A Study of Work Practices in Tasmanian Government Schools

Final report to the Australian Education Union – Tasmanian Branch

Education Policy and Practice

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1 PRINCIPALS

1.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at the workload of principals and assistant principals at primary, secondary, combined and specialist schools. The chapter first considers demographics before looking at the average hours worked and the proportion of time spent on different tasks. The chapter closes with a consideration of ways to manage principal workload, and the extent to which principals feel supported in their role.

1.2 Demographics

Staff employed as principals are most commonly in the role of Principal or Assistant principal at a primary school, as presented in Table 1.1. Two-thirds of principals responding to the survey are at primary schools, as are one-third of assistant principals.

Table 1.1   Percentage of principal and assistant principal respondents by school type

School type	Principal (%)	Assistant principal (%)
Campus	-.-	-.-
Primary school (K-6)	66.7	34.0
Secondary school (7-10)	4.4	24.7
Secondary school (11-12)	8.1	10.0
District school (K-10)	5.2	-.-
District school (K-12)	5.2	8.7
Secondary college (11-12)	4.4	13.3
Non-school based	-.-	-.-
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Notes: Cells with 5 or fewer respondents are not shown. Colleges are included with Secondary schools.

Overall, close to three-quarters of survey respondents (74%) are female, with smaller percentages at secondary level (see Table 1.2). This can be contrasted with teachers of whom 79 per cent are female (refer to **Error! Reference source not found.**). Male principals and assistant principals are younger on average, by more than five years overall. In primary schools, male principals are on average close to eight years younger than female principals.

Table 1.2   Percentage of principals and assistant principals by gender and average age, by school type

	Percentage of respondents		Average age	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (years)	Female (years)
Primary	17.7	82.3	43.9	51.5
Secondary	34.7	65.3	46.6	50.5
Primary and secondary	35.9	64.1	44.4	47.5
Specialist/support	25.0	75.0	-.-	51.9
Total	**26.3**	**73.7**	**45.3**	**50.8**

Notes: Cells with 5 or fewer respondents are not shown. Colleges are included with Secondary schools.

The percentages of assistant principals and principals differ by school level due mainly to the size of schools at each level, and this is reflected in the percentages of survey respondents shown in Table 1.3. Primary schools are generally smaller than secondary

schools and are more likely to have just one assistant principal. Secondary schools are larger and often have more than one assistant principal. In this instance 75 per cent of respondents in secondary schools (including colleges) are assistant principals.

Table 1.3   Percentage of principal and assistant principal respondents by school type

School type	Principal (%)	Assistant principal (%)
Primary	63.6	36.4
Secondary	25.5	74.5
Primary and secondary	41.7	58.3
Specialist/support	54.5	45.5
Total	47.4	52.6

Note: Colleges are included with Secondary schools.

The Staff in Australia's Schools (SiAS) survey undertaken in 2010 noted that, nationally, there were more males than females in leadership positions with the exception of assistant principals at primary level (62%). By the 2013 survey, males were only in the majority as principals of secondary schools (58%).[1] The proportions represented in this survey differ greatly. There is a balance of about half and half in secondary schools among principals, as shown in Table 1.4, but only 30 per cent of assistant principals in secondary schools are male, as shown in Table 1.5. At primary level, 18 per cent of principals and assistant principals are male.

Table 1.4   Percentage and average age of principals by gender and school type

	Percentage of respondents		Average age	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (years)	Female (years)
Primary	18.0	82.0	44.6	51.5
Secondary	48.0	52.0	52.2	55.4
Primary and secondary	60.0	40.0	46.3	47.2
Specialist/support	16.7	83.3	43.0	53.6
Total	28.1	71.9	47.3	51.9

Note: Colleges are included with Secondary schools.

National figures from the SiAS survey for 2013 indicated that the average age of male leaders in primary schools was 51 and females at 50.5, while for secondary, males averaged 51.4 years and females 51.7 years.[2] Table 1.4 and Table 1.5 show that for both principals and assistant principals, at all school types, females are older on average than males, overall by more than four years. Assistant principals are younger than principals by four years among males and two years among females. Overall average ages for female school leaders are similar to the national averages in SiAS.

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[1] McKenzie, et al (2014), Table 3.10.

[2] McKenzie, et al (2014), Table 3.5.

Table 1.5   Percentage and average age of assistant principals by gender and school type

	Percentage of respondents		Average age	
	Male (%)	Female (%)	Male (years)	Female (years)
Primary	17.6	82.4	42.7	51.4
Secondary	30.1	69.9	43.2	49.3
Primary and secondary	19.0	81.0	41.8	46.8
Specialist/support	40.0	60.0	49.0	48.0
Total	24.7	75.3	43.2	49.7

Note: Colleges are included with Secondary schools.

1.3   Workload

Principals were asked about the number of hours they worked on average per weekday and per weekend in term time and during the holidays. Table 1.6 shows that, during terms, principals work 10.4 hours per weekday during term time and 3.5 hours per day over the weekend, and assistant principals work 9.9 hours per weekday during term time and 2.3 hours per day over the weekend. Using these figures to calculate weekly hours, principals work approximately 59 hours per week during term time and assistant principals work 55 hours.

During school holidays principals worked five hours per weekday on average and 1.4 hours per day on weekends, for a total of 28 hours per week on average. Assistant principals work 25 hours during school holidays.

Table 1.6   Average hours worked per day by principal type

	Average hours per weekday		Average hours per day, weekends	
Principal type	School term	School holiday	School term	School holiday
Principal	10.4	5.1	3.5	1.4
Assistant principal	9.9	4.5	2.3	1.2

Table 1.7 provides additional disaggregation of average hours by school level, for primary and secondary schools.[3] Principals recorded slightly higher average hours than did assistant principals. Similarly, secondary staff recorded slightly higher average hours than primary staff and again differences are small. The average weekly hours calculated from these figures, of 57-58 hours, are similar to those recorded in the SiAS 2013 survey, of 57 hours at primary level and 58.5 hours at secondary level.[4]

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[3] Combined school and special school respondents were not included in the data analysed for Table 1.7.

[4] McKenzie, et al (2014), Table 5.11.

Table 1.7   Average hours worked per day by school principals and assistant principals, by school level

	Principal		Assistant principal	
	Primary	**Secondary**	**Primary**	**Secondary**
Hours per day: school term	10.3	10.6	9.9	9.9
Hours per day (weekend): school term	5.2	5.1	4.1	4.6
Hours per day: school holidays	3.7	2.9	2.2	2.4
Hours per day (weekend): school holidays	1.3	1.7	1.0	1.3

Notes: Too few respondents in Primary and secondary schools and Specialist schools to include in table. Colleges are included with Secondary schools.

Principals were also asked about hours spent on all school-related activities in the previous week (Monday to Sunday). The average of responses for those who worked full-time, shown in Table 1.8, are slightly higher than those calculated from the average daily hours (see previous paragraphs), with principals in primary, secondary and combined schools recording averages of 59-60 hours.

Table 1.8   Average hours worked in the previous week by full-time principals and assistant principals, by school type

School type	Principal	Assistant principal
Primary	59.8	53.2
Secondary	60.5	55.1
Primary and secondary	59.1	55.9
Specialist/support	56.0	55.2
Total	59.7	54.6

Note: Colleges are included with Secondary schools.

The principal health and wellbeing survey (Riley, 2014) presented data on the percentages of principals working within five-hour bands of weekly hours. The 2014 data were compared with the Victorian AEU data (2016) and are compared with the current survey, which asked Principals for details of a specific week (the previous week). Riley (2014) reported that 50 per cent of principals were working over 55 hours per week on average.[5] The current survey indicates that 56 per cent of principals had worked over 55 hours in the previous week (see Table 1.9).

[5] Riley (2014), Table 16.

Table 1.9   Principals' hours worked in the previous week, compared to average hours per week from Riley (2014) and Victorian AEU survey (2016)

Hours per week	Riley (2014) (%)	Victorian AEU (2016) (%)	Tasmanian AEU (2017) (%)
Less than 25	0.7	1.1	2.0
25-30	0.4	0.4	0.3
31-35	0.6	0.2	0.7
36-40	1.9	1.3	1.7
41-45	5.3	2.9	6.5
46-50	16.2	11.9	17.0
51-55	24.3	19.3	16.0
56-60	24.5	28.3	17.3
61-65	12.4	14.5	12.9
66-70	9.2	10.1	8.5
More than 70	4.4	10.0	17.0
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Principals were also asked to indicate what proportion of their time was spent on different tasks. Table 1.10 provides results for principals and assistant principals in primary, secondary and combined schools.

Three tasks—administrative tasks, curriculum and teaching-related tasks, and working with students and parents—were most frequently cited by both principals and assistant principals, in all schools, each taking up about one-quarter of their work time. Principals more frequently than assistant principals represented the school, spoke with the public and raised funds for the school.

Table 1.10   Distribution of administrative tasks, by principal type and school type

	Principal			Assistant principal		
Tasks	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Primary and secondary (%)	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Primary and secondary (%)
Internal administrative tasks	**27.7**	**26.3**	22.9	24.9	29.4	26.3
Curriculum and teaching-related tasks	19.0	28.4	18.2	30.6	25.8	28.4
Compliance requirements	12.4	9.4	14.8	5.9	8.5	9.4
Representing the school	7.2	5.2	8.0	5.9	5.0	5.2
Public relations and fundraising	3.3	0.5	4.6	1.1	1.8	0.5
Occupational health and safety compliance	3.6	0.8	3.7	0.9	1.3	0.8
Grounds and maintenance	2.9	0.2	3.5	0.6	0.4	0.2
Working with students and parents	22.1	26.1	19.3	28.7	25.3	26.1
Other tasks	1.8	3.2	5.1	1.4	2.4	3.2

Notes: Principals were asked to ensure the sum of the tasks was 100%. Columns do not sum to 100% due to rounding.
Colleges are included with Secondary schools.

1.4   Perceptions of workload

Principals and assistant principals were asked some general questions about their workload, some questions about specific aspects of their workload, and some questions about health and wellbeing. Results for principals and assistant principals in primary, secondary and combined schools are presented in Table 1.11.

20 per cent of principals felt that their workload was often or always manageable. A similar percentage believe they have a good work-life balance, more than 75 per cent look forward to the school day. Only 13 per cent would consider stepping down from their role as a school leader and 16 per cent would consider leaving the teaching profession.

Between one-quarter and one-third of principals indicated that their workload adversely affects their health. Lower proportions of assistant principals were so affected. A slightly higher proportion of primary school principals appear to be struggling with their workload and its consequences.

There are some differences between principals and assistant principals. Greater percentages of primary school and secondary school assistant principals stated that their workload is manageable, and a greater percentage of primary school principals stated that they often consider leaving the teaching profession. However, a much greater percentage of assistant principals spend time leading teaching and learning at their schools than do principals, and this occurs more frequently in primary schools than in secondary schools. Among both principals and assistant principals, the majority of the work day is spent on administration tasks, and more time is spent on compliance requirements.

Table 1.11 Principals' perceptions of workload and workload issues, by principal type and school type

Perceptions	Principal			Assistant principal		
	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Primary and secondary (%)	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Primary and secondary (%)
My workload is manageable	**19.0**	**20.8**	21.4	30.4	25.0	21.1
I have a good balance between home and work	16.7	25.0	21.4	24.4	28.4	15.8
I think about leaving the teaching profession	15.0	21.7	15.4	26.7	19.4	36.8
I think about relinquishing my role as a network or school leader	13.8	12.5	14.3	11.4	16.2	21.1
I look forward to the school day	71.2	79.2	85.7	66.7	63.2	73.7
My workload adversely affects my health	32.9	25.0	38.5	17.4	19.1	26.3
I spend a reasonable amount of time on leading teaching and learning at my school	38.8	33.3	53.8	63.0	48.5	57.9
The majority of my work day is spent managing school administration requirements	**56.2**	**54.2**	69.2	50.0	53.7	63.2
I spend more time than I used to on compliance requirements	**65.0**	**66.7**	84.6	46.7	58.8	57.9
I have enough time to provide necessary professional support for my colleagues	26.2	16.7	30.8	30.4	23.5	21.1

Notes: Figures indicate the percentage of respondents who indicated often or always to each item. Colleges are included with Secondary schools. Specialist/support schools not included due to small numbers.

Principals were also asked about the performance and development process for themselves and their staff. Table 1.12 shows that between 10 and 20 per cent of assistant principals think that their own performance and development process regularly takes up a lot of time, compared to more than 25 per cent of principals. More than one-half of principals and assistant principals think that the performance and development process for staff takes up a lot of time. Nevertheless, more than one-third of both principals and assistant principals believe that the performance and development process improves the way they lead their schools.

Table 1.12   Principals' perceptions of the performance and development process, by principal type and school type

	Principal			Assistant principal		
	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Primary and secondary (%)	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Primary and secondary (%)
My performance and development process/review takes up a lot of time	25.3	29.2	38.5	10.9	19.1	21.1
My performance and development process/review improves the way I lead my school	37.5	37.5	23.1	34.8	30.9	26.3
The staff performance and development process/review takes up a lot of time	55.0	58.3	84.6	52.2	31.8	36.8
The staff performance and development process/review improves staff performance at my school	36.2	29.2	53.8	32.6	23.5	21.1

Notes: Figures indicate the percentage of respondents who indicated often or always to each item. Colleges are included with Secondary schools. Specialist/support schools not included due to small numbers.

1.5   Managing workload

Principals and assistant principals were asked to indicate to what extent they have been able to judge their work on 10 items during the year. Table 1.13 shows the results, based on those who answered 5, 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale where 1 represents 'Not at all' and 7 represents 'To a great extent'. Most items received support from more than one-half of principals and assistant principals, with the highest response for two items relating to school culture: collaboration and high expectations for lifelong learning.

Table 1.13   Principals' and assistant principals' reflections on their work during the year, by principal type and school type

Perceptions of their work	Principal			Assistant principal		
	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Primary and secondary (%)	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Primary and secondary (%)
Lead teaching and learning in your school	61.3	58.3	57.1	71.7	53.8	68.4
Develop or support collaborative school culture	78.5	75.0	85.7	80.4	57.8	73.7
Develop or support a culture of high expectations and life-long learning	75.0	79.2	85.7	73.9	52.3	73.7
Analyse student learning and development with teaching staff	49.4	43.5	64.3	71.7	40.0	52.6
Identify and prioritise areas of learning needs across the school	70.0	58.3	85.7	70.5	52.3	66.7
Take active part in planning and developing curriculum and instruction	52.5	37.5	64.3	69.6	58.5	52.6
Work with staff to identify and strategically resource programs	55.7	50.0	50.0	58.7	46.2	57.9
Design and play an active role in programs to build teacher capacity	46.2	50.0	50.0	68.9	56.9	57.9
Keep up to date with the latest research on student learning	30.0	37.5	28.6	52.2	41.5	57.9
Communicate with parents to support student learning	66.2	58.3	42.9	54.3	53.8	52.6

Notes: Figures indicate the percentage of responses of 5, 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale asking the extent of agreement. Colleges are included with Secondary schools. Specialist/support schools not included due to small numbers.

Table 1.14 presents principals' and assistant principals' suggestions for managing their workloads. the most frequently cited items would enable others, including students, in their roles, such as more specialist staff to work with students and more effective teachers. Simplified compliance requirements and more administrative support were considered important by most principals. Principals and assistant principals were less favourable to greater community involvement in the school.

Table 1.14   Suggestions for managing workload, by principal type and school type

Perceptions	Principal			Assistant principal		
	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Primary and secondary (%)	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Primary and secondary (%)
More administrative support	**65.8**	70.8	76.9	60.0	64.6	52.6
More specialist staff for student wellbeing work	**83.8**	87.5	78.6	89.1	86.4	94.7
More staff at leadership level	**70.0**	66.7	85.7	71.7	63.1	68.4
An increased budget	61.3	66.7	78.6	84.8	71.2	84.2
An increased capacity to attract and retain effective teachers	**86.2**	83.3	92.9	87.0	89.4	89.5
Better access to ICT and school ICT networks	41.2	41.7	64.3	56.5	57.6	73.7
Better facilities	45.0	62.5	71.4	54.3	51.5	73.7
Greater community involvement in the school	33.8	33.3	64.3	43.5	40.9	68.4
More teachers	**67.5**	66.7	78.6	76.1	74.2	68.4
Simplified compliance requirements	**81.2**	83.3	85.7	63.0	69.7	50.0
More teacher assistants	42.5	54.2	57.1	68.9	64.6	66.7
Greater Learning Services or departmental support	53.2	54.2	50.0	48.9	51.5	52.6
Fewer / more strategic departmental communications	53.8	62.5	85.7	47.8	47.0	52.6

Notes: Figures indicate the percentage of responses of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale asking the extent of agreement.
Colleges are included with Secondary schools. Specialist/support schools not included due to small numbers.

Principals were also asked to suggest ways to manage the workload of teachers in their schools. They could indicate manageable, manageable except for short periods and unmanageable most of the time. Table 1.15 shows the proportion who agreed with each suggestion. Most frequently principals and assistant principals cited time for planning and preparation, more specialists and additional staffing in general.

Table 1.15 Principals' suggestions for managing teachers' workload, by principal type and school type

Suggestions	Principal			Assistant principal		
	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Primary and secondary (%)	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Primary and secondary (%)
Transferring routine administrative tasks to support staff	62.8	66.7	64.3	60.0	68.3	63.2
Transferring student wellbeing work to specialist staff	70.5	75.0	61.5	75.6	76.2	77.8
Additional staffing	**78.2**	83.3	92.9	77.8	82.8	84.2
Smaller classes	48.7	33.3	21.4	55.6	58.7	70.6
Less face-to-face teaching time	42.3	62.5	21.4	40.9	42.9	15.8
Better access to ICT and school ICT networks	46.2	41.7	57.1	58.1	48.4	73.7
Creation of more guaranteed time for planning and preparation	**82.1**	70.8	92.9	86.7	85.9	84.2
An overall limit to the length of the working week	47.4	58.3	61.5	60.5	54.0	57.9
Reduced compliance requirements	51.3	75.0	57.1	46.7	53.1	42.1
Transferring routine tasks to support staff	43.6	29.2	42.9	44.4	51.6	52.6
More in-class support for teachers	**78.2**	56.5	78.6	86.7	78.1	94.7
More specialists	**88.5**	75.0	92.9	95.6	85.9	94.7

Notes: Figures indicate the percentage of responses of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale asking the extent of agreement.
Colleges are included with Secondary schools. Specialist/support schools not included due to small numbers.

Principals were asked to what extent they felt supported in their role. Table 1.16 shows that principals and assistant principals feel most supported by their administrative staff and executive team—the people they generally work most closely with—and their teaching staff. Only 24 per cent of primary school principals and 38 per cent of secondary school principals felt supported to a great extent by the Department of Education; assistant principals felt even less supported by the Department.

Table 1.16 Percentage of principals and assistant principals who feel supported in their role, by principal type and school type

	Principal			Assistant principal		
	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Primary and secondary (%)	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Primary and Secondary (%)
By your administrative staff	83.8	83.3	78.6	84.8	88.9	78.9
By your teaching staff	79.7	66.7	78.6	73.9	76.6	63.2
By your leadership team	88.2	87.0	85.7	91.3	82.8	73.7
By other principals	67.5	75.0	64.3	42.4	62.3	53.8
By your learning services	38.0	50.0	50.0	31.8	32.8	27.8
By the Department	23.8	37.5	28.6	20.5	17.7	23.5

Notes: Figures indicate the percentage of responses of 4 or 5 on a 5-point scale asking the extent of agreement.
Colleges are included with Secondary schools. Specialist/support schools not included due to small numbers.