

[Articles](#) > [Education](#) > How to become principal of a school

How to become principal of a school

September 01, 2024 • 7 minutes



Written by [Dillon Price](#)



Reviewed by [Pamela M. Roggeman](#), EdD, Dean, College of Education



In this article

- [Why become a principal?](#)
- [Steps to become a principal](#)
- [Start your journey to become a school principal](#)

Have you wondered what it takes to become the principal of a school? It's more than just managing daily tasks. It's about inspiring both students and teachers and building a thriving school community.

So, how do you become a principal? If you're interested in [school administration](#) and making a lasting impact, read on to find out what educational requirements, skills and experience are needed to get started.

What is a school principal?

Principals manage school operations and work to ensure everything runs as smoothly as possible. Their responsibilities include overseeing staff, developing curricula and maintaining a safe learning environment.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the [responsibilities and duties of a principal](#) include:

- Managing teachers and support staff
- Establishing class schedules
- Implementing curriculum standards
- Counseling and disciplining students
- Observing teachers and evaluating their performance
- Meeting with parents and teachers about student progress
- Assessing student achievement through test scores and reports
- Organizing professional development for staff
- Handling the school's budget, supplies and maintenance
- Implementing security procedures

Qualifications and education required to become a principal

Becoming a principal requires a master's degree in education administration or similar program. These programs teach required skills such as leadership development, educational diversity, policy, curriculum development and more. Typically, candidates need a bachelor's degree in education or a related field before pursuing a master's.

Experience is also key to becoming a principal of a school. Principals usually need several years of teaching experience as well.

Public school principals must obtain a license as school administrators, and requirements for that may vary by state. Generally, this includes holding a master's degree, passing an exam and completing a background check.

Assistant principals can move up to become principals, while some principals later become superintendents or instructional coordinators. These roles may require further education and licensure.

To excel in a job as a principal, you need excellent communication, critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, interpersonal and leadership skills.

Why become a principal?

Being a principal of a school gives you the chance to influence the school's culture, motivating both staff and students to reach their full potential.

Principals also build strong connections within the community, collaborating with teachers, parents and partners to ensure the school meets everyone's needs within reason. It's a role in which leadership and relationships come together to make a lasting impact.

As of May 2023, principals earned between \$70,050 and \$163,010, with a median wage of \$103,460, [according to BLS](#).

Salary ranges are not specific to students or graduates of University of Phoenix. Actual outcomes vary based on multiple factors, including prior work experience, geographic location and other factors specific to the individual. University of Phoenix does not guarantee employment, salary level or career advancement. BLS data is geographically based. Information for a specific state/city can be researched on the BLS website.

Key skills and qualities of a successful principal

Successful principals often possess a unique blend of skills and qualities that enable them to lead schools effectively.

Leadership abilities and effective management skills

Being a [principal of a school](#) takes more than just being a manager. Principals set ambitious goals, craft the right policies and inspire their staff to achieve greatness. Their leadership can help create a culture of achievement and make their school a thriving environment for learning.

Strong communication and interpersonal skills

Effective principals should know how to resolve academic issues and explain school policies clearly. They also act as a voice for students, teachers and parents.

Problem-solving and decision-making capabilities

Running a school can mean making tough decisions and focusing on the bigger picture. Principals weigh the needs of students, staff and the overall environment. Their decisions can drive positive (or negative) outcomes for the entire school.

To be an effective principal, you must assess school challenges that arise, dig into the root causes, and ideate and implement solutions that work.

Ability to create a positive and inclusive school culture

Principals who model support and encouragement can help encourage a positive school culture. This starts with a focus on positive messaging, which encourages risk-taking and celebrates success. School assemblies can reinforce this culture and, ideally, keep everyone motivated and feeling like part of a community.

Collaboration and teamwork with teachers, parents and stakeholders

Collaboration can contribute to a well-run school as well. By building positive, trusting relationships with teachers, parents and district leaders, principals can create a team atmosphere that helps align everyone toward achieving common goals of educational success.

A principal's challenges and rewards

Jobs for principals can come with challenges and rewards worth considering ahead of time. This can range from handling student behavior to creating a supportive community environment.

Handling disciplinary issues and managing student behavior

As a principal, you'll need to be comfortable managing disciplinary issues and sometimes mediating conflicts within your community. You'll also be the go-to person for complaints from teachers and concerns from parents, and set the tone for acceptable (and unacceptable) student behavior.

In addition to calmly and wisely handling these issues, you'll need to commit to recharging regularly.

Dealing with community expectations

Being a principal means managing relationships with the community. Building strong, proactive relationships shows you genuinely care about your school's well-being. You can also help establish a supportive environment by creating spaces for open dialogue, such as community gatherings, social media groups or informal meetings.

Balancing administrative tasks with instructional leadership

Principal positions may require managing budgets and school operations while focusing on improving teaching and learning. This often involves guiding teacher development and improving student achievement. Principals may leverage data to make informed decisions and foster a culture of continuous improvement among staff.

Celebrating achievements and fostering a supportive school environment

When you work as a principal, you can share in the success of your students, staff and teams. As leaders of a school, principals can recognize both publicly and privately the achievements of outstanding students and staff. These moments of celebration boost morale and encourage further achievement.

Of course, successes also reflect the impact of leadership, and so principals can share in many of the successes. For example, if a school program is doing well, this can reflect your team's hard work.

Steps to becoming a principal

Curious about how to become a principal of a school? Here are key milestones to qualify.

1. Obtain a bachelor's degree in education or a related field

The first step to becoming a principal is earning a bachelor's degree. Most future principals start with a degree in education, but you can also pursue degrees in subjects you want to teach, such as math or English.

While studying, you may focus on gaining a solid foundation in classroom instruction, curriculum development and child psychology. Some programs offer internships or student teaching experiences, which provide hands-on learning in real educational settings.

2. Gain teaching experience and obtain a teaching certificate

Principals may start their careers as teachers and gain valuable experience managing classrooms, designing lesson plans and working directly with students and other educators. This experience helps build such skills as communication, leadership and organization.

3. Pursue a master's degree in educational administration

If you're looking to step into school administration, you typically need a master's degree. A Master of Education (MAEd) can help build skills to lead. These programs cover school law, budgeting, curriculum development and instructional leadership.

4. Complete required licensure and certification

To pursue a job as a principal, you need a valid teaching license as well as a principal's license. Some states also expect principals to keep their licenses up to date throughout their careers. Before you start applying, double-check your state's guidelines to make sure you have the required credentials.

You might also need to pass state exams to be eligible for a particular role.

5. Continue professional development and stay updated on educational trends

Education is ever-changing, and continuing professional development can help you stay on top of these changes. Consider enrolling in leadership programs to learn fresh strategies to improve your school. Professional learning communities can also give you space to collaborate with peers, share insights and tackle educational challenges.

5 STEPS TO BECOMING A PRINCIPAL



OBTAIN A DEGREE

Obtain a bachelor's degree in education or related field. Most future principals start with a degree in education, but you can also pursue degrees in subjects you want to teach, such as math or English.

GAIN EXPERIENCE

Principals may start their careers as teachers and gain valuable experience managing classrooms, designing lesson plans and working directly with students and other educators.



PURSUE A MASTER'S DEGREE

If you're looking to step into school administration, you typically need a master's degree. A Master of Education (M.Ed.) can help you build skills you'll need to lead.

COMPLETE REQUIRED LICENSURE

To pursue a job as a principal, you'll need a valid teaching license and certification. Some states also expect principals to keep their licenses up to date throughout their careers.



CONTINUE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Education is ever-changing and continuing professional



Start your journey toward becoming principal of a school

Ready to take the next step toward becoming a principal of a school? University of Phoenix offers an [online education degree](#) designed to help you build leadership skills, personalize instruction and more. Whether you're pursuing a bachelor's or [master's in education](#), UOPX's programs prepare you with relevant skills to help you lead.

[Request information](#) to learn more about online education degree programs.

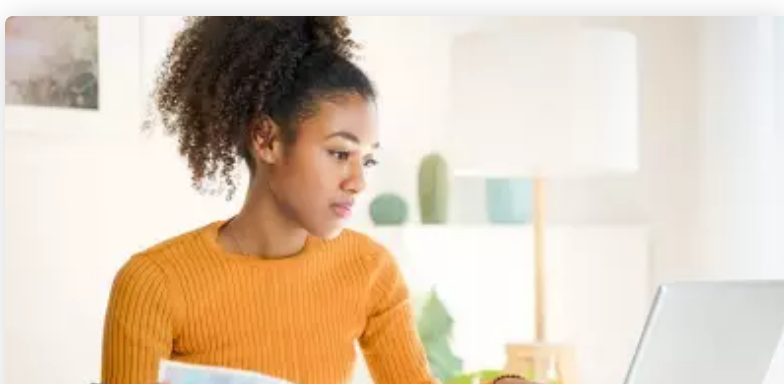
Read more articles like this:



Teacher Interview Questions

ONLINE DEGREES

June 16, 2023 • 9 minutes



Essential Skills For Online Teaching

CAREER SUPPORT

May 09, 2022 • 8 minutes



Educational Learning Theories

ONLINE DEGREES

September 09, 2021 • 8 minute read



What Is a Paraprofessional?

ONLINE DEGREES

February 13, 2025 • 6 minutes



How to Create Welcoming Classroom Environment

ONLINE DEGREES

May 28, 2023 • 6 minutes



How to Become a School Superintendent

ONLINE DEGREES

February 04, 2025 • 6 minutes



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dillon Price is a detail-oriented writer with a background in legal and career-focused content. He has written and edited blogs for dozens of law firms, as well as Law.com. Additionally, he wrote numerous career advice articles for Monster.com during the company's recent rebranding. Dillon lives in Western Massachusetts and stays in Portugal each summer with his family.

**ABOUT THE REVIEWER**

As dean of the University of Phoenix College of Education, Pamela Roggeman has spent over a decade in higher education teacher preparation in both the public and private sector. Her experience has included national partnerships that help to advance thought leadership in the field of education. Dr. Roggeman also serves as the President of the Arizona Educational Foundation's Board of Directors.



This article has been vetted by University of Phoenix's editorial advisory committee.

[Read more about our editorial process.](#)