the weighted number of respondents who provided an answer to an item by the weighted number of respondents who were eligible to answer that item.

For the PFS, only a response to the principal’s current occupational status is needed for an interview to be considered complete. Therefore, the item response rate of question 1 is the same as the unit response rate. For the 2008–09 PFS, the weighted unit response rate for public and BIE school principals was 99 percent; the weighted unit response rate for private school principals was slightly lower (97 percent). For the 2012–13 PFS, the weighted unit response rate was nearly 100 percent for traditional public school principals, 99 percent for public charter school principals, and 96 percent for private school principals. For the 2016–17 PFS, the item response rate for the PFS item was 96 percent for traditional public school principals, and 93 percent for public charter school principals. Since the item response rate was above 85 percent, a nonresponse bias analysis for the item was not necessary. See table PFS-1 for details on the response rates.

**Measurement error.** Re-interviews were conducted in the validation study for the purpose of measuring response variance in the 2012–13 PFS. In general, more variation in response was found than was expected. This was particularly troublesome for the stayer category, where the expectation was that the principal’s current status would be fairly unambiguous. Anecdotal evidence gathered seems to point to confusion over the term “principal” and precisely who it may apply to at a particular school. The ability to draw definitive conclusions was limited by the small sample size captured by the validation study and the inability to reach a substantial minority of the original validation study sample. In particular, subpopulations could not be compared, so it is not clear under what circumstances it may be acceptable to accept proxy responses.

**Data Comparability**
Care must be taken in estimating change over time with PFS data files, because some of the measured change may not be attributable to a change in the educational system, but due to changes in the sampling frame, or other changes. For example, 2008–09 PFS release reports have included information on principals in public, public charter, private, and BIE schools during the 2007–08 SASS, but only public, public charter, and private school principals are included for the 2012–13 PFS reporting due to a sampling frame change.
Since the 2015–16 NTPS only included public schools, private school principals were not included in the 2016–17 PFS. For further information on data elements, see Documentation for the 2008–09 Principal Follow-up Survey (Battle et al., 2010) and Documentation for the 2012–13 Principal Follow-up Survey (Cox and Cox, 2015).

Table PFS-1. Weighted response rates, by survey population: School years 2007–08 through 2016–17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>PFS overall unit response rate</th>
<th>Public school</th>
<th>Private school</th>
<th>BIE school</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Charter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008–09</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>70.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012–13</td>
<td>72.5</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>62.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016–17</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>66.8</td>
<td>†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFS item response rate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008–09</td>
<td>99.4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>97.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012–13</td>
<td>99.7</td>
<td>99.7</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>96.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016–17</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>92.9</td>
<td>†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Base-year unit response rate for principal questionnaire</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007–08 SASS</td>
<td>79.4</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>72.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011–12 SASS</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>72.9</td>
<td>69.7</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015–16 NTPS</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>†</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

— Not available.
† Not applicable.

NOTE: The “overall unit response rate” accounts for each stage of data collection and is the product of the “item response rate” and the principal questionnaire “base-year unit response rate”. The “item response rate” is the weighted percentage of principals with a complete interview (and only a response to the principal’s current occupational status was needed for an interview to be considered complete). The “base-year unit response rate” is calculated by dividing the base-weighted number of principals who completed the base-year questionnaires by the base-weighted number of eligible cases. “BIE” refers to schools funded by the Bureau of Indian Education which are operated by the BIE, a tribe, or a private contractor and not by a regular school district. “NTPS” is the National Teacher and Principal Survey; “PFS” is the Principal Follow-up Survey; “SASS” is the Schools and Staffing Survey.


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7. METHODOLOGY AND EVALUATION REPORTS

General


**Data Quality and Comparability**