

# Leadership Survey Results

## The Education Group

*What is appealing about the head of school job?*

*What leads us to it and keeps us there? On the other hand, what are its perils?*

*What makes it a complex and sometimes controversial one?*

Thank you for participating in our Leadership Taskforce Survey. We hope you find the results as interesting as we did.

Of all respondents, with an average tenure in current positions of 5.3 years, here is a composite of positions held by you and your colleagues:

With few exceptions and some trepidation, most of the key administrators aspire to be heads of school. 58% of respondents came from ISACS' Midwestern states group. Next came responses from the South, closely followed by the West and Mid-Atlantic. Responses from the Northeast and Southwest were negligible.

Thanks to all those who participated in the survey, The Education Group has clear indicators of interest in regional workshops and a dozen or so specific areas of concentration identified.

Said one respondent: "I've already climbed in the saddle again, but looking at the list of topics below, I only wish that I had a resource like this."

And, "The preview topics still are of great interest even though I've been through the transition twice already and am gearing up for a third time."



The Education Group

[www.educationgroup.com](http://www.educationgroup.com)

# PROs to Becoming a Head of School

Creating a positive  
ethos...compatible to  
my own...now that's  
appealing.

★★★★★

Freedom to lead  
with a board engaged  
in professional  
development,  
collegiality, and  
research-based  
learning.

★★★★★

Try some new ideas.

★★★★★

On the edge of  
educational issues  
and reform.

★★★★★

Major opportunity  
to effect change.

★★★★★

Enjoyment of being  
in charge and  
being good at it.

★★★★★

Forces one to keep  
abreast of all  
situations, to keep  
improving one's  
personal outlook.

★★★★★

Great job.

*I love my current school and feel that I have made some significant, positive contributions. I would like to move on while I am at the 'top of my game.'*

— Survey respondent

One item, "Working with the board," while cited frequently as a negative under the *CON'S* heading, also had fairly frequent mention on the plus side, where current heads enjoyed and future heads anticipated deriving benefit from that special relationship.

Receiving the most significant number of mentions by far were three key aspects of the job:

1. **Working the big picture: scope and vision**
2. **Influence and impact**
3. **Career growth and challenge**

A bit further along the sliding scale of value, and about equal in importance, were two other draws,

4. **Financial rewards and benefits**
5. **Community, culture and values**

Far behind the pack, often conceptually lumped together, were the attractions of

6. **Independence and variety**

(which in this report are collected under "3. Career growth and challenge.")

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**SCOPE AND VISION** are potent attractions to becoming a head of school. Being able to take a long-range view, fulfilling the mission through decision-making and putting theory into practice are magnetic Big Picture features of the top school leader position. Some saw in this feature the chance to "coordinate and oversee an entire organization," and bring a school into the 21<sup>st</sup> century," by breaking through old outdated systems and ideas." Others found the overview and being in touch with all operational aspects appealing. Another, the "prospect of" assisting in fashioning opportunities for personal discoveries."

Positive nouns and verbs flowed throughout the narratives: *love of learning, opportunity, constructive teamwork, quality, and fun*. Also: *achieve, build, create, guide, contribute, implement, promote, enjoy, accomplish, shape, mold, and plan*.

You have to put in a lot of years to get to the final payoff – decent money.

★★★★★

Leaving a legacy.

★★★★★

Be a member of a vibrant education community of students and adults.

★★★★★

More authority on major community issues.

★★★★★

It's important to work with all the varied components of a school and mentor up and coming leaders.

Serving a broad band of constituencies as well as chances to be involved in public relations work, having more input on policy, or putting together a team of administrators were all pulls in a positive direction. Heads looked forward to the “enjoyment of the whole child, k-12, as opposed to one or two grades or disciplines.”

There were frequent references to the comprehensive nature of the position allowing a head to develop innovative approaches to teaching and learning through curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and environment. Other head initiatives suggested revisiting the mission, instituting a wellness program, and serving on other non-profit boards.

**INFLUENCE AND IMPACT** are powerful outcomes to being school head, as were their related opportunities to using total experiences and skills to shape a school's future:

- Making a difference by forming curricula that is exciting and enlightening.
- Opportunity to influence the lives of children – empower teachers – energize parents – develop programs – build enrollment.
- I have strong leadership skills, if leadership is defined as articulating a vision, coaching, and developing relationships.
- Having accountability with authority.

One enthusiastic respondent wrote about engaging in a building program that allows the school to envision a new purpose in education and raising money to pay teachers more and to allow them the chance to continue their education.

Another, the collaborating with “teachers, board members, and parents to create an environment where safe, serious and fun learning occurs day-to-day, and is not merely a catchy phrase.” And, “I am ready, I believe, to become a Head. I love being a leader and feel that I am good at it.”

**CAREER GROWTH CHALLENGE** is a key motivation for educators to become heads of school. Work that offers variety and career development advances seemed a logical and expected next step to many. Yet another freely admitted, “I never thought of it until others began to ask me to consider it. I think I'm ready in many ways.”

As you might expect, oft-repeated key words in this category centered on both personal and professional growth, and the opportunity to get involved in new areas--fund-raising, finance, advancement:

Opportunity	Advance to Keep Improving Creativity	
Expand My Skills	Challenge	Complexity
Problem-Solve	Stimulation	

Independence and variety are strong features of career development. Autonomy mixed with responsibility and working for oneself are attractive elements of the job. A potential head summed up the feeling

of many with: “Leadership opportunities provide the intellectual and creative challenge I desire.”

**FINANCIAL AND OTHER BENEFITS** offer heads increased compensation, financial security, enhanced benefits, housing, and professional status are all sought; so are the extra delights of working with wonderful colleagues, meeting new people. Benefits ranged from the mundane to the sublime, from the hard and practical to almost spiritual aspirations. These pairs of direct quotes illustrate:

Primo parking spot	vs.	Rewards worth the effort
Security	vs.	Status
Perks	vs.	Intangible growth of a human being

**COMMUNITY CULTURE AND VALUES** are strong collegial motivations for aspiring and current heads of school. Leaders seek to contribute to the tone of school and make policy that impacts overall school climate. Many anticipated better opportunities to support teachers and their growth, watch children develop, and organize teams to get work done cooperatively.

Powerful values about “community” emerged from the survey. Heads spoke of building and rebuilding cohesive communities, focusing on character development and service. Another respondent mentioned “moving forward with an agenda of diversity and pluralism. I want to address the challenges and opportunities that the future holds.”

Beyond their own immediate schools, heads saw broader new horizons: to contribute to regional and/or national associations, to serve a wider school community, and to partner with board members, parents, students and the community at large. They sought to establish peer relations with respected, knowledgeable colleagues.

Heads clearly feel the excitement of community building. They desire the opportunity to serve students and faculty: “Exercise what I feel, after 15 years of independent school work, would create the best working environment for independent school teachers.” “I feel that I should ‘give back’ to the profession by becoming a head, by raising the living standard and quality of life of the faculty and staff,” stated another. “Working around kids and teachers is the best.”