

**RESEARCH BRIEF**

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# New Principals in Chicago Public Schools: Diversity and Their Prior Experiences



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# Introduction

The school principal position is a complex and important role. Research shows that high-quality school leaders have a positive impact on a wide range of school outcomes from sense of safety to teacher satisfaction to student learning.<sup>1</sup>

In Chicago Public Schools (CPS) and nationally, policy-makers have paid increased attention to strengthening the principal pipeline. National groups like the Wallace Foundation have brought attention to the effects of having a strong principal and have provided examples of district initiatives to support principals. Locally in Chicago, the Chicago Public Education Fund has played a key role in assisting CPS with intentionally building a leadership pipeline and providing support and networks for current CPS principals. CPS also has many initiatives directed at the principal pipeline. For example, CPS's Chicago Leadership Collaborative (CLC) is a partnership between the district and local institutes of higher education that provides aspiring CPS principals with training and residency experiences targeted toward leading urban schools. District efforts with support from the Chicago Public Education Fund and other local organizations have also focused on providing additional support for assistant principals to develop a wide range of leadership skills, encouraging principals to think about individuals who will replace them when they leave the school (i.e., succession planning), and considering whether the school's current assistant principal would be a good successor in the principalship.

The research in this brief takes place within the context of all of these efforts to strengthen the principalship in CPS. Regardless of efforts to support principals, some exit is to be expected. In CPS, about 1 out of 10 schools has a principal vacancy each year (author calculations of CPS administrative data). Principal turnover poses challenges for schools and students, since leadership changes lead to lower student achievement and higher

teacher turnover.<sup>2</sup> When a school loses its principal, finding the right new leader is critical to ensure student success. We explore who enters these principalship vacancies, with what previous experiences, and how the pathway into the principalship has changed over time.

There are also national and local efforts to diversify the educator workforce. Nationally, there is an over-representation of white principals in urban areas relative to the student population.<sup>3</sup> Representation matters for student learning at least when it comes to students having at least one teacher of the same race/ethnicity with Black students, in particular, benefiting from having at least one Black teacher.<sup>4</sup> Emerging research also suggests benefits for non-white students of having a principal that matches their race/ethnicity.<sup>5</sup> Further, there is evidence that teachers prefer to work for principals of their same gender and race/ethnicity<sup>6</sup>, which has implications for the stability of the educator workforce in schools. Therefore, we examine the demographic composition of principals in CPS, relative to teacher and student demographics, and whether there have been changes over time or among recently hired principals.

Using eight years of data from CPS, 2012-13 to 2019-20, we describe Chicago's principals — their demographic characteristics, their backgrounds, their trajectories into the principalship, and how long they stay. We focus intentionally on the racial/ethnic diversity of the principalship since CPS is a district that primarily serves Black and brown students. In addition, we describe how their previous experiences in schools align with the schools they ultimately lead. Finally, we conclude by looking at exit rates among principals.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom (2004); Sebastian & Allensworth (2012); Grissom, Egalite, & Lindsay (2021)

<sup>2</sup> Bartenan, Grissom & Rogers (2019), Miller (2013)

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2020a)

<sup>4</sup> Dee (2004); Egalite, Kisada, Winters (2015); Gershenson, Hart, Hyman, Lindsay, & Papageorge (2022)

<sup>5</sup> Bartenan & Grissom (2021)

<sup>6</sup> Bartenan & Grissom (2021); Grissom & Keiser (2011); Husain, Matsa, & Miller (2021); Sartain & Estrera (2022)

**We find the following:**

- **Racial/Ethnic Diversity of CPS Principals:** CPS principals tend to be more racially/ethnically diverse than principals nationally and in other urban districts. While new CPS principals are more likely to be Black than veteran principals, Latinx principals are still underrepresented relative to the growing Latinx student population in the district. These findings raise questions about strategies the district and its partners can develop to identify promising future leaders from the Latinx community. In other words, what efforts can ensure that Latinx students are more likely to have school leaders who look like them?
- **Pathway to the Principalship:** CPS principals are increasingly entering their position from an assistant principal position, and one of every four newly-hired CPS principals is hired from within their school community. We also find that schools tend to hire principals who previously worked in similar school communities (e.g., served similar students in terms of race/ethnicity, free/reduced-price lunch status). These findings raise questions about the implications that different hiring pathways have for student and staff experiences. For example, does having a new principal who is familiar with the school community (or similar school communities) make for a more seamless principal transition?

- **Principal Transitions:** About one of every ten CPS schools experiences a principal transition each year. Further, five years after entering the principalship, about half of newly-hired principals have left their school. Not all schools experience principal turnover at the same rate. For example, schools with low levels of performance experience higher rates of turnover than other schools, suggesting that schools that could benefit most from stable high-quality leadership are those that experience the most transitions. How can district officials recruit effective principals and retain them at the schools most in need of strong leadership?

This research is part of a mixed-methods study of the principal pipeline in Chicago. Our companion Report, *On the Path to Becoming a Chicago Public School Principal*, <https://www.norc.org/PDFs/School%20Leaders/NORC%20Principalship%20Report%2022%20101.pdf> characterizes the pre-service experiences and wished-for supports of early-career CPS principals. These principals' perspectives provide further insights about the pathway into the principalship and conditions that might help new principals as they transition into their leadership roles.

## Quantitative Data Sources

Through a data sharing agreement between CPS and the UChicago Consortium, this study benefits from access to the following data sources from 2012-13 (the first year in which school administrators are in the data) to 2019-20:

- Personnel data, which include employment history (school and position) for all non-charter school administrators and teachers, as well as employee demographics.
- Student-level demographic information aggregated to the school-by-year level to characterize student populations (e.g., the percent of students who qualify for free/reduced-price lunch, racial/ethnic composition of the student body).
- Publicly available school performance data (SQRP) for the 2015-15 through 2019-20 school years.
- Rosters of participants in the Chicago Leadership Collaborative, a CPS principal pipeline initiative (**see the box titled *Chicago Leadership Collaborative for more details about the program on page 9***).

We merge these data sources using unique employee and school identifiers to create an analytic dataset in order to answer research questions related to principals' backgrounds and the similarity of previous school experiences to the schools they lead, as well as their tenure at those schools.

We note that data are only available for educators and school leaders working in district-run, non-charter schools.

## RESEARCH QUESTION 1

# How Diverse Are Chicago's Principals?

## &gt; KEY FINDINGS

- Principals in CPS are **more diverse in terms of race/ethnicity** than principals in other urban areas and nationally.
- **Newer CPS principals are more likely to be Black** than the overall CPS principals population.
- **Latinx principals** continue to be **underrepresented** compared to the CPS student population.
- CPS principals are **more likely to be female** than principals nationwide.
- CPS **elementary principals** are **more likely to be female** than high school principals.

Our findings apply to district-run CPS schools. Due to limitations of data availability, we exclude charter schools, which educated 15 percent of CPS students in the 2019-20 school year.

During this period, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) was the third largest district in the United States. In the 2019-20 school year, it served 300,000 students across 559 non-charter schools. Among these students, 47 percent were Latinx, 34 percent were Black, 13 percent were white, 5 percent were Asian, and 3 percent identified in another racial category. But how racially/ethnically diverse are the principals serving this diverse group of students?

We first show the racial/ethnic and gender characteristics of CPS principals in 2014 and in 2020, as well as a comparison to other districts across the country (**shown in Figure 1**). The share of principals who are female has increased slightly in CPS over time, such that about two-thirds of principals in the 2019-2020 school year were female. Notably, this is a higher percentage of female principals than in other parts of the U.S.: nationally, 54 percent of principals are female and 61 percent in other urban areas, compared to 69 percent of CPS principals (**See Panel A of Figure 1**).

As **Panel B of Figure 1** shows, elementary schools in CPS were much more likely to have a female principal than CPS high schools. Nearly three in four elementary schools had a female principal in 2020, compared to 44

percent of high schools. That elementary school principals were more likely to be female than high school principals reflects the teacher workforce in CPS: 84 percent of elementary school teachers were female, compared to 59 percent of high school teachers.

**Panel C of Figure 1** provides information on principal racial/ethnic composition. In 2019-20, 44 percent of CPS principals were Black, 35 percent were white, and 17 percent were Latinx. The principal workforce nationally, and in other urban areas, had higher percentages of white principals (78 percent and 61 percent, respectively) and lower percentages of Black principals (11 percent and 20 percent, respectively) than did CPS. The racial/ethnic compositions of CPS elementary school principals and CPS high school principals were very similar (**Panel D of Figure 1**).

How do CPS principal demographics compare to other educator and student populations in the district? **Figure 2** shows the racial/ethnic composition of CPS principals, new principals (principals in the first two years at their school), assistant principals (APs), teachers, and students in the 2019-20 school year.

Newly-hired principals in their first or second year in their current position were more likely to be Black than

the general principal population — 55 percent of new principals were Black compared to 44 percent of all CPS principals. Newly-hired principals were also much more likely to be Black than CPS assistant principals (APs) or teachers (36 percent and 20 percent, respectively), who make up the pipeline to one day become principals.

**Figure 2** also shows that Latinx principals were underrepresented compared to CPS' student population. In 2019-20, 47 percent of CPS students were Latinx, compared to only 17 percent of CPS principals. The underrepresentation of Latinx individuals was present throughout the educator pipeline. Only about one in five CPS teachers, APs, and new principals identified as Latinx, compared to about one in two CPS students.

Conversely, white principals, APs, and teachers were overrepresented compared to CPS' student population. We see in **Figure 2** that 13 percent of CPS students were white in the 2019-20 school year compared to 51 percent of teachers, 34 percent of APs, and 35 percent of principals. Black principals were overrepresented compared to CPS' student population, but the share of Black APs matched the student population more closely, while Black teachers were underrepresented.

In **Figure 3**, we see that while about three-fourths of

Black and white CPS students had a same-race principal in the 2019-20 school year, only one in three Latinx students attended a school with a Latinx principal. Asian and multiracial students, who together make up six percent of the district, were very unlikely to have a principal who shared their racial/ethnic identity. None of the 0.5 percent of CPS students who identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander had a principal who shared their racial/ethnic identity.

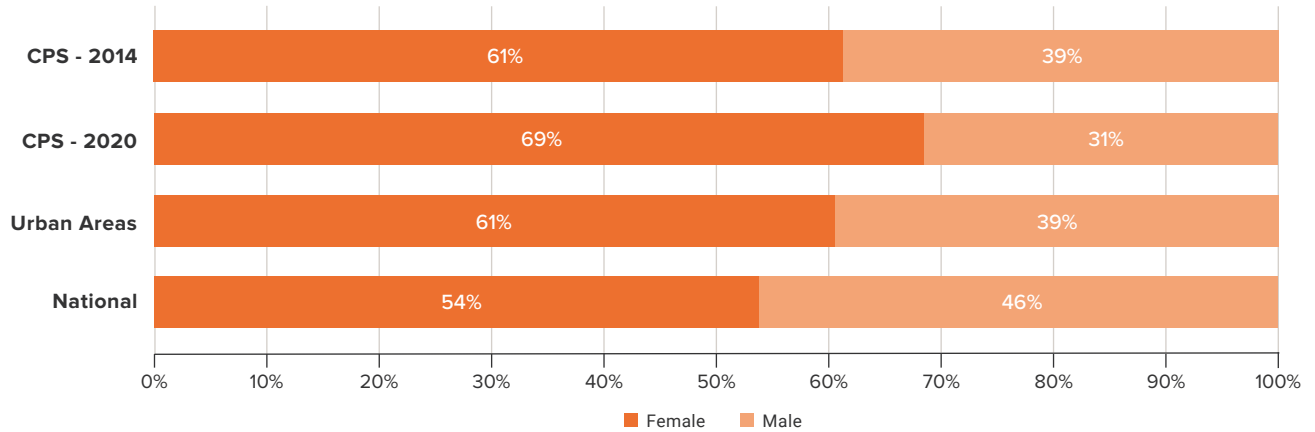
Ultimately, this evidence shows that there is a mismatch between student race/ethnicity and principal race/ethnicity in the district for Latinx students. The issue of racial/ethnic representation in the principal position can impact student success. Recent research finds that having a same-race principal improves student math achievement and increases the percentage of same-race teachers in a school.<sup>7</sup> This research builds on a larger body of work showing the positive impact of students having at least one teacher of their same race/ethnicity.<sup>8</sup> We do note, however, that it is neither possible nor necessarily desirable to achieve a total match between principal and student race/ethnicity. The only way this could happen would require schools to be completely segregated by race/ethnicity.

<sup>7</sup> Bartanen & Grissom (2021)

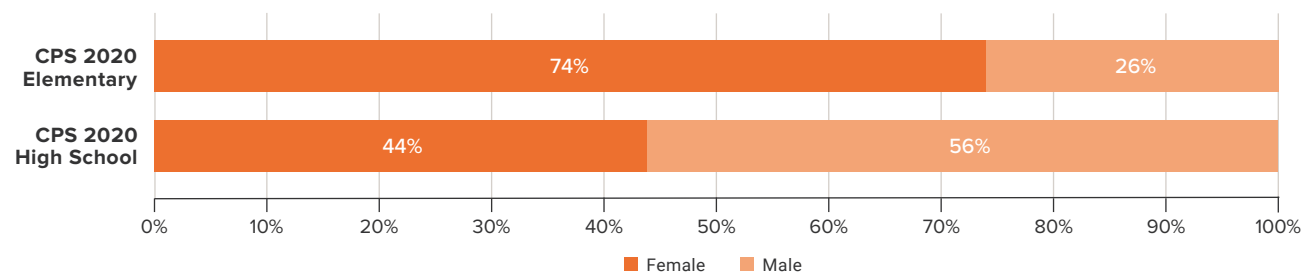
<sup>8</sup> Dee (2004); Egalite, Kisada, Winters (2015); Gershenson, Hart, Hyman, Lindsay, & Papageorge (2022)

**FIGURE 1 | CPS principals more likely to be Black, female than principals nationwide**  
*Distribution of principal demographics in CPS over time, in urban areas, and in the US*

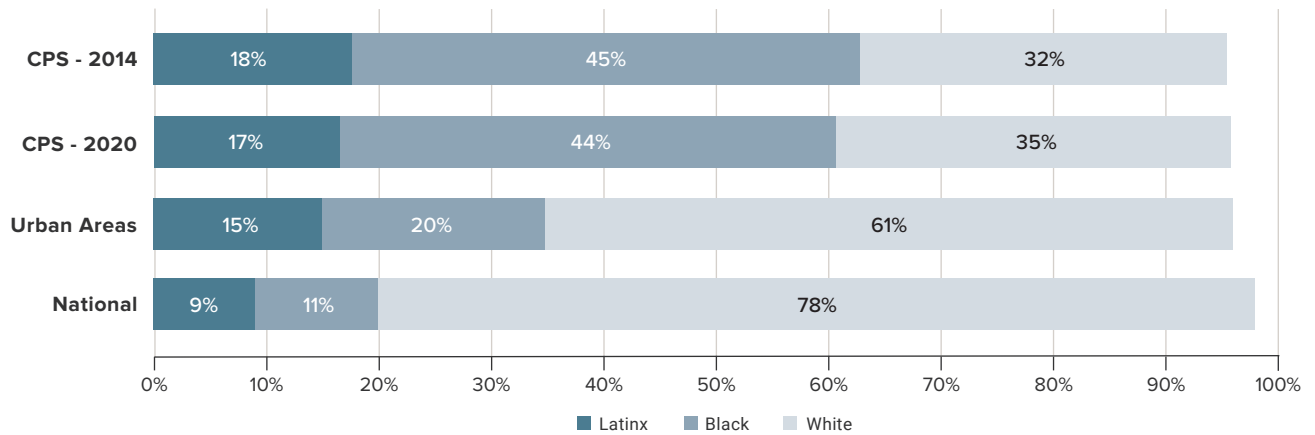
**PANEL A. Principal Gender**



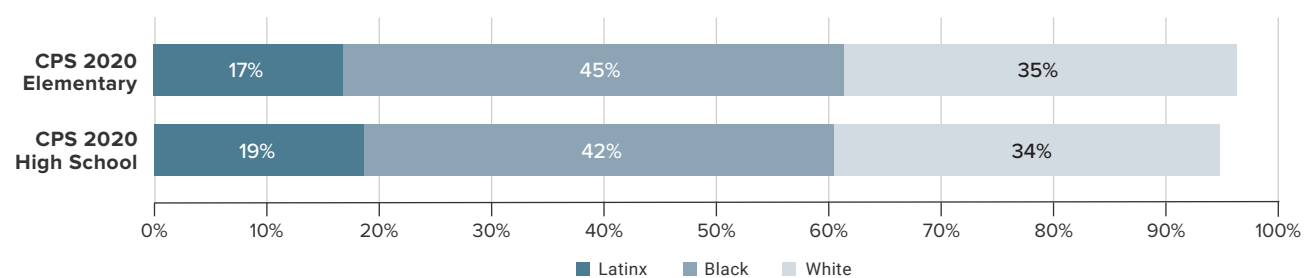
**PANEL B. Principal Gender by School Level**



**PANEL C. Principal Race/Ethnicity**

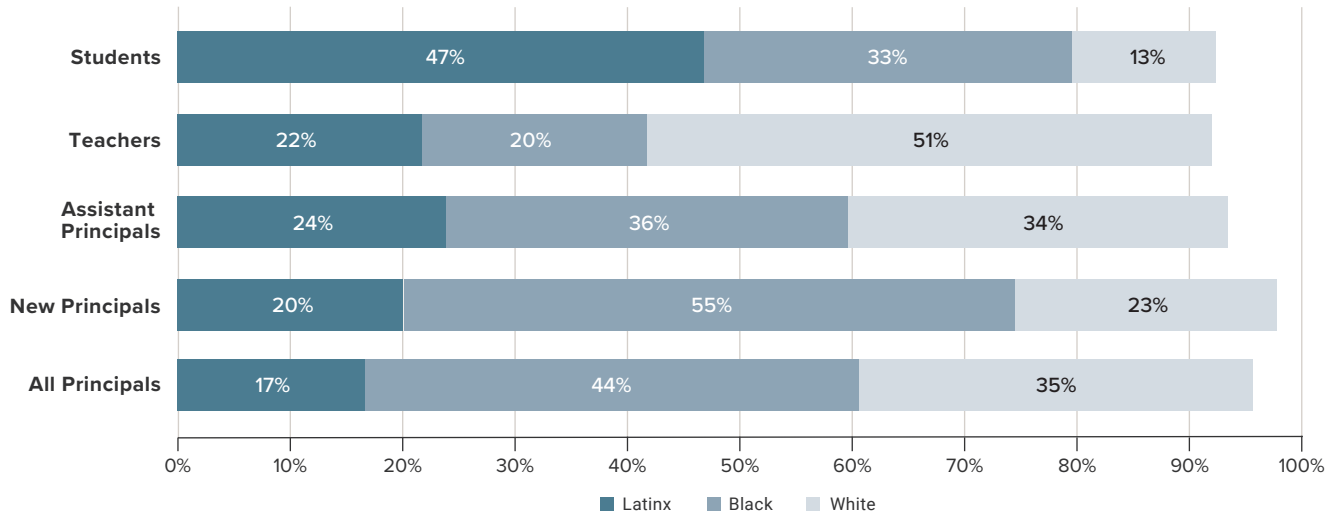


**PANEL D. Principal Race/Ethnicity by School Level**



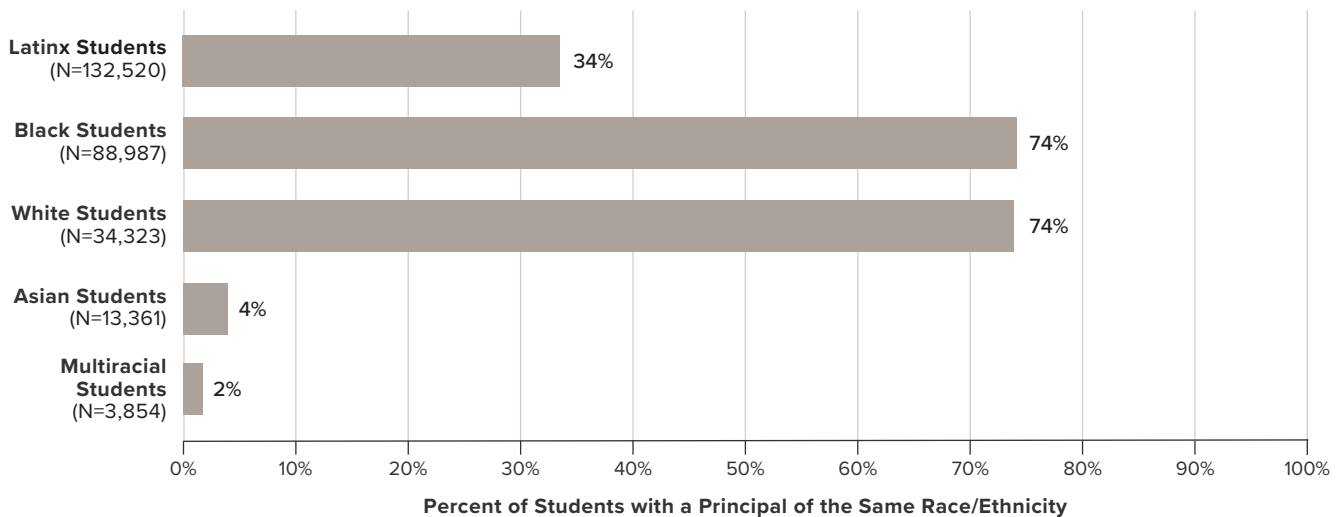
**Note:** CPS data excludes principals in schools that do not report personnel data (i.e., charter schools). CPS data does not exclude interim principals. National and urban data from the 2017-18 school year (the most recent year reported) obtained from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2020a).

**FIGURE 2 |** Latinx principals underrepresented relative to the CPS student population  
*Racial/Ethnic Composition of CPS Populations, 2019-20*



**Note:** Excludes students and educators in schools that do not report personnel data (i.e., charter schools). “New principals” are principals in their first or second year as principal at their current school. “All principals” includes new principals: the “all principals” and “new principals” categories are not mutually exclusive. Interim principals are not excluded from the “new principals” or “all principals” categories.

**FIGURE 3 |** Three of every 4 Black and White CPS students have a principal of the same race/ethnicity  
*Percent of CPS students with principal that shares their racial/ethnic identity, 2019-20*



**Note:** Excludes students in schools where principal race/ethnicity was unavailable, such as schools that do not report personnel data (i.e., charter schools), schools with no principal as of the 20th school day, and schools where principal race/ethnicity is not reported. Students whose race was unavailable were excluded. Students in schools with interim principals were not excluded. 906 students in district-run schools identified as “American Indian/Alaskan Native” and 563 identified as “Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander”. They are not included in the figure because no student in these groups had a principal whose racial/ethnic identity matched their own in the 2019-20 school year.



## RESEARCH QUESTION 2

# What are Common Pathways into the Principalship?

## &gt; KEY FINDINGS

- Newly-hired CPS principals are **increasingly likely to come from an assistant principal position** as opposed to from another CPS principal position.
- About 1 in 4 newly-hired principals were **hired from within the school community**.
- Schools often **hire principals who have worked at similar schools** in terms of student demographics and school performance ratings.

In this section of the brief, we document principals' experiences in terms of their positions and the types of schools they previously worked in prior to entering a new CPS school. We consider "newly-hired principals" to be principals in their first year as a principal in a school. This could include principals who are new to their current school but have previous principal experience, or principals who have experience at their current school in another role but have just been promoted to the principal role.

In CPS, aspiring principals must go through a district-run principal eligibility process, in which they are interviewed, tested on relevant skills, and required to submit evidence of relevant qualifications.<sup>9</sup> Principal hiring is decentralized to schools rather than done by the central office, although schools are limited to the candidates who have been approved by the district as eligible. Most principal contracts are governed by Local School Councils (LSCs), which are school-based elected bodies of parents, educators, and community members. Ultimately, LSCs are responsible for approving school improvement plans and budgets, assisting with principal evaluation, and selecting and hiring principals.<sup>10</sup> (For more details about principal hiring, see **Figure 4**).

## Previous Position

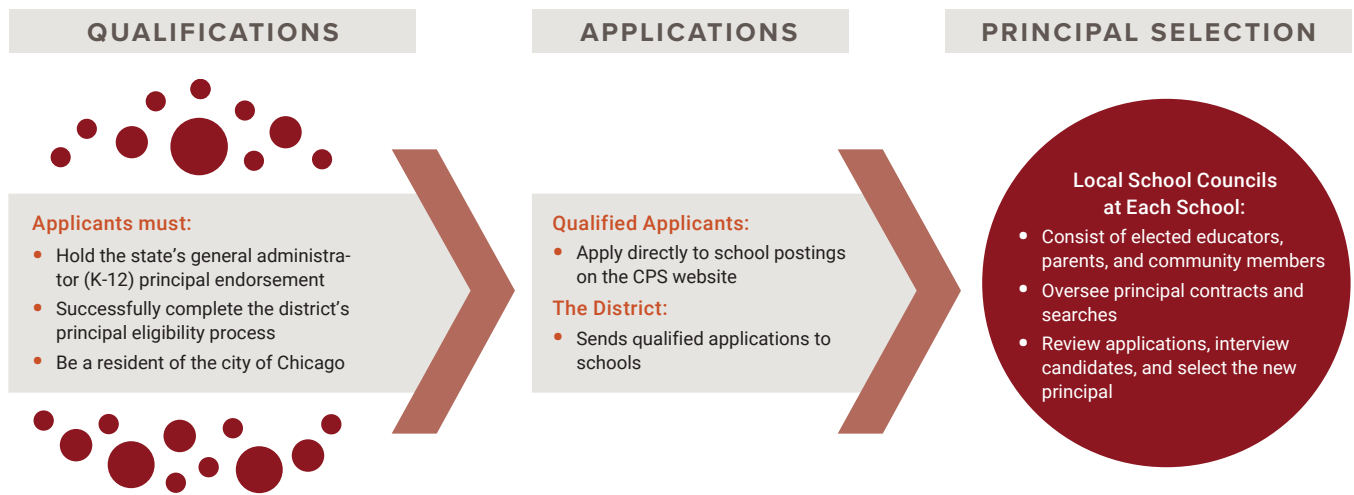
**Role Prior to the First Year in a Principalship.** About half of newly-hired principals were employed as APs in CPS district-run schools the year immediately prior to being hired to the principalship. **Figure 5** shows how the pathway into the principalship in CPS has shifted in a relatively short period. Over time, the trend of principals entering the role from AP positions grew steadily from 39 percent in 2013-14 to 69 percent in 2019-20. Conversely, the share of newly-hired principals coming from a principal role in another CPS school dropped steadily from 33 percent in 2013-14 to 4 percent in 2019-20.

**Hiring Internally from within a School.** About one of every four newly-hired principals moved up in rank from an AP or resident principal role to become principal within the same school. As shown in **Figure 6**, between 2013-14 and 2018-19, the rate of internal hiring increased by 20 percentage points, making up 35 percent of newly-hired principals in 2018-19, although there was a dip in the 2019-20 school year. This upward trend, as well as the increase in APs who are becoming principals at their same school, is consistent with district efforts around intentional succession planning in anticipation of school leaders exiting.

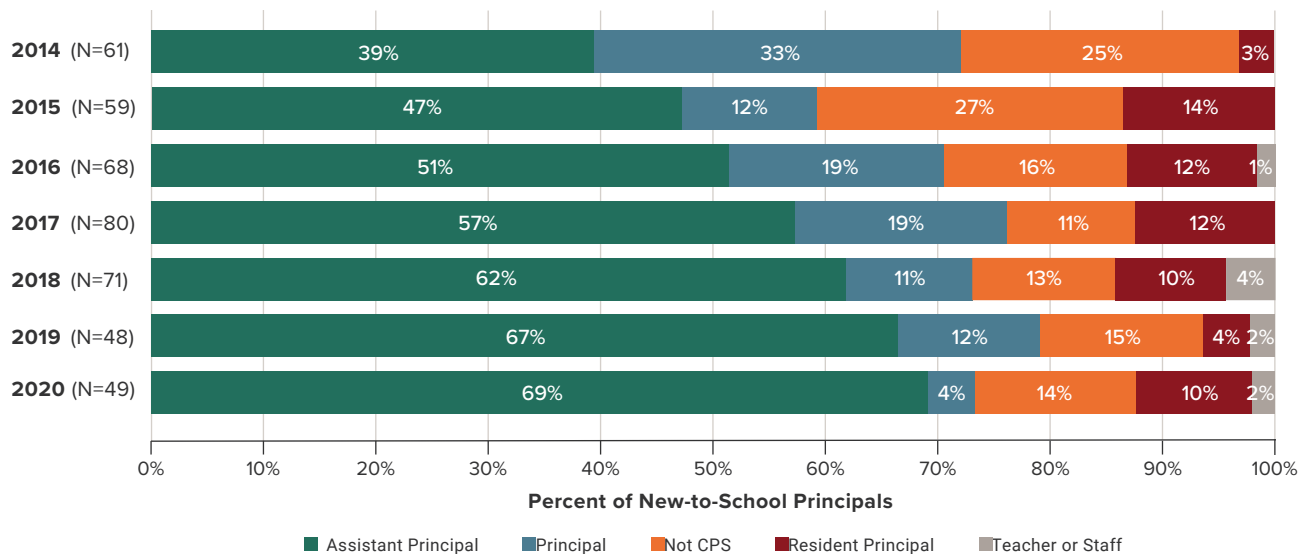
<sup>9</sup> Chicago Public Schools (n.d.-b)

<sup>10</sup> Chicago Public Schools (n.d.-a)

**FIGURE 4 | The Principal Hiring Process in CPS**

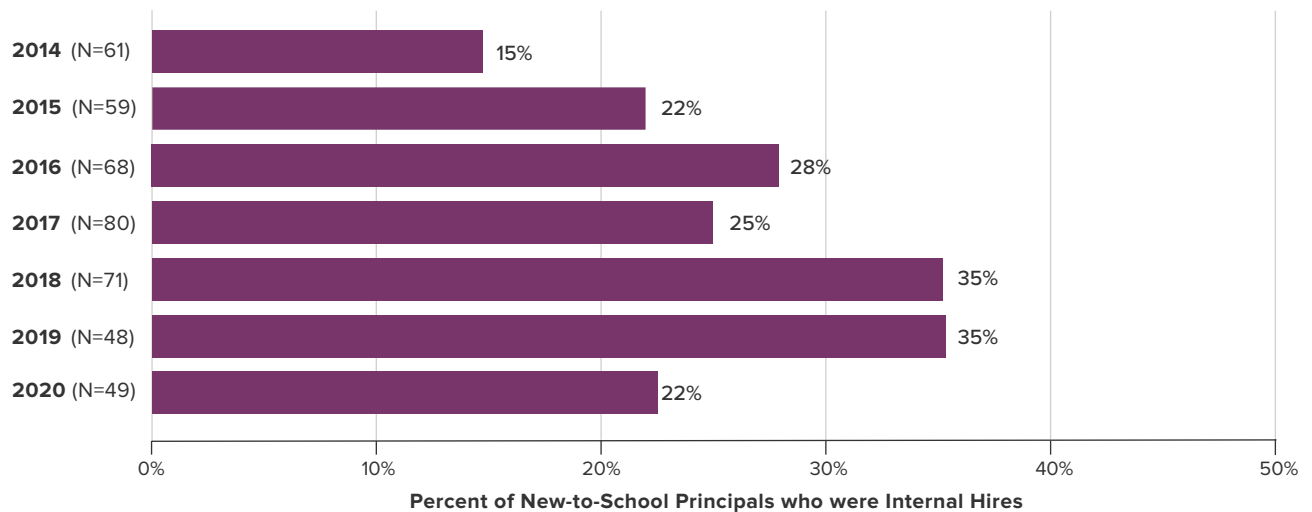


**FIGURE 5 | Over time, newly-hired principals are more likely to come from AP positions**  
*Newly-hired principal previous position, 2014-20*



**Note:** Excludes newly-hired principals in schools that do not report personnel data (i.e., charter schools). Excludes interim principals who are not ultimately hired to the position. “Not in District-Run CPS” could include employees of CPS charter schools or CPS central office, since these positions are not covered by personnel data.

**FIGURE 6 | Newly-hired principals are increasingly likely to be hired from within the school**  
Percent of newly-hired principals who were internal hires, 2014-2020



**Note:** Excludes schools that do not report personnel data (i.e., charter schools). Excludes interim principals who are not ultimately hired to the position. An internal hire is when a principal is chosen to lead a school where they were already employed. 89% of internal hires come from the Assistant Principal position, and 11% come from the resident principal position. Personnel information is drawn from the fall. Thus all data predate the COVID-19 pandemic, since data from the 2019-20 school year comes from fall of 2019.

## Chicago Leadership Collaborative (CLC)

CPS launched the Chicago Leadership Collaborative (CLC) in 2011 to address principal turnover rates across the district. The program's aim is to entice highly-qualified educators into leadership roles in Chicago schools by creating an accelerated pipeline that transitions leaders through three training key phases:

1. Enroll in a graduate program, either local to Chicago or in partnership with a national graduate principal preparation program, and receive training specializing in urban schooling and in alignment with the State of Illinois Principal Standards;
2. Serve as a school leader through a year-long residency in a CPS school under a high-performing principal;
3. Matriculate into a principalship in CPS, with mentoring support from CLC in the first 1-2 years following program completion.

CPS awards contracts to principal preparation programs and offers residents \$80,000 each year, or their previous salary, whichever is greater. Candidates cover their own costs for tuition and fees in their preparation program.

Between the school years 2013-14 and 2019-20, we find that:

- In 2019-20, 23 percent of CPS principals had been trained by a CLC program.
- Most CLC participants (61 percent) do not go straight into a principal role immediately following their residency. The average time between the residency and entering the principalship is 2.7 years for CLC participants who do become principals.
- First-year CLC principals are **more likely** to be **female, Black, younger**, and have **less previous teaching experience** compared to other principals in CPS.

## Previous School

Across all newly-hired principals, the majority are hired at or placed into schools with similar student demographics and similar school performance levels as the school where they previously worked.<sup>11</sup>

**Panel A of Figure 7** shows that the majority of newly-hired principals served at schools whose student body racial composition category matched the category of the school where they previously worked. We see that 76 percent of newly-hired principals leading schools with racially mixed student bodies had previously worked at a school with racially mixed student bodies, compared to 73 percent of newly-hired principals at predominantly Black schools, 63 percent at predominantly Latinx schools, and 42 percent at Black and Latinx schools.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, it is very typical for newly-hired principals to work in schools whose student body has a similar

socio-economic composition as their previous school (**see Panel B of Figure 7**). **Panel C of Figure 7** shows that newly-hired principals at schools with strong accountability ratings tended to come from schools with high accountability ratings,<sup>13</sup> although this pattern did not hold for schools with lower accountability scores.

Some of this trend of principals from similar schools being hired is due to internal hiring, but even schools that did not hire their own AP as principal were likely to hire a principal who previously worked in a similar school.

It is important to note that there could be many explanations for this relationship. When applying to leadership positions, candidates may prefer jobs at schools that are similar to the schools where they have worked in the past. On the other hand, schools hiring principals may be looking for candidates with experiences at schools similar to theirs. This is an area we will continue to explore in further research.

**11** In these sections, we categorize schools based on student racial/ethnic and socioeconomic conditions, and based on accountability ratings. Schools in the same category might not be totally similar, and schools in different categories might not be totally dissimilar. However, we consider category-match between schools to be a useful strategy for determining if a principal's current and prior school are similar on a given dimension.

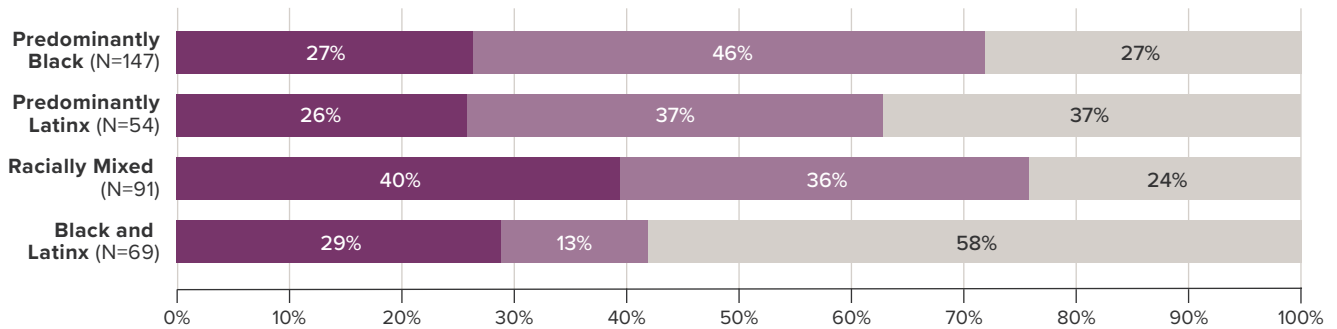
**12** Predominantly Black schools are schools in which at least 85 percent of the student body identifies as Black, Predominantly Latinx schools are schools in which at least 85 percent of the student body identifies as Latinx, Black and Latinx schools are schools in which Black and Latinx students

combined make up 85 percent or more of the student body, and Racially Mixed schools are schools in which Black and Latinx students combined make up less than 85 percent of the student body

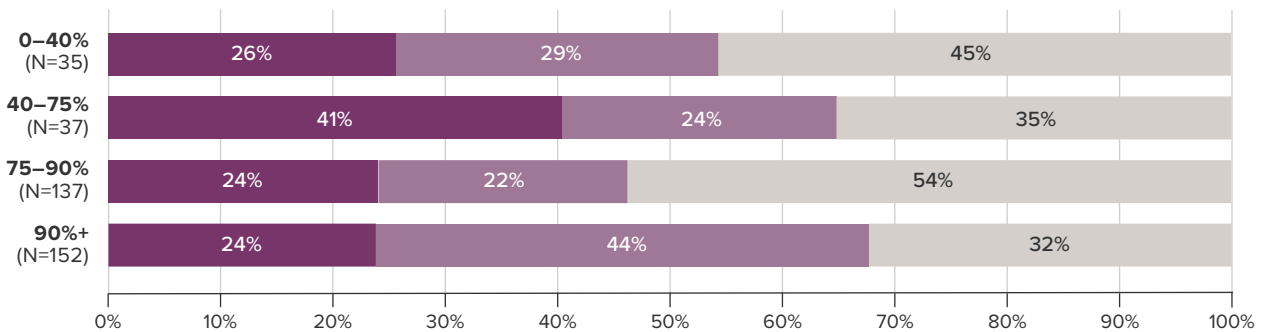
**13** We use accountability ratings pulled from the School Quality Rating Policy (SQR). CPS schools were assigned SQR ratings from 2014-15 to 2019-20; the system is no longer in use. SQR ratings are not necessarily perfect measures of school quality, but they provide public information about schools that principal applicants and principal hiring decision makers might have cared about, and so we believe it to be a relevant school dimension to examine.

**FIGURE 7 | Newly-hired principals were very likely to lead schools that are similar to the schools where they worked previously**  
*Percent of newly-hired principals leading schools in the same category as their prior school*

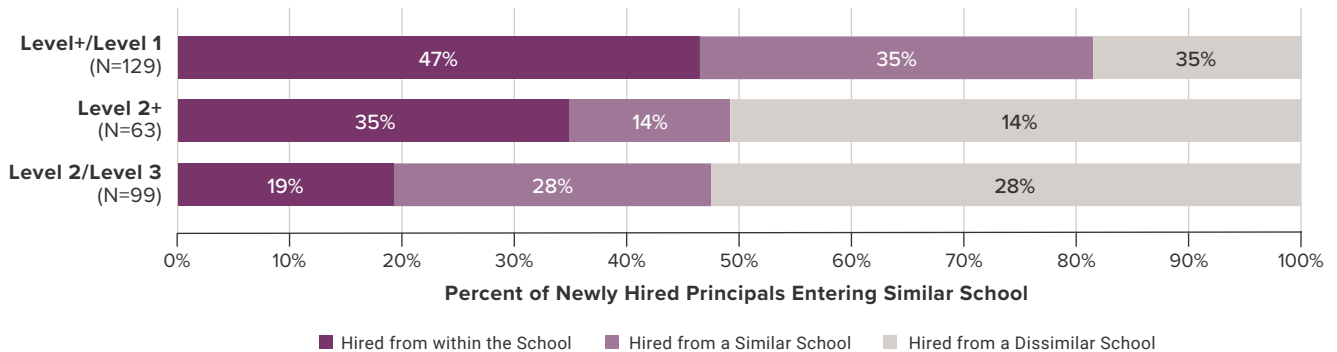
**PANEL A. Student body racial composition category match for newly-hired principals**



**PANEL B. Student body free and reduced-price lunch category match for newly-hired principals**



**PANEL C. School accountability rating match for newly-hired principals**



**Note:** The sample includes 361 newly-hired principals from the 2013-14 through the 2019-20 school years. The sample excludes 74 newly-hired principals from that time period because their position in the prior year was not in a district-run CPS school, and 1 newly-hired principal was excluded because their position in the prior year was at a school with missing information.

School match is determined by whether the category of the newly-hired principal’s school in the first year of their position matches the category of the school the individual was employed at in the prior school year. Schools that do not report personnel data (i.e. charter schools) are excluded. Interim principals who are not ultimately hired to the position are also excluded. An internal hire is when a principal is chosen to lead a school where they were already employed (typically as the assistant principal).

For information on the student body racial composition categories used in Panel A, see footnote 11.

In Panel C, we use SQRP ratings from two schools. First, the school that the new principal joined. For this school, we characterize school performance prior to the new principal joining. Second, the school where that same principal previously worked. For the previous school, we characterize school performance from the last year the principal worked there. Thus the SQRP rating for a principal’s current and prior school are both drawn from the SQRP ratings reported in the year the principal started their new position, since SQRP ratings are based on data pulled from the prior school year. Panel C’s sample includes 291 newly-hired principals from the 2014-15 through the 2019-20 school years. The 2013-14 cohort of newly-hired principals are excluded because SQRP ratings were not reported until the 2014-15 school year. An additional 24 sample principals from the 2014-15 through the 2019-20 school years are excluded from Panel C because their prior school or their current school did not have SQRP data in the relevant year.

## RESEARCH QUESTION 3

# How Long Do New Principals Stay in Their Position?

## > KEY FINDINGS

- In a typical year, **10 to 16 percent of CPS schools have a new principal**. This is a lower rate of turnover than schools nationwide (18 percent).
- **About half of newly-hired principals** from the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years were in the same position five years later.
- Newly-hired principals at elementary schools and racially mixed and predominantly Latinx schools were more likely to remain in their position five years later.
- Principals who were **hired from an AP position** were **more likely to remain** in their post five years later.

Hiring is an important part of the principal pipeline, but not the end of the story. Nationally, about 20 percent of principals leave their school each year.<sup>14</sup> This presents a challenge for educators and students, because when a principal leaves a school, student achievement tends to dip and teachers are more likely to leave the school as well.<sup>15,16</sup> Low-achieving schools, high-poverty schools, urban schools and schools with higher percentages of students of color are more likely to experience principal turnover.<sup>17</sup>

Once a new principal joins a CPS school, how long do they stay in their school? In a given year, between 10 and 16 percent of CPS schools transition to a new principal (as shown in **Figure 8**). In the most recent two years of the data, about 1 of every 10 CPS schools had a new principal, the lowest numbers in recent years.<sup>18</sup> This CPS turnover rate is lower than the national average of 18 percent in

the 2016-17 school year, the most recent year for which data is available.<sup>19</sup>

In order to understand more about stability in the principalship, we follow all 120 principals who were newly-hired to lead schools in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years. In **Figure 9**, we show the position of newly-hired CPS principals in the years after they were hired. In the first year after their hiring, 93 percent of newly-hired principals were still principals at the school that hired them, and another 3 percent were principals at a different CPS school. By the fifth year after their hiring, 48 percent of principals were still serving as the principal of the school that hired them, and 42 percent had left CPS district-run schools. This is a relatively high retention rate compared to what prior studies have found: A study of newly-hired Texas principals from 1996 through 2008 found that less than thirty percent remained in their position four years after they were initially hired.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2020b)

<sup>15</sup> Bartanen, Grissom, & Rogers (2019); Miller (2013); Winters, Kisida, & Cho (2022)

<sup>16</sup> However, one study suggests that when a less effective principal leaves a school, the school experiences fewer negative effects (Bartanen, Grissom, & Rogers 2019).

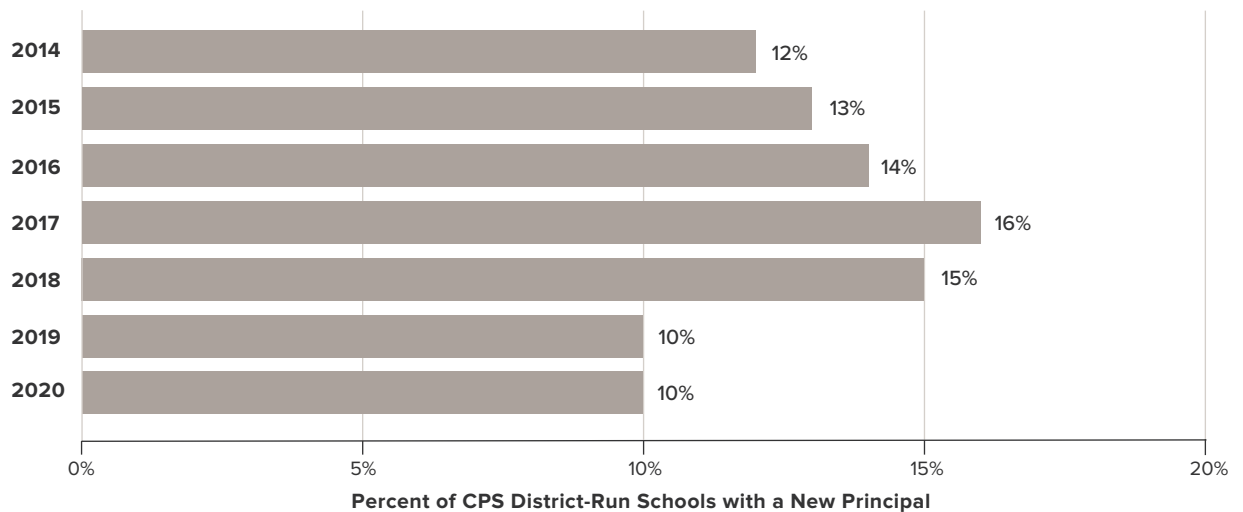
<sup>17</sup> Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Guarino, Ghosh-Dastida, & Brown (2006); Grissom, Bartanen & Mitani (2019); U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2020b)

<sup>18</sup> We are unable to distinguish if a given principal voluntarily left their school, or if their governing body chose not to renew their principal contract. Unless a principal leaves their position to join another district-run CPS school, we are unable to distinguish the path they take after leaving their school. These paths might vary widely, and could include retirement, promotion to central office, a change of district or movement to charter schools within the district, or even leaving education entirely.

<sup>19</sup> National Center for Education Statistics (2020b)

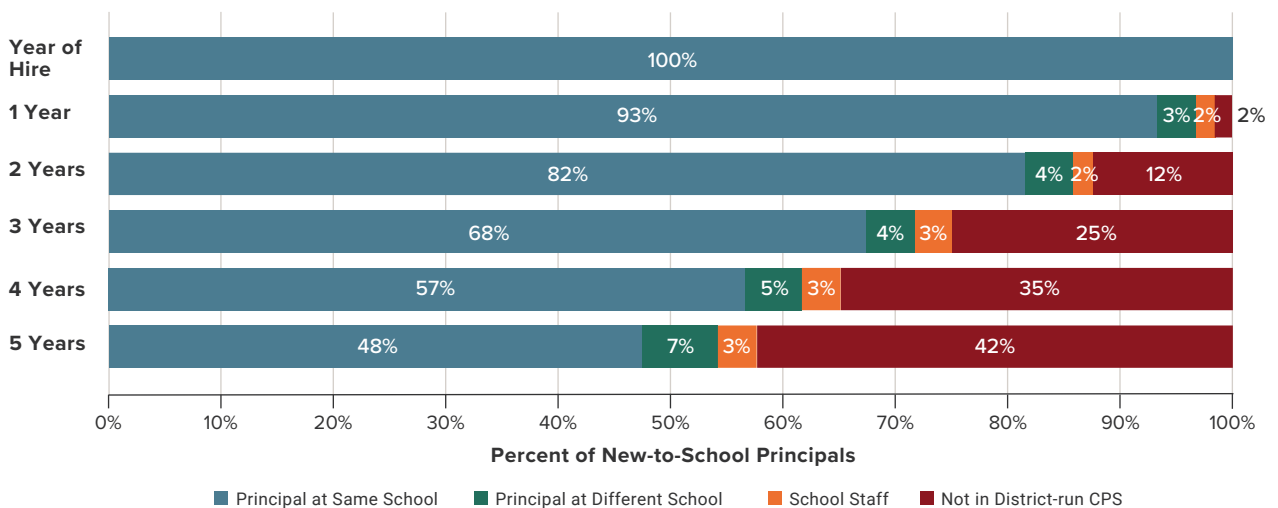
<sup>20</sup> Fuller & Young (2009)

**FIGURE 8 | Typically, at least 1 of every 10 CPS schools had a new principal annually**  
*Percent of schools with a new principal, 2014-2020*



**Note:** Excludes schools that do not report personnel data (i.e., charter schools). Excludes interim principals who are not ultimately hired to the position. An internal hire is when a principal is chosen to lead a school where they were already employed. 89% of internal hires come from the Assistant Principal position, and 11% come from the resident principal position. Personnel information is drawn from the fall. Thus all data predate the COVID-19 pandemic, since data from the 2019-20 school year comes from fall of 2019.

**FIGURE 9 | Over half of newly-hired principals principals did not hold the same principal position five years later**  
*Five-year trajectories of newly-hired principals hired in 2013-14 and 2014-15*



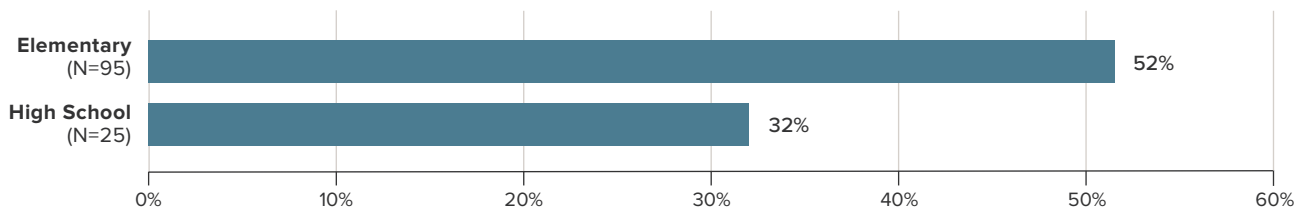
**Note:** This figure includes information about the 2013-14 and 2014-15 cohorts of the 120 newly-hired principals in district-run CPS schools. Excludes schools that do not report personnel data (i.e. charter schools). Excludes interim principals who are not ultimately hired to the position. "Not in District-Run CPS" could include individuals who became employees of CPS charter schools or CPS central office, since these positions are not covered by personnel data.

Some schools are more likely to experience a principal transition than others. In **Figure 10**, we show that:

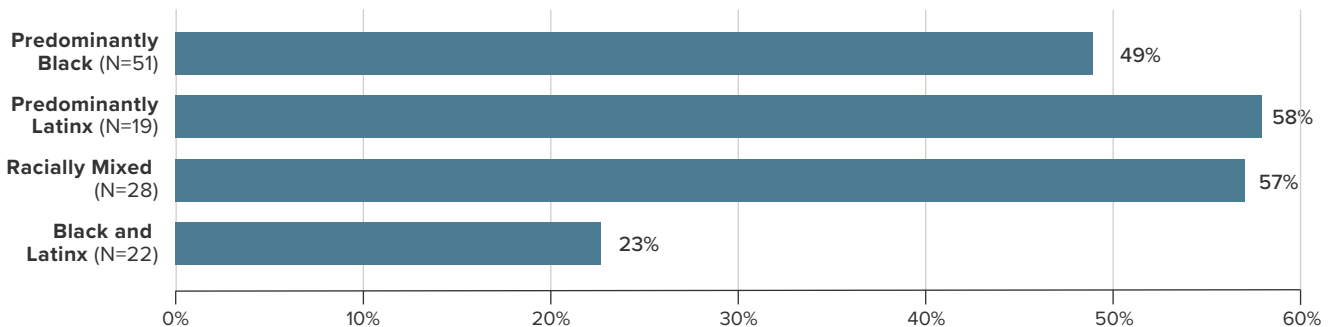
- Newly-hired elementary school principals were more likely to be in the same principal position five years later (52 percent of newly-hired principals) compared to high school principals (32 percent) (**Panel A**);
- Newly-hired principals at Predominantly Latinx and Racially Mixed schools were more likely to be in the same principal position five years later (58 percent and 57 percent, respectively) than newly-hired principals in Predominantly Black and in Black and Latinx schools (49 percent and 23 percent, respectively)<sup>21</sup> (**Panel B**); and
- 45 percent of newly-hired principals at schools with the highest levels of student poverty remained in their position five years later, compared to 50 to 54 percent of principals at other schools. (**Panel C**)

**FIGURE 10 | A newly-hired principal’s likelihood of remaining in their position five years later differed by school category**

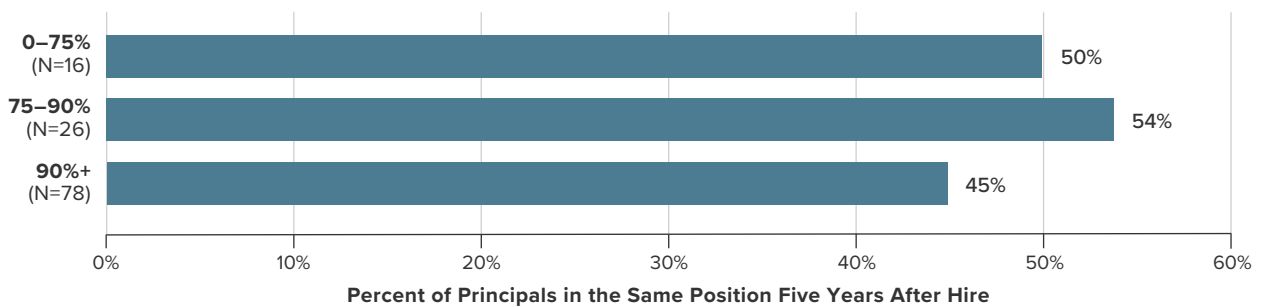
**PANEL A. Percent of principals in same position five years after hire by school level**



**PANEL B. Percent of principals in the same position five years after hire by student body racial composition category**



**PANEL C. Percent of principals in same position five years after hire by free/reduced-price lunch category**



**Note:** Sample includes the 120 newly-hired principals in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years. Excludes interim principals who are not ultimately hired to the position. School characteristics are determined based on the newly-hired principal’s first year in their position. Schools that do not report personnel data (i.e. charter schools) are excluded. For information on the student body racial composition categories used in Panel B, see footnote 11. In Panel C, Schools with 0-40% & 40-75% FRPL eligible student bodies are combined into one category due to low sample size.

<sup>21</sup> In these sections, we categorize schools based on student racial/ethnic and socioeconomic conditions, and based on accountability ratings. Schools in the same category might not be totally similar, and schools in

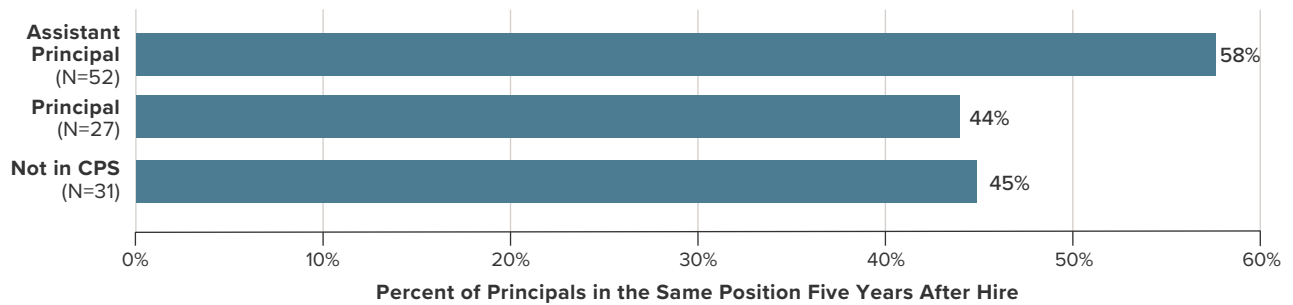
different categories might not be totally dissimilar. However, we consider category-match between schools to be a useful strategy for determining if a principal’s current and prior school are similar on a given dimension.



Figure 11 shows differences in the tenure of newly-hired principals based on the new hire’s previous position. Over half of new CPS principals in 2013-14 and 2014-15 who came from the AP position remained as a principal in their school five years later (58 percent), compared to 44 percent

of principals who came from a different CPS principal position and 45 percent of principals who were not employed at a district-run CPS school prior to being hired. This finding suggests that hiring from the AP pipeline might be associated with greater stability in the CPS principalship.

**FIGURE 11 | Assistant Principals tend to stay in their schools longer than other newly-hired principals**  
*Percent of newly-hired principals in the same position five years after hire by job prior to the principalship*



**Note:** Sample includes the 110 newly-hired principals in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 school years. Excludes interim principals who are not ultimately hired to the position. The job prior to the principalship is based on the year prior to the newly-hired principal’s first year in the position. The “Assistant Principal” and “Principal” categories refer to individuals who held these positions within district-run CPS schools in the year prior to assuming their new principalship. Schools that do not report personnel data (i.e. charter schools) are excluded. Principals who were resident principals prior to the principalship are excluded due to low numbers.

# Discussion

In this brief, we examine principal diversity, pathways to the principalship, and principal transitions in Chicago Public Schools. Our findings raise important considerations for policy and practice in Chicago and other diverse urban districts.

## Identifying Potential Leaders from the Latinx Community

Latinx students are the largest racial/ethnic group in Chicago Public Schools, making up 47 percent of CPS students, but only 17 percent of principals identify as Latinx. This means that Latinx students are much less likely to have a principal who shares their racial/ethnic identity compared to white and Black CPS students. Compared to the CPS student population, **the Latinx community is underrepresented at every step of the school leadership pipeline – from teachers to principals.**

Having a school principal who looks like you can provide positive leadership role models for both students and teachers. If all students had a principal of their same race/ethnicity, that would lead to school segregation, which is not necessarily a desirable outcome. However, finding ways to identify and support high-quality prospective Latinx leaders through the pipeline to the principalship would likely promote the success of Latinx students in the district. CPS has made efforts in this direction with their Great Expectations Mentoring program, a fellowship for Latinx educational leaders, as well as African American male leaders.

## Ensuring Assistant Principals Have a Wide Range of Experiences

**The assistant principal position in CPS has increasingly become the launching pad to the principalship.** In the 2019-20 school year, 69 percent of newly-hired principals came directly from a CPS assistant principal position, and newly-hired principals who come directly from an assistant principal role tend to stay in their positions longer.

Principals we interviewed even pointed to their previous leadership experiences, including the APship and residencies or internships, as the best training they received.

Since the assistant principal role is an important pathway for newly-hired principals, it is important that assistant principals receive a broad range of developmental experiences to ensure that they are best prepared to lead their own school successfully from day 1.

## Understanding What Schools are Looking for in New Principals

In CPS, it is quite typical for a new principal to enter a school that is similar to schools they worked in the past – in terms of student population and performance levels. It is unclear if these patterns are driven by applicant preferences to work in similar schools, or schools looking to hire candidates who know how to work in schools like theirs.

School leadership transitions typically hurt school performance and result in increased teacher attrition in the short terms. **Having previous experience in similar schools may provide new principals with insights and strategies to lead their school** – it could be that experiences in similar schools mitigate the negative effects of principal turnover. This area is one we are investigating currently.

## Thinking Hard About School Leadership Transitions

**Schools that serve high-poverty students tend to have the highest principal attrition rates.** Many of these schools are also experiencing difficulties with funding, teacher vacancies, and student enrollment, which likely pose challenges for school leaders. Retaining effective principals across the board, and especially at the types of schools more likely to experience turnover, is an important strategy for ensuring a stable and productive learning environment for students. When newly-hired principals enter challenging settings, such as schools that have

already had a lot of transition or schools in neighborhoods that have experienced population loss and disinvestment, districts will need to provide these principals with additional support so that they feel confident and successful.

Some principal turnover is to be expected due to life

transitions or promotions. In cases like these, intentional district- and school-level planning to identify high-quality principals who would be good candidates to lead the school is critical, as is supporting these new principals to best manage the transition when they enter the building.

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**UChicago Consortium on Chicago School Research** conducts research of high technical quality that informs and assesses policy and practice in the Chicago Public Schools, with the goal of supporting stronger and more equitable educational outcomes for students. We seek to expand communication among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, families, and communities as we support the search for solutions to the challenge of transforming schools. We encourage the use of research in policy action and practice but do not advocate for particular policies or programs. Rather, we help to build capacity for systemic school improvement by identifying what matters most for student success, creating critical indicators to chart progress, and conducting theory-driven evaluation to identify how programs and policies are working.

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