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The Maine Principal Study: Stability and Change Among Maine Principals, 1997-2001

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Occasional Paper No. 42

**The Maine Principal Study:
Stability and Change Among
Maine Principals, 1997-2001**

**Gordon A. Donaldson, Jr.
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May 2003

**A publication of the College of Education and Human Development at
The University of Maine and the Penquis Superintendents' Association.**

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A publication of the College of Education & Human Development at the University of
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The Maine Principal Study:
Stability and Change Among Maine Principals, 1997 – 2001
Gordon A. Donaldson, Jr., Donald A. Buckingham, and Theodore Coladarci

Executive Summary

Highlights of the Maine Principal Study 2001:

- Over 50% of responding principals are over the age of 50 (39% in 1997); 11 % are under 40.
- One third of Maine’s principalships continue to turn over every two years; two thirds of the principals have been in their current position less than eight years.
- The number of professional staff and support staff the average principal supervises has risen by 37% between 1997 and 2001 to 40 personnel.
- The average hours per week principals put into the job has risen from 56 to 58.
- The variety and number of activities the average principal often engages in remains very broad.
- Personnel management, public relations and student management now top the list of activities (in 1997, student management, personnel management, and “interactions with the education hierarchy” topped their agendas.
- Principals believe that activity clusters described as “responding to people” and “leading the instructional program” have the greatest positive impact on the school; however, they reported being relatively uninvolved in instructional leadership and professional development activities in both 1997 and 2001.
- Principals in 2001 expressed enthusiasm, optimism, confidence, and a sense of fulfillment about their work, as they did in 1997.
- Principals in 2001 reported that their work was stressful; more principals in 2001 than in 1997 expressed doubt that “the time and the stress are worth it.”

Introduction

School leadership is essential to school effectiveness and improvement. As Maine and the nation have rallied to improve schools, concerns about school principal quality, recruitment, turnover, and work conditions have risen. Since the mid-1980s, we have witnessed a steady stream of articles and studies raising doubts that the principalship is in good health (Fenstermacher, 1999; Murphy, 1992). A 1998 national study of principals (Educational Research Service) and a summary of recent research on principals (Keller, 1998) found that:

1. the principalship is not attracting the best educators;
2. the principalship is not attracting women and minorities in representative numbers; and
3. perhaps most telling, principals report that their work
 - does not compensate them in proportion to their responsibilities,
 - is stressful,
 - is so focused on management and crises that they cannot attend to important instructional matters, and
 - intrudes too much into principals' personal and family time.

In Maine, concerns such as these led to a study of administrator supply and demand in the late 1980s, and in 1999 to a summit that looked hard at solutions to “the school leadership crisis” (Maine Leadership Consortium, 1999). The 1999 Select Seminar sought to rally the education and policy communities to five major recommendations for action. In 2003, these remain largely neglected. One factor weakening this initiative for educational improvement has been the absence of a dependable data base on the Maine principalship.

To remedy this data vacuum, the University of Maine's Gordon Donaldson and Charles Hausman in 1997 conducted the first Maine Principal Study, surveying all Maine principals and assistant principals on a range of issues impacting their ability to lead Maine's schools (Donaldson & Hausman, 1998; 1999; Hausman et al., 2002). Then, in April of 2001, Donaldson with Don Buckingham and Ted Coladarci again surveyed all Maine principals using substantially the same questionnaire. This longitudinal study will again survey Maine principals in 2005 and 2009. The study has been undertaken with support from the Maine Principals' Association and the Center for Educational Research and Evaluation at the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine.

This monograph describes the results of the 2001 questionnaire and compares the profile of Maine principals that emerges from these results with the 1997 profile. For more detailed data or to share observations and comments, readers are encouraged to contact any of the authors.

The Survey

In May 2001, questionnaires and cover letters were mailed to the 957 principals who were listed on the Maine Department of Education's roster of 2000-2001 principals and assistant principals. Of the 503 returned surveys, 492 were usable in the final study. Once duplicates were removed from the initial mailing (32), the final response rate was 53%. Of these respondents, 26% were assistant principals; 5% were teaching principals; and the remainder (68%) were supervising principals. The results reported below are restricted to the latter two groups: the 363 Maine principals who served as the only administrator or the supervising administrator of a Maine school in 2001.

The profile of responding principals is fairly representative of the state's principal population in several respects. It matches approximately the statewide distribution of principals with respect to gender, school size, and the percentage of students eligible for free/reduced lunch (see below). As with all surveys, however, principals who did not respond are likely to share some characteristics, and thus these data should be used with caution. We conjecture that principals who felt most burdened by their work in May 2001 and who were less interested in the goals of the survey were less likely to have responded.

Basic Descriptors: Maine Principals in 2001

A Few More Women and Closer to Retirement

The 2001 respondents include a slightly higher percentage of women than did the 1997 group (43.5 % vs. 41%). As expected, more principals (50%) now are over 50 years of age than was the case four years ago (see Table 1). The percentages of principal falling in the 41-50 age bracket has declined since 1997 while those in the 31-40 bracket have grown slightly.

Most Maine principals are married or living with a significant other; they also share their homes with children, parents, others, or some combination of these. The percentage of principals carrying responsibilities for other people at home has grown since 1997. Most important is the growing number of principals caring for a parent or other relative (15% in 1997; 38% in 2001).

Slightly under half Maine principals live inside the district in which they work.

Table 1.
Description of Respondents

	1997		2001	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender				
Female	177	41	158	43.5
Male	255	59	205	56.5
Age				
21-30	2	0.5	3	0.8
31-40	38	8.8	37	10.2
41-50	231	53.5	140	38.6
51 and over	161	37.3	183	50.4
Family condition				
Married, significant other	NA	86	313	86.2
Single, involved	NA	5	22	6.1
Single, uninvolved	NA	9	24	6.6
Dependents living at home				
1 or more children	NA	62	NA	74
1 or more parents	NA	15	NA	38
1 or more others	NA	0	NA	30
Residence				
In district	NA	NA	160	44.1
Out of district	NA	NA	203	55.9

Home Grown with Preparation that was “Relevant”

Nearly every responding principal held a graduate degree, with 74% at the Master’s or Master’s Plus Credits level, 17% at the CAS level, and 5% holding a doctorate. Fully 90% did their administrative graduate preparation in Maine. Forty-six percent have matriculated at the University of Maine for these purposes and 37% at the University of Southern Maine (3.6% reported studying at the University of New England). On average, the principals rated their graduate study as “relevant” to their work (mean score of 2.02 where 1 = very relevant, 2 = relevant, 3 = mostly irrelevant, and 4 = irrelevant).

Experienced, but Continuing High Rates of Turnover

The average Maine principal has 12.3 years of experience in administration and 13.2 years experience in teaching. This typical principal has worked at her/his present school for 9.4 years; of those, 6.8 years have been in her/his current position as a principal or teaching principal. These data are roughly the same as the 1997 figures. The typical principal is thus fully vested in the Maine State Retirement System and, given that Maine principals are an aging population, the state is likely to see major turnover in the next 4 to 8 years.

To get a better grasp of longevity/turnover patterns, Table 2 contrasts principals by different lengths of tenure in administration and in their current positions. What is striking

Table 2.
Length of Tenure (Percentages)

Number of Years	1997		2001	
	in Current Position	in Administration	in Administration	in Current Position
1 or fewer	17.4	2.8		16.0
2 or fewer	34.3	10.7		30.9
5 or fewer	60.4	27.5		56.5
7 or fewer	70.5	34.7		66.7
10 or fewer	79.8	44.6		77.7
More than 10	20.2	55.4		22.3
More than 15	9.5	37.5		11.3

about these data is the continuing pattern from 1997 to 2001 of low tenure in Maine principalships. In 1997, 60% of principals had been in their current positions for 5 years or less, with 34% for 2 years or less. By 2001, this pattern had improved slightly but not appreciably to 56% and 31%. In other words, the turnover rate in Maine principalships seems to have held steady over the past four years with roughly one third of positions turning over every two years.

Another one third of principalships appear to hold their principals more than two years but fewer than seven years. And the remaining one third of principalships hold their incumbent principals for more than seven years (and about 10% hold their leaders for 15 years or more).

These data have obvious implications for school leadership and sustaining programs of school improvement. Given the disparity between experience in administration (average of 12.3 years) and tenure in the current position (6.8 years) and these turnover rates, Maine policy-makers and school boards might well explore whether wisdom and experience are being lost from leadership positions just when they might be most needed.

Predominantly Rural—and with Growing Supervisory Responsibilities

Sixty-seven percent (67%) of principals characterized their districts as rural, and the remaining 33% reported their districts as suburban or urban. Interestingly, these proportions held roughly constant when principals reported the type of district in which they have spent the majority of their careers. By contrast, only 46% of the sample reported having grown up in rural communities (20% are from urban and 34% from suburban communities). These data suggest that the Maine principalship attracts educators who have chosen to work in smaller and more community-based schools than they may have attended as students.

Not surprisingly, school sizes mirror the largely rural nature of principals' workplaces. Table 3 reports the variation in school enrollment across the population of principals, emphasizing the diversity of types and sizes of schools served by Maine principals.

Table 3.
Supervisory Responsibilities

	1997	2001
Mean enrollment	355	371
% of principals in schools		
Under 200	NA	27
Under 300	NA	50
Under 450	NA	74
Under 650	NA	87
% of principals in schools with		
< 25% FRL eligible	NA	29
< 50% FRL eligible	NA	77
% of principals in schools		
Serving grades 9-12	24.1	24
Serving only grades 9-12	18.6	18
Supervisory load (mean)		
Professional staff	18	33
Support staff	11	17
% of principals supervising		
< 24 staff	NA	21
< 44 staff	NA	50
> 44 staff	NA	50

Note. FRL = free or reduced lunch.

These data reveal not only that the average Maine principal is serving a slightly larger school in 2001 than in 1997, but that the number of staff he/she supervises has risen 37% (from 18 to 33 professional staff and from 11 to 17 support staff). While we cannot determine which principals share these tasks with assistant principals, we assume that the majority are in schools sufficiently small and rural to not merit such assistance. As in 1997, the supervisory responsibilities of the typical Maine principal continue to far surpass those typically expected of a supervisor in the private sector (where 15-20 supervisees is considered optimum). With the

growing pressure for accountability and reform, this situation cannot be viewed as constructive either for schools or for principals.

Diverse Administrative Structures; Modest Central Office Involvement

Forty-six percent of responding principals reported working in school administrative districts (SADs), while 30% are employed by individual municipalities, 19% in school unions (SUs), 2.8% by community school districts (CSDs), and 1.4% by independent or private schools. That is, about half of the sample is employed by larger geographic and organizational units (SADs and CSDs) while most of the remaining half serve schools in single towns where they answer to a local board elected by that town (municipalities and SUs).

These differing organizational arrangements constitute quite divergent working conditions for principals. Principals in general reported that central office involvement in the work of their schools had not significantly changed between 1997 and 2001 (mean involvement fell between “very little” and “quite a bit” both years). Interestingly, roughly 11% now rate this involvement as “a great deal”; in 1997, about 17% rated it in this fashion.

Perceived Sources of Help

Principals were asked to rate the helpfulness of a range of people, groups, and organizations that are typically influential in principals’ work. As in 1997, the 2001 principals rated the same two sources clearly at the top (between “sustaining” and “often”): secretaries and spouse/significant other. These were followed by teachers, other principals outside the school, and counselors. Interestingly, in 2001, the superintendent/central office was viewed as slightly more helpful than in 1997, as was the Maine Principals Association. Finally, it is noteworthy

that the local school board was seen as the least helpful influence on the list in both years. That said, none of the sources listed was viewed by these two groups of principals as making their work more difficult or as being “a regular obstacle to me.”

Table 4.
Perceptions of Sources of Help (Means)

	1997	2001
Source		
Secretaries	1.40	1.47
Spouse, significant other	1.65	1.64
Teachers in my school	2.09	2.01
Principal(s) outside my school	2.16	2.09
Guidance counselors	2.15	2.15
Superintendent, central office	2.26	2.18
Maintenance staff	2.21	2.20
Maine Principals’ Association	2.43	2.41
Principal(s) in my school	2.10	2.49
Parents of children in my school	2.62	2.49
Universities, professors	2.57	2.58
Local school board	2.77	2.72

Note. 1997 used a 4-point scale: 1 = provided sustained help to me; 2 = often been helpful when I needed it; 3 = negligible influence on my work; 4 = made my work more difficult. In contrast, 2001 used a five point scale: 1 = provided sustained help to me; 2 = often been helpful when I needed it; 3 = negligible influence on my work; 4 = sometimes makes my work more difficult; 5 = has been a regular obstacle for me.

Professional Work Patterns

Time: Longer Hours at School

In 1997, the average Maine principal reported spending 56 hours per week at work and 24 hours with family. In 2001, the average work hours had risen slightly to 58, and hours with family had increased to 28. Ninety-eight percent of responding principals reported spending more than 40 hours per week at work. Seventy-eight percent reported spending more than 50 hours per week, and fully half of Maine principals reported spending more than 60 hours per

week on their jobs. Clearly, these patterns stand in stark contrast to the standard American work week, which is said to have declined from 40 hours in recent decades.

As the weekly demands on Maine principals have grown in the past four years, their involvement in volunteer, exercise, and leisure activities has remained the same. Approximately 20% report spending between 1 and 3 hours in religious, civic, and volunteering activities; roughly 36% in exercise; and 43% in leisure/hobbies. Very few principals reported spending more than 3 hours in any activity except the last two (about one third in exercise and one third in leisure/hobbies). Six percent of the group spends more than 3 hours each week at other employment.

Activities: What Principals Do and How They Rate Their Impacts

The MPS questionnaire listed 38 activities commonly associated with principals' work. These fell into activity clusters established by the researchers, such as "instructional leadership," "satisfying the hierarchy," and "professional development." Maine principals were asked to rate each of these activities in two respects: frequency of engagement (from 1 = rarely to 4 = very often); and level of direct positive impact on the school's success (from 1 = none to 4 = a great deal). These two measures permit not only a profile of activity patterns and perceived impact, but they also allow us to examine the relationship between principals' allocation of time and their perception of the productivity of those allocations. We first present a comparison of 1997 and 2001 principals, using the a priori activity clusters. Following this, we describe how 2001 principals tended to see their activities naturally clustering and what they saw as the positive impacts of these activity clusters on their schools.

Activity and Productivity: 1997 vs. 2001

Overall, principals in 2001 reported being engaged frequently in most of the 38 activity clusters, as they were in 1997 (see Appendix A for item means). They were engaged in 17 of the activities “often” or more than “often” and in another 12 slightly less than “often” (mean, *M*, of 2.7 or above). Activities they were “occasionally” engaged in (*Ms* \cong 2.0) were “social activities with staff,” “fundraisers for the school,” and “direct involvement in teaching.” It should surprise no one that Maine principals continue to be busy with the wide variety of activities that are expected of them.

When we examined these activity patterns by category, some differences appeared between 1997 and 2001 (see Table 5). In 1997, Maine principals were involved most in student

Table 5.
Patterns of Activity, and Perceptions of Impact/Success (Means)

Activity cluster	1997		2001	
	Involvement	Success*	Involvement	Impact*
Student management	3.13	3.34	3.02	3.20
Personnel management	3.07	3.19	3.16	3.23
Interactions with education hierarchy	3.02	3.12	2.99	2.76
Resource management	2.95	3.15	2.73	2.81
Public relations	2.89	3.15	3.06	3.13
Instructional leadership	2.87	2.98	2.76	2.97
Professional development	2.85	3.02	2.83	2.99

Involvement Scale: 1 = rarely; 2 = occasionally; 3 = often; 4 = very often. *Success/Impact Scale: 1 = none; 2 = very little; 3 = moderate; 4 = a great deal. Note. Use caution when comparing 2001 “Impact” ratings and 1997 “success” ratings. The former indicate perceived impacts of activity *on the school’s success*, whereas the latter indicate how successfully 1997 principals *felt they performed each activity*.

management followed by personnel management and interactions with education hierarchy. This work pattern has changed in 2001. Principals now report devoting most time to personnel

management activities, followed by public relations and then student management. While their rate of involvement with the education hierarchy holds steady from 1997, their engagement in resource management has dropped and their involvement in instructional leadership activities has declined somewhat. Principals were least involved in these last two activity clusters. Their involvement in professional development held steady over the four years. In 2001, however, professional development ranked slightly above resource management and instructional leadership, while it ranked last in 1997.

In the principals' opinions, which of these activity clusters led to their greatest direct positive impact on the school's success? The data indicate that principals' three highest-involvement activities—personnel management, student management, and public relations—also are the activities that have the most impact (rated between “moderate” and “a great deal”). This, of course, can be viewed as good news: if principals view their investments of time and energy as having payoffs for the school, they can be expected to find these professionally rewarding and, presumably, they will continue to invest in them.

However, the obverse of this situation appears to apply to instructional leadership and professional development activities. Maine principals are engaged in these less frequently than the three top activity clusters and, as a whole, believe that their involvement has only a moderate impact on the school's success. These results suggest that Maine principals see more payoff in management and public relations activities than in direct involvement in instruction or in their own learning. Importantly, these principals rated their interactions with the education hierarchy as the least impactful of all activities (between “very little” and “moderate”).

How 2001 Principals Think of Their Activity and How Impactful It Is

We asked whether these principal activities tended to cluster together in the responses of the principals, speculating that, if they did, we might learn more about the way principals think about what they spend time on and whether their engagement patterns are productive. We conducted factor analyses of “engagement levels” and “impact levels” of these 38 activities. A factor analysis is a statistical procedure that reveals whether principals tended to respond consistently to groups of items. Each of these factors reveals an important quality of principals’ activity patterns and of their beliefs about how they impact the school’s success. This analysis allows us to answer the question: What activities clustered together as “high impact” strategies for these Maine principals?

Turning first to the “positive impact” factors, three clusters of activities were associated in principals’ minds as they thought about their activity patterns; the impact of each of these was viewed as positive, although the strength of the impact varied. The first of these we label *leading the instructional program* ($\alpha = .86$)*, which included hiring, supervision, and professional development of teachers, program and curriculum planning and evaluation, professional reading, and time spent in faculty meetings. Maine principals viewed their investment in this cluster of activities as having “moderate to a great deal” of impact on the success of the school ($M = 3.20$).

A second cluster, *responding to the people* ($\alpha = .76$), includes responding to staff needs, parent and community inquiries, special education issues, as well as reaching out to parents regarding student issues. Principals rated their investment in these activities the strongest contributor to school success of all factors ($M = 3.36$).

* Alpha (α) is a measure of internal-consistency reliability.

A third cluster held together statistically as a factor but was puzzling ($\alpha = .80$). It included several activities in which they engaged with the public (giving information, raising money) and with state and district offices (e.g., completing reports); but it also included attending meetings and courses for school improvement and for professional improvement. These *beyond-the-school* activities, interestingly, were viewed as substantially less “impactful” than their investments in the instructional program and in responding to people ($M = 2.86$).

Four other factors emerged, but did not cohere statistically as strongly as these three. They did cohere, however, conceptually around four clear themes: decision-making about students, instructionally and behaviorally ($\alpha = .68$); finances and scheduling ($\alpha = .64$); district obligations ($\alpha = .59$); and managing activities and plant ($\alpha = .51$). Principals generally rated the first two of these clusters as more profitable to the school (M s of 2.99) than the second two (M s of 2.91), although the differences were slight.

How do Maine Principals Experience Their Work?

The final section of the survey asked Maine principals to evaluate various aspects of their worklives, such as enjoyment of work, faculty agreement about school goals, community support for their schools, and so on. These items were designed to profile how principals were experiencing their work. Our hope was that we could learn about those aspects of the job that were rewarding and those that were persisting challenges.

Most Principals Feel Efficacious in Their Work.

As we found in 1997, most principals who responded to our survey expressed positive sentiments toward their work. Over 90% agreed or strongly agreed with the following items:

“I am making a positive difference for students”

“I am confident in my ability to be an effective leader”

“I enjoy being a principal”

“I feel as though I am making progress at my school”

“Parents are supportive of our school”

And between 80 and 90% agreed or strongly agreed that:

“The community takes a lot of pride in our school”

“My work is energizing and rewarding”

They Find Their Work Stressful and Intrusive

Principals work, while it can be energizing and fulfilling in one sense, can also be depleting and stressful. For many Maine principals, leading a school is a two-edged sword. Eighty-four percent “find my job stressful” and 83% reported that “I often find myself in situations that are challenging for me.” The costs weigh against the benefits and leave a significant number of Maine principals unsure that it is “all worth it”:

- 72% also said, “Because of the long hours, I have little time to myself.”
- 64% feel that “My job intrudes too much on my personal life.”
- and only 61% said, “The stress and challenge of being a principal are well worth it.”
- and 50% “often wonder if the long hours involved in the job are worth it.”

Some of the stressors experienced by Maine principals emerged from the data:

- 57% report feeling “pressure from others to make sure this school has a reputation for excellence.”

- 40% report that they “spend a lot of time responding to conflicting expectations for our school.”

Thirty Percent Express Hesitancy Toward Their Careers as Principals

Throughout much of the 2001 data, a fairly consistent minority of responding principals express uncertainty about their choice to become a principal or the wisdom of continuing. The proportion of principals expressing such sentiments ranges from 25% to 35%. Their views are represented in the following items:

- 28% reported either that they would not “become a principal again” if they had the choice or that they were unsure if they would choose this career again.
- 31% said, “I often consider becoming a teacher again.”
- 22% reported that “If I could earn more, I’d leave the principalship in a minute.”

If we consider that the survey’s non-respondents were more likely to harbor such views, we estimate that the percentages of Maine principals who are “on the fence” about their work ranges from 30 to 40%.

Four Important Characteristics of Maine Principals’ Worklives

Table 6 summarizes principals’ responses broken out into four clusters, or factors, of items that characterized principals’ work experience in 2001. These clusters surfaced through another factor analysis, the statistical procedure that reveals how principals tended to respond to groups of items in predictable ways. Each of these factors reveals an important quality of principals’ worklives that we would be wise to examine further to better understand the nature of

principals' work. We present 1997 summary data for these same four factors for comparison purposes. All item-level data are presented in Appendix B.

Table 6.
Worklife Factors

Factor	1997		2001	
	α	M	α	M
Enthusiasm and sense of efficacy	.86	3.09	.83	3.03
Sense of synchrony	.78	2.98	.76	3.12
Level of personal challenge	.75	2.99	.74	2.91
External cross-currents and pressures	.66	1.82	.64	2.05

Note. Each mean is based on a scale ranging from 1 to 4 (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree).

Enthusiasm and sense of efficacy. The cluster of items that was most strongly interrelated describes principals' enthusiasm for their work and the sense that they were "making a difference." It included items that asked directly about how much principals enjoyed "being a principal," whether they believed principals "are a powerful influence on student achievement," and whether they are "energized and rewarded" by their work. This cluster also included the items asking if "the stress and challenges of being principal are well worth it" and whether principals "often consider becoming a teacher again." All together, these items tell us that principals' enthusiasm and sense of efficacy is a key quality of Maine principals' work; how the job evokes—or does not evoke—this response is important to principals.

As a group, the Maine principals in both 2001 and 1997 "agreed" with the many positive sentiments about their work contained in this factor. They expressed least agreement that "the

stress and challenges of being a principal are well worth it” and that “the long hours involved in the job are worth it,” but their sentiments in general were positive.

This factor seems to tap into an emotional quality of principals’ work: the energy, excitement and sense of personal mission principals feel. A comparison of changes from 1997 to 2001 shows that, while overall enthusiasm is about the same, principals express more doubts that the time and stress are worth it in 2001 than they did in 1997 (see Appendix B, items e and z).

Sense of synchrony. The second factor tapped into the degree to which principals view themselves to be standing together with their staffs, how much agreement there is over goals and vision, and how confident they feel as leaders. While most items in this cluster address the faculty and the principal, one item asks whether “the community takes a lot of pride in our school.” This factor suggests that principals’ sense of synchrony with their schools is an important quality of their work. Their perception of “everyone being on the same page” blends with the sense that “I am making a positive difference” and that “I am confident in my ability to be an effective school leader.”

Again, both the 1997 principals and the 2001 principals as groups tended to experience this sense of synchrony. It is noteworthy that the 2001 principals felt this way more strongly than did the 1997 principals. Contributing to this was the fact that the 2001 principals more strongly agreed that their communities took “a lot of pride” in their schools than did the 1997 principals. Interestingly, the Maine principals in both years were more positive about their own abilities to lead than they were that there was widespread agreement about goals and that teachers have high standards (although they did generally agree with these, as well).

Level of personal challenge. The third factor that emerged from principals’ responses tapped into their sense of how personally challenging and stressful their work is. Items

clustering in this factor dealt with how much the job intrudes on “my personal life,” how much “time for myself” they feel they have, whether they “find it easy to balance my commitments to job and family,” and how “stressful” and “challenging” they find the work. Clearly, their ability to balance professional and personal responsibility affects Maine principals’ feelings about—and ability to do—their jobs.

Again, Maine principals in 1997 and 2001 as a group solidly agreed that their work leaves little time for them personally and that it is stressful and challenging. One aspect of this condition is the “pressure from others to make sure this school has a reputation for excellence.”

Contrasting 1997 and 2001 item means, principals in 2001 are less certain that “the long hours involved in the job are worth it”, but they find other aspects of the “personal challenge” of being principal about the same as they did in 1997. These results suggest that the Maine principalship is becoming a less tenable position for the people occupying it (a finding that is reinforced by data on turnover).

External cross-currents and pressures. The final factor taps into the extent to which principals feel their communities and other external constraints are impinging on their work. These items express principals’ sense that “priorities change too frequently,” that they “spend a lot of time responding to conflicting expectations for the school,” and that policies and paperwork interfere with their ability to do their jobs. This factor also encompasses their reading of parents’ supportiveness of the school and of the community’s pride in the school. Clearly, principals’ reading of the dependability and supportiveness of their professional environment makes a powerful difference in how they experience their work.

Maine principals in 1997 and 2001 disagreed as a group that these external pressures significantly hampered their ability to do their jobs. Although many agreed that uncertainties

and conflicting expectations about priorities, rules, and policies were offset by parent and community support of their schools.

Between 1997 and 2001, Maine principals' perceptions of community pride rose. However, they became more concerned that "school rules and policies hinder me from doing my job." More principals in 2001 than in 1997 also agreed that "if I could get a higher paying job, I'd leave the principalship in a minute." In all, these patterns suggest that accomplishing the work expected in the Maine principalship has not become any more tenable, even if parents and community seem more supportive than they did in 1997.

Conclusions

We draw the reader's attention to the highlights of the study summarized in the Executive Summary. The picture of the Maine principalship emerging from this second data point in our longitudinal study has several dominant features:

1. High rates of turnover and the approaching retirement of over half Maine's principals require immediate and concerted attention from Maine's education and policy communities. If we continue to place demands on schools to demonstrate improvement in student outcomes, we must take steps to create continuity and competence in school leadership.
2. Many principals are enthusiastic about their work and feel rewarded by it, but they also find it stressful. Central to this stress are the extraordinary supervisory responsibilities, the extraordinary time and energy commitment, and the policy and resource uncertainties that accompany Maine principals' work.

3. Maine principals believe that “responding to people” and “leading the instructional program” lie at the heart of what they should be doing. Yet the range of activities and demands they experience erodes their capacity to attend well to these.
4. Roughly 40% of Maine principals did not respond to the survey. It is likely that these included a large percentage of principals who felt embattled, frustrated, and unhappy in their work. We estimate that between 30 and 40% of all Maine principals at any one time are seriously considering leaving the job and feeling substantially inefficacious as leaders. For the schools, districts, and communities these principals serve, this is a matter of very urgent concern.
5. Local and state leaders, while acknowledging the importance of the principal to a school’s success, have done little to change the work conditions of principals, the incentive structure for principals, or the preparation and recruitment practices of principals even though these were clearly called for in 1999. With a new generation of Maine principals rising in the coming half-decade, these changes will be of paramount importance. If Maine can draw its best educators into a principalship which promises to reward them for instructional leadership and sustain them personally and professionally, future generations of Maine students, teachers, and communities will benefit in untold ways.

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APPENDIX A

Patterns of Principal Activity and Perceptions of Impact/Success: 1997 and 2001 Means

	1997		2001	
	Involvement	Success	Involvement	Impact
Student Management	3.13	3.34	3.02	3.20
direct supervision of students	3.22	3.61	2.81	3.23
resolving student [behavioral] problems	3.59	3.42	3.32	3.59
organizing and supervising co-curricular activities	NA	NA	2.38	2.60
organizing co-curricular activities	2.32	3.04	NA	NA
supervising co-curricular activities	2.35	3.02	NA	NA
contact with parent regarding child	3.48	3.51	3.39	3.49
consulting with teachers about specific students	3.52	3.49	NA	NA
special student issues (PET, G & T, etc.)	3.38	3.27	3.21	3.08
resolving specific student learning issues	NA	NA	2.98	3.20
Personnel Management	3.07	3.19	3.16	3.23
orientation of employees	3.00	3.14	NA	NA
supervision/evaluation of teachers	3.59	3.25	3.47	3.37
supervision/evaluation of support personnel	2.72	2.87	2.72	2.86
social activities with staff	2.15	2.81	2.12	2.48
schedule/assignment of work for all personnel	3.30	3.40	NA	NA
recruitment of support personnel	2.08	2.68	NA	NA
scheduling classes and other instructional events	3.05	3.44	3.21	3.25
running faculty meetings	3.68	3.47	3.58	3.42
responding to the needs of teachers	3.65	3.38	3.66	3.58
responding to the needs of support personnel	3.23	3.23	3.28	3.28
recruitment of instructional personnel	3.05	3.45	3.30	3.64
coordinating staff efforts on a daily basis	3.18	3.26	3.07	3.20
Interactions with Education Hierarchy	3.02	3.12	2.99	2.76
district administrative team meetings	3.33	3.07	3.48	2.98
consulting with superiors	2.98	3.28	2.89	2.90
dealing with state/community agencies	2.27	2.66	2.20	2.29
meeting with school board	3.21	3.20	3.40	2.86
completing required reports	NA	NA	3.14	2.72
Resource Management	2.95	3.15	2.73	2.81
budget preparation	3.55	3.41	3.44	3.42
monitoring condition of equipment	2.66	2.94	2.44	2.59
fundraisers for the school	2.52	3.04	2.18	2.38
purchasing/accounting	2.86	3.21	2.70	2.72
monitoring condition of the building and grounds	3.19	3.12	2.94	2.92

continued

	1997		2001	
	Involvement	Success	Involvement	Impact
Public Relations	2.98	3.15	3.06	3.13
responding to parent/community inquiries	3.43	3.44	3.42	3.38
meeting [initiating contact] with parent/citizen groups	2.70	3.13	2.63	2.84
recruiting parent volunteers	2.22	2.68	NA	NA
preparing written information about the school and events	3.24	3.33	3.14	3.16
Instructional Leadership	2.87	2.98	2.76	2.97
curriculum development activities	3.09	3.02	3.14	3.27
selection of texts and instructional materials	2.56	3.01	2.49	2.80
encouraging student learning	3.43	3.26	NA	NA
curriculum evaluation activities	2.63	2.76	2.86	3.02
direct involvement in teaching	NA	NA	2.21	2.61
collecting and using student assessment data	NA	NA	2.84	3.03
attending meetings/workshops on school improvement	NA	NA	2.71	2.82
long-range program/curriculum planning	2.65	2.85	3.06	3.22
Professional Development	2.85	3.02	2.83	2.99
professional reading	2.86	2.95	2.81	2.90
in-service programs for instructional personnel	2.89	3.00	2.91	3.09
meetings/courses for professional growth	2.79	3.12	2.77	2.98

Note. Each mean is based on a scale ranging from 1 to 4. For the Involvement scale: 1 = rarely, 2 = occasionally, 3 = often, 4 = very often. For the Success/Impact scale: 1 = none, 2 = very little, 3 = moderate, 4 = a great deal. Bracketed language reflects slight variation in wording between surveys.

APPENDIX B
Cluster and Item Means for Principal Worklife Factors: 1997 and 2001

	1997	2001
Enthusiasm and Sense of Efficacy	3.09	3.03
	($\alpha = .86$)	($\alpha = .83$)
a. I enjoy being a principal.	3.53	3.48
c. My work is energizing and rewarding.	3.16	3.16
e. I think the stress and challenges of being a principal are well worth it.	2.96	2.76
f. When all factors are considered, principals are a powerful influence on student achievement.	3.25	3.29
h. I would like to be a principal at this school for many years.	2.93	2.99
(r97) I think about staying home from school because I am just too tired to go (r).	3.42	NA
o. If I could get a higher paying job, I would leave the principalship in a minute (r).	3.13	2.95
v. I have as much enthusiasm as I did when I first became a principal.	2.94	2.92
x. I feel as though I am making progress at my school.	NA	3.24
bb. I often consider becoming a teacher again (r).	2.88	2.92
z. I often wonder if the long hours involved in the job are worth it (r).	2.62	2.48
Sense of Synchrony	2.98	3.12
	($\alpha = .78$)	($\alpha = .76$)
l. There is a shared vision for this school.	3.02	3.03
s. There is widespread agreement regarding the goals we want to achieve with students.	3.00	3.03
u. Teachers at this school have high standards for all students.	3.06	2.99
y. This school has explicit goals for student performance.	2.83	NA
(r97) This school has written goals for student performance for all grades/courses.	NA	2.69
cc. Most teachers at this school have values and philosophies of education similar to my own.	3.03	2.97
r. I am making a positive difference for students at this school.	3.42	3.49
aa. I am confident in my ability to be an effective school leader.	3.36	3.37
d. I have enough training/experience as a principal to deal with almost any learning problem.	2.96	3.06
p. The community takes a lot of pride in our school.	3.17	3.34
Level of Personal Challenge	2.99	2.91
	($\alpha = .75$)	($\alpha = .74$)
z. I often wonder if the long hours involved in the job are worth it.	2.38	2.52
m. My job intrudes too much on my personal life.	NA	2.85
t. Because of the long hours required by the role, I have little time left for myself.	3.18	3.06
dd. I find it easy to balance my commitments to job and family.	2.90	2.87
q. I find my job stressful.	NA	3.20
k. I feel pressure from others to make sure this school has a reputation for excellence.	3.37	2.72
w. I often find myself in situations as a principal that are challenging for me.	NA	3.11

continued

	1997	2001
External Cross-Currents and Pressures	1.82	2.05
	($\alpha = .70$)	($\alpha = .64$)
g. Parents are supportive of the school (r).	1.80	1.68
p. The community takes a lot of pride in the school (r).	1.83	1.66
j. Priorities change too frequently and are sometimes hard to keep track of.	2.37	2.48
i. School rules and policies hinder me from doing my job.	1.83	2.14
n. I spend a lot of time responding to conflicting expectations for the school.	NA	2.40
b. The hours students spend in school have little influence compared to their home environments.	NA	2.05
o. If I could get a higher paying job, I'd leave the principalship in a minute.	1.87	2.08

Note. Principals and teaching principals responded. r = item has been reversed coded. Each mean is based on a scale ranging from 1 to 4. For the Involvement scale: 1 = strong disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree. 2001 item that did not load: (ee) "Some community groups/individuals fervently oppose some of our practices here at school."
