Texas High School Project
Leadership Initiative Issue Brief 1:

Tenure and Retention of Newly Hired Principals in Texas

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Texas High School Project Leadership Initiative Issue Brief 1:
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Executive Summary

While much attention has been focused on the issue of teacher retention, very little evidence exists on the issue of principal retention. A small but growing body of evidence suggests that school leaders play a pivotal role in the school improvement process. Further, the evidence suggests that principals must remain on a school for a number of consecutive years to fully impact a school.

This report documents the principal tenure and retention rates of newly hired principals in Texas public schools from 1996 through 2008. The purpose of this report is to provide basic information about the actual length of tenure and retention rates of newly hired principals and explore some possible relationships between personal and school characteristics and the tenure and retention of principals. The results of this study suggest ***seven major findings***:

1) Principal tenure and retention rates vary dramatically across school levels, with elementary schools having the longest tenure and greatest retention rates and high schools having the shortest tenure and lowest retention rates.
2) High school retention rates are strikingly low for all schools—just over 50% of newly hired principals stay for three years and less than 30% stay for five years.
3) Principal retention rates are heavily influenced by the level of student achievement in the principal's first year of employment, with principals in the lowest achieving schools having the shortest tenure and lowest retention rates and the high achieving schools having the longest tenure and highest retention rates.
4) The percentage of economically disadvantaged students in a school also has a strong influence on principal tenure and retention rates, with principals in high-poverty schools having shorter tenure and lower retention rates than principals in low-poverty schools.
5) Principal retention is somewhat lower in schools in rural and small town districts and somewhat greater in suburban districts whose students tend to be White and not economically disadvantaged.
6) The personal characteristics of principals such as age, race, and gender appear to have only a small impact on principal retention rates.
7) Certification test results appear to have little impact on principal retention rates.

We must remember that these results are suggestive rather than definitive. Indeed, this study looks at simple relationships between selected factors that may influence the tenure and retention of a principal. More sophisticated analyses that control for a host of other factors need to be undertaken to better understand the influences of certain factors on tenure and retention. Further, this study raises far more questions than it answers. Some of these new questions will be answered in subsequent reports.

Texas High School Project Leadership Initiative Issue Brief 1: Tenure and Retention of Newly Hired Principals in Texas

Introduction

This brief study focuses on the tenure and retention of principals in public schools in Texas. While much attention has been focused on teacher retention over the last decade, there has been almost no discussion of principal retention. This first in a series of short papers will shed light on the tenure and retention of Texas principals using state databases on educator employment, educator demographics, school characteristics and location, and principal certification. The primary focus of this study is on principals new to a school and principals new to the profession.

Why Does Principal Retention Matter?

With the introduction of improved research designs and statistical methods, a growing body of empirical evidence demonstrates that principals have an important impact on schools, teachers, and student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Prestine & Nelson, 2005). Specifically, research has found that principals indirectly influence student achievement through several key "avenues of influence:" people, purposes and goals of the school, structure of the school and social networks, and organizational culture (Hallinger & Heck, 1996, p.171).

First, principal and teacher retention are inextricably lined. Schools with high levels of principal retention tend to have higher levels of teacher retention. A small body of research has shown that low teacher retention can have serious negative financial and educational impacts on schools (Baker, Young, Fuller, 2007; Levy, Fields, & Jablonski, 2007)..

Second, any school reform effort is reliant on the efforts of a principal to create a common school vision that focuses on implementing the reform effort over multiple years (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Heck & Hallinger, 1999; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Creating such visions and thoroughly integrating reform efforts into the culture of a school takes a sustained effort. Such efforts are clearly derailed with the turnover of a principal. The available evidence, in fact, suggests that principals must be in place five years for the full implementation of a large-scale change effort (Fullan, 1991; McAdams, 1997).

Third, as with teacher turnover, there are financial costs to principal turnover. Not only does a school district have to spend resources on recruiting, hiring, and training a new principal, but the district's investment in building the capacity of the principal is lost This direct cost is in addition to the costs associated with greater teacher turnover and the associated lower student achievement.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to examine the tenure and retention of newly hired principals in Texas public schools. Moreover, this paper aims to examine some of the factors that are associated with principal tenure and retention.

Data

This study relied on state administrative data sets purchased from the Texas Education Agency. The data included information on the principal employed in each Texas public school from 1995 through 2008. Further, the data sets included the personal characteristics of each principal such as race/ethnicity, age, gender, and state principal certification test score.

In addition, the following school-level information was downloaded from the TEA website:

- Student demographics;
- School size;
- Student achievement on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS);
- School level;
- Accountability rating; and,
- Geographic location of the school employing the principal.

The employment data was used to determine whether a principal was new to a school. This was accomplished by comparing whether the principal in a school in Year X was employed in the same school in Year X-1. A follow-up study will focus on those individuals employed as a principal for the first time.

Because this study focused on retention rates, only newly hired principals in the years 2006 through 2008 were included in the analysis. Across these years, there were a total of 16, 544 newly hired principals. This was an average of 1,504 newly hired principals in Texas public schools.

Methodology

This preliminary analysis employed only descriptive statistics. Thus, it is important to note that these results are suggestive rather than definitive. Indeed, this study looks at simple relationships between selected factors that may influence the tenure and retention of a principal. More sophisticated analyses that control for a host of other factors need to be undertaken to better understand the influences of certain factors on tenure and retention. Further, this study raises far more questions than it answers. Some of these new questions will be answered in subsequent reports.

Principal Tenure

Principal tenure is difficult to measure unless there is a longitudinal database that includes employment records over multiple decades. This study relied on fourteen years of employment data from 1995 through 2008. In focusing on principals new to a school, the longest tenure to be examined is the 13 years from 1996 to 2008.

School Level: 1996-2008

This initial analysis examined the 1996 cohort of newly hired principals and followed them through 2008. Because the number of years employed had a maximum of 13, the calculated tenure is lower than the actual tenure rate if data was available for a longer period of time.

As shown in Table 1, the average tenure from 1996 through 2008 was almost five years for elementary school principals and about 3.8 years for high school principals. Further, the length of tenure decreases as the school level increases.

Table 1: Principal Tenure by School Level: 1996 - 2008

School Level	Tenure
Elem Schools	4.96
Middle Schools	4.48
High Schools	3.83
Both Elem / Sec Schools	3.95
Total	4.51

School Level: Ten Year Cohorts

For the four cohorts of principals who could stay at the same school for up to 10 years, the same pattern emerges with respect to school level—elementary school principals had the longest average tenure (4.99 years) while high school principals had the lowest average tenure (3.84 years). Schools designated as both elementary and secondary schools have the lowest tenure overall at 3.71 years, but a large proportion of these schools are special schools such as juvenile detention centers and alternative placement settings.

Table 2: Principal Tenure Over One Decade
by School Level: Cohorts 1996 through 1999

School Level	Tenure
Elem Schools	4.99
Middle Schools	4.18
High Schools	3.84
Both Elem / Sec Schools	3.71
Total	4.47

Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged Students

As shown in Table 3, low-poverty schools had greater average principal tenure rates than high-poverty schools. Indeed, the difference was three-quarters of one-year in tenure for elementary and middle schools and at least one year for high schools and both elementary/secondary schools. Strikingly, the tenure of principals in high-poverty high schools

was only slightly longer than three years. Thus, the evidence suggests that the student demographics of a school may impact the length of tenure of a principal.

Table3: Principal Tenure Over One Decade by School Level and Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged Students in the School Cohorts 1996 through 1999

% Students Eco Disadv	School Level			
	Elem School	Middle School	High School	Both El / Sec
00.0-25.0% (Lowest-Poverty)	5.76	4.74	4.34	5.00
25.1-50.0%	4.88	4.20	3.64	3.61
50.1-75.0%	4.67	3.87	3.48	3.33
75.1-100% (Highest-Poverty)	4.97	3.98	3.38	3.67
Total	0.79	0.77	0.97	1.33

School Achievement

As shown in Table 4, principal tenure was substantially greater in the highest performing schools as compared to the lowest performing schools at the elementary and middle school level. The differences, in fact, were greater than one full year. Unlike at the lower school levels, there was almost no difference between the highest- and lowest-performing schools. However, there was a difference of just less than one year between higher-performing schools and the lowest performing schools. Evidence from one of our previous studies suggests that principals of the highest-performing schools often take positions as associate superintendents or other central office positions. In contrast, our previous study suggested that principals of the lowest performing schools often returned to the assistant principalship or left the field of education altogether. Thus, while the tenure rates of principals at the lowest- and highest-performing high schools were roughly equal, the evidence suggests that the causes of the relatively low tenure rates are different. In sum, the initial levels of student achievement at a school appeared to influence the tenure of principals, especially at the extremes of performance.

Table 4: Principal Tenure Over One Decade by School Level and Quintiles of School Achievement on TAAS (Cohorts 1996 through 1999)

Quintiles of TAAS Performance	School Level		
	Elem School	Middle School	High School
Lowest performing	4.30	3.31	3.26
Low Performing	5.04	3.71	3.53
Average	4.75	4.31	3.88
High Performing	4.99	4.49	4.02
Highest Performing	5.67	4.64	3.43
Total	1.37	1.33	0.18

Age

As shown in Table 5, younger and older principals have shorter tenures than other principals. The shortest tenures are for principals less than 30 years old. Although very few newly hired principals are under the age of 30, the evidence suggests they do not stay at a school for very long periods of time. Newly hired principals between 40 and 44 years of age have the longest tenure. Overall, this suggests that principals older than 35 and younger than 55 have longer tenure rates than other principals.

Table 5: Principal Tenure Over One Decade
by School Level and Age Range
Cohorts 1996 through 1999

Age Range	School Level		
	Elem School	Middle School	High School
< 30	3.25	3.73	2.00
30-34	4.64	3.62	3.29
35-39	4.74	4.01	3.75
40-44	5.16	4.30	4.44
45-49	4.95	4.23	3.94
50-54	4.84	4.16	3.45
55-59	4.23	3.61	3.44
60+	4.02	3.14	3.00
Total	4.83	4.09	3.76

Race/Ethnicity

As shown in Table 6, there were only slight differences in tenure across the three racial/ethnic categories included in the analysis. The largest difference--.44 years--was at the high school level between African American and Hispanic principals. Overall, principal race/ethnicity did not appear to substantially influence tenure.

Table 6: Principal Tenure Over One Decade
by School Level and Race/Ethnicity
Cohorts 1996 through 1999

Race/ Ethnicity	School Level		
	Elem School	Middle School	High School
African American	4.92	4.02	3.90
Hispanic/Latino	4.68	4.00	3.46
White	4.87	4.12	3.79
Total	4.83	4.09	3.76

Gender

As shown in Table 7, female principals had longer retention rates at the elementary school level, just slightly longer retention rates at the middle school level, and slightly shorter retention rates at the high school level. Thus, only at the elementary school level did gender appear to have a strong influence on retention.

Table 8: Principal Tenure Over One Decade
by School Level and Gender
Cohorts 1996 through 1999

Gender	School Level		
	Elem School	Middle School	High School
Male	4.40	4.03	3.79
Female	5.04	4.18	3.68
Total	4.83	4.09	3.76

Principal Retention

In these analyses, retention is determined by whether or not an individual returned to the same school. The one-year retention examines the percentage of principals who returned to the same school the second year. The three-year retention rate measures the percentage who returned for their third year, while the five-year retention rate measures the percentage that remained at the same school for five consecutive years. Finally, the ten-year retention rate measures the percentage of principals who remained at the same school for ten consecutive years.

School Level

As shown in Table 8, a relatively low percentage of principals return tom the same school—even after just one year. At the elementary level, 85% return after the first year, but only about 46% are at the same school for five consecutive years and just 16% continue for 10 consecutive years. At the middle school level, less than 80% return to the same school after one year and only 37% remain at the same school for five consecutive years. Over a ten year period, only 11% remain for all years. At the high school level about 76% return after one year and just 57% stay for three consecutive years. By the fifth year, only 30% still remain at the same schools and just 9% stay for an entire decade. Thus, the school level appeared to heavily influence the retention rates of principals.

Table 8: Principal Retention by School Level

School Level	One Year	Three Year	Five Year	Ten Year
Elem Schools	84.6%	69.9%	45.9%	16.1%
Middle Schools	78.8%	61.5%	36.5%	11.3%
High Schools	75.8%	56.8%	30.5%	9.2%
Both Elem / Sec Schools	66.5%	46.0%	27.7%	11.2%
Total	80.3%	63.7%	39.4%	13.2%

Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged Students

As shown in Table 9, the retention rates for all years were greater in low-poverty schools than in high-poverty schools for all school levels. Some striking results from this analysis are the low retention rates of principals in all schools, regardless of poverty status, and the low retention rates of principals in high-poverty secondary schools. Only one-third of middle school principals and just more than one-quarter of high school principals in high-poverty schools remained at the same school for five years. As with tenure, the student demographics of a school appeared to heavily influence the retention rates of principals at all school levels.

Table 9: Principal Retention Rates by School Level and Percentage of Economically Disadvantaged Students

Quartiles of the Percent of Econ Disadv Students	One Year	Three Year	Five Year	Ten Year
Elementary Schools				
00.0-25.0% (Low-Poverty)	88.9%	79.1%	54.5%	23.2%
75.1-100% (High-Poverty)	84.0%	67.6%	45.6%	14.2%
Diff: LP - HP	5.0	11.5	8.9	9.0
Middle Schools				
00.0-25.0% (Low-Poverty)	81.4%	67.3%	43.3%	14.2%
75.1-100% (High-Poverty)	76.5%	58.9%	32.2%	8.4%
Diff: LP - HP	4.9	8.4	11.1	5.8
High Schools				
00.0-25.0% (Low-Poverty)	77.2%	62.6%	36.0%	14.8%
75.1-100% (High-Poverty)	74.0%	52.0%	27.0%	5.0%
Diff: LP - HP	3.1	10.6	9.0	9.8
Both Elementary / Secondary Schools				
00.0-25.0% (Low-Poverty)	68.8%	51.9%	32.4%	17.1%
75.1-100% (High-Poverty)	60.2%	37.7%	22.7%	12.8%
Diff: LP - HP	8.5	14.2	9.7	4.3
All Schools				
00.0-25.0% (Low-Poverty)	82.3%	69.5%	44.5%	17.9%
75.1-100% (High-Poverty)	80.3%	62.9%	40.6%	12.5%
Diff: LP - HP	1.9	6.6	3.9	5.4

School Achievement

As shown in Table 10, principal retention was much greater in the highest performing schools than in the lowest performing schools. The differences in the three- and five-year retention rates were greater than 15 percentage points. In fact, after just one year, nearly 20% of the principals in the lowest performing schools returned to the same school compared to nearly 90% for the highest-performing schools.

Table 10a: Elementary School Principal Retention Rates by School Achievement Level in Principal's First Year

School Achievement	One Year	Three Year	Five Year	Ten Year
Lowest Performing	81.1%	63.2%	38.7%	9.5%
Low Performing	85.1%	69.2%	43.9%	19.1%
Average Performing	85.4%	70.8%	46.7%	15.1%
High Performing	86.8%	73.6%	48.2%	18.8%
Highest Performing	88.5%	79.0%	56.4%	23.0%
Total	7.4	15.8	17.7	13.4

One might argue that turnover should be greater in the lowest performing schools precisely because performance is low. However, the analysis in Table 10b examines principal three-year retention rates in low-performing schools by the gains in student achievement made by those schools over the next three years. Schools were divided into quintiles based on the change in their relative ranking of the percentage of students passing all TAKS tests. If retention was based primarily on school performance, then we would expect principals in schools with the greatest gains in performance to have greater retention rates than principals in schools with the lowest gains in performance. However, as shown in Table 10b, retention rates were no greater in schools with the greatest gains in student achievement than in the schools with the lowest gains in student achievement. This suggests that performance over time is not necessarily the primary driver of attrition. Further research in this area is needed to make a more definitive conclusion.

Table 10a: Elementary School Principal Retention Rates by School Achievement Level in Principal's First Year

Performance Level	% Same School
Lowest Performing: Gains	69.7%
Lower Performing: Gains	73.5%
Average Performing: Gains	73.0%
Higher Performing: Gains	71.5%
Highest Performing: Gains	67.3%
All Schools	71.0%

As at the elementary school level, principal retention at the middle school level was also much greater in the highest performing schools than in the lowest performing schools as shown in Table 11. Importantly, only about one-quarter of the principals in the lowest performing schools remained for the full five years as compared to over 40% for principals in the higher and highest performing schools.

Table 11: Middle School Principal Retention Rates by School Achievement Level in Principal's First Year

School Achievement	One Year	Three Year	Five Year	Ten Year
Lowest Performing	73.5%	53.9%	26.3%	3.9%
Low Performing	80.0%	59.1%	33.4%	6.7%
Average Performing	79.9%	62.6%	37.2%	13.4%
High Performing	82.2%	67.4%	45.6%	16.2%
Highest Performing	81.6%	66.1%	42.0%	14.6%
Total	8.1	12.3	15.7	10.7

Finally, as shown in Table 12, the retention rate for principals in schools at all performance levels was low. Specifically, the greatest three-year retention rate was 61% while the greatest five-year rate was only 33%. While there were differences in the retention rates between the highest- and lowest-performing schools, the differences were relatively small compared to those at the elementary and middle school level.

Table 12: High School Principal Retention Rates by School Achievement Level in Principal's First Year

School Achievement	One Year	Three Year	Five Year	Ten Year
Lowest Performing	74.5%	50.7%	23.6%	5.2%
Low Performing	79.2%	55.6%	30.0%	4.5%
Average Performing	77.5%	60.6%	30.1%	9.1%
High Performing	79.2%	60.3%	33.0%	11.8%
Highest Performing	80.1%	59.6%	30.7%	6.3%
Total	5.5	8.9	7.1	1.1

Overall, the initial level of student achievement at a school strongly influenced the retention of principals, especially at the extremes of performance. Specifically, newly hired principals in the lowest performing schools had far lower retention rates than those starting in the highest performing schools.

Age

As shown in Table 14, principals between the ages of 35 and 49 tend to have greater school retention rates than principals of other ages. This is particularly true at the middle and high school levels. However, outside of those less than 30 years old and those greater than 60 years old, the retention rates were not drastically different. Hus, outside of the extreme ages, age did not appear to strongly influence retention.

Table 14: Principal Retention Rates by School Level and Age Range of Principal

Age Range	One Year	Three Year	Five Year	Ten Year
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS				
< 30	72.9%	65.2%	42.9%	8.3%
30-34	83.3%	66.3%	36.6%	15.8%
35-39	85.6%	70.1%	45.1%	13.7%
40-44	87.1%	72.2%	51.0%	21.4%
45-49	87.1%	74.4%	49.1%	16.1%
50-54	84.0%	70.9%	48.5%	17.1%
55-59	80.6%	63.4%	36.4%	6.1%
60+	66.8%	42.6%	22.8%	15.9%
Total	84.6%	69.9%	45.9%	16.1%
MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
< 30	73.0%	59.4%	21.7%	18.2%
30-34	76.4%	52.4%	26.6%	14.0%
35-39	82.3%	64.6%	38.7%	11.1%
40-44	81.5%	65.9%	42.6%	14.3%
45-49	80.0%	63.8%	37.6%	11.9%
50-54	78.0%	62.4%	35.9%	10.4%
55-59	72.0%	50.3%	28.7%	3.4%
60+	69.4%	52.1%	31.9%	4.5%
Total	78.8%	61.5%	36.5%	11.3%
HIGH SCHOOLS				
< 30	48.5%	27.3%	12.5%	0.0%
30-34	74.3%	55.8%	25.0%	8.9%
35-39	79.1%	58.9%	31.5%	12.7%
40-44	78.2%	61.8%	35.4%	12.8%
45-49	78.3%	58.3%	36.1%	10.9%
50-54	76.0%	56.2%	27.6%	5.8%
55-59	72.5%	53.6%	24.9%	3.0%
60+	56.2%	41.3%	14.1%	11.5%
Total	75.7%	56.8%	30.5%	9.3%

Race/Ethnicity

As shown in Table 15, there were no substantial differences in retention rates by the race/ethnicity of the principal. Hispanic middle school principals did have slightly lower retention rates than White or African American principals, but the differences were not very large. Thus, the evidence suggests that the race/ethnicity of a principal did not influence the retention of principals at any school level.

Table 15: Principal Retention Rates by School Level and Race/Ethnicity of Principal

Race/Ethnicity	One Year	Three Year	Five Year	Ten Year
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS				
African American	82.1%	65.5%	43.4%	12.8%
Hispanic	85.5%	68.8%	44.7%	12.5%
White	84.7%	71.2%	46.7%	17.7%
Total	84.6%	69.9%	45.9%	16.1%
MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
African American	77.8%	61.7%	37.5%	15.4%
Hispanic	75.3%	58.2%	33.7%	8.7%
White	80.0%	62.3%	37.1%	11.4%
Total	78.8%	61.5%	36.5%	11.3%
HIGH SCHOOLS				
African American	71.8%	53.4%	29.0%	11.1%
Hispanic	76.0%	54.0%	26.3%	6.9%
White	76.3%	57.7%	31.5%	9.4%
Total	75.8%	56.8%	30.5%	9.2%

Gender

As shown in Table 16, at the elementary school level, female principals had greater retention rates than male principals. Indeed, the retention rate for female principals after five years was a full ten percentage points greater than for male principals. At the middle school level, there were essentially no differences in the retention rates of male and female principals. Thus, only at the elementary school level did gender appear to influence retention.

Table 16: Principal Retention Rates by School Level and Gender of Principal

Gender	One Year	Three Year	Five Year	Ten Year
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS				
Male	82.5%	64.2%	39.2%	12.2%
Female	85.5%	72.6%	49.0%	18.0%
Total	84.6%	69.9%	45.9%	16.1%
MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
Male	78.2%	59.9%	36.5%	10.4%
Female	79.8%	63.8%	36.6%	12.7%
Total	78.8%	61.5%	36.5%	11.3%
HIGH SCHOOLS				
Male	76.9%	57.2%	29.4%	9.6%
Female	72.8%	55.7%	33.3%	8.2%
Total	75.8%	56.8%	30.5%	9.2%

District Type

As shown in Table 17, schools in small town and rural districts had slightly lower principal retention rates than schools in other types of districts. Interestingly, there was very little difference in the retention rates between schools in major urban, suburban affluent, suburban poor, and city districts..

Table 17: Elementary School Principal Retention Rate by District Type

District Type	One Year	Three Year	Five Year	Ten Year
Major Urban	88.1%	71.0%	45.7%	10.0%
Sub: Affluent/White	89.0%	76.8%	52.0%	20.5%
Sub: Poor/Minority	86.9%	72.7%	50.4%	17.1%
City/City Fringe	86.6%	74.7%	50.0%	18.4%
Small Town	82.1%	67.7%	40.1%	17.5%
Rural	77.9%	60.3%	37.7%	14.5%
Total	84.6%	70.0%	45.9%	16.1%

As shown in Table 18, suburban schools—whether in affluent and white districts or poor and minority districts—had slightly greater principal retention rates than schools in other types of districts. Alternatively, schools in small town and rural districts had slightly lower principal retention rates than schools in other types of districts.

Table 18: Middle School Principal Retention Rate by District Type

District Type	One Year	Three Year	Five Year	Ten Year
Major Urban	81.0%	61.7%	32.6%	7.2%
Sub: Affluent/White	84.0%	66.6%	40.3%	12.2%
Sub: Poor/Minority	81.1%	68.0%	40.7%	12.3%
City/City Fringe	82.2%	64.1%	38.0%	12.0%
Small Town	77.0%	56.7%	36.6%	13.5%
Rural	72.0%	54.2%	31.4%	10.6%
Total	78.9%	78.9%	36.5%	11.3%

While principal retention was relatively low for all schools, there were some slight differences in the high school principal retention rates by the type of district the school was located in as shown in Table 19. Across all years of retention, schools in affluent/White suburban districts had slightly greater retention rates than schools in other types of districts. While slightly lower than schools in the affluent / White suburban districts, schools in city and major urban districts also had relatively high retention rates. Schools in rural districts had the lowest retention rates except for charter schools. Charter schools--located primarily in the Dallas/Fort Worth, Houston, and San Antonio metro area—had extremely low retention rates. Indeed, only 50% of the principals returned after one year and only 36% after five years. While poor reporting on employment is one cause of this low retention rate, teacher retention is lower in charter schools as well which suggests something systemic in charter schools that affects employee retention.

Table 19: High School Principal Retention Rate by District Type

District Type	One Year	Three Year	Five Year	Ten Year
Major Urban	80.3%	63.3%	33.9%	10.1%
Sub: Affluent/White	81.6%	65.8%	39.0%	14.6%
Sub: Poor/Minority	76.5%	56.3%	33.2%	11.8%
City/City Fringe	81.8%	67.1%	37.3%	11.4%
Small Town	77.1%	55.0%	28.0%	6.8%
Rural	73.6%	52.5%	25.3%	6.9%
Charter	51.0%	36.4%	22.9%	0.0%
Total	75.9%	57.0%	30.5%	9.2%

Overall, the results suggest that newly hired principals in rural and small town districts have slightly lower retention rates while principals in affluent/White suburban districts have slightly greater retention rates.

Principal Certification Scores

As shown in Table 20, principals with a certification score in the top quintile of test-takers had greater retention rates through five years at the elementary school level. The differences at the middle and high school levels were relatively small, but did favor principals in the top quintile through three years at the middle school level and principals in the bottom quintile after three years at the middle school level. There may be other variables related to principal certification scores that influence retention. For example, those with higher certification scores may be more ambitious about "moving up the career ladder" into central office positions or may be more likely to be selected to take over low-performing schools or for central office positions than principals with lower certification scores. Thus, interpreting the impact of individuals' certification scores is difficult.

Table 20: Principal Retention Rates by School Level and Initial Principal Certification Test Score of Principal

Certification Score Result (First Score)	One Year	Three Year	Five Year	Ten Year
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS				
Bottom Quintile	83.9%	66.3%	45.7%	17.5%
Middle Three Quintiles	85.8%	71.8%	46.6%	18.0%
Top Quintile	87.0%	74.1%	50.4%	16.0%
DIFF: Top - Bottom	3.1	7.8	4.7	-1.4
MIDDLE SCHOOLS				
Bottom Quintile	79.3%	63.9%	38.8%	13.8%
Middle Three Quintiles	79.3%	60.7%	35.8%	11.8%
Top Quintile	82.5%	66.1%	36.3%	10.7%
DIFF: Top - Bottom	3.2	2.3	-2.5	-3.1
HIGH SCHOOLS				
Bottom Quintile	76.6%	57.1%	31.1%	12.2%
Middle Three Quintiles	78.7%	60.4%	31.5%	8.8%
Top Quintile	77.9%	57.0%	32.5%	8.3%
DIFF: Top - Bottom	1.3	-0.1	1.4	-3.8

Conclusions

Having stability in the principalship is a key component in enacting effective school reforms. Yet, far too little attention has been focused on the issue of principal retention. This brief analysis provides some empirical data on the tenure and retention of principals.

The above analyses suggest seven major findings:

1) Principal tenure and retention rates vary dramatically across school levels, with elementary schools having the longest tenure and greatest retention rates and high schools having the shortest and lowest retention rates.

2) High school retention rates are strikingly low for all schools—just over 50% of newly hired principals stay for three years and less than 30% stay for five years.

3) Principal retention rates are heavily influenced by the level of student achievement in the principal's first year of employment, with the lowest achieving schools having the shortest tenure and lowest retention rates and the high achieving schools having the longest tenure and highest retention rates.

4) The percentage of economically disadvantaged students in a school also has a strong influence on principal tenure and retention rates, with high-poverty schools having shorter tenure and lower retention rates than low-poverty schools.

5) Principal retention is somewhat lower in schools in rural and small town districts and somewhat greater in suburban districts whose students tend to be White and not economically disadvantaged.
6) The personal characteristics of principals such as age, race, and gender appear to have only a small impact on principal retention rates.

7) A principal's certification test results appear to have little impact on principal retention rates.

It is important to note that most of the principals who leave a school actually leave the principalship altogether. In fact, about 90% of those leaving a school actually leave the principalship. Thus, this problem is not simply one of principals moving from one school to another, but rather a massive number and percentage of principals leaving the profession altogether. Moreover, most will never return to the principalship. This is important because it means we have a constant revolving door of new principals who have not had the opportunity to hone their skills and become experts at school leadership. This simply makes turnover even more likely, thus creating a vicious cycle of turnover and inexperience.

While informative, this short study leaves many questions unanswered and fails to control for other factors when examining the impact of a particular factor on principal tenure and retention. Subsequent studies will address these short comings and provide further information on principal tenure and retention.

Discussion

Given our other research that suggests principal stability is positively associated with decreases in teacher attrition, increases in teacher quality, and increases in student achievement, the high turnover rates of principals is troubling. This is particularly true of high-poverty, high-minority and low-performing schools most in need of leadership and teacher stability. State and district policies makers certainly need to focus much greater attention on this issue if they want to improve schooling outcomes for all students and close the achievement gap.

Unfortunately, this research raises far, far more questions than it answers. We need to better understand the factors associated with principal turnover, examine more carefully the patterns of employment after leaving the principalship, and undertake survey and qualitative studies that ascertain the reasons principals provide for leaving a school.

Our other research and discussions with current and former principals does provide some anecdotal information about why turnover is so great. In general, we believe there are four primary factors related to the overall issue of principal turnover:

1) *Accountability Pressures*

Our anecdotal evidence suggests that the accountability pressures placed on school principals to quickly and dramatically raise student achievement has a profound effect on the stress felt by principals. Principals often feel like they are asked to do the impossible without the tools and time necessary to do the job well.

2) *Complexity and Intensity of the Job*

Even apart from accountability pressures, the job of school principal has become incredibly complex, difficult, intense, and extremely stressful. In Texas, schools are rapidly becoming larger and more diverse as well as enrolling a greater percentage of economically disadvantaged students and students whose primary language is not English. All of these factors make the job of school leadership more complex and difficult. Moreover, principals are now expected to be business managers, instructional leaders, community engagement experts, data analysts, and even marketers for the school. Principals, thus, are expected to be proficient in a far greater number of roles than in the past. Yet, the job is still structured the same and the level of support is no different than 10, 20, or even 50 years ago.

3) *Lack of Support from Central Office*

A number of former principals we have spoken with—especially those in urban districts—express dissatisfaction with central office personnel. In particular, former principals often cite excessive interference from central office staff, lack of autonomy to run the school as they see fit, lack of resources necessary to effectively run the school, and lack of mentoring and support as reasons many principals leave a school.

4) *Compensation*

As with teachers, principals also appear to be influenced by compensation. This is particularly true when principals do not make substantially more money than an experienced teacher. In such cases, the monetary benefits of becoming a principal simply do not outweigh the additional time commitments and stress of being a principal.

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