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New National Survey Reveals Public School Principals Overwhelmed by Administrative Burden.

"Nearly 60% of School Principals Consider Leaving Due to Administrative Overload, National Survey Finds"

Administrative overload is driving burnout, undermining school leadership, and contributing to a growing retention crisis among South African public-school principals.

The Governing Body Foundation (GBF) has released the findings of its National Survey Report on the Administrative Load of Public-School Principals, revealing that excessive administrative demands have become a systemic and unsustainable challenge across South Africa's public schools.

Based on responses from more than 300 principals from GBF member schools across multiple provinces and school contexts, the report highlights a growing concern that school leaders are spending increasing amounts of time on compliance requirements, reporting obligations, financial administration, and management systems at the expense of educational leadership, curriculum oversight, staff support, learner engagement, and school improvement.

The survey found that:

- 92% believe the administrative burden has increased significantly over the past five years.
- 84% of principals indicated that it is often required from them to perform administrative work after-hours.
- 71% report that administrative demands have a high or severe impact on their ability to fulfil their core leadership responsibilities.
- Nearly 60% indicate that administrative overload contributes significantly to thoughts of leaving their position as principal.
- More than 40% spend more than nine hours per week on administrative tasks outside normal working hours.

The report identifies management and accountability tools, financial administration, and compliance reporting as the most burdensome areas of responsibility. Principals also expressed frustration with duplicated reporting requirements, unrealistic deadlines, excessive documentation, and frequent last-minute requests from education authorities.

"The findings make it clear that administrative overload is no longer simply a management issue; it is a structural threat to effective school leadership," said Marna Jordaan, Chief Executive Officer of the Governing Body Foundation. "Principals are increasingly being diverted from their primary role of leading teaching and learning, with significant consequences for school effectiveness and learner outcomes."

The survey reveals that administrative pressure affects schools across all quintiles, provinces, and school sizes, although regional trends differ. Gauteng principals reported particularly intense after-hours workloads, while respondents in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape, highlighted communication challenges and system inefficiencies. Principals in the Western Cape reported some of the strongest links between administrative burden and intentions to leave the profession.

Qualitative responses further point to rising levels of stress and burnout among school leaders. Many principals reported having less time available for curriculum leadership, mentoring staff, supporting learners, engaging with parents, and undertaking strategic planning.

Key Recommendations

The report calls for urgent system-level reforms to reduce administrative pressure on principals, including:

- Eliminating duplication in reporting and compliance requirements.
- Simplifying management and accountability processes.
- Introducing realistic notice periods and coordinated administrative calendars.
- Improving digital systems to reduce repetitive data capture.
- Strengthening administrative support at school level.
- Reducing unnecessary meetings and improving communication practices.

The Governing Body Foundation further recommends the adoption of a "capture once, use many times" approach to educational data management and advocates for more risk-based accountability systems that reduce unnecessary reporting requirements for stable, high-performing schools.

"The sustainability of the principalship is at risk," the report concludes. "Without meaningful intervention, administrative overload will continue to undermine leadership effectiveness, school functioning, and principal wellbeing."

The Governing Body Foundation will use the findings of the survey to strengthen its advocacy efforts with provincial and national education authorities and to promote practical reforms that support effective school leadership and improve educational outcomes.

For the full report or interview requests, please contact:

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