

# AWSP News - Principal Contracts Edition

Welcome to this special edition of AWSP News. Think of this as your 20/20 on the principal pay gap. I'm your host....Scott Seaman. We're here in the studio today because we keep hearing from our members across the state. About what? Glad you ask. We get calls or emails almost every...single...day about what principals should do and how they should bargain as a result of the shrinking pay gap between principals and assistant principals and the teachers they lead and supervise. They're also asking if years of service as a principal translate back to the classroom. Think those two might issues might be related?

First let's talk about how we got here.

In 2017, the Legislature drastically changed how we fund education. They added more money from the state budget and decreased the amount districts can raise from local levies. They eliminated the state salary schedule and staff mix. Now, districts receive money based on average salaries for classified, certificated and admin salaries, and regionalization. Even though regionalization was well-intentioned, it created huge disparities.

In 2018, the Legislature adjusted education funding a bit. They added more to special education funding and added a 4% experience factor for school districts with teachers who have above-average education and experience.

However, in the bargaining process last summer, WEA fought for and received this additional funding without concern for four-year budget projections. And, in this process, trust was broken and relationships were damaged. Principals were the leaders left to pick up the pieces and mend those relationships. And now, many districts are faced with massive budget cuts for next year that will leave fewer adults in the building to do already challenging jobs.

Who's to blame? What's to blame? Well, it depends on who you ask. Some people blame the Legislature for "fixing" the school funding problem, the shortfall in special education funding, and pitting districts against each other with regionalization. Oh, and there's that thing about the 3.1% salary cap for administrators. Legislative intent was not just a 3.1% cap just for administrators, but for certificated instructional staff as well. Of course, there were several exceptions – exceptions that the WEA, let's just say, loosely interpreted. For example, if a 3.1% raise didn't bring your lowest paid teachers up to the \$40,000 minimum, you could go over 3.1%. Clearly, that's not what happened.

Some people blame superintendents and school boards for agreeing to unsustainable teacher raises, hoping to receive a bailout from the Legislature. A lot of legislators will tell you nobody forced districts to agree to teacher contracts they can't afford. They have trouble understanding

how districts put themselves in a position to have to RIF after they added billions of dollars in new money over the past few years.

A lot of superintendents and districts will tell you they had no real choice but to agree to unsustainable contracts. On some level, you have to keep up with the Joneses. A lot of people will blame the WEA for forcing district's hands and blowing the lid off what the Legislature thought they were funding. Some blame Superintendent Reykdal and say his guidance was too late, or wasn't firm enough, although he did tell districts they were limited by what they can afford AND sustain.

Let's be clear. Teachers deserve to be well-paid and a raise was long overdue. And as we discussed, the raises aren't the only cause of the upcoming budget crisis. However, the drastic increases are a big part of what's now leading to teacher and principal RIFs, and in some cases, reductions in service to students. Either way, it doesn't matter who's to blame. A lot of factors created this "perfect storm" for principals. It's important to keep all of this in mind. No single person or group created this on their own, so we need to focus on trying to solve problems and not just point fingers.

Which brings us to this. Can we have some real talk here? We can't wrap our brains around the idea that districts are hiding money in order to not pay teachers? That's simply not true. I mean, if you're a district and you have no profit motive, why on earth wouldn't you want to pay your teachers well, and pay as much or more as neighboring districts. It's a competitive advantage. If you can pay more than your neighbors, that's one giant leg up in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers. Let's remember, superintendents, central office directors, principals...we're all former teachers. We're all in this together, to educate children and give every single child the best chance at a successful future. Let's not lose sight of that.

But back to why we're here making this video for you. Wage compression, as former Governor Gregoire called it on an episode of our talk show, is a problem. Why is it a problem? It's not just a question of fairness for the individual. It's a question of pragmatism and the best interest of the whole system. If you've watched our Power of the Principal video, you know how much principal leadership matters. Principals, not just teachers, are directly responsible for student achievement. Principals are the #2 influencer on student achievement. The research shows it takes 5-10 years to turn a school around, but only 1 in 5 principals is in the same building after 5 years.

We also know principal churn is costly. It costs districts money and time. It costs schools culture and leadership. And it costs students relationships and achievement. And that my friend, that's you the viewer, is why we must fix this problem. Why do principals take on their roles? (clip of JM show me the money plays)

Nope. Principals don't go into their role for the money, but without a sustained and substantial pay gap, who in their right mind would take on the extra hours, extra stress and anxiety and reduced job security if extra pay doesn't come with it? That brings us to where we are now and

what we've done so far. If you're one of our 558 members who took our survey this past fall, thank you. The survey provides the data and context that's so critical for our efforts and story.

So what have we done? We've shared that data with the world, from legislators to business leaders and everyone who will listen to us. 65% of you are working at least 6 days a week. 72% of you work over 56 hours per week, and if you cut that down to over 50 hours a week, it's an astounding 93%. Almost 70% of you said the job has had a somewhat negative or negative effect on your personal relationships. And despite all the extra time, pressure, and responsibility, 71% of our assistant principals and 61% of our principals have teachers they supervise making more than they do on a per diem or per contract day rate.

What else have we done? We've spent countless hours on the phone, in email, and in person giving guidance on what principals should be doing for bargaining. We've put those best practices online and shared our survey data. We created our "Power of the Principal" video to show the world how important school leadership is and how much principals directly affect student learning. We've got another great video in the works to share the importance of your role and the challenges you face.

We've worked with WASA to help districts prepare for strikes, avoid them if possible, and rebuild after the damage is done. We've worked closely with WASA, WSSDA, and other stakeholders to make sure people understand this is a big issue not just for today's principals, but if left unfixed, the pipeline of future principals. And of course, we've met with legislators.

Where are we now? Well, we're in limbo, stuck between the 3.1% language of last year and the hope of magical fixes for next year. The 3.1% cap ends June 30, 2019, so there's nothing preventing districts from fixing the situation...except for, you know, a huge budget shortfall. So, how in the heck do we advocate for principal salary increases as districts begin the ugly process of a reduction of force? Every single day we read a new story about budget shortfalls and possible RIFs. We even read an article about one of the principals on our middle level board who expects to lose 6 of his 24 staff, which for the math challenged is an astounding 25%.

If the situation doesn't get fixed, we could easily head into a principal leadership crisis. We fixed a teacher shortage and started a new crisis...attracting and keeping great principals in our schools. We hear from our university prep programs most of their students don't plan on applying for an assistant principal or principal job until something changes, and everyday we hear from veteran principals serious about heading back to the classroom.

With the state budget still unknown and the Legislature working through piles of bills, it's safe to say there are no silver bullets emerging from this session. Waiting and hoping for a budget fix might be a fruitless effort. Principals have historically waited in line and bargained for their salary after others are settled. However, when you consider the small slice of the district budget that makes up administrative salaries, it might be prudent for you to head to the bargaining table sooner than later. You shouldn't settle for table scraps. According to some data from OSPI and the Office of Financial Management, principal salaries are about 2.5% of the state education

budget. If we increased the average principal salary by 10%, total principal salaries would be about 2.7% of the state education budget, for a whopping increase of .2% of the state's education budget. Supporting building leadership is worth it.

What should you be doing right now? You're already taken step one by watching this video. Keep checking our website for many of the talking points and resources we reference in this video. Next, gather the principals in your district to talk about what you need to be able to effectively lead and impact the students and adults in your school. If you are a small district with only a few administrators, reach out to neighboring principal groups for collective wisdom.

Next, we recommend collectively brainstorming and creating a spreadsheet broken into three columns. The first column simply lists your "needs," which are the non-negotiable items you need to do your job. The middle column are the "wants," which are things that would help you increase your impact on students, adults and your school. The third column are the "wishes." These are the items that increase your effectiveness and your work-life balance. Build this spreadsheet together and collaborate and compare with others to make sure you've done your research.

After that, we strongly encourage you to request immediate meetings with your district supervisor to begin working towards an agreement on your contract. This is awkward for most principals because we've enjoyed healthy and amiable relationships with central office for decades. No one asked for this situation, and principals, for the most part, have never been placed in this position before.

However, you must take a strong stance and advocate for yourselves in this situation. And, I want to remind you, I have not spoken to a single superintendent who is not empathetic to your position and wants to make this right for principals. We recognize the tough spot superintendents are in, but you need to step out of your comfort zone and advocate for yourself in this case.

If you'd like to see some comparable district contracts, reach out to Annalee here in our office for some assistance. She is a rock star who will get you the info you need to inform your negotiations. Again, if you haven't started this process already, we strongly encourage you to make it happen ASAP. If you've already reached an agreement on a contract, please send it to us so we can better support principals throughout the state. Remember, check out our website for a list of things you might want to ask for, like making sure your time as an admin counts toward years of teacher service and protections against RIFs.

Finally, we encourage you to reach out to your local media and elected officials. If you don't let them know the realities of what "principaling" is like in your school, then we'll never be able to bring attention to this statewide crisis. Your stories will help bring awareness to this issue and add some pressure to the system.

Now, here's where I'll step on my soapbox for a second and provide some editorial. We all know that a good principal makes all the difference in the world for a school's culture and student success. In fact, teachers said that "feeling supported" was the strongest predictor of job satisfaction in WEA's all-member survey. How we can possibly provide the kind of support teachers want and need if we cut principals and don't provide adequate compensation?

Next, when a student blows out of a classroom, where do you think that student goes? The principal's office. Principals report spending upwards of 90% of their day responding to mental health issues. So, what happens when we reduce the number of principals, and in this case, assistant principals, working on the front lines with our kids who need us the most. How you handle our kids with the most challenging needs can impact them forever. You're needed now more than ever.

The same can be said about school safety. Is it really a good idea to reduce front line adults, like principals, in this era of school violence? At our Summer Conference in 2014, Frank DeAngelo, the principal of Columbine HS at the time of their tragedy told us, "It's all about relationships and visibility." Without enough adults in the building, this is not possible. Isn't it a little ironic that in this year's legislative session there is so much energy around school safety, but districts will likely be cutting the adults responsible for keeping everyone safe? School safety is the second criterion principals are evaluated on. Can anyone honestly argue reducing staff makes schools safer?

Finally, principals create hope in our schools. This pay-gap compression is killing the resolve of our principals, which in turn impacts their ability to lead hope. Hope-filled leaders and organizations make the impossible possible. So, what happens when our principals lose hope? What happens when amazing veteran principals decide to leave the leadership of their schools because the time, stress and anxiety is not worth it anymore? That is the leadership crisis. When we lose amazing principals, kids, and even teachers, suffer.

Again, we know how tough it is to ask for more when teachers are getting laid off. But you sat patiently last year when the Legislature capped pay increases at 3.1% and watched as others got sizeable increases. You were told to wait while large contracts were negotiated, and you did. Now is the time to advocate for what should have been done last August.

Thanks for watching this. We hope this is helpful information for you and your team. Remember, make your case, use our recommendations and data, but be sure to remain kind and professional, knowing the incredibly tough position your superintendent is in. Let us know how else we can be of service and, as always, keep up the great work for kids.