

Teachers Want Their Administrators to Teach. Here's Why



By Hayley Hardison — November 12, 2021

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Education Week contributor Elizabeth Heubeck recently wrote about principals who also teach, capturing how the practice helps school leaders better understand the challenges teachers face in the classroom. That regular connection to the classroom, and to students, can make principals stronger, more empathetic leaders.

The story sparked a ton of conversation on social media, most of it from teachers who overwhelmingly endorsed the practice and wished that their own principals—and other administrators—would take time to teach. Some principals embraced the idea, too.

Here's what we heard from some of the principals:

“I was [a] Principal [in] a small town school. I taught a grade, Spanish in Kindergarten, and Science in Grades 1-2. I really knew what it meant to be on the front lines.”

—Rosanna Schultz

“A positive twist on what many of us as principals are experiencing. Time spent in classrooms affects leadership decisions outside of it.”

—@Mr_dabreu

“It's not just ‘more’ work, but it's really important work and it fills [my] bucket. The time I spend teaching is my sacred time and time joyfully spent. I am a better principal because of it. I will always be a ‘teaching principal.’ ”

—@mellytheteach

“All principals need to be teachers!”

—@mwrisher

A shift in perspective

Among the outpouring of responses, we noticed an intriguing number of current or retired teachers who believe that teaching should *not* be considered a “best practice” for principals. Instead, they argued that it should be mandatory for school leaders—or any administrator, for that matter—to teach in some capacity.

“For anyone in the back of the room, I firmly believe all admins should be responsible for teaching one class as part of their work (especially with our job

shortage now).”

—@Migas4Edu

“I think every administrator in the district, including those who don’t work at school sites, should have to teach for one hour daily, with the regular teacher there to help.”

—Ralph Bedwell

“This post is spot on! They should also take turns in the special education setting. This helps them stay connected to all students and staff.”

—Brenda Mitchell

“It should be required for all administrators and school board members!”

—Laurie Harris Norman

This sentiment comes at a time when teachers report feeling more stressed than ever before. According to an EdWeek Research Center survey from May 2021, “[m]ore than a quarter of teachers said job-related stress leads them to think often about quitting, and 16 percent said they dread going to work every day.”

Administrators and teachers, however, value potential strategies to mitigate stress and burnout differently. According to the same survey, only 27 percent of school administrators said that reducing administrative burdens such as meetings, paperwork, or hall duty, could help retain teachers, while 43 percent of teachers said the administrative reduction could help.

Gaps between how principals and teachers view the challenges of teaching and managing a classroom aren’t emerging just because of the pandemic, though. In a 2019 EdWeek Research Center survey, principals and teachers placed different values on sources of friction such as school discipline, planning period timing and scheduling, duty assignments, and instructional approaches.

‘On the front lines’

Why are some teachers calling for mandated principal teaching, and how might this practice improve the principal-teacher dynamic? Here's what our readers had to say:

“Should be mandatory. Unless you're on the front lines - in the classroom - you really have no clue what it takes to navigate changing curriculums every year.”

—Idette Hecht Durbin

“With the way the education sector continually shifts, administrators need a viewpoint of the classroom that is relevant to today so that they don't continually recommend unhelpful things and implement prescriptive strategies that just add to the job with no ROI to the students or teachers.”

—Richie Conway

“The administration of the school district I just retired from in Virginia dictates from on high. They are so far removed from the classroom, they have no idea the toll their 'new initiatives' are taking on teachers. And they simply don't care.”

—Kevin Quesenberry

“The Principal should be the Principal Teacher in the building. If they can't teach children, they shouldn't be there. I worked for 17 of them throughout my career. One of my favorites would cover your classes for you if you had to leave early for a doctor or dentist appointment. Sadly, some of them just wanted to boss us around.”

—Joyce Walker

“I said this all along! What a great way to get to know the students, as well as getting to know your teaching staff and their planning, etc. This practice was NEVER done during my 35 years teaching full time, and I wish it had been!”

—Trent Agnew

“I worked at a pilot school and I taught a class w/ my principal. It was in their charter that the principal had to teach a class. It was a good experience and students seem to like it. Best staff I ever worked with.”

—Judi McMahon

“So many of them forget so fast. I totally agree with this. All administration should have to do this.”

—Abbie Jackson-Barrett

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