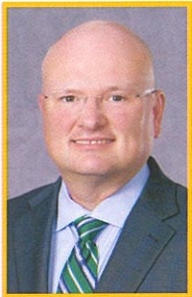


## The Numbers Don't Lie



By Dr. Eric C. Eshbach,  
PA Principals  
Association  
Executive  
Director

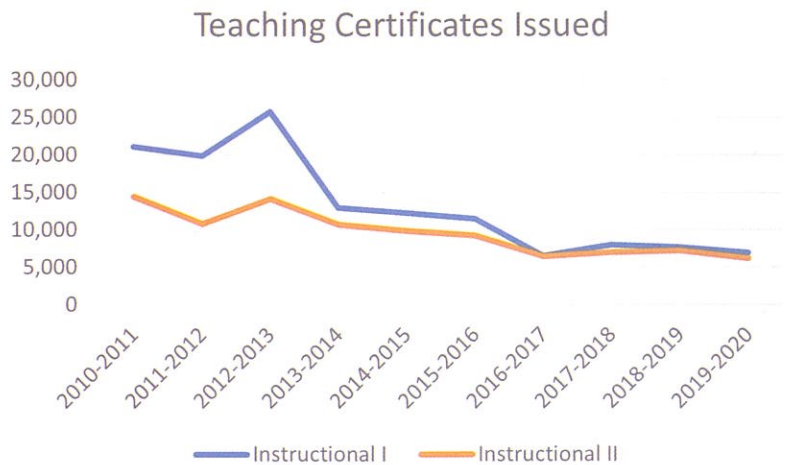
*"The numbers don't lie – there continues to be a problem, and it's getting worse, not better."* Janee Briesemeister, a senior policy advocate for a consumer advocacy group, made this statement in 2005 when reporting on the number of complaints about cell phone service. She went on to say, "The staggering increase in complaints is further evidence that reform is needed in the wireless phone market so consumers can get a fair shake." She noticed a 38% increase in the number of complaints filed between 2003 and 2004. Of course, she was spot-on in her assessment as the number of complaints has sky-rocketed over the years thanks to unwanted robocalls, declines in customer service satisfaction and the fact that everyone now has a cell phone. I would imagine Ms. Briesemeister might attribute a similar statement to the crisis Pennsylvania is experiencing in terms of the number of educators being certified in our commonwealth.

Statistics from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) indicate that there was a 67% decrease in the number of Instructional I certificates issued when comparing a 10-year period from 2010 through 2020. (See Figure 1) That includes a 50% decrease in one year (2013-2014) and another 43.5% decrease in another year (2016-2017). It should come as no surprise that we see a similar decrease of 57% in the number of Instructional II certificates issued in that same 10-year period. These numbers are alarming, but not surprising to those of you who are trying to hire teachers. Notice that the numbers reported (the most up to date on the PDE website) are PRE-PANDEMIC numbers. I am confident we will see this trend continue and that the quote I opened this column with will hold true: *It's getting worse, not better.*

Principals report the challenges of finding properly certified candidates to fill vacant teaching positions, especially in certain historically hard-to-staff certificate areas (physics, chemistry, special education, foreign languages, etc.). Additionally, past efforts associated with finding the best candidate or the perfect fit have been sacrificed as hiring for quality has given way to simply finding "a warm body with the proper certificate." However, the challenges principals face extend beyond the hiring of teaching staff. These challenges include finding the next assistant principal or even mentoring someone to replace them as building leader upon their resignation or retirement. And we know the number of individuals walking away from the principalship continues to rise.

The data from PDE referenced above, also shows a decrease in Administrative I certificates between 2010-2011 and 2019-2020 (38%). It is indicative of the same problem we are having with teachers: The decrease in certificates issued has and will continue to result in a shallow pool of candidates for an increasing number of jobs. Most revealing, however, is that on average, over that 10-year period, only one-quarter of those who have earned their Level I Administrative Certificate convert those to Level II (i.e., they have completed the necessary requirements over three years to earn their Level II Administrative Certificate). (See Figure 2 on next page) This means that 75% of those who have earned the right to be a principal, choose not to do so. Perhaps something is disillusioning candidates to actually take the step into the principalship. I'm sure many candidates realize that they are not cut out for the position. Realistically speaking, there are many who earn a

Figure 1



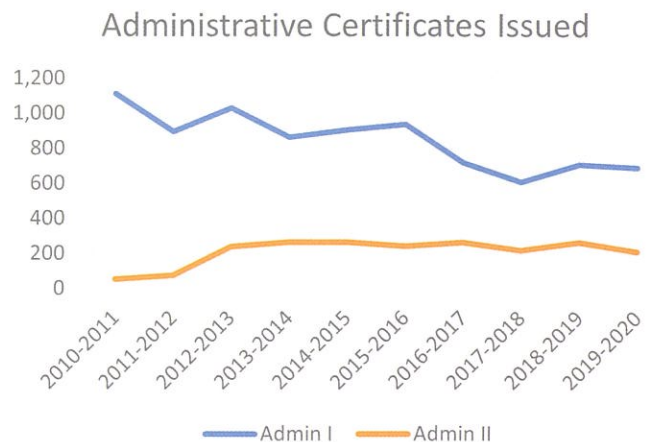
Level I certificate who do not have the talent or fortitude to do these jobs. However, “The numbers don’t lie – there continues to be a problem, and it’s getting worse, not better.” Our ability to find and retain high-quality principals will be even more difficult than it has been in the past.

In my opinion, this data provides an opportunity for principals to reflect on the problems associated with the struggle to find school leaders as well as solutions to preserve and nurture our profession. First, this data is indicative of the fact that qualified candidates are disillusioned with what the school leader position offers. You have, no doubt, heard the comment, “I wouldn’t want your job!” Why is that? Perhaps, it is the fact that as a teacher, they may make more money on a per diem basis, have their summers free and have the protection and support of a union. We, as an association, need to focus our efforts on pushing for changes to the law governing principal compensation (Act 93 of 1984) and improve it to include rights and protections. Private meetings held between PA Principals Association leadership and key legislative leaders cause me to believe that we can get real and lasting change to Act 93 accomplished in the near future.

Second, this data shows me that we need to make a conscious effort to identify the next cadre of school leaders. Just because someone is a great teacher, does not mean that they will be a great (or even adequate) leader. The qualities of those positions are starkly different. This means, it is necessary to be cognizant of what those qualities are and who on your staff possesses those qualities. There are many resources that can help you determine and encourage leadership among your staff. Some important books in my understanding, and fine-tuning of these skills, are *Leading at the Edge*, by Dennis N.T. Perkins; *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*, by John Maxwell; and *Strengths Finder 2.0*, by Tom Rath.

Third, we need to stop bad-mouthing the principalship and administration in general. These positions have never been easy, yet each of us was encouraged to become an

Figure 2



administrator because someone in our professional circle knew what it meant to be a principal. Someone saw in you the potential and leadership qualities that caused them to believe that you would fit wonderfully into this rewarding profession. When I was a teacher, my principal encouraged me to keep trying even when I didn’t get the first position to which I had applied. He didn’t say things like, “This job is awful, and we need more people like you to join us in the mire.” Instead, he said, “I see potential in you, and you have what it takes to lead.”

We are well aware of the importance strong school leadership has on student achievement. In times of crisis, we cannot afford to squander opportunities to build leaders and encourage our most talented to join us in this seminal work. While we can expect challenging times thanks to the data regarding the number who seek certification, we must prepare to meet that challenge by ensuring there is a next generation of high-quality school leaders. *Take some time this week to identify the strong leaders who surround you and encourage those individuals to join us.*

## Submit a Review for Magazine Feature... READERS FOR LEADERS

We are seeking educational book reviews for our newest magazine column, “**READERS FOR LEADERS**,” but only for books that you have found valuable and would “recommend” to your colleagues. Educators are constantly looking for new ideas to use and share, but do not always have time to read new books. It is our hope that this column will provide you with the latest in contemporary readings.

Book reviews should be no more than 350-400 words, written using APA style and must be submitted as a Word document (with a brief biographical sketch and a photo of the author). Authors may not be the book’s author since the purpose of the review is **to provide information and NOT to sell books!** In addition, authors **MUST include a written statement of any connection to the publication being reviewed. For example:** *The book being reviewed is part of a book selection for a principal certification course (OR...Administrator Professional Development). I have no affiliation with the author(s) or publishing company(ies) of the book(s) in the submitted book review(s).*

**The deadline to submit a book review for the next magazine is March 11, 2022.**