

Listening to Leaders

Insights From the Seventh-day Adventist Education Leadership Survey

OCTOBER 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The Bainum Family Foundation — a long-time supporter of Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) education — engaged Project Evident to conduct a survey of education leaders across the North American Division (NAD) of the SDA organization, both in schools and in other administration roles.



SURVEY GOALS

- ▶ Generate comprehensive systemwide data about SDA education leaders' most pressing challenges and priorities
- ▶ Collect useful system-level data about SDA school leaders' experiences that can be made available throughout the education system
- ▶ Solicit insights to help the foundation understand how it can best partner with the system to build a talent management strategy that strengthens the SDA K-12 leadership pipeline



PRIMARY AUDIENCES

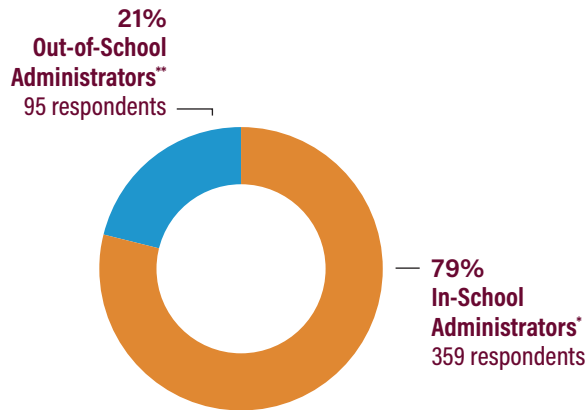
- ▶ SDA education leaders at all levels, including in higher education
- ▶ SDA leaders beyond education (including pastors and Conference, Union, and NAD leaders)
- ▶ Other stakeholders/partners that support and invest in SDA education



Survey Respondents

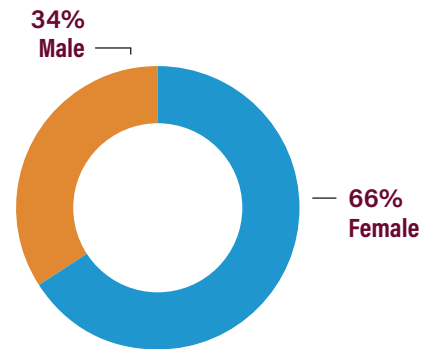
An online survey was conducted in spring 2023. In total, 870 SDA education leaders from across the NAD were invited to participate, with 454 (52%) responding. This included representation from all Unions and all types of SDA schools.

Role

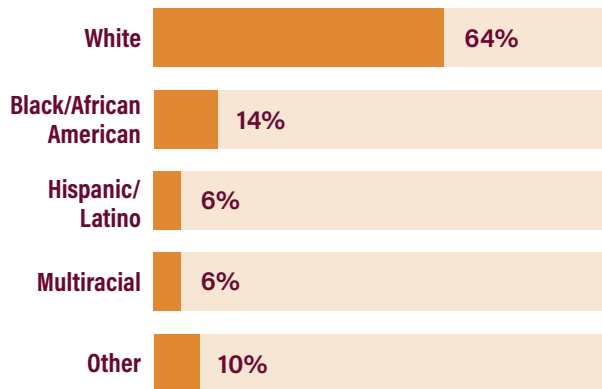


* Principals and Teaching Principals
 ** NAD, Union, and Conference Education Leaders

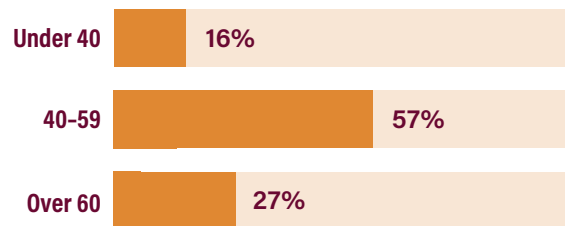
Gender



Race



Age



Key Takeaways and Findings

This survey captures and compares the work experience of Adventist education leaders as well as their priorities and professional development needs and perceptions of the SDA education system. Among the key 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.



- ▶ Nearly half of Teaching Principals and more than a third of Principals expect to leave their current role within three years.
- ▶ Systemwide, more than half of SDA education leaders said better work-life balance would keep them in the profession.
- ▶ Respondents find it challenging to recruit principals and teachers who are effective, qualified, diverse, and looking to stay in the role.
- ▶ Fewer than half of all respondents said they were very prepared or extremely well prepared for their roles.
- ▶ More than a quarter of respondents were not aware of the K-12 Adventist Education Leadership Standards; three-quarters rarely or never use these standards in their role.
- ▶ In-school administrators said they lack professional development/training in areas central to their roles (e.g., enrollment/marketing, crisis management/school safety, and fundraising/development).
- ▶ Teacher recruitment and retention were named the top priority systemwide.
- ▶ Respondents were more likely to rate the state of education in their Conference as good or excellent compared to their Union or across the NAD.
- ▶ In-school administrators perceived the SDA system most effectively meets the needs of students of color and low-income populations, but less effectively meets the needs of LGBTQ+ students and those with physical disabilities.

Opportunities for Improvement

The full survey report identifies opportunities for improvement in critical areas, such as retention; succession planning; leadership standards; professional development; and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Some examples:

- ▶ Conduct a review to assess whether SDA compensation is competitive and reflects the scale of what leaders are being asked to do in their respective roles.
- ▶ Given the multiple retention and recruitment concerns highlighted in the survey, prioritize succession planning to prepare for and mitigate the negative impacts of leadership transitions.
- ▶ Develop a systemwide onboarding process for new Teaching Principals and 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.
- ▶ Review current leadership standards and competencies to determine whether they best represent a practical systemwide approach for 1) identifying necessary leadership behaviors and skill sets, and 2) supporting standardized expectations and common language across the system.
- ▶ Engage in deeper exploration and capacity building so SDA education leaders can more effectively respond to the needs of diverse student populations and incorporate culturally responsive practices.

Having data to pinpoint and understand the extent of key issues and areas of concern among education leaders is essential for taking strategic actions to strengthen the system. These findings can inform additional research to complement and contextualize the initial results. Conducting this survey every few years among Adventist education leaders would help monitor progress on current challenges and identify new issues that emerge over time.



Read the Full Report: bainumfdn.org/listening-to-leaders-sda-leadership-survey