

WHO IS LEADING PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN PUERTO RICO?

A Profile of
School
Principals

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Full Report

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Institute—University of Puerto Rico
for Flamboyan Foundation



FLAMBOYAN
FOUNDATION



WHO IS LEADING PUBLIC SCHOOLS IN PUERTO RICO? A PROFILE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Report for the academic period 2007–2008

Flamboyant Foundation

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Introduction

Evidence shows that school principals play a central role in any effort that aims to reform or improve public schools.¹ Although traditionally their role has been seen as one that is focused on the administrative aspects of supervising a school, it is now clear that principals are, and need the preparation and support, to be much more than administrators. They are increasingly held responsible for how much their students are learning; and they are also the primary supervisors of the teachers and other staff that directly impact their students' education. As heads of their schools, principals are in a unique and crucial position to lead change and to implement transformative initiatives. Schools and districts that have shown dramatic improvements in the academic achievement of their students, inevitably have a leader that has been key in making this happen.

Wishing to learn more about school principals in Puerto Rico, Flamboyan Foundation commissioned the Behavioral Sciences Research Institute (BSRI) to prepare a report on the current state of school principals throughout Puerto Rico. This research study focused on the following areas:

- Demographics, Career Paths and Retirement Trends
- Academic Preparation, Certification and Professional Development
- Recruitment, Selection and Retention
- Evaluation and Incentives
- Responsibilities, Expectations and Regulations that define the position
- Barriers, Challenges and Issues affecting principals' performance
- Effects of the No Child Left Behind Law — The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) amended and reauthorized in 2002

The study was conducted during academic year 2007–2008 and the research methodology included an extensive School Principal Survey; Secondary Data Analyses using data from the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE); focus groups with active principals; and in-depth interviews with PRDE top-level executives. Each one of these methods served to corroborate and enrich the information gathered for the report throughout the year-long study. This report is organized into four chapters, which summarize the findings from each of these methods. Together they offer a comprehensive picture of school principals, their work and their needs, and the challenges that the PRDE is facing as the foremost entity responsible for primary and secondary education in Puerto Rico. We trust that this report will offer the PRDE and others a greater understanding of how best to support, retain and encourage school leaders.

¹For references please refer to the final section of this report titled "References."

CHAPTER I: WHAT DO PRINCIPALS NEED TO GET THEIR JOB DONE?

Survey Data

This section of the report presents the findings of a survey sent to all public school principals to learn more about their experience as school leaders and to identify some of their current needs and concerns.¹ Survey questions focused on the opportunities, challenges, and barriers that they face relating to the following:

- Funding and resources from the central office
- Teacher quality
- Performance evaluation for principals
- On-the-job training opportunities and ongoing professional development
- Professional and academic experience
- Implementing the “No Child Left Behind” Law

From a total of 1,411 eligible principals, 688 completed the survey (49%). All educational regions and school levels were represented (See Chart 1 and Table 1). A detailed description of the methodology is included in Chapter 6.

Chart 1: Principals' survey received by educational region

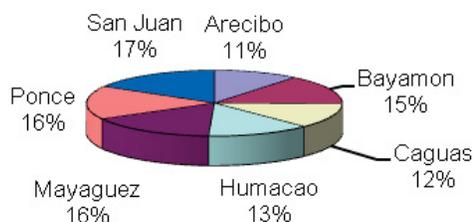


Table 1: Surveys received by school level

School Level	n	%
Elementary School	419	60.9%
Middle School	102	14.8%
Secondary School	10	1.5%
Secondary Unit	83	12.1%
High School	73	10.6%
All Levels	1	0.2%
Total	688	100.0%

FINDINGS

THE #1 PROBLEM IS FUNDING

Principals point to insufficient funding as the most urgent problem and barrier they face in managing their schools. They feel that they have experienced an increase in their responsibilities while receiving little, if any useful support from the PRDE. They said that politics and bureaucracy are the main reasons for talented principals to leave their position.

¹ The survey was designed by the researchers in consultation with Flamboyant Foundation and other educators. As a reference, the group studied a questionnaire developed by Public Agenda and published in the report titled “Rolling-Up Their Sleeves” (Farkas, 2003). Public Agenda is an organization founded in 1975 by social scientists who work to help national leaders better understand public points of view and help the average citizen to better understand public affair policies.

Among the problems identified by school principals, the most urgent problem encountered was “insufficient funds” (See Table 2). They also mentioned infrastructure among the biggest problems. School buildings in Puerto Rico are mostly old and require significant maintenance, in many cases renovation. Keeping up with infrastructure challenges becomes an enormous burden for principals especially if they do not receive a budget assignment for their school. Funding at the school level is important to address not only infrastructure, but also academic challenges. Although the government faces an economic crisis at all levels, the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE) receives a significant amount of state and federal funds that should reach schools and allow the school principals to carry out their administrative and academic responsibilities. Why are sufficient funds not reaching the school level? This is a question that must be addressed and looked into in more detail.

It is important to note that when principals were asked how much funding affected their school’s progress, more than three quarters of the participants (88%) stated the lack of funds is a critical problem that affects their ability to manage their school (See Chart 2).

More than 20% of the principals indicated that lack of committed teachers or poorly prepared teachers are also problematic areas. Only 16.6% indicated lack of committed or motivated students as an urgent problem.

Politics and Bureaucracy

Interestingly, when principals were asked to indicate some of the reasons that a talented principal would leave the position, it was not lack of funding, teacher quality or poor parental commitment that stressed them to the point of resigning. School leaders indicated that politics and bureaucracy are the main reasons that principals leave their job. A third (34%) of the participants reported that talented school principals leave the field due to the politics and bureaucracy within PRDE (See Table 3).

School principals are responsible for implementing educational policies in their schools and communities, including hundreds of annual circular letters, memos and administrative orders, among others. They receive instructions from the central, regional and superintendent levels. Additionally, principals have to comply with local and federal mandates. And finally, they also have to oversee all academic issues, deal with union issues, submit hundreds of reports, participate in numerous monthly meetings, and personally administer four electronic platforms at their school in order to get materials or to pay their personnel.

Table 2: Principals’ opinions about the most urgent problem their school encounters **		%
Insufficient funds		40.3
Lack of committed and helpful parents		24.5
Problems with infrastructure		24.1
Lack of committed and devoted teachers or poor quality teachers		21.9
Lack of committed and motivated students		16.6

** Multiple responses were allowed

Chart 2: How big of a problem is funding?

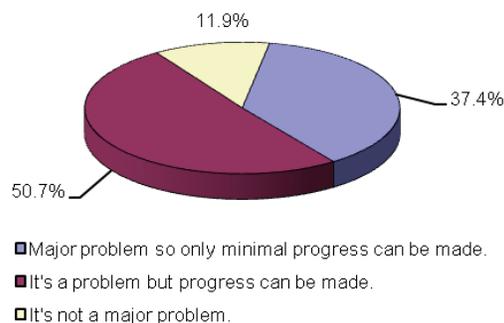


Table 3: Why would talented principals leave their job? **		%
Politics and bureaucracy		34.4
Low salary and prestige		29.3
Irrational demands due to more responsibilities and higher standards		28.0
Lack of resources		13.9
Discipline/Violence		9.1
No effort from the students		2.3

** Multiple responses were allowed

These are only some of the daily responsibilities that create an enormous burden for school principals. 28% of respondents identified irrational demands placed on them due to more responsibilities and higher standards as a reason for a talented individual to leave their position (See Table 3). In addition, an overwhelming percentage of respondents (92%) confirmed that everyday emergencies consumed too much of their time, making it difficult for them to focus on academic affairs (See Table 4).

93% of principals agreed or strongly agreed that they experienced an increase in responsibilities and mandates without receiving the necessary resources to be able to comply with them (See Table 4). Most principals believe that the position has low pay and prestige. In fact, that was the second most prevalent reason indicated by principals as a precipitating factor for quitting the position of school principal. More than 80% of principals indicated that it is frustrating for them to think that there are some teachers in their schools whose salaries are higher than what they earn (See Table 4). Excessive responsibilities, long hours and relatively low salaries add to problems in retaining talented leaders as principals, especially if the salaries have not kept pace with the demands of the job.

Table 4: Barriers or challenges faced by school principals				
	Extremely Agree	Agree	Disagree	Extremely Disagree
Everyday emergencies consume the time that I could be putting to better use in academic affairs.	69.62%	22.56%	6.64%	1.18%
My school has seen an increase in responsibilities and mandates without offering the necessary resources to be able to comply with them.	72.57%	22.12%	4.87%	0.44%
It's frustrating to think that there are teachers in my school whose salaries are higher than a school principal.	61.65%	21.83%	12.54%	3.98%

HIGH QUALITY TEACHERS IN ALL CLASSROOMS: NOT A REALITY

According to principals, the best way to improve teachers' quality is to have more autonomy to recruit and fire teachers. In addition, principals are not certain that currently available professional development activities are the way to improve teachers. Furthermore, instead of seeing the teachers labor union as an aid to improving their district's education, most principals see it as a hindrance.

Teacher Preparation, Certification Process, Evaluation and Improvement

The overwhelming majority (89%) of principals agreed that university programs to educate teachers fail to prepare them for the realities of public schools (see Table 5). Furthermore, they state that the certification system does not provide teachers with what they need (37%) or only provides them with a minimum set of needed skills (43%). Only 19% believe that current teacher certification requirements guarantee that teachers have the necessary skills to teach.

In terms of evaluating teacher performance, most principals (78%) expressed that it is very difficult to obtain a real assessment of teacher performance through formal evaluations (See Table 5). They believe that the most effective way to improve teachers in their schools would be by having more autonomy

to hire and fire teachers. This could imply that some principals don't believe that poor quality teachers can be improved, instead that if the teacher is good he/she should be hired and if he/she is bad, then fired. In fact, only 29% indicated that improving training and education of current teachers would improve the quality of teachers.

Discharging Teachers

The majority of principals (61%) indicated that it is almost impossible to discharge a teacher, even with poor classroom performance (See Chart 3). Only 3.3% of school principals indicated that it is relatively easy for them to discharge teachers for poor performance. When asked how many of their tenured teachers they would discharge if they could, eight out of every ten principals indicated they would discharge some or many teachers (See Chart 4).

However, principals lack the authority and time to conduct evaluations and are not supported by the PRDE in establishing an effective process that would allow them to select the best possible staff for their school. Clearly, principals indicate that they are hampered in their ability to put together a highly capable team of teachers, one of the key ingredients in creating schools where students learn and achieve at high academic levels.

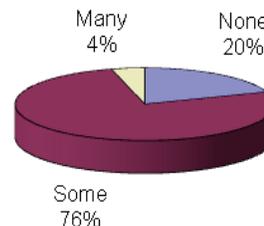
Table 5: Principals' opinion on teachers' issues	%
Programs that prepare teachers are not in tune with the reality of public schools nowadays...	
Extremely Agree	59.1
Agree	29.8
Disagree	9.9
Extremely Disagree	1.2
The system to certify teachers...	
Guarantees that the teacher has a minimum of skills to teach.	43.4
Doesn't guarantee that teachers have what they need to teach.	37.3
Guarantees that the teacher has what he/she needs to teach.	19.3
It is very difficult to obtain a real performance evaluation of teachers through formal evaluations.	
Extremely Agree	38.0
Agree	40.6
Disagree	17.5
Extremely Disagree	3.9
What is the most effective way to improve teachers in your school? **	
Have more autonomy to hire and fire teachers.	51.6
Improve the training and education of current teachers.	28.8
Having a pool of highly qualified teachers to choose from.	16.0
More rigorous evaluation system.	12.7
More supervision	10.3
Professional development offerings.	6.1
Improve teacher salaries.	3.9

** Multiple responses were allowed

Chart 3: How difficult it would be to fire a permanent teacher with poor classroom performance?



Chart 4: Approximately how many permanent teachers would you fire from your school if you could?



Professional Development

More than half of the principals (55 %) indicated that teacher professional development had not resulted in improving teacher performance, whereas 45% indicated that professional development resulted in better teachers. This could indicate that a significant number of principals are not certain that currently available professional development activities are the way to improve teachers. This data also suggests that principals might be unable to assess whether or not professional development is making a difference. Furthermore, as we have learned from other survey questions, principals are not actively involved in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of their faculty. The question that remains to be answered is: who is evaluating teachers?

Teacher's Labor Union

Eight of every ten participants (80%) agreed that “the teachers labor union is reluctant to do things that would improve education in their respective districts” (See Table 6). Most of them (89%) agreed that the union does not work to improve education in their district, but to protect teachers that shouldn't be in the classroom.

Table 6: Principals' opinions on the teacher's labor union		%
The teacher's labor union is reluctant to do things that would improve education in their district.		
Extremely Agree		50.9
Agree		29.1
Disagree		13.2
Extremely Disagree		6.8
The teacher's labor union generally fights for things that would improve education in your district.		
Extremely Agree		5.2
Agree		13.3
Disagree		44.6
Extremely Disagree		36.9
The teacher's labor union occasionally fights to protect teachers that really shouldn't be in the classroom.		
Extremely Agree		68.9
Agree		20.0
Disagree		5.9
Extremely Disagree		5.3

PRINCIPALS NEED TO BE BETTER PREPARED

According to most participants, current certification for principals does not guarantee that they have the needed skills to supervise a school, or only guarantees a minimum set of skills. Principals believe that their previous work experience and the orientation and guidance received from mentors are the most valuable factors that have helped them to properly administer a school.

Principal Preparation and Certification

The majority of principals think that a principal's certification only guarantees a minimum of needed skills (39%), or does not guarantee that the principal has what is needed to administer a school (36%). Only one-fourth stated that certification guarantees a person has the skills needed to administer a school (See Table 7). The variability in responses on this issue might be due to several factors that are beyond the scope of this study. The university where they received their certification might also play a role; some might do an excellent job in preparing candidates while others do not.

Participants were asked to choose what best described what they learned in their coursework to become school principals. Nearly one fourth of respondents indicated that the theory they learned does not go hand in hand with practice and that aside from obtaining their credentials, what they learned was not of great use. This highlights the need to formally evaluate academic program curricula to prepare principals. However, in order to perform a proper evaluation, the PRDE needs to understand the competencies

needed to become a school director. These competencies can only be identified by analyzing and revising Law 149 of the PRDE (See Appendix A) and ensuring that tasks assigned to principals truly impact the school's academic achievement, and not only the principal's ability to become a good administrator.

More Emphasis on Practice

Principals indicated that their previous work experience (53%) and the orientation and guidance received from people they have worked with were the most valuable factors in preparing them to administer a school (48%). Finally, most of them (78%) agreed that the requirements for certification should change to emphasize practical experience in administration.

THE ROLE OF SUPERINTENDENTS AND PRINCIPAL EVALUATION

School principals are satisfied with the support they receive from their superintendent when they need help. They also believe that the most important criteria that should be considered during their performance evaluation is the improvement achieved in student academic performance.

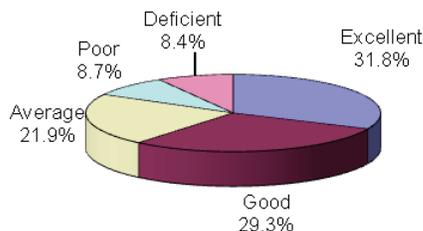
Table 7: Principals' opinions about certification and preparation issues		%
The current system to certify school principals...**		
Guarantees that the principal has a min. set of skills to supervise a school.		38.7
Doesn't guarantee that the principal has what they need supervise a school.		35.9
Guarantees that the principal has what he/she needs to supervise a school.		25.4
Which of the following would you say was the most valuable to prepare you for your position as principal?*		
Previous experience		53.4
Guidance and advice received by the people you have worked with.		48.2
Sense of responsibility and commitment		42.5
Graduate studies		40.3
Which of the following best describes what you learned in the graduate program you took to become a certified school principal?*		
I learned some useful things that helped me prepare for the job.		44.9
What I learned has proven to be indispensable for my job.		34.1
Theory doesn't go hand in hand with practice.		14.4
Aside from helping me obtain credentials, it wasn't much help.		9.6
Requirements to become school principal should change to provide more emphasis on practical experience in administration.		
Extremely Agree		41.3
Agree		36.4
Disagree		18.1
Extremely Disagree		4.3

** Multiple responses were allowed

Good Support from Superintendents!

According to the results of the study, the majority of school principals (61.1%) characterized the help and support provided by the regional superintendent as excellent or good (See Chart 5). Only 21.9% described the help and support of their regional superintendent as average. Regarding this finding, there are no major differences among educational regions. This speaks well of superintendents in Puerto Rico. Superintendents are the closest level of support to the principals and thus probably are more accessible to help principals than the educational region or the central office.

Chart 5: How would you classify the level of support you receive from your superintendent?



However, during the term of this study the PRDE decided to eliminate superintendents and appoint them to vacant school principal positions. This decision contrasts with study findings, since school directors were very satisfied with the support received from superintendents.

Criteria for a Principal's Evaluation

Principals were asked to point out the most important criteria they thought should be part of an evaluation of a principal's performance (See Table 8). Six of every ten school principals indicated that the most important part of a performance evaluation should be how much they increase students academic performance (60%). A total of 41% also endorsed the criterion of how well they manage the school and administer a budget.

Only 12% of principals indicated that maintaining teacher quality should be the most important criteria in their evaluation and a majority of principals stated that they should not be responsible for student scores in standardized tests (89%). This could be due to the fact that principals are not allowed (by law) to evaluate the performance of their teachers. Although principals feel accountable for their students' academic performance, a majority stated that they should not be held responsible for student scores in standardized tests (89%). When asked what their reaction would be if their students had low averages in standardized tests, a third (31%) blamed the school for not preparing students well (See Table 9). This apparent contradiction may be due to the fact that a school—and implicitly its leader—is judged according to the degree that it achieves Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP is measured according to the percentage of students in each school that achieve a certain level of proficiency on the standardized tests (in this case, the *Pruebas Puertorriqueñas*).

Almost half of the principals (47%) said that standardized tests are not an explicit part of a specific evaluation, but that the results are nevertheless used in evaluating their performance (See Chart 6). One out of every four principals (25%) indicated that standardized tests are an explicit part of their evaluation,

Table 8: Which of the following should be the most important criteria in evaluating a principal? **	%
How well he/she improves the academic performance of the students	59.9
How well he/she manages the school and funds	41.1
How well he/she maintains teacher quality	11.7

** Multiple responses were allowed

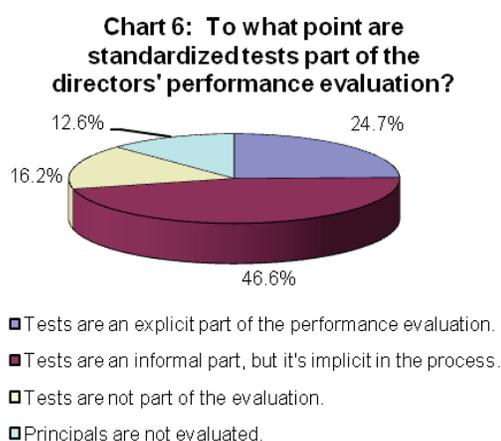


Table 9: Principals' opinions on student performance in standardized tests **	%
The school failed to adequately prepare students	31.3
Students are not interested or motivated to do the tests.	27.9
Discrepancies between the curriculum and the test	17.1
Special education students are measured with the same instrument.	16.9
There is something wrong with the design of the test.	16.8
Lack of support at home.	12.9
Students come from an economically poor background.	7.8
Students simply don't have the capacity to do well.	6.7

** Multiple responses were allowed

and 16% that the tests are not part of a principal's evaluation. Evidently principals are confused about whether the results of the standardized tests are part of their evaluation or not.

WHAT DO PRINCIPALS THINK ABOUT NCLB?

Principals in Puerto Rico reported that the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) added responsibilities without increased support. In addition, principals seemed to lack a full understanding of the law and were ambivalent about its effectiveness.

A majority of principals (71.5%) indicate having a lot of knowledge about the law (See Chart 7). In addition, 90% indicated that they have done many or at least some real changes in the school's policies and programs in response to the NCLB.

Forecast of the Impact of NCLB

There is uncertainty about the impact that the law will have in Puerto Rico's public schools. The majority of respondents indicated the Law would require many adjustments in order to work (74%). Meanwhile, 23% said the Law would probably work. Only 3% indicated that the Law would probably not work at all in Puerto Rico.

There is disagreement among school principals regarding the final impact the law will have on school academic standards. Half of the principals (50%) believe NCLB will raise academic standards. However, (30%) believe that NCLB will result in lower academic standards in order to facilitate that schools demonstrate progress (See Chart 8).

Chart 7: How much do you know about the specific elements of the NCLB?

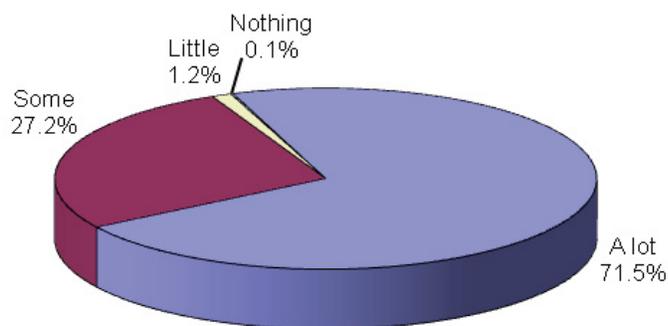
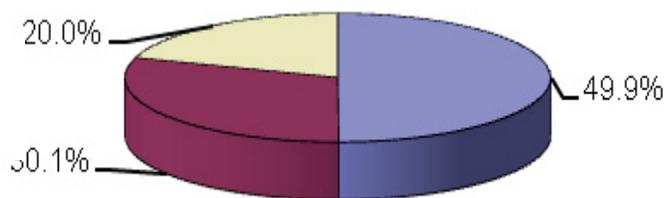


Chart 8: Which of the following better reflects your point of view about the final impact the NCLB will have on the academic standards in your school?



- Will raise academic standards
- Will lower academic standards to make it possible to show progress
- Academic standards will not be affected

CHAPTER 2: IS THERE A SHORTAGE OF QUALIFIED SCHOOL LEADERS?

Secondary Data Analyses

This section of the report is based on an analyses of secondary data provided by the Puerto Rico Department of Education (PRDE)¹, with the objective of presenting a profile of the demographics and career paths of school principals in Puerto Rico. Secondary data was used to answer the following research questions:

- Is there a shortage of qualified individuals?
- What are the demographic characteristics of school principals in Puerto Rico's public schools? (Age, gender, school level, and educational region).
- What are the career paths of school principals in Puerto Rico's public schools? (University based programs, accreditation process, highest degree earned, and years of experience).
- What is the compensation for school principals and what factors impact it?
- What are the retirement trends of school principals?

Survey Respondents

The final dataset included information of 1,508 school principals. The statistical layout included a total of 20 variables, such as social security number, name, age, gender, date of birth, educational region, district, school name/code, classification, level, position, status, salary, academic degree, university attended, years of public experience, years in the position of principal, starting date, and ending date. The PRDE was unable to offer written documentation on the datasets layout, consequently layout definitions were generated by the team of researchers. This was a major limitation for this part of the study since most interpretations of the results were based on verbal information provided by PRDE staff. The data presented in this paper is solely based on the information provided by the PRDE, therefore the reliability, fidelity or validity of the data cannot be confirmed by the research team. A detailed description of the methodology is included in Chapter 6.

FINDINGS

SCHOOL PRINCIPAL VACANCIES

During the year of the study, approximately 14% of schools had a vacancy for the position of school principal. However, there was a pool of candidates that seemed reasonably large to satisfy the needs of current demands. The procedure for recruiting and selecting school principals is complicated and requires extensive coordination between the regions and the central administration.

¹ The BSRI obtained some of the requested data from different sources of the PRDE at different points in time, mostly from a consultation firm called Rock Solid. Rock Solid is an information technology consulting service that is subcontracted by the PRDE to manage some of their data.

During academic year 2007–08 a total of 1508 school principals were active at some point of the year in 1,319 schools in the Island (See Table 10). From the total of 1524 schools in the island, 205 schools (13.5%) were not assigned a school principal. These schools had a vacancy for the principal position during the entire 2007–08 academic-year.

The problem of vacancies appears to be one that needs immediate attention from the PRDE. The fact that 13.5% of schools did not have a principal for an entire academic year puts forth a series of questions that must be addressed without further delay. Is the vacancy problem due to a reduced pool of candidates or is it due to administrative inefficiency? As can be observed in Table 11, as of June 16, 2009 the pool of eligible candidates for the school principal position appeared to be reasonably large in comparison to current demands. However, qualitative findings from our previous research efforts point to a different reality. According to interviews with key-informants, the PRDE seems to be more focused on a strategy of re-activating retirees to serve as principals on a part-time basis (4hrs. per day) instead of hiring available applicants. This cannot be tracked with the data provided for this study as these cases started to be recorded electronically as of June 2008. In addition, some principals are currently directing two schools simultaneously according to focus group interviews. This observation could not be validated with 2007–08 information as the dataset provided did not allow for such an analysis.

No. of schools in the Island	1,524
No. of schools listed with a principal in 2007-08	1,319
No. of active school principals	1,508

School Level	Number of Candidates
Elementary School	1,083
Intermediate or High school	855
Technological Institute	54
Vocational	122

The pool of eligible candidates for the position of principal seems to be reasonably large for current demand. The question that needs to be answered is whether the number of vacancies is related to an inefficient administrative process. The process for recruiting and selecting school principals is explained in Circular Letter #13, 2007–2008 (See Appendix B). Although Law 149 indicates that “a school principal shall be designated by the Secretary of education”, the actual procedure begins with the regional director requesting a certification of eligible candidates from the Assistant Secretary of Human Resources at PRDE’s central offices. This should occur within five working days after resignation acceptance, employment termination, or death of the incumbent. After five working days the regional director and the president of the school board are responsible for notifying eligible candidates on the PRDE central office databank.

Once a position for school principal is vacant, the incumbent can occupy the position on a probation basis, but the transitory period should not exceed 60 calendar days. An interview committee, composed of the regional director and two school board members, evaluates eligible candidates and submits three recommendations to the Secretary of Education for his or her final selection. The Assistant Secretary of Human Resources is then responsible to notify the selected candidate.

While findings from this study cannot confirm that the number of vacancies for school directors is due to a cumbersome administrative process, the procedure established in circular letter #13 seems to be extremely complicated. It requires extensive coordination between school regions and the central administration, thus delaying the timely filling of a vacancy. If the recruitment procedure is not simplified and made more efficient, it seems impossible that all schools will have a principal.

WHAT ARE THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS?

The majority of principals are women (70%). Their average age is 50. Most school principals are appointed to elementary schools (55%).

Table 12 includes demographic data for all school principals that were active at some point during academic year 2007–2008. The data includes distribution by gender, age, and school level. The majority of principals are female (70.4%). The average age was 50 years, ranging from 29 to 85 years old. Approximately 10% of principals are older than 60, suggesting they are at retirement age though they continue to be active.

There is no difference in age distribution for males and females. Principals are fairly evenly distributed throughout the seven academic regions. The region of Mayagüez had slightly more principals, which is surprising since it ranked fifth in student population for that year.

According to Law 149 of 1999, schools in Puerto Rico are classified according to the course level offered by the school. The levels are:

1. Elementary (kindergarten to 6th grade)
2. Intermediate or Middle school (7th–9th grade)
3. High school (10th–12th grade)
4. Second unit school (PK–9th grade)
5. Secondary school (7th–12th grade)
6. Specialized school (music, art, theater, dance)

High schools are categorized as vocational, regular program or vocational with post-secondary and/or specialized offering. Schools are classified according to course level offering, the nature of their programs and total student enrollment. All schools are to be headed by school principals of equivalent categories. When examining the distribution of school principals by level, over half of public school principals in Puerto Rico head elementary schools. The distribution by school level is proportional to the number of schools operating by region across the Island.

Table 12: Demographic Characteristics

	n	%
Gender		
Female	1061	70.4
Male	447	29.6
Age		
≤ 40	183	12.1
41-49	505	33.5
50-59	684	45.4
60-69	123	8.2
70+	13	.9
School Level		
Elementary school	833	55.2
Middle school	195	12.9
High school	201	13.3
Second unit (PK-9)	196	13
Secondary (7-12)	34	2.3
Specialized	29	1.9
Vocational or post-sect	20	1.3

CAREER PATH OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

The average number of years that principals have worked in public service is 22. However, most principals have been in the position of principal for less than eight years, indicating that principals spend a considerable number of years as teachers or in another position at the PRDE before becoming a school principal. Most principals have a master's degree and have earned their degree at private universities.

The majority of school principals have a master's degree as their highest earned degree (96%). Only 8% of school principals earned their highest degree at the University of Puerto Rico, which is by far the most affordable university in the Island (See Table 13). The remaining 92% of principals earned their degree at private universities, mostly in Puerto Rico. Nearly a quarter of principals earned their degree at the University of Phoenix, which is a private university specifically designed and structured for working people; it offers many on-line courses and requires only limited face-to-face contact.

Principals have worked, on average, 22 years in public schools (See Table 14). Years in public service refers to total amount of time that a principal has worked in the PRDE including all positions occupied before becoming a principal. While only 13.3% of principals have spent less than 11 years in public service in the PRDE, a significant number of principals have enough years to qualify for retirement (16.1%). Chart 9 presents the number of years of experience in the position as school principal. Nearly 75% of principals have been in the position for less than eight years, indicating that the majority of principals spend a considerable number of years as teachers or in another position at the PRDE, before becoming a school principal.

Although current requirements to certify school principals establish that the minimum academic preparation should be a master's degree, there are still a small number of principals (20) that only have a bachelor degree. The requirements for certifying school principals are described in Article IX of the booklet entitled "Certification Regulations of Teaching Personnel" (*Reglamento de Certificación del Personal Docente, 2004*). Article IX establishes the requirement for certification as follows: professional and academic preparation, prior experience, and academic specialties that must be met by all candidates for teaching positions in public and private schools in Puerto Rico. According to the Regulation, school

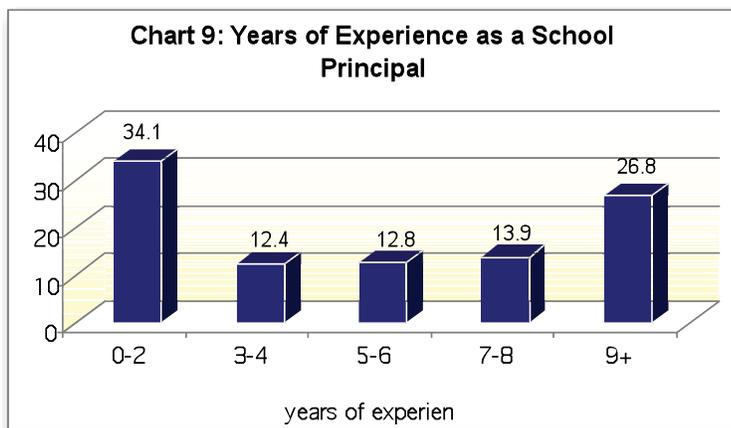
Table 13: Career path of the PRDE principals for the academic year 2007-2008

	n	%
Highest degree earned		
BA	20	1.3
MA	1449	96.1
PhD	39	2.6
University of highest degree earned		
University of Phoenix	353	24.0
Interamerican University	282	19.2
University of Puerto Rico	128	8.7
Ana G. Mendez System	198	13.5
Catholic University	132	9.0
Other Universities in PR	246	16.7
Other Universities in US	100	6.8

Table 14: School principals' years in public service as of 2007-08

Years in Public Service	n	%
≤ 11	199	13.3
12-17	255	17
18-23	407	27.1
24-29	399	26.6
30+	241	16.1

*Entries in table are based on cases with complete data only



principal certifications are offered by academic level (i.e.: elementary school) or by program (i.e.: vocational-tech) to those candidates that meet one of the following requirements:

Doctorate or Master’s Degree in Supervision and School Administration.

- Person must have a permanent teacher certificate in the level, subject or program for which he/she was certified;
- Two years of teaching experience; and
- 18 graduate level credits of chosen specialty for those principals who wish to work in specialized or special education schools.

If the person holds a Master or PhD degree but does not have a specialty in Supervision and School Administration then the following applies:

- The person must have 18 graduate level credits in Administration and School Supervision if their Master’s Degree is not in Administration and School Supervision;
- Supervised practice as a school principal;
- Possess a certificate as a permanent teacher in their level, subject or program;
- Two years of teaching experience; and,
- 18 graduate level credits of chosen specialty for those principals who wish to work in specialized or special education schools.

To our knowledge, there has not been a recent, in-depth evaluation of the availability and quality of school principal training programs in Puerto Rico.

WHAT IS THE COMPENSATION FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS?

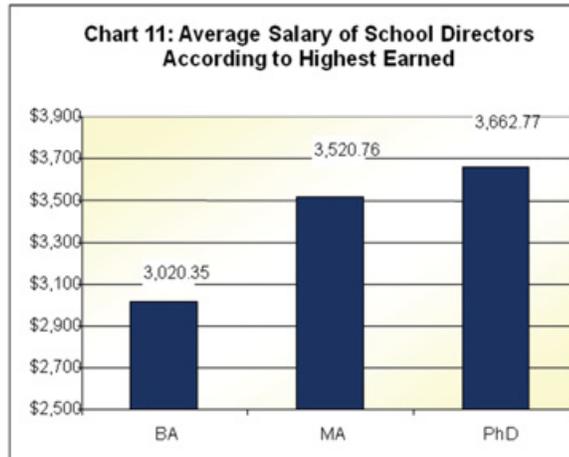
The average monthly salary of a school principal for the year of the study was \$3,510, ranging from \$1,520 to \$4,475. No differences in salary were observed by years of experience, school level, or educational region. The only factor that was related to a principal’s salary was highest degree earned.

During academic year 2007–08 school principals in Puerto Rico earned an average of \$3,510.79 per month (\$42,129 a year). The minimum reported salary was \$1,520 per month and the maximum was \$4,475.

The following factors were explored to determine if they were related to the principals’ salaries: years of public experience, educational region, academic preparation, and school level. When the average salary was compared by school level or educational region, no difference was observed (See Table 15). Even though significant differences were not observed in average salary by educational region, the lowest average was for the San Juan and Mayagüez regions, while the highest was for the Ponce region. Regarding average salary by school level, data show that the differences are very small, ranging only by \$51.70 from the lowest average for middle school to the highest average for high school.

Table 15: Principals’ average monthly salary by educational region and school level	
Variable	Average Mo. Salary
Educational Regions	
Arecibo	\$3,533.74
Bayamon	\$3,505.32
Caguas	\$3,521.83
Humacao	\$3,534.53
Mayaguez	\$3,495.52
Ponce	\$3,546.35
San Juan	\$3,488.65
School Level	
Elementary	\$3,511.22
Intermediate	\$3,505.32
High School	\$3,557.02
Other	\$3,509.57

Chart 10 illustrates the distribution of salaries according to years of service or public experience. Although a linear relationship could have been expected, i.e.: having principals with greater experience earning a higher salary, such a relationship was not observed. The only factor that seems to be related to principal salary is the highest degree earned. As illustrated in Chart 11, the average monthly salary of a school principal with a PhD was \$642.42 higher than a principal with a bachelor degree and \$142 higher (on a monthly basis) than a Master’s degree. During year 2007–08 a principal’s salary was not



associated with years of experience, educational region or school level. The only factor that seemed to be related to a principal’s salary was his/her academic degree. Currently, the PRDE does not have a specific salary range or scale for school principals based on years of experience or highest degree earned.

It was not possible to obtain a written document from the PRDE explaining the school principal compensation system. Instead, a previous Undersecretary of Education provided a written explanation describing how a school principal’s remuneration is determined by the teacher salary scale at the time of assuming a position as principal, as the base salary. In addition to the designated salary as a teacher, a monthly differential of \$250.00 is granted to all school principals. To provide them with additional compensation a principal’s highest degree earned and years of experience are taken into consideration as follows:

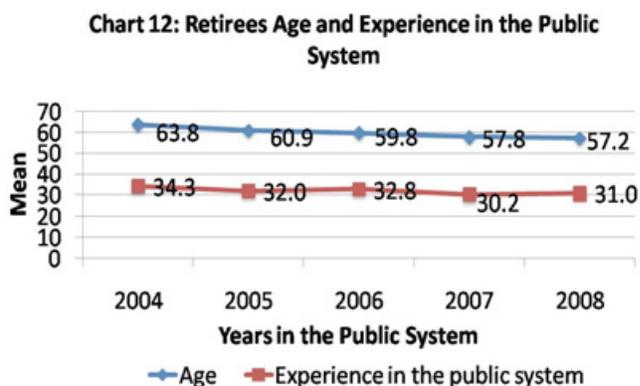
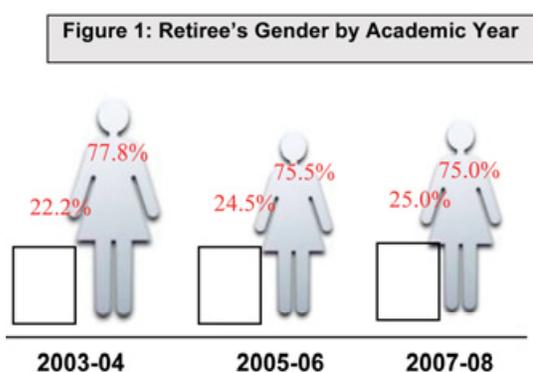
- \$105.00 is applied to officials with less than 13 years of experience with any degree (BA, MA Ph.D.)
- \$375.00 is applied to officials with over 13 years of service and with a Master’s degree.
- \$600.00 is applied to officials with 15 years or more of service and with a Ph.D. degree.

Currently, almost all school principals earn less than some of the teachers they supervise. In addition, as it is considered a managerial position, principals are not paid for overtime even when most of them work at least 60 hours per week, eleven months per year. It is essential that school principals have a compensation scale that responds to the position and correlates with the amount of time and responsibilities typically expected of them as school leaders. In a Manifesto published by the Broad Foundation for Better Leaders for America’s Schools (Meyer 2003), it is proposed that a principals’ base salary be at least 150% of what their highest-paid teacher receives as a starting point, with a possibility of an additional 50% in performance-related bonuses. As stated in the Manifesto, “If we want better school leaders, we must expect to pay them better.” A similar idea for principals could be considered in Puerto Rico, but it would have to be tied to the development of a performance evaluation system for school principals. At present, there is no formal evaluation process for school principals in the PRDE.

RETIREMENT TRENDS

There has been a decreasing trend in the retirement age of school principals from academic year 2003–04 to 2007–08. Over the next five years, more than a third of Puerto Rico’s public school principals could retire, depriving the PRDE of a significant amount of experienced school leaders.

During Academic Year 2007–08 a total of 21 school principals retired. This represents 1.39% of active principals during that academic year. A similar percentage was observed in academic year 2003–04. The data provided by the PRDE for the past five academic years (2003–2008), demonstrate that the majority of retirees during that period were women (See Figure 1). This was expected since most school



principals are female. The percentage of women retiring has remained steady for the past five years, fluctuating from 75% in 2007–08 to 77.78% in 2003–04. Chart 12 shows the retirement trends by academic year 2003–04 to 2007–2008, according to the principal’s age at retirement and years of public experience. The average age at retirement in 2007–2008 was 57, six years younger than the average retirement age in 2003–2004. There has been a decreasing trend in the age of retirement of school principals from academic year 2003–04 to 2007–08. In terms of years of experience, the average was slightly lower in 2007–08 than in 2003–04.

The number of years of experience in public service was used to estimate potential retirees for upcoming years. During 2007–08, a total of 241 active school principals already had enough years of experience to retire. By year 2012 there will be an additional 335 school principals that could retire, as they will have more than 30 years of service. A total of 576 current principals could retire within the next five years. Closer inspection of future retirement trends shows that the educational region that will be most affected will be San Juan and the least affected will be Ponce.

Over the next five years more than a third of Puerto Rico’s public school principals could retire, depriving the PRDE of a significant amount of experienced school leaders. This could represent a shortage of principals in our public school system, aggravated by the fact that there is a problem filling school principal vacancies. The situation is even more worrisome since career-paths may be collapsing at both ends: prospective or entering principals may be driven away by low pay and working conditions, while experienced principals (who may still have much to contribute) are retiring at an earlier age.

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CHAPTER 3: A PRINCIPAL'S DAY-TO-DAY REALITY

Focus Groups

Four focus groups were conducted with school principals to identify their responsibilities and expectations, their perceptions of their jobs and the challenges they face. Focus group discussions also elicited participant opinions regarding ways in which they could help improve the teaching-learning processes in their schools, and the opportunities for improvement or development available at the PRDE. Lastly, principals talked about current academic training for school directors and what it should cover, as well as the demands and impact of the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB) in Puerto Rico's schools.

Four focus groups of active school principals were carried out in a period of two months (November–December 2008). The groups were conducted in four of the seven educational regions of the PRDE (Mayagüez, Ponce, Humacao and San Juan). The moderator used a series of questions to steer the discussion. A detailed description of the methodology is included in Chapter 6.

FINDINGS

PRINCIPALS' EXPECTATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Principals feel they have responsibilities beyond what is stated in the job description included in Law 149. Many of the additional tasks are administrative and take time from the teaching-learning process. Principals believe that some of this extra burden can be solved by hiring support personnel, especially administrative personnel.

Focus group participants stated that Law 149 contains 24 functions for school principals. The law was last amended in 1999. However, school needs change and the PRDE continues adding functions that are not covered in the law. For example, school districts are responsible for administering the database for vaccine records. Principals agreed that it is necessary to modify and update this law in order to better reflect their current duties.

School principals feel they are accountable for an overwhelming amount of obligations. They are responsible for writing reports, attendance records for all personnel, departmental audits, and administering collective bargaining agreements. Principals supervise all school personnel, including non-educational employees and teachers. Budget preparation and the school's purchasing system are also part of their responsibility.

Participants stated that attending meetings takes a lot of their time. They have meetings with school committees, their district, the PRDE, parents, teachers, and special education groups. Other tasks mentioned were: representing the educational system in court, managing information systems, organizing professional development of teachers, dealing with the community and supervising student and teacher affairs. Their responsibilities are so many, that principals indicated having limited time, if any, to deal with aspects related to the teaching-learning process. Principals felt that the expected tasks for a director are too many for one person to fulfill effectively.

Adding to their burden, principals expressed that one area that is overwhelming because they receive little support is dealing with the school's infrastructure. Schools are usually old and in need of repairs. Many principals reported that they, on occasions, have had to clean bathrooms, buy cooking gas,

purchase cleaning supplies, and do renovations of the schools on their own. Often, the cost for these items comes out of their own pocket. Moreover, they are the ones that have to deal with reactions from parents and staff related to decisions made by the district or central levels over these and other matters.

The lack of a performance evaluation system for directors was also mentioned among the barriers they encounter. Principals would like to have regular evaluations in order to clearly know what is expected of them. According to the law principals should be supervised by the Secretary of Education, and the superintendent should function as a facilitator. However, the superintendent functions more like a supervisor rather than a facilitator; and the Secretary has not evaluated principals. Participants indicated that these situations make a principal's job much harder.

Another barrier is the lack of necessary support personnel. Many schools do not have an administrative assistant. Informants explained that only schools with more than 150 children are able to obtain one. Hence, principals of smaller schools are in charge of all administrative duties. This decreases the amount of time allotted for other responsibilities including educational tasks. In larger schools principals have added responsibilities, such as more staff to supervise and more children. These schools may have an administrative assistant, but no other staff to compensate for the additional workload typical of larger schools.

The final barriers mentioned by focus group participants were the amount of time needed to complete their tasks and low compensation. They explained that their 7.5 hour day is not enough to complete all of the above mentioned tasks. Furthermore, they are not compensated for the additional time they have to work each day. All participants indicated that in order to complete their expected duties they have to work at night and on weekends. They also expressed frustration about the fact that some of their teachers earn more than they do. In the words of a principal, "a 7 ½ hour workday becomes a 24-hour job, seven days a week. There is no compensation or overtime pay for that additional time." Several principals indicated that they even feel responsible for the school during hurricanes, should the school be used as a shelter. Many of them explained how they have moved into their schools with their families during hurricane emergencies. This time or responsibility is not compensated either.

Principals gave two main recommendations to solve the issues of what is expected of them and their responsibilities. In the first place, they suggest amending Law 149. Second, they suggest assigning additional administrative support and retraining current clerical personnel (administrative officers, administrative assistants, secretaries and social workers). They explained that the responsibilities of school secretaries have not been revised in decades. For example, a secretary is not required to be computer literate, as this is not described as part of their duties.

Principals expressed mixed feelings about the expectations of their position. On the one hand, the majority of principals expressed a sense of loneliness in achieving their tasks. They indicated that they receive little support from the central department. Most teachers are defensive with principals because they view them as supervisors. Community members that are often not very receptive to PRDE decisions get angry at the principal. On the other hand, principals are proud of the hard work they put into their schools. They believe that they can make a difference in educating Puerto Rico's children.

PRINCIPALS' OPINIONS ON THE NCLB LAW

According to principals, the NCLB Law places additional strain on them. The test used to measure yearly progress is not designed for the reality of Puerto Rico's public schools. Principals believe that there is low motivation from teachers, students, and parents to comply with NCLB requirements.

There was a great deal of concern from directors regarding the No Child Left Behind Law and how it has affected their schools. Participants agreed that the law's expectations are not aligned with Puerto Rican school reality. For example, neither NCLB nor the Puerto Rican Test (*Pruebas Puertorriqueñas*) used to evaluate student performance is compatible with the standardized skill levels for schools in Puerto Rico. According to directors, one of the weaknesses of NCLB is that it is solely focused on results and not on the learning process.

Principals reported several barriers when trying to comply with NCLB. Participants indicated that many teachers, parents, and students are not motivated to do what is needed to fulfill NCLB requirements. According to them, the law calls for parents to be involved with the school. However, principals find that motivating parents to visit the school is difficult, especially parents of students who are in high school.

Other principals indicated that many students are not interested in doing well in achievement tests. They often answer the test randomly to get it out of the way and they are not motivated to perform well because they are not graded by it. Another NCLB barrier is that it uses the same standards and tests to measure children in special education, which makes the results unfair to the students and the school. Finally, principals believe that many teachers are tired and poorly motivated to administer the test; they show resistance to both the tests and the law.

Principals expressed that the educational system in Puerto Rico does not have the disciplinary mechanisms to sanction parents who are not responsible for their child's education, as in the case of absenteeism when tests are administered. Also, the bureaucracy at the PRDE makes processes difficult for a principal to provide students with help to do well in the tests (i.e. tutoring). Another limitation that principals deal with in having their students perform well in NCLB test requirements is the high turn-over of school personnel. Relocation of teachers, retired teachers, and recently graduated teachers are factors that affect test results. Finally, they noted a lack of incentives for students to perform well in the tests.

Some of the positive aspects of NCLB noted by principals were related to the economic resources it provides to schools. Teachers have been able to receive training and even work towards a master degree with funds granted by the law. The law has also offered reinforcement for some students through tutoring services and it has helped increase student attendance. Finally, some participants see test results as a self-evaluating tool, and use the results to attend to those areas that must be improved in their school.

Focus group participants offered a few strategies to better prepare students and teachers for the tests. A few examples are: teacher workshops; revision of curricula to go in accordance with the test; and conducting research to better understand students' lack of motivation.

Direct Quotes

"...the only evaluation done to principals' performance is when you are in the process of transitioning into a position, possibly to justify it. Even though a form

exists, it's not specific to the position of principal; instead, it's the teacher's evaluation form with the old functions of the principal's position."

"The workload is almost above human capabilities; the time is not enough. It's difficult for us to devote time to the kids and teachers."

"We can't reach academic excellence because there are many factors that don't allow us to. The many letters, meetings, and functions assigned to us, are just too many."

"I am a principal who leaves the school at 10:30 at night; I arrive at five and four in the morning...to fulfill my duties, since I can't accomplish the ones that I planned to do during the day; each day is a struggle; if it is an issue with a student I have to leave everything I had planned in order to work with that situation. Also, dealing with the students is a bureaucratic process for which you have to interview all the parties, all the witnesses, the parents (if present), look for regulation guidelines and find out who's at fault."

WORK CONDITIONS THAT AFFECT THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS

The principal's work conditions and administrative tasks are directly affecting the teaching and learning process. Principals lack the time, administrative and parental support to directly supervise teachers and influence the teaching and learning of their students.

Principals were asked to describe the conditions and/or situations they believe affect the education process and the challenges that schools face to obtain academic excellence. Interestingly, most of the issues mentioned by participants were not directly related to teaching issues, but rather to job conditions or administrative duties. In fact, all participants in the four focus groups agreed that in order to improve academic excellence it was necessary to raise school director salaries, since some of them earn less than the teachers. It was not clear, however, how a salary increase would actually help them improve the education at their schools.

The groups also agreed that the teaching curriculum needed to be adapted to current achievement tests used to evaluate schools (*Pruebas Puertorriqueñas*), and to student realities. If curricula are flexible and updated, in their opinion, achievement and test scores could improve.

To improve academic achievement directors explained that they would need to have more autonomy to select, change and dismiss teachers and other support personnel that do not work toward academic excellence in their schools. Directors also believe they need more time to direct supervise teachers in order to provide them with suggestions and recommendations to improve student outcome.

According to principals, school libraries are also essential to excel in education. This is an area in great need of improvement since most schools have poorly equipped libraries (if they have one). Directors also believe that there should be a better offer of pre-vocational and vocational courses, and that technology should be an integral part of the teaching process.

One of the major problems affecting teaching at schools, according to principals, is the frequent change of key personnel at the central administration level, and constant changes in educational philosophy due to political changes in the central government, which limit continuity and affect academic excellence.

Directors suggested that the Secretary of Education should be appointed to the position for a period of approximately ten years, in order to be independent of political change. It would also be desirable if the Secretary of Education had experience as a teacher or director.

Other challenges that directors identified as affecting academic excellence were the following:

- Poor training of recent graduates that become teachers. Principals mentioned that recent graduates lack the training to work in a classroom, and that most of the time they do not follow curricula and limit themselves to teaching only those areas they feel they master.
- Lack of commitment from other non-teaching school personnel.
- The curriculum is not pertinent to a great number of students who are interested in short career-training upon graduation.
- Teachers feeling threatened by a director who supervises them and do not see evaluation processes as an opportunity to improve their teaching.

Direct Quotes

“The Law requires parental engagement and everyone knows that parents are not that engaged with our schools...we have tried to engage parents with little success...”

“The curriculum has been changing; before it was based on educational standards and now it is based on expectations. However, teachers have not necessarily changed their teaching methods in response to these changes.”

“The expectations or academic standards of the tests are too high and difficult for all schools to achieve. Many students do not have the mental maturity to work with the type of exercises included in the tests.”

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING NEEDS

Principals are interested in receiving training in different areas such as special education, legal issues and successful teaching practices. These are areas they have to work with on a daily basis. Also, a few showed interest in non traditional workshops like yoga and relaxation techniques.

Principals were asked about their professional development or training needs. Most directors feel that they need to be better trained in the areas of special education and legal issues related to school settings. Others think that it would be positive to receive training on cutting-edge educational research findings on successful teaching practices at national and international levels, be it new teaching models, modern teaching methods or technological tools available through the web. Some mentioned the importance of conducting research in the schools.

Another need that directors expressed was related to having more opportunities or mechanisms to communicate with other school directors. Some mentioned that a possibility was to create a “blog” or chat system where they could ask questions and receive responses directly from other directors. Respondents also said that the training they are interested in should be oriented to building skills, using a hands-on approach rather than a theoretical approach. Some participants mentioned interest in non-

traditional workshop topics such as yoga, managing emotions and relaxation. They believe these could help ease the tension caused by the multiple responsibilities of a school director.

ACADEMIC PREPARATION FOR FUTURE DIRECTORS

According to current principals, the academic preparation for future school directors needs to contain more detailed courses in areas such as administration, criminal justice, and psychology. These courses should require directors to spend time in hands-on activities.

Directors believe that current curricula to prepare directors should be updated to include more detailed courses on administration, criminal justice, labor laws, and supervision. Other directors think that curricula should include more practical courses that require future directors to spend time in real scenarios. For example, such courses could require that future directors prepare budgets and participate in grant writing activities. Other suggestions were to include courses on group management, the current philosophy of the Puerto Rico Department of Education, accounting and managing, management of databases used by the PRDE, and psychology. Other initiatives that can improve the preparation of future directors are local and national exchange programs for school directors, mentoring programs by experienced directors, and practical courses on managing the software used by PRDE.

Direct Quote

"I would like to suggest the University to work with strategies to help new teachers on how to have control of their groups."

CHAPTER 4: SUPPORTING EXCELLENCE IN LEADERSHIP

Key Informant Interviews

Key informant interviews were used to foster discussion and collect information from top managers of the PRDE Central Administrative Offices regarding issues presently affecting school directors. Senior BSRI investigators met individually with each of the four key informants from the previous administration at the Central Administrative Offices of the PRDE. The informants were: the Secretary of the PRDE, the Sub-Secretary of Academic Affairs, the Special Assistant to the Secretary of PRDE, and the Executive Director of the Institute of Administrative Training and School Advising.

The areas which were discussed during the interviews included: incentives for school directors; the evaluation process for school director performance; the consequences school directors face when their school fails to achieve minimum academic standards for several years in a row; current strategies for the selection, recruitment, and retention of the best candidates for school director positions; and courses that should be included in academic programs for directors to better prepare them for Puerto Rican school reality. A detailed description of the methodology is included in Chapter 6.

FINDINGS

INCENTIVES

There is no reward or incentive system in place at the PRDE for school principals, and there is no formal evaluation process to determine their performance and productivity.

All key informants reported that there is currently no reward or incentive system in place for school principals, regardless of their performance or productivity. A respondent also mentioned that there is no established systematic method to identify productive and effective principals. One of the main reasons for this is the lack of a proper evaluation mechanism for determining which principals are considered outstanding.

An economic incentive was offered in 2007 for schools that were under an “Improvement Plan” and that improved academic achievement, as evidenced by the results of the Puerto Rican School Achievement Tests (*Pruebas Puertorriqueñas de Aprovechamiento Académico, PPAA*). According to key informants, school directors in these schools received a \$2,500 bonus. Teachers and other non-teaching personnel were also rewarded. Schools that did not reach the standard were ineligible to receive an incentive. A respondent stated that although the standardized test (PPAA) is not perfect, it provides data on student academic achievement.

Direct Quotes

“The PRDE doesn’t have an incentive system for school principals.”

“The system recognizes that we still don’t have a way of identifying outstanding principals...”

“What we have is an incentive system for principals of difficult recruitment schools”

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Currently there is no systematic quantitative evaluation method for performance or productivity of school principals. There was poor consensus among respondents regarding who should be responsible for conducting principals' evaluations.

Participants agreed that there is no systematic quantitative evaluation method for principals and that a standard instrument does not exist for this purpose. As established in Article 2.15 of the Department of Education's Law 149, the responsibility for evaluating all school directors falls in the hands of the Secretary of Education and the School Council. An informant explained that given the number of school principals, it is almost impossible for one person from the PRDE to do all the evaluations. Because of this, the function has sometimes been delegated to regional directors. However, regional directors do not conduct many evaluations because of the number of responsibilities they have. Generally, when evaluations have been conducted, they are done in one short visit, using an instrument known as Form 435. A respondent stated that Form 435 does not reflect the actual reality of a school and its director's performance, but rather that the form is primarily used for school principals who are transitory and must be further evaluated to obtain tenure.

All respondents indicated that a new evaluation instrument was under development (See Appendix C). This instrument was created in collaboration with a group of principals who gave their input and suggestions. The dimensions used in this new evaluation tool are a result of suggestions by principals, based on their current responsibilities. According to one of the informants the goal of the instrument is to provide principals with a guide of what is expected from them. The five areas covered by the instrument are: organizational leadership, educational leadership, administrative leadership, ethical/professional leadership, and planning and evaluation. According to key personnel the new evaluation was fully developed, revised, and approved by several PRDE stakeholders during academic year 2008-09.

There was poor consensus among respondents on who should be responsible for administering this new evaluation tool. As stated above, the responsibility of evaluating principals still falls under the PRDE Secretary, according to Law 149. However, some respondents felt that the evaluation should be done by the superintendents. Others believed that it should be done by people close to the principal like, such as the school council, support staff, community members, teachers, central administration staff, and external evaluators, such as retired principals. With regard to the superintendent conducting the evaluation, two respondents felt that this would be unrealistic since Law 149 states that the superintendent is not a supervisor but rather a facilitator. According to one of the respondents, all principals should be evaluated annually, and if the director does not comply with what is expected, he/she must be replaced.

Direct Quotes

"... in reality, until now, if there was an evaluation instrument somewhere out there, it hasn't been utilized and principals need to be evaluated."

"...it doesn't have to be a punitive evaluation, instead there has to be a clear message about what is expected of them as principals."

DESIGNING ACADEMIC PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Respondents believe that academic programs that prepare school principals should offer more technological training to familiarize them with the software used at the PRDE; emphasize courses related to educational leadership to ensure that a principal is knowledgeable about the teaching-learning process, and other administrative courses with topics such as time management, labor laws, and accounting, among others.

Three informants stated that principals need technological training, in order to acquire the necessary skills to manage information systems currently used at the PRDE. School principals are presently responsible for administering four different information systems that are the cornerstone of the PRDE's future. The systems are the following:

- Financial Information System of the Department of Education (SIFDE for its initials in Spanish)
- Time, Absences, and Licensing (TAL for its initials in Spanish)
- Automation Software for Special Education (SEAS for its initials in Spanish)
- Student Information System (SIE for its initials in Spanish)

Educational leadership was pointed out by three of the respondents as an area that should be strengthened by academic programs. This area refers to principal preparedness for motivating his/her teacher counterparts to achieve excellence. A respondent indicated that a school principal must be knowledgeable in the teaching-learning process. This is the only way they can assure that teachers under their supervision are using appropriate methods to obtain desired learning outcomes. A respondent stated that school directors must be proven teachers in order to demonstrate their expertise with teaching. The goal is for principals to be respected by their faculty for their academic expertise.

According to one of the informants, organizational leadership and administration courses offered by academic institutions should reinforce the following content areas: time management, multi-tasking, conflict resolution, adequate interaction with labor unions and labor laws. Accounting courses are also desirable because principals have to manage a school's budget and they need to do it with discretion. There is also a need to teach principals to deal with day-to-day situations in their school, both with teachers and the community, and how to establish priorities. Specifically, principals need to develop skills to enable them to simultaneously manage many different issues.

A respondent believes that an area that has been neglected in the academic preparation of a principal is working with communities. Principals must learn to identify and understand the historical context of their schools, parents, and community. According to this respondent, parents and communities are key aspects of successful schools.

Finally, one of the informants detailed areas that should be included in the academic preparation of a good school principal. These include:

- Laws, regulations, Circular Letter (*Cartas Circulares*) from the PRDE
- Conflict management
- Identifying funds and grant writing, both at the state and federal level
- Innovative teaching strategies
- Effective working plan design
- Personnel supervision and evaluation
- How to conduct effective meetings
- Development and implementation of programs for teacher professional development

- Effective time management
- Memo and document writing
- Managing a school budget
- Effective school organizations
- Learning communities
- Parliamentary procedures

Direct Quotes

"I think that an area which is greatly needed and has to be worked by school principals is organizational leadership..."

"The area of educational technology is something that is not covered by the universities."

SELECTING, RECRUITING AND RETAINING PRINCIPALS

The consensus was that there is no PRDE strategy to identify, recruit or retain the best school director candidates. Currently, anyone that obtains a School Director Certificate can apply for the position. According to respondents there is no objective information available at the PRDE that indicates the quality of candidates that apply for these positions.

One respondent stated that one of the strategies implicitly used by the PRDE to assess the quality of the principal is to examine the outcomes of the Puerto Rican School Achievement Tests (PRAA). These are yearly tests given to all students. Another informant explained that while there are no incentive programs to retain efficient school directors, there are other compensation mechanisms that can be attractive to principals. For example, the PRDE covers tuition costs for teachers interested in continuing graduate studies, and they also offer workshops and trainings. Another activity mentioned by respondents as a way to retain school directors is for the Secretary of Education to hold periodic meetings, where he listens to the needs of the principals. In addition, superintendents provide support by performing academic follow-up to schools in each region. Another respondent expressed that although the PRDE does not have adequate mechanisms for retaining good principals, it has the means to eliminate school directors that violate laws or regulations.

Direct Quotes

"The reality is that we don't have a defined strategy... That is something we must do. We should do it as soon as possible, especially if we want to retain them."

"There are no incentives to retain those directors that have shown to be effective. The existing mechanisms are to eliminate those who violate laws and regulations."

RECRUITMENT IN DIFFICULT SCHOOLS

Fifty thousand dollars in incentives are available for school principals who accept a position in schools that are categorized as “difficult to recruit.” This incentive is divided in yearly \$10,000 payments for the first two (2) years of service, and \$15,000 for the next two years of service.

Three respondents spoke about PRDE’s Circular Letter #13 (2007–2008), that establishes the procedure for recruitment and selection of directors for schools classified as “difficult to recruit.” Though this memo has been approved, it has not yet been implemented. According to the memo, “difficult to recruit schools” are defined as having one or more of the following conditions:

1. The school has not had a full-time principal for the entire span of an academic calendar year during the two (2) previous years.
2. The Department has published one or more announcements for a principal position and it has remained vacant during at least six (6) months, due to unavailability of candidates
3. The school is in an improvement phase and the principal was removed from his/her position as part of a corrective measure.

In other words, these are schools “...that have had substantial personnel turnover , usually without direction for a period longer than a year”, and “that are seriously deteriorated”, as expressed by one of the informants. In some cases, these schools fall into the “improvement or restructuring plan.” Once it reaches this phase, the schools receive direct follow-up from the PRDE. The Secretary of Academic Affairs meets periodically with principals of these schools to help develop a plan in areas that are needed the most.

A support system was created by the PRDE which consists of offering educational workshops to all principals, as a way to retain school principals in “difficult to recruit schools”,. They also receive psychological support, and support from the office that is in charge of providing help and support to school directors (Institute of Administrative Training and School Advising).

Two informants were asked if they had knowledge of a \$50k incentive for school directors. They indicated that this incentive is for schools that have had trouble recruiting director candidates. It is a federal assignment that is added to a director’s basic salary, in exchange for a four year commitment. Under this incentive program, the director is subject to an annual evaluation of his/her execution and achievements. The evaluation is done by the PRDE at the end of each academic year, before determining if the contract is renewed. If the principal does not comply with the contract, he/she has to return the bonus, either in cash or with 2 years of service for each yearly bonus received.

Respondents also mentioned the following strategies that the PRDE is using to retain directors where recruiting is difficult:

- A pilot project that offers directors more autonomy to transfer teachers from their schools
- Technical assistance for directors and their faculty in selecting academic initiatives that are effective with their students, according to the needs of their community
- Providing additional external support and resources for needs identified by the school (i.e.: one-on-one coaching with school directors, tutoring, workshops, etc.)
- Greater flexibility in adapting curricular content to the population served by the school

Direct Quotes

"...what the Secretary was interested in doing was to be able to identify directors that have been exemplary and offering them a monetary incentive to relocate to these {difficult to recruit} schools."

CONSEQUENCES OF NOT COMPLYING WITH THE NCLB LAW

Sanctions for principals who are on probation due to failure to comply with what is required in NCLB, range from relocation of school to removal from the position. However, at present no director has been sanctioned for failing to comply with NCLB.

All respondents indicated that the NCLB law includes sanctions to principals that range from relocation to another school up to their removal from the position. In line with this law, PRDE published Circular Letter #8 of 2008–2009 (See Appendix D). Among other things, this policy establishes the process for dealing with directors who fail to comply with the law. It states that it will "evaluate the need to replace all or most of the staff related to poor achievement, that caused the school not to do well on AYP." However, no director has been sanctioned for failing to comply. There were only a few schools under this situation at the time of the interviews with key-personnel (8, according to two of the informants).

Two respondents explained that most of the schools that are in their 8th year of the Improvement Plan do not have school directors; therefore, they fall under the new category of schools that are difficult to recruit. The problem is that directors in low performance schools usually leave the school to work in another one before being sanctioned. Another informant explained that PRDE, instead of imposing sanctions on principals, has worked closely with schools in an effort to see if they can improve. As a result, some schools have been successful in achieving NCLB goals.

Direct Quotes

"The law stipulates that we can relocate principals, the maximum would be to remove them from their position..."

"...there are excellent directors and they have to be listened to, we have to see what they are doing and...once it's documented, the world will know it and continue to learn..."

"I believe that research is necessary, we are lacking of solid research which documents the educational processes"

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

Paying Attention to Teaching and Learning

While they are increasingly held responsible for student achievement, principals do not have the legal authority, the knowledge and tools, or the time to focus on how well their teachers are teaching and how much their students are learning. In their day-to-day reality, most school principals are overwhelmed with responsibilities such as managing databases, preparing reports, finding basic resources to run their schools, attending central office meetings, dealing with legal issues and managing students, parents and community affairs. They are also in charge of supervising teachers and other personnel. However, as currently defined and carried out, this supervisory responsibility is not focused on whether students are receiving a high quality and equal learning opportunity.

Lack of Funds for their Schools

The most urgent problem that principals encounter in their schools is the lack of sufficient funds. Approximately half of surveyed principals stated that because it is such a major problem, only minimal progress can be made. Some principals indicate that they find ways to deal with this limitation, but still see it as a serious problem. Further investigation—beyond the scope of this study—is necessary to identify why principals do not have access to their school budget. It is clear that they feel that not having access to funds is much more detrimental to their ability to get their job done than other challenges they face, such as difficulty in involving parents, deteriorated school facilities and supervising teachers.

Qualified Candidates to Lead Schools

A majority of principals indicated that the certification process to become a principal requires only a minimum set of skills and no guarantee that the person knows how to supervise a school. The men and women who are certified to become principals in Puerto Rico spend an average of 22 years in the educational system, either as teachers or in other positions. Combined, these two facts point to a troublesome reality. Not only is the bar set low initially—as indicated by the principals themselves—but there is currently no process to identify, select and train potential candidates, early in their careers, who demonstrate the qualities of good school leaders. Furthermore, retirement trends indicate that more than a third of current school principals could retire within the next five years. Without a long-term plan to retain high-performing principals or to keep them in the system, e.g., as mentors, the PRDE will face the additional challenge of filling positions and retaining talent. Finally, it is important to note that most principals express a desire to become better at their job, but they feel they do not have the necessary support and learning experiences to improve and grow professionally.

Hold Us Accountable—but Restructure the Playing Field

There was consensus among principals and top-level PRDE executives regarding the need to establish a system of performance evaluation, which currently does not exist. Six of every ten principals indicated that the most important criteria for their evaluation should be how well they improve the academic achievement of students. However, a majority also said that principals should not be responsible for student scores on standardized tests. The apparent contradiction is most likely due to a set of constraints that principals identified as limiting their capacity to impact learning, including the lack of alignment between the curriculum that is taught and what appears on standards-based tests; that they are not allowed by law to assess teachers performance; and resistance from students, teachers and parents who do not see the usefulness of the test, among others. The emphasis placed by NCLB on test results to determine how well a school is doing in reaching a set of standards presents a difficult conundrum for principals, who express a desire to be measured according to their capacity to impact student learning, but have very limited control over the teaching and learning process.

Overworked and Underpaid

The current job description for principals is defined by Law 149, which was last amended in 1999. Since then, PRDE has added numerous functions and responsibilities responding to local and federal mandates, without conducting a holistic review of the position. Principals are overwhelmed with the amount of responsibilities they are expected to complete. Low salaries and a salary scale that does not take into consideration years of experience, educational region, school level or job performance only exacerbate this situation. Presently, almost all principals earn less money than some of the teachers at their schools. Both principals and top-level executives agree that there is no incentive system that recognizes and rewards improvement and excellence for principals and their schools.

Information to Move Forward

Although this research study did not set out to investigate how information about principals is organized and used, one of the main issues the research team encountered was the lack of centralized and reliable information on school directors. Several types of information are unavailable or inconsistent, including number of vacancies at the beginning of each school year, number of schools without principals, how long it takes to fill these positions and principal mobility. It is also unclear why vacancies exist when there appears to be a large enough pool of certified candidates. Information on the professional development opportunities for both new and experienced principals was also unavailable. Finally, both principals and top-level executives discussed the need for university programs that prepare principals to review their programs, using information that reflects current reality, responsibilities and challenges that define the job of a school leader.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **BUILD A ROBUST RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION SYSTEM** that brings only the best candidates into schools.
- **WORK WITH UNIVERSITIES THAT PREPARE SCHOOL DIRECTORS** to ensure coursework is relevant to present and future demands, and work with the PRDE to review the requirements to become a principal.
- **CENTRALIZE PRDE DATA** and information in order to better select, train, recruit and develop current and future principals.
- **BUILD A SUPPORT STRUCTURE** to provide principals with the ongoing professional development they need to improve their work. Improve professional development activities so that they are aligned with their specific needs and realities.
- **CLARIFY WHAT PRINCIPALS ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR** and provide them with the financial and structural means to achieve what is expected of them.
- **IDENTIFY WHY PRINCIPALS DO NOT HAVE ACCESS TO FUNDS** for their schools and improve the process by which their school budgets are available to them for effective use.
- **DEVELOP A SYSTEMATIC, EMPIRICAL METHOD** to identify school principals that excel at their job, but that is not solely based on one evaluation tool.
- **ESTABLISH WHO IS RESPONSIBLE** for managing principals and providing them with feedback on their work. It is not feasible for the Secretary of Education to evaluate all principals, as the current structure dictates. Review the role of the Superintendent, or a similar position, which principals point to as one of the few support systems that was working for them.
- **ESTABLISH A COMPENSATION SCALE** that does justice to principals, and that correlates with the amount of time and responsibility that is expected of them as school leaders.
- **INCREASE SUPPORT PERSONNEL** to alleviate some of the administrative tasks that principals are responsible for, making time for them to work with teachers and influence the teaching and learning of their students.
- **CREATE AN ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM** where principals are the supervisors of teacher performance. Then, provide principals with greater autonomy to recruit and fire teachers and to reinforce academic excellence in their schools.

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CHAPTER 6: METHODOLOGY

1. Survey for School Principals

The School Principal's Survey was sent to all PRDE school principals using three methods: postal service, e-mail, and in-person testing at regional meetings.

Contact information of the school principal such as name, school address, phone number, and e-mails were provided by the PRDE. All participants were active at the time of the survey. School principals were excluded from participating if they were in charge of the following type of schools: special education, specialized (arts, music, ballet, etc.), pre-vocational, vocational, technological institute, or adults. After eliminating these cases there were 1411 eligible school principals. The first mailing was delivered by electronic-mail on November 25, 2008 and included an invitation letter, the link to respond to the online survey, and a copy of the PRDE authorization to perform the study. An electronic survey management software called E-survey Pro was used to place the survey online and facilitate handling of the data (See Appendix E). The initial e-mail was sent to 1,274 school principals. Some principals (n=351) were not included in this mailing because the database did not contain their updated e-mail address. The response rate after this mailing was 15% (See Table 16).

Delivery Method	# of School Principals	Principals that completed survey	Participation Rate
First e-mail delivery	1,274	181	688 / 1,411= 48.8%
Second e-mail delivery	1,233	101	
Third e-mail delivery	1,099	95	
Postal delivery	1,066	174	
In Person	Present at school districts meetings	137	

The second mailing was done on December 8, 2008, also through e-mail. By then, BSRI personnel obtained additional contact information and sent 1,233 e-mails. A total of 101 additional surveys were received. The last electronic mailing was sent on January 9, 2009 (1,099) and by April 30, 2009, there were 377 web surveys completed for a 27% response rate. On January 28, 2009, 1,066 surveys were mailed through regular post to the principals that had not yet responded. The questionnaire was sent along with a presentation letter, the PRDE authorization, and a self-addressed stamped envelope to return the completed survey. From these, 174 surveys were received.

The districts were later contacted to identify dates in which school principals would meet with the superintendent and to obtain permission for BSRI personnel to attend those meetings. Staff went to 16 district meetings, explained the study, and requested principals who were present at the meeting to participate. Only principals who had not yet responded were asked to complete the survey. A total of 137 additional surveys were collected through this method. The final response was 48.8%.

A total of 30 surveys were eligible but could not be used for the following reasons: two refused to participate, one survey was incomplete, six surveys were from specialized school principals, three surveys had codes with no corresponding school in the database, and 18 surveys were without identifiable school codes for tracking purposes.

Data Analysis: Some survey questions had to be recoded before the postal mailing because evaluators noticed that some respondents had difficulty following the instructions to answer the questions. For example, for some questions principals were instructed to select the best answer from a list of responses. Many principals felt they could not select only one and began to write all their responses under the “other” category making it difficult for evaluators to code the answers. The research team decided to recode each possible response as a “yes” or “no” question, allowing participants to choose as many as they desired. The responses entered in the system under the “other” category were re-codified as yes-no alternatives.

All the data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive analyses of the data were performed using frequencies, means, and cross-tabulations.

2. Secondary Data Analyses

In order to obtain secondary data from the PRDE, the Behavioral Sciences Research Institute (BSRI) research team initially met with the Principal of the Administrative and School Advising Training Institute of PRDE (ICAAE for its acronym in Spanish) on April 30, 2008. The following objectives were accomplished at the meeting: 1) essential information to complete the study was provided, 2) the process to obtain the data was explained, and 3) the PRDE provided a list of documents required for the study.

BSRI personnel had difficulty obtaining the data since it was never directed to a central source. In order to obtain the information and needed documents, subsequent meetings were held with several units of the PRDE and the BSRI personnel had to go back and forth to these units. Not all requested data was obtained and most of it was provided by Rock Solid, an information technology consulting service that is sub-contracted by PRDE to manage some of their data.

As a result of the BSRI research team efforts, more than five datasets with principal information were obtained. None of the datasets included the complete set of variables requested, and inconsistencies were identified within the information that was provided (See Table 17 for a list and description of all datasets received from the PRDE).

Data Analysis: To answer the research questions of the study, personnel from the BSRI performed data cleaning and management, as well as analyses of the datasets provided by PRDE. In order to obtain a master dataset the personnel had to clean and merge datasets A and B using the principals’ social security number as a unique identifier. All other datasets were used separately to obtain additional information. These could not be merged into the final dataset since the data was arranged by school and not by a unique principal identifier such as social security. The description of the final dataset is included in Appendix F.

Name of Database	Period	Date / Delivered by	Total (N)
Database A: School Principals – version 1	Academic years 2003-04 to 2007-08	Sept-12-09 Rock Solid through the Statistical Division of the Office of Planning and Development	2003-04 - 1,203 active principals 2004-05 - 1,285 active principals 2005-06 - 1,327 active principals 2006-07 - 1,524 active principals 2007-08 - 1,698 active principals
Database B: List of school principals – version 2 active and retired	Academic years 2003-04 to 2007-08	Jan-08-08 / Rock Solid	2003-04 - 1,199 principals 2004-05 - 1,284 principals 2005-06 - 1,329 principals 2006-07 - 1,526 principals 2007-08 - 1,698 principals
Database C: Compensation scale for school principals	Since 2000	Sept-15-2008 / Teaching Staff Division / Sub-Secretary for Academic Affairs	Administrative Document

Datasets A and B included all personnel transactions conducted in an academic year for each principal. Thus, some principals were duplicated if they had changed their employment status during the academic year (2007–08). For example, if a principal changed schools or received a salary increase, two entries were found in the dataset for that principal. Duplicates were carefully analyzed and the most recent entry was kept in the final data file. A separate database of all principals that had more than one personnel transaction was kept and analyzed separately, to obtain information on principal mobility. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to perform descriptive analyses. Frequency distributions of all variables were calculated, as well as means and crosstabs for a subset of the variables.

3. Focus Groups

Four focus groups composed of principals were carried out in a two month period (November 13 to December 2, 2008). The groups were conducted in four of the seven educational regions of the PRDE (See Table 18). The same moderator conducted the four groups. In order to lead the group, the moderator followed a question guide designed by the team of researchers, in collaboration with personnel from Flamboyán (See Appendix G for the question guide).

Educational Region	Directors Invited to Participate	# of Participants	Participation Rate
Mayagüez	13	8	62%
Ponce	13	5	38%
Humacao	12	5	42%
San Juan	20	8	40%

All participants were active school principals of the PRDE. A dataset was obtained from PRDE for selecting participants. Principals in charge of the following type of schools were excluded: special education schools, specialized schools (arts, music), pre-vocational schools, vocational schools or technological institutes. Principals from the entire island were included except for those in the off-island municipalities of Vieques and Culebra. These municipalities were excluded because of the difficulty school principals would encounter for attending the focus groups, due to long traveling distances. The SAS Statistical Program was used to select a random sample of 16 principals from each educational region. The selection stratified by school level in order to obtain a proportional representation of elementary, intermediate and high school regional levels. Each principal was invited to participate in the focus group and was informed that participation was voluntary. Table 18 describes the number of principals invited to the groups, how many attended, and the participation rate by region. Total participation rate was 45%. Participants consented to tape record the focus group for the purpose of preparing the report and to ensure the quality of the data.

Data Analysis: To analyze the data, two independent coders reviewed the transcripts to identify common themes across respondents. If there was disagreement about coders, a third coder was asked to review the transcript in order to achieve consensus. The report also includes specific valuable aspects, even if mentioned only by a single respondent. The report presented discusses the findings using identified categories.

4. Interviews with Key Informants

Key informant interviews were used to foster discussion and collect information from top managers of the Central Administrative Offices of the PRDE, regarding issues presently affecting school principals. The identified key personnel were selected for being knowledgeable in these issues. Senior investigators

of BSRI met individually with each of the 4 key informants at the Central Administration Offices of the PRDE. The informants interviewed were:

- Secretary of the PRDE
- Sub-Secretary of Academic Affairs
- Special Assistant to the Secretary of PRDE
- Executive Director of the Institute of Administrative Training and School Advising

The interviews took place between August 25 and September 22, 2008. Each meeting took approximately one hour to complete. A structured interview guide was developed by the BSRI team in collaboration with personnel from Flamboyan (See Appendix H for the interview protocol). The purpose of the interview was described at each one of the meetings as an opportunity to examine specific issues affecting school directors. The areas discussed in the interviews were:

- availability of incentives for school directors
- evaluation process for school director performance
- consequences faced by school directors when their school fails to achieve minimum academic standards several years in a row
- current strategies for the selection, recruitment, and retention of the best candidates for school director positions
- information for directors about which courses should be included in academic programs to better prepare for the reality of Puerto Rican schools
- ideas on how to improve school academic achievement using private funds

Participants were informed that their responses would be recorded and later transcribed in order to facilitate writing the report. It was explained that the report would be a summary of the responses provided by all informants, rather than a report identifying any of them. Therefore, this report presents a summary of the responses without individual attribution. To analyze the data, two independent coders reviewed the transcripts to identify common themes across respondents. If there was disagreement about coders, a third coder was asked to review the manuscript in order to achieve consensus among coders. The report also includes valuable aspects mentioned only by a single respondent.

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