



Teaching Conditions Across CORE Areas

To do their best work with students, teachers need supportive school environments that maximize their opportunity to be effective. As a part of the First to the Top Initiative, the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) and a coalition of education stakeholders worked collaboratively with the New Teacher Center (NTC) to implement the second iteration of the Tennessee Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning Survey (TELL Tennessee Survey) to assess whether educators across the state report having the resources and supports necessary to encourage the most effective teaching. Findings from this initiative will inform district and school strategic planning.

The TELL Tennessee Survey is a statistically valid and reliable instrument that assesses nine research-based teaching and learning conditions: Time, Facilities and Resources, Community Support and Involvement, Managing Student Conduct, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, Professional Development, Instructional Practices and Support, and New Teacher Support. Response options for core questions from TELL Tennessee use a Likert scale and range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. NTC administered the anonymous survey of all school-based licensed educators in early 2013. Over 61,000 educators (82 percent) in the state responded.

This brief is part of a series of special analyses requested by the Tennessee Department of Education to examine educators' responses on selected TELL conditions (Time, Teacher Leadership, Professional Development, and three items related to teacher evaluation) by different categories of educators, schools, and districts, which include:

- Educator years of experience,
- Alternative evaluation models (Coach, TEM [Teacher Effectiveness Measure], and TIGER [Teacher Instructional Growth for Effectiveness and Results]), compared to the statewide TEAM (Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model),
- Combined alternative evaluation models compared to statewide TEAM,
- Urbanicity status,
- CORE (Centers of Regional Excellence) areas,
- District enrollment, and
- School accountability (Reward, Priority, and Focus) status.

The current brief examines differences in TELL constructs across the CORE areas. The Tennessee Department of Education divided the state into eight geographical CORE areas. These include: East Tennessee, First Tennessee, Mid Cumberland, Northwest, South Central, Southeast, Southwest/Memphis-Shelby, and Upper Cumberland. All TELL construct areas combined will be presented to provide an overview of the pattern of responses but the focus of the brief will be on Time, Teacher Leadership, Professional Development, and teacher evaluation compared across CORE areas. Individual items associated with the areas of focus area are listed in the endnotes.¹

For this brief, results are summarized using a rate of agreement that combines the strongly agree and agree categories for each of the regions and the percentage point change from 2011 is reported.

Findings

Across survey administrations, educators located in the Northwest area consistently view teaching conditions more positively than other areas. Figure 1 illustrates the differences in the combined rates of agreement across all TELL constructs by CORE area to demonstrate the general pattern of educator perceptions.

- Northwest reported the highest composite rate of agreement in 2013 (86 percent) as well as in 2011, (84 percent).

- All regions demonstrate an increase in the composite rates of agreement between 2011 and 2013. The increases varied from two percentage points in Northwest to six percentage points in First Tennessee.
- East Tennessee, Mid Cumberland, and Southeast region educators report the lowest overall rate of agreement in 2013, 81 percent. Southeast also reported the lowest agreement in 2011, 76 percent.

FIGURE 1. 2011 AND 2013 COMPOSITE RATES OF AGREEMENT BY CORE AREA

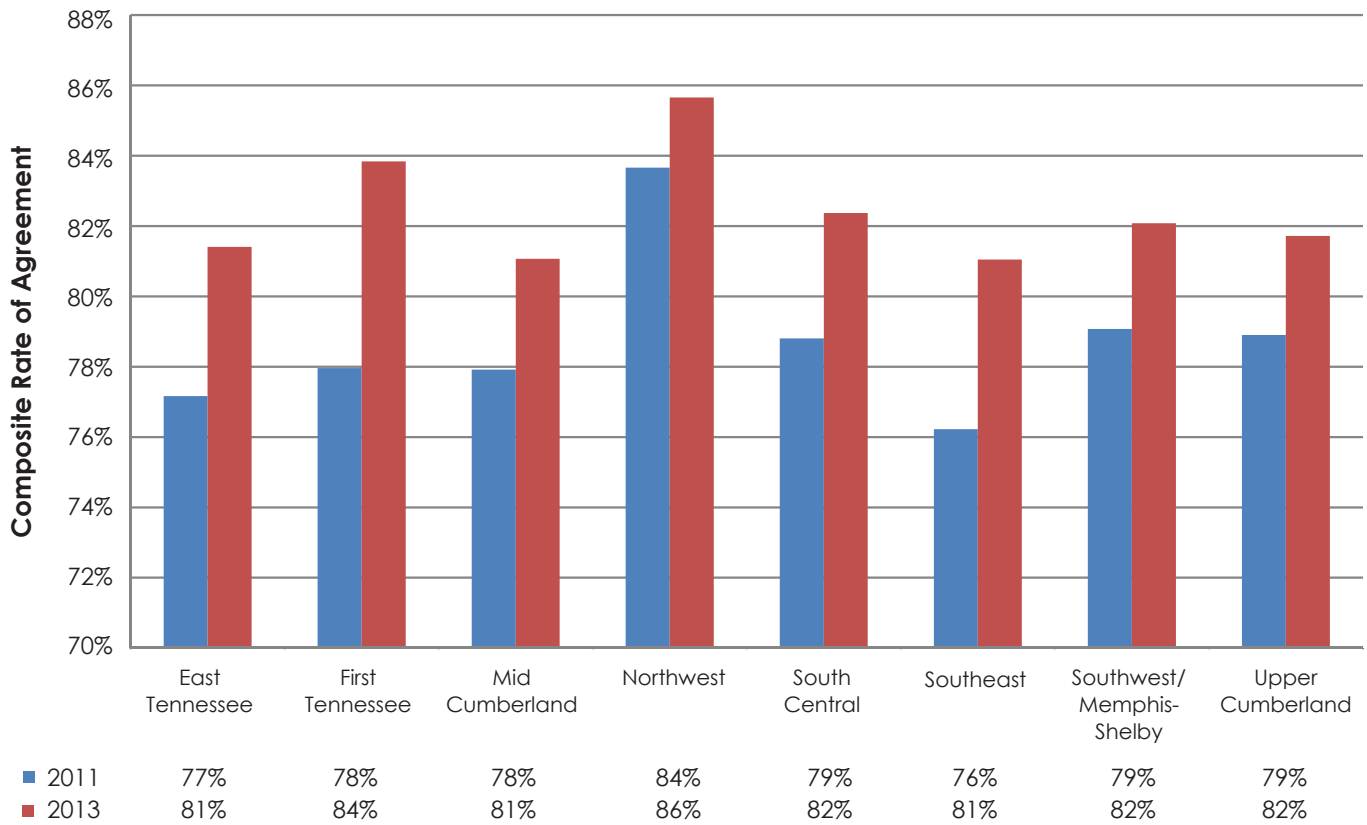


Table 1 presents the rates of agreement on the specific TELL constructs of interest. Overall, educators in Southwest Memphis-Shelby report the lowest rate of agreement for the area of Time. The highest rate of agreement is reported by educators in the Northwest area in the area of Teacher Leadership.

Across the eight CORE areas, educators report increased rates of agreement across identified TELL constructs from 2011. Time, Teacher Leadership, and Professional Development rates of agreement increased from 2011 ranging from nine percentage points to two percentage points. The First Tennessee CORE area educators indicate the largest increases between survey administrations on the constructs of interest. See Table 2.

TABLE 1. 2013 CONSTRUCT LEVEL RATE OF AGREEMENT BY CORE AREA								
Construct	East Tennessee	First Tennessee	Mid Cumberland	Northwest	South Central	Southeast	Southwest/ Memphis-Shelby	Upper Cumberland
Time	69%	75%	69%	67%	73%	72%	68%	69%
Teacher Leadership	84%	86%	83%	88%	85%	84%	84%	84%
Professional Development	78%	80%	78%	82%	77%	77%	83%	79%

TABLE 2. CHANGE IN TEACHING CONDITIONS BY CORE: 2011 TO 2013								
Construct	East Tennessee	First Tennessee	Mid Cumberland	Northwest	South Central	Southeast	Southwest/ Memphis-Shelby	Upper Cumberland
Time	6	8	6	5	5	7	5	4
Teacher Leadership	7	9	5	4	5	7	4	5
Professional Development	4	6	2	3	6	5	3	3

ACROSS THE EIGHT CORE AREAS, educators report increased rates of agreement across identified TELL constructs from 2011.

Educators across the CORE areas report the lowest rates of agreement and the most range in agreement rates for the area of Time. The Northwest area exhibits the highest rate of agreement (79 percent). There is a 10-percentage-point difference between the Northwest (79 percent) and three other regions (East Tennessee, Mid Cumberland, and Upper Cumberland all at 69 percent) and an 11-percentage-point difference between Southwest/Memphis-Shelby (68 percent). See Table 1.

At the item level in the area of Time, educators are least positive about the efforts made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do. In seven out of eight regions, fewer than three-quarters of educators (75 percent) agree that this condition is in place for them.

Considering the three survey constructs, educators across the CORE areas report the highest rates of agreement for Teacher Leadership. Over eight out of 10 educators agree teachers are provided leadership opportunities. Rates of agreement range from a high of 88 percent in the Northwest region to 83 percent in Mid Cumberland region. This construct demonstrates the least range of the three, varying by five percentage points across CORE areas.

Almost eight out of 10 educators across regions agree that teachers receive the necessary training and support. The Professional Development agreement rates range from 83 percent in Southwest Memorial-Shelby region to 77 percent in South Central and Southeast regions. Additionally, this construct demonstrated the least increase between administrations. The First Tennessee and South Central region educators report a six-percentage-point increase from

2011 and Mid Cumberland educators reported a two-percentage-point increase.

While almost all educators agree teachers are held to high standards, educator rates of agreements about the consistency of teacher evaluation procedures decreased between 2011 and 2013 across regions. There is no construct specific to teacher evaluation in the TELL Tennessee Survey, however; there are three questions that can contribute to a broader discussion of the teacher evaluation process in Tennessee. See Tables 3 and 4.†

- Across the areas, over nine out of 10 educators agree that “Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.” Additionally, agreement increased slightly from 2011 (varying between one and four percentage points).
- Examining the question, “Teacher performance is assessed objectively,” no CORE region reports an increase from 2011 to 2013. Decreases varied from zero (Southeast) to seven percentage points (Northwest and Southwest/Memphis-Shelby).
- Of the three questions related to teacher evaluation, all CORE area educators report a decrease in the rate of agreement for “The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.” Southeast educator rates of agreement decrease the least (one percentage point) while six of the eight regions’ educators reported a nine percentage point decrease or greater and Upper Cumberland educators decreased the most (12 percentage points).

† It should be noted that since the 2011 survey, all teachers in the state were introduced to a new evaluation instrument in the 2011-2012 school year.

EDUCATORS ACROSS THE CORE AREAS report the lowest rates of agreement and the most range in agreement rates for the area of Time.

TABLE 3. 2013 TEACHER EVALUATION QUESTIONS BY CORE AREA*

Teacher Evaluation Question	East Tennessee	First Tennessee	Mid Cumberland	Northwest	South Central	Southeast	Southwest/ Memphis-Shelby	Upper Cumberland
Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.	96%	96%	95%	97%	95%	96%	96%	95%
Teacher performance is assessed objectively.	83%	87%	83%	86%	85%	87%	81%	84%
The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	79%	83%	78%	81%	80%	85%	77%	79%

* Percentages indicate rates of agreement after combining the agree and strongly agree response options.

TABLE 4. CHANGE IN TEACHER EVALUATION QUESTIONS BY CORE: 2011 TO 2013

Teacher Evaluation Question	East Tennessee	First Tennessee	Mid Cumberland	Northwest	South Central	Southeast	Southwest/ Memphis-Shelby	Upper Cumberland
Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.	3	4	2	2	2	3	1	2
Teacher performance is assessed objectively.	-4	-1	-5	-7	-6	0	-7	-6
The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	-9	-5	-9	-10	-10	-1	-9	-12

Summary

Differences observed across the constructs suggest that regions may be employing a variety of strategies or that contextual differences may account for reported differences. TDOE and CORE staff may consider further examining practices and strategies in First Tennessee to learn more about how this area achieved relatively large increases

between administrations across constructs of interest. Additionally, the Northwest region may be of interest given the consistently high educator rates of agreement across the three constructs. Considering items related to teacher evaluation, almost all educators across regions agree they are held to high standards and all regions exhibit similar patterns of decreased agreement between administrations for other evaluation items.

Endnote

1. The Time construct pertains to the available time to plan, collaborate, provide instruction, and eliminate barriers in order to maximize instructional time during the school day. The construct includes the following questions:

- Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.
- Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues.
- Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions.
- The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.
- Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine administrative paperwork teachers are required to do.
- Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.
- Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students.

The Teacher Leadership construct pertains to the degree of teacher involvement in decisions that impact classroom and school practices. The construct includes the following questions:

- Teachers are recognized as educational experts.
- Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.
- Teachers are relied upon to make decisions about educational issues.
- Teachers are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles.
- The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions to solve problems.
- In this school, we take steps to solve problems.
- Teachers are effective leaders in this school.
- Teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making in this school.

The Professional Development construct pertains to the availability and quality of learning opportunities for educators to enhance their teaching. The construct includes the following questions:

- Sufficient resources are available for professional development in my school.
- An appropriate amount of time is provided for professional development.
- Professional development offerings are data driven.
- Professional learning opportunities are aligned with the school's improvement plan.
- Professional development is differentiated to meet the needs of individual teachers.
- Professional development deepens teachers' content knowledge.
- Professional development provides teachers with strategies to involve families and other community members as active partners in their children's education.
- Teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own practice.
- Follow up is provided from professional development in this school.
- Professional development provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices.
- Professional development is evaluated and results are communicated to teachers.
- Professional development enhances teachers' ability to implement instructional strategies that meet diverse student learning needs.
- Professional development enhances teachers' abilities to help improve student learning.

The TELL Tennessee Survey included a few questions related to the Department's interest in teacher evaluation. They are:

- Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.
- Teacher performance is assessed objectively.
- The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.

About the New Teacher Center

New Teacher Center focuses on improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of new teachers. NTC partners with states, school districts, and policymakers to design and implement systems that create sustainable, high-quality mentoring and professional development; build leadership capacity; work to enhance teaching conditions; improve retention; and transform schools in vibrant learning communities where all students succeed.



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