*Fiscal Facts by Wisconsin Policy Forum*

**Recent trends in Wisconsin’s principal and superintendent turnover**

Principals and superintendents turn over in Wisconsin public schools and districts at about the national average, state data show, but turnover is most prevalent for those serving the state’s most vulnerable students. For now, at least, a feared pandemic-related surge in school leadership turnover has not yet emerged.

As schools navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of strong district and school leadership has never been more evident. Nor has it seemed more at risk. given the heightened risk and stress faced by school districts nationwide.

Reputable national research indicates principals have a substantial impact on student learning, perhaps second only to teachers among school-based factors. Research further suggests that principal transitions impact student achievement as well as related factors such as teacher retention and school climate. While research on superintendent turnover is less conclusive, most would agree they play a primary role in establishing the direction of a school district, and that their transitions cost districts in both money and stability.

“Turnover” refers to any instance in which leadership shifts, whether due to a leader taking a different role in the same setting, taking the same or different role in a new setting, or leaving the profession entirely.

Data from the state Department of Public Instruction (DPI) show that principal turnover entering the 2020-21 school year was at its lowest level since 2010. On average between 2010 and 2021, 18.4% of principals turned over. In 2021, only 15.5% of principals moved to other schools or departed the principal role.

Superintendent turnover going into the 2020-21 school year was not quite as rosy: 17.7% of Wisconsin superintendents moved districts or departed the superintendent role, slightly above the 15.7% average for the period studied. Still, this percentage is a decrease from the previous year’s uptick.

According to DPI data, 4,089 instances of principal turnover across 2,155 schools in Wisconsin occurred between 2009 and 2021, for an average of 1.90 turnovers per school over the period in question. This rate equates to 17.6% of schools experiencing a principal transition each year on average, similar to the national average.

Between 2009 and 2021, Wisconsin districts turned over superintendents at the same rate that schools turned over principals: an average of 1.90 turnovers per district over the period, with 811 instances of turnover across 427 districts. This rate equates to 16.2% of districts experiencing a superintendent transition each year on average, which appears to track with national average estimates.

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