

UTAH LEADING THROUGH EFFECTIVE, ACTIONABLE, AND DYNAMIC EDUCATION

PRINCIPAL JOB SATISFACTION

FIVE TAKEAWAYS FROM A BURNOUT SURVEY OF UTAH ADMINISTRATORS



ABOUT THIS REPORT

Utah Leading through Effective, Actionable, and Dynamic (ULEAD) Education was created to find, research, and highlight proven practices in Utah schools for replication statewide. ULEAD partners with practitioners, researchers, and education organizations to develop and curate resources, foster collaboration, and drive systemic change for improved student outcomes. The ULEAD Clearinghouse is a growing repository of innovative, effective, and efficient practice resources and tools to support educators.

The ULEAD Steering Committee, composed of current Utah educators and stakeholders, meets quarterly to inform the focus priorities that ULEAD will research. ULEAD uses data to find positive outliers in each focus area and create reports, such as this one, illuminating the practices and policies that lead to positive outcomes. At the time of this report, these priorities include:

Student Attendance, Educator Retention and Job Satisfaction, Academic Achievement through Strategic Engagement through Technology, and Academic Success through Social Emotional Supports Grounded in Academic Classroom Practice, with an emphasis on middle grade mathematics and multilingual learner achievement.

This report addresses initial findings from a survey of Utah principals addressing Educator Retention and Job Satisfaction.

ULEAD collaborates with Institutes of Higher Education and education practitioners to develop Innovative Practice Reports. This report was developed in partnership with Utah Valley University.

RESEARCH TEAM

Dale Cox, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor, Utah Valley University
DCox@uvu.edu

Dr. Dale Cox is an assistant professor in the Education Leadership Department at Utah Valley University and Program Director for UVU's K-12 Educational Leadership Program. He has worked in public education extensively as a teacher and administrator and also served as an international school developer and administrator in China and the Asia-Pacific region.

Utah Leading through Effective, Actionable, and Dynamic Education staff assisted in the survey implementation, analysis, and literature review resulting in the production of this report.

Meghan Everette, Ed.D.
Director, ULEAD
meghan.everette@schools.utah.gov

Jordan Green
Researcher II, ULEAD
jordan.green@schools.utah.gov

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	05	RELATIONSHIPS	10
PARTICIPANT PROFILE	06	CHALLENGES	11
SATISFACTION & STRESS	07	IN CONCLUSION	13
ACCOMPLISHMENT & EXHAUSTION	08	REFERENCES	14
WORKLOAD & VALUES	09	APPENDIX	15
		ABOUT THIS SURVEY	

ADA Compliant 6.2024

June 2024

This document contains examples and resource materials that are provided for the user’s convenience. The inclusion of any material is not intended to reflect its importance, nor is it intended to endorse any views expressed, or products or services offered. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses, and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The opinions expressed in any of these materials do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of the Utah State Board of Education or ULEAD. The Utah State Board of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Solidifying the principal pipeline and retaining administrators has become a critical concern. Initial results from the Utah Principal Burnout Survey, administered in 2023, revealed five significant themes related to principal job satisfaction.

Utah principals are more likely than not to be satisfied with their jobs.

Despite more than 80% of participants citing an increase in job stress since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, Utah principals were 2.4 times more likely to report being satisfied or very satisfied with their job than dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

Utah principals feel a sense of accomplishment but are exhausted.

There is both great stress and great reward that come with the principal position. Emotional Exhaustion among Utah principals is high with nearly two-thirds of principals feeling emotionally drained multiple days per week, yet nearly as many principals also report high levels of Personal Accomplishment.

Utah principals feel their workload is overwhelming but find strong overlap in their values and the values of their schools.

Roughly three out of four principals said they do not have time to accomplish their work, yet the same number found their personal, career, and school values to be in alignment.

Relationships matter. Time spent working directly with students and staff contribute most to principal satisfaction.

Principals cited positive interactions in the school community as the main driver of satisfaction. Satisfaction was derived from all kinds of interactions including positive relationships that drove student achievement, teacher growth, and contribution to the greater community.

Utah principals say a lack of support and negative adult behaviors would contribute to them leaving their current role.

Principals said they would be likely to leave their role if they did not have the necessary support for their job and if adult behaviors became untenable.

Further insight into policies and practices leading to highly satisfied principals and increasing retention will be forthcoming in the ULEAD Innovative Practice Report: Promoting Principal Satisfaction highlighting follow-up interviews with identified participant outliers from the MBI-ES/AWS survey.

We invite readers to explore these themes further over the following pages, then use the conclusion of this report to drive discussions about the actions that will help address principal job satisfaction.

PARTICIPANT PROFILE

Methodology

The Maslach Burnout Inventory - Educator Survey (MBI-ES) and Areas of Worklife Survey (AWS) were distributed online from December 2023 to January 2024.

In total, 184 Utah principals completed the survey, which was administered to collect data about the MBI constructs, AWS worklife domains, and job satisfaction, and to compare their experiences with normative samples.

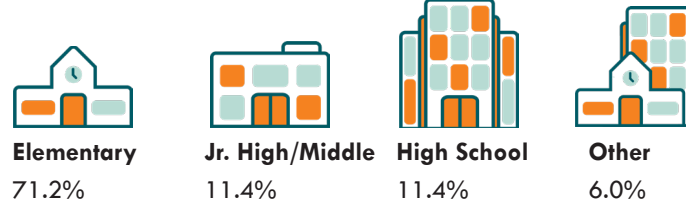
Only school principals participated in the survey. The survey instrument gathered information about respondents':

- Job satisfaction, and the effects of COVID-19 on their stress levels
- Burnout Constructs
- Worklife Domains
- Demographic information

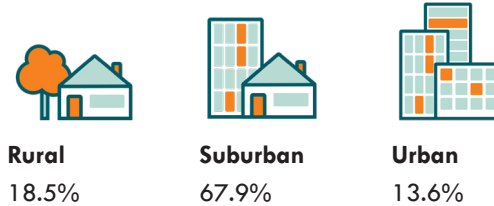
For survey details, refer to the Appendix (p. 15)

Profile of Participants

School Level



School Locale



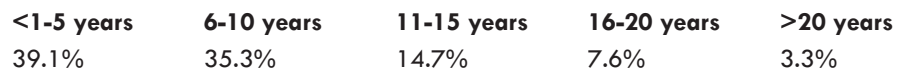
Gender



Age



Years of Experience as a Principal



Race & Ethnicity



THEME 1

Utah principals are more likely than not to be satisfied with their jobs.

Regarding job satisfaction, 50% of Utah principals were satisfied or very satisfied with their job, versus 29% of principals who were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, meaning Utah principals were 2.4 times more likely to be satisfied or very satisfied than to be dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Of note, job satisfaction increased with age. This may be because of increased social networks within the profession, a tendency toward commitment nearing the end of the career span, or age being associated with more work history and experience (Bauer & Brazer, 2013; Darmody & Smyth, 2016; Wang et al., 2018).

Multiple studies and surveys indicate job stress among principals rose precipitously during and following the COVID-19 pandemic (Steiner, et al., 2022). A large-scale study found those with higher professional satisfaction experience smaller effects from stress, while for those with lower job satisfaction, additional workload stress is “the straw that breaks the camel’s back” (Ning et al., 2022). The same study also found workload stress contributed to teachers in the United States being less willing to take on leadership roles, which has a negative impact on the principal pipeline. 82% of Utah principals reported that their job stress has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, so job stress is an issue that is worsening and requires attention.

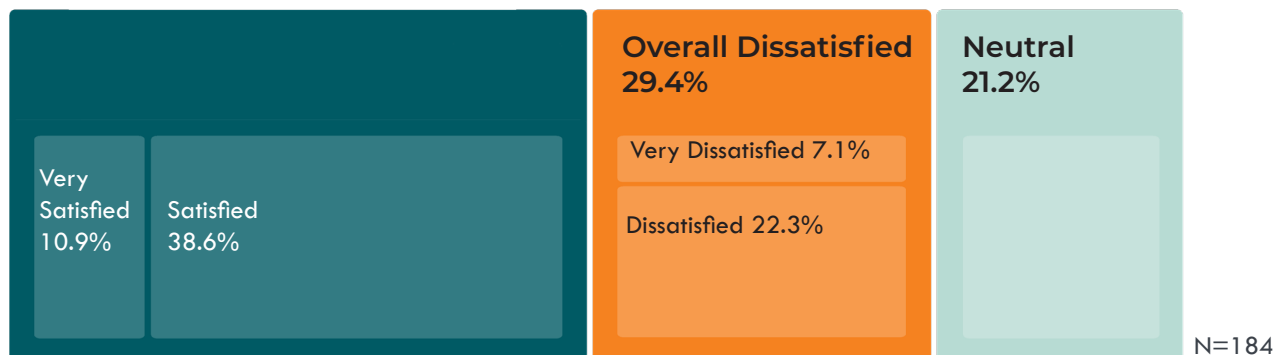
Stress has increased since the COVID-19 pandemic, yet

Since the COVID outbreak, has your level of job stress increased, decreased, or remained the same?



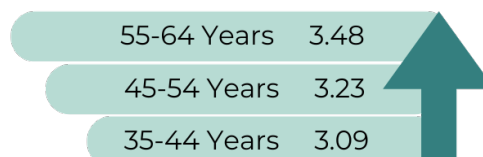
principals are more likely to be satisfied than not and

How would you describe your current overall job satisfaction?



their level of job satisfaction increases with age.

Average Satisfaction by Age on a 5 Point Scale



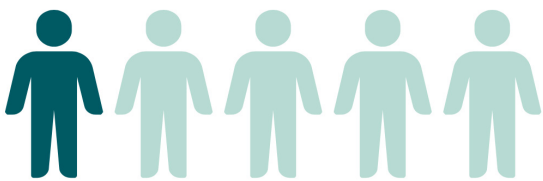
THEME 2

Utah principals feel a sense of accomplishment but are exhausted.

The MBI-ES, which measures Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalization, and Personal Accomplishment, was a key component of our survey. A synthesis of research on principal retention found that working conditions, which include factors such as workload, support, and school climate, have a direct effect on principal attrition (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Burnout can be offset by higher personal accomplishment. As sense of personal accomplishment and satisfaction increase, emotional burnout and depersonalization decrease (Karakose et al., 2016). Even if they stay, unhappy administrators may be less effective than those who find greater satisfaction in their roles (Duckworth et al., 2009; Krekel et al., 2019).

Most Utah principals (64%) reported feeling emotionally drained from their work at least a few times a week, and 20% of principals reported feeling emotionally drained from their work every day. Meanwhile, the majority of Utah principals (55%) reported feeling that they have accomplished many worthwhile things at least a few times a week. In comparison to a schoolteacher norm group, there are significant differences and large effect sizes for Utah principals' Emotional Exhaustion and Personal Accomplishment.

Utah principals experience burnout and are tired,

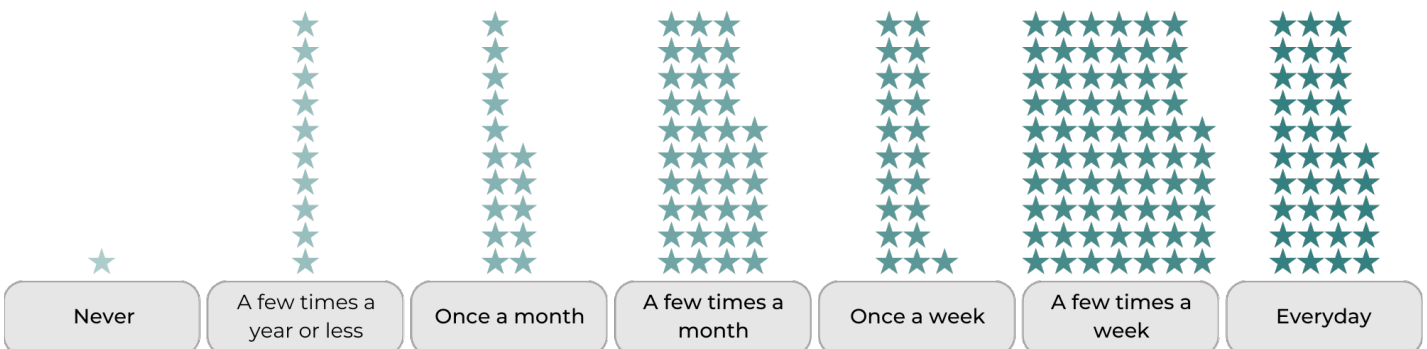


One in five Utah principals feels emotionally drained daily.



Six in ten Utah principals feel burned out at least once a week.

but they do feel accomplished in their roles.



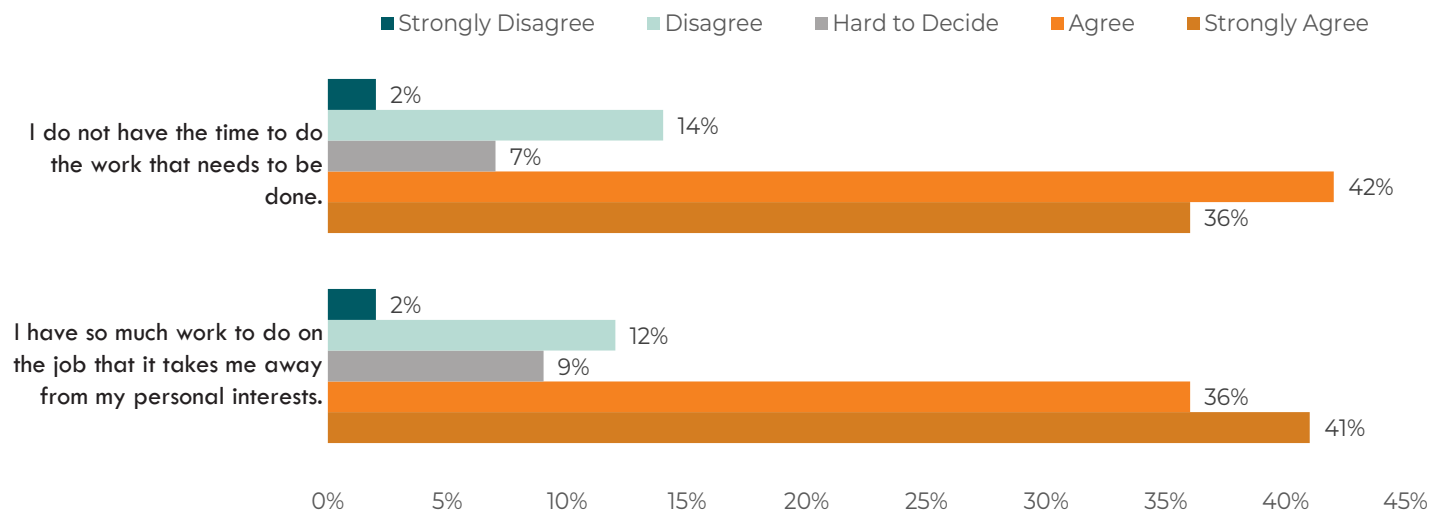
THEME 3

Utah principals feel their workload is overwhelming but find strong overlap in their values and the values of their schools.

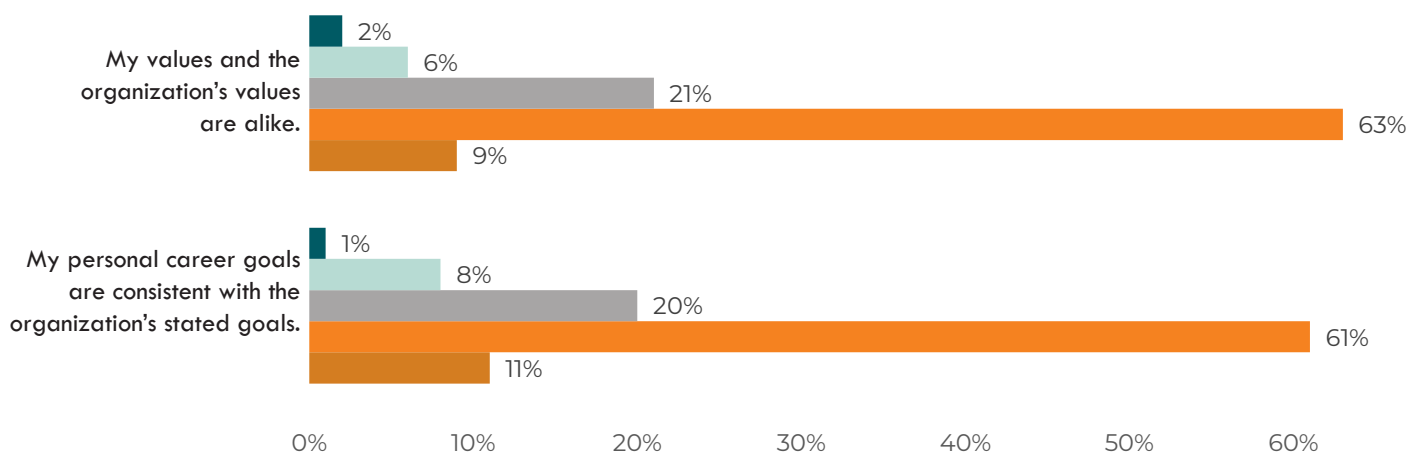
Research has found principal workload to impact the perception of working conditions and to be a significant factor influencing principal turnover (Levin & Bradley, 2019; Yan, 2020). The Job Demands-Resources Model states that burnout occurs when “the demands of the job exceed one’s capacity and available resources” (Coombs et al., 2009, p. 12). A conflict in values between the employee and their organization is related to all three dimensions of burnout, while aligned values are predictive of retention, and shared values can decrease educator turnover (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Leiter & Maslach, 2006; Wang & Klassen, 2023).

Most Utah principals (74%) agreed or strongly agreed that they do not have enough time to do the work that needs to be done, and 78% of principals agreed or strongly agreed that they have so much work to do on the job that it takes them away from their personal interests. Meanwhile, 72% of Utah principals agreed or strongly agreed that their values and the values of their school are alike. In comparison to a norm group, there are significant differences and large effect sizes for Utah principals’ workload and values match.

Utah principals feel imbalances in their workload,



but have a strong balance between their values and their schools’ values.



THEME 4

Relationships matter. Time spent working directly with students and staff contribute most to principal satisfaction.

Participants were asked open-ended questions at the end of the MBI-ES portion of the survey to determine what factors contribute to their satisfaction and retention. Between 97-99% of respondents answered each question, creating a robust list of factors important to administrators. Both intrinsic factors related to personal fulfillment and extrinsic factors such as support, recognition, and school environment contributed to respondents' feelings of satisfaction. The most frequently cited factors were directly interacting with students, supporting teachers, and positively contributing to the community.

Principals say the best parts of their job are direct student interactions,

What aspects of your job contribute most to job satisfaction in your current role?

“The students are the main reason I am still in this position. I love that aspect of my job. They keep me coming back every day.”

“Working closely with students and being able to spend meaningful time with students in a positive way leads to great satisfaction in my job. I wish there was more time to do this.”

the chance to support teachers and staff, and

“I enjoy interactions with students and find fulfillment in providing quality opportunities for teaching and learning within my school.”

“I love working with the people I work with who are skilled, professional, and passionate about what they do. I love the kids and seeing their progress.”

positively contributing to the community.

“Knowing I am making a difference in my school and my community. Giving public service for the greater good.”

“I love working with people and solving complex personnel problems. I believe the work I am doing is making a difference.”

THEME 5

Utah principals say a lack of support and negative adult behaviors would contribute to them leaving their current role.

When asked what would cause them to leave their current role, more than 40% of written responses mentioned challenging adult behaviors from both parents and staff. More than a quarter of respondents specifically mentioned difficulty in dealing with parent expectations. Similarly, more than a quarter of respondents said that a lack of support would lead them to leave their current role. It is important to note not all principals are currently experiencing these factors; rather, they named them as factors that would influence their likelihood of leaving their role. Some respondents named current challenges and an intention to leave, while others simply said an increase in these issues would influence them. Reasons that would cause principals to leave were numerous, with many causes being highly specific and only mentioned once. The five reasons here were identified by at least 15% of participants.

Utah principals would leave due to poor relationships with parents,

“#1 Parent complaints.”

“Over-controlling parents, non-supportive parents, helicopter parents, parents in general”

a lack of support,

“[I’m] just so overwhelmed. I have felt supported when I ask for help, I really have. But the needs keep growing and teachers are overwhelmed, so I try to take on more to alleviate them. All while smiling and trying to keep the morale of the building up.”

“I do not feel like educators have the support of not only district leaders but also communities in general.”

a lack of professional collaboration,

“It is very hard to do anything when I don’t have a team to talk to every day consistently and work through decisions.”

“I find it difficult to deal with adults sometimes. They often have some unreasonable expectations for what I can do.”

increased negative student behaviors, and

“Student behavior with no support from others on how to handle even the toughest situations is becoming a bigger and bigger problem.”

“If student behaviors continue to intensify or the expectations of the job continue to increase, I may not be able to continue for many more years without negatively impacting my health.”

unmanageable workloads.

“More and more is added every month and nothing is taken away.”

“The scope of my job is too much. I can not get to all my staff members and needs as well as being the instructional leader. Then comes running a huge building. It is too much!

A lack of support was felt in both generalized and specified ways. Principals most often expected the district or their direct supervisor to provide support. The specific supports and their sources were often unnamed, but those identified included help with managing student behaviors and managing the expectations and workload of their role.

Sources of Requested Principal Support

District Leadership &
Direct Supervisor

Parents & School Community

Types of Requested Support

Managing Student Behaviors

Managing Workload

IN CONCLUSION

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, an average of one in five principals left their jobs each year (Harbatkin & Henry, 2019). After the 2020-21 academic year, 11% of public-school principals left the profession entirely, while overall principal turnover increased to 16% (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023; National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Burnout can influence people to leave their roles, whereas those who are satisfied are more likely to not only maintain their current position, but to be more successful as well. In order to understand the current state of job satisfaction and burnout among Utah principals, the MBI-ES/AWS was administered. Five key findings were:

Utah principals are more likely than not to be satisfied with their jobs.

Utah principals feel a sense of accomplishment but are exhausted.

Utah principals feel their workload is overwhelming but find strong overlap in their values and the values of their schools.

Relationships matter. Time spent working directly with students and staff contribute most to principal satisfaction.

Utah principals say a lack of support and negative adult behaviors would contribute to them leaving their current role.

The principalship is a challenging and complex role. Utah principals struggle with exhaustion stemming from hefty workloads. They identify a need for support to continue in their current roles. It is the adults principals deal with that often give them the most cause for concern, be it parents or teachers. Utah principals say they need support to handle the challenges associated with their jobs.

Despite the challenges, there is a lot to celebrate among Utah principals. Our administrators tend to be satisfied in their roles. They feel a sense of personal accomplishment, have values aligned to those of their schools, and enjoy time working directly with students and staff. Utah principals feel they are contributing to the greater good and are proud of the work they do.

While the MBI-ES/AWS provides insights into the state of Utah principal burnout, further study is needed to understand what leads to higher levels of job satisfaction. Those respondents with the lowest levels of emotional exhaustion were invited to qualitative interviews to identify specific practices that help support principal job satisfaction in Utah. Results will be published in an upcoming Innovative Practice Report.

REFERENCES

- Bartanen, B., Grissom, J. A., & Rogers, L. (2019). The impacts of principal turnover. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 41(3). <https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737198550>
- Bauer, S. C., & Brazier, S. D. (2013). The impact of isolation on the job satisfaction of new principals. *Journal of School Leadership*, 23(1), 152-177. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1045155.pdf>
- Boudreau, B., Graham, R., Boudreau, W., & Boudreau, R. (2024). *The Boudreau burnout bibliography: 1957-2023*. <https://openeducationalberta.ca/boudreauburnoutbibliography/>
- Darmody, M., & Smyth, E. (2016). Primary school principals' job satisfaction and occupational stress. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 30(1), 115-128. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-12-2014-0162>
- DeMatthews, D. E., Knight, D. S., & Shin, J. (2021). The principal-teacher churn: Understanding the relationship between leadership turnover and teacher attrition. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 58(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X211051974>
- Dilberti, M. K., & Schwartz, H. L. (2023). *Educator turnover has markedly increased, but districts have taken actions to boost teacher ranks: Selected findings from the sixth American school district panel survey*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA956-14.html
- Duckworth, A. L., Quinn, P. D., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2009). Positive Predictors of Teacher Effectiveness. *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 19, 540-547. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760903157232>
- Harbatkin, E. & Henry, G. T. (2019, October 21). *The cascading effects of principal turnover on students and schools*. Brookings. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-cascading-effects-of-principal-turnover-on-students-and-schools/>
- Henry, G. T., & Harbarkin, E. (2019, June). *Turnover at the top: Estimating the effects of principal turnover on student, teacher, and school outcomes*. (Working Paper No. 19-95). Annenberg Institute at Brown University. <http://www.edworkingpapers.com/ai19-95>
- Karakose, T., Kocabas, I., Yirci, R., Esen, C., Celik, M. (2016). Exploring the relationship between school principals' burnout situation and life satisfaction. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 4(6), 1488-1494. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1103266.pdf>
- Krekel, C., Ward, G. & De Neve, J. (2019) *Employee wellbeing, productivity, and firm performance*. (Working Paper No. 2019-04). Saïd Business School. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3356581>
- Leiter, M. P., & Maslach, C. (2006). *Areas of worklife survey manual and sampler set* (5th ed.). Mind Garden, Inc.
- Leiter, M. P. & Maslach, C. (2020). *Areas of worklife survey*. Mind Garden, Inc. <https://www.mindgarden.com/274-areas-of-worklife-survey#horizontalTab2>
- Levin, S., & Bradley, K. (2019, March 19). *Understanding and addressing principal turnover: A review of research*. Learning Policy Institute & National Association of Secondary School Principals. Learning. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/media/326/download?inline&file=NASSP_LPI_Principal_Turnover_Research_Review_REPORT.pdf
- Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., & Schwab, R. L. (1986). *MBI-ES*. Mind Garden, Inc. <https://www.mindgarden.com/316-mbi-educators-survey#horizontalTab2>
- Maslach, C., Jackson, S., & Leiter, M. (1996-2018). *Maslach burnout inventory manual* (4th ed.) Mind Garden, Inc.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2021, July 31). *Roughly one in ten public school principals left profession in 2021-22 school year* [Press release]. https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/7_31_2023.asp
- Ning, B., Liu, H., & Cui, Y. (2022). Working conditions influencing junior school principalship as a satisfying profession: A cross-country comparative study. (2022, March 25). *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13(1), Article 834349. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8990902/pdf/fpsyg-13-834349.pdf>
- Skaalvik, C. (2020). Self-efficacy for instructional leadership: relations with perceived job demands and job resources, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and motivation to quit. *Social Psychology of Education*, 23(1), 1343-1366. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-020-09585-9>
- Steiner, E. D., Doan, S., Woo, A., Gittens, A. D., Lawrence, R. A., Berdie, L., Wolfe, R. L., Greer, L., Schwartz, H. L. (2022). *Restoring teacher and principal well-being is an essential step for rebuilding schools: Findings from the state of the American teacher and state of the American principal surveys*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-4.html
- Wang, F., Pollock, K. E., Hauseman, C. (2018). School principals' job satisfaction: The effects of work intensification. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 185(1), 73-90. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1179195.pdf>
- Wang, H., & Klassen, R. M. (2023). Longitudinal relationships between teachers' utility values and quitting intentions: A person-organization fit perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 127. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0742051X23000975>
- World Health Organization. (2019/2021). *International classification of diseases* (11th ed.). <https://icd.who.int/browse/2024-01/mms/en#129180281>
- Yan, R. (2020, February). The influence of working conditions on principal turnover in k-12 public education. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 56(1), 89-122. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0013161X19840391>

APPENDIX

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

According to the World Health Organization (2019/2021), the occupational phenomenon of burnout is defined as unsuccessfully managed workplace stress that is characterized by three dimensions: “feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion; increased mental distance from one’s job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one’s job; and reduced professional efficacy.”

The MBI-ES measures burnout across three scales identified in this definition: high Emotional Exhaustion, high Depersonalization, and low Personal Accomplishment, and is used in more than 80% of burnout research publications (Noudreau et al., 2024; Maslach et al, 1996-2018). The AWS identifies six areas of work life where an imbalance may lead to burnout.

MBI-ES measures the extent of burnout

AWS measures the likely cause of burnout

Burnout is a distinct construct from job stress or depression, but Depersonalization and Emotional Exhaustion have a negative correlation with general job satisfaction, while Personal Accomplishment has a positive correlation (Maslach et al., 1996-2018). This means that even though lack of burnout does not automatically imply higher job satisfaction, the three scales used to determine level of burnout are correlated with job satisfaction. Additionally, the AWS provides details about the organizational structures that may be affecting burnout and satisfaction, offering a link to practical implications and needed interventions.

Example MBI Questions

I feel emotionally drained from my work.

Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Everyday
-------	----------------------------	--------------	---------------------	-------------	--------------------	----------

I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job.

Never	A few times a year or less	Once a month	A few times a month	Once a week	A few times a week	Everyday
-------	----------------------------	--------------	---------------------	-------------	--------------------	----------

Example AWS Questions

Workload: I have time to do the work that must be done.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Hard to Decide	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	----------------	-------	----------------

Reward: I receive recognition from others for my work.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Hard to Decide	Agree	Strongly Agree
-------------------	----------	----------------	-------	----------------



Utah Leading through Effective, Actionable, and Dynamic Education

ulead@schools.utah.gov

Utah State Board of Education

250 East 500 South | PO Box 144200

Salt Lake City, UT 84114-4200