
7.

Principals' perspectives on their work

This section presents the principals' perspectives on their work. It starts with a discussion of principal pathways, and their likely career plan over the next 5 years. The section also discusses principals' perspectives on the support they get, workload and morale, and changes principals would like to see in their role.⁴²

Principal pathways

Most have been a principal for more than 3 years

In 2018, 23% of the principals are in their first 3 years as a principal, down slightly from the 28% in 2015. Most (77%) have been a principal for more than 3 years, including 35% who have had the role for more than 11 years.

Two-thirds of the principals are in their first principalship

Two-thirds of the principals (67%) have been principal of only their current school (slightly down from 73% in 2015). A quarter (26%) have been principals of two schools (20% in 2015), and 6% of three or four schools.

Many principals intend to stay in their current school for the next 5 years

When asked about their likely career plans over the next 5 years, principals' responses have been similar since 2009, with some increase in interest in sabbaticals and in the proportion of principals who say they are unsure of their plans. Table 21 shows that many secondary principals intend to stay in their current school over the next 5 years (62%). Table 21 also shows that if secondary principals feel the need to move on from being a principal, they are more likely to seek a job within education than leave it. Twenty-two

⁴² Information about how the principal survey was distributed is included in the Appendix along with more details of the principal sample. In 2018, there was a slight under-representation of principals at decile 1-2 schools, as there had also been in 2015. In other respects, the principal respondents were largely similar to the principal respondents in 2015. The response rate was 53% ($n = 167$). The margin of error for principals' responses is 7.6%.

percent are thinking of retirement—a proportion that has remained much the same since 2009, even though in 2009, 19% of principals completing the survey were aged 60 or more, compared with 34% of secondary principals in 2018.

Compared with 2015, a higher proportion of principals are not sure of their career plans over the next 5 years (16%, compared with 8% in 2015).

TABLE 21 Likely career plan for secondary principals over next 5 years; 2009, 2012, 2015, and 2018⁴³

Career plan	2009 (n = 187) %	2012 (n = 177) %	2015 (n = 182) %	2018 (n = 167) %
Continue as principal of current school	65	65	62	62
Apply for study award/sabbatical/fellowship	34	36	32	40
Retire	19	20	19	22
Change to a different role within education	21	17	19	21
Lead another school	22	14	23	20
Not sure	8	10	8	16
Take on a Kāhui Ako/Community of Learning leadership role	Not asked	Not asked	12	9
Retrain/change to a different career	7	5	4	8
Return to classroom teaching	4	2	2	4

There are differences related to school decile in whether a principal is planning to continue at the same school for the next 5 years, but no clear pattern. Principals in decile 9–10 schools (87%) are more likely to say they intend to remain in their current school, and principals in decile 7–8 schools less likely (45%).⁴⁴

Stability of school leadership

Half the principals have been at their current school for 3–10 years

In 2018, just over half of the principals responding to the survey have been principal at their current school for 3–10 years (see Table 22), compared with 43% in 2015. Sixteen percent have led their school for more than a decade. This is a little less than the 20% in 2015 and 24% in 2012, and much the same as the 18% in 2009.

⁴³ In 2018, 61% of principals gave more than one answer here, indicating they thought several pathways were possible, or that they were thinking of two pathways consecutively over the next 5 years.

⁴⁴ Fifty-three percent of principals in decile 1–2 schools, 58% of principals in decile 5–6 schools, and 70% of principals in decile 7–8 schools intend to remain in their current school.

TABLE 22 Principals' years at their current school

Number of years	Principals (<i>n</i> = 167) %
Under 3 years	34
3–5 years	23
6–10 years	28
11–15 years	9
16+ years	7

Principal turnover data show little change since 2009

Stability of school leadership is important, and low principal turnover is a reasonable sign of school health. The number of principals that a school has had in the past 10 years remains very similar to the 2015 figures, and shows little change since 2009. In 2018, just under a quarter (23%) of schools had had just one principal in the past 10 years, just under half (47%) had had two principals in the past decade, and a quarter (25%) had had three principals (see Table 23). In 2015, we reported that 9% of the schools had had four or more principals in that time. In 2018, this figure has returned to the 5%⁴⁵ reported in 2012 and 2009.

TABLE 23 Number of principals at the school in the past 10 years, reported by principals

Number of principals	Principals (<i>n</i> = 167) %
1	23
2	47
3	25
4	4
5+	2

Schools with more than three principals in the past decade have a higher proportion of newer principals, with less than 3 years' experience (36% of principals of these schools have less than 3 years' experience, decreasing to 10% of principals in these schools having more than 15 years' experience).

Support for the principal role

The most used Ministry of Education-funded support is provided through NZSTA

Table 24 shows principals' use of Ministry of Education-funded support for their role, including from NZSTA. In 2018, a higher proportion of principals than in 2015 said they had support from the NZSTA helpdesk and slightly more through NZSTA professional development: support for their management functions rather

⁴⁵ The total of 6% in Table 23 is due to rounding.

than educational role. Use of the Educational Leaders website dropped markedly in 2015 and continues to decline, although it is still the third most used support.

Since 2015, there have been changes to the support for aspiring or new principals, which are reflected in responses. The National Aspiring Principals Programme concluded at the end of 2016 and there is currently no nationally-funded programme for aspiring principals. The First-Time Principals Programme was replaced in 2017 with the Evaluation Associates contract to provide Beginning Principals with the support of an adviser and a mentor for 2 years.

The proportion taking sabbaticals may indicate the attraction of time out from the school as well as the opportunity to focus on an issue that is relevant to the school's and the principal's development.

TABLE 24 **Secondary principals' Ministry of Education-funded support for their role over past 3 years; 2009, 2012, 2015, and 2018**

Support	2009 (n = 187) %	2012 (n = 177) %	2015 (n = 182) %	2018 (n = 167) %
NZSTA Human Resources and Industrial Relations advisers	68	67	63	65
NZSTA Helpdesk	*	48	52	62
Educational Leaders website	71	70	52	44
NZSTA professional development	*	*	31	37
First-Time Principals' programme	43	37	40	33
Sabbatical	*	33	30	29
Leadership and Assessment professional development	*	17	17	11
Aspiring Principals course	11	11	11	5

* Not asked.

Many principals use support from SPANZ and former principals

Most principals also use other support (see Table 25). The most used non-Ministry of Education-funded support was SPANZ (68%, up from 59% in 2015), and consultants who are former principals (60%, up from 44% in 2015). A small proportion of the principals (4%) had not used any of these sources of support over the past 3 years, down from 9% in 2015.

TABLE 25 Secondary principals' non-Ministry of Education-funded support for their role over past 3 years; 2015 and 2018

Support	2015 (n = 182) %	2018 (n = 167) %
Secondary Principals' Association of New Zealand (SPANZ)	59	68
Private consultant/adviser—former principal	44	60
PPTA	30	32
Private consultant/adviser—not former principal	30	29
Postgraduate study	12	12
Nothing	9	4

Most principals have face-to-face professional contact with other principals

Most principals also have contact with other principals (see Table 26). Regular meeting attendance is most frequent, along with attending conferences, and discussion of common issues. All these types of professional contact were reported by a higher proportion of principals than in 2015. However, a smaller proportion of the principals said they provided mutual support (46%, down from 60%).

In 2018, we asked for the first time about professional learning groups (PLGs). Forty percent of the principals are in either a PLG they facilitate themselves, or a PLG facilitated by an external consultant. The small proportion of principals working together in inquiry projects has remained at the 2015 figure, half of what it was in 2012. Digital technology is also used by just a small proportion, with no change since 2015.

TABLE 26 Secondary principals' professional contact together; 2012, 2015, and 2018

Type of professional contact	2012 (n = 177) %	2015 (n = 182) %	2018 (n = 167) %
Attend regular meetings	81	75	87
Attend conference	73	68	82
Discuss common issues	62	64	78
Provide mutual support	60	60	46
Part of PLG we facilitate ourselves	*	*	22
Part of PLG facilitated by external consultant	*	*	20
Mentor another principal	13	13	17
Mentored by another principal	13	11	17
Critical friendship based on structured visits to each other's schools	22	19	16
Part of an inquiry project to improve practice	13	6	6
Use Twitter to get advice/ideas	*	4	4
Online discussion forum	*	5	2

* Not asked.

Principals' annual performance reviews have potential to be more useful

Annual performance reviews are intended to provide principals with the opportunity to gain important feedback and challenge, to support their ongoing development and the development of the school. Although most principals gain something from their annual performance review (just 3% said they gained nothing), Table 27 shows that there is plenty of scope to make more of annual performance reviews. There has been little improvement in the usefulness of these since 2009. Only three types of gain from annual performance reviews are reported by more than half of the principals.

TABLE 27 Gains from secondary principals' most recent performance review; 2009, 2012, 2015, and 2018

Gain	2009 (n = 187) %	2012 (n = 177) %	2015 (n = 182) %	2018 (n = 167) %
Good acknowledgement of my contribution to the school	75	73	68	77
Agreement on goals that will move the school forward	50	58	60	58
Agreement on goals that will move me forward	47	55	53	56
Opportunity for frank discussion of challenges facing the school and joint strategic thinking	43	46	39	46
Opportunity for frank discussion of issues at the school and joint problem solving	37	36	38	45
New insight into how I could do things	32	31	26	34
Nothing, it was not professionally done	*	*	*	3

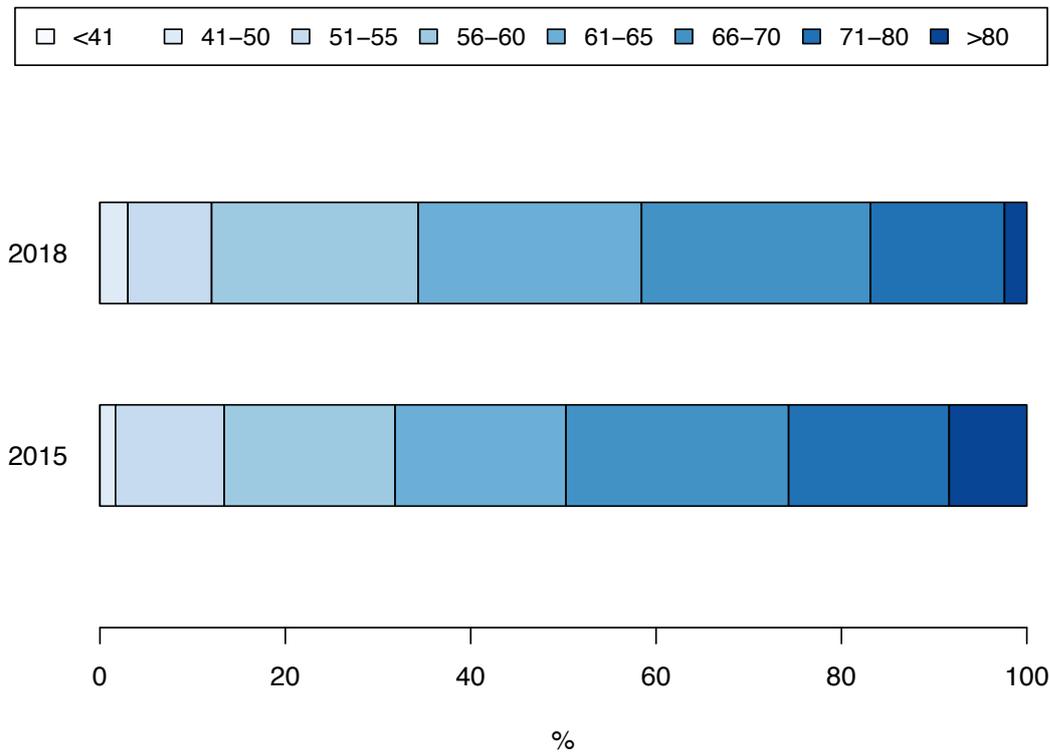
* Not asked.

Workload and morale

Two-thirds of the principals work more than 60 hours a week

Figure 38 shows the hours that the principals report they work in a week, including meetings, contact with trustees, and contact with parents and whānau. Only 3% of secondary principals report working less than 50 hours a week. Thirty-one percent work from 50 to 60 hours in an average week, and 24% from 61 to 65 hours a week. A sizeable minority (41%) report working at least 66 hours in an average week.

FIGURE 38 Hours worked by principals per week; 2015 and 2018



The slight differences between the hours worked by principals in 2015 and 2018 are not statistically significant. There were no differences related to school decile in 2018 (in 2015, some differences were reported).

Levels of stress have increased since 2015

Stress levels also remain high, with an increase from the levels reported in 2015. In 2018, 46% of principals report high typical stress levels (up from 39% in 2015), and 11% extremely high typical stress levels (up from 5%).

Most principals describe themselves as healthy

As in 2012 and 2015, most principals describe themselves as being healthy, with just 4% saying their health is not good. However, few principals manage to follow the general fitness guidelines of 30 minutes or more exercise a day: 8% did so on 6 to 7 days during the week in which they did the national survey, 26% did so on 3 to 5 days that week, and 44% on 1 or 2 days that week. Twenty-two percent had not undertaken any fitness activity that week. These figures are almost identical to those reported in 2015.

Morale continues to decline but most principals remain optimistic

Fewer principals now describe their morale as “very good” or “good” (61% in 2018, compared with 77% in 2015, and 80% in 2012). The decline is particularly in the proportion who describe their morale as “very good” (22% in 2018, compared with 33% in 2015, and 44% in 2012). At the other end of the scale, the proportion of principals describing their morale as “poor” or “very poor” has stayed around 7%. There were no differences related to school decile in the 2018 data (in 2015, some differences were reported).

In 2018, 77% of the principals describe themselves as feeling very optimistic or optimistic about their life and role as a principal (the same proportion as said they were very optimistic or quite optimistic in 2015—the wording changed slightly). However, there is a decrease in the proportion that are very optimistic: just 13% in 2018 (compared with 26% in 2015, and 36% in 2012).

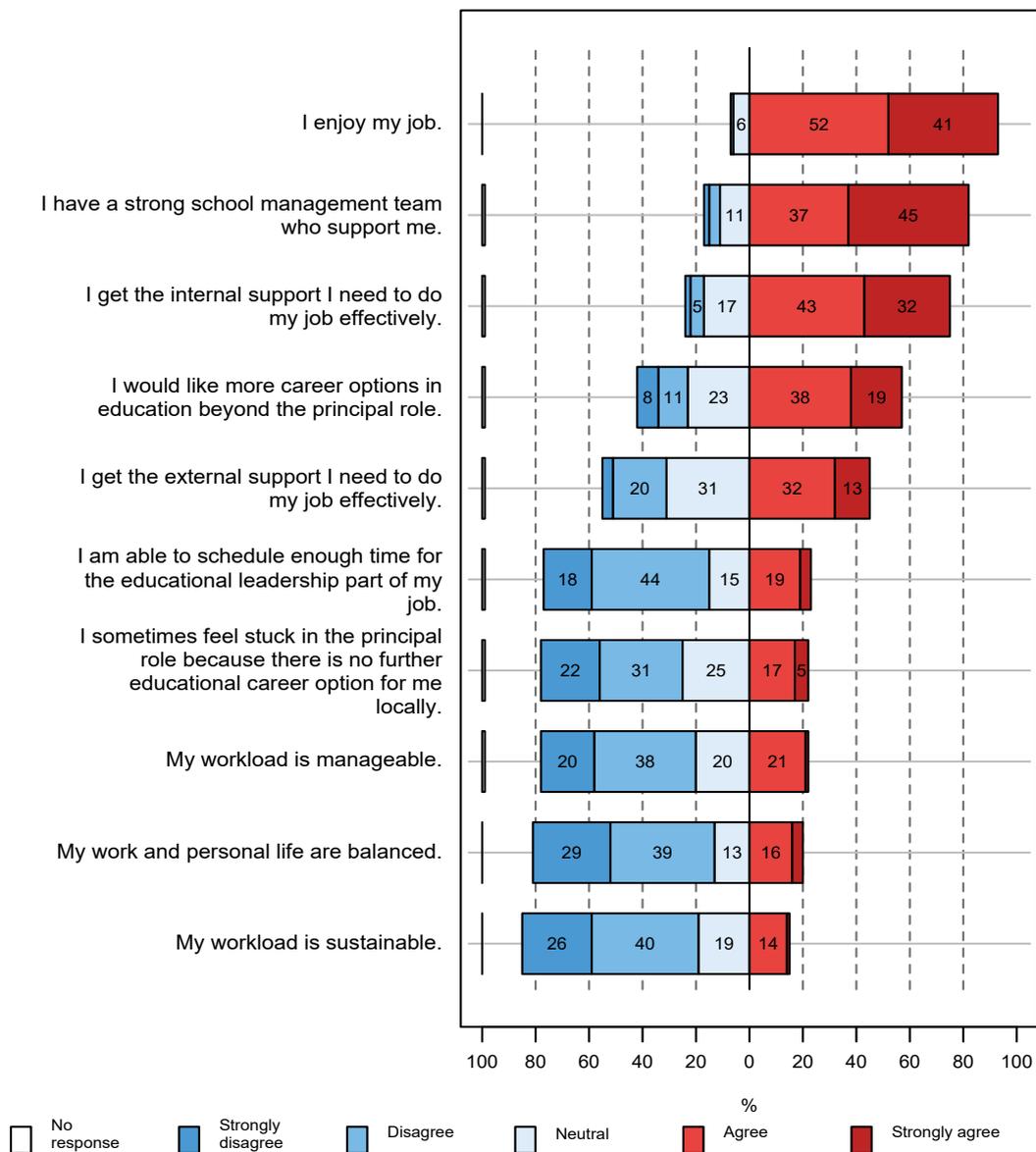
Almost all the principals enjoy their job but many have workload concerns

Figure 39 shows that secondary principals continue to enjoy their jobs.⁴⁶ However, fewer principals are positive about their workload than in 2015. In 2018, 22% said their workload was manageable (36% in 2015), 19% said their work and personal life was balanced (not significantly different from 2015), and 16% that their workload was sustainable (26% in 2015). Only 22% thought they could schedule enough time for the educational leadership part of their job. Over half (57%) would like more career options in education beyond being a principal, and 22% sometimes feel stuck in the principal role.

Most secondary principals feel supported by strong school management teams, and report they have the internal support they need to do their job effectively. Fewer get the external support they need: 45%, down from 58% in 2015.

⁴⁶ There was a small change to this question in 2018, with no option for principals to say they were not sure about a statement. The “not sure” option was selected by a small number of principals in relation to only two statements in the 2015 survey (“I sometimes feel stuck in the principal role” and “I would like more career options in education”).

FIGURE 39 Secondary principals' views of their work (n = 167)



Changes principals would like in their work

Principals want more time to focus on educational leadership

Only 22% of the principals agreed they could schedule enough time for the educational leadership part of their job (see Figure 39). Time to focus on this was also a change many principals wanted to see in their role (see Table 28). Related to this is more time to reflect/read/be innovative.

Table 28 shows there is an increase from previous years in those who seek a higher salary. There is also an increase in the proportion of principals who would like to reduce demands on them: demands about property and HR, demands from external agencies, and demands from parents and whānau (which increased to 21% from under 10% in previous years).

TABLE 28 Changes secondary principals would like in their work; 2012, 2015, and 2018

Change	2012 (n = 177) %	2015 (n = 182) %	2018 (n = 167) %
More time to reflect/read/be innovative	*	73	86
More time to focus on educational leadership	72	81	83
More balanced life	57	67	71
Reduce administration/paperwork	61	54	50
Reduce human resource management demands	35	30	47
Higher salary	38	34	46
Reduce external agencies' demands/expectations	41	30	44
Reduce property management/development demands	34	31	37
Reduce parents' and whānau demands	7	9	21

* Not asked.

Principals from higher decile schools are most likely to want to reduce parent and whānau demands (38% of decile 7–8 schools, and 27% of decile 9–10 schools, compared with 5% of decile 1–2 schools, 11% of decile 3–4 schools, and 15% of decile 5–6 schools).

Summary and discussion

Secondary principals report high levels of enjoyment of their role, but it remains a role with long work hours and high stress levels. Morale and stress levels have worsened since 2015.

Many secondary principals intend to stay in their current school over the next 5 years. This figure has been consistent since 2009. If secondary principals feel the need to move on from being a principal, they are more likely to seek a job within education than leave it. Over half say they would like more career options in education beyond being a principal.

Two-thirds of the principals who responded to the survey are in their first principalship. Most principals say they feel supported by a strong school management team, and that they get the internal support they need to do their job effectively. However, less than half agree they get the external support they need. The new Leadership Strategy⁴⁷ developed by the Teaching Council is timely: what support there has been from the system is limited and often focused on school management rather than educational leadership.

The increase in the proportion of principals accessing NZSTA support, support from SPANZ, and from former principals working as consultants suggests principals are looking for support. Most principals also meet other principals regularly, but only a minority work closely with other principals, and the trend here has not improved since 2012. One way in which principals may work with other principals is through participating in a Kāhui Ako. In *Section 9: Interactions and collaborations, including Kāhui Ako* we report principals' views on working in Kāhui Ako.

There were no differences related to decile and no notable differences related to location for how likely a principal was to use support or to have professional contact with other principals.

⁴⁷ See: <https://educationcouncil.org.nz/content/leadership-strategy>