Listening to Leaders

Insights From the Seventh-day Adventist Education Leadership Survey

AUGUST 2024

Acknowledgments

In Memory

The project team also would like to honor the memory of Arne Nielsen, Vice President for Education of the North American Division, who passed away unexpectedly on June 3, 2024. Arne was a lifelong educator, dedicated to the mission of Adventist education. He deeply supported efforts to strengthen the Seventh-day Adventist education system by seeking input and feedback from SDA education leaders at all levels.
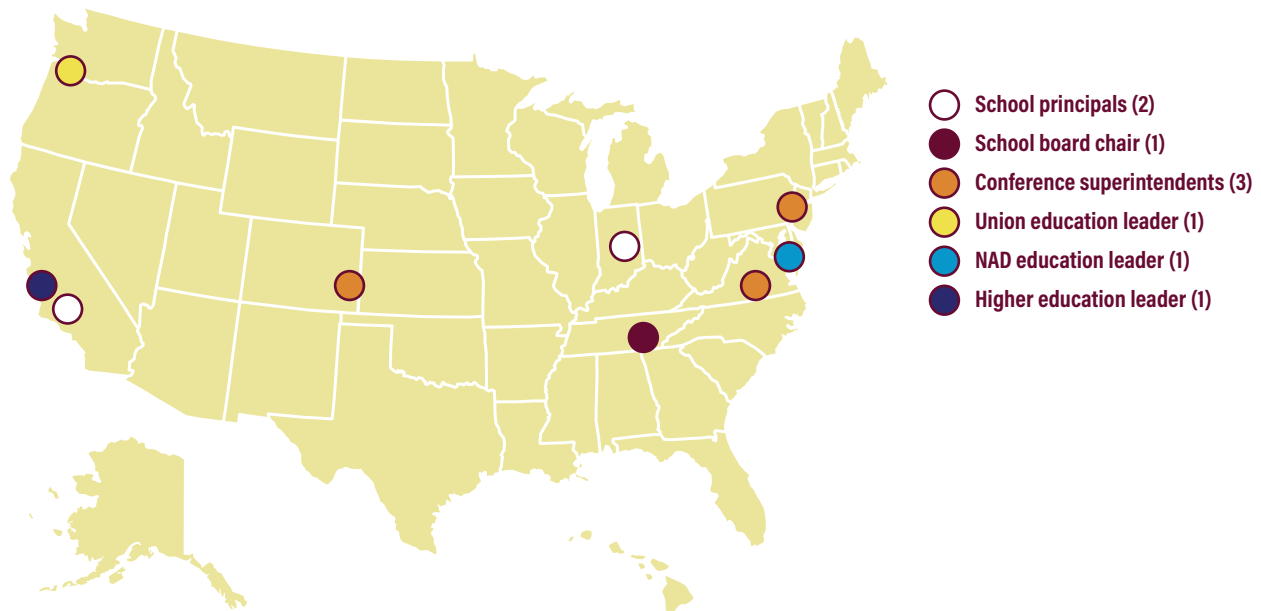
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Background and Introduction

SURVEY FOCUS AREAS

► Work-life quality

► On-the-job priorities and challenges

► Perspectives on equity and decision-making

► Important leadership competencies

► Training and development needs and opportunities

► Critical issues facing the SDA education system

For more than three decades, the Bainum Family Foundation has provided support for Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) education to honor the deep commitment of its founders, Stewart Sr. and Jane Bainum, to faith-based education. One of the ways this Legacy work continues today is through ACE (Advancing Christian Education) Academy, which the foundation established in 2015. ACE Academy focuses on developing strong and effective leaders for K-12 SDA schools.

In December 2022, the foundation and ACE Academy engaged Project Evident to design a survey for Adventist education leaders — both within schools and in other administration roles — across the North American Division (NAD) of the SDA organization. The survey was designed based on learnings from focus groups conducted earlier that fall with a small group of school administrators and education leaders at different levels. The focus groups were designed to assess leaders' work experiences, challenges, and development needs. A steering committee of nine key SDA stakeholders contributed to developing and conducting both the focus groups and the survey. (See Figure 1.)

Figure 1: Composition of Key SDA Stakeholder Group

- ○ School principals (2)
- ● School board chair (1)
- ● Conference superintendents (3)
- ● Union education leader (1)
- ● NAD education leader (1)
- ● Higher education leader (1)

The survey also was informed by the project team's literature review of other research of education leadership. A list of those surveys and reports can be found in Appendix A.

The survey had three primary goals:

- ► Generate comprehensive systemwide data about SDA education leaders' most pressing challenges and priorities.

- ► Collect useful system-level data about the experiences of SDA school leaders that can be made available throughout the education system.

- ► Solicit insights from leaders at all levels of the Adventist education system to help ACE Academy understand how it can best partner with the system to build a talentmanagement strategy that strengthens the Adventist K-12 leadership pipeline (i.e., identifying, mobilizing, supporting, and retaining exceptional school leaders).

This report — which provides a comprehensive look at the survey findings and highlights opportunities for improvement — has been developed to inform those who work within and support Adventist education, including:

► SDA education leaders at all levels, including in higher education

► SDA leaders beyond education (including pastors and Conference, Union, and NAD leaders)

► Other stakeholders/partners that support and invest in SDA education

High-level survey findings initially were shared with attendees at the quinquennial Adventist Educators Conference in Phoenix in August 2023. This report provides a deeper analysis of the findings and outlines improvement opportunities.

Survey Demographics: Respondents and Their Schools

An online survey was conducted in April and May 2023, with an honorarium offered as an incentive for participation. In total, 870 SDA education leaders from across the NAD were invited to participate. They included:

▶ **In-school administrators,** defined as Principals and Teaching Principals.[1] These roles accounted for 736 of the total individuals invited to participate in the survey.

▶ **Out-of-school administrators,** defined as NAD education leaders, Union education leaders, and Conference education leaders. These roles accounted for 134 of those invited to participate.

The survey elicited 454 individual responses (from 359 in-school administrators and 95 out-of-school administrators) for an overall response rate of 52%. This included representation from all Unions. (See Figure 2.)

For context, the typical response rate for employee surveys is between 30% and 60%, with 50% to 60% considered good and anything above 70% considered excellent.[2] Other studies found the average response rates for online surveys to be 34% to 36%, further emphasizing the strong response rate to this survey.[3, 4]

Figure 2: Union Representation in Survey Response (N=454)
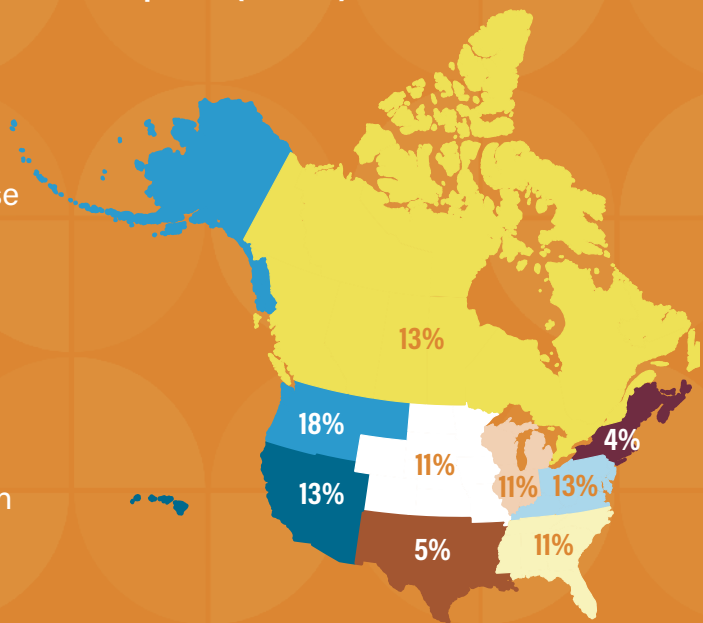
> "We need to think differently about how we train, mentor, and empower those who work for [the Adventist education] system — in particular, for our leaders. People should feel as proud [of] their employment under the Adventist church as they do in their mission for the Adventist church. I do not think we're doing a very good job of that right now."
>
> — SURVEY RESPONDENT

School Type and Geography

The survey asked in-school administrators to describe the type of school in which they worked and the community in which their school is located: rural area, small city or town, suburb near a large city, large city, or other. (See Figures 3 and 4.)

Figure 3: Type of School (N=359

Day school	344	96%
Boarding school	15	4%

Figure 4: School Location (N=359)

Rural area	80	22%
Small city or town	142	40%
Suburb near a large city	66	18%
Large city	64	18%
Other	7	2%

Respondent Profile

ROLE

Of the 454 respondents, 79% identified as in-school administrators (Principal or Teaching Principal). The remainder (21%) identified as out-of-school administrators: NAD education leader (e.g., Director of Education, Associate Director), Union education leader (e.g., Director of Education, Associate Director), or Conference education leader (e.g., Superintendent, Associate Superintendent). (See Figure 5.)

Figure 5: Role Breakdown (N=454)

Role	Percentage
NAD Education Leader	1%
Union Education Leader	4%
Conference Education Leader	16%
Principal	33%
Teaching Principal	46%

Out-of-School Administrators

In-School Administrators
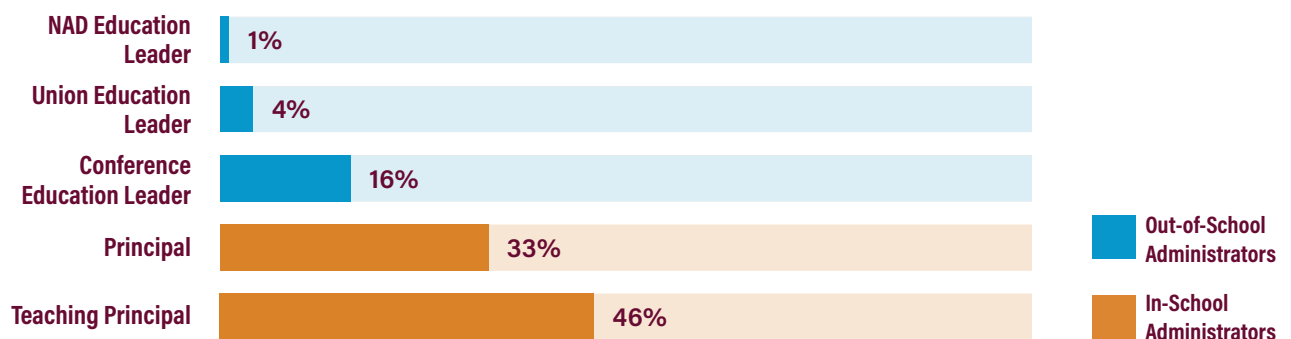
RACE

Individuals identifying as white made up more than 60% of the survey respondents. The next-largest respondent group was individuals identifying as Black/African American. (See Figure 6.)

Figure 6: Race Breakdown (N=454)

Race	Percentage
Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.0%
Indigenous/Native American	0.2%
Other	2%
Prefer not to disclose	4%
Asian	4%
Multiracial	6%
Hispanic/Latino	6%
Black/African American	14%
White	64%
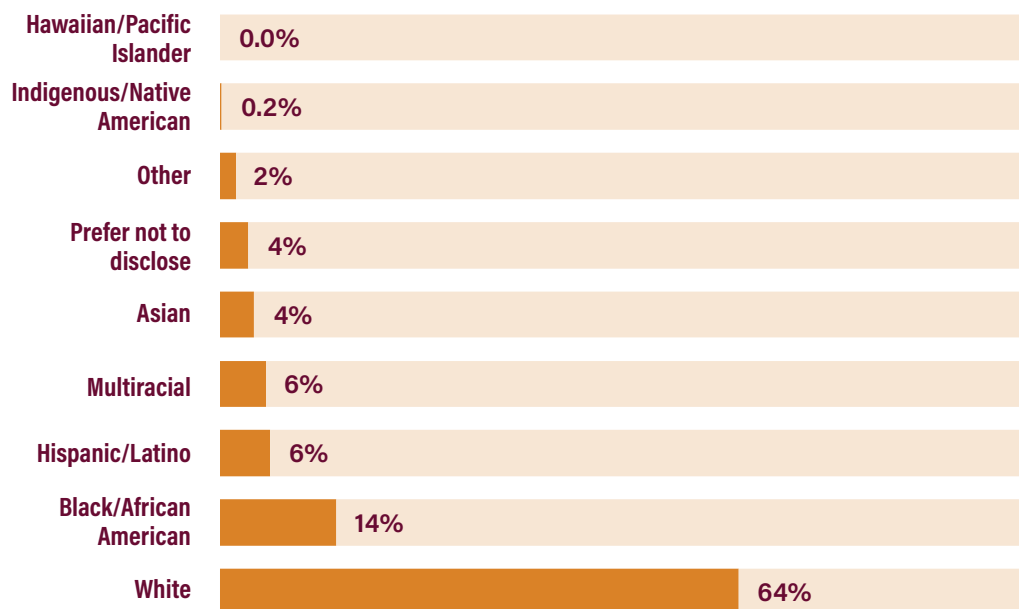
The analysis also examined educational roles by race. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) respondents held four in 10 Principal positions but were less likely to be Teaching Principals or hold roles as Conference, Union, or NAD education leaders. (See Figure 7.)

Figure 7: Race Breakdown by Role (N=454)

	Principal	Teaching Principal	Conference Education Leader	Union Education Leader	NAD Education Leader
White	60%	69%	70%	72%	83%
BIPOC	40%	32%	30%	28%	17%

AGE

More than a quarter of respondents were over age 60, and the largest share overall was 50–59. Only 16% of respondents were under the age of 40. (See Figure 8.)

Figure 8: Age Breakdown (N=454)

Age Group	Percentage
25-29	3%
30-39	13%
40-49	20%
50-59	37%
60-69	22%
Over 70	5%
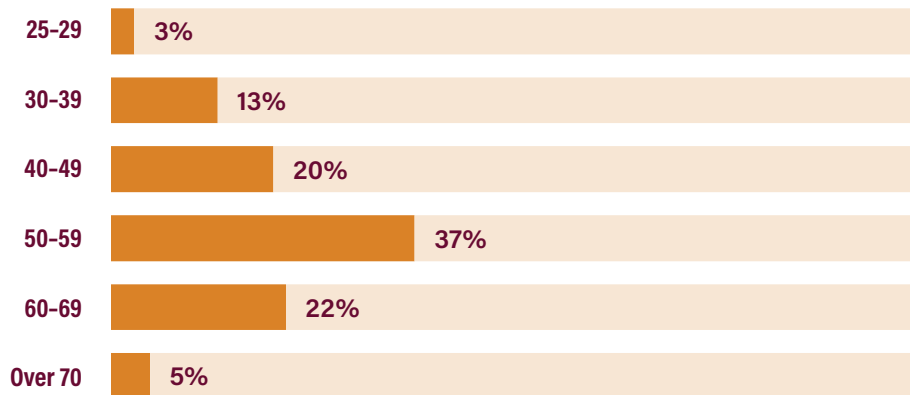
The analysis also examined roles by age. More than half of Union education leaders were over age 60, along with 40% of Conference education leaders. The largest share of both Principals (39%) and Teaching Principals (37%) were aged 50−59. Nearly a quarter (24%) of Teaching Principals were under age 40 but only 13% of Principals were. (See Figure 9.)

Figure 9: Age Breakdown by Role (N=454)

	25–39	40–49	50–59	60–69	70+
Principal	13%	24%	39%	18%	6%
Teaching Principal	24%	19%	37%	18%	3%
Conference Education Leader	4%	21%	35%	34%	6%
Union Education Leader	0%	6%	39%	44%	11%

> "The challenge of being a teaching principal is great. Both roles require 100%, and that is impossible to achieve. There are definitely ways of balancing, and I'm blessed to have figured that out, but there is so much potential that is untapped because there simply is not enough time to execute both roles fully.
>
> **— SURVEY RESPONDENT**

The racial composition among the older three demographic groups is heavily white. The reverse is true only for the 20–29 age group. (See Figure 10.)

Figure 10: Age Breakdown by Race (N=454)

Age	White	BIPOC
20–29	31%	69%
30–39	59%	41%
40–49	62%	38%
50–59	72%	28%
60–69	69%	31%
Over 70	71%	29%

White
BIPOC
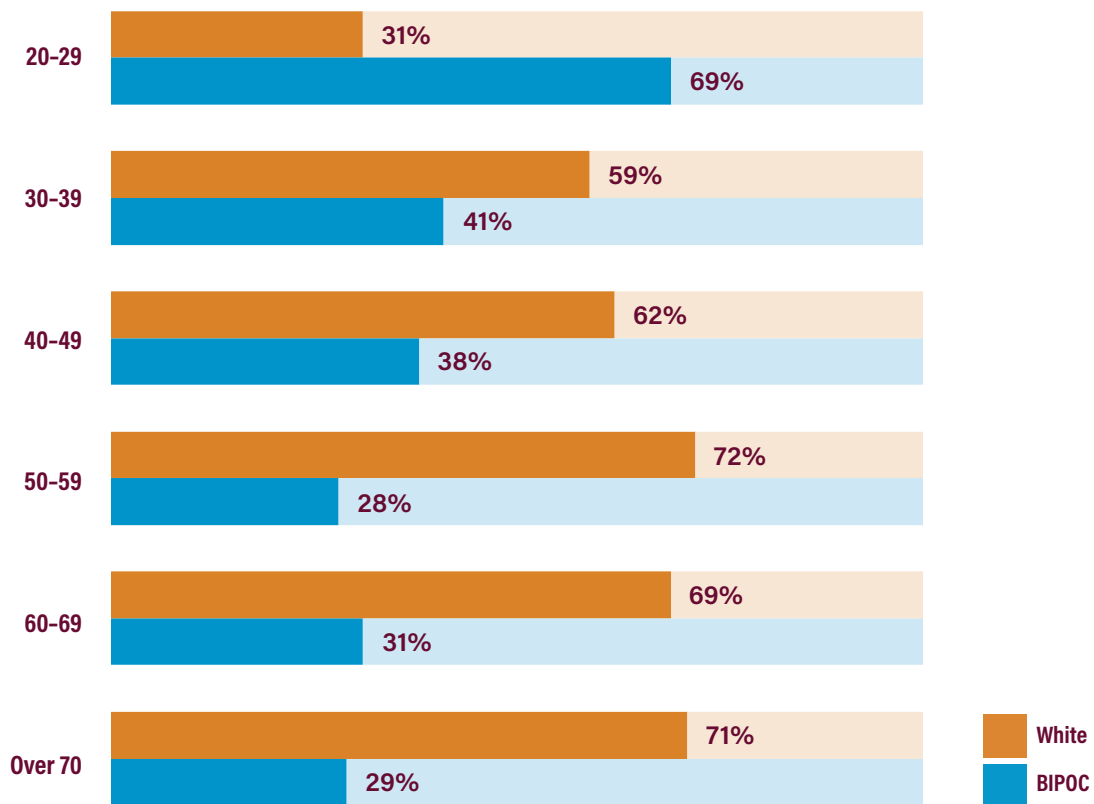
GENDER

Two-thirds (66%) of the respondents identify as female and one-third (34%) as male. When responses were disaggregated by role and gender, males were more likely to hold Principal and Conference education leader roles whereas females were far more likely to hold the dual role of Teaching Principal. (See Figure 11.)

Figure 11: Role by Gender (N=454)

Males:
- NAD Education Leader: 1%
- Union Education Leader: 4%
- Conference Education Leader: 22%
- Teaching Principal: 28%
- Principal: 45%

Females:
- NAD Education Leader: 2%
- Union Education Leader: 4%
- Conference Education Leader: 12%
- Teaching Principal: 56%
- Principal: 27%

Legend:
- NAD Education Leader
- Union Education Leader
- Conference Education Leader
- Teaching Principal
- Principal

Principal Profiles

To further understand the survey respondents, we conducted cluster analysis to identify subgroups of Principals and Teaching Principals (referred to collectively as "in-school administrators" throughout this report) based on shared characteristics, such as age, gender, race, and experience. Four unique groups (comprising both Principals and Teaching Principals) stood out:

Early-Career Principal

<5 years Admin. Experience

- 37.4% of sample
- 25–39 years old
- 54.5% white/ 46.5% BIPOC
- 82% female/ 18% male

Mid-Career Principal

5–10 years Admin. Experience

- 18% of sample
- 30–59 years old
- 54% white/ 46% BIPOC
- 56% female/ 44% male

Seasoned Principal

11–20 years Admin. Experience

- 26.7% of sample
- 50–69 years old
- 73% white/ 27% BIPOC
- 66% female /34% male

Veteran Principal

20+ years Admin. Experience

- 18% of sample
- 50–69 years old
- 84% white/ 16% BIPOC
- 58% female/ 42% male

The analysis yielded important insights:
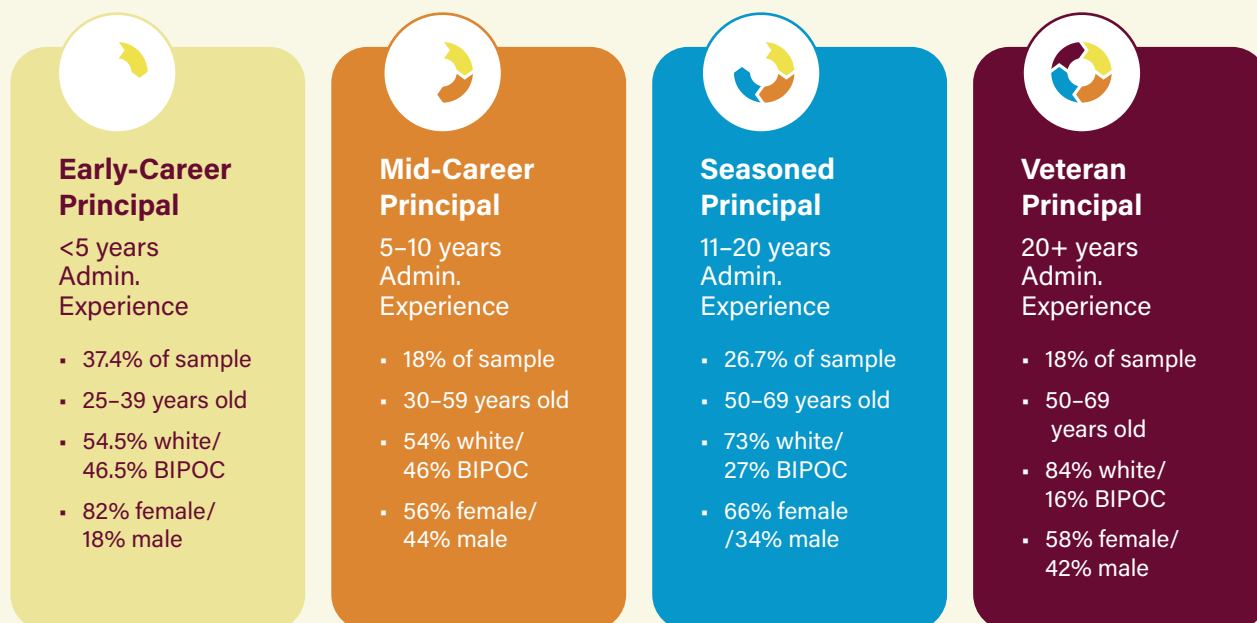
▶ The Early-Career Principal group is the largest and most diverse (almost half are BIPOC individuals) and has the largest percentage of females (82%).

▶ The Mid-Career Principal group has the largest percentage of males (44%) of any group.

▶ Seasoned Principals are predominantly white (73%) and female (66%), and three-quarters (76%) of respondents range in age from 50–69 years.

▶ Veteran Principals are the least racially diverse of any group (84% identify as white and 16% BIPOC), and three-quarters (74%) of respondents range in age from 50–69 years.

While this report's findings are not organized according to the four profiles, the profiles may serve as a valuable framework for future discussion and decisions related to in-school administrators in the SDA education system.

Key Takeaways and Findings

In-school administrators reported higher workloads, fewer reward systems/practices, less access to supportive communities, and less voice in and control over their work and resources compared to their out-of-school counterparts.

In-school administrators also expressed a different perspective on SDA education priorities. These factors indicate a potential vulnerability to burnout among in-school administrators and a retention risk. BIPOC in-school administrators are even more vulnerable to turnover at this point.

This survey was designed to capture and compare the work experience of Adventist education leaders as well as their priorities and professional development needs. This section captures the key takeaways and themes that emerged from the findings. Full survey results can be found in Appendices B–F.orklife Quality and Experience

WORKLOAD

Two sets of questions surfaced workload concerns, especially among in-school administrators. Respondents were asked to rate the worklife quality areas of Values, Community, Control, Reward, Fairness, and Workload, and their responses were compared to a normative sample of non-SDA respondents from similar sectors. Both in-school and out-of-school SDA administrators rated the first five areas more positively than did the normative sample. However, Workload was rated significantly less favorably by SDA respondents, especially by Teaching Principals. A separate question found that SDA education leaders in all roles work an average of more than 50 hours per week, with Principals working the longest hours at nearly 58 hours per week.

The Mind Garden "Areas of Worklife Survey" (AWS) was embedded into the overall survey design. This tool is used to assess employee perceptions of workplace qualities that contribute to on-the-job engagement or burnout. The following are definitions of the six worklife factors assessed through the tool.

▶ **Values** — This factor encompasses the ideals and motivations that originally attracted employees to the job. It is the motivating connection between the worker and the workplace that goes beyond the utilitarian exchange of time for money or advancement.

▶ **Community** — Community is the overall quality of social interaction at work, including issues of conflict, mutual support, closeness, and the capacity to work as a team.

▶ **Control** — This area includes employees' perceived capacity to influence decisions that affect their work, to exercise professional autonomy, and to gain access to the resources necessary to do an effective job.

▶ **Reward** — The reward area of worklife addresses the extent to which rewards — monetary, social, and intrinsic — are consistent with expectations.

▶ **Fairness** — Fairness is the extent to which decisions at work are perceived as being fair and people are treated with respect.

▶ **Workload** — This factor reflects overload or when job demands exceed human limits, i.e., when employees have to do too much in too little time with too few resources.

REWARDING EXPERIENCES

Respondents were asked to identify which of nine workplace experiences they found most rewarding or rejuvenating. Across the SDA system, the most rewarding professional experiences were building positive working relationships with staff and building a culture aligned to the organizational mission. Rated lowest was receiving pay commensurate with their experience, role, and performance. When asked which of these same workplace experiences were missing from their current role, having sufficient resources to promote student learning and success was identified as missing by more than half of the respondents, followed by commensurate pay and support for professional development. The three lowest-scored "missing" experience items were, not surprisingly, the three highest-scored rewarding experiences.

Other notable findings related to worklife quality and experience included:

▶ The activities on which in-school administrators currently spend their time are not where they feel they should be spending their time.

▶ Fewer than half of all respondents indicated that they were **very prepared** or **extremely well prepared** for their roles. Out-of-school administrators tended to feel more prepared for their roles than did in-school administrators.

▶ Most in-school administrators indicated that they had limited voice representation at the NAD and Union levels but more at the Conference level and a great deal at the school level.

Turnover, Retention, and Recruitment

TURNOVER

The survey found that nearly half of Teaching Principals and more than a third of Principals expect to leave their current role within three years. This rate is highest among those aged 25–39, with 52% indicating plans to leave the system within the next three years. Among in-school administrators who indicated they would leave their role, nearly half indicated they would stay in the SDA system (serving in either a new location or a different role), whereas 53% plan to move outside the SDA system or retire. These findings, when combined with the aging demographics of in-school administrators, may indicate a potential vulnerability related to staffing, retention, and recruitment activities.

RETENTION

Systemwide, more than half of the SDA education leaders said better work-life balance would keep them in the profession. Higher salary was cited second as a retention tool, followed by more school funding, more teachers and staff, and more professional development. The compensation issue may merit further study, as receiving pay commensurate with their experience, role, and performance also was ranked low by education leaders as a rewarding or rejuvenating experience but high as a missing experience.

RECRUITMENT

Compounding the turnover and retention issues identified in the survey, recruitment also was identified as a core challenge. Systemwide, respondents said it was challenging to recruit both principals and teachers who were effective, qualified, diverse, and looking to stay in the role.

"

[It is rewarding to realize] you have made a difference in the life of another educator — being able to support them to be their best.

— SURVEY RESPONDENT

1. **Action Oriented:** Taking on new opportunities and tough challenges with a sense of urgency, high energy, and enthusiasm

2. **Builds Networks:** Effectively building formal and informal relationship networks inside and outside the organization

3. **Collaborates:** Building partnerships and working collaboratively with others to meet shared objectives

4. **Courage:** Stepping up to address difficult issues, saying what needs to be said

5. **Drives Results:** Consistently achieving results, even under tough circumstances

6. **Global Perspective:** Taking a broad view when approaching issues, using a global lens

7. **Instills Trust:** Gaining the confidence and trust of others through honesty, integrity, and authenticity

8. **Manages Complexity:** Making sense of complex, high-quantity, and sometimes contradictory information to effectively solve problems

9. **Self-Development:** Actively seeking new ways to grow and be challenged using both formal and informal development channels

10. **Strategic Mindset:** Seeing ahead to future possibilities and translating them into breakthrough strategies

Leadership Standards and Professional Development

LEADERSHIP STANDARDS

More than a quarter of respondents systemwide were not aware of the K-12 Adventist Education Leadership Standards, and three-quarters indicated that they rarely or never use these standards within their role. These standards were established in 2017 and are designed to serve as the basis for school improvement outcomes with the end goal of increased learner achievement. These standards articulate the knowledge, performances, and dispositions of SDA teachers and leaders that are necessary to improve student achievement.

LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

SDA educational leaders were asked to rank 10 leadership competencies (taken from the Korn Ferry For Your Improvement (FYI) competency framework) according to which are most critical for success in their roles. Respondents identified Builds Networks, cultivating a Strategic Mindset, and Manages Complexity as both critical for success within their role and among the top areas for growth and training for both in-school and out-of-school

> **"Our schools do an amazing job considering some of the challenges we have. We still make a world of difference in the lives of people."**
>
> — SURVEY RESPONDENT

leaders. Additionally, Self-Development and Global Perspective were frequently identified as additional areas of focus for growth and training. Leaders expressed that they were strong in the domains of Instills Trust, Collaborates, Courage, and being Action Oriented.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The survey revealed that in-school administrators were lacking professional development/training in areas central to their roles. More than 45% of Principals and Teaching Principals said they had received no professional development/training in the areas of change management, fundraising/development, finance/budgeting, strategic planning, or talent management/human resources. Additionally, more than 45% of Principals indicated enrollment and marketing as priority needs for

professional development. Respondents said the most effective space in which to deliver professional development/ training opportunities was in-person conferences/workshops, followed by mentoring, coaching, peer observation, and communities of practice.

In-school administrators also expressed a strong desire for more opportunities to meet and collaborate with other principals and schools, which could provide avenues for growth and fulfillment. These opportunities are currently limited, and in-school administrators feel siloed in their role. Other than with Principals in their own Conference, respondents reported they rarely or never connected with Principals in their Unions (72%), across the NAD (85%), or at other public and/or private schools (77%).

> "I have struggled for many years trying to keep my work and life in balance, provide for my family, and grow as a professional. I feel tired and used up.
>
> **— SURVEY RESPONDENT**

Critical Issues in SDA Education

The survey sought to identify and prioritize the most critical issues facing the SDA system. These issues were first identified during focus groups held during fall 2022 and were expanded upon in the survey. Respondents were asked to identify the top three issues from a list of 21 possible options. Teacher recruitment and retention was named the top priority systemwide, followed by mental health and well-being of leaders, teachers, and staff, and leadership recruitment and retention. Rounding out the top five were student enrollment and teacher training and professional development.

When responses were analyzed by role, teacher recruitment and retention remained the highest priority. However, significantly more out-of-school administrators (64%) rated this a critical issue compared to in-school administrators (34%), resulting in one of the largest disparities found in the survey results. Where alignment did not occur, responses appeared to reflect the specific vantage points and challenges respondents experience in their role. For instance, the responses of in-school administrators reflected an additional focus on students and families served by their schools, whereas for out-of-school administrators the top five critical issues included leadership recruitment and retention; teacher quality, training, and development; and finance/budgeting.

DIFFERENCES BY RACE

When analyzed by race, many survey findings were similar among BIPOC and white respondents. However, noteworthy points of divergence include the following:

▶ BIPOC in-school administrators are much more likely to be planning to leave their current role within the next three to five years (77% versus 57% for white in-school administrators).

▶ BIPOC respondents held a less favorable view of the state of education at the Conference level, with 49% viewing it as good or excellent compared to 68% for white respondents.

▶ When identifying the leadership competencies critical for success, BIPOC respondents placed less emphasis on Courage and Instills Trust and greater emphasis on Collaborates.

▶ BIPOC administrators were more likely to see building networks as a training opportunity compared to their white colleagues (37% versus 27%).

PERCEPTIONS OF EQUITY

Respondent ratings indicated there is strong awareness and interest for equitable practices, yet there is opportunity to further build equity

EQUITY VERSUS EQUALITY

The survey addressed issues of both equity and equality as part of the discussion of diversity, equity, and inclusion. While both concepts have to do with "fairness," there is a distinct difference between them. To avoid misunderstanding about these terms, the following definitions were provided:

► **Equality** means everyone is provided with the exact same resources, support, and opportunities to succeed.

► **Equity** means everyone is provided with what they specifically need to succeed in reaching an equal outcome.

The definition of equity acknowledges that not everyone begins at the same starting point or faces the same circumstances and challenges. It also reflects the inherent advantages or disadvantages that may apply to certain groups and the shortcomings of a one-size-fits-all approach.

into practices and policies as well as education and professional development opportunities. While there was not a significant difference in the rating between white and BIPOC leaders, older leaders did perceive the systems and practices to be more equitable than did younger leaders.

SDA education leaders across all roles also identified an existing gap and the need for training opportunities to more effectively respond to a diverse range of students and to engage in practices that are culturally responsive and humble.

PERCEPTIONS OF THE SDA EDUCATION SYSTEM

When asked about the state of education across the SDA system, respondents were more likely to rate their Conference as good or excellent (62%) compared to their Union (52%) or the NAD (40%). Overall, white SDA education leaders had a more favorable view of Conferences, Unions, and the NAD than did their BIPOC colleagues.

Across the SDA education system, respondents from in-school administrator roles identified that the system most effectively meets the needs of students of color and low-income populations. Inversely, it was identified that the SDA system less effectively meets the needs of LGBTQ+ students and students with physical disabilities.

Opportunities for Improvement

This report documents an initial exploration of SDA education leaders and their perceptions and needs. The goal of the survey and accompanying analysis was to identify tactical insights and learnings to help the SDA education community as well as the Bainum Family Foundation support future strategic planning activities, decision-making, and resource allocation. These findings also can help inform additional research to complement and contextualize these exploratory results.

Outlined here are opportunities for improvement and future investment based on key survey findings. While certain issues and potential solutions highlighted in this report may be familiar to individuals currently working in SDA education, having data to pinpoint key areas of focus allows stakeholders to identify opportunities, understand the extent of issues, and be more strategic in taking actions to strengthen the system.

1 Retention Factors

Better work-life balance and higher salary were identified as the most critical factors that would keep school and educational leadership in their roles, with Teaching Principals voicing especially strong concerns about their workload and job expectations. Given this, the following actions could prove beneficial:

► Further examine how to provide resources and support that would result in better work-life balance for education leaders.

► Conduct a compensation review — both inside the system and with comparative data outside the system for similar job classifications — to assess whether SDA compensation is competitive and reflects the scale of what leaders are being asked to do in their respective roles.

> "I love the school and the church. But I am tired, overwhelmed, underappreciated, underpaid, and sometimes grossly undervalued by all the stakeholders. We really don't have support for leadership training and ongoing mentoring and encouraging. It is a lonely job."
>
> — SURVEY RESPONDENT

2 Succession Planning

While retention of education leaders is a critical and necessary focus, 50% of respondents indicated that they are planning to leave the SDA system in the next three years. Thus, it is important for school principals, school boards, and Conference leaders to also prioritize succession planning to prepare for and mitigate negative impacts of leadership transitions.

3 Leadership Standards

Most respondents were unfamiliar with the SDA K-12 Education Leadership Standards implemented in 2017 or did not use them consistently. Several steps could be taken to ensure that education leaders understand and are aligned around a consistent set of leadership standards:

▶ Review current framework to determine whether it best represents a practical systemwide competency approach for:

  » Identifying leadership behaviors and skill sets necessary for school and educational leaders

  » Supporting standardized expectations and common language across the system.

▶ Develop a comprehensive communications plan to introduce and, on an on-going basis, reinforce systemwide standards.

4 Professional Development and Peer Networks

Survey findings elevated the need to identify, develop, and provide ongoing professional development aligned with the developmental needs and priorities of educational leaders. The following are some steps to be considered:

► Develop a systemwide onboarding for new teaching principals and full-time Principals that provides 1) general awareness and a knowledge base about critical administrative focus areas and 2) the opportunity to integrate networking with fellow education leaders from the start of their careers. Key areas of need identified by school leaders included strategic planning, school finance, talent management, change management, and fundraising/development.

► In-school administrators expressed a desire for more opportunities to meet and collaborate with other Principals and schools. Establish a structure that allows for consistent opportunities for school administrators to collaborate and network within and outside their schools and Conferences.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADDITIONAL RESEARCH

While the survey had a relatively robust sample size (454), representing 52% of all SDA education leaders, these findings should be confirmed through subsequent activities — given the context, knowledge of self-report biases, and potential viewpoints of the non-responders who make up approximately half of the SDA education leaders in the NAD.

In addition, the project team worked through the NAD and Union education offices to distribute the questionnaire to potential participants, so the response is influenced, in part, by how effectively each Union solicited participation. Further, this data represents a point-in-time analysis, and without baseline comparisons, robust extrapolations should leverage additional data and context.

SDA higher education leaders were not included in this survey even though higher education institutions are an essential partner in preparing SDA school leaders. Therefore, it is important to further examine the role and critical contributions of SDA higher education in a systemwide approach to developing effective SDA school leaders and the leadership pipeline.

Conducting this survey every two to three years among Adventist education leaders would be beneficial to monitoring progress on current challenges and identifying new issues that emerge over time.

5 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

While the survey highlighted that leaders have a strong awareness of the importance of equitable practices in education, it also identified a need to engage in deeper exploration and capacity building so that SDA education leaders can more effectively respond to the needs of diverse student populations and incorporate culturally responsive practices.

Final Thoughts

Survey respondents expressed concerns about whether their voice was heard and included at different levels of decision-making throughout the SDA education system. As actions are considered, planned, and enacted in response to the survey findings, it will be critical to ensure representation across education leadership roles and a variety of perspectives from all levels of the system.

Based on the findings from the data, ACE Academy recognizes opportunities to collaborate with various stakeholders in the SDA education landscape — many of which align with unique programs ACE Academy has been actively implementing. ACE Academy aims to contribute in areas such as leadership competencies, professional development, and discussions on diversity, equity, and inclusion as opportunities arise.

Appendices:
Literature Review and
Full Survey Results
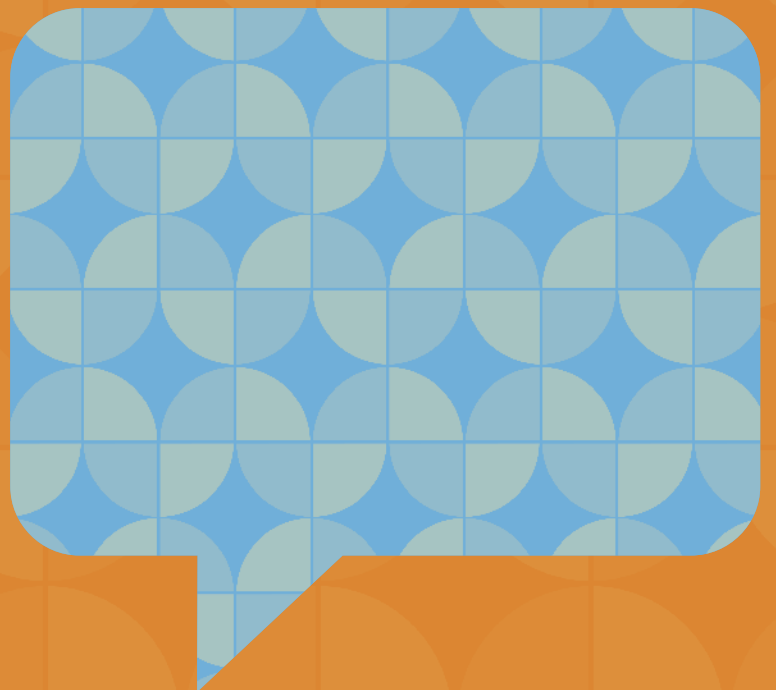
Review of Other Education Leadership Surveys

The project team reviewed other relevant research among education leaders to inform the development of the SDA education leader survey. The following is a list of surveys and reports included in this literature review.

Source	Type	Link
Teaching and Learning International Survey, 2018 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development)	**Principal Questionnaire**	https://web-archive.oecd.org/2018-11-15/499239-TALIS-2018-MS-Principal-Questionnaire-ENG.pdf
Principal Professional Development: Results of a National Survey, 2022 (EdWeek Research Center)	**Report**	https://epe.brightspotcdn.com/79/41/5f2eb7674c249ea17f1cc5345654/principal-pd-survey-report-final-1.26.22.pdf
Elementary School Principals' Professional Learning: Current Status and Future Needs, 2020 (Learning Policy Institute)	**Report**	https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/elementary-school-principals-professional-learning-report
Professional Development Needs Assessment — Survey Instrument, 2020 (Hanover Research)	**Survey**	https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/3409306/Professional-Development-Needs-Assessment-Survey-Instrument.pdf
Private School Principal Questionnaire, National Teacher and Principal Survey, 2020-21 (U.S. Department of Education)	**Survey**	https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/pdf/2021/Private_School_Principal_Questionnaire_2020_21.pdf
Private School Questionnaire, National Teacher and Principal Survey, 2020-21 (U.S. Department of Education)	**Survey**	https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ntps/pdf/2021/Private_School_Questionnaire_2020_21.pdf

Source	Type	Link
2021-22 District-Wide Principal and Assistant Principal Survey (School District of Philadelphia)	Survey	https://www.philasd.org/research/programsservices/district-wide-surveys/allquestions/
2020 Principal Survey (Council on Education Standards and Accountability)	Report	https://www.cesaschools.org/assets/docs/cesa-survey-final-final1.pdf
K-12 Strategic Priorities Diagnostic Tool, 2020 (Hanover Research)	Survey	https://f.hubspotusercontent00.net/hubfs/3409306/K-12%20Strategic%20Priorities%20Diagnostic%20Tool.pdf?utm_campaigN=internal-email&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=129764092&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-9UAqVi5jLK3HPR4ts_BpquQlmgS0_bkNz6km6fv1FdSetJQPU8HQXxAWYs4ooYmWNEH4IWWDed18hWBWiSwKfZWV8lm702ifiEaIkGpkG4LDVeYPo&utm_content=129764092&utm_source=hs_email
2022 Tennessee Educator Survey Administrator Core	Survey	https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/data/district-survey/Administrator%20Core.pdf
Survey of America's School Leaders and High School Students, 2022 (National Association of School Secondary Principals)	Report	https://survey.nassp.org/2022/#intro
Tool for Organizational Self-Assessment Related to Racial Equity, 2013 (Coalition of Communities of Color and All Hands Raised)	Survey	https://nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/organizational-self-assessment-related-to-racial-equity_oct-2013.pdf
Building Level Assessment: An Equity Manual (National Alliance for Partnerships in Equity)	Survey	https://napequity.org/wp-content/uploads/10f-Building-Level-Equity-Assessment.pdf
K-12 Staff Equity and Inclusion Survey, 2020 (Hanover Research)	Survey	https://f.hubspotusercontent00.net/hubfs/3409306/K12-Staff-Equity-and-Inclusion-Survey.pdf

Work-Life Quality and Experience

Several questions were designed to gauge the worklife quality and experience of SDA education leaders.

Time Allocation

In-school administrators were asked where they currently spend a significant amount of time and where they felt they should be spending their time. Out of the 14 categories provided, the seven shown in Figure 12 represent the greatest discrepancies between "currently spend" and "should spend." In other words, education leaders most strongly felt they should be spending more time in these areas.

Figure 12: Where In-School Administrators Spend Their Time Versus Where They Should (N=359)

Category	Currently Spend Time	Should Spend Time
Community activities	6%	55%
Fundraising	21%	55%
Instructional leadership	14%	58%
Personnel/Talent management	19%	42%
Professional development provision/planning	15%	51%
School growth	46%	52%
Strategic planning	32%	68%
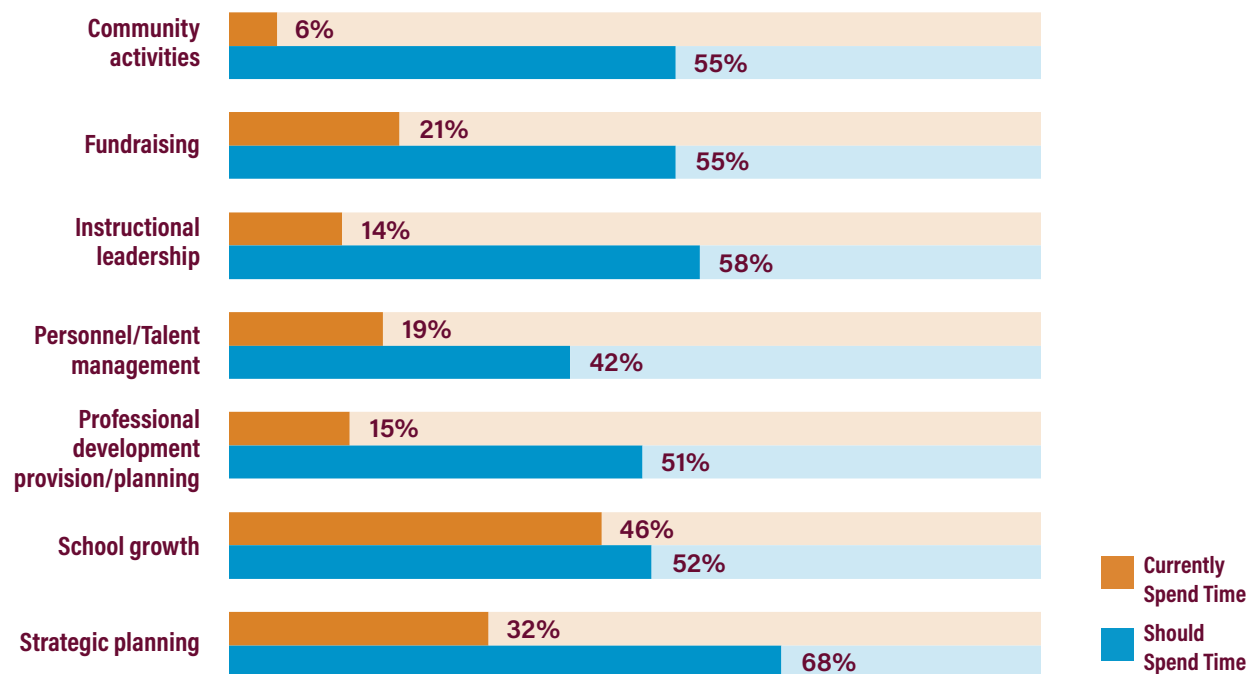
OPTIONS FOR TIME ALLOCATION

In responding to the question about time allocation, in-school administrators were asked to choose from the following options, selecting all that apply:

▶ Attending meetings/Traveling to meetings

▶ Building/Facilities management

▶ Community activities (e.g., Rotary Clubs, City Council, Head of School/Private School Associations, strategic community partners)

▶ Communication with board, constituents, families, staff, students

▶ Finances (e.g., budgeting, forecasting)

▶ Fundraising

▶ Instructional leadership/Teacher observations and evaluation

▶ Personnel/Talent management (e.g., recruitment, hiring, succession planning)

▶ Planning/Providing professional development for staff

▶ Student discipline

▶ School activities (e.g., Christmas/Spring concerts, Fall festivals)

▶ School culture and relationship building

▶ School growth (e.g., enrollment, recruitment, retention planning)

▶ Strategic planning/Visioning

▶ Other

HOURS WORKED

Respondents in all roles reported that they typically work more than 50 hours per week, with Principals highest at nearly 58 hours per week. (See Figure 13.)

Figure 13: Hours Worked Weekly by Role (N=448)

	Hours Worked Weekly
Principals	57.8
Teaching Principals	55.6
Conference Leaders	57.1
Union Leaders	50.3

The survey also revealed that nearly half of full-time Principals (70 out of the 149 respondents in this role) teach classes (an average of three) while also handling administrative duties.

PREPAREDNESS FOR ROLE

Across all roles, 45% of respondents indicated that they were very or extremely well prepared for their role. The remainder reported that they were either moderately, slightly, or not at all prepared for their role. (See Figure 14.)

Figure 14: Preparedness for Role (N=454)

- 2% Not at all prepared
- 12% Slightly prepared
- 41% Moderately prepared
- 35% Very prepared
- 10% Extremely prepared
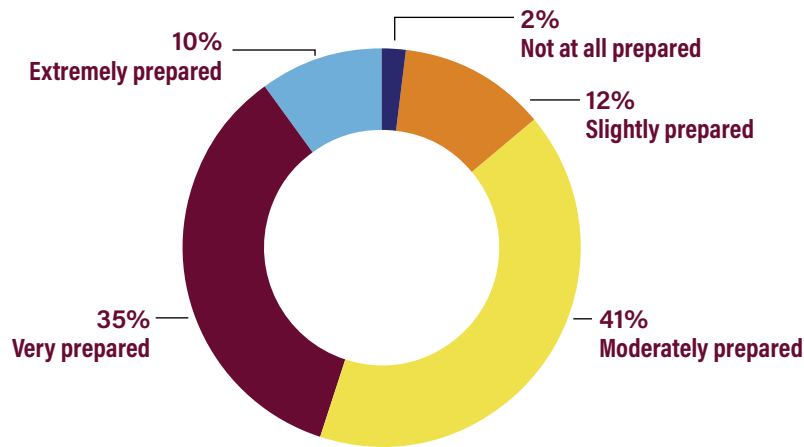
Education leaders in out-of-school roles were more likely to report that they were extremely or very prepared for their role compared to those in in-school roles. (See Figure 15.)

Figure 15: Preparedness for Role by Type of Role (N=454)

	In-School Administrators	Out-of-School Administrators
Not at all prepared	2%	0%
Slightly prepared	14%	4%
Moderately prepared	42%	38%
Very prepared	34%	40%
Extremely prepared	8%	18%
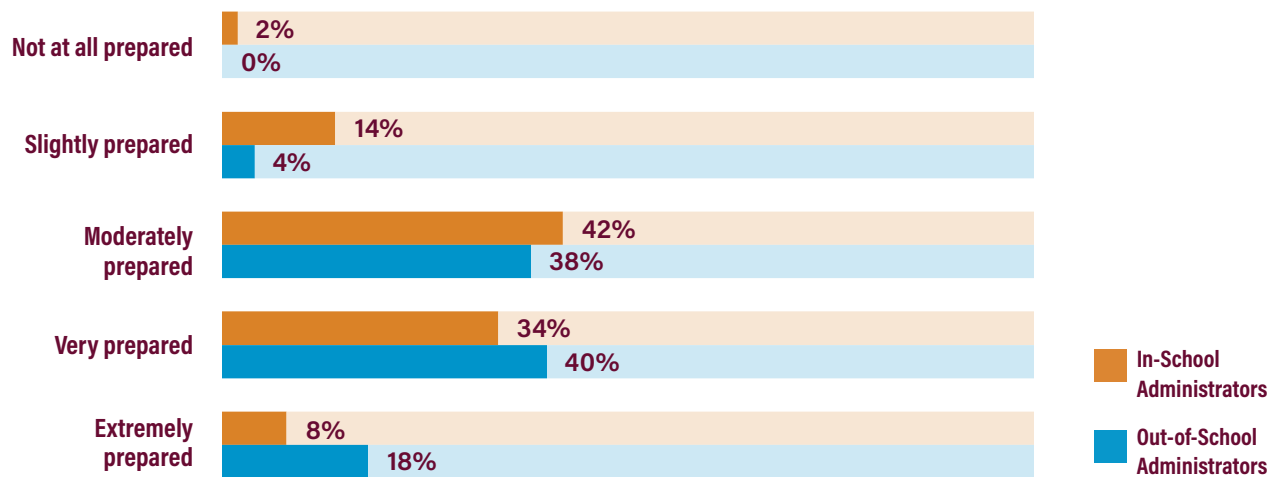
By geography, the suburb/large city respondents were more likely to indicate that they were very or extremely prepared for their roles. More than 36% of rural/small town respondents indicated that they were very or extremely prepared, with 47% indicating moderate preparedness. (See Figure 16.)

Figure 16: Preparedness for Role by School Geography (N=359)

	Rural/Small Town	Suburb/Large City	Other
Not at all prepared	3%	1%	14%
Slightly prepared	14%	15%	0%
Moderately prepared	47%	32%	57%
Very prepared	31%	40%	29%
Extremely prepared	5%	12%	0%
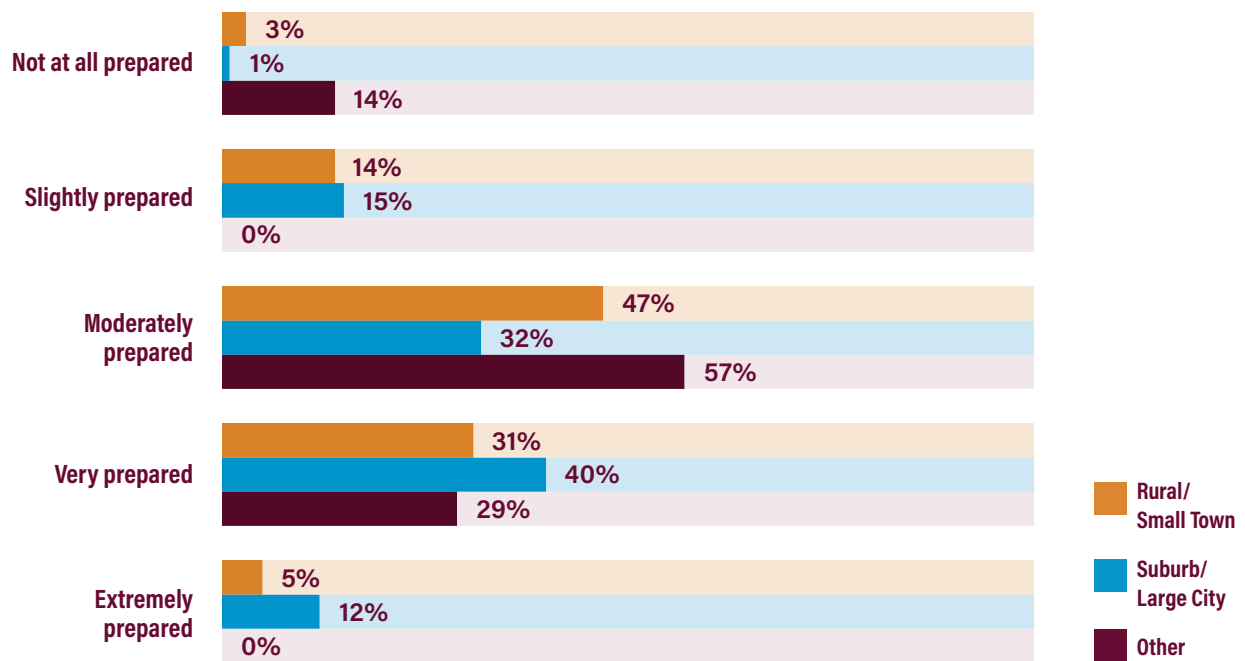
The survey asked in-school administrators about the specific types of training they had received in preparation for becoming an education leader. Three in 10 Principals and nearly six in 10 Teaching Principals said they had not received training prior to accepting their current position. The majority also had not received on-the-job training, participated in a graduate-level program on education administration, or participated in a leadership training or certification program. (See Figure 17.) For this survey question, respondents were asked to select all responses that apply.

Figure 17: Type of Training Received by SDA Education Leaders (N=359)

	Principal		Teaching Principal	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Received on-the-job training as an assistant or a vice principal	55	37%	49	23%
Participated in a graduate-level program that focused on administration	71	48%	44	21%
Participated in a leadership training or certification program	42	28%	32	15%
Did not receive training prior to accepting the position	45	30%	119	57%
Other	7	5%	23	11%

REWARDING OR REJUVENATING EXPERIENCES

To capture perceptions of factors contributing to burnout or engagement, the survey asked respondents which of the following nine workplace experiences were rewarding or rejuvenating:

▶ Building positive working relationships with staff

▶ Building a school or an organizational culture that is fully aligned with the mission

▶ Having clear expectations for my role and the support needed to perform to those expectations

▶ Having sufficient resources, staffing and infrastructure to effectively promote student learning and success

▶ Possessing and being valued for my skills and competencies as a leader

▶ Receiving mentoring and support for professional development and growth

▶ Receiving pay that is commensurate with my experience, role, and performance

▶ Receiving positive affirmation for my work

▶ The ability to network and build community with my peers

Positive working relationships with staff was identified as rewarding or rejuvenating by three-quarters of respondents. Pay commensurate with their experience and skills rated lowest. (See Figure 18.)

Figure 18: Rejuvenating Experiences Systemwide (N=454)

Experience	Percentage
Commensurate pay	30%
Support for professional development	34%
Sufficient resources to promote student success	37%
Clear expectations	49%
Peer network and community building	52%
Valued as a leader	60%
Positive affirmations	61%
Culture that is aligned with the mission	68%
Positive working relationships	76%

Listening to Leaders: Insights From the Seventh-day Adventist Education Leadership Survey

> [It is] most rewarding for me when higher-ups that make decisions really listen about the complexities of being a teaching principal. It is a very challenging job, and it helps when there is understanding.
>
> — SURVEY RESPONDENT

MISSING EXPERIENCES

Respondents also were asked which of the same nine workplace experiences were missing in their current role. Having sufficient resources to promote student learning and success was identified as the top item missing — by more than half of the respondents — followed by commensurate pay and professional development support. (See Figure 19.)

Figure 19: Missing Experiences Systemwide (N=454)

Positive working relationships	18%
Culture that is aligned with the mission	22%
Positive affirmations	25%
Valued as a leader	28%
Peer network and community building	31%
Clear expectations	37%
Support for professional development	45%
Commensurate pay	46%
Sufficient resouces to promote student success	53%
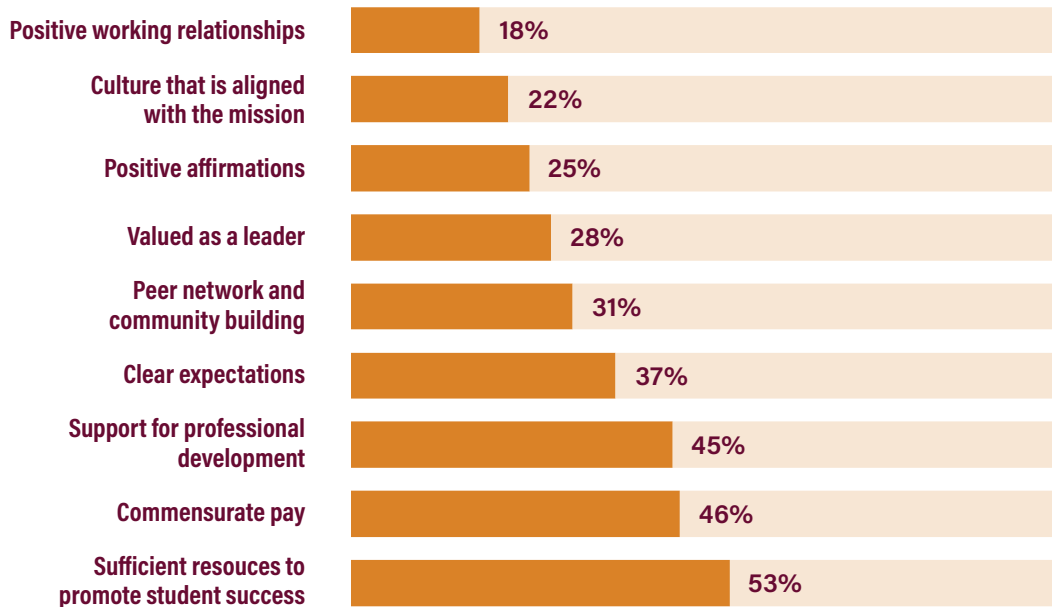
VOICE RECOGNITION

In-school administrators were asked to what extent they believe their voice is represented as a school/educational leader in major decisions regarding policy, budgeting, and hiring. The majority said they had limited voice representation at the NAD and Union levels but more at the Conference level and a great deal in their schools. (See Figure 20.)

Figure 20: In-School Administrators' Voice Representation (N=359)
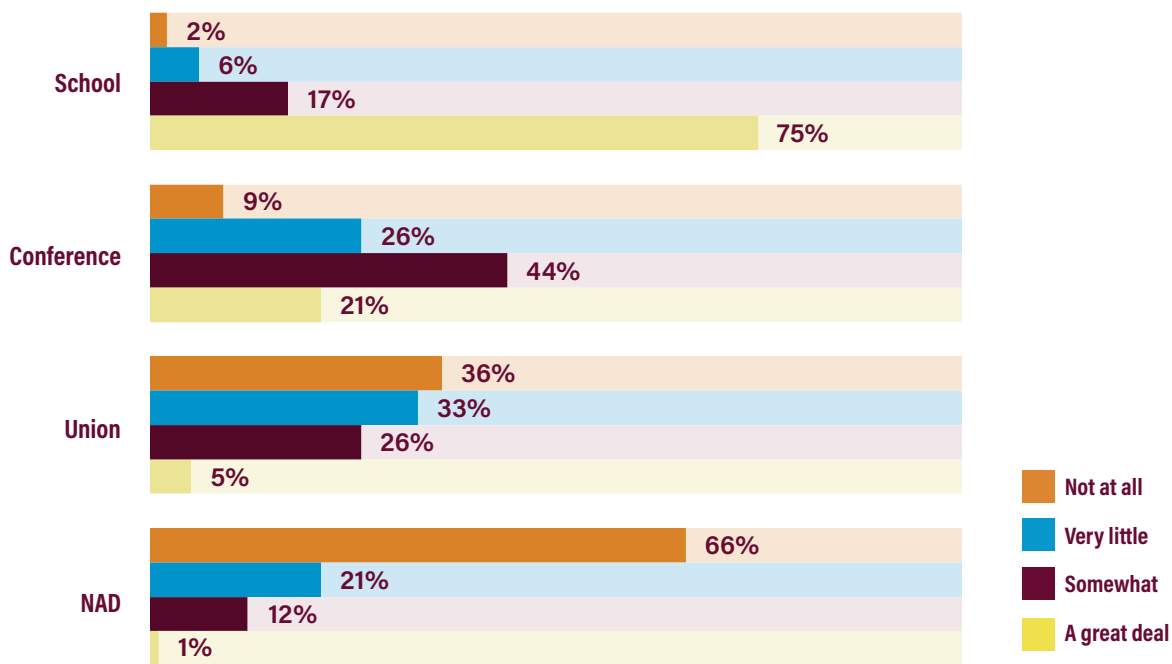
School
- Not at all: 2%
- Very little: 6%
- Somewhat: 17%
- A great deal: 75%

Conference
- Not at all: 9%
- Very little: 26%
- Somewhat: 44%
- A great deal: 21%

Union
- Not at all: 36%
- Very little: 33%
- Somewhat: 26%
- A great deal: 5%

NAD
- Not at all: 66%
- Very little: 21%
- Somewhat: 12%
- A great deal: 1%

Legend:
- Not at all
- Very little
- Somewhat
- A great deal

> "The challenge of being a teaching principal is great. Both roles require 100%, and that is impossible to achieve. There are definitely ways of balancing, and I'm blessed to have figured that out, but there is so much potential that is untapped because there simply is not enough time to execute both roles fully.
>
> — SURVEY RESPONDENT

Further Insights on Worklife Quality

To further identify and clarify workplace quality for SDA education leaders, the Mind Garden *Areas of Worklife Survey* (AWS was embedded in the overall survey design. This widely used and well-researched tool is used to assess employees' perceptions of workplace qualities that contribute to on-the-job engagement or burnout. The survey has six subscales (Values, Community, Control, Reward, Fairness, and Workload) and features a normative sample with which to compare SDA education leaders' results. (See definitions of the six subscales on page X.)

A higher score (on a scale of 1 to 5) indicates better worklife quality perceptions within the subscales. **The SDA respondents overall rated all areas — except for Workload — higher than the sample taken from a normative cross-sector sample.** (See Figure 21.)

Figure 21: Average Scores for SDA Respondents Relative to AWS Normative Sample

VALUES	COMMUNITY	CONTROL	REWARD	FAIRNESS	WORKLOAD
3.80 / 3.43	3.78 / 3.46	3.74 / 3.35	3.52 / 3.06	3.47 / 2.83	2.83 / 2.16

■ SDA sample (N=454)

■ Normative cross-sector sample (N=6,815)

Analysis of this data explored differences by role and the degree to which role differences accounted for any global statistical differences found. Four of the six subscales (Community, Control, Fairness, and Workload) revealed statistically significant differences by role, while the other two (Reward and Values) did not. These findings are captured in Figures 22 through 27 and the related commentary.

SUBSCALE: COMMUNITY

Community reflects trust of one another to fulfill roles, membership in a supportive work group, cooperation with one another, open communication, and closeness to colleagues. Teaching Principals had the lowest average score on Community, while Union leaders had the highest. (See Figure 22.)

Figure 22: Average Scores by Role on Community Domain (N=448)
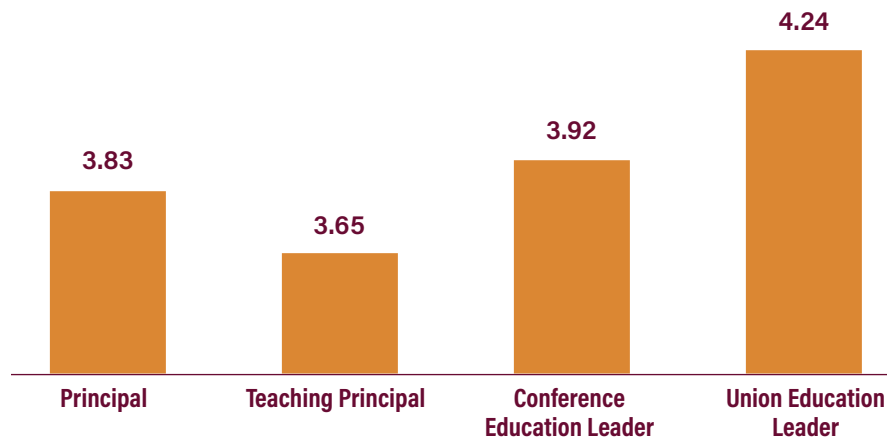
SUBSCALE: CONTROL

Control reflects items that assess control over how to do work, influence over management to obtain the equipment and space needed for the work, professional autonomy/independence in doing work, and influence in the decisions affecting individual work. Average scores were lowest for Principals and Teaching Principals and highest for Conference and Union education leaders. (See Figure 23.)

Figure 23: Average Scores by Role on Control Domain (N=448)
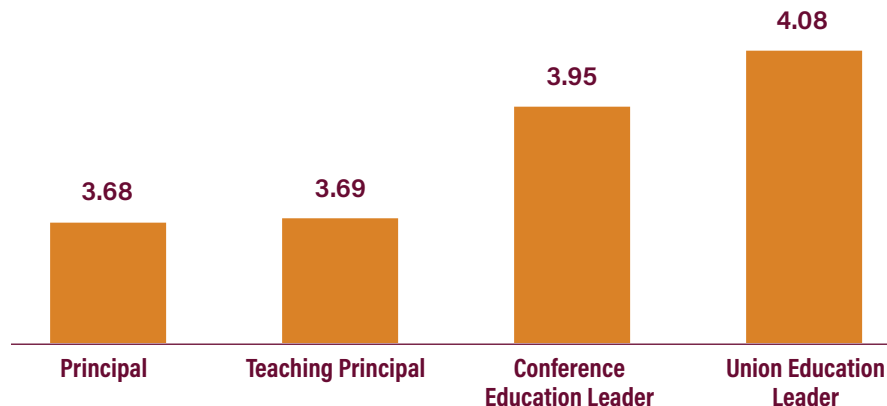
SUBSCALE: FAIRNESS

Fairness addresses fair allocation of resources, opportunities based solely on merit, the availability of effective appeal procedures when the fairness of decisions are in question, fair treatment of employees by management, and use of favoritism in making decisions. Scores were relatively close on this subscale: Conference education leaders had the lowest ratings while Union education leaders had the highest. (See Figure 24.)

Figure 24: Average Scores by Role on Fairness Domain (N=448)

Principal	Teaching Principal	Conference Education Leader	Union Education Leader
3.49	3.48	3.35	3.79
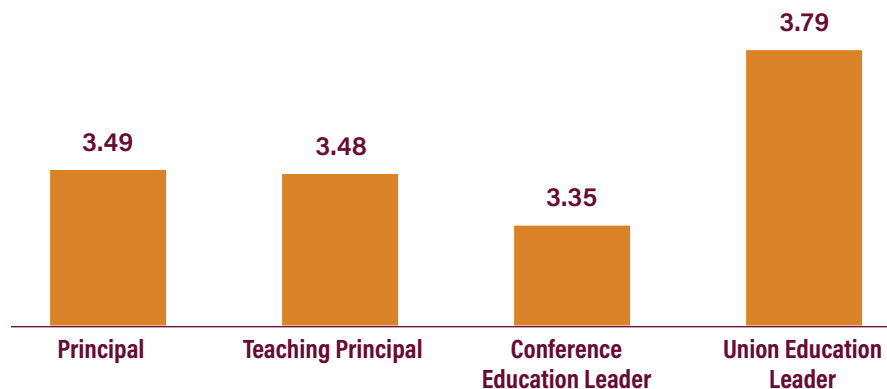
SUBSCALE: REWARD

The Reward category reflects the recognition, compensation, and benefits employees receive for their efforts. While there was slight variation among scores for the different education leader roles, it was not deemed statistically significant. (See Figure 25.)

Figure 25: Average Scores by Role on Reward Domain (N=448)

Principal	Teaching Principal	Conference Education Leader	Union Education Leader
3.59	3.4	3.6	3.79
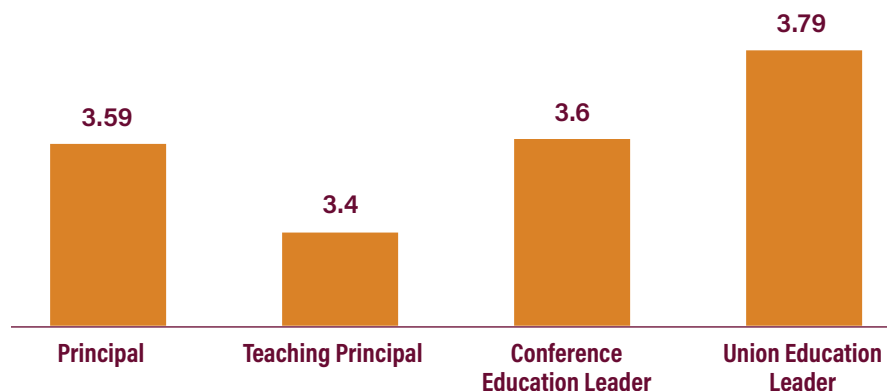
SUBSCALE: VALUES

Values refers to the alignment between personal values and the organization's mission and culture. Scores were close across the SDA education leader roles. (See Figure 26.)

Figure 26: Average Scores by Role on Values Domain (N=448)

Principal	Teaching Principal	Conference Education Leader	Union Education Leader
3.8	3.83	3.71	3.89
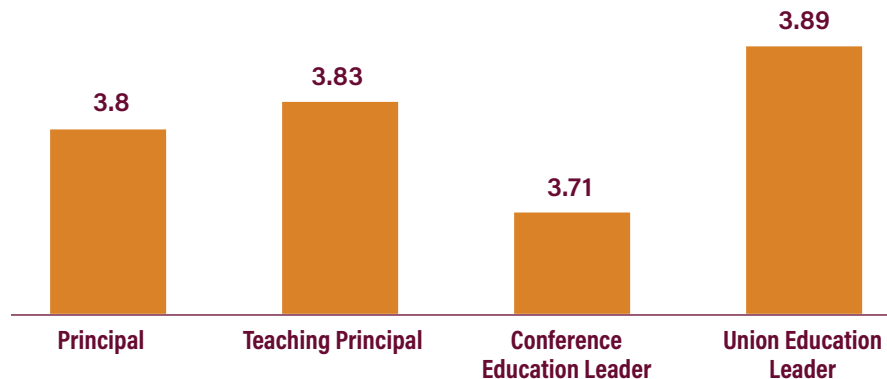
SUBSCALE: WORKLOAD

Workload items reflect having the time to do the work that must be done, working intensely for prolonged periods of time, having so much work to do on the job that it takes away from personal interests, having enough time to do what's important for the job, and the ability to leave work behind when going home at the end of the workday. Teaching Principals reported the lowest average score on Workload (2.06) while Union education leaders reported a significantly higher average score (2.94) — the largest gap on the subscale scores. This result is not completely unexpected given the multitude of concurrent pressures and responsibilities school leaders face, particularly Teaching Principals, who serve dual roles of teacher and administrator. (See Figure 27.)

Figure 27: Average Scores by Role on Workload Domain (N=448)

Principal	Teaching Principal	Conference Education Leader	Union Education Leader
2.13	2.06	2.35	2.94
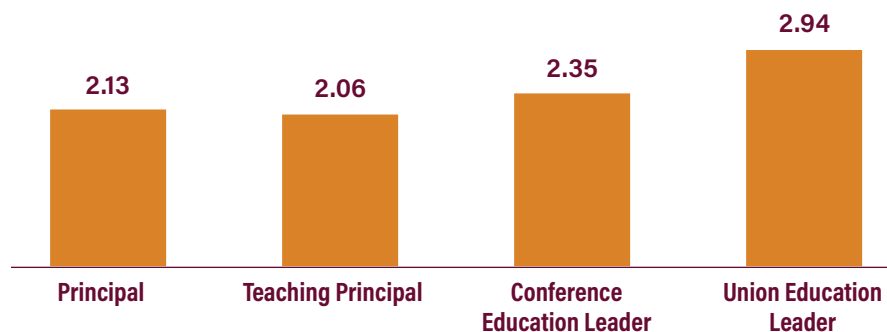
Appendix C

Turnover, Retention, and Recruitment

The survey explored the future career plans of respondents, including how long they expect to stay in their current role. Nearly half of Teaching Principals and more than a third of Principals expect to leave their current role within three years. A quarter of the Principal group expects to leave their current role in 10+ years. (See Figure 28.)

Figure 28: When SDA Education Leaders Plan to Leave Their Current Role (N=448)

Role / Timeframe	In the next 3 years	4–5 Years	6–9 Years	10+ Years
Principal	36%	20%	20%	25%
Teaching Principal	48%	18%	14%	19%
Conference Education Leader	43%	22%	19%	16%
Union Education Leader	31%	25%	19%	25%

Legend:
- Principal
- Teaching Principal
- Conference Education Leader
- Union Education Leader
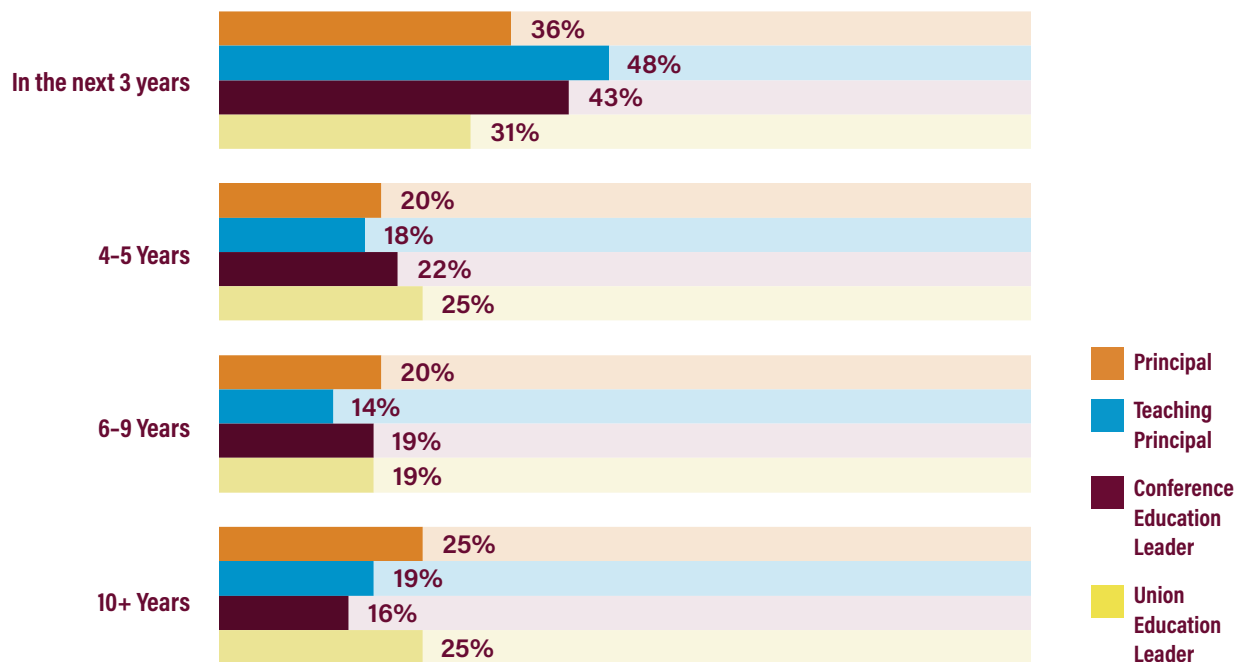
Among in-school administrators who indicated they would leave their role in the next three to five years, about half indicated that they would stay in the SDA system. (See Figure 29.)

Figure 29: Where In-School Administrators Plan to Go Upon Leaving Their Current Role (N=359)
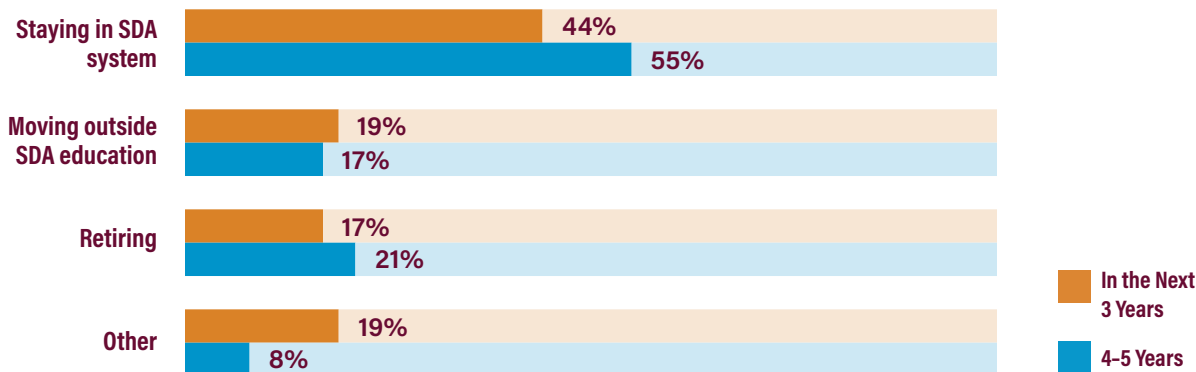
	In the Next 3 Years	4–5 Years
Staying in SDA system	44%	55%
Moving outside SDA education	19%	17%
Retiring	17%	21%
Other	19%	8%

Systemwide, more than half of the SDA education leaders said better work-life balance would keep them in the profession. Higher salary was cited second as a retention tool, followed by more school funding and more teachers and staff. (See Figure 30.)

Figure 30: What Would Keep SDA Education Leaders in the Profession? (N=454)

1	2	3	4	5
Better Work-life Balance	Higher Salary	More School Funding	More Teachers and Staff	More Professional Development
52%	39%	29%	27%	18%
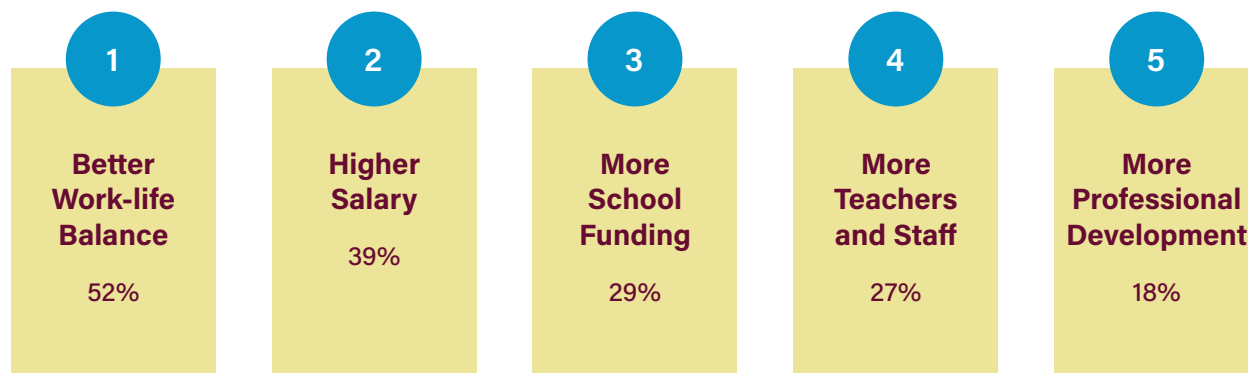
TURNOVER/RETENTION BY RACE

More than 43% of BIPOC education leaders expect to leave their current role within three years compared to 39% for white leaders. More than two-thirds of current BIPOC leaders expect to leave their current role in the next five years. (See Figure 31.)

Figure 31: When SDA Education Leaders Plan to Leave Their Current Role, by Race (N=438)

	White	BIPOC
In the next 3 years	39%	43%
4–5 years	18%	24%
6–9 years	18%	12%
10+ years	21%	18%
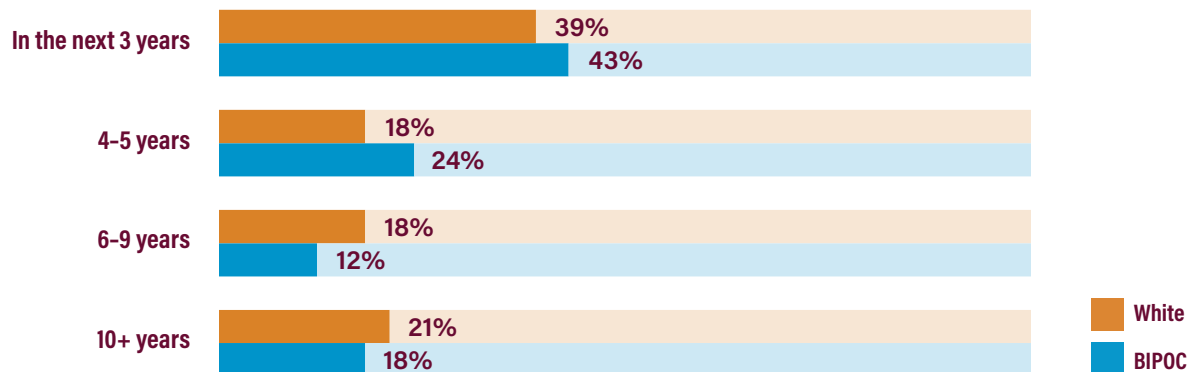
Across racial demographics, there was little difference among BIPOC and white education leaders in the factors that would promote retention.

TURNOVER/RETENTION BY AGE

More than half of those aged 25–39 plan to leave their current role within the next three years. As expected, most education leaders over 70 expect to leave their current role within the next three years. (See Figure 32.)

Figure 32: Plans to Leave Current Role, by Age (N=454)

25–39
- 52%
- 17%
- 7%
- 23%

40–49
- 38%
- 26%
- 8%
- 28%

50–59
- 33%
- 15%
- 23%
- 29%

60–69
- 45%
- 28%
- 24%
- 3%

70+
- 86%
- 9%
- 5%
- 0%

Legend:
- In the next 3 years
- 4–5 Years
- 6–9 Years
- 10+ Years
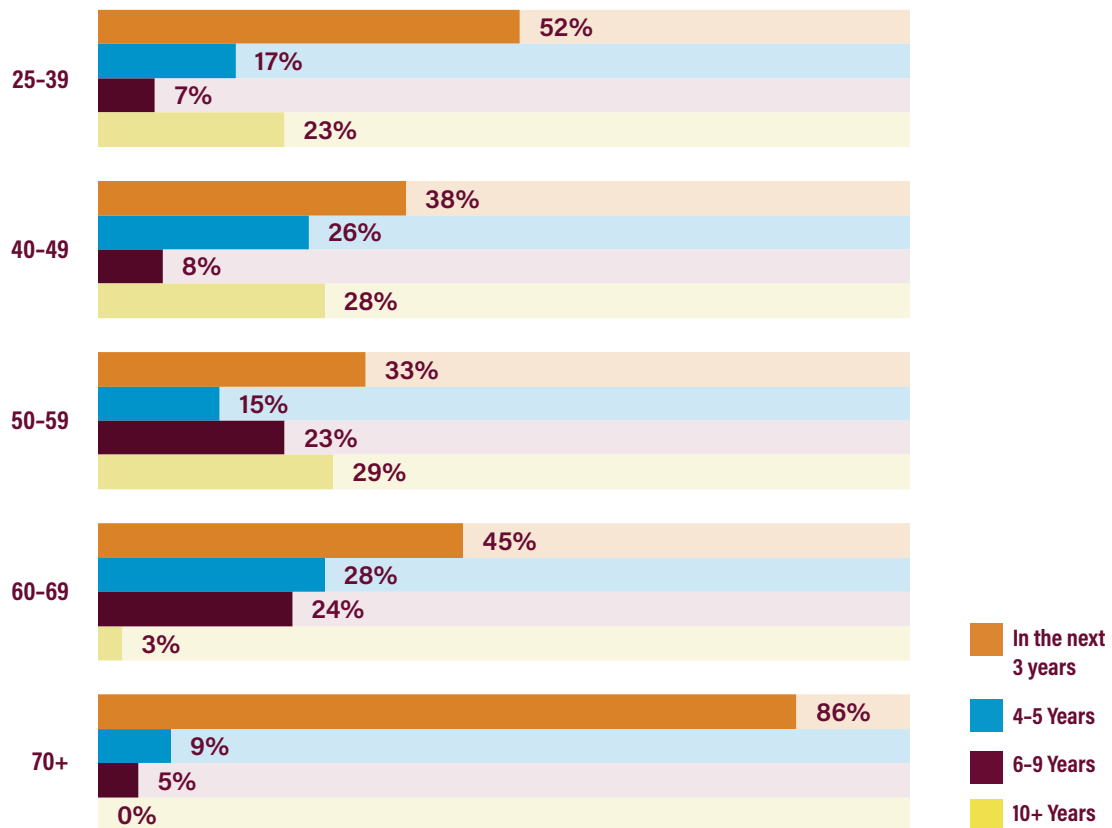
> Leaders are often thrust into a leadership role and are not effectively trained. It is important to equip leaders to prevent burnout and failure. Appreciation is given to teachers, but leaders are often left out.
>
> **— SURVEY RESPONDENT**

RECRUITMENT OF PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

Given that recruiting challenges were identified as a critical issue, the survey additionally asked both in-school and out-of-school leaders how challenging it was to recruit principals and teachers who are effective, qualified, diverse, and looking to stay in the role.

Principals, Teaching Principals, Conference education leaders, and Union education leaders all were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (not at all challenging) to 4 (very challenging) how difficult it is to recruit teachers. A similar question was asked of Conference and Union leaders regarding challenges in principal recruitment.
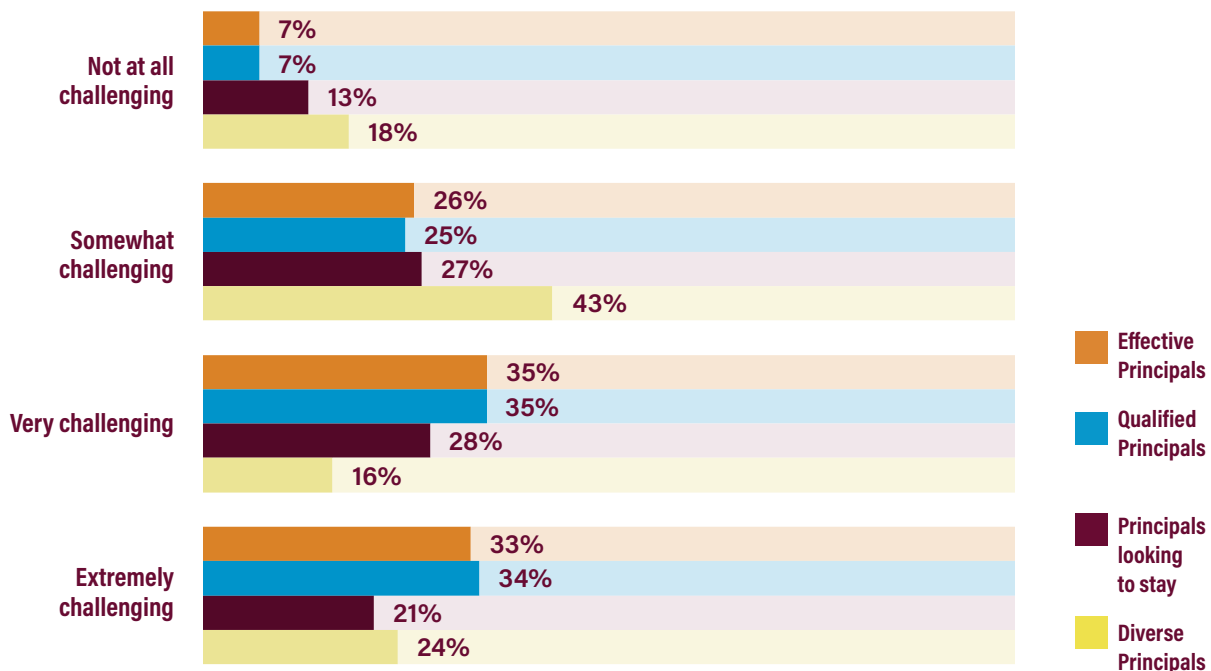
The results indicated across-the-board challenges in recruiting both principals and teachers. Respondents indicated particular challenges in recruiting effective and qualified principals, with more than two-thirds describing this as either very challenging or extremely challenging. (See Figures 33 and 34.)

Figure 33: Principal Recruiting Challenges (N=89)

Not at all challenging
- Effective Principals: 7%
- Qualified Principals: 7%
- Principals looking to stay: 13%
- Diverse Principals: 18%

Somewhat challenging
- Effective Principals: 26%
- Qualified Principals: 25%
- Principals looking to stay: 27%
- Diverse Principals: 43%

Very challenging
- Effective Principals: 35%
- Qualified Principals: 35%
- Principals looking to stay: 28%
- Diverse Principals: 16%

Extremely challenging
- Effective Principals: 33%
- Qualified Principals: 34%
- Principals looking to stay: 21%
- Diverse Principals: 24%

Legend:
- Effective Principals
- Qualified Principals
- Principals looking to stay
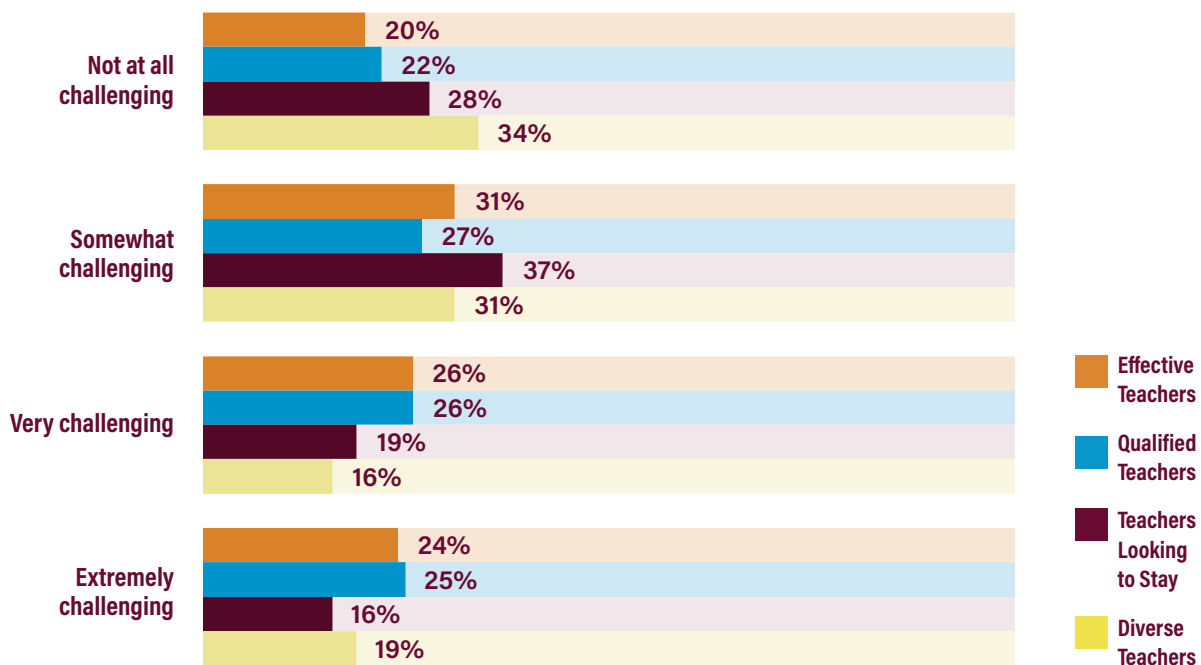- Diverse Principals

I [have needed] to pursue additional sources of income and employment in my free time just to survive financially. I do not feel adequately supported or compensated for the work I do, and I am tired of giving everything I have without the proper recognition for that effort.

— SURVEY RESPONDENT

Figure 34: Teacher Recruiting Challenges (N=448)

Not at all challenging
- Effective Teachers: 20%
- Qualified Teachers: 22%
- Teachers Looking to Stay: 28%
- Diverse Teachers: 34%

Somewhat challenging
- Effective Teachers: 31%
- Qualified Teachers: 27%
- Teachers Looking to Stay: 37%
- Diverse Teachers: 31%

Very challenging
- Effective Teachers: 26%
- Qualified Teachers: 26%
- Teachers Looking to Stay: 19%
- Diverse Teachers: 16%

Extremely challenging
- Effective Teachers: 24%
- Qualified Teachers: 25%
- Teachers Looking to Stay: 16%
- Diverse Teachers: 19%

Legend:
- **Effective Teachers**
- **Qualified Teachers**
- **Teachers Looking to Stay**
- **Diverse Teachers**

There were some variations in the responses from Conference and Union education leaders regarding Principal recruitment. For example, 78% of Union leaders said it was either very (61%) or extremely (17%) challenging to recruit **effective** Principals compared to 68% of Conference leaders, who said it was very (35%) or extremely (33%) challenging. Meanwhile, more Conference leaders (77%) said it was either very (50%) or extremely (17%) challenging to recruit **qualified** Principals compared to 69% of Union leaders (35% said it was very hard, and 34% said it was extremely hard).

Leadership Competencies and Professional Development

WHAT ARE COMPETENCIES?

Components of on-the-job learning typically include:

► Understanding the business

► Developing functional and technical skills

► Building competencies

Competencies are observable and measurable skills and behaviors that contribute to workplace effectiveness and career success. This research asked about the competencies most critical to the success of SDA education leaders.

To explore leadership competencies and professional development needs and priorities, the survey leveraged the SDA K-12 Education Leadership Standards as well as the Korn-Ferry For Your Improvement (FYI) leadership competency framework. (See page x for a list of the leadership competencies included as part of this research.)

> " I am a leader within the Seventh-day Adventist education system because no other candidate was available/applied for the position. I have zero administrative experience and have been asked to effectively lead a school through many changes this year. "
>
> — SURVEY RESPONDENT

SDA K-12 EDUCATION LEADERSHIP STANDARDS

Nearly a quarter of respondents systemwide were not at all familiar with the SDA K-12 Education Leadership Standards, while almost two-thirds were moderately or slightly familiar with them. (See Figure 35.)

Figure 35: Familiarity With SDA K-12 Education Leadership Standards (N=454)

14%
Very familiar

23%
Not at all familiar

31%
Moderately familiar

31%
Slightly familiar
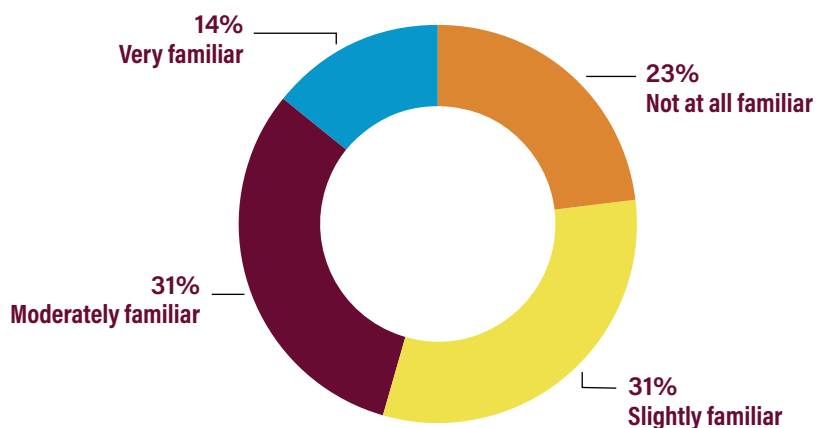
Three-quarters of all respondents (74%) said they never or rarely use or refer to the SDA K-12 Education Leadership Standards in their current role. The remainder use the standards often or always. (See Figure 36.)

Figure 36: Frequency of Use of SDA K-12 Education Leadership Standards (N=454)

5%
Always

21%
Often

31%
Never

43%
Rarely
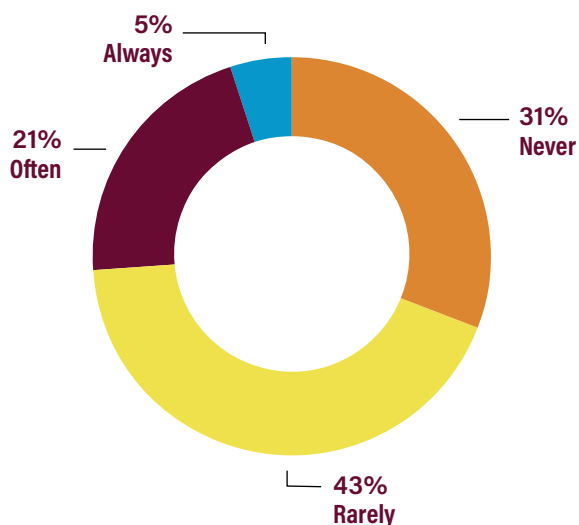
CRITICAL LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

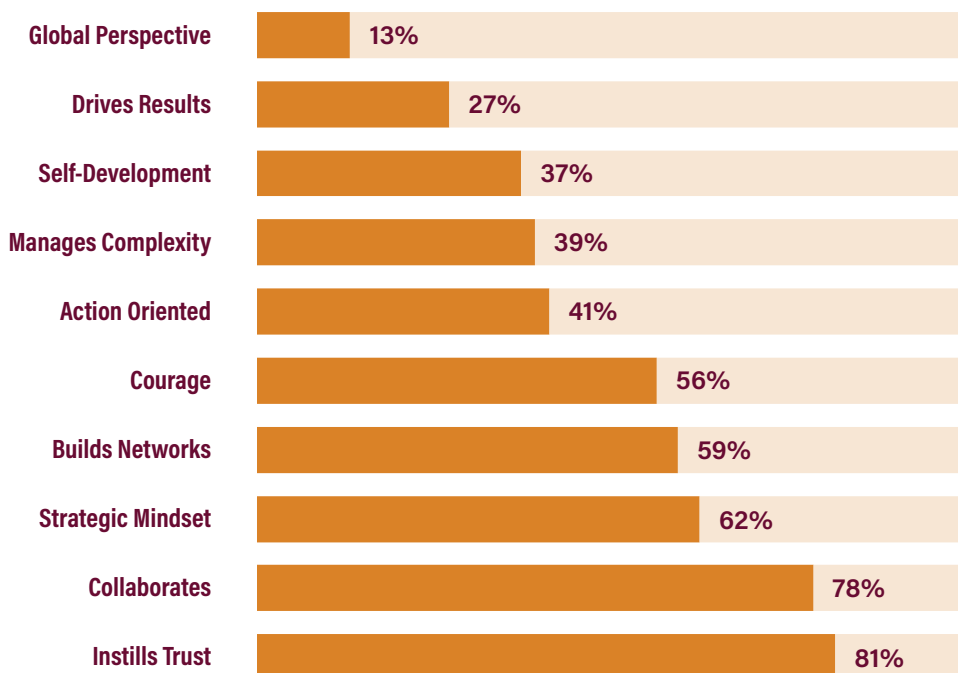Survey respondents were asked to rank which leadership competencies were most critical for success in their role while further identifying areas for growth and improvement. At the outset of the survey process, the key stakeholder group provided input on the competencies most critical for success as an SDA education leader. Based on this feedback, the project team selected 10 out of 38 competencies in the FYI framework.

Across all survey respondents, Instills Trust and Collaborates were the competencies most frequently selected as critical for success in their role. Global Perspective and Drives Results were the two least common responses among the full survey population. Courage, Builds Networks, Strategic Mindset, Collaborates, and Instills Trust all had a more than 50% response rate — indicating that most respondents found them critical for success within their respective role. (See Figure 37.)

Figure 37: Leadership Competencies Critical for Success (N=454)

Competency	Percentage
Global Perspective	13%
Drives Results	27%
Self-Development	37%
Manages Complexity	39%
Action Oriented	41%
Courage	56%
Builds Networks	59%
Strategic Mindset	62%
Collaborates	78%
Instills Trust	81%

The top five were consistent among both in-school and out-of-school administrators. (See Figure 38.)

Figure 38: Top-Rated Competencies by Role (N=454)

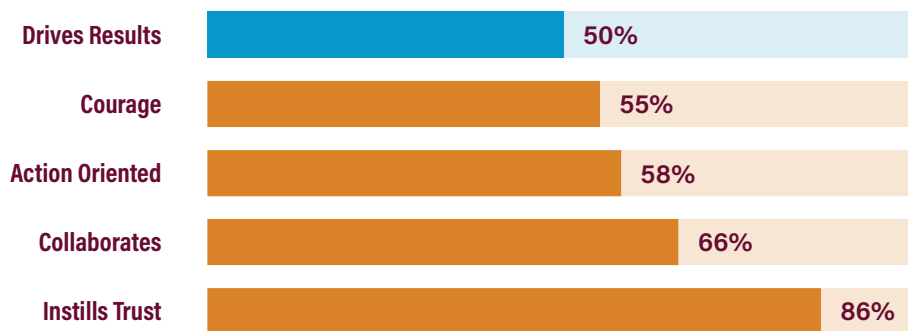|	In-School Administrator	Out-of-School Administrator
(1) Instills Trust	80%	86%
(2) Collaborates	77%	82%
(3) Strategic Mindset	62%	60%
(4) Builds Networks	59%	58%
(5) Courage	58%	49%

COMPETENCIES: CURRENT STRENGTHS

Respondents were asked to identify the top five competencies they believe are current strengths for them in their role and their top five areas for growth.

Although indicated as critical for success, neither Strategic Mindset nor Builds Networks were indicated as a current strength. Instills Trust and Collaborates were the two highest-rated leadership competencies and current strengths, but the actual scores differed significantly. The same is true for scores on Courage. (See Figure 39.)

Figure 39: Top Five Current Strengths Among Leadership Competencies (N=359, 95)

Top Five Leadership Competencies: Current Strengths (In-School Administrators, N=359)

Competency	Value
Drives Results	50%
Courage	55%
Action Oriented	58%
Collaborates	66%
Instills Trust	86%

Top Five Leadership Competencies: Current Strengths (Out-of-School Administrators, N=95)

Competency	Value
Self-Development	56%
Action Oriented	57%
Courage	68%
Collaborates	86%
Instills Trust	96%

Competencies that are common among both groups

Competencies that differ between both groups
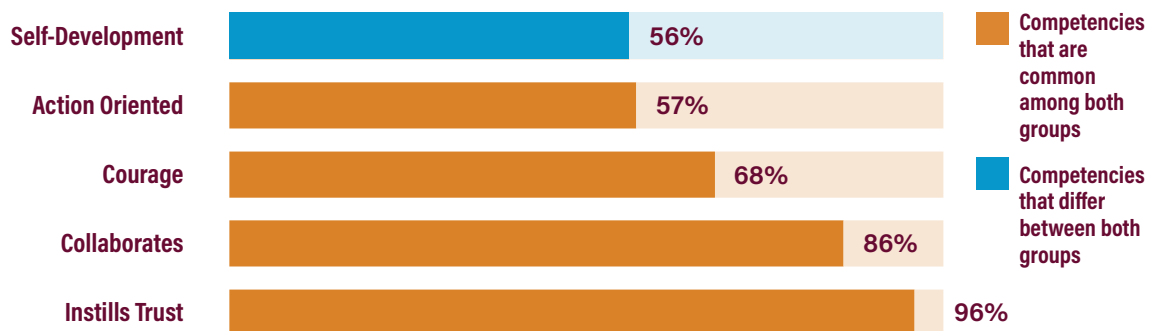
COMPETENCIES: AREAS FOR GROWTH

Global Perspective, the lowest-rated item on the critical for success metric, is identified as the highest-growth area for both in-school and out-of-school administrators. While the top five were consistent among groups, the competencies were prioritized differently. For example, Self-Development was the second-highest area for growth for in-school administrators yet tied for fifth among out-of-school administrators. (See Figure 40.)

Identified as two of the top five competencies critical for success, Strategic Mindset and Builds Networks are also top five areas for growth.

Figure 40: Areas for Growth Among Leadership Competencies (N=359, 95)

Leadership Competencies: Areas for Growth (In-School Administrators, N=359)

Competency	Percentage
Manages Complexity	55%
Builds Networks	56%
Strategic Mindset	59%
Self-Development	61%
Global Perspective	65%

Leadership Competencies: Areas for Growth (Out-of-School Administrators, N=95)

Competency	Percentage
Builds Networks	48%
Self-Development	48%
Manages Complexity	49%
Strategic Mindset	51%
Global Perspective	67%

■ Competencies that are common among both groups

■ Competencies that differ between both groups
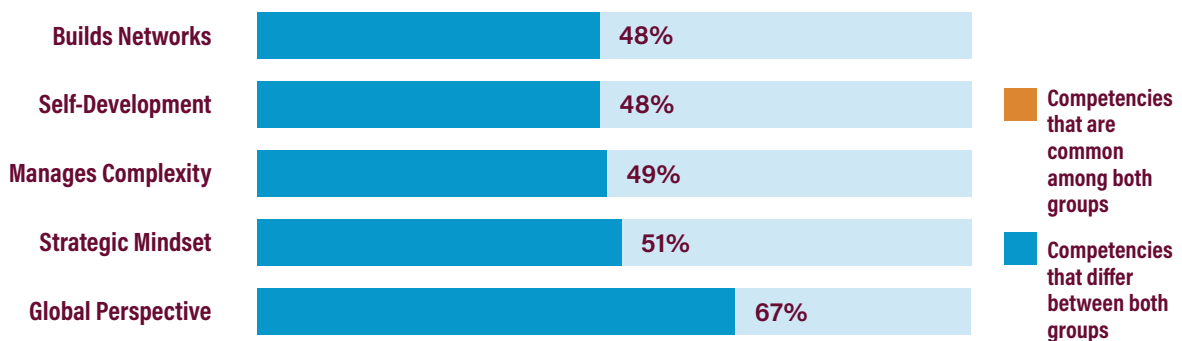
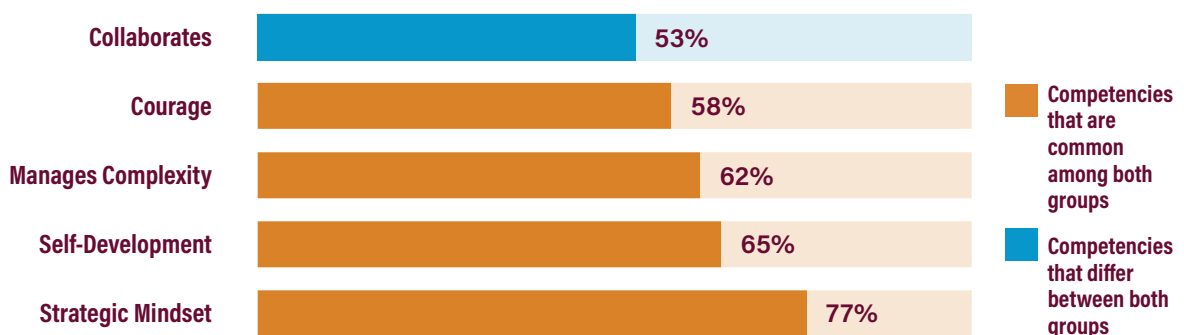## COMPETENCIES: TRAINING/DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

Respondents were asked in which five competencies they would benefit most from additional training or development. Although rated as the third-highest area for growth, Strategic Mindset was identified as the area in which education leaders would most benefit from additional training opportunities. Courage, not indicated as an area for growth, was identified by both in-school and out-of-school leadership as a top five area for training. Although 86% of out-of-school respondents indicated that Collaborates was a strength, more than half still identified this area for additional development. (See Figure 41.)

Figure 41: Top Five Additional Training/Development Needs Among Leadership Competencies (N=359, 95)

Top Five Leadership Competencies: Additional Training Opportunities (In-School Administrators, N=359)

Competency	Percentage
Self-Development	56%
Builds Networks	59%
Manages Complexity	63%
Courage	64%
Strategic Mindset	73%

Top Five Leadership Competencies: Additional Training Opportunities (Out-of-School Administrators, N=95)

Competency	Percentage
Collaborates	53%
Courage	58%
Manages Complexity	62%
Self-Development	65%
Strategic Mindset	77%

Competencies that are common among both groups

Competencies that differ between both groups

COMPETENCIES CRITICAL FOR SUCCESS BY RACE

The top five competencies named as critical for success were consistent among BIPOC and white education leaders, although ranked differently. (See Figure 42.)

Figure 42: Top Five Critical Competencies, by Race (N=454)

	White Staff	BIPOC Staff
(1) Instills Trust	85%	76%
(2) Collaborates	77%	82%
(3) Strategic Mindset	61%	64%
(4) Builds Networks	59%	59%
(5) Courage	60%	49%

> "Adventist colleges need teacher programs to incorporate an administration class. Most graduates may be in a position someday to be head teacher/principal, and there is no undergraduate training for this.

— SURVEY RESPONDENT
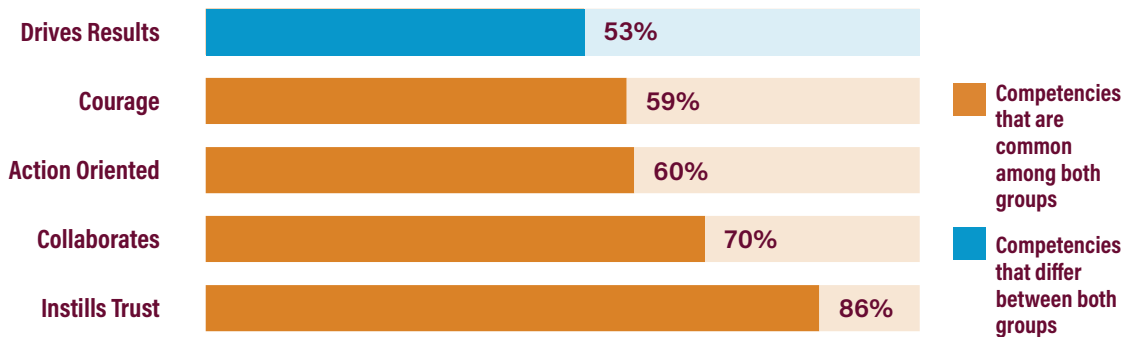
COMPETENCIES: STRENGTHS BY RACE

Four of the top five competencies cited as strengths were consistent among white and BIPOC education leaders. (See Figure 43.)

Figure 43: Top Five Current Strengths Among Leadership Competencies, by Race (N=454)

Top Five Leadership Competencies: Current Strengths (Race: White)

Competency	
Manages Complexity	52%
Courage	57%
Action Oriented	60%
Collaborates	70%
Instills Trust	90%

Top Five Leadership Competencies: Current Strengths (Race: BIPOC)

Competency	
Drives Results	53%
Courage	59%
Action Oriented	60%
Collaborates	70%
Instills Trust	86%

Competencies that are common among both groups

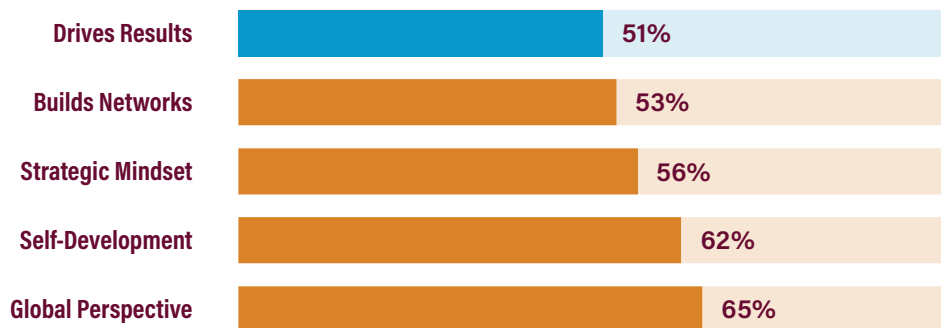Competencies that differ between both groups
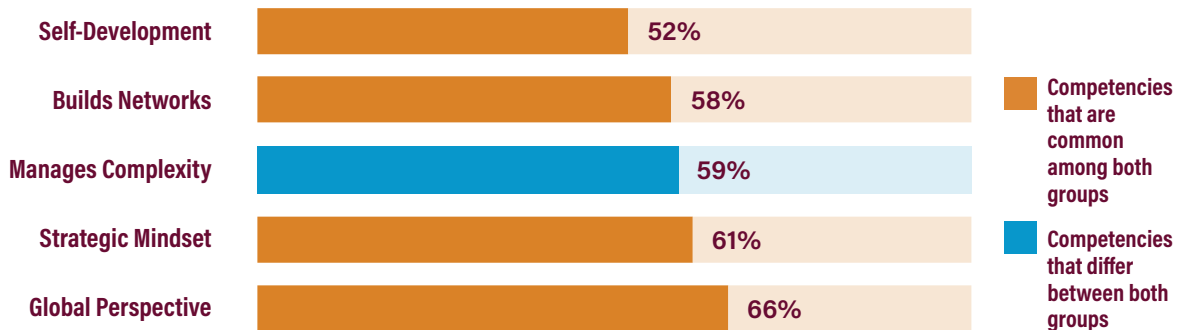
COMPETENCIES: AREAS FOR GROWTH BY RACE

Four of the five competencies cited for growth were consistent among groups, with no variance greater than 5 percentage points. (See Figure 44.)

Figure 44: Top Five Areas for Growth Among Leadership Competencies, by Race (N=454)

Top Five Leadership Competencies: Areas for Growth (Race: White)

Competency	Percentage
Drives Results	51%
Builds Networks	53%
Strategic Mindset	56%
Self-Development	62%
Global Perspective	65%

Top Five Leadership Competencies: Areas for Growth (Race: BIPOC)

Competency	Percentage
Self-Development	52%
Builds Networks	58%
Manages Complexity	59%
Strategic Mindset	61%
Global Perspective	66%

■ Competencies that are common among both groups

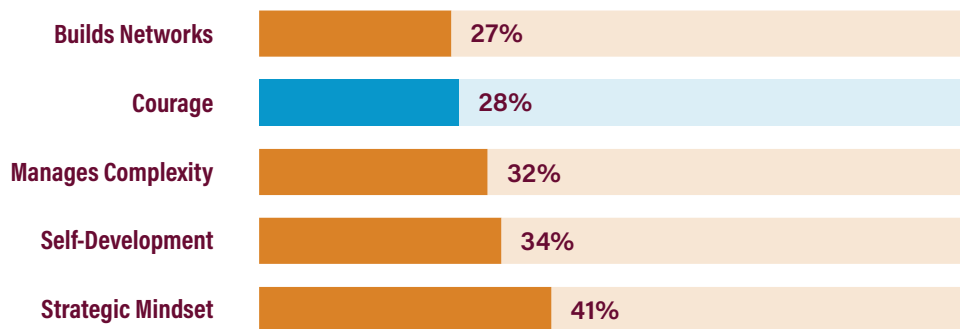■ Competencies that differ between both groups

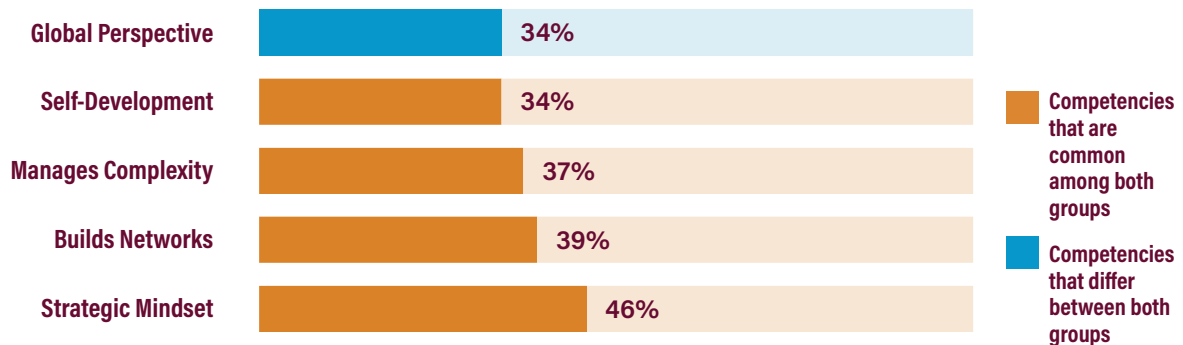## COMPETENCIES: ADDITIONAL TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES BY RACE

There was some divergence between BIPOC and white education leaders regarding training opportunities. Strategic Mindset ranked first for each group. However, among the notable differences, BIPOC staff identified Builds Networks as an additional training opportunity 39% of the time compared to 27% for their white colleagues. (See Figure 45.)

Figure 45: Top Five Training Opportunities Among Leadership Competencies, by Race (N=454)

Top Five Leadership Competencies: Additional Training Opportunities (Race: White)

Competency	Percentage
Builds Networks	27%
Courage	28%
Manages Complexity	32%
Self-Development	34%
Strategic Mindset	41%

Top Five Leadership Competencies: Additional Training Opportunities (Race: BIPOC)

Competency	Percentage
Global Perspective	34%
Self-Development	34%
Manages Complexity	37%
Builds Networks	39%
Strategic Mindset	46%

Competencies that are common among both groups

Competencies that differ between both groups

Training, Development, and Supports

As indicated by other survey findings, training and professional development opportunities were identified as an important retention strategy, a rewarding/rejuvenating experience, and one of the top five missing workplace experiences. As such, the survey also explored specific training and development experiences that SDA educational leaders have participated in to identify the strengths of the current training and professional development, and areas to which leaders have less exposure.

In-school administrators were asked to share how frequently they have participated in specific activities to develop their leadership skills, knowledge, and expertise. Notably, most administrators said they never or rarely had the opportunity to share ideas and collaborate with other principals or visit other schools. Conversely, three-quarters said they occasionally or frequently have participated in professional convenings and courses. (See Figure 46.)

> I never get to go anywhere that I get principal-specific training, nor do I ever get to spend time with peers. I used to feel a peer bond with my teachers, even when I was a teaching principal, but as I shift into the role of just principal, that gap increases, and I feel lonely.

— SURVEY RESPONDENT

Figure 46: Frequency of Learning and Development Activities Among In-School Administrators (N=359)

NEVER OR RARELY

Sharing ideas & collaborating with other principals
72-85%

Other than with principals in their own conference, respondents most commonly reported they rarely or never connected with principals in their Unions (72%), across the NAD(85%) or at other public and/or private schools (77%)

Visiting other schools
76-91%

Principals most commonly reported that they rarely or never visited schools within (76%) and/or outside the Seventh-day Adventist Conference/Union (90%) or system (91%).

OCCASIONALLY OR FREQUENTLY

Coaching
69%

Principals most commonly reported that they occasionally or frequently participated in formal or informal coaching

Mentoring
63%

Principals most commonly reported that they occasionally or frequently participated in formal or informal mentoring and/or support networks

Support Networks
54%

Principals most commonly reported that they occasionally or frequently participated in formal or informal mentoring and/or support networks
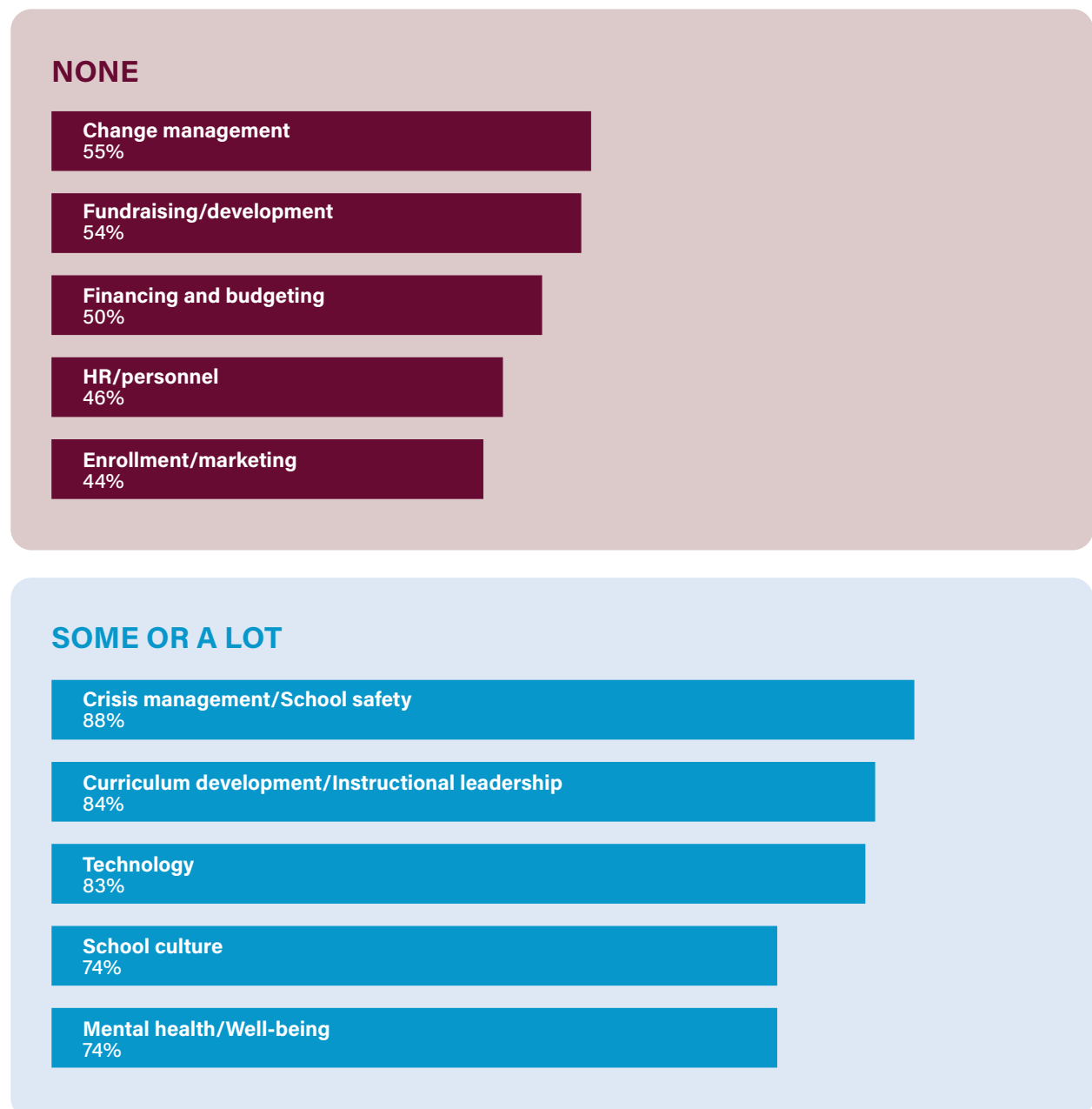
Receiving meaningful feedback
57%

Principals most commonly reported that they occasionally or frequently received meaningful feedback from other school leaders on their specific problems or practices

Professional convenings & courses
75%

Principals most commonly reported that they occasionally or frequently participated in professional conferences, workshops, academic courses, etc.

In-school administrators also were asked how much professional development or training they had received in the following school/educational leadership areas. More than half had received none in areas central to their role, including change management, fundraising/development, and finance/budgeting. They had received the most training in crisis management/school safety, curriculum development/instructional leadership, and technology. (See Figure 47.)

Figure 47: Subject and Amount of Professional Development/Training Received by In-School Administrators (N=359)

NONE

Change management
55%

Fundraising/development
54%

Financing and budgeting
50%

HR/personnel
46%

Enrollment/marketing
44%

SOME OR A LOT

Crisis management/School safety
88%

Curriculum development/Instructional leadership
84%

Technology
83%

School culture
74%

Mental health/Well-being
74%

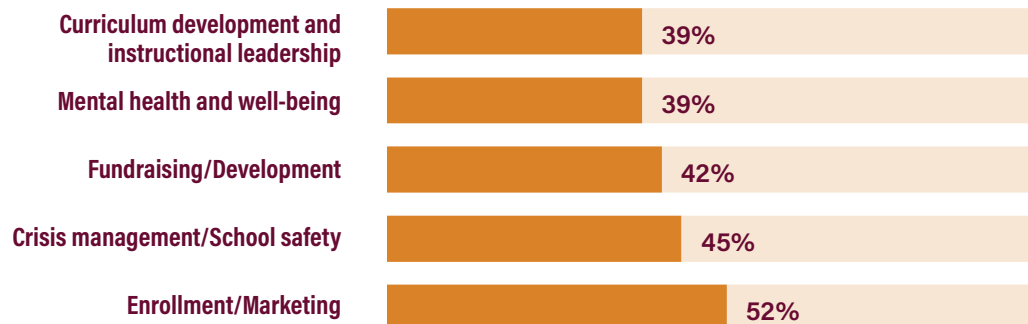## TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EDUCATION LEADERS

For the survey questions related to training/professional development in school/educational leadership (e.g., training/professional development received, priorities for more training), respondents were asked to consider the following list of options and select all that apply:

▶ Addressing issues related to equity and cultural diversity

▶ Change management

▶ Community and family engagement

▶ Crisis management/School safety

▶ Curriculum development and instructional leadership

▶ Education law/Legal issues

▶ Enrollment/Marketing

▶ Finance and budgeting

▶ Fundraising/Development

▶ Governance/Board

▶ Human resources/Personnel management

▶ Mental health and well-being

▶ Organizational management

▶ School culture

▶ Supporting special populations (e.g., English language learners, special education)

▶ Technology

▶ Other

When asked about priority areas for receiving more training or professional development, enrollment/marketing was the only area that more than half of all education leaders identified as a priority. Crisis management/school safety and fundraising/development round out the top three. (See Figure 48.)
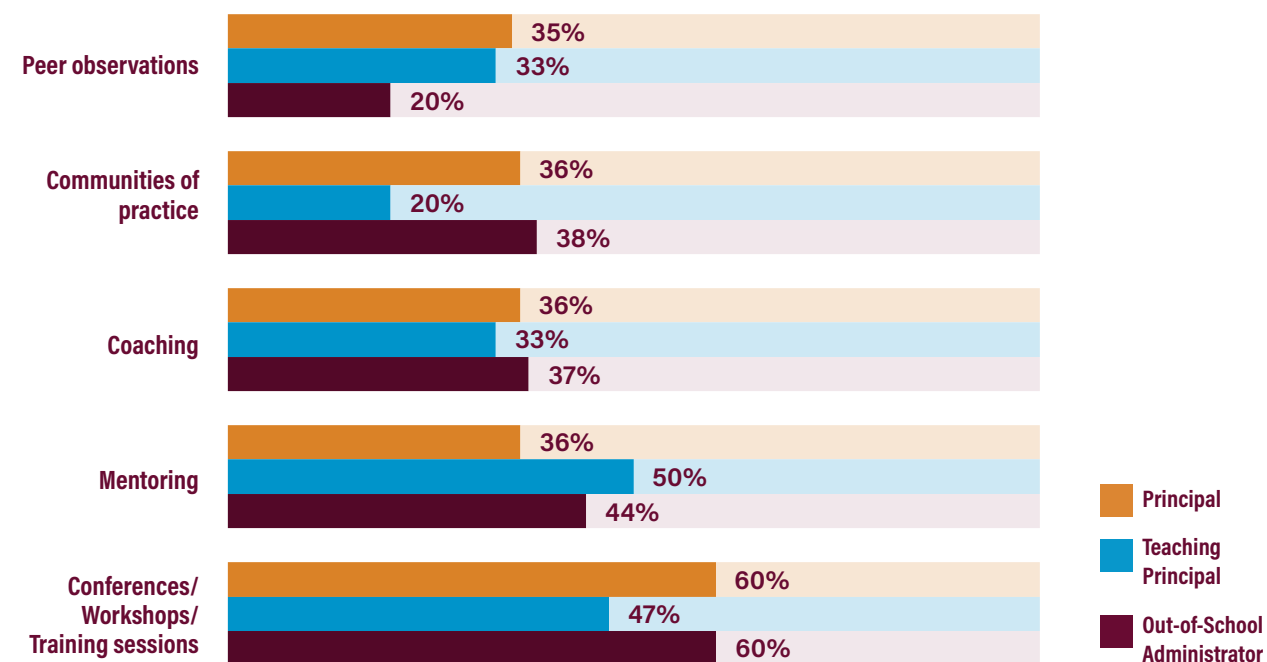
For in-school administrators specifically, community and family engagement also emerged as a training need, with 40% of this group identifying a desire for more professional development in this area.

Figure 48: Top Five Priority Areas for More Professional Development Systemwide (N=454)

Priority Area	Percentage
Curriculum development and instructional leadership	39%
Mental health and well-being	39%
Fundraising/Development	42%
Crisis management/School safety	45%
Enrollment/Marketing	52%

When asked what types of systemwide training and/or on-the-job support they would find most valuable, educational leaders identified in-person conferences/workshops/trainings and mentoring as the most valuable forums for professional development/training opportunities. Coaching, communities of practice, and peer observation (all peer-based activities) round out the top five. (See Figure 49.)

Figure 49: Top Five Most Valuable Professional Development Activities Systemwide (N=454)

Activity	Principal	Teaching Principal	Out-of-School Administrator
Peer observations	35%	33%	20%
Communities of practice	36%	20%	38%
Coaching	36%	33%	37%
Mentoring	36%	50%	44%
Conferences/Workshops/Training sessions	60%	47%	60%

Summer trainings were cited as the least valuable professional development activity. (See Figure 50.)

Figure 50: Bottom Three Least Valuable Professional Development Activities Systemwide (N=454)

Summer trainings	9%
Degree/Certification	19%
Online conferences/Workshops	20%
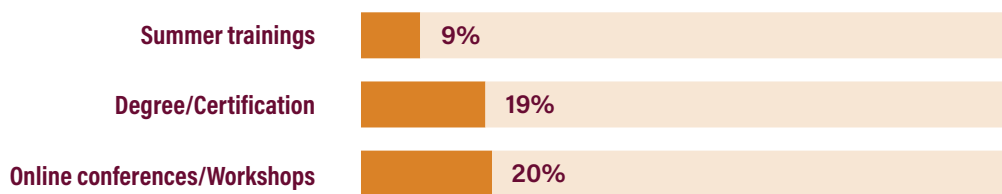
"
There is a dire need for a coaching/mentoring program for leaders in the SDA education system.

— SURVEY RESPONDENT

For in-school administrators, lack of time, lack of money, and insufficient coverage for leaving the building were cited as the biggest obstacles to pursuing professional development opportunities. Out-of-school administrators also identified lack of time and lack of money as obstacles.

A particularly striking finding was that more than **a third of Teaching Principals** and nearly **a third of Principals** said they were not aware of professional development opportunities or that existing opportunities were not relevant to their needs. (See Figure 51.)

Figure 51: Obstacles to Training Opportunities (N=454)

	Principal (N=149)		Teaching Principal (N=210)		Conference Education Leader (N=71)		Union Education Leader (N=18)		NAD Education Leader (N=6)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Insufficient coverage for leaving the building	73	49%	157	75%	4	6%	0	0%	3	50%
Lack of awareness of professional development opportunities	44	30%	81	39%	12	17%	2	11%	1	17%
Lack of money	71	48%	103	49%	29	41%	3	17%	2	33%
Lack of opportunities that are relevant and meet my needs	47	32%	76	36%	17	24%	2	11%	1	17%
Lack of time	111	74%	164	78%	50	70%	8	44%	3	50%
Other	8	5%	0	0%	1	1%	1	6%	0	0%
There are no obstacles	10	7%	11	5%	10	14%	8	44%	1	17%

Perceptions of the SDA System

Respondents were asked to share their perceptions of the SDA education system from several perspectives: equity, overall effectiveness, priorities, and effectiveness in meeting the needs of different student subpopulations.

Perceptions of Equity

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which SDA systems and practices were equitable, sharing their perceptions in three key areas (see full definitions on page X):

▶ Practices and Policies

▶ Education and Professional Development

▶ Self-Awareness and Responsibility

Based on the findings, there is strong awareness of, and interest in, equitable practices. The ratings on perceptions of equity (on a four-point scale of Almost Never, Occasionally, Frequently, and Almost Always) generally reflected the occasional use of systems and practices that support diversity, equity, and inclusion across the three subscales. Education and Professional Development received the lowest average rating, while Self-Awareness and Responsibility received the highest. (See Figure 52.)

KEY AREAS OF EQUITY DEFINED

PRACTICES AND POLICIES

This subscale assesses structural and procedural efforts within the organization to promote equity. It includes examination of barriers that prevent family involvement in school activities, such as economic, gender, racial, and physical conditions; the organization's commitment to having important, sometimes uncomfortable, conversations about race among staff members; the regular analysis of school data to ensure equal treatment of students from different groups; and the scrutiny of disciplinary strategies to ensure they yield positive outcomes for all students. Proactive steps to improve communication with parents from diverse backgrounds also fall under this subscale.

EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This subscale addresses the educational content and professional growth opportunities aimed at fostering equity and cultural responsiveness within the organization. It includes efforts to integrate curriculum that challenges race and gender biases and stereotypes and is designed to reflect the diverse population of the nation, the availability and execution of training for instructional staff in teaching approaches that meet the diverse needs of students, racial equity, and cultural responsiveness. It also emphasizes the role of professional development experiences in helping educators explore new ways to promote equity in their practices.

SELF-AWARENESS AND RESPONSIBILITY

This subscale assesses individuals' awareness and proactive efforts toward equity, including personal steps taken to understand the experiences of students and colleagues from different races, ethnicities, and cultures; efforts to recognize and attempt to overcome personal cultural and gender biases; awareness of the effects of race and gender biases on children; and taking steps to address these biases. This subscale also covers efforts to provide appropriate alternatives to counter group prejudices that might arise from homogenous or ability grouping. Moreover, it includes the willingness to engage in open, tough conversations with students and faculty from diverse cultural backgrounds, even when their views differ significantly. Finally, it encompasses the readiness to confront racially or culturally biased statements within one's sphere of influence.
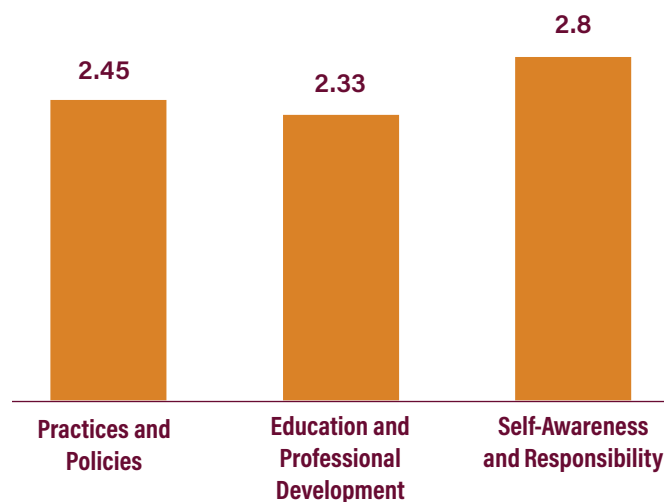
"[I] would love to have more collaborative in-person sessions, with other leaders to discuss Adventist education and its direction."

— SURVEY RESPONDENT

Figure 52: Average Ratings on Perceptions of Equitable Systems and Practices (N=454)
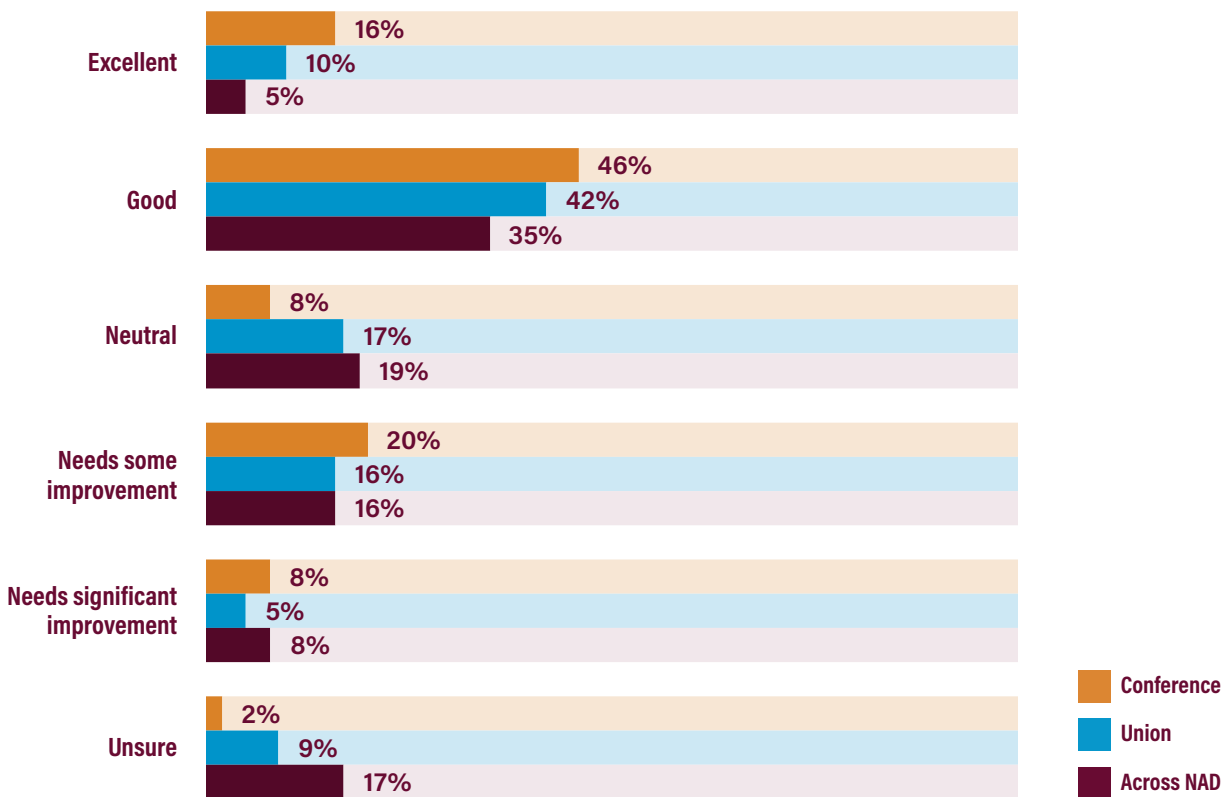

There were some variations in perceptions of equity by role and race, with the greatest variation seen in the Practices and Policies category. The average ratings for Principals (2.52) and Teaching Principals (2.50) were higher than the scores for Conference (2.26) and Union (2.08) education leaders.

In addition, average scores on perceptions of equity generally increased with age, with individuals 60 and over having higher average scores across all subscales compared to other age groups. SDA education leaders across all roles also identified an existing gap in training opportunities to more effectively respond to a diverse range of students and to engage in practices that are culturally responsive and humble.

Perceptions of SDA Conferences, Unions, and the NAD

Overall, 62% of respondents perceive the state of education in their Conference to be good or excellent, with 52% indicating the same for their Union and 40% for the NAD. Nearly 30% indicated that their Conference needed improvement compared to 21% for their Union and 24% for the NAD. (See Figure 53.)

Figure 53: Current Perceptions of the State of SDA Education (N=454)

	Conference	Union	Across NAD
Excellent	16%	10%	5%
Good	46%	42%	35%
Neutral	8%	17%	19%
Needs some improvement	20%	16%	16%
Needs significant improvement	8%	5%	8%
Unsure	2%	9%	17%

Overall, white SDA education leaders had a more favorable view of Conferences, Unions, and the NAD than did their BIPOC colleagues. For example, more than two-thirds of white respondents (68%) indicated that the state of education in their Conferences was good or excellent compared to 49% of their BIPOC colleagues. BIPOC leaders also indicated that their Conferences could use improvement at a higher rate (41%) compared to their white colleagues (21%). (See Figure 54.)

Figure 54: Current Perceptions of the State of SDA Education (Conference Level), by Race (N=464)

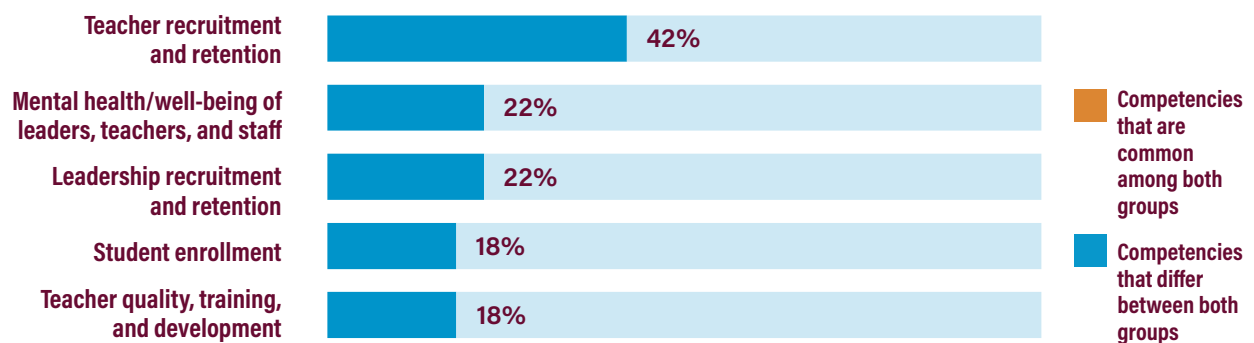|	White	BIPOC
Excellent	17%	12%
Good	51%	37%
Neutral	8%	9%
Needs some improvement	17%	25%
Needs significant improvement	4%	16%
Unsure	2%	1%
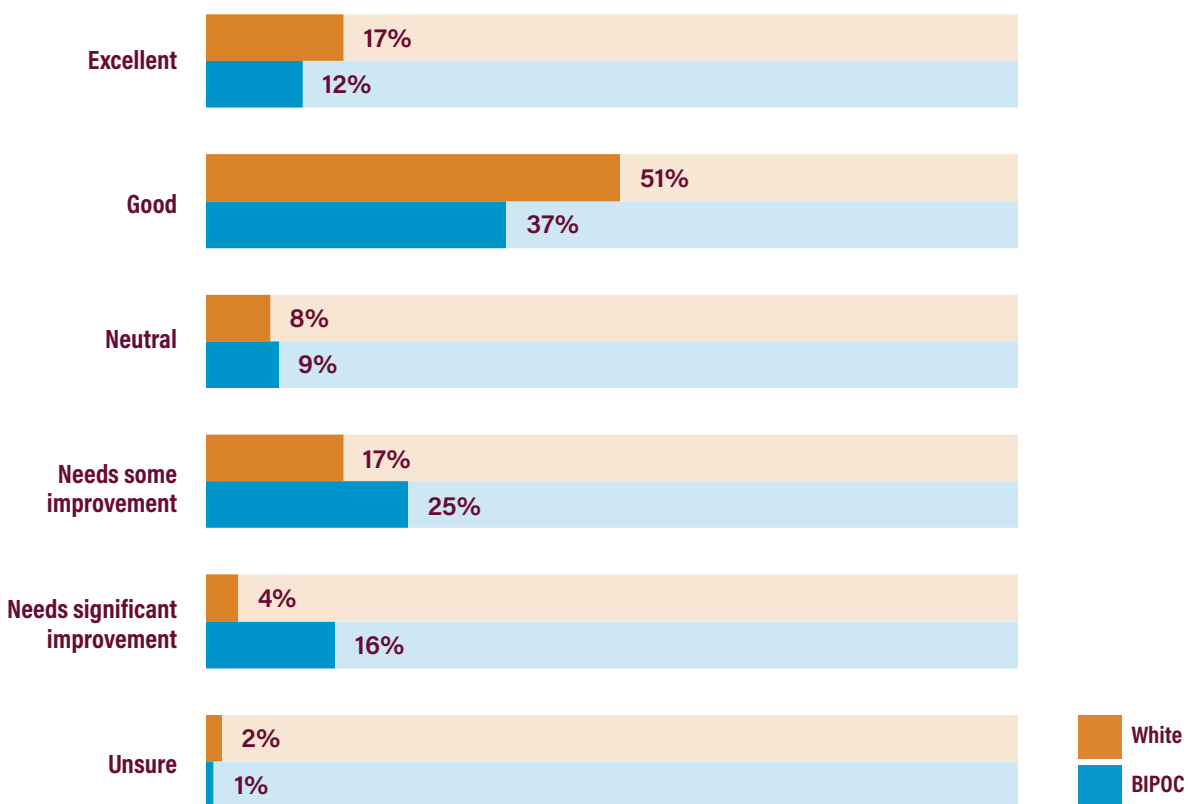
At the Union level, more than half of white respondents (56%) indicated that the state of education in their Unions was good or excellent compared to 44% of their BIPOC colleagues. At the NAD level, the difference was 44% for white respondents and 35% for BIPOC respondents.

Critical Issues/Priorities for SDA Education

The survey sought to identify and prioritize the most critical issues facing the SDA system. Survey respondents were asked to identify the top three issues from a list of 21 possible response options. Teacher recruitment and retention was named the top priority systemwide, followed by mental health and well-being of leaders, teachers, and staff, and leadership recruitment and retention. (See Figure 55.)

Figure 55: Top Five SDA Education Priorities Across All Respondents (N=454)

Priority	Percentage
Teacher recruitment and retention	42%
Mental health/well-being of leaders, teachers, and staff	22%
Leadership recruitment and retention	22%
Student enrollment	18%
Teacher quality, training, and development	18%

Competencies that are common among both groups

Competencies that differ between both groups

Responses were disaggregated for in-school and out-of-school administrators. Teacher recruitment and retention remained the highest priority for both groups. There also was alignment on the prioritization of mental health and well-being of leaders, teachers, and staff.

Where alignment did not occur, responses appeared to reflect the specific vantage points and challenges respondents would be expected to experience in their role. For instance, the responses of in-school administrators reflected an additional focus on students and families served by their schools, whereas for out-of-school administrators the top five critical issues included leadership recruitment and retention; teacher quality, training, and development; and finance/budgeting. (See Figures 56 and 57.)

CRITICAL ISSUES

Respondents were provided the following list of options for the survey questions related to critical issues in SDA education (for the respondent personally and for the SDA education system as a whole):

1. Addressing issues related to equity and cultural diversity
2. Closing achievement gaps among students
3. Community and parent/family engagement
4. Improving academic programming
5. Improving extracurricular programming
6. Governance/Board relations
7. Finance/Budgeting
8. Fundraising/Development
9. Leadership recruitment and retention
10. Leadership quality, training, and development
11. Overall student achievement
12. School/Organizational culture
13. Crisis management/School safety
14. Mental health and well-being of students
15. Mental health and well-being of leaders, teachers, and staff
16. Social issues (e.g., equity, gender identity)
17. Strategic planning/Visioning
18. Student discipline and behavior
19. Student enrollment
20. Teacher recruitment and retention
21. Teacher quality, training, and development
22. Other

> "I do not believe we can accomplish what is needed to be safe, inclusive, front-line missions and excellent places of education until our system can be restructured to be led and controlled by professional educators (not ministerial leaders) and financed differently for equitable pay.
>
> **— SURVEY RESPONDENT**

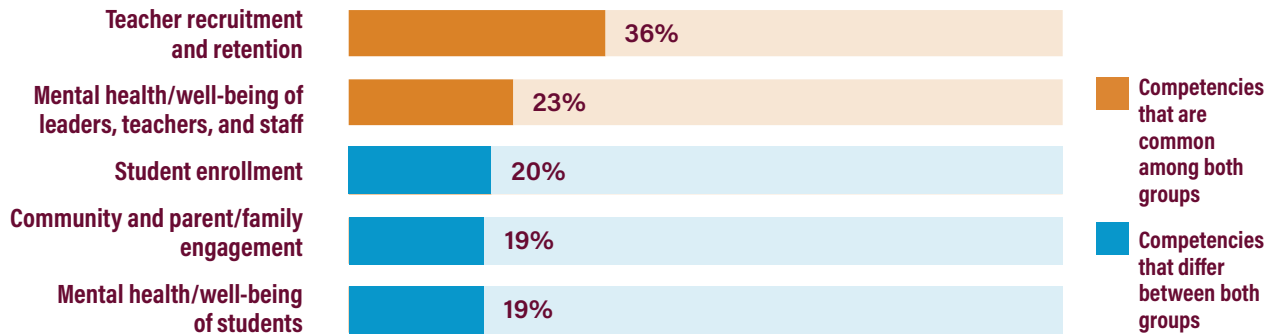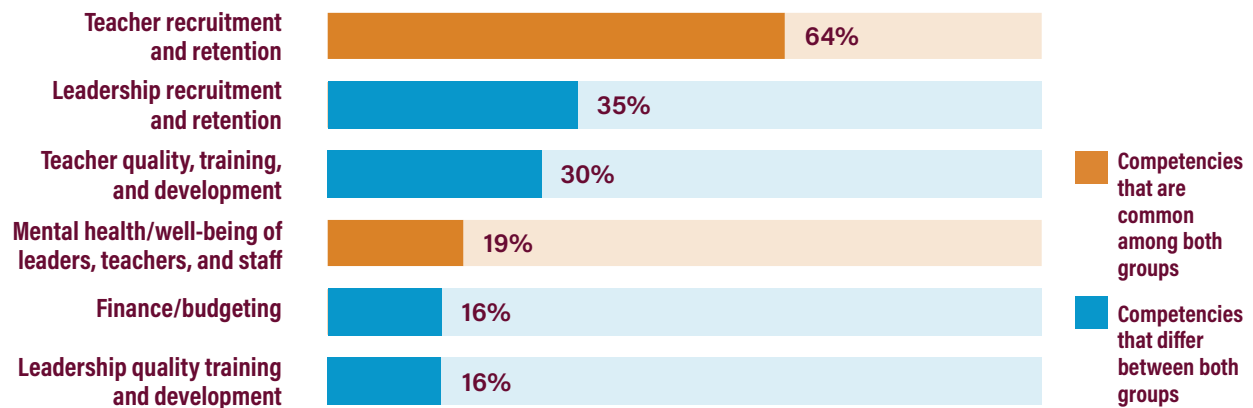**Figure 56: Top Five SDA Education Priorities for In-School Administrators (N=359)**

Priority	Percentage
Teacher recruitment and retention	36%
Mental health/well-being of leaders, teachers, and staff	23%
Student enrollment	20%
Community and parent/family engagement	19%
Mental health/well-being of students	19%

Competencies that are common among both groups

Competencies that differ between both groups

Figure 57: Top Five SDA Education Priorities for Out-of-School Administrators (N=95)

Priority	Percentage
Teacher recruitment and retention	64%
Leadership recruitment and retention	35%
Teacher quality, training, and development	30%
Mental health/well-being of leaders, teachers, and staff	19%
Finance/budgeting	16%
Leadership quality training and development	16%

Competencies that are common among both groups

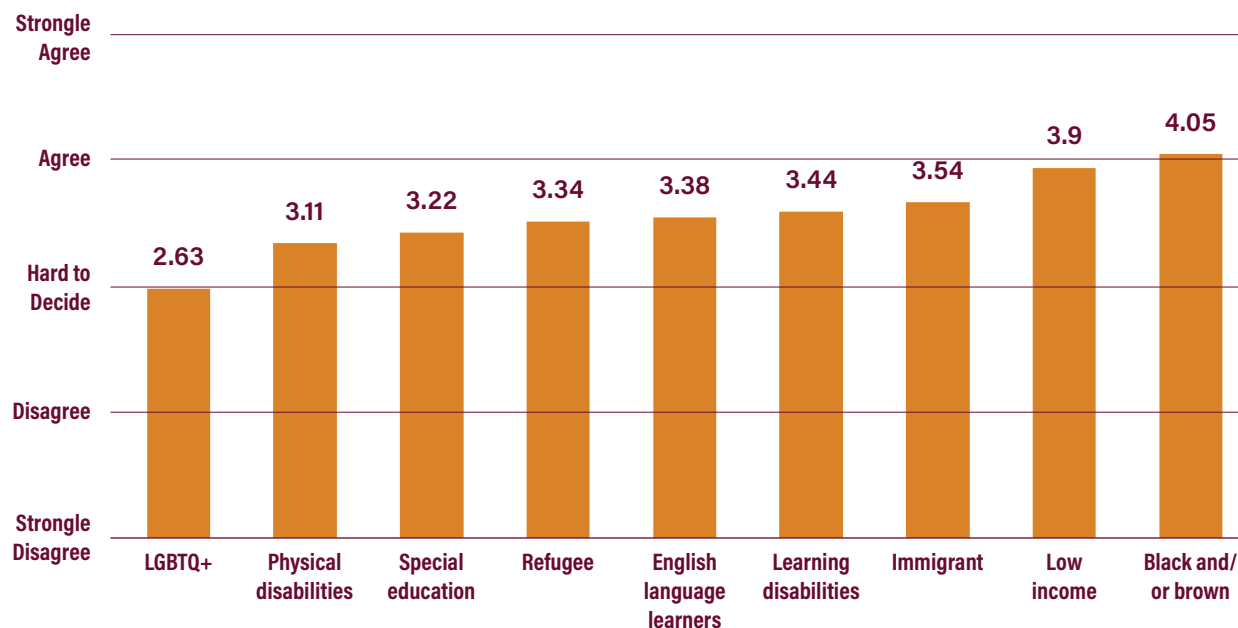Competencies that differ between both groups

Meeting Students' Needs

Across the SDA education system, survey respondents from in-school administrator roles identified that they most effectively meet the needs of students of color and low-income populations. Inversely, it was identified that the SDA system less effectively meets the needs of LGBTQ+ students and students with physical disabilities. (See Figure 58.)

Figure 58: Perceptions on Meeting the Needs of Student Subpopulations (N=454)

Subpopulation	Rating
LGBTQ+	2.63
Physical disabilities	3.11
Special education	3.22
Refugee	3.34
English language learners	3.38
Learning disabilities	3.44
Immigrant	3.54
Low income	3.9
Black and/or brown	4.05

Citations

1   For this survey, the titles Principal and Teaching Principal are used to define in-school administrator roles. Previously within the SDA education system, Teaching Principals were known as Head Teachers/ Principals.

2   LinkedIn, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-typical-employee-survey-response-rate-how-do-i-increase-bye/.

3   Shih, T. H., & Fan, X. (2008). Comparing response rates from web and mail surveys: A meta-analysis. *Field methods, 20*(3), 249–271.

4   Daikeler, J., Silber, H., & Bosnjak, M. (2022). A meta-analysis of how country-level factors affect web survey response rates. *International Journal of Market Research, 64*(3), 306–333.

About the Bainum Family Foundation

The Bainum Family Foundation is working to create a society where all children thrive. We work alongside communities experiencing racial and economic disparities to create lasting systems change for the well-being of children and families. The foundation focuses on Early Childhood and what children need for a strong start in life (including early learning, health and mental health, family economic security, and stable housing). Our Legacy Programs support faith-based education and other issues important to the Bainum family. Learn more at bainumfdn.org.

About ACE Academy

ACE (Advancing Christian Education) Academy, powered by the Bainum Family Foundation, is a team of people with unwavering commitment to the development of strong leaders for Seventh-day Adventist K-12 schools. We believe the future of Adventist education shines brightest in the hands of game-changing leaders who dare to push boundaries and redefine what's possible. We have an audacious goal: to completely redesign the experience of Adventist school leaders — all the way from how principals are groomed for leadership to how they are supported on the job and recognized for their impact. Our programs equip leaders with the skills and mindset to face their challenges with creativity and resilience. Learn more at aceacademy.org.