

## **Principal Career Path Exploration**

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### **Introduction**

This article focuses on providing information regarding a career in educational administration as a principal. Prospects interested in this career may find the article beneficial. The purpose of this article is to supply factual information about the career to help interested individuals make an educated decision about whether the career is right for them. The following information in regard to principals will be presented in this order: responsibilities, how to become one, pay and benefits, and job outlook.

### **Responsibilities of Principals**

Principals are responsible for a wide array of activities and functions that contribute to the overall operation of schools. Principals have a number of responsibilities related to the management of the school's faculty and staff, including hiring personnel, observing and evaluating teachers' performance, and organizing professional development opportunities for faculty. Principals also work directly with students, providing counsel when needed, acting as the students' disciplinarian, and assessing students' academic progress based on performance in schoolwork school and on standardized tests (United States Department of Labor, 2019).

In public schools, principals have the added responsibility of ensuring that the school is successfully implementing standards defined on the district, state, and federal levels. Multiple aforementioned responsibilities, such as evaluating teacher performance and assessing student progress, contribute to this goal (United States Department of Labor, 2019).

Principals serve to represent their school in the eyes of their communities. Many principals are directly supported by one or more assistant principal to whom different tasks can be delegated to help improve the operation of the school. This often depends on the size of the district or school and the funding that is available for additional faculty (United States Department of Labor, 2019).

### **How to Become a Principal**

Principals must have a master's degree in either education leadership or education administration in order to be qualified. In order to enter such master's programs, candidates typically need to have completed a bachelor's degree in education, school counseling, or a related field before applying (United States Department of Labor, 2019).

Principals need to have multiple years of teaching experience before becoming teachers. According to Teacher.org (n.d.), principals typically need to have at least one to five years of experience teaching in a classroom setting, either in a specific subject area or specific grade

level. Therefore, most principals must hold a teaching license and a bachelor's degree related to their subject or grade level.

Some states offer alternative programs for licensure for candidates who have not completed a master's degree in either of the above programs. Principals working in private schools are not required to have a license for teaching or administration (United States Department of Labor, 2019).

### **Pay and Benefits for Principals**

According to the United States Department of Labor (2019), the median annual salary for principals was \$95,310 in May 2018. The lowest ten percent made less than \$61,490 while the highest ten percent made more than \$144,950. Salary.com states that the average annual base salary for principals is \$105,402.

Principals' average annual wage is impacted by the type of institution that employs them. Private school faculty are generally paid less annually than those in comparable positions at public schools. For example, in May 2018, the median salary for principals working in public elementary, middle and high schools was \$96,760; comparatively, the median salary for those in private elementary, middle, and high schools was \$84,990 (United States Department of Labor, 2019).

### **Job Outlook for Principals**

The projected rate of growth for employment of principals is eight percent between 2016 and 2026, which is approximately the same rate as the average for all careers. This rate for principal employment will be contingent on the increase in student enrollment within this time frame (United States Department of Labor, 2019).

The rate of growth in employment of principals is not affected as directly as other educational careers such teaching. According to the Center for Public Education (n.d.), the optimal class size for one teacher is eighteen students; as schools strive to maintain this ratio, employment of teachers grows with student enrollment. However, there is no standard for the optimal ratio of principals to students, which prevents the same rapid growth from happening in this career.

### **Interview with Heath Dudley the Principal of Yorktown Middle School in Yorktown, Indiana**

Heath Dudley was interviewed by Devon A. Lejman and Edward J. Lazaros on June 10, 2019. The interview questions along with Heath Dudley's responses are listed in the section below:

#### **1. How did you become a principal?**

"I was a teacher, and then an assistant principal and athletic director and eventually became the principal. The position required a building level administration license and a master's degree" (H. Dudley, personal communication, June 10, 2019).

## **2. What kind of technology do you get to use in your job?**

“A walkie-talkie is used for inter-school communication as well as communication throughout the district. There is a maintenance channel, a transportation channel, and an emergency channel. A public announcement (PA) system is used to control the bells between classes. The system can also be used to make individual classroom calls or announcements to the entire school. It also allows for two way communication between the office and the classroom with the teacher. A handheld metal detector is used if there is a security check that is needed in the school” (H. Dudley, personal communication, June 10, 2019).

## **3. What do you like best about your job?**

“I like the fact that no day is the same. Each day is different when you get to work. I like the days that are busy and hectic. As a principal, you get to interact with every student, all of the teachers and parents, as well as the community. Athletic events, PTO events, and school dances give opportunities to speak to and engage with community members” (H. Dudley, personal communication, June 10, 2019).

## **4. What is the biggest challenge you face on a daily basis?**

“At a middle school the challenge is finding how to best work with students who are at this point in their developmental process. We need to help them be successful so that they can complete middle school and high school and graduate to prepare them for an adult setting. Middle school is the early foundation for adulthood” (H. Dudley, personal communication, June 10, 2019).

## **5. What makes your position at Yorktown Middle School unique?**

“We’re way ahead of the game as far as technology goes in this area, and I always liked to use technology in the classroom anyway. Others are catching up quickly, but Yorktown is innovative and always willing to try new technologies in the classroom. Anything I ask teachers to use in their classrooms, I will try to model for them. This past year, I created professional development courses that teachers could do as a way for me to model Canvas to the teachers as well as to provide professional development opportunities. In addition, Yorktown is growing. We have a lot of kids transferring in. You’re not just working with the Yorktown community; you’re working with Delaware County as a whole. You have to see yourself as a Delaware County school, not just a Yorktown school” (H. Dudley, personal communication, June 10, 2019).

## **6. What advice do you have for someone who wants to become a principal?**

“Try to find out who some of the highly thought-of principals in your area and get advice from those people. An internship with some of these principals would also be very helpful. Having some good role models would lead to success. Being as involved as you can in school committees so that you know how the inner workings operate behind the scenes. When leadership opportunities are available, take them” (H. Dudley, personal communication, June 10, 2019).

### **Pictures of Heath Dudley at Yorktown Middle School in Yorktown, Indiana**

Figure 1: Heath Dudley is shown sitting at his desk in his office at Yorktown Middle School. While much of his day is spent around the school building, he conducts some work from behind the desk as well.



Figure 2: Heath Dudley uses a walkie-talkie for inter-school communication with other faculty. It can also be used to communicate throughout the school district, and has different channels for maintenance issues, transportation inquiries, and emergency situations.



Figure 3: Sometimes, communicating quickly with other faculty is as simple as using a cell phone. Heath Dudley uses his personal phone to communicate throughout the day.



Figure 4: One of the most common technologies Heath Dudley uses is the school's public announcement (PA) system. The PA is used to speak with individual teachers during the day and make school-wide morning and afternoon announcements, and is programmed with the school's bell schedule.



Figure 5: In his office, Heath Dudley works on different laptops, including a MacBook as well as a PC model (pictured). These may be used for anything from answering emails to creating modules on Canvas to help teachers learn to use the platform.



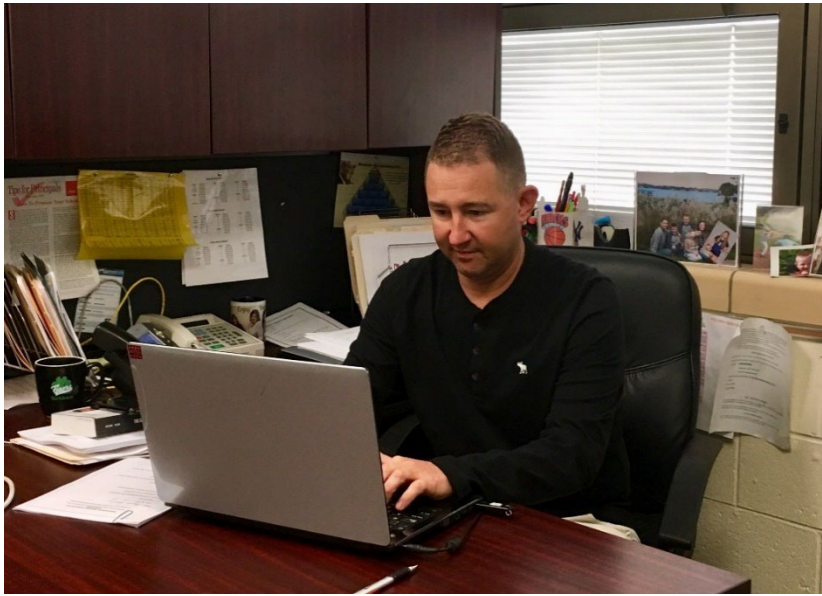


Figure 6: In situations when there may be a security threat, Heath Dudley may use a handheld metal detector to help ensure the safety of the school's faculty and students. He says the school's resource officer is more likely to do this, but that he is qualified as well.



## **Conclusion**

A career as a principal has the potential to be a good fit for those interested in education. Because of the volume of preparatory work required to be licensed as a principal, candidates should carefully consider their interest in the career. Because this career's projected growth is on par with all other careers, it is a viable employment option for those who have the appropriate experience and qualifications. Those in this career should expect to be given a large volume of

responsibilities requiring a wide range of expertise, and need to be prepared to act as public representatives of the schools that employ them.

### **References**

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