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MAPPING AND ANALYZING THE PERFORMANCE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN FOUR BRAZILIAN MUNICIPALITIES

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Abstract: In the light of the literature on school leadership, this research provides a mapping and analysis of the performance of principals in four municipalities located in the state of São Paulo: Jundiaí, Cordeirópolis, Francisco Morato and Batatais. This work aims to contribute to the qualification of professionals in charge of school management. To this end, it carried out a survey of the trajectory and perspectives of the principals of these four municipalities in relation to the position they occupy through the application of a questionnaire with open and closed questions. Five findings were identified from the data collected: i) a high level of interest in remaining in the position; ii) a predominance of administrative activities and dealing with parents and students in their day-to-day work; iii) overlap between the positions of principal and deputy principal; iv) pedagogical management as the main responsibility of the pedagogical coordinator; and v) a view of the role of the headteacher as fundamental to the smooth running of the school. This article presents the systematization of the responses, as well as a descriptive analysis and recommendations based on the findings to support the work of Municipal Education Departments in the professional development of school management.

Keywords: school principal; school leadership; professional development; municipal education department.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 50 years, the literature on school effectiveness has been widely developed and has produced important references related to the identification of factors that associate the performance achieved by students with various elements linked to the school. The development of more robust studies, mainly as a result of improved statistical analysis and systematic evaluations of educational results and other associated factors, has made it possible to measure different variables and the relative importance of each one.

Among the relationships analyzed, the influence that school principals exert and its positive association with student learning outcomes were observed when characteristics of effective leadership were identified (Brazer et al., 2019; Brooke and Soares, 2008; Chapman et al., 2016; Day et al., 2016; Teddlie and Reynolds, 2003; Leithwood, 1992; Levine and Lezotte, 1990; 1978; Madaus et al., 1980). Regarding the way in which this leadership is configured, three characteristics were identified: i) objective and consistent, capable of resolving issues both internal and external to the school; ii) participatory, capable of ensuring the involvement of other people in the process; and iii) pedagogical, capable of setting objectives, supervising teaching, promoting a learning environment, developing a collaborative and committed working environment.

In Brazil, although there are studies on the subject of school management, with emphasis on the discussions arising from the concept of democratic management (Lück, 2009; Pena et. al., 2021; Abrucio, 2018; Silva et al., 2015), the production related to the figure of the school principal itself is insipient, especially in the field of quantitative research. One of the authors of this article (Siqueira and Silva, 2020), in his doctoral thesis, made a significant contribution in this regard by investigating the influence of school principals on student learning outcomes in Brazilian state public schools. To this end, they selected a set of data from the SAEB socioeconomic questionnaire from the 2013, 2015 and 2017 editions that address issues related to leadership based on what the studied literature points out, as well as the students' scores in these tests, which were then used to compose a multiple linear regression model. The analysis showed that

leadership has a positive association with the score, and can exert an influence equivalent to 12 points on the SAEB score, both in Portuguese and Mathematics. This study also points out that, among the Brazilian states, the duties assigned to the principal are mostly characterized by a list of tasks that do not foster the development of an effective leadership profile.

Recently, Krauel and Ramos (2024), using two qualitative methods, analyzed the work carried out by thirty-one elementary school principals in the Ribeirão Preto municipal school system in the state of São Paulo. The results of this work reinforce the essential role of these professionals in the smooth running of schools, while at the same time pointing out challenges that permeate their work and often inhibit the ability of these leaders to act successfully. These results also draw attention to the importance of developing school leaders with duties that go far beyond administrative issues.

Based on this evidence, the role of school principals gained prominence at the national level with the development of the Common National Matrix of Competencies for School Principals by the National Education Council in 2021 (Brazil, 2021). As the Opinion explains,

> The Matrix presented has the scope of parameterizing the various aspects concerning the role of the School Director, helping to define national, state and municipal policies aimed at their initial and continuing training, their choice, their monitoring and evaluation of their performance (CNE, Parecer s/n; 2021; p. 4).

The Matrix is made up of ten General Competencies, followed by specific competencies, organized into four dimensions: i) political-institutional; ii) pedagogical; iii) administrative-financial; and iv) personal and relational.

It is within this context that the article in question is set, with the aim of contributing to the qualification of professionals in charge of school management in the municipalities of Jundiaí, Cordeirópolis, Francisco Morato and Batatais. To this end, we carried out a survey of the trajectory and perspectives in relation to the position they occupy. In the light of the literature on school leadership, this research offers a mapping and analysis of the performance of these principals and recommendations for the four education networks included in this work in order to improve the performance of these professionals.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire with open and closed questions was administered via Google Forms to the principals and vice-principals of the public elementary schools in the four municipalities included in this study. The final sample was 106 responses, distributed as follows:

- Batatais: 9 answers
- Cordeirópolis: 9 answers
- Francisco Morato: 57 answers
- Jundiaí: 31 answers

The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect information on access to the post and to map the respondents' perspective on the position they hold. It is worth noting that the research did not seek to compare the municipalities, but rather to provide an analysis based on the data collected. The questionnaire was developed based on the Matrix of Questions that guided the research, shown in Table 1 below.

The multiple-choice answers were tabulated and organized in graphs with the overall result of the sample and broken down by municipality. The open-ended answers were analyzed together using the ATLAS.ti

Axis	Question	Objective
Experience in the role	How much experience do you have as a principal? (Adding up all the years in the position, even if in different schools)	To identify the seniority of the respondents in the position.
	Did you hold the position of vice-principal before becoming principal?	Map out the background/ training to take up the position.
	Do you have a postgraduate degree or specialization in School Management?	Map out the background/ training to take up the position.
Access to the function	By what means did you become a director? Check all the relevant boxes if the process involved more than one option.	Identify the form of selection.
	Describe what motivated you to take on the role of school principal.	Identify motivations for taking on the job.
Engagement with the job	Would you like to remain a director for the next two years?	Identify engagement with the job.
	Have you taken any time off work in the last 12 months?	Identify engagement with the job.
	Describe the reason for your absence. Please write in up to 200 characters.	Identify engagement with the job.
	Would you recommend the position of school principal to other people?	Identify engagement with the job.
Job duties	Briefly describe what your routine is like as a school principal, i.e. what activities you normally do on a daily basis. Please write in up to 700 characters.	Map out the routine and its activities.
	Regarding the selection process for the vice-principal, were you the person responsible for choosing him/her?	Autonomy to make up the team.
	From your perspective, what is the difference between the duties of the principal and vice-principal? Please write in up to 700 characters.	Mapping understanding of one's duties as a leader.
	From your perspective, how important is the position of principal to the running of schools? Please write in up to 700 characters.	Mapping understanding of one's duties as a leader.
	Briefly describe how pedagogical management is carried out in your school and what your involvement is in this area. Please write in up to 900 characters.	Identify pedagogical management practices.
Professional development	In your self-assessment, what practices and knowledge would you need to improve in order to be more successful as a director? Please write in up to 400 characters.	Identifying training needs

Table 1 General Matrix of Questions
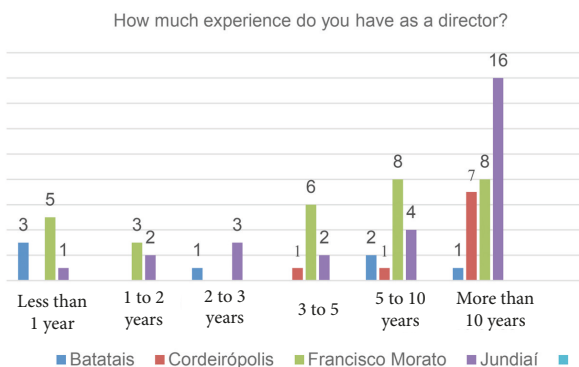
Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

qualitative research software. After reading the texts of the answers, codes were created to represent relevant themes for each question. The answers were classified according to these codes and then the number of codes per answer was analyzed. The tabulation of these codes enabled the construction of graphs that help to observe the frequency of each variable.

RESULTS: DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES

DIRECTORS' QUESTIONNAIRE-CLOSED QUESTIONS

Length of experience

The data shows that 63% of the respondents have been in the position for more than 5 years, as can be seen in Graph 1, which suggests a context in line with the national average (6 years), and close to the average for the state of São Paulo (approximately 8 years).

How much experience do you have as a director?

Graph 1 Length of experience as directors in number of years - per municipality in the sample

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

Deputy management experience

With regard to experience in the position of principal, it can be seen that, on average, just over half of the municipalities in the sample had experience as a deputy principal, i.e. 53%. However, there are significant differences in the breakdown of each municipality (Graph

2). In Francisco Morato, for example, most of them were vice-principals before becoming principals, as in Batatais. In Jundiaí and Cordeirópolis, the opposite is true.

Did you hold the position of vice-principal before becoming principal?
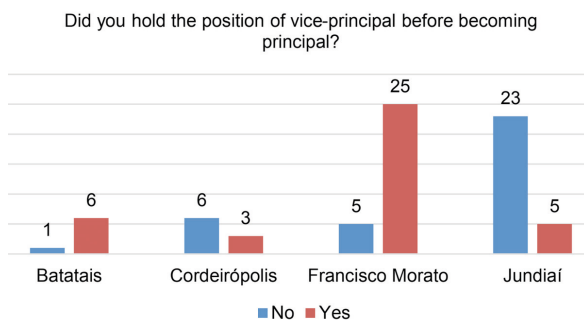
Graph 2 Previous experience as a vice-principal - by municipality in the sample

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Specialization

With regard to the training of these professionals, it can be seen that most of the respondents have a postgraduate degree or specialization in School Management (Graph 3), which corresponds to a percentage of 76%.

Do you have a postgraduate degree or specialization in School Management?
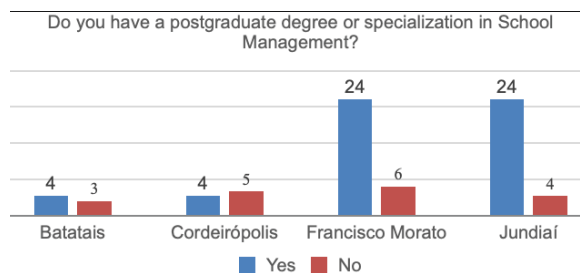
Graph 3 Postgraduate studies or specialization in School Management - per municipality in the sample

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Selection process

With regard to the selection process for the position of director, there was significant variability among the sample. In general, the majority of respondents pointed to the "other" option, indicating an internal selection process as the main way of gaining access to the position. In the disaggregated analysis,

there is a pattern in Jundiaí, with selection via public examination and in Batatais via election (Graph 4).

Graph 4 - By what means did you become a director?
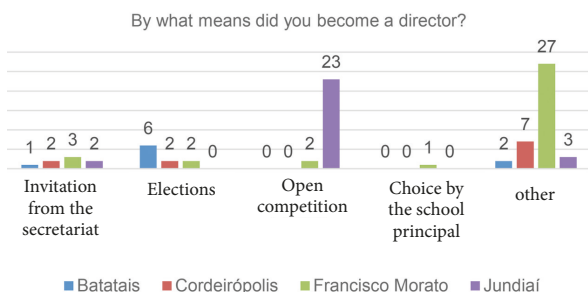
Graph 4 - By what means did you become a school principal? - total sample

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

Interest in staying in the job

The question about the respondents' interest in remaining in the job for the next two years shows a homogeneous perspective, with the vast majority, both on average and in the disaggregated municipalities (Graph 5), wishing to remain in the job.
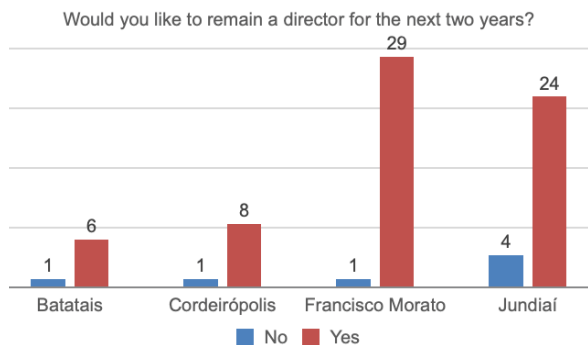
Graph 5 - Interest in remaining as principal for the next two years - by municipality in the sample

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

Removal from office

With regard to the occurrence of dismissal from the job in the last 12 months, it can be seen that it is not a phenomenon present in the majority of the sample, both on average and disaggregated (Graph 6), with a slightly higher frequency in the municipality of Jundiaí.
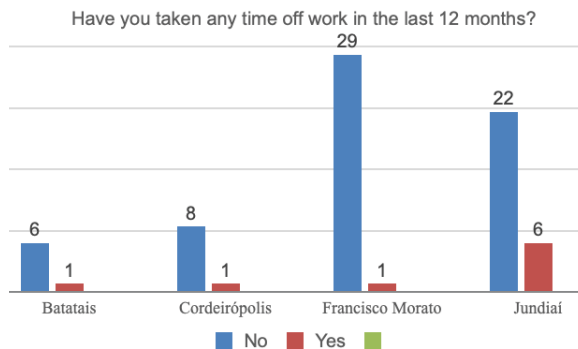
Graph 6 - Leave of absence in the last 12 months - by municipality in the sample

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

### Selection of the vice-principal

When asked about their involvement in choosing the deputy head , just over half said they had not taken part. However, when broken down by municipality, there is a wide variation (Graph 7). In Cordeirópolis, all the respondents indicated that they had not participated; in Batatais, the majority indicated that they had not participated, and there were also blank answers, a phenomenon that had not occurred in the other questions in the questionnaire. In Francisco Morato and Jundiaí, approximately half of the respondents indicated that they had taken part, and in Jundiaí there were also blank answers.
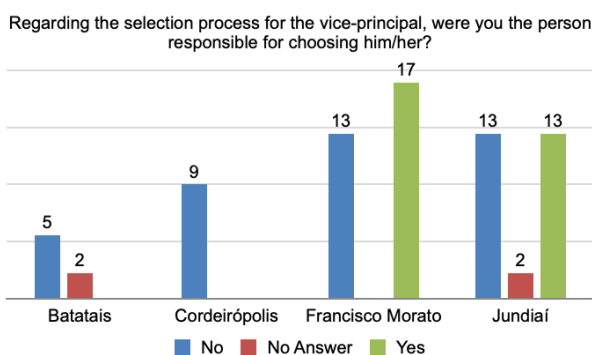
Graph 7 Involvement in the choice of vice-principal - by municipality in the sample.

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

Function recommendation

When asked if they would appoint a principal, the vast majority, both in the sample average and in each municipality (Graph 8), responded positively. In Jundiaí there was a higher frequency of negative cases and in Cordeirópolis only one.
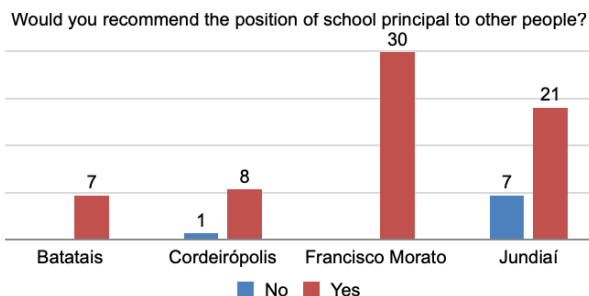
Graph 8 Appointment as principal - by municipality in the sample.

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

## DIRECTORS' QUESTIONNAIRE- OPEN QUESTIONS

In relation to the open questions, we asked about i) the motivation for taking on the role ("Describe what motivated you to take on the role of school principal"), ii) the activities normally present in your day-to-day work ("Briefly describe what your routine is like as a school principal, in other words, what activities are normally present in your day-to-day work?"), iii) the practices and knowledge that need to be improved in order to perform more successfully ("In your self-assessment, what are the practices and knowledge that you would need to improve in order to perform more successfully as principal?**"**), iv) the difference between the duties of the principal and the deputy principal ("From your perspective, what is the difference between the duties of the principal and the deputy principal?"), v) the importance of the post of principal for the running of the school ("From your perspective, what is the importance of the post of principal for the running of the school?") and, finally, vi) how

pedagogical management is carried out at the school ("Briefly describe how pedagogical management is carried out at your school and what your involvement is in this activity").

Motivation to take on the job

When describing what motivated them to take on the role of principal, the respondents' main justification was their interest in getting involved and contributing to the management of the school as a whole. Other elements mentioned were career progression, the prospect of dealing with new challenges, encouragement from peers, as well as remuneration. Occasionally, the expectation of contributing to learning, helping to transform society and the very fact of having been invited to take up the post were also mentioned.

Graph 9 shows the proportion of times each motivation is presented, in which it can be seen that 60% of the reports point to the motivation to contribute to the general management of the school and to progress in their careers.
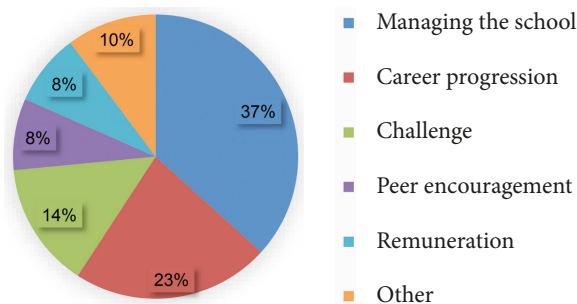

Graph 9 Motivation for taking on the job

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Work routine

The answers collected to this question show the diversity of duties that permeate the day-to-day work of school management. From the reports, twelve recurring themes were identified and listed below, starting with the most frequent. Graph 10 shows the proportion of times a given theme is mentioned, in which we can see that 52% of the reports point to

administrative and customer service activities as the most frequent duties.

1. Administrative activities

2. Service

3. Pedagogical activities

4. Student entry and exit

5. Conflict resolution

6. Untimely demands

7. Meetings

8. Organizational culture and school climate

9. Communication

10. Psychosocial support

11. The Secretariat's demands

12. Training
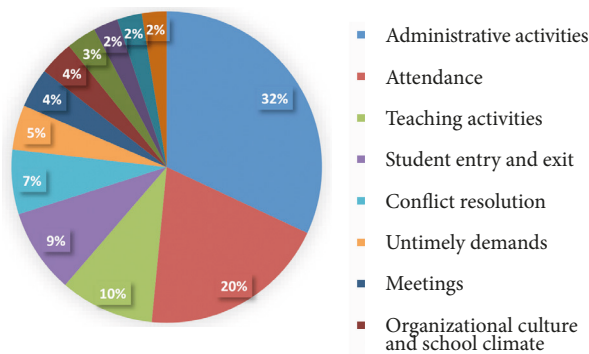
Graph 10 - Proportion of routine activities mentioned

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Professional development

The reports brought up a wide variety of themes. Even so, it was possible to identify the most recurrent themes, which involved people management, administrative/financial management, time management, knowledge of legislation and pedagogical management. Graph 11 shows the proportion in which a given theme is mentioned, in which we can see that 51% of the reports point to the need for improvement in people management, administrative/financial management and time management.
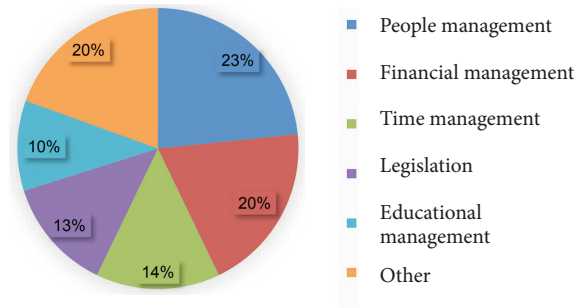

Graph 11 Proportion of topics to be developed mentioned

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

Difference between the role of director and vice-director

The answers collected for this question show a significantly homogeneous understanding, most of the time indicating that there are no significant differences between the duties of the principal and the vice-principal.

Among the differences mentioned were the head teacher concentrating on the execution of certain budgets, the emphasis on administrative aspects and greater emphasis on the relationship with the community. The view that responsibility for the entire running of the school rests with the principal was also mentioned as a difference. A significant proportion of respondents pointed out that there is no position of deputy principal in the municipality where they work, as shown in Graph 12 below.
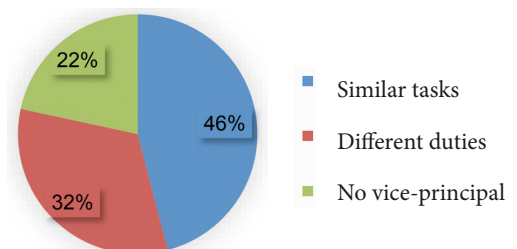
Graph 12 - Duties of the principal and vice-principal

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

The importance of school leadership

The reports point in a significantly similar way to the importance of the principal as the one who organizes and articulates all the parts for the smooth running of the school, gives direction, promotes integration between family and school and, above all, as the one who inspires and motivates teachers, students and the community.

Pedagogical management

The reports on how pedagogical management is carried out pointed to a process linked to the school's pedagogical policy project and in partnership with the pedagogical coordinator. It was not possible to identify specific practices for how this management takes place. In general, the participants emphasized that it is a joint effort with the coordinator, carried out in a democratic and collaborative way, with the HTPC being pointed out as an important moment.

Only two answers gave examples of what is done. These specific cases pointed to diagnostic assessments, reading and writing tests, bimonthly monitoring of student performance, observation of teachers' teaching practices, meetings with a team of specialists - such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists and social workers.

One report also pointed out the challenge of managing many classes with just the principal and pedagogical coordination.

GENERAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

The survey collected reports from 74 principals and 31 deputy principals with the aim of identifying the respondents' perspective on the role, involving attributions, engagement and needs for improvement. The analysis of the responses highlights five general findings.

1. **High interest in the job**. The vast majority of respondents are interested in the job, with 91% of directors saying they would like to remain in the position for the next two years and 89% saying they would recommend the job to others. This perception suggests that there are professionals who see themselves in the position in the near future, which can be an important indication of engagement and satisfaction with the job.

2. **Predominantly administrative and customer service activities.** When indicating what makes up the duties and routines of the position, the most frequent themes were administrative activities and serving those responsible and the community. When describing the activities that make up their day-to-day work, the majority of respondents reported the general organization of the school involving monitoring maintenance and cleaning, reading emails, taking part in meetings, monitoring the working lives of teachers and staff, organizing timetables, timekeeping, financial management, serving the community and welcoming students in and out. Despite arguing about the fundamental importance of guaranteeing student learning, the examples reported most often refer to activities not directly linked to learning management.

3. **Overlap between the role of principal and vice-principal**. When identifying the responsibilities of the position of principal and deputy principal, the vast majority said they were practically the same, being considered equivalent positions, with the exception of certain activities related to financial management. Although they indicated that the principal is subject to more pressure from the community, on a day-to-day basis they feel that

the positions are very similar. In the absence of a significant distinction between the positions, the question arises as to whether or not the position of vice-principal should be a stage in the process of professional development and building a career in school leadership. It is also proposed to discuss the responsibility of the principal in people management. Being equivalent positions, the interaction between principal and deputy suggests a relationship of peers rather than leader and led.

4. **Pedagogical management as the main task of the pedagogical coordinator.** When asked to explain how pedagogical management is carried out, the vast majority of respondents pointed out that it is done in conjunction with pedagogical coordination. Many said that management was based on the principles of democratic management and often pointed to collective working time meetings as the place where it took place. It was not possible, based on the responses, to identify evidence of what is done on this front and how. Only two responses gave specific examples, while all the others pointed to characteristics and values that they consider important to follow, such as collaboration and active listening, without explaining the activities that are carried out.

5. **Importance of the headteacher as the person who ensures the smooth running of the school**. When asked about the importance of the headteacher, the respondents defined the headteacher as fundamental to ensuring the smooth running of the school by motivating the staff and encouraging an organized environment focused on learning. In general, they point out that the principal is the one who organizes and articulates all the parts for the smooth running of the school, gives direction, promotes integration between family and school and, above all, as the one who inspires and motivates teachers, students and the community.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the analysis of the responses, this research identified four recommendations proposed for the Education Departments in order to contribute to initiatives aimed at improving the performance of school leadership.

1. **Valuing school leadership.** Interest in the job is an important factor in engagement and openness to professional development initiatives. Given that the vast majority of respondents say they enjoy their job, it is recommended that the Secretariats offer specific development initiatives for school management, helping these professionals, most of whom already indicate that they are engaged with the job, to perform their role with greater quality.

2. **Developing the competencies of school management.** Despite the common understanding that the school's main function is to ensure that students learn, it can be seen that on a daily basis school leaders concentrate on administrative activities that end up taking precedence over other activities, including teaching. It is recommended that the Secretariats develop processes to monitor the performance of these principals, seeking to guide and develop the necessary competencies, which, in turn, can be based on the Common National Matrix of Competencies for School Principals, approved by the National Education Council in 2021. A major challenge for

school principals is to organize the various activities that make up the running of the school unit and to ensure that they have the time needed on a daily basis to get involved in all the relevant responsibilities of the job. It is suggested that the Secretariat review what is expected of these professionals, analyzing the extent to which administrative requirements overlap with pedagogical ones, as well as establishing support for principals to manage learning processes more consistently. The qualification of practices that allow for more organized and planned time management, as well as the establishment of more structured management processes, appear to be important factors in professional development. It is recommended that the Secretariat carry out an assessment of the extent to which it offers instruments and follow-up actions that contribute to building a robust career in school management.

3. **Guiding the work dynamics of the management trio.** The relationship between the principal, vice-principal and pedagogical coordinator is a process that requires improvement. Despite the respondents reporting the collaborative nature of the work, it is recommended that the Secretariat analyzes what arrangements are expected to exist to support the interaction between these three functions. More than just indicating the main duties of each (as indicated in the regulations), it is necessary to clarify how the interaction between these actors is expected to take place, as well as their interaction with other educators and the school community. It is also proposed to discuss the principal's responsibility for people management and the professional development of the vice-principal. Being equivalent positions, the interaction between principal and deputy suggests a relationship of peers rather than leader and led. Helping school leaders to develop people management practices could contribute to a more organized and consistent team performance.

4. **Support time management and focus on learning**. Despite the fact that the reports point to a commitment to learning, it can be seen that the management's time is concentrated on administrative and financial activities. Time management is seen as one of the biggest challenges for school leadership. In this sense, it is recommended that the Secretariat support these professionals both in their ability to manage the multiple tasks that permeate the routine of school leadership and in the allocation of time to guarantee the quality of the teaching and learning processes. It is recommended that the Secretariat develops the expertise of school leaders in strategic instructional matters, such as curriculum management, evaluation processes, learning indicators, classroom observation, selection of teaching materials and strategies for restoring learning. In this sense, the relationship between principal and pedagogical coordination needs to be examined, and it is important that principals understand how to monitor and guide the work of coordination. The technical capacity of the Secretariat to train school principals who are not only good managers, but also pedagogical leaders, is a determining factor in the profile of principals we want to achieve.

THANKS

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