



A descriptive analysis of the principal workforce in Wisconsin





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Summary

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Prepared by

Matthew Clifford
American Institutes for Research

Chris Condon
American Institutes for Research

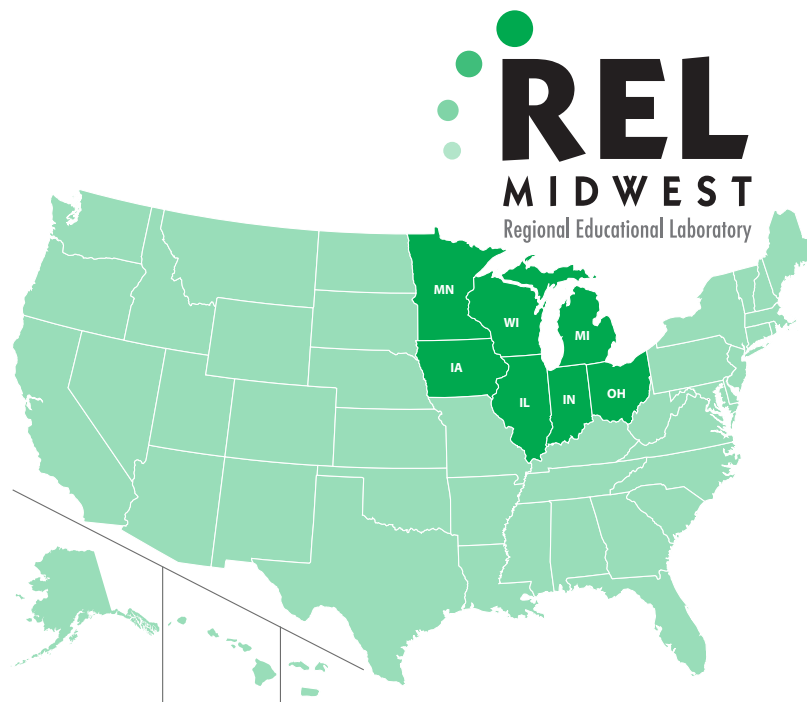
Ariela Greenberg
American Institutes for Research

Ryan Williams
American Institutes for Research

R. Dean Gerdeman
American Institutes for Research

Jenni Fetters
American Institutes for Research

Bruce Baker
Rutgers University



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A descriptive analysis of the principal workforce in Wisconsin

This study describes trends in demographic characteristics and retention rates in the Wisconsin principal workforce between 1999 and 2009. Over the period, the principal workforce remained predominantly White and male, but the share of female and racial/ethnic minority principals rose. Less than half of new principals remained as principals in Wisconsin after eight years.

Researchers and policymakers have devoted more attention to the impact of principals on student achievement and school improvement (Leithwood et al. 2004). National and state policymakers are concerned that the principal workforce is aging, that fewer new principals are joining the workforce, and that fewer female and racial/ethnic minority educators are entering and remaining in the principal workforce (Gates et al. 2006; Jackson and Kelley 2002).

This study responds to a request from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction for information on Wisconsin's school principal workforce population.¹ Descriptive analyses addressed two research questions:

- How do the demographic characteristics of Wisconsin school principals compare with those of Wisconsin teachers, and

how did these characteristics change over 1999–2009?

- How does the eight-year retention rate for a cohort of new Wisconsin principals from 2000 to 2002 compare with the retention rate of returning Wisconsin principals?

Data were gathered for the 11 academic years from 1999 to 2009² from the Wisconsin public school personnel and certification databases. The sample consisted of 1,703 principals and 59,803 teachers in 1999.³ A cross-sectional analysis was used to describe principal and teacher demographic characteristics.

A longitudinal cohort design was used to study the retention of Wisconsin principals for two cohorts: one of new principals who began between 2000 and 2002 and one that included all principals in 1999. The cohort of new principals included 641 principals in their first year (2000–02); the cohort of all principals included 1,339 principals as of 2001.

The following are key findings:

On demographic characteristics

- The majority of Wisconsin principals in 2009 were male, but the percentage of female principals increased 7.1 percentage

points, from 35.5 percent in 1999 to 42.6 percent in 2009.

- The majority of Wisconsin teachers in 2009 were female, and the percentage of female teachers increased 4.1 percentage points, from 69.5 percent in 1999 to 73.6 percent in 2009.
- The majority of Wisconsin principals and teachers in 2009 were White, but the percentage of racial/ethnic minority principals increased 0.7 percentage point, from 6.6 percent in 1999 to 7.3 percent in 2009, and the percentage of racial/ethnic minority teachers increased 0.4 percentage point, from 3.9 percent in 1999 to 4.3 percent in 2009.
- The average age of the Wisconsin principal workforce fell 0.5 year, from 48.6 years in 1999 to 48.1 years in 2009, and the average age of teachers did not change, remaining at 43.0 years.
- The majority of Wisconsin principals in 2009 held a master's degree, and the percentage of principals and teachers who held a master's degree increased from 1999 to 2009. The percentage of principals holding a master's degree increased 2.8 percentage points, from 84.2 percent in 1999 to 87.0 percent in 2009, and the percentage of teachers holding a master's degree increased 13.4 percentage points, from 36.3 percent in 1999 to 49.7 percent in 2009.

On principal retention

- After eight years, 43.7 percent of the new principal cohort and 46.1 percent of the

comparison cohort remained principals. Annual attrition rates for new principals ranged from 9.0 percentage points to 13.4 across the eight years, while annual attrition rates for comparison principals ranged from 8.8 percentage points to 12.0.

Thus, from 1999 to 2009, the workforce of Wisconsin principals remained predominantly male and White, but it became more diverse, with an increase in the share of female and racial/ethnic minority principals. Studies of principals in other states have reported that the percentages of female principals (Papa, Lankford, and Wyckoff 2002; RAND 2004) and racial/ethnic minority principals (Black, Bathon, and Poindexter 2007) have increased over time. The average age of principals decreased by 0.5 year, a finding that differs from research by Papa, Lankford, and Wyckoff (2002) and Gates et al. (2003), which reported increases over time in average principal age in New York and nationally. The share of principals who hold a master's degree increased, consistent with research in other states (Gates et al. 2006). Changes in Wisconsin teacher workforce demographics from 1999 to 2009 indicate trends parallel to those in the principal workforce, with increases in the share of female teachers, racial/ethnic minority teachers, and teachers holding a master's degree.

The cohort of new principals exhibited retention and attrition rates similar to those of the comparison cohort. The range of annual attrition rates observed in this study is less than the range reported in other states, which varied between 12 and 20 percent (Battle and Gruber 2010).

The findings from this study can help Wisconsin educators and policymakers better understand the principal workforce in the state and inform policy discussions on certification, training, and initiatives targeting workforce diversity and retention. Future research could include a thorough analysis of the career pathways of Wisconsin principals based on the initial results of this study.

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Notes

1. The report defines “principal” as a K–12 public school principal in the Wisconsin school system.
2. This report refers to academic years by the year in which the school year under consideration begins (for example, 1999 for the 1999/2000 academic year).
3. To obtain a comparable number of years across the two cohorts, data from the 1999 all-principal comparison cohort are reported beginning in 2001 for principals who remained in the cohort.

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