



Teaching Conditions by School Accountability Designations

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) regions,
- District enrollment, and
- School accountability (Reward, Priority, and Focus) status.

The current brief compares accountability designations of Tennessee schools by the identified teaching and learning conditions. Individual items associated with each survey 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 questions.

This brief provides definitions of the designations used in the analyses and sample sizes for each designation group. It also includes the overall construct rate of agreement for Time, Professional Development, and Teacher Leadership, as well as the increase in the rate of agreement from 2011 by accountability categories. The brief then reports rates of agreement and increases from 2011 by designation categories for selected items in each construct to demonstrate general patterns. Not all items are included in each table, however, a list of items is found in the endnotes. Finally, this summary includes similar information on the items related to the teacher evaluation system.

As a portion of the state’s waiver from No Child Left Behind, the Tennessee Department of Education identified outliers in its new accountability system and developed three specific designations for these schools.² These designations are used to create comparison groups for better understanding how teaching conditions vary across different settings.

- Reward Schools are defined as the top five percent of schools in the state for overall performance—as measured by overall student achievement levels—and the top five percent of schools for year-over-year progress—as measured by school wide value-added data. Reward schools may qualify for this designation due to overall performance, or progress, or both. For the purposes of this analysis another category was added to include all Reward schools—those for performance, those for progress, and those receiving both—this category is labeled Reward.
- Priority Schools are the lowest-performing five percent of schools across the state, in terms of academic achievement. Schools in this group are eligible for inclusion in the Achievement School District or in District Innovation Zones. They may also plan and adopt turnaround models for school improvement.
- Focus Schools are the 10 percent of schools in the state with the largest achievement gaps between groups of students, such as economically disadvantaged status

or English-language learner status. A school may be designated as a Focus School in a number of performance areas, such as a high school with a graduation rate less than 60 percent or having a subgroup proficiency rate below five percent.

Participant sample sizes from each accountability designation provided by the state are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1. 2013 PARTICIPANT SAMPLE SIZES BY ACCOUNTABILITY DESIGNATION	
Accountability Designation	Sample Size
Reward (Performance, Progress, OR both)	5,279
— Reward Performance (only)	1,305
— Reward Progress (only)	2,641
— Reward Both (Performance and Progress)	1,333
Priority	2,008
Focus	5,266
— Focus Graduation Rate Below 60 Percent	26
— Focus Success Rate Below 5 Percent	57
— Focus Gap	5,183

For this analysis, comparisons are made at the larger Reward, Priority, and Focus levels due to the small sample size of some of the subgroups.

THE TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION *identified outliers in its new accountability system and developed three specific designations for these schools—Reward, Priority and Focus.*

Findings

All three groups are improving in the areas of Time, Teacher Leadership, and Professional Development.

All three groups report increases in the three construct areas identified for this brief (Table 2). In addition:

- Educators in the Priority group, or those in the lowest performing five percent of schools, report the largest percentage point increase of the three groups in the area of Time, but report the lowest agreement rate in 2013 (66 percent), meaning this group improved the most in this area but also started the lowest.
- All three groups report five percentage point increases or more in the area of Teacher Leadership and at least four out of five (80 percent) educators report the presence of positive teaching conditions in Teacher Leadership.
- All three groups report an agreement rate of more than 80 percent in the Professional Development area. The Priority group indicates the highest rate of agreement in this area (84 percent) compared to 81 percent for the other two accountability groups.

TABLE 2. KEY TEACHING CONDITIONS BY ACCOUNTABILITY DESIGNATION: 2013 TO 2011

Construct	Reward		Priority		Focus	
	2013 RA*	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011
Time	73%	7	66%	9	72%	4
Teacher Leadership	87%	6	80%	7	84%	5
Professional Development	81%	5	84%	5	81%	3

* RA indicates rate of agreement after combining the agree and strongly agree response options.

ALL THREE GROUPS (REWARD, PRIORITY, FOCUS) are improving in the areas of Time, Teacher Leadership, and Professional Development.

Time

Rate of agreement increases in Priority and Reward schools exceed those of Focus schools on every item related to Time.

While both Priority and Reward educators report higher agreement than Focus educators on issues of Time, the two groups excel in different areas (Table 3).

- Priority school educators report larger gains in reducing paperwork, minimizing interruptions, and protecting teacher time than their colleagues in Reward and Focus group schools. Despite these large gains, educators in Priority schools still report the lowest agreement rates of the three groups in these areas.
- Reward school educators report larger agreement increases in having reasonable class sizes and having sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all of their students.
- Focus group educators report less increase in rates of agreement across all questions related to Time, and report higher rates of agreement in their perceptions of class sizes (73 percent) and sufficient non-instructional time (70 percent) than educators in the Reward and Priority groups for 2013.

TABLE 3. TIME QUESTIONS BY ACCOUNTABILITY DESIGNATION: 2013 TO 2011

Time Questions	Reward		Priority		Focus	
	2013 RA*	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011
Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.	71%	5	65%	4	73%	2
Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues.	73%	6	74%	6	74%	3
Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions.	77%	9	62%	14	73%	4
The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.	69%	5	64%	8	70%	2
Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine administrative paperwork teachers are required to do.	71%	12	61%	16	70%	8
Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	72%	9	68%	7	71%	4
Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students.	76%	5	70%	9	76%	4

* RA indicates rate of agreement after combining the agree and strongly agree response options.

Teacher Leadership

All three groups demonstrate increases in the rates of agreement on all items related to Teacher Leadership. Across all three groups, between one and six percentage point increases occur across Teacher Leadership questions (Table 4).

- Reward group educators report a six percentage point increase that their faculty has an effective process for making group decisions to solve problems compared to a four percentage point increase by the Priority group and a two percentage point increase in the Focus group. Despite this increase, this question is one of the least

positively viewed items in Teacher Leadership across the three groups. No group exceeds a 79 percent agreement rate in 2013.

- More than four out of five educators in each group agree that teachers are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles.
- Priority school educators, while indicating a higher rate of agreement than in 2011 on all items in the area of Teacher Leadership, report lower agreement rates in 2013 than their Reward and Focus group colleagues across all questions related to Teacher Leadership.

TABLE 4. TEACHER LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS BY ACCOUNTABILITY DESIGNATION: 2013 TO 2011

Select Teacher Leadership Questions	Reward		Priority		Focus	
	2013 RA*	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions to solve problems.	79%	6	72%	4	75%	2
Teachers are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles.	90%	4	84%	1	88%	3

* RA indicates rate of agreement after combining the agree and strongly agree response options.

EDUCATORS, REGARDLESS OF EVALUATION MODEL, are more positive about time, leadership opportunities, and teacher evaluation in 2013 compared to 2011.

Professional Development

All three groups of educators report higher rates of agreement on all questions related to Professional Development compared to 2011. All three groups demonstrate between two and eight percentage point increases across all Professional Development questions (Table 5).

- The largest increase for all three groups (five percentage points or more) is on the question, 'Follow-up is provided from professional development in this school.'
- Collectively, these three groups indicate they are encouraged to reflect on their practice and that

professional development is data-driven and aligned with their school improvement plans more than in 2011. All groups report an 89 percent or greater agreement rate with these three items.

- All groups of educators report less agreement that professional development is evaluated and results are communicated to teachers, that it provides teachers with strategies to involve families in their children's education, and that it is differentiated to meet the needs of all educators. On these items, agreement rates did not exceed 75 percent for any group.

TABLE 5. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS BY ACCOUNTABILITY DESIGNATION: 2013 TO 2011

Select Professional Development Questions	Reward		Priority		Focus	
	2013 RA*	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011
Follow-up is provided from professional development in this school.	76%	7	80%	8	75%	5
Teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own practice.	94%	4	93%	4	93%	3
Professional development provides teachers with strategies to involve families and other community members as active partners in their children's education.	67%	4	74%	6	68%	3

* RA indicates rate of agreement after combining the agree and strongly agree response options.

All three groups of educators (Reward, Priority, Focus) report higher rates of agreement on all questions related to Professional Development compared to 2011.

Teacher Evaluation

Almost all educators in each group agree that teachers are held to high standards. Fewer agree teachers are assessed objectively or that the evaluation process is consistent and agreement on these two items decreased from 2011. The TELL Tennessee Survey includes three questions related to teacher evaluation that can inform discussions about the evaluation system (Table 6). †

- The three groups are in high agreement (94 percent or greater) that teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction and report a three or four percentage point increase on this question from 2011.
- The agreement rate associated with ‘Teacher performance is assessed objectively’ decreased (two to four percentage points) for each group from 2011.
- The largest decreases in rates of agreement are observed for the Reward and Focus groups (six and seven percentage points respectively) for the item, ‘The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.’ The Priority group educators also report a decrease from 2011 of one percentage point and report the lowest agreement rate of the three groups in 2013 at 79 percent.

† 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.

Summary

The educators in schools included in the Priority accountability designation report the lowest rates of agreement for the constructs of Time and Teacher Leadership but the highest rate of agreement in the area of Professional Development. Additionally, rates of agreement generally increased the most in the Priority schools across the three constructs. These differences may be due to specific improvement strategies and policies implemented for the Priority schools or could be due to larger contextual issues associated with these schools.

Across accountability types, while most educators agree teachers are held to high standards, educator perceptions about the consistency and objectivity of teacher evaluation decreased between survey administrations for all three accountability groups.

TABLE 6. TEACHER EVALUATION QUESTIONS BY ACCOUNTABILITY DESIGNATION: 2013 TO 2011

Teacher Evaluation Questions	Reward		Priority		Focus	
	2013 RA*	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011
Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.	97%	3	94%	4	96%	3
Teacher performance is assessed objectively.	87%	-2	80%	-3	84%	-4
The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	83%	-6	79%	-1	81%	-7

* RA indicates rate of agreement after combining the agree and strongly agree response options.

Endnotes

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.

2. Information on Tennessee's Accountability System are located on the department's website: <http://www.tn.gov/education/accountability/>

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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