

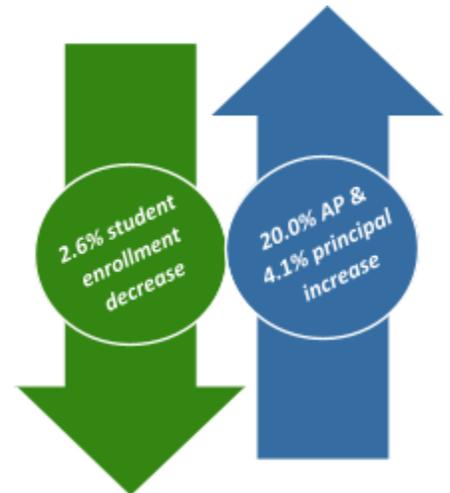
## Profile of Wisconsin Principals (2000-2020)

This policy brief, produced by the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison as part of the Region 10 Comprehensive Center, is one in a series which examines selected topics related to Wisconsin’s educator workforce. This brief is a descriptive profile of Wisconsin’s principal and assistant principal labor force over the past 20 years. Attributes explored in this brief include counts of these two

types of administrators, distribution across locale type (urban, suburban, town, rural) and region of the state, and selected demographic characteristics (including gender, race/ethnicity, age, and years of experience). For a detailed report of these findings, [click here](#). The three questions framing this comparison of administrator trends in Wisconsin include:

- Question 1** How has the number of principals and assistant principals working in Wisconsin public schools changed over the past two decades, and how does this compare to trends in student enrollment?
- Question 2** How has the distribution of Wisconsin principals and assistant principals by locale type and region of the state (including the state’s largest districts) changed over the past two decades?
- Question 3** How have selected characteristics of Wisconsin’s principals and assistant principals changed over time?

**Numbers of Principals.** During the 2019-20 school year, Wisconsin public schools employed 1,741 principals and 829 assistant principals (APs). When compared to 1999-00 staffing levels, the number of principals had increased by 69 (+4.1%) while the number of AP increased by 138 (+20.0%). During the same 20-year time frame, fluctuation in the number of principals statewide has been minimal while the number of APs has seen somewhat greater year-to-year fluctuation. These increases have occurred even though student enrollment in grades PK-12 over the same 20-year timeframe have decreased by 22,389 (-2.6%), with most of the decrease occurring between 2013-14 to 2019-20. Despite declining enrollment, it is possible districts are adding building-level leadership roles (particularly AP positions) to focus on issues such as school culture and climate, teacher development, and family engagement.



**Distribution of Principals.** Over the past eight years, the number of principals in Urban, Suburban, and Town *district locales* have remained mostly stable, while the number of principals working in Rural districts has increased by more than 50 positions (+11.5%). City districts employ the largest number of APs, an increase which occurred most significantly between the 2012-13 and 2019-20 school years. There were also regional patterns in the distribution of WI principals and APs. CESA 1 (in southeastern Wisconsin) continues to have the largest number of both principals and APs, although growth in both position types over the past 20 years has been modest in this region when compared to increases in other CESAs (such as 2, 6, and 7). Several CESAs, comprised largely of smaller rural districts (such as CESAs 3, 8, and 10), saw a decline in both principals and students between 1999-00 and 2019-20

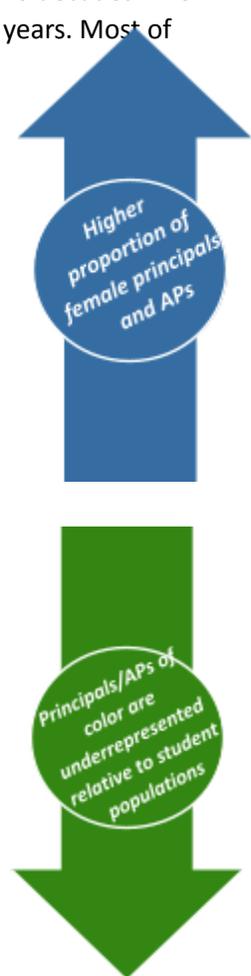
while adding small numbers of AP positions. This suggests APs may represent an emerging strategy for fulfilling principal-type roles in districts that face stagnant or declining enrollment.

**Demographics of WI Principals.** Over half of Wisconsin’s principals have been working in the state for more than 20 years, and another third have been WI principals between 11-19 years. Therefore, a substantial portion of principals will approach retirement age over the next decade, making it imperative to have a “pipeline” of candidates prepared to replace them. In terms of educational attainment, a majority of principals and APs hold a master’s degree, a statistic which has changed little over the past 20 years. A small but increasing number of principals hold only a bachelor’s degree, a trend which began in the years immediately following Act 10 and was possibly hastened by retirements. Wisconsin’s principal and AP ranks have also gradually trended younger over the past two decades. The average principal age decreased by 1.3 years, and the average AP age decreased by 1.8 years. Most of these decreases occurred between 2011-14.

The female portion of Wisconsin’s principal workforce has grown steadily over the past 20 years, such that gender discrepancies in this profession have nearly disappeared. This same trend is evident with assistant principals, although males still outnumber females by a 54:46 ratio. When exploring the principalship across grade levels, there were higher proportions of female principal and assistant principals at the elementary level than at the middle school and high school levels.

In terms of the race/ethnicity of Wisconsin public school principals and APs, certain groups remain underrepresented in the principalship. Hispanic/Latinx principals and APs (who comprise less than 2% of the state’s principals) remain particularly under-represented in relation to the share of Hispanic/Latinx students in public schools statewide (12.6% of statewide public school enrollment). Black principals and APs are under-represented as well (less than 6% of principals and APs vs. 9% of students), and the percentage of APs statewide who are Black decreased by two percentage points over the 20-year time span analyzed for this brief (from 7.4% of all APs in 1999-00 to 5.3% in 2019-20). Asian and American Indian principals and APs represent less than 1% of all principals and APs statewide, compared to 4.2% and 1.1% of students in 2019-20, respectively.

In 1999-00, approximately 85% of the principals of color, and 92% of the APs of color, worked in the state’s five largest school districts (Milwaukee, Madison, Kenosha, Green Bay, and Racine). While this concentration has decreased somewhat over time, in 2019-20, about 75% of both principals and APs of color in the state still work in the five largest districts, even though those districts include less than half (approximately 48%) of Wisconsin’s students of color. Exacerbating the statewide mismatch between students of color and school leaders, most of the state’s principals and APs of color work in a relatively small number of districts.



Hopefully the findings in this brief are useful to Wisconsin stakeholders as they examine the relevance of these trends in their own contexts and seek to address any needs or gaps in the principal and assistant principal workforce.