

Job Satisfaction of Iowa Public School Principals

~ by Boris Sodoma and
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In 1999, the Institute for Educational Leadership at the University of Northern Iowa released research about the job satisfaction of Iowa public school principals. The results showed that in overall job satisfaction, 76% of Iowa public school principals were *moderately satisfied* with their job. Considering the changes that have been carried out in our public education during recent years—with more responsibilities and accountabilities for principals in leading and managing their schools, and with implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001)—we decided to examine the job satisfaction of Iowa public school principals again and contrast the results of the 2005 study to the perceptions six years prior.

Since the 1999 study, (Else & Sodoma) the role of the principal has continued to change. In recent writings, Seyfarth (1999) sees three themes that appear; the principal as a *manager-by-results*, the principal as a *cultural leader*, and the principal as *professionalized manager*. The principal's job can feel overwhelming to both experienced and new administrators (Tirozzi & Ferrandino, 2001). Demands placed on principals have changed, but the profession has not adapted to meet these demands. Principals today are



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too often not ready to meet the demands placed on them (IEL Task Force on the Principalship, 2000). A sharp increase in responsibilities in recent years has made the job of principal more stressful (National Association of Elementary School Principals [NAESP], 2003). Principals are now being held more accountable for the performance of students and teachers, while at the same time they are required to adhere to a growing number of government regulations.

With growing emphasis on accountability, standards, and high-stakes testing, we have to wonder what impact the demands to raise student achievement and close the achievement gap has had on principal job satisfaction. Since the initial study six years ago, state budget cuts, minimal allowable growth in per pupil spending, declining student enrollment, endless mandates, ever present litigation, and growing concerns about violence have



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increased the pressures on principals. Have all of these challenges, combined with the requirement of No Child Left Behind (2001), affected the job satisfaction of Iowa public school principals?

In the 2005 study, 64.3% of Iowa public school principals responded. There were no changes in demographics from the 1999 study. The majority of the respondents in the 2005 study were male (65.8%), while 34.2% were female. Nearly all principals were white (98.4%), with the other 1.6% being represented through other racial/ethnic groups including 1.1% African-American, and .5% Hispanic. Seventy-one point five (71.5%) of the principals were 41-60 years old, while 25.9% were below 40, and only 2.6% were above 60. Forty-four percent of the respondents were principals in schools with enrollments between 300 and 599 students. Thirty-five percent served in schools of 600 pupils or more, and 21% were at schools

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with less than 300 students enrolled.

More than half of the respondents (51.3%) had served as a principal for 1-10 years and 31.6% had served 11-20 years. Thirteen point five percent had served 21-30 years and only 3.6% of the respondents had served more than 30 years. Considering their experience in their present school, more than half of the principals (51.3%) had served 1-5 years, 25.9% had served 6-10 years and 22.8% had served more than 10 years. Just under half of the respondents (45.6%) were employed in elementary schools, with 25.4% working in middle schools, and 29% in high schools.

In both studies, factors included in the questionnaires were related to the job itself and were represented by Herzberg's motivators: *recognition, responsibility, and work itself*. Hygiene factors were related to the job context and were represented by the categories of *school policy and administration; personal life; interpersonal relations with peers, superiors, subordinates, and parents; and salary*. Principals were asked to rate their level of satisfaction for each factor, along with their overall level of satisfaction. From the descriptive statistical perspectives examined by gender, years served as a principal, years served

in their present school, and the size of their school, the overall satisfaction score varied between a highest mean score of 1.80 (*very*

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satisfied) and lowest mean score of 2.28 (*moderately satisfied*). The results of the study showed that in spite of new responsibilities, added accountabilities, implications of No Child Left Behind, and other state regulations, Iowa public school principals were overall more satisfied in the 2005 study than they were in 1999.

In both studies, principals were very satisfied with their relationships with teachers, parents, administrative team/cabinet members, board of education members, superintendent, and with the sense of accomplishment. They were less satisfied with time and community demands placed on principals, salary, and the community's image of school administrators. The time available for activities that provide balance in the lives of principals, extra-curricular demands, time spent on leadership activities, and time spent on management tasks were factors that were rated with lower satisfaction in both studies.

The findings confirmed the trend that principals spend more time on the management of their schools than on leadership tasks.

This trend contradicts the expectations of the public, which wants principals to be educational leaders, not just managers of school affairs

(Else & Sodoma, 1999).

In both studies, those principals who spent more time on leadership activities were more satisfied overall. The results also indicated higher means of satisfaction in the 2005 study for both motivators and hygiene factors. Both studies also revealed that principals were more satisfied with hygiene factors (school policy and administration, personal life, interpersonal relations, and salary) than with motivators (recognition, responsibility, and work itself). This contradicts Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory that states that the factors leading to job satisfaction are motivators and those leading to job dissatisfaction are hygiene factors. The absence of hygiene factors can create job dissatisfaction, but their presence does not motivate or create satisfaction. While some studies support the results of Herzberg's theory, (Rasmussen, 1990) other studies only partially support his theory (Graham & Messner, 1998) or do not support his theory at all (King, 1970).

The results of our study are in accordance with the study of Malinowski & Barry (1965) who revealed that both motivators and hygiene factors contributed to job satisfaction. The results of the Iowa studies do not reflect Herzberg's theory that also states that hygiene factors fail to provide positive satisfaction because "they do not possess the characteristics necessary for giving an individual a sense of growth" (p.80). Yet results of the 1999 and the 2005 studies show high scores in professional growth opportunities. These results point out the good work of school districts in the areas of school policy and administration. Both studies also contradict Ford et al. (1968) who claimed that only individuals who prefer motivators should be considered as candidates for administrative positions and all other candidates who prefer hygiene factors should be regarded as undesirable candidates for administrative positions. On the other hand, Sergiovani (1987) claimed that effective principals are concerned with both motivators and hygiene factors.

Principals in the 2005 study were more satisfied than they were in 1999. This is interesting because during these six years, greater focus was placed on raising student achievement and closing the achievement gap as a result of pressures to show proficiency in growth as mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act. All school districts also experienced an

across the board budget cut and minimal allowable growth during the period between 1999 and 2005. In the 2005 study, 78.2 % of principals indicated that NCLB significantly or somewhat increased their collaboration with teachers. Forty-eight point two percent (48.2%) of respondents indicated increased collaboration with parents, while 46.6% indicated that NCLB significantly decreased their collaboration with parents. Seventy-two point five percent (72.5%) of principals also indicated increased supervision and evaluation of teachers, and only 18.1% of principals indicated a significant decrease in the supervision and evaluation of teachers as a result of NCLB. Of the respondents, 75% of principals indicated that NCLB somewhat increased the time necessary to fulfill their role, and 16.6% indicated that NCLB somewhat or significantly decreased time necessary to fulfill their role. There was also a noted increase in communication with the public, with 71.5% of principals indicating increased or somewhat increased communication, while 25% indicated a significant decrease in their communication with the public. The study showed less encouraging results in the area of overall job satisfaction, where more than 25% of principals indicated that NCLB somewhat or significantly decreased their job satisfaction, while 42% reported no change, and 20.1% indicated a significantly or somewhat increased satisfaction with

their role as principal since NCLB.

So why are Iowa public school principals more satisfied in 2005? One can only speculate that principals feel more responsibility for student success. Perhaps they see themselves more as educational and instructional leaders than in the past. Principals tend to have a close working relationship with teachers, parents, board members, and other stakeholders and the focus on student achievement and closing the achievement gap may provide a common agreed upon direction. Maybe the opportunity to provide instructional leadership and seeing research based instructional practices implemented in classrooms has contributed to greater satisfaction. Knowing that students are benefiting from a team effort to improve instruction could be a source of satisfaction. Perhaps principals feel more support from their boards of education as they work through processes designed to improve schools. Perhaps additional pressures since 1999 have allowed more opportunities to work together and improved relationships. We sense a greater engagement of professional learning teams with a common mission and vision.

To encourage principals into higher performance, motivation factors are needed. Schools need a clear understanding of what principals personally find satisfying or dissatisfying about their jobs.

This is a task for boards of education and superintendents. Principals as middle level managers compare their possibilities and opportunities for promotion and professional growth with other categories of managers. More autonomy in personal management, redesign expectations, reevaluation of their workload, and compensation will lead to higher job satisfaction and higher motivation for principals. Despite the positive results in both studies, it is important to concentrate on efficient and effective educational leadership. It is necessary to reduce time demands, improve salaries, and increase administrative support and support services. University preparation programs (preservice) and inservice training programs have to not only expand knowledge and the understanding of theory, they also must create a cycle of skill development and practice, meaningful feedback, reflection, and additional practice. Aspiring principals have to be prepared for longer working hours, growing time pressures, elevated levels of stress, limited resources, and the demands that accompany change. Principals need communication skills which convey that they truly value others and their ideas, genuine relationship building skills, a profound understanding of teaching and learning, the ability to set clear direction, a capacity to build a strong culture and climate, and the courage to ensure accounta-

bility. Thus, if we want to attract new people into educational leadership, we must ensure continuous growth opportunities that meet individualized needs. Further we need to help leaders discover how to put balance in their lives.

faction of Iowa public school principals in 1999 and 2005. These findings also suggest that both motivators and hygiene factors be considered as we seek to attract and retain highly qualified leaders for our schools.

Are principals more satisfied in 2005 because they feel more responsibility for student success?

To retain principals, we must enable them to develop and utilize their expertise and ability. If job satisfaction is to remain high, we need to address the problems principals face and look for ways to help them work effectively and productively. It is necessary to reduce management tasks and to increase time for leadership. In spite of budget cuts and school financial problems, it would be useful for boards of education and superintendents to hire assistant principals for schools with larger student populations. Also, more women are needed for the principalship, especially at the high school level. In the 2004-2005 school year, 35.5% of principals in Iowa were women. Because of more culturally diverse student populations, it is also necessary to hire minority principals. The current number of ethnically diverse principals in Iowa is not reflective of student enrollment in many districts.

The findings of this research provide insight into the job satis-

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