



Reflections over Time

TENNESSEE EDUCATOR SURVEY
2018 RESULTS IN CONTEXT

TN

Department of
Education

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Introduction

The strength of Tennessee’s student achievement is reliant on the work of Tennessee’s educators. Therefore, it is crucial for decision-makers to understand what teachers experience every day in their schools and classrooms. This spring marked the eighth year that the Tennessee Department of Education collaborated with the Tennessee Education Research Alliance to survey public school educators across the state.

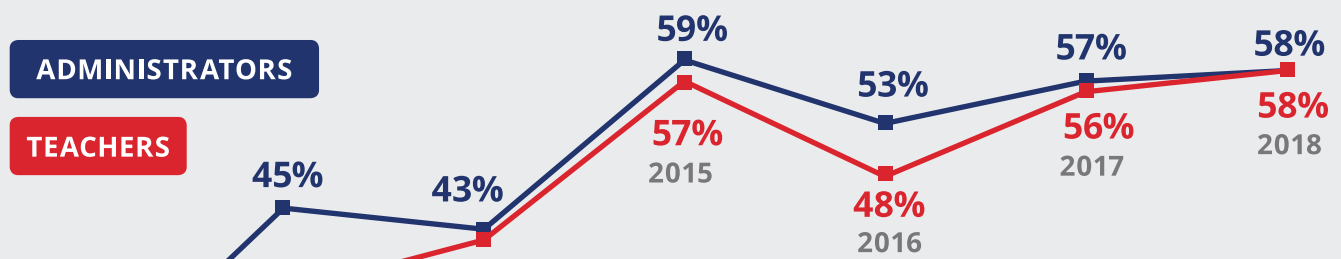
Over the last three years, the department has publicly reported teachers’ views on a range of topics pertaining to the state’s strategic priorities, including instructional time and discipline, curriculum and materials, and teacher evaluation and professional learning. In this report, we revisit a few familiar topics—such as instructional time, evaluation, and professional learning—and also report on teacher perceptions of grade-level standards, instructional materials, and parental

involvement. Survey results point to progress maintained in a number of areas, alongside several issues where our state’s educators continue to see a need for improvement.

More about this survey

Nearly 40,000 educators responded to this year’s survey, representing 58 percent of the state’s teachers and administrators. We administered this year’s survey between March 6 and April 20. Similar to 2017, the earlier window enabled the department to share results with school and district leaders ahead of summer planning for the upcoming school year. This year, 1,167 schools and 133 districts met the 45 percent threshold to receive school- and district-level data. This report provides a review of state-level trends; the [public-facing survey results website](#) includes more detailed data from schools and districts.

PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPATING EDUCATORS, 2012–18



Survey responses increased by about 2,000 educators over last year.

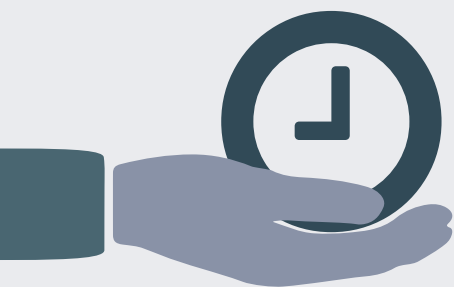
40,000 educators represented



58% of Tennessee teachers and administrators

Instructional & Planning Time

Most teachers agree that administrators are supportive in protecting their instructional time, but teachers increasingly say that **planning and collaborative time is insufficient.**

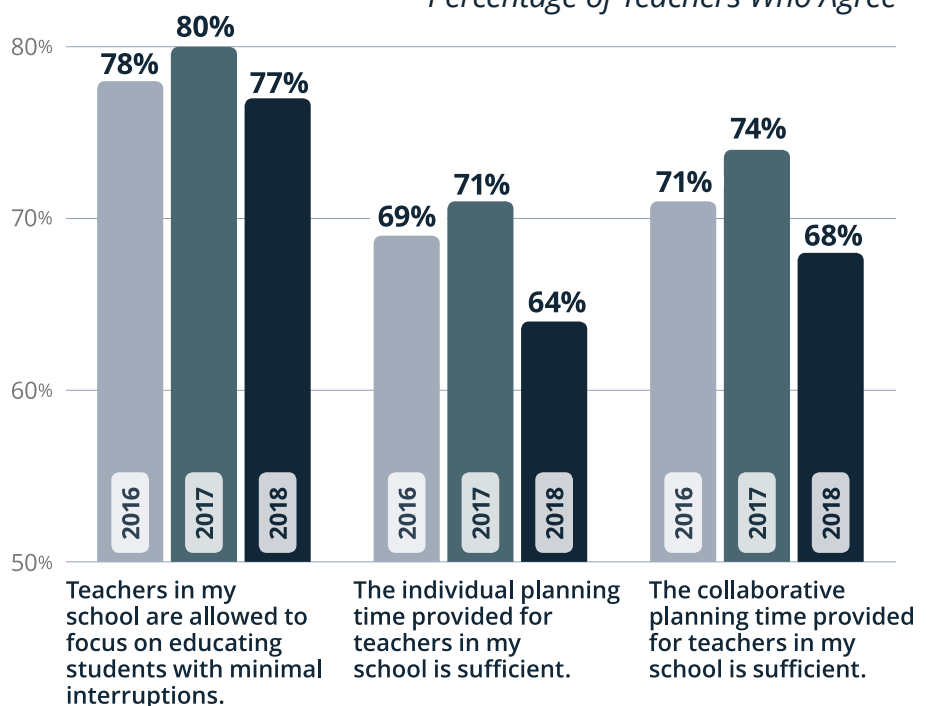


As in the past, most teachers agree that school leaders have worked to minimize needless interruptions for their teachers. Seventy-seven percent of teachers say that they're able to focus on teaching students with minimal interruptions, a slight dip from 2017 but still an improvement since the question was first asked in 2014.

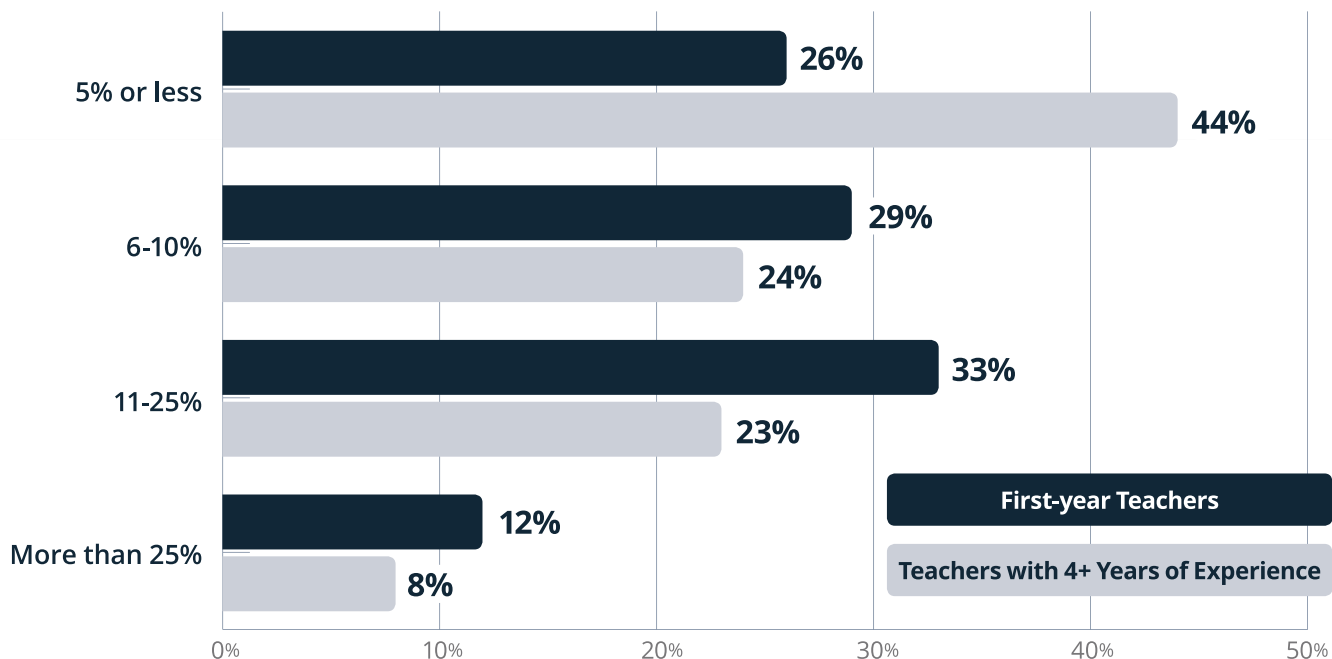
At the same time, 1,300 fewer teachers reported satisfaction with the available amount of classroom planning time compared to last year. This year, 64 percent of teachers agree that the individual planning time provided was sufficient, and 68 percent agree collaborative planning time was adequate—results that represent a seven and six percentage point decrease respectively from 2017. In the open comments, teachers often mentioned having too many responsibilities to adequately plan and execute on tasks assigned. However some teachers highlighted that simply putting more planning time on the schedule may not be the solution, offering sentiments that mirrored one teacher who stated, "It's not that we don't have adequate planning time, we just never get it (meetings, IEPs, more meetings, etc.)."

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF INSTRUCTIONAL & PLANNING TIME

Percentage of Teachers Who Agree



IN A TYPICAL WEEK, WHAT PERCENTAGE OF INSTRUCTIONAL TIME DO YOU SPEND DEALING WITH STUDENT BEHAVIORAL AND DISCIPLINARY ISSUES?



Results also show that student behavioral and disciplinary issues continue to be a challenge for many teachers seeking to get the most out of their time in the classroom. One-third of all teachers report spending 11 percent or more of their classroom time on student behavior/discipline in a typical week—levels mostly unchanged since last year. Early career educators' classrooms continued to be affected most, with nearly half reporting that they spend 11 percent or more of their time dealing with student discipline.

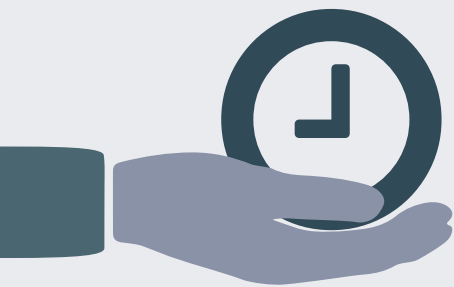
Beginning teachers are also the least likely to report feeling satisfied with student behavior-focused professional learning experiences. Only 40 percent of teachers with less than four years of experience report satisfaction with the quality and quantity of student behavior-focused professional learning, compared to 56 percent of teachers with more than three years of experience.

Nearly half of early career educators report that they spend 11 percent or more of their time dealing with student discipline.

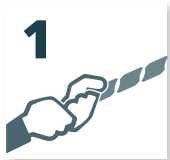
Instructional & Planning Time

TEACHER COMMENT

“I'm sure if I want to give up my 45 minutes of planning time the administration would love for me to observe other teachers, but I feel this should be done in additional time, not my planning time. I already give up one day every other week to meet with my team of teachers. Other planning days are given up for parent meetings. **No one understands how much teachers need their planning time to actually plan good lessons.**”



FIVE ADDITIONAL FACTS



1 Compared to 2017, this year, fewer teachers say they feel pulled in too many different directions in terms of what to teach and how to teach it (45 percent in 2018 compared to 58 percent in 2017).



2 Most teachers (85 percent) report regularly meeting with colleagues to reflect on potential improvements to their instructional practices.



3 In addition to regular teaching responsibilities, most teachers serve a role in selecting materials and resources, selecting new teachers to join their staff, and school improvement planning.



4 Teachers frequently mentioned a need to reduce the scheduling impact of RTI² implementation and statewide testing.



5 School leaders say that their top responsibilities in an average week are observing teachers, providing feedback, and planning with teachers (32 percent of time); student discipline issues (21 percent); and administrative duties (20 percent).

Teacher Evaluation and Instructional Improvement

Teachers agree that evaluation has led to improvements in their teaching, but **many continue to rate the experience as burdensome.**



Between 2012 and 2017, there was a persistent increase in the percentage of teachers reporting that the evaluation process has led to improvements in their teaching—going from one-third of teachers to three-fourths over five years. As one teacher said, “I agree that my teaching and my students’ learning have both improved because of the focused observations, evaluations, and conferences.” Though the percentage slightly declined this year, this is still impressive growth.

Seventy-two percent of teachers report having adequate or strong support from their school around information and communication about the teacher evaluation process, an eight percent increase since 2017. Still, 50 percent of educators rate evaluation as a significant burden. Educator comments suggest this burden is due to both time and resource constraints and anxiety regarding evaluation. This stress seems to be related to teacher perceptions of evaluation fairness. As one teacher said, “Things regarding the evaluation system are done correctly at this school where I teach now. I have been at other schools where it was a tremendous stressor and burden. At my previous school, I did not believe the scoring was done fairly or accurately.” Perceptions of fairness are also connected to feelings of the usefulness of evaluation. Almost all teachers who said evaluation was fair also said it led to improvements in their teaching.

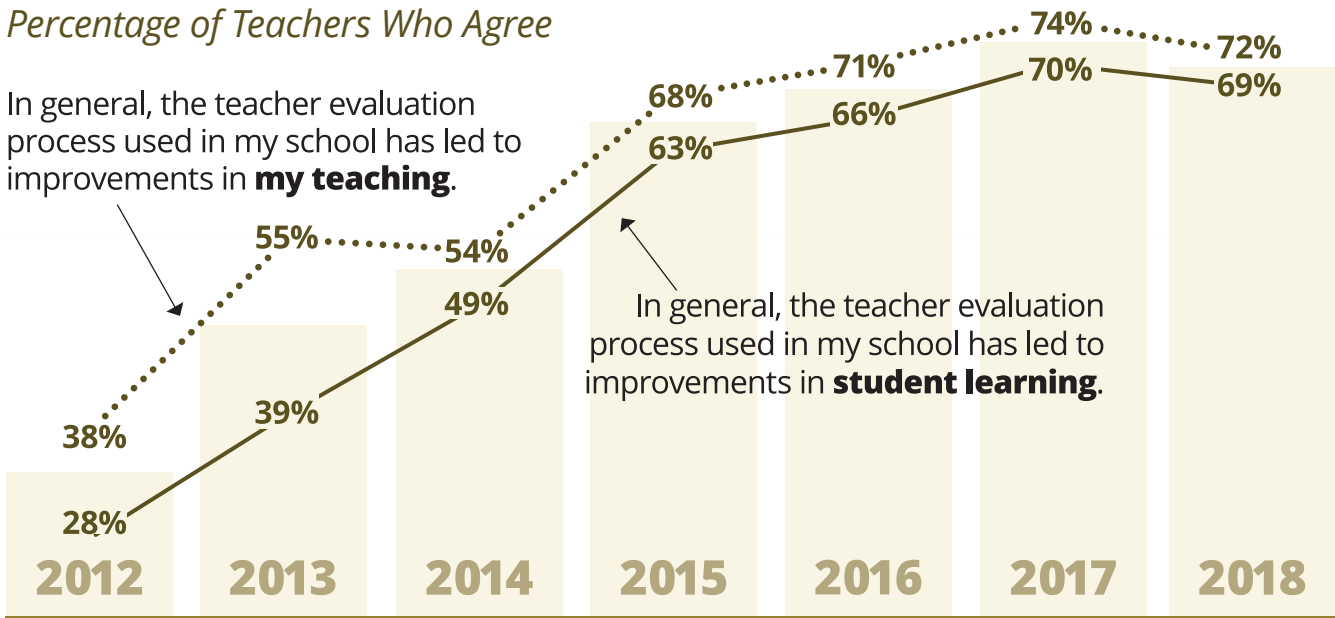
Teacher comments about how to improve educator evaluation varied. For example, many teachers said they wanted more frequent observations, but others said they wanted fewer observations. Teachers were also mixed on whether observations should be announced or unannounced and longer or shorter, but there were areas where teachers did agree. Teachers value observers with content expertise, want fewer observation indicators, and express a need for high-quality feedback.

As in previous years, teachers report that they seldom choose the professional development (PD) sessions they attend, but their professional learning experiences are most helpful when the experiences are either selected by the teacher themselves or are sessions with their grade- or subject-level teams. Just under 50 percent of teachers report attending whole-school professional development at least monthly, but almost half of those teachers say the experiences were of little or no help. In contrast, just one-fifth of teachers say they participate in learning experiences they selected themselves at least monthly, but of those who do, 83 percent say they were helpful.

CHANGE OVER TIME IN EVALUATION PROCESS RESPONSES

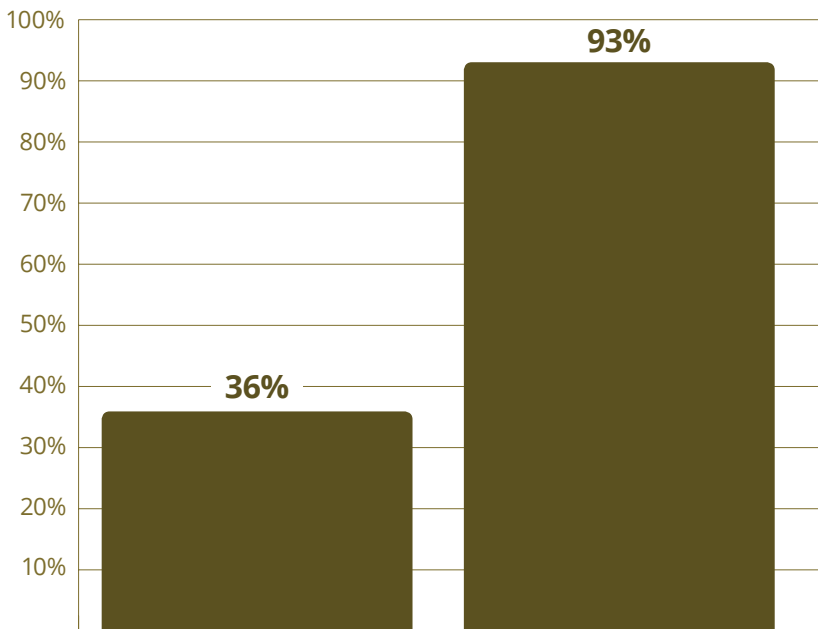
Percentage of Teachers Who Agree

In general, the teacher evaluation process used in my school has led to improvements in **my teaching**.



In general, the teacher evaluation process used in my school has led to improvements in **student learning**.

THE PERCENTAGE OF TEACHERS WHO AGREE EVALUATION HAS LED TO IMPROVEMENTS IN THEIR TEACHING



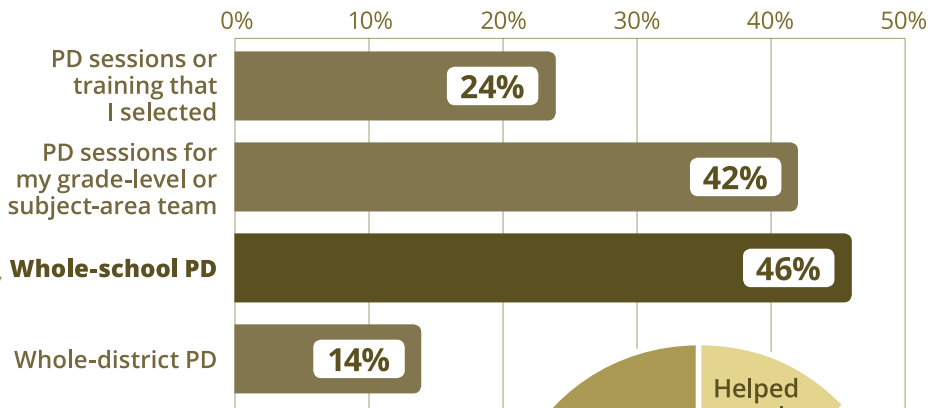
Among teachers who **disagree** the process used to evaluate their teaching was fair.

Among teachers who **agree** the process used to evaluate their teaching was fair.

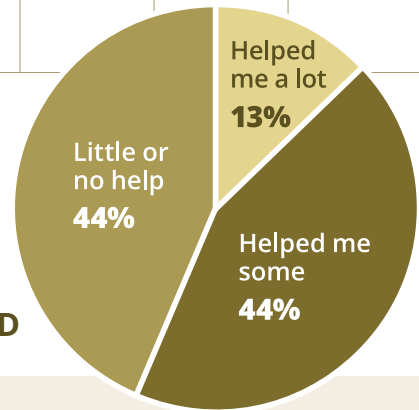
Perceptions of fairness are also connected to feelings of the usefulness of evaluation. Almost all teachers who said evaluation was fair also said it led to improvements in their teaching.

Teacher Evaluation and Instructional Improvement

DURING THE CURRENT SCHOOL YEAR, HOW OFTEN DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THE FOLLOWING TYPES OF PD ACTIVITIES? (AT LEAST MONTHLY)



TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF HELPFULNESS OF WHOLE-SCHOOL PD



TEACHER COMMENT

“ **The evaluation system needs to be differentiated** based on the experience level and past evaluation scores of the teachers. This would minimize the burden of all involved.”

TEACHER COMMENT

“ I am a new teacher. I have been supported and included in this school. I feel that my high school is concerned about my growth as a teacher. My first evaluation went horribly mostly due to nerves. My administration was honest about my lesson while still being positive. I had a bad evaluation; it did not make me a bad teacher. **It was a learning experience.**”

FIVE ADDITIONAL FACTS

1



Pre-K, kindergarten, and high school teachers were more likely than all other teachers to vocalize concerns about the evaluation process in the open response section (though the majority of all groups still reported that evaluation led to improvements in their teaching). Pre-K and kindergarten teachers commonly noted frustrations with the new legislatively-mandated statewide portfolio growth model. High school teachers commented on their desire for observation to be more frequently conducted by observers with content expertise.

2



Almost all teachers report post conferences following observation. Half say their post conferences last less than 15 minutes, 46 percent say they were 15–30 minutes, and 6 percent say conferences were longer than 30 minutes.

3



Teachers are split on the usefulness of the achievement measure, with about half saying it provides useful information about their professional performance and half disagreeing.

4



Over 40 percent of teachers think the evaluation system is ineffective at identifying outstanding teachers. In 2017–18, 80 percent of teachers were rated as an overall 4 or 5, which may make it hard to separate out the ‘best of the best.’

5



Most teachers say they spent little or no time at all working directly with an instructional coach, administrator, or teacher leader over the past year—34 percent say they did only once or twice, and 31 percent say they didn’t do so at any point.

Standards, Materials, & Resources

Almost all Tennessee teachers report understanding what the standards expect of them, but **fewer teachers agree that their instructional materials are well-suited to teaching the standards.**

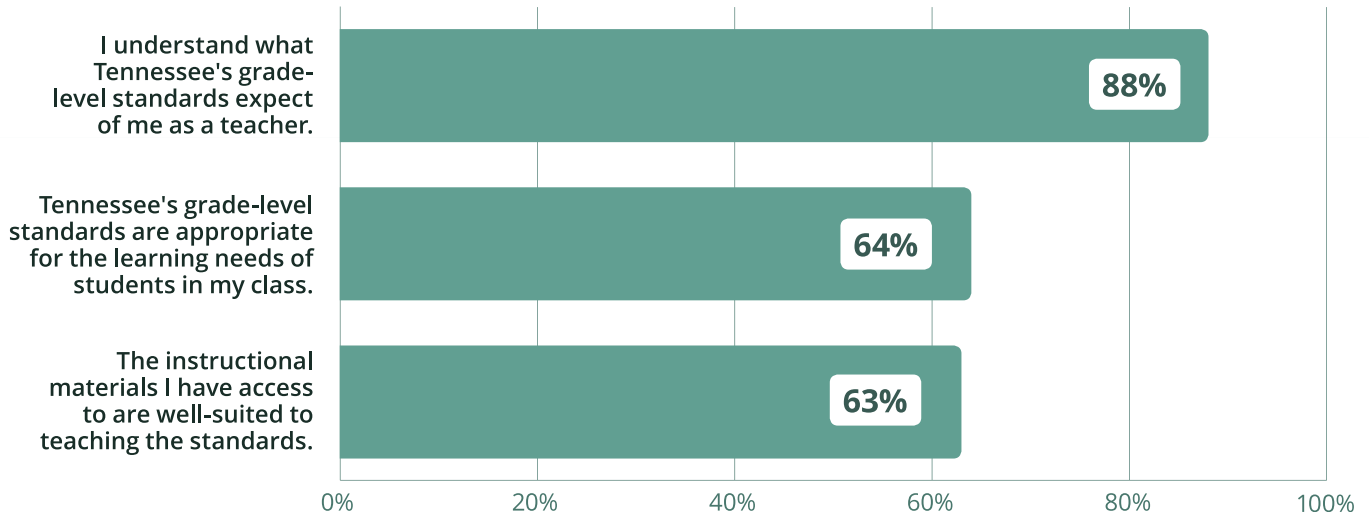


On last year's survey, Tennessee teachers reported difficulties identifying and accessing high-quality instructional materials. Specifically, K-3 reading teachers reported an average of 4.5 hours per week creating or sourcing materials for daily reading blocks. This year, all teachers were asked whether the instructional materials they had access to were well-suited for teaching Tennessee's grade-level standards. Overall, 9 in 10 teachers report that they understand what the standards expect of them as a teacher, but fewer report feeling the materials currently available to them are well-suited for teaching the standards.

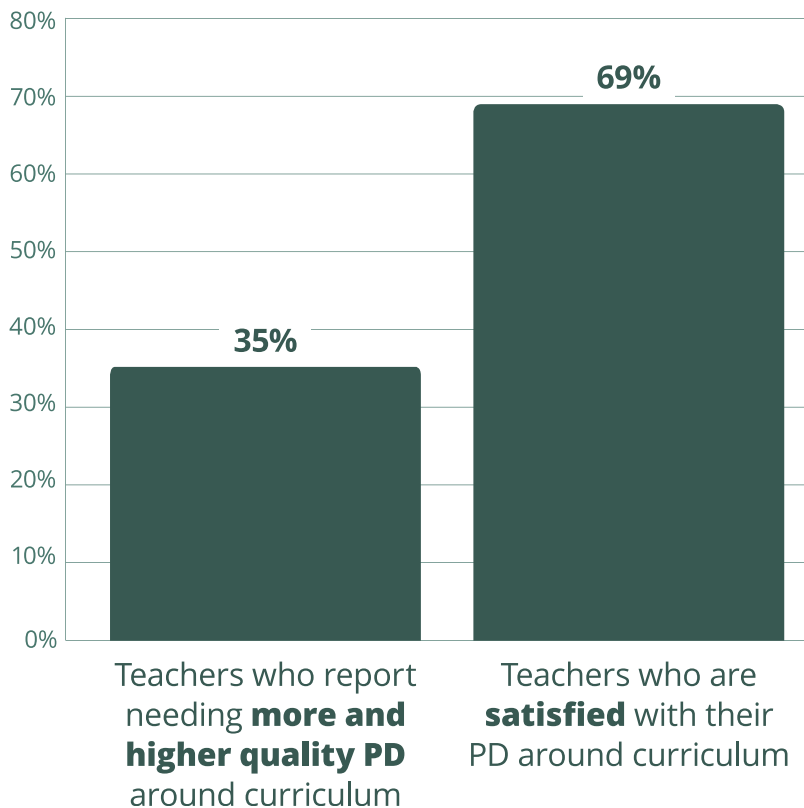
Overall, just under two-thirds of teachers report that the standards are appropriate for the learning needs of their students. Interestingly, 75 percent of first-year teachers agree on standards being appropriate compared to 55 percent of teachers with seven or more years of experience. Current standards are rooted in the knowledge and skills students need to succeed in their postsecondary studies and/or careers and generally have higher expectations of student performance than the prior standards.

Teachers also require aligned professional learning and support on implementing the materials. About two-thirds of teachers agree that their professional learning was closely aligned to the instructional materials they use in class. Similarly, two-thirds of teachers report receiving a sufficient quantity and satisfactory quality of professional learning experiences focused on "using the curriculum provided to them" and "covering standards" respectively. Teachers who report receiving sufficient professional development aligned to materials are more likely to feel that their materials were well suited to teaching the standards.

PLEASE INDICATE THE EXTENT TO WHICH YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS REGARDING TENNESSEE'S GRADE-LEVEL STANDARDS.



TEACHERS WHO REPORT MATERIALS ARE WELL SUITED TO TEACHING THE STANDARDS



Teachers who reported receiving sufficient professional development aligned to materials were more likely to feel that their materials were well-suited to teaching the standards.

Standards, Materials, & Resources

TEACHER COMMENT

“ I arrive at work each day at 6:30 a.m. and if I am lucky I will leave by 5:30 or 6 p.m. that night, and when I leave I still have papers to grade or I'm searching for or creating materials for future lessons.”



TEACHER COMMENT

“ I am doing the job of a textbook company, a curriculum coach, and a teacher all for one small salary.”

FIVE ADDITIONAL FACTS

1



Over 90 percent of teachers agree that curriculum is an important tool in helping reach their students' instructional goals.

2



Three-quarters of teachers report having a moderate or large role in selecting materials.

3



Over half of school leaders (56 percent) say funding is one of the biggest challenges to ensuring teachers are using strong materials, but 4 in 10 administrators cite teacher expertise to select and/or implement quality materials as a barrier.

4



Three out of four teachers report that they feel more empowered, versus constrained, to teach in ways that feel best for their students. Many teachers attribute their empowerment to having reasonable access to strong materials and resources, and the autonomy to implement their curriculum to best meet their students' needs.

5



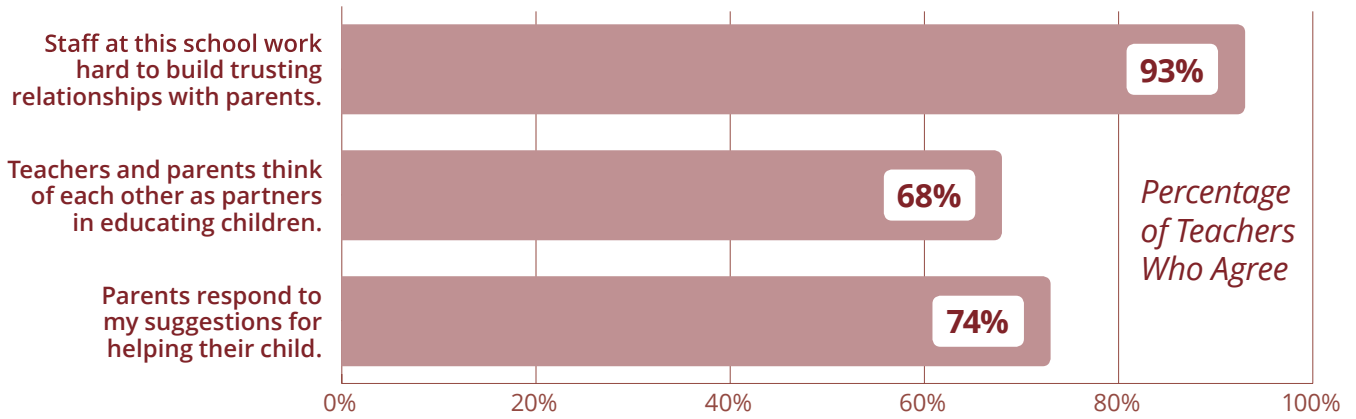
Pre-K teachers express a need for curriculum materials that allow them to differentiate instruction. Six out of 10 pre-K teachers report that they source/create their own materials to supplement their curriculum in order to differentiate their instruction.

Additional Findings

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

Teachers uniformly agree (93 percent) that their staff works hard to build trusting relationships with parents, and the majority say parents engage with them in return. Overall, 68 percent of teachers

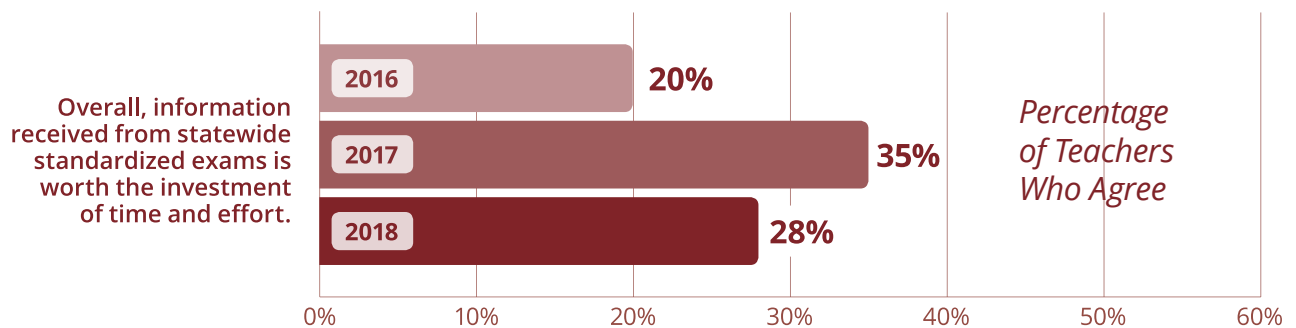
agree that their relationship with parents feels like a partnership for educating children. A slightly higher percentage of teachers (74 percent) report that parents are responsive to their suggestions.



ASSESSMENT

Two-thirds of teachers say statewide assessments are moderately or very consistent with their own teaching goals and instructional practices, as well as their school's overall educational goals. However, only about one-third of teachers agree that the information received from statewide standardized exams is worth the investment of time. In the comments, teachers acknowledge the value of information provided from formative and summative assessments but noted that they

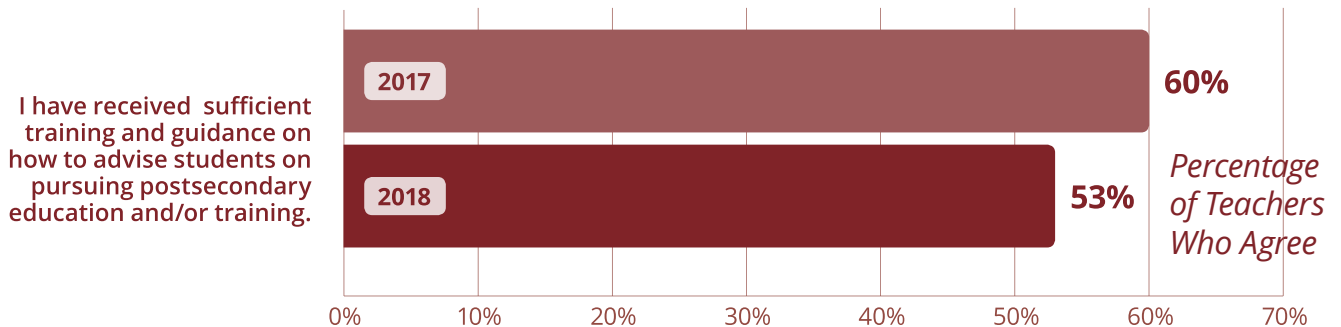
wished that the assessments took up less time. As one teacher said, "We spend too much time reviewing for a test or taking a test to actually teach. I strongly agree that data is necessary for accountability. However, in my district alone, we have taken three common assessments—STAR tests every nine weeks for RTI² and now we are preparing for TNReady." Another stated simply, "We are testing more than we are teaching."



POSTSECONDARY READINESS

In 2017, we observed that too many high school teachers reported feeling underprepared to advise students on their postsecondary pursuits. These results contrasted with 2016 results, which showed teacher perception as generally positive regarding their school's culture of postsecondary readiness, even in schools where fewer than 40 percent of graduates made a seamless transition into a postsecondary institution. This year even

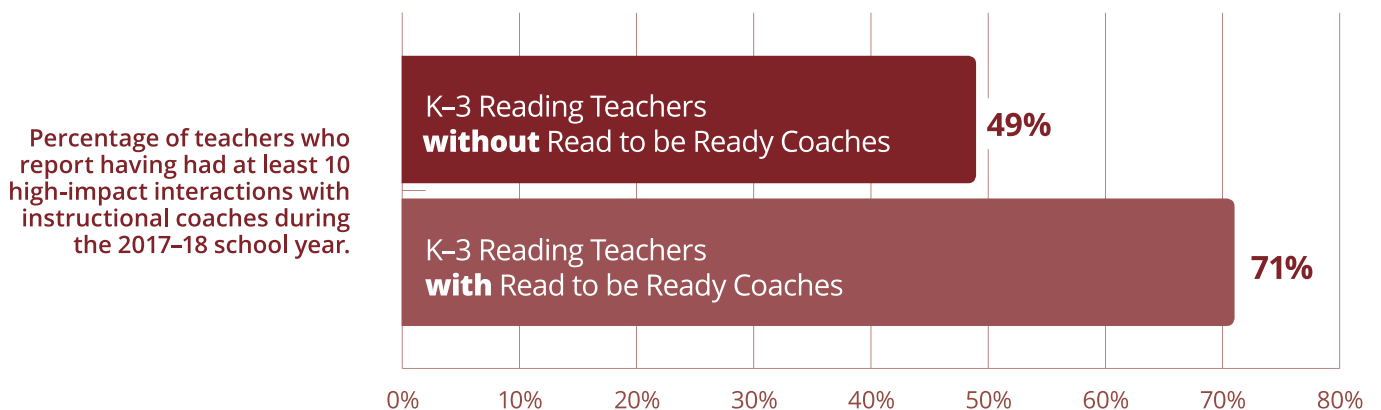
fewer high school teachers (53 percent) agree that they received sufficient training and guidance for advising their students on postsecondary matters—a decline of seven percentage points from the 2017 survey. Teachers report fairly similarly on this sentiment, regardless of the area (e.g., advising students on course selection, advising students on postsecondary transitions, etc.) in which they report being most engaged.



EARLY READING

The educator survey included a few items specifically for K–3 literacy teachers. Teachers participating in the Read to be Ready (R2BR) Coaching Network report much more coaching focused on student work, vocabulary, texts, and tasks. Seventy-one percent of teachers receiving

R2BR coaching reported monthly high-impact coaching activities compared to just 50 percent of teachers not participating. R2BR teachers also report more time spent on literacy activities with their students.

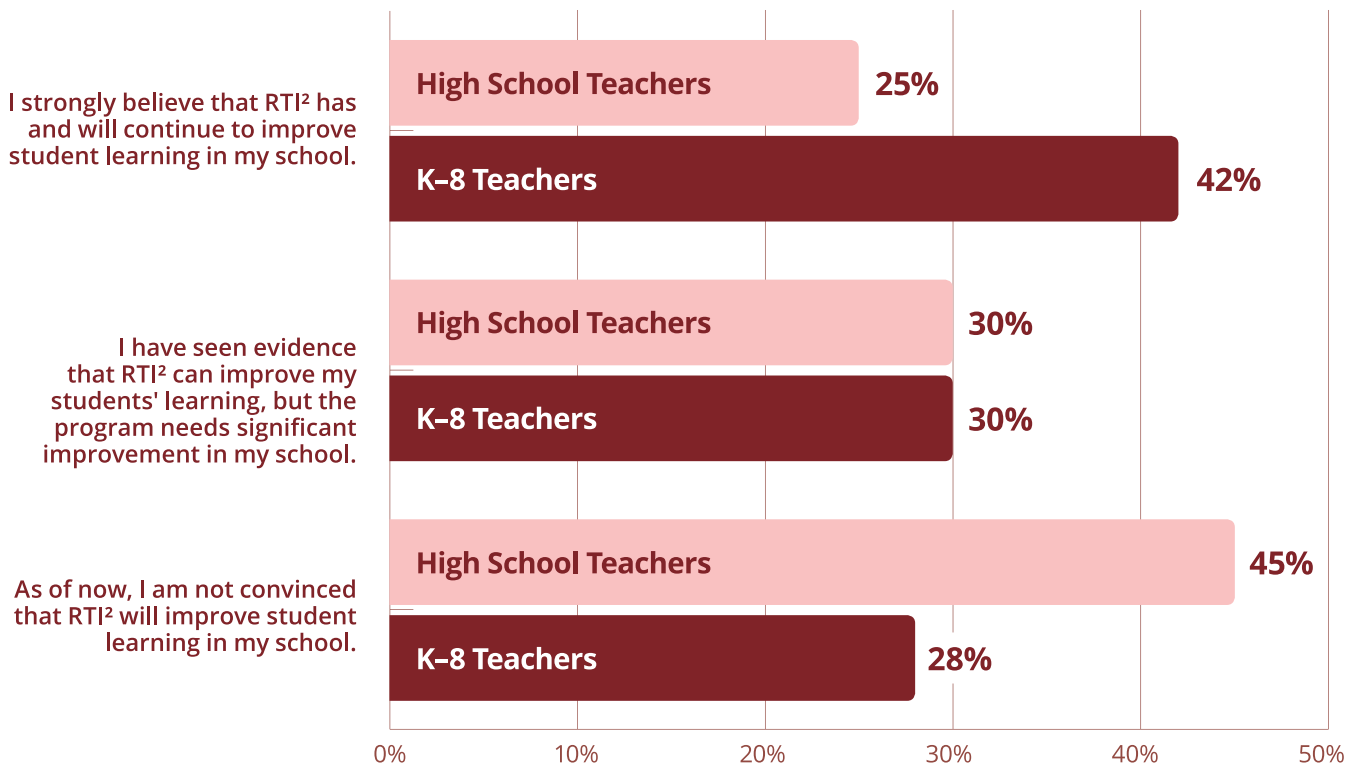


RESPONSE TO INSTRUCTION AND INTERVENTION

Perception of RTI² remains mostly unchanged since 2017. Most teachers—67 percent—say they either strongly believe or have at least seen evidence that RTI² can improve student learning. A large gap persists between the perceptions of K-8 and high school teachers, as 42 percent of K-8 teachers “strongly believe that RTI² has and

will continue to improve student learning” in their school, compared with only 25 percent of high school teachers. Teachers remain concerned about the amount of time and resources required for proper implementation, and the extent to which these efforts compromise their efficiency in other areas.

Which of the following statements best describes your perception of RTI² effectiveness in your school?



What's Ahead?

INSTRUCTIONAL TIME

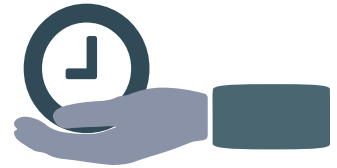
In response to the RTI²-related challenges identified by [last year's educator survey](#), the department conducted a statewide listening tour this spring to gather additional feedback regarding RTI² implementation from educators, parents, and students. This feedback has prompted changes to RTI² that will seek to address both previously recognized and continuing concerns, including the RTI² time burden and/or scheduling impact that was once again a popular topic on this year's survey.

For example, current guidance indicates all students in Tier II or III intervention receive a certain number of fidelity checks. The recent revision in guidance will allow districts greater flexibility in frequency and depth of direct and indirect fidelity checks based on students' progress during intervention. A new definition of fidelity will expand beyond adherence to a particular intervention program and will be conceptualized as a more continuous process embedded within a problem-solving model. This more intentional approach to assessing fidelity will remove superfluous, time-consuming fidelity checks and give districts and schools the autonomy to address fidelity in a way that supports student learning and aligns with their scheduling needs.

The department also recently made changes to the assessment program to reduce the amount of time spent on statewide assessment. For the next two years, there will be no stand-alone field tests. At the recommendation of the Assessment Task Force, the state also eliminated two end-of-course assessments for next year—Chemistry and English III—reduced test time in third and fourth grades, and planned reductions in time for grades 5-8 science from 95 to 75 minutes.

EVALUATION & PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

To address educator feedback about the need for higher-quality feedback and reduced burden around the evaluation process, the department is launching TEAM 2.0. The initiative is focused on a more integrated approach to educator evaluation to ensure student mastery of standards-aligned instructional tasks. Statewide supports will include enhanced TEAM training opportunities focused on student tasks, district norming sessions, and a structure for providing stronger and more transparent



feedback. The department is also working with 16 districts during the 2018–19 school year to pilot additional evaluation improvements and flexibility options, including a new condensed/integrated rubric.

The department continues to advocate for districts to consider how existing programs and tools like the Instructional Partnership Initiative, micro-credentials, and professional learning communities fit into their respective plans. The department also released a [Professional Learning Rubric](#) to monitor and evaluate the quality and impact of professional learning on educator effectiveness and student outcomes.

STANDARDS, MATERIALS, & RESOURCES

Building off the learnings from the first two years of implementation with its Read to Be Ready initiative, the department launched a new campaign—Ready with Resources—in April 2018 that is focused on ensuring that educators have access to high-quality resources and instructional materials. In the year 2020, districts will adopt new English language arts textbooks and materials. The timing of this adoption cycle presents a significant opportunity for both the state and districts to lay out a clear vision for selecting strong resources and building a comprehensive implementation to support their skillful use.

Our research, gathered through hundreds of classroom observations, shows that while students are successfully completing classroom tasks, the tasks rarely reflect the true demands of the standards. Educators are cognizant of this challenge and routinely report that creating daily tasks that meet the expectations of the standards is difficult.

The Ready with Resources campaign is composed of two work streams aimed at supporting both districts and educators with selecting and implementing strong resources:

- English Language Arts Textbook and Instructional Materials Adoption, including resources that will provide additional transparency into the strengths and weaknesses of all the materials submitted in the formal adoption process;
- District Support, including regional trainings and networking opportunities, as well as school-level grants for grade levels using the [department's unit starters](#).



Tying It All Together

This report highlights educators' perceptions on progress and needs for improvement across three major topic areas—instructional and planning time, evaluation and professional learning, and standards, materials, and resources. The main takeaways include:

- Steps must be taken to ensure that teachers' planning time is as well-protected as their instructional time.
- The formal evaluation process has helped many teachers improve, but teachers would benefit from efforts to mitigate the burdensome nature of the experience.
- Teachers would also benefit from improved access to strong instructional materials, along with the training and support necessary to properly implement curriculum in their classroom.

These findings are intertwined—teachers need to be supported by aligned instructional systems. These systems must include adequate planning and collaboration time, high-quality feedback and professional learning, and strong materials so that teachers can plan and deliver the quality of instruction necessary to help students pursue mastery.

Positively, compared to last year, fewer teachers report feeling pulled in too many directions in terms of what to teach and how to teach it. This suggests that teachers are adjusting to the expectations set by new grade-level standards and perhaps feeling more confident and better supported. Still, these results suggest that state, district, and school leaders must work together more closely to assess and adjust expectations for the use of teachers' time. Tennessee teachers have clearly embraced the idea of continually improving their own craft to best serve their students, but they must have the unburdened time and high-quality resources to ensure that they can put their best foot forward.

