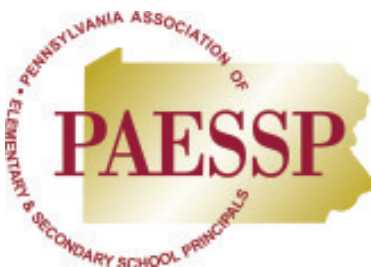


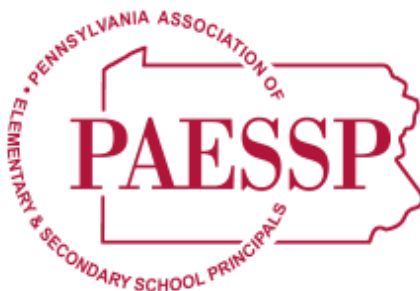
How To Attract and Retain Outstanding School Principals



By Dr. William R. Hartman, Jr.

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This publication provides suggestions for attracting and retaining outstanding school principals. It is designed to provide general guidance to school board members, superintendents and principals. It is not a substitute for specific legal advice.

PAESSP's Mission is to assure a quality education for every child in Pennsylvania by comprehensively supporting the educational leaders in our schools.

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Introduction

The purpose of this work is to assist school leaders and district leaders in the important task of attracting and retaining outstanding school principals. It is clear from the research that school leadership is one of the most important elements in successful student learning. Only the individual classroom teacher ranks higher. The school leader is the difference between an organization that has isolated pockets of student success based upon the “luck” of getting the right teacher and a system that consistently produces student learning for all children.

Although the thoughts expressed in this work are based upon research and 45 years of experience in schools, it is not a work of research. Rather, it is a guide for principals, superintendents and school boards who want to lead organizations of quality, and understand the importance of hiring and retaining the highest quality school leaders.

There are thoughts expressed within that you may disagree with, but as with any useful tool, the power is with the thinking of the individual that accompanies the read.

Why It's Important

As long as formal education has existed, researchers have tried to determine what makes great schools and how to duplicate the process. From Dewey to the current myriad of researchers, public education has been scrutinized, dissected, examined, rebuilt and declared dead! In reality, quite a bit of knowledge has been produced over those years – dedicated researchers built upon the solid work of those who came before and a verifiable picture of what makes great schools is coming into focus.

In 2004, The Wallace Foundation commissioned a review of research conducted by The University of Minnesota and The University of Toronto titled: *How Leadership Influences Student Learning* (Lethwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). This thorough and comprehensive review reached well-documented conclusions about the importance of quality leadership in schools. Among other things, they concluded that:

- “Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school.”
- “Leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed most.”
- “...much of the existing research actually underestimates its (school leadership) effects.”
- “The total (direct and indirect) effects of leadership on student learning account for about a quarter of total school effects.”
- “...the greater the challenge the greater the impact of leaders’ actions on student learning...”
- “Indeed, there are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader.”
- “We need to be developing leaders with large repertoires of practices and the capacity to choose from that repertoire as needed, not leaders trained in the delivery of one “ideal” set of practices.”
- “Leaders contribution to student learning then, depend a great deal on their judicious choice of what parts of their organization to spend time and attention on.”
- “Three sets of practices make up this basic core of successful leadership practices: setting directions, developing people and redesigning the organization.”
- Setting Direction: “People are motivated by goals which they find personally compelling, as well as challenging, but achievable.”
- Developing People: “Such capacities and motivations are influenced by the direct experiences organizational members have with those in leadership roles, as well as the organizational context within which people work.”
- “More specific sets of leadership practices significantly and positively influencing the direct experiences include, for example: offering intellectual stimulation, providing individualized support and providing appropriate models of best practices and beliefs considered fundamental to the organization.”

- Redesigning the Organization: “But organizational conditions sometimes blunt or wear down educators’ good intentions and actually prevent the use of effective practices.”
- “Specific practices typically associated with this set of basics include strengthening district and school cultures, modifying organizational structures and building collaborative processes.”

In the following chapters, I will provide information based upon these findings that will help districts attract and retain the successful leaders they need to make their schools permanent institutions of excellence.

What Makes Your District Attractive to High-Quality Candidates

There is a difference between attracting candidates and attracting those of the highest quality. While salary and benefits play a part in attracting quality candidates, it is not the only factor and, in fact, may not be the most important to those seeking to lead.

Many other factors are important to individuals with the skills and talents required of quality leaders. These include: conditions of the community at large, reputation of the district, the manner in which the board functions, the quality of existing leadership, the formal and informal operational practices of the district, the managerial structure of the district and the evidence of support provided to existing administrators. If you are seeking the highest quality leaders who can transform your district into a model for all others, then you must first look at the conditions you offer these transformational leaders.

Put yourself in the place of the potential candidate and try and answer these questions. When you are through, consider whether your district is a place you would like to work and determine ways in which the district can improve.

Responsibility and Authority Go Hand-in-Hand

Whom do you hold responsible for the success of each school? To whom do you give the authority to run the school? **Responsibility without authority is meaningless and only provides scapegoats for the failure of others.** Great principals eagerly accept responsibility; however, they cannot be responsible without the authority to act. While school boards have responsibility to set policy, budget and be the final judge in matters of employment, they all too often assume authority from the district and school administration in the daily operation of a school.

Clear lines of authority are important to the effective running of a school. Great leaders do their homework and they will have a general sense of how your district (board and administration) operates, before accepting a position. Often, in my role as executive director for a principals' association, I will be asked by potential candidates what the district is "like." The meaning here is clear — does the district have a supportive school board?; and does the district have central office leadership that sets direction, but does not micro-manage the day-to-day activities of the principal? These are important questions to a quality leader. They want to know if they will be given the freedom and support they need to use their talents.

It is not infrequently that school boards, or some members of the school board, decide to administer the school district rather than focus upon policies and procedures that set clear direction for the district. This is a district that quality administrators avoid. I have countless stories of board members coming into schools unannounced, observing classes and directing principals on what should be done or who on the staff is not performing satisfactorily. While it is certainly a school board member's duty to report incidents he or she feel needs attention, it is not the member's responsibility to determine the appropriateness of the accusation or the appropriate course of action the principal "must" take.

Schools are complex organizations and anyone who works in a school knows there are usually multiple stories related to an incident. There are often numerous ways to approach the same problem. You have hired a principal to determine these things — allow him or her to do so.

Good districts set into policy the ways and methods of reporting a concern about a school or staff member. These usually include first reporting the concern to the principal, and if the matter is not resolved, to the superintendent. Good school boards define this process and then support the process by not circumventing it.

Good superintendents do the same thing. They define the process for staff and community members — then allow it to work. They also hire great leaders and give them the authority to decide in areas for which they are directly responsible.

No one is capable of leading while constantly looking over his or her shoulder. Good school boards and superintendents point, offer support and trust their school leaders to get to the destination.

The principal must have the authority to: set direction for the school; develop people over time; and redesign the school as needed, based upon his or her assessment of personnel strengths and weaknesses, community conditions and culture, available resources and challenging, yet achievable goals.

Respect for Administrators

Does your district discuss personnel matters at public board meetings? Do your board members share stories about administrators that have not been investigated by the administration? Do you reprimand individuals for what you perceive to be minor breeches in etiquette or for expressing an opinion counter to that of the board or superintendent?

Another disqualifier for a great leader seeking a position is a school board that permits the public abuse of administrators in school board meetings. **All personnel matters are confidential for a reason – accusations are not facts!** If you permit board members and/or the public to accuse and debase administrators in public meetings, you are in a district that will not encourage strong leadership. Again, a process should be in place for the public and/or board members to express a concern that will be investigated by the administration. These matters should remain confidential, and as will happen in most cases, if the accusation proves false or misleading, the principal and the accuser should be made aware of the finding.

A second area where respect comes into play is the understanding that education is a people-driven endeavor dependent upon thousands of daily interactions between administrators and staff; administrators and students; administrators and parents; administrators and the public; and administrators and central office. **Great administrators have training and know-how to move through this myriad of interactions and bring the school, staff and students to high-quality outcomes. However, administrators are still human, they make mistakes, they are not always right and they sometimes blunder.** If you desire a mistake-free administration you will never obtain the quality leadership good schools need. Like scientists, great leaders learn from mistakes, they experiment, and consider the experiment successful if they learn from it. Great leaders try things! It is granted these “tries” should be based upon strong theory. They will not always succeed, but will always provide learning opportunities. If your district (board and central administration) has created an atmosphere of “**no failure permitted,**” it is virtually assured you will have a district of “**no progress made.**” The lesson here is simple: Understand that all humans make mistakes, do not hesitate to make them aware of those mistakes, but trust they will correct them.

If you respect your administrators, you will permit them to express an opinion different than your own. Superintendents seeking strong leaders recognize that strong leaders will want to express opinions and ask questions related to policies and practices that impact their school. Great administrators understand and respect the notion that the superintendent is the voice of the administration in the district. Great administrators do not circumvent the superintendent by going directly to the school board on every policy, curricula or staffing issue. However, great administrators do expect the right to speak freely to their superintendents on matters impacting their schools. They expect to be encouraged to discuss possible pitfalls and problems the new initiative might bring. They expect to have their thoughts considered, and in the end, they accept that they will not always get their way. **Respect is demonstrated by a willingness to listen.**

Too often, I have seen principals reprimanded for: offering their opinions in administrative meetings; passionately expressing their beliefs one-on-one with the superintendent; and being asked to comment at a board meeting and later being reprimanded for expressing a view that was less supportive than the superintendent or school board wanted. Great systems allow for open discourse.

Great systems encourage different points of view. And in the end, great administrators, who have had their say, get behind the decision made by the school board and administration and do their best to make it successful.

If teachers and community members sense that the board and/or central administration lacks respect for principals, it will be impossible to set direction, develop people or redesign the organization. Public criticism, micro-management and/or personal interventions in daily operations of the school or personnel by board members clearly demonstrate a lack of respect for leadership and will hamper, or more likely destroy, the school's chance for significant improvement.

TRUST

Do you trust the professional staff in your district? Are you often questioning decisions the superintendent and principals have made? When making these judgments, how many sources did you consult? How much information do you really have?

Great leaders know that to function properly, they must be immersed in an atmosphere of trust. Great leaders must cultivate a school in which teachers trust administrators; administrators trust teachers; students and parents trust teachers and administrators; and all personnel trust the school board and central administration to make thoughtful and knowledgeable decisions that impact the school.

Trust is developed over time, and often is not present when an administrator arrives on the scene. This could be due to previous administration or board actions, or it could be the result of a culture that has developed over time. **Administrators must be given sufficient time and flexibility to go about developing an atmosphere of trust.** To do this, they need the understanding and support of the school board and central administration.

Do not mistake trust for "just being nice" to everyone or allowing things to be as they have always been. **Trust is developed in a school as the result of consistent, persistent actions on the part of leadership to enhance the quality of education for students. It takes time to develop. It is the result of thousands of interactions.** The daily interactions, goal-setting and staff communications necessary to develop trust can best be determined by the leader at the site. Often, individual incidents or predetermined opinions are formed from above (school board and superintendent) and a determination is made to direct the principal to do a specific thing or act a specific way. Rather than promoting trust and accomplishing what was hoped for, this kind of directive often inhibits the on-site administrator's plan, and in some cases, can actually damage or destroy the process of building trust.

Yes, boards and central office staff should establish clear policies and expect them to be followed. Those policies should be broad and flexible, and principals should have the freedom to operate and decide which option is most appropriate within the policy for the betterment of the school. **If rigid policy were the answer, than school administration would be unnecessary. Simply provide the policy and have a computer spew out punishments and actions!**

Those at the top of an organization (school board and superintendent) must **be prepared to give trust before they receive it.** It is best to assume the trustworthiness of your professional staff. **Start from a position of trust.** Only when clear facts and information are available and confirmed, should you bring into question the trustworthiness of individuals within your organization. Remember that **in matters of trust, the question isn't whether a situation was handled as you would have handled it,** or whether your desired solution was enacted; the question should be: Is the professional staff making a genuine effort to move toward district goals with integrity and expertise?

Summary

Districts which are attractive to high-quality leaders:

- 1. Have a competitive salary and benefit package which acknowledges the increased job responsibilities and qualities of high-performing principals.**

- 2. Couple responsibility with authority and give the school leader not only the responsibility for the school, but the authority to make decisions.**
- 3. Respect administrators by having a confidential process to address personnel issues, never permitting the airing of unsubstantiated accusations about school or staff in open board meetings. Permit administrators to freely express their views in appropriate forums, even if contrary to the district or superintendent's position, and understand that failure is a necessary learning tool and progress cannot be made without trying some things that may not work as intended.**
- 4. TRUST is a foundational condition in successful organizations. To be trusted, you must first trust. Hire good people and then trust them to make the right decisions.**

Salary Packages That Attract and Retain Outstanding School Principals

Most principals enter the profession because they believe they possess the qualities necessary to lead a school effectively. They are seeking a new challenge that will impact even more children than they might have if they had remained a classroom teacher.

Usually, states require a minimum number of years as a classroom teacher and most boards and administrations seek only those individuals who were exceptional classroom teachers. Newly-hired principals are expected to have successful classroom experience; advanced education and training in school administration; understand curricula and student-growth research; and be able to supervise and help improve teachers in a range of grade levels and/or subject areas. **The case is closed that board members and central administration expect principals to have skill levels broader and deeper than classroom teaching.**

Additionally, there is an expectation of additional time required to be a school administrator. Most teaching contracts are 180-190 days in length with teachers (often counselors and others) compensated at a per diem rate for any additional days required. Most school administrators are hired on 260-day contracts minus vacation (usually 20-25) and holidays (usually 10-15) and end up working at least 220 (the average is 227) days a year when these maximum vacation and holidays are taken into consideration. Daily time also increases as one moves to administration. Where a teacher might have 3-5 nights a year, school administrators have 30-110. Most often, administrators start earlier and end their day later than the teaching staff. **There is no argument that administrators work many more days, work many more nights and usually work longer days than teachers.**

With these higher expectations for skill levels, training, supervision and time, it is reasonable to assume that the position would have a higher compensation rate than classroom teaching. Alas, this is rarely true! Many administrators are paid less per day than the classroom teachers they supervise. In more cases than you might imagine, they actually receive less total dollars. It does not take long for a teacher who might work 10 extra days to make more than assistant principals working 20 days more. In fact, I could cite specific districts where they eliminated assistant principals for a dean of students to save money. The hilarious, if not so ridiculous, story ends with the district paying more for a dean of students, a dean who works 20 less days than an assistant principal and does not have the certification to evaluate or supervise teachers. Unfortunately, this per/day dilemma extends to principals as well.

A Real Example

Let's take a look at a real district to demonstrate what I mean. **District X** (name has been changed to avoid embarrassment). This district was selected for several reasons. First, it is a middle of the road district in the region for teacher pay. Second, it is financially stable. Third, it is by no means the most extreme case. It is likely that more than half the districts in the state have worse ratios of teacher to administrative per diem. Finally, information was readily available for comparison.

The comparisons you see below are based upon actual contractual agreements for the same school year. They do not include any supplemental pay a teacher would receive for coaching, curriculum work or per diem extensions.

Teachers in this district work 191 days, but their six required evening meetings are credited as 1/3 days so they actually work 189 days. Administrators in this district have a 260-day contract with 20 vacation days and 12 holidays for actual working days of 228. All comparisons are for teachers and administrators with equivalent years experience and degree levels.

District X

Elementary Principals	Years of Service	Degree Level	Administrator's Salary	Teacher's Salary	Per Diem Administrator	Per Diem Teacher	Daily Difference
1	15	Ms+60	83,644	80,302	366.89	424.87	-\$57.98
2	13	Dr.	83,644	76,371	366.85	404.08	-\$37.23
3	21	Ms+60	89,930	82,267	394.43	435.22	-\$40.79
4**	23	Dr.	100,503	82,267	440.80	435.03	+5.77
Middle School Principals							
1	13	Dr.	101,692	76,371	446.02	404.08	+\$41.94
High School Principals							
1	24	Ms+60	114,990	82,267	504.34	435.03	+\$69.26
Secondary Assistant Principals							
1	11	Ms+60	73,950	72,440	324.34	382.28	-\$57.94
2	12	Ms+60	76,834	74,405	336.99	393.68	-\$56.69
3	15	Ms+60	72,400	80,302	317.54	424.88	-\$107.34
4	9	Ms+60	73,828	70,474	323.80	372.88	-\$49.08

Seven of 10 administrators make less per day than they would if they had remained a teacher.

Of those seven, they received from \$40.79 to \$107.34 less per day than had they remained a teacher.

One assistant principal actually makes less gross per year than an equivalent teaching position.

**** Has additional central-office duties as coordinator of the elementary division.**

The questions raised by these facts are simple, but important:

- Is it logical to pay less for a position that requires a broader range of skills and responsibilities while requiring significantly more time and training?
- Why would someone leave a teaching position to receive less pay and have more responsibilities?
- How many highly-qualified people don't even consider the switch for this very reason?
- Does such a disparity show respect for the leaders of your district?
- Does this disparity acknowledge the leadership skills you expect of your principals?
- Where is your district in this dilemma?

Don't get me wrong. I am not suggesting that principals are money-hungry individuals who enter the profession based upon how much more they will make. At the same time, principals are people with families to support, bills to pay and financial considerations to make when deciding upon a career. Unfortunately, many qualified individuals decide that it is the wrong financial move to make.

Ways To Resolve this Salary Dilemma

At the least, districts should ensure that principals and assistant principals will not make less than teachers they supervise with equivalent degrees and years of experience.

Establish a responsibility ratio or amount. This may be done in several ways.

1. Take the per diem amount the administrator would make as a teacher and multiply it by the total working days of the administrator.
2. Provide a per diem responsibility factor. Districts have done this in several ways. For example:
 - Some districts have a percentage responsibility factor – assistant principal — 105% of equivalent teacher wage; elementary principal — 110% of teacher wage; middle school principal — 115% of teacher wage; and high school principal — 120% of teacher wage. So, if an equivalent elementary teacher's per diem is \$300, then an elementary principal's per diem would be \$330.
 - Another method used is the flat fee responsibility factor. Some districts offer a daily flat fee responsibility factor to their formula. For example, assistant principal is \$10 per day, elementary is \$20 per day and secondary is \$30 per day.
3. Provide at least the same percentage yearly increases for principals that you provide for teachers so that principals do not regress in ratio over the years.

Another method sometimes used is to determine the administrative market you wish to compete with and **establish salary ranges based upon that market.**

1. Determine the market you think will ensure you are competitive with the caliber of principal you wish to attract. This can be done in many ways. Some districts consider the region, some the county and some districts of like wealth or size. Make certain that the market you use will be competitive for the best principals.
2. Once the market is established, determine the range of salaries in that market by taking the market and establishing an average of principal salaries.
3. This average becomes the midpoint of a salary range. Then reduce the midpoint by 20% to establish the minimum and increase the midpoint by 20% to establish the maximum.
4. Make certain that no principal is below the minimum or you have disrupted your range before it becomes effective.
5. Adjust the range annually for average increases of salaries in your market.
6. Establish a minimum increase for those that exceed the range.

These are but two examples of how your administrators' salaries can be made more competitive. If need be, a consultant could be secured to provide you with recommendations.

No matter your solution, your administrators should not be paid less per day than a teacher with equivalent years and degree.

Penny Wise and Pound Foolish

Do not make the mistake of thinking tactically rather than strategically. If you want good schools and quality education, you must have quality leadership. In the long run, quality leaders save the district money — often in large quantities as compared to the destructive nature of not rewarding leadership simply to save an immediate dollar.

Some Thoughts on Merit Pay, Bonus Systems, Performance Rewards

A number of districts have merit systems in place and/or bonus systems for exemplary performance. It is thought that this is an incentive which will motivate administrators to put forth more effort resulting in better performance. In theory, this is worthy of consideration, but in practice, it is difficult to implement effectively and if done poorly, it actually serves as a disincentive. I have seen few, if any, of these systems achieve their intended goal. The following cautions are offered if you are considering offering or currently offer merit/bonus systems.

- A merit system should not focus on one evaluative criterion such as school test scores.
- A merit system, to be effective, must have sufficient funding to actually serve as an incentive. Systems I have seen often offer incentives of only hundreds of dollars, amounts that often do not even begin to bring the administrator in line with teacher per diems.
- A merit system should not limit the number of administrators that may receive the recognition in a given year. This is more an effort at budget constraint than an effort to provide true incentives.
- A good incentive/merit system should have challenging but achievable goals that are measurable, define how levels are achieved and not opinion-based.
- A good incentive/merit system should clearly state amounts or percentages received when specific levels of achievement are reached.
- Merit increases should become a part of an administrator's permanent salary. Bonuses apart from salary reduce the administrator's salary and pension overtime and will create a non-competitive salary compared to other administrators in the region. In some ways, this is more a penalty than incentive and it is often done to save the board money, not motivate administrators.
- Poorly administrated and/or constructed merit systems can create administrative competition that is harmful to the collegial administrative team effort essential to quality schools. Often the unintended consequences are harmful, not helpful, to the district.
- Finally, educators expect to be compensated fairly for the skill and knowledge levels expected, the massive time commitment the job requires, and the increased responsibility, but money should not be the driving force for any administrator. School administrators differ from their business counterparts in that student growth and welfare, not profit, is their primary concern.

Benefit Packages That Attract and Retain Quality Principals

Quality leaders seek a clear understanding of their salary and benefit packages. This is also desirable for the school board and administration. States differ in their laws regarding principals. In some states, principal groups negotiate agreements, in others, administrative teams have meet and discuss requirements, but not negotiating rights. Because of the variances in state requirements, I will focus on what a good salary and benefit package contains. Salary was discussed in the previous chapter, so I will concentrate upon elements contained in attractive benefit packages.

First and foremost, an administrator compensation package should be no less than that to which the teachers are entitled. This is often not the case. In some districts, the administrative team is not treated with respect. Because they are a smaller team that often does not have the right to negotiate, school boards and central office take advantage of the short-term budget opportunity. Often, principals will receive less percentage raises, pay more for healthcare and have fewer rights of appeal and/or protection than teachers simply because they are not envisioned as a threat. Quality administrators avoid districts that operate in this manner. These kinds of actions illustrate the trust and respect that the district has for quality leaders. These types of actions are also unattractive to those quality leaders already serving in the district and will, at the least, produce a toxic atmosphere, and at worst, cause your best to seek employment elsewhere.

Secondly, it is desirable that a clearly defined and designed package be provided in writing for the entire administrative team. Avoid individual contracts that grant some things to one person yet deny them to others. Not having an administrative package is a formula that promotes corruption, encourages nepotism, destroys morale and collaboration and sets the district up for litigation regarding gender, race, age and/or other discriminatory practices. A package encompassing the entire administrative team is desirable. Differentials based upon position, responsibilities, length of employment, etc. may of course be delineated in the package — but it is there for all to see and based upon sound logic, not on whims, personal friendships, etc.

Quality leaders look at the administrative compensation package before accepting a position in the district and high-quality leaders already within the district determine whether to stay or depart based partially on this package.

The following is included in attractive administrative salary and benefits packages:

- **Group Recognition** — Name of the group to which the agreement applies and a list of positions identified as being part of the group.
- **Duration of the Agreement** — Years the agreement covers. Three-to five-year agreements are preferable to one-year agreements. Short-term (one-year) agreements are rarely settled before it is time to begin again. Also, longer term agreements provide stability and more certainty for those considering moving to the district.
- **List of Positions and Number of Days per Year** — Each position covered should be listed along with the number of work days ascribed to the position. (E.g., all principals will have a 260-day schedule, or all principals are 12-month employees or list each position and designate the days: high school principal - 260 days, elementary assistant principal - 215 days, etc.)
- **Holidays** — List the holidays. (E.g., There are 15 paid holidays in the work schedule. List the days.)

- **Vacation Days** — Number of vacation days for each position and/or by days of employment. (E.g., all 260-day employees will have 20 vacation days per year, 260-day employees with 15 years of service in the district will have 25 days per year.)

How vacation days are earned is also important to define. Some districts require administrators to earn days the first year before receiving them. If this is the case, those days or per diem is owed to the administrator when he or she departs. In other cases, the administrator is granted the 20 days immediately without needing to earn them. This provides a different scenario when one departs the district.

- Define how days are requested and how many days may be carried from year to year.
- Define whether unused days may be turned in for reimbursement per diem each year.
- **Leaves** — The following leaves should be defined: **Personal** (usually 3-5 days), **Sick Leave** (usually accumulated at one day per month and carried from year to year), **Family Illness, Bereavement, Childbearing/Childrearing, Jury Duty, Sabbaticals, Armed Forces and Unpaid**. What is granted here varies from place to place.
 - Conditions for return from leave should be defined. In most cases, the individual should be returned to the position he or she left.
- **Insurance Coverage** — A range of insurance coverage is provided for most school employees. Administrative teams often have additional coverage beyond the teacher contract.
 1. **Health Insurance** — Often offered at the same rate and conditions as per the teacher contract. Usually provided for family.
 2. **Dental** — Found in most administrative contracts. Also offered most frequently for families.
 3. **Vision** — Found in most administrative contracts.
 4. **Life** — Usually offered at a higher rate than the teacher contract. Two to 2 ½ times the salary is the norm. A low-cost, highly-valued item.
 5. **Disability** — Offered in most administrative contracts.
 6. **Travel** — This insurance is low-cost for groups and provides coverage for all travel including school-related events.
 7. **Long-Term Care** — Offered in some administrative contracts and is a growing trend. This coverage is inexpensive for groups and provides coverage during active service. Most of these agreements allow administrators to buy into the coverage upon retirement at a much lower rate than if they had purchased it on their own.
 8. **Physical Examination Cost** — Many districts provide for annual physicals for administrators.
 9. **Group Health Reimbursement Accounts (HRA)** — This is a Voluntary Employees' Beneficiary Association tax-exempt trust established under Section 501(c)(9) of the Internal Revenue Code. Public sector employees, spouses and qualified dependents are eligible participants of the plan. Plan sponsors pay no FICA taxes on contributions to the plan and participants pay no FICA, federal or state income taxes on contributions, investment earning or distributions for qualified healthcare expenses.

- **Tuition Reimbursement** — Most districts contribute to tuition reimbursement for members of its administrative team. Reimbursement ranges from 75% to 100% for courses related to school management, curriculum or student development. Most districts also have a buy-back for those who leave the district after completing courses. For example, one year after course completion, 75% payback to district; two years after course completion, 50%; three years, 25%; and after this it's 0.
- **Professional Memberships** — Administrative agreements often contain a membership fee payment for one or two professional associations. This is the norm not the exception. This allows the principal to stay up-to-date in curricular and management matters and demonstrates the district's commitment in continuing education and professional rigor.
- **Retirement Benefits** — In an attempt to keep good leaders, districts often offer retirement incentives. The most frequently used incentive is providing healthcare for an individual (sometimes including family) until Medicare eligible or for a duration of years (E.g., 10 years). This incentive usually requires serving as an administrator in the district for at least 10 years and requires retirement not resignation. Other common retirement incentives include sick day buy-back, vacation day buy-back and lump sum payments for years of service. There are other creative incentives to hold administrators in the district which are not herein enumerated.
- **Employer Contributions to Employee 403(b) Plans** — Districts may make contributions to administrators' 403(b) plans. A range of investment companies offer advice on how this is done and the limitations involved.
- **Dispute Resolution Process** — Solid administrative agreements include a process for dispute resolution. For example: If a dispute arises between the employer and one or more members of the administrative team, this dispute will be resolved by: **1.)** The employee meeting with his/her immediate supervisor. The employee may elect to have an administrative representative with him/her; **2.)** If the employee is dissatisfied with the disposition of the dispute, he/she shall submit the dispute in writing to the superintendent. A meeting shall be arranged with the superintendent to resolve the dispute; and **3.)** If the employee is dissatisfied with the disposition, the employee shall submit in writing a request for the superintendent to present the matter to the board of school directors. After review by the board, the employee will be notified by the superintendent of the board's decision.
- **Clear Statement of Salaries and Salary Determination for Years of the Contract** — It is suggested here that one of the methods in the last chapter be applied. With whatever method is used, it should be clear and unambiguous. Also, how salaries are awarded in subsequent years of the agreement should be clearly stated.
- **Method of Evaluation** — An appendix should accompany the agreement clearly spelling out the evaluation process for administrators. Ideally, this would be developed by the superintendent in collaboration with the administrative team or its representatives. School board members should not be directly involved in the evaluation process but should have final approval of the policies that guide and outline the process. The school board would serve an unbiased role in mediating any disputes.

Quality leaders want to know what is expected of them, how they will be compensated, how they appeal disputes and how they earn future compensation. Most school boards and superintendents want the same. For these reasons, a written agreement, free of ambiguity, is the best instrument.

Some Simple Do's and Don'ts

For Principals:

- **Do** understand that salary is not the only, or most important, factor in determining whether you should accept a position.
- **Don't** accept a position until you are convinced that a supportive board and administration exist within the district.
- **Do** be honest, clear and direct in the interview process — it is better to be rejected for a position than to obtain one that does not match your skills and talents.
- **Don't** accept a position for which expectations are not clear and achievable. Unrealistic expectations only lead to future disappointment.
- **Do** your homework. Find out how the district operates both formally and informally. Review policies and practices of the board, the school you are about to enter and the current central administration. Speak to current employees and community members.
- **Don't** accept a position until the terms of your salary and benefits are agreed to in writing.
- **Do** understand that what has happened in the past is more telling than what is promised for the future. Do the words you hear match past deeds? If not, why would it change?
- **Don't** accept unreasonably low starting compensation because you think it will get better. It is most often the case that the salary and benefits you first negotiate will dictate how you will be compensated in the future. Cheap usually gets even cheaper in future compensation.
- **Do** accept a position that you believe aligns with your style of leadership and in which you will be given the authority to lead in fulfilling your responsibilities.
- **Don't** accept a position in which the evidence suggests that subordinates have more influence and authority with the school board or superintendent than you will have.
- **Do** expect the district to have a clear, unambiguous evaluation process for you and your staff.
- **Don't** expect that a district with a vague or non-existent evaluation process is well-run.
- **Do** examine the communication processes within the district: How are complaints handled? Are you free to express your opinions? Where and in what forums? What process is in place that assures you have reasonable appeal regarding decisions impacting your career?
- **Don't** accept a position that has an unreasonable timeline for success. Change does not occur overnight.
- **Do enter your new position with confidence and enthusiasm. Once you have accepted a position, you have committed to doing your utmost to assure the district's success. Roll with any unexpected punches and stay focused upon achieving your goals.**

For Superintendents and Principals' Supervisors:

- **Do** have clear, achievable expectations for the principal.
- **Don't** micro-manage the principal's actions in achieving those expectations.
- **Do** involve your principals in the selection of principals. You have the final say, but input and measured compatibility are important to administrative team success.
- **Don't** hire principals without fully vetting them. Call references and check with people you know who have worked with them. Also, look for past successes and don't hire based upon the individual's skill or knowledge of one program.
- **Do** give the principal the authority to act related to his or her responsibilities.
- **Don't** allow individuals to bypass the processes for expressing concerns or complains.
- **Do** permit your principal to speak freely on issues impacting his or her school without fear of reprimand. Clearly define the appropriate forum to do so.
- **Don't** ask a principal to speak before the board on an issue and then reprimand him or her for saying what they think.
- **Do** provide time for principals to meet and discuss issues as a group. Use these times to keep them informed as to the district's needs and situation and listen to their concerns.
- **Don't** expect your principals to always agree with you, but after they have had an opportunity to express their thoughts and concerns do expect them to be team players.
- **Do** provide a written agreement for your principal group that clearly states salaries, benefits, working days, how future compensation is calculated and how evaluations will take place.
- **Don't** consider your principals to be hourly employees, they are not. They are salaried employees with responsibilities they must complete and many additional hours to work. They are not clock punchers and should have professional courtesy in how they set their work schedule when job responsibilities are being met.
- **Do** have a process for the board to report concerns to you that assures fairness and requires specific incidents for sharing or investigation.
- **Don't** discuss principal performance or public complaints in open board meetings. Have a process for the public to express concerns that is confidential — accusations are not facts, and handled in an unprofessional way will erode the principal's authority in the school.
- **Do** share concerns about a principal expressed to you by staff or citizens in a timely manner with the principal. Issues cannot be addressed if they are unknown. Understand that there is likely a reasonable explanation or that the information expressed may be unfounded.

- **Don't** hesitate to be direct with the principal if you believe you have a valid concern or you believe the principal needs to improve in certain areas. Back this up with specific examples so that the principal may address the issue and/or improve his or her performance.
- **Do** understand that timely intervention is the key to improvement. This would encourage sharing issues with the principal as soon as you have information that supports your conclusions. Timely is not waiting until the mid-year evaluation to share an incident two months earlier.
- **Don't** assume you have the facts until you have heard from the principal.
- **Do** have a clear understanding with the board that they are the policymakers and final judges on matters of budget and personnel, but that you are the administrator and you administer the schools. This means you enforce policy, recommend punishments, evaluate staff and manage the budget.
- **Don't** permit school board members to micro-manage the schools or direct personnel. This is your responsibility, and although it may cost you your job, it is the only way to effectively run an organization.
- **Do** know that when you are hiring a principal you are looking for someone who can set direction for a school, develop the people in the school and design the organization of the school for production and efficiency.
- **Don't** hire principals based solely on charm, likability or appearance. It should not be based upon nepotism. It is not an opportunity to populate the ranks with people who think exactly like you.
- **Do look for principals who have a past history of success in whatever endeavors they undertook. Past success, not years of experience, is important to future success. Hire good people and let them do their job. Protect them when necessary, correct them when appropriate, but always work with them for the betterment of the children in the school. Principals and the superintendent are part of the administrative team that sets direction for the district — cultivate this professional relationship and you will have success.**

For School Board Members:

- **Do** permit your superintendent and central administration to screen, interview, research and recommend individuals for the principal's position. Being a principal requires training and skill that your administration is intimately familiar with – trust their judgment.
- **Don't** advocate for a friend, relative or professional in the district simply because you know them. These people should not be eliminated from consideration, but they should rise to the top based upon the administrative process of selection.
- **Do** compensate your principals in accordance with the skill and knowledge levels you expect of school leaders and in line with the extra time and days expected of them. At a minimum, principals and assistant principals should receive a per diem of no less than a teacher comparable in years of service and educational level. A responsibility factor should also be considered.
- **Don't** expect to have a district that will attract and retain outstanding principals if your compensation package is not reasonable compared to teacher compensation.
- **Do** set policies and procedures that are clear but flexible, so that administrators can use their judgment, within the bounds of the policy, to administer the schools. **No tolerance policies** look good on paper and provide the outward appearance of toughness, but they are often restrictive and harmful when one tries to fairly administer them.

- **Don't** interfere in the administration of policy if the actions are within the bounds of the policy. This is not to imply that there will not be instances that require investigation by your superintendent or solicitor. However, if you wrote it [the policy] and it has been followed, then steer clear of criticism.
- **Do** have a clear policy related to how citizens may express concerns about an employee without subjecting the employee to public accusations at a board meeting or in a public forum. Accusations are not facts, but expressed publicly they can damage an individual's reputation and effectiveness within a school.
- **Don't** take responsibility for personally investigating and/or solving a complaint. Good policy will provide an avenue to which you may direct the person with the concern. Do not gossip, support or encourage disparaging remarks with no foundation or that lack investigative conclusions by the administration. Even if investigated and somewhat supported, the place for this discussion is with the superintendent or executive session of the board.
- **Do** give the benefit of the doubt to your school administration or principal until facts support another conclusion.
- **Don't** take it upon yourself to visit a school, teacher or administrator to "see for yourself" and correct the problem. This is disruptive and non-productive. If you have reason to visit a school, inform the superintendent and principal in advance...give them a heads-up and be certain that the visit will not disrupt instruction.
- **Do** have a clear evaluation system in policy for your superintendent to administer regarding principals. It should articulate expectations and methods of measurement.
- **Don't** become directly involved in the evaluation of principals — this is an administrative function and requires certification and training. If a situation develops that the superintendent is recommending suspension or termination, or the employee wishes to dispute an evaluation, the board will need to sit in unbiased judgment regarding the individual case. Therefore, the board should not be directly engaged in the evaluation process.
- **Do hire principals with the ability to set direction for the school, develop people in the school and organize the school for success. Show respect for your administration by not criticizing them in public, by abiding by the flexible policies you have set and by trusting your superintendent to administer your policies and lead the principals effectively.**

Final Thoughts

School districts of quality have a well-organized and cohesive management team composed of an effective school board, central administration and school leaders. These three elements of the management team each have different roles to play. The school board must “point” to where they want the district to go and create clear, flexible policies to guide the administration. The central office team must interpret that policy and establish procedures that assure its implementation. They must make certain that district targets are clear to school leaders and personnel. They must monitor progress toward district goals and work to develop and support school leaders. The school building is where the “rubber hits the road,” and the school principal must continually point the staff toward district and school goals, develop people to assist in meeting the needs of students and structure the school so that it operates efficiently and effectively. Each of these elements — school board, central administration and building leaders — should have primary authority in the areas for which they have direct responsibility.

- Quality districts have clear lines of authority and responsibility.
- They have school boards, central administrators and school leaders who respect one another, understand each other’s roles and assure that each element has the tools and authority to serve their purposes.
- They communicate clearly with one another through well-defined channels.
- They celebrate with all staff as they achieve their goals and focus on fixes, not finger-pointing.

When they do these things, they succeed!

About the Author

Dr. William R. Hartman, Jr. is a graduate of Elizabethtown College and holds both a master's degree and doctorate in educational leadership from The University of Pennsylvania. He has been engaged in public education for 45 years.

Dr. Hartman has served as a teacher of social studies and mathematics in West Chester Area School District (9 years), as principal in Waynesboro Area School District (9 years) and as assistant superintendent (7 years) and superintendent (13 years) in York Suburban School District. For the last seven years, he has been executive director of the Pennsylvania Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals (PAESSP).

During his tenure in public education, he has been the principal of a Blue Ribbon School and served as superintendent of one of the highest performing districts in the Commonwealth. York Suburban saw 11 years of academic gains during his tenure.

He has presented for The National Association of Elementary School Principals, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators and many others. He has also authored several approved Pennsylvania Inspired Leadership (PIL) courses and served as a trained PIL instructor.

As Executive Director of PAESSP, Dr. Hartman has consulted and advised thousands of principals on matters related to their employment, and Act 93 Meet and Discuss issues. He frequently consults with superintendents on matters regarding the principalship.

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