

THE ILLINOIS SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENCY
Performance Excellence for the New Millennium

A Summary Report of the
2002 Survey of
Illinois Superintendents

by

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Springfield, IL

May 2002

Introduction

This is the report of the fifteenth annual survey of Illinois public school district superintendents. The purpose of the survey is to determine the attitudes and opinions of school superintendents on issues of importance to them and to provide guidance to the Illinois Association of School Administrators (IASA) in developing programs to meet the needs of its members. This survey was sponsored by IASA, and the Department of Educational Administration and Supervision, College of Education and Human Services, Western Illinois University.

While the primary objective of the survey is to provide information about important educational issues facing Illinois schools, a secondary objective is to provide longitudinal data about Illinois school district superintendents. Like last year, the main focus of the survey was on superintendents themselves. Most of the 36 questions on the survey dealt with their backgrounds, demographic and personal data concerning their careers, length of contract and factors directly affecting their jobs as superintendents such as time required each week to fulfill their tasks.

The survey was jointly developed by the researchers and IASA. The researchers would again like to acknowledge the efforts of Dr. Thomas Glass who directed 11 of the 15 previous studies and provided a solid base on which to develop an on-going data base to benefit the members of IASA.

The views expressed in this report are solely those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Illinois Association of School Administrators.

Survey Procedures

The survey was distributed by IASA to all employed public school district superintendents. IASA mailed out 895 questionnaires and there were 671 useable surveys returned for a response rate of 75 percent. The researchers were very pleased with the way that superintendents responded to the questionnaire since the return rate for the 2001 survey surpassed that of the 1998 and 1988 surveys which had the previous highest response rates.

As with past reports, the reader should be cautioned that Illinois is a very diverse state with hundreds of small school districts of three types (unit, high school and elementary) and very large suburban and urban districts. The data and analysis in this report combine the entire state.

Survey Results

The "typical" Illinois superintendent is a 52 year old male who has been in education for 25 years. He was a building or central office administrator for one-half that time (13 years) and has 10 years of experience as a superintendent. He has been in his current position for the past 8 years (including 2001-2002) and was 42 years old when he assumed his first superintendency. The typical superintendent is white (97 percent), considers himself to be politically independent (39.1 percent) and is moderately active in IASA.

The typical superintendent has a three year contract (42.1 percent). Like last year, over one half of the superintendents (52.1 percent) have only held one superintendency, about one-fourth (25.2 percent) have held two, and one-fifth (19.2 percent) have served in three or four different districts.

With respect to the highest degree held, approximately one-half (45.7 percent) of the superintendents have a doctorate, slightly less than half (47.9 percent) have an education specialist degree and about 6 percent have a master’s degree. Most current superintendents came from outside of the district (61 percent) and have only served as a superintendent in the State of Illinois (91.1 percent).

Approximately one half of the superintendents started out either teaching at the elementary level (28 percent) or teaching social studies (25.8 percent). The next four most frequently mentioned initial teaching assignments were science (17.9 percent), mathematics (17 percent), English (17 percent) and PE/Health (16.1 percent) and, with respect to their total educational experience, the average was 25 years. The person with the longest career in education has served for 51 years.

The average superintendent decided to become a superintendent when she/he was a building administrator (61.3 percent) and slightly over one-half (51.1 percent) started their administrative careers as a building principal while about one-fourth (25.8 percent) started as an assistant principal. Concerning the level of their first administrative experience, 38.5 percent of the respondents started at the elementary level, 23 percent started at the junior high level and 39.4 percent started at the high school level. As stated previously, respondents reported that they had about 13 years of administrative experience before assuming a superintendency.

1. What is your gender?

	Percent	Count
Male	84.1	564
Female	15.9	107

Even though education is predominately an occupation dominated by females, 84.1 percent of the sitting superintendents are males.

2. What is your age?

Mean	Range
52	30 - 74

While there is a broad range of ages within the superintendents, the mean (52) is quite close to the magic age of 55.

3. Political party affiliation?

Party	Percent	Count
Democrat	26.7	174
Republican	34.2	222
Independent	39.1	254

More respondents indicated that they were members of the "Independent" party rather than Democrat or Republican. This probably reflects their practical orientation, rather than actual party affiliation.

4. Racial/Ethnic group?

Group	Percent	Count
White	97.0	650
Asian	.6	4
African American	1.8	12
Native American	.1	1
Other	.5	3

The predominant racial/ethnic group for school superintendents is white.

5. What is the highest academic degree you hold?

Degree	Percent	Count
Masters	6.4	43
Specialists or Equivalent Degree	47.9	321
Doctorate	45.7	306

There is about an even split between superintendents who hold the Educational Specialist degree and the doctorate.

6. What subjects did you teach in your first full-time teaching position?

Subjects	Percent	Count
Elementary	28.0	188
Counseling	2.1	14
Art	1.9	13
Math	17.0	114
Science	17.9	120
Social Studies	25.8	173
English	17.0	114
P.E. - Health	16.1	108
Business Education	3.6	24
Industrial Arts	2.8	19
Computer Education	.7	5
Vocational Agriculture	.9	6
Music	4.0	27
Foreign Language	2.1	14

Special Education	6.4	43
Driver Education	2.2	15
Vocational Education	2.4	16
Home Economics	.3	2
No Teaching Experience	.1	1
Other Position	3.3	22

The most predominate teaching backgrounds were elementary and social studies followed by p.e., health, science, math, and English. Respondents were allowed to check more than one subject taught, therefore, percentage exceeds 100 percent.

7. First administrative position was in?

Position	Percent	Count
Elementary School	38.5	258
Junior High	23.0	154
Middle School	6.3	42
High School	39.4	264
Vocational	.7	5
College	.7	5
District Office	5.4	36
Parochial School	1.5	10
Other Position	6.4	43

Most superintendents started with an administrative position in the high school (39.4 percent), followed by elementary (38.5percent) administrators and then junior high/middle school (29.3 percent).

8. What extracurricular activity did you most participate in as a teacher?

Activity	Percent	Count
Coaching Athletics	59.0	367
Club Advisor	10.3	64
Class Advisor	4.5	28
Music Groups	16.7	104
Newspaper/Annual	4.3	27
Other	5.1	32

Whether we like the stereotype or not, most superintendents are ex-coaches.

9. When did you decide to become a superintendent?

Response	Percent	Count
While a teacher	20.7	138
While a building administrator	61.3	409
While a central office administrator	15.0	100
Other	3.0	20

Most superintendents decided to move up the hierarchy while building administrators.

10. What was the nature of your first administrative-supervisory position?

Position	Percent	Count
Asst. Prin.	25.8	158
Principal	51.1	332

Asst. Supt.	1.8	12
State Agency	.3	2
Dean of Students	6.3	41
Director/Coordinator	9.7	63
Superintendent	1.2	8
Business Office	.9	6
Other	2.8	18

The route to the superintendency leads through the assistant principal or principal position (76.9 percent).

11. How many public school superintendencies have you held?

Number held	Percent	Count
One	52.1	339
Two	25.2	164
Three	12.4	81
Four	6.8	44
Five	2.5	16
Six	.6	4
Seven or more	.5	3

Superintendents are mobile, but not all that mobile. The vast majority, 77.3 percent indicated that they have only held one or two superintendencies.

12. In how many states have you served as a public school superintendent?

Number of States	Percent	Count
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One	91.1	592
Two	6.6	43
Three	1.8	12
Four	.5	3

Superintendents from Illinois tend to stay in Illinois, with 91.1 percent reporting that this is the only state that they have held that office. With the coming superintendent shortage, we could find the number of superintendents from other states increasing.

13. Were you appointed to your first superintendency from?

Location	Percent	Count
Inside same district	39	254
Outside district	61	397

While superintendents do not move often, almost two-thirds reported that they had to move to another district to attain their first superintendency.

14. What type of district do you serve?

Type of District	Percent	Count
Secondary	10.3	67
Elementary	40.3	262
Unit	48.0	312
Other	1.4	9

Unit district superintendents were the largest group, followed by elementary superintendents and then high school districts.

15. How big is your district (Number of students)?

Size	Percent	Count
Under 500	26.4	172

500-999	25.5	166
1,000-2,999	32.1	209
3,000-5,999	10.3	67
6,000-11,999	3.8	25
12,000 and above	1.8	12

The largest group of respondents came from districts of 1,000 to 2,999 students, followed by districts of under 500 students, and finally districts with from 500 - 999 students. It is interesting to note that the smallest school districts (<500 – 999) still make up slightly over 50 percent of the superintendentcies in the state.

16. How many years in length is the full-term of your present contract?

Years	Percent	Count
One	12.3	79
Two	4.5	29
Three	42.1	271
Four	10.4	67
Five	30.7	198

Three-year contracts are still the most popular. However, the new status symbol has become the five-year contract.

17. Do you have performance goals in your contract?

Goals	Percent	Count
Yes	84.8	543
No	15.2	97

Almost 85 percent of the respondents had performance goals written in their contracts. Last year, it was about 75 percent of the respondents who had performance goals in their contracts. It would appear that this number would increase to about 87.7 percent, since superintendents on a single year contract do not need performance goals.

18a. How many years (including 2001-02) have you been an educator?

Mean	Range
25	1-51

The average superintendent has 25 years in the business.

18b. How many years (including 2001-02) have you been an administrator (other than Supt.)?

Mean	Range
13	0-38

Most respondents were not new to administration when they took their first superintendency. They had spent an average of 13 years in the "trenches."

18c. How many years (including 2001-02) have you been a superintendent?

Mean	Range
10	0-40

While there are some very experienced superintendents out there, the average superintendent is probably in his/her second job.

19. How many years (including 2001-02) have you been in your current position?

Mean	Range
8	1-27

The average superintendent is staying around for 8 years now. It will be interesting to see if the new five-year contracts will increase or decrease that number.

20. How many hours per week do you spend at your job?

Hours per week	Percent	Count
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21 - 40	1.4	9
41 - 45	4.4	28
46 -50	14.5	93
51 - 55	40.2	258
56+	39.6	254

The superintendency is a time-intensive occupation. The respondents indicated that 79.8 percent of them spend more than 51 hours per week in the exercise of their job.

21. Would you favor statutorily mandated board member training?

Response	Percent	Count
Yes	52.5	336
No	22.8	146
Maybe	24.7	158

Statutorily mandated board member training has long been a topic of debate throughout the state. This year, 77 percent of the respondents indicated that they would favor it or maybe favor it, while the number opposing it is only 23 percent.

22. What was your age at the beginning of the 2001-02 school year.

Mean Age	Range
52	30 - 74

The mean age of the superintendent is now 52 years. That would seem to indicate that more people are approaching the magic age of 55, when many superintendents have indicated they plan to retire.

23. At what age were you when you were employed in your first full-time administrative position in a school?

Age	Percent	Count
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25 - 30	47.7	305
31 - 35	21.6	138
36 - 40	17.0	109
41 - 45	8.9	57
46+	4.8	31

The vast majority, 69 percent, of the superintendents started in administration early in their careers. Almost half, 47 percent, indicated that they started before the age of 30.

24. What was your age at the beginning of your first year as a superintendent?

Mean	Range
42	26- 60

The average respondent entered the superintendency at 42. If s/he works until 55, that will mean the average superintendent will serve for approximately 13 years.

25. Have you spent your entire educational career in one school district?

Response	Percent	Count
Yes	6.8	44
No	93.2	602

While many teachers spend there entire career in one district, it seems that a very small portion of persons who aspire to the superintendency do.

26. How long did it take you to obtain your first superintendency once you were certified and actively sought such a position?

Years	Percent	Count
Less than 1 year	59.8	386
1 year	15.5	100

2 years	10.1	65
3 years	5.7	37
4 years	1.7	11
5+ years	7.1	46

Most superintendents, 75.3 percent, once certified and ready, took 1 year or less to locate that first position.

27. How satisfied are you with your present superintendency?

Response	Percent	Count
Very Satisfied	59.8	389
Satisfied	29.6	193
Somewhat	8.3	54
Not Very	2.3	15

While there are many opportunities to find other positions, and the superintendency is a stressful position, 89.4 percent of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs.

28. What was your last board evaluation rating?

Response	Percent	Count
Excellent	86.4	520
Satisfactory	13.6	82

100 percent of respondents, indicated that their boards ranked them as "excellent" or "satisfactory."

29. How much time do you spend during an average week in direct communication with board members? Please disregard scheduled board meetings or work sessions.

Hours per week	Percent	Count
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0 - 1	22.2	144
2 - 3	51.7	335
4 - 5	15.7	102
6 - 7	6.8	44
8 - 9	1.4	9
10 or more	2.2	14

Contrary to popular wisdom, board members are not taking more of the superintendent's time. Respondents indicated that 73.9 percent of them spend 3 hours per week or less with board members.

30. How active are you in IASA?

Response	Percent	Count
Very	14.5	94
Average	68.6	444
Not at all	16.8	109

Most members reported only average involvement in the association. IASA is one of those organizations that the more a member invests in time and energy, the greater the personal reward.

31. What kind of employment contract do you have with your board?

Contract Type	Percent	Count
Verbal Single Year	3.6	23
Verbal Multiple Year	1.2	8
Written Single Year	8.7	56
Written Multiple Year	86.6	560

The predominant contract for superintendents in the state is a written, multiple year contract.

32. Indicate the following sports/activities that you participate in on a regular basis:

Sports	Percent	Count
Bowling	2.2	14
Tennis	5.6	36
Canoeing	1.9	12
Fishing	18.4	119
Golf	43.7	283
Jogging	18.7	121
Sailing	2.5	16
Swimming	8.7	56
Soccer	.5	3
Volleyball	1.2	8
Softball	2.5	16
Walking	52.2	338
Bicycling	16.2	105
Camping	6.0	39
Handball	0	0
Treadmill	21.3	138
Chess	2.0	13
Bridge	2.6	17
Quilting	.6	4
Knitting	.2	1
Gardening	25.5	165

Basketball	6.6	43
Baseball	1.5	10
Hockey	.3	2
Rollerblading	1.5	10
Hiking	8.5	55
Racquetball	1.9	12
Aerobics	5.3	34
Hunting	9.3	60
Powerboating	7.0	45
Weight Training	20.7	134
Billiards	2.5	16
None of the Above	5.3	34
Other Activity	16.1	104

Obviously, the big three for IASA are walking, golf and gardening. Does the fact that walking has taken over the lead from golf say something about our age?

33. Which one of the phrases below do you think best describes IASA?

Response	Percent	Count
Key source of information needed to do my job effectively	19.9	132
Professional association for superintendents	58.3	387
Organization focused on promoting school district leadership	11.9	79

Organization recognized as providing the State voice for public education	4.8	32
Organization advocating for public education	3.2	21
Organization advocating for children	.3	2
Other	1.7	11

IASA is recognized as the professional association for superintendents.

34. Which one of the phrases below best describes what you think IASA should be?

Response	Percent	Count
Key source of information needed to do my job effectively	23.5	158
Professional association for superintendents	40.1	266
Organization focused on promoting school district leadership	18.4	122
Organization recognized as providing the State voice for public education	11.0	73
Organization advocating for public education	4.4	29
Organization advocating for children	1.1	7
Other	1.5	10

When comparing tables 33 and 34, a couple of things are noticeable. First, the respondents would like to see IASA be recognized "voice" in public education within the state and secondly that

they are realistic and realize that numbers denote power in politics, so that position will probably always belong to the IEA.

35. Please rate your level of satisfaction with IASA regarding the following:

Response	Rating	Percent	Count
State Voice for the Profession	High	57.0	377
	Medium	36.5	241
	Low	6.5	43
Resource for my professional development	High	44.2	292
	Medium	45.4	300
	Low	10.4	69
Source of new ideas	High	25.3	166
	Medium	57.9	380
	Low	16.8	110
Advocate for public education	High	61.8	405
	Medium	33.1	217
	Low	5.0	33
Advocate for children	High	47.3	310
	Medium	43.7	286
	Low	9.0	59

It would generally appear that the majority of the respondents are happy with the stances/time allocations that IASA has taken on each of these issues.

36. Please indicate your personal opinion of IASA by checking one item in response to each of the issue statement groupings.

Response		Percent	Count
On the whole IASA:	Focuses on issues of great interest to me	45.3	297
	Focuses on issues of some interest to me	48.4	317
	Focuses on issues of little interest to me	2.9	19
	I do not know what issues IASA focuses on	3.4	22
On the whole IASA:	Is too liberal politically	.5	3
	Is too conservative politically	7.1	44
	Usually does not lean too far in either direction	92.4	574
On the whole IASA:	Spends too much time of advocacy for public education	1.1	7
	Spends too little time on advocacy for public education	19.1	118
	Spends about the right amount of time on advocacy for public education	79.8	494

On the whole IASA:	Spends too much time on child advocacy	.5	3
	Spends too little time on child advocacy	21.4	128
	Spends about the right amount of time on child advocacy	78.1	466

The respondents indicate that IASA focuses on the right issues and seems to have an appropriate balance in the allocation of resources.

38. At what age do you plan to retire?

Age	Percent	Count
Before Age 55	2.7	17
55	22.1	145
56	12.3	81
57	9.3	61
58	9.6	63
59	6.6	43
60	13.1	86
61+	24.4	160

Superintendents are planning on retiring earlier. This year, 43.7 percent of the respondents indicated that they intended to retire between the ages of 55 - 57. It is interesting to note that they either plan on retiring early or continuing until after age 60.

39. I would characterize my feelings about my job as follows:

Response	Percent	Count
I feel full of energy and readiness to promote school district matters.	66.2	433
*I feel emotionally worn out by running the school district.	16.1	105
I feel quite fresh at the end of a days work at school.	15.9	104
*I feel that my teachers could by themselves solve many problems which they present to me.	23.5	154
I feel that my work as a school superintendent gives me a lot of pleasure.	82.7	541
*I think I would like to have better teachers than the ones I have in my school district at the moment.	11.3	74
*I feel that parents come to me with complaints about matters or problems that they themselves are responsible for.	34.3	224
*I feel I have difficulty keeping up with the need to find solutions to school district problems.	16.5	108
*In contrast with the past, I find no satisfaction with the way teachers perform in my school district.	1.2	8
*I think that students in my school district do not work	26.1	184

as hard as they should at their studies.		
*In contrast to the past, I tend to ignore things in the school district that I do not agree with.	3.4	22
*I feel tired of running the school district, to the extent that I wish to quit.	1.8	12
*I feel that I would like to take a break from the problems that are brought to me.	13.3	87

This last table is particularly interesting. The vast majority of the respondents, 82.7 percent indicate that the job "...gives them a lot of pleasure." The items marked with an asterisk have been shown to be indicators of burnout. Respondents who checked multiple asterisked items may be well advised to seek strategies to reduce stress and possibly consider a career change or retirement.