

Assistant Principal Feelings of Preparedness to Step into the Principalship

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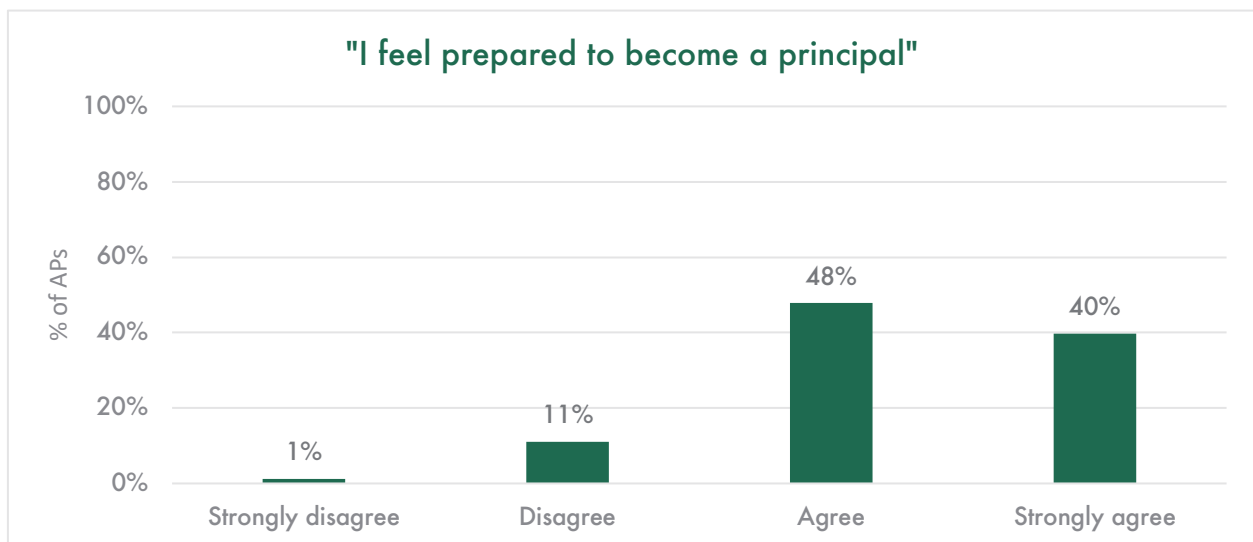
About this snapshot

School districts across Tennessee hire an average of about 200 new principals each year, and over 70 percent of the new hires have previously served as assistant principals (APs) (Grissom et al., 2019). Given their role in principal pipelines, a better understanding of the AP labor pool and preparedness could help school districts to identify and further support APs' needs. In the 2019 Tennessee Educator Survey, we asked APs about their experiences as school administrators and how prepared they feel to become principals.

Of 1,920 APs in Tennessee during the 2018-2019 school year, 53 percent responded to the survey. Over 64 percent of AP respondents have more than three years of school administration experience, and 14 percent are first-year school administrators. Respondents are generally representative of all APs in terms of race, gender, school level, and demographics of students served.

Overall, most assistant principals in Tennessee feel prepared to become principals.

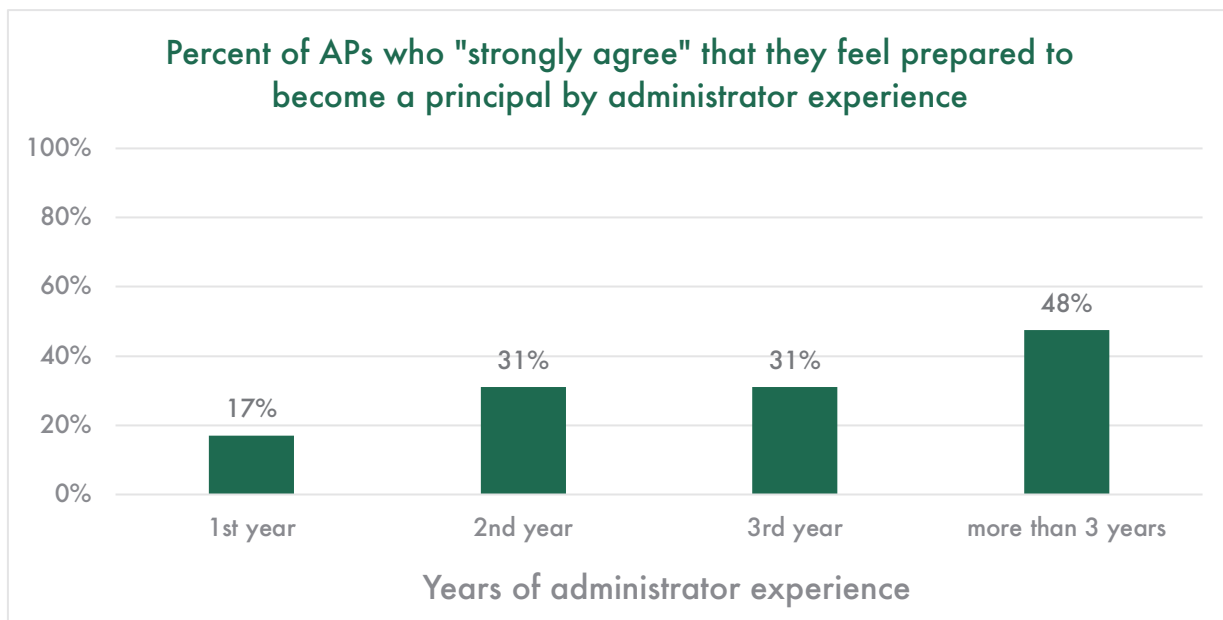
Nine out of 10 APs who responded to the survey agree or strongly agree that they feel prepared to become principals – though only four out of 10 APs strongly agree. As Tennessee works to improve its principal pipelines, it is important to understand the experiences of the APs who most strongly agree that they feel prepared compared to others. In the following sections, we focus on this group of APs.



More experienced assistant principals strongly agree that they feel prepared to become principals.

Almost half of APs with more than three years of administrator experience strongly agree that they feel prepared to become principals, whereas only 17 percent of first-year APs do.

APs also report different levels of preparedness for principal roles based on the percentage of economically disadvantaged students in their current schools. More APs strongly agree that they feel prepared in schools with 0-25 percent free and reduced lunch (FRL) students (44 percent) than in schools with 76-100 percent FRL students (35 percent).

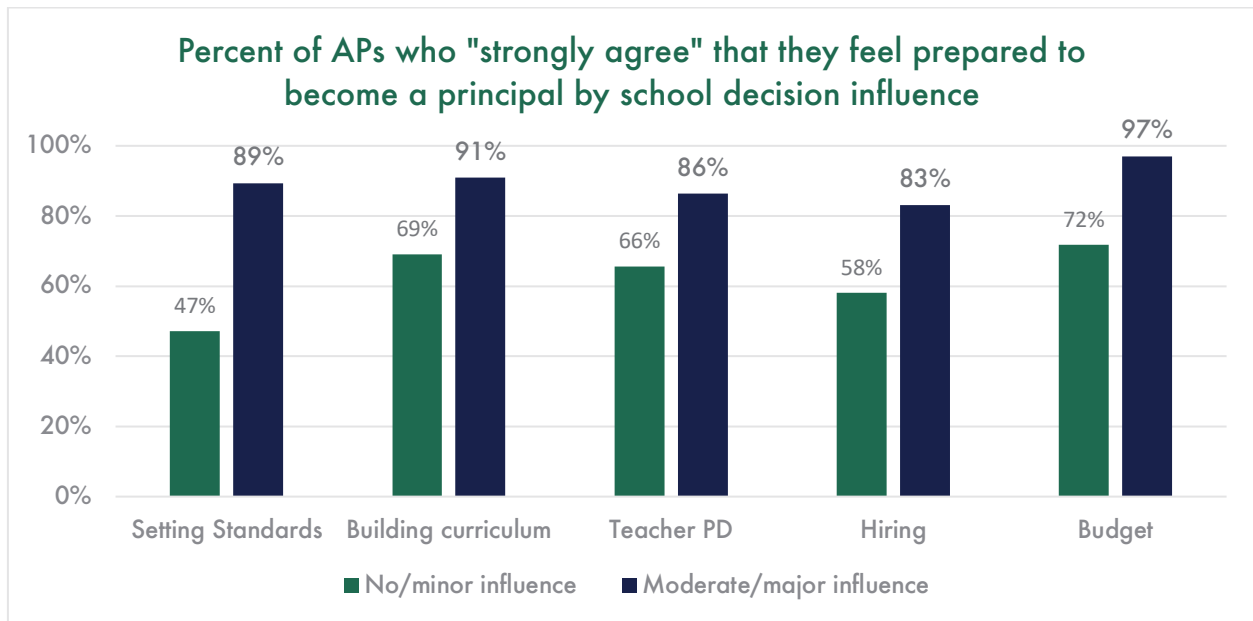


Assistant principals with more influence over instructional and operational decisions strongly agree that they feel prepared to become a principal.

APs who strongly agree that they feel prepared to become principals are also more likely to report that they have “moderate influence” or “major influence” over budgeting, building curriculum, setting standards, determining teacher professional development programs, and teacher hiring. However, APs with more influence in teacher evaluation and school discipline are not as likely to strongly agree that they feel prepared.

This association between roles and feelings of preparedness is important given that few APs report having influence over instructional and operational responsibilities, but many report influence over teacher evaluation and school discipline. For example, 97 percent of APs report that they have moderate or major influence over teacher

evaluation, and 84% say they do over school discipline. However, only 52 percent of APs report that they have a moderate or major influence over building curriculum, and even fewer (41 percent) say they do over budgeting.



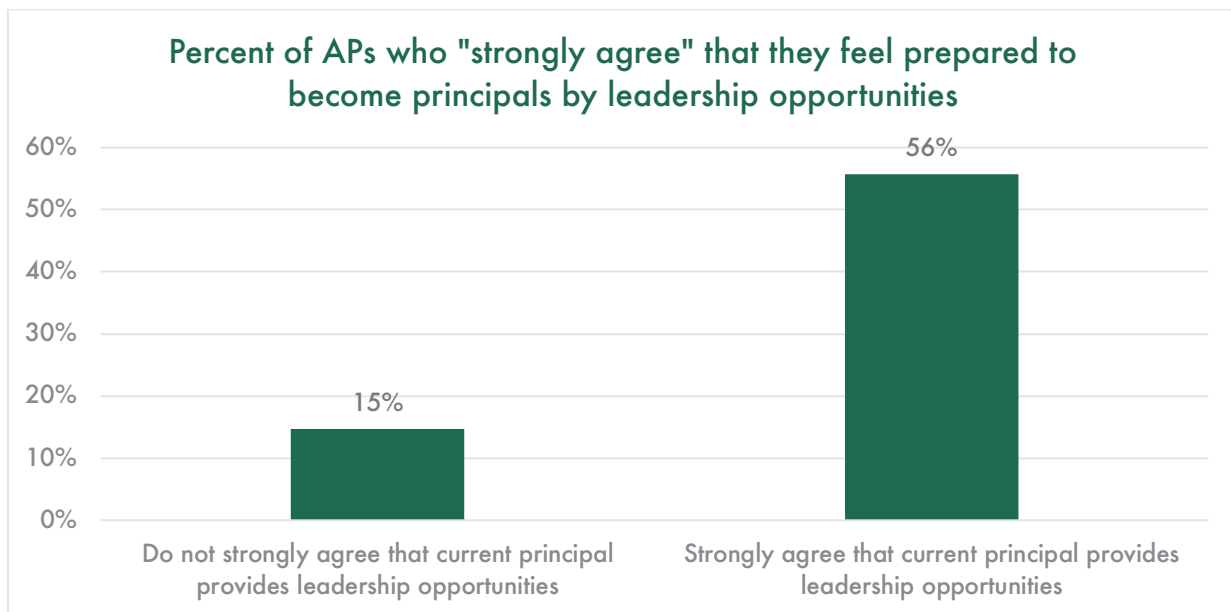
Reported influence over school decisions does not systematically vary by years of administrator experience. That is, more experienced APs do not necessarily have more influence over certain types of school decisions.

Assistant principals who regularly interact with their principals and receive leadership opportunities and encouragement are more likely to strongly agree that they feel prepared to become principals.

APs who report that they have more frequent one-on-one interactions with their current principals are more likely to strongly agree that they feel prepared to become principals than those who do not. Almost half of APs who had weekly one-on-one meetings with their principals strongly agree that they feel prepared compared to just one-third of those who never had a one-on-one meeting with their principals.

For APs who strongly agree that their current principals create opportunities to build school leadership skills, 56 percent strongly agree that they feel prepared to become principals. For those who do not strongly agree that their principals provide leadership opportunities, only 15 percent of them strongly agree that they feel prepared.

Of APs who feel encouraged by their current principals, 43 percent strongly agree that feel prepared to become principals. For APs who are not encouraged by their principals, only 28 percent strongly agree that they feel prepared.



Next steps for research

Most APs in Tennessee agree or strongly agree that they feel prepared to become principals, but the strength of their feelings of preparedness varies based on the length and types of their administrator experience. In particular, APs who have influence over instructional and operational decisions are more likely to strongly agree that they feel prepared to become principals. APs' relationship with their principals is also tied to their feelings of preparedness for principal roles.

Future TERA research will look closely at how APs' reported feelings of preparedness relate to Tennessee's principal pipelines and provide guidance to district leaders on improving APs' preparedness for principal roles.

References

Grissom, J. A., Bartanen, B., & Mitani, H. (2019). Principal Sorting and the Distribution of Principal Quality. AERA Open. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858419850094>