



Teaching Conditions by Urbanicity Status

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 examines teaching and learning conditions across Tennessee teachers' grouped by the urbanicity status of their schools. For this comparison, the 12 urbanicity categories provided by the Department were combined into four broader categories, 'City,' 'Suburb,' 'Town,' and 'Rural.' The sub-categories of city large, city mid-size, and city small were designated 'City;' the suburban large, suburban mid-size, and suburban small were designated 'Suburb;' town fringe, town distant, and town remote were designated 'Town;' and rural fringe, rural distant, and rural remote were designated 'Rural.' These four broad areas are compared across Time, Teacher Leadership, Professional Development, and teacher evaluation questions. Individual construct items are found in the endnotes.¹ For this brief, results are summarized using a rate of agreement that combines the strongly agree and agree categories.

Findings

Educators from the different designations generally view their conditions similarly, although educators assigned to schools in the Town category are slightly more positive than the other groups.

Upon examination of 2013 Tell Tennessee Survey results, all groups are within five percentage points of one another across the three constructs and all demonstrate similar increases in rates of agreement from 2011.

- Educators in City schools report slightly higher increases on items related to Time (between one and three percentage points). However, educators working in Town

and Rural schools report this highest agreement rate of 73 percent in the area of Time.

- Educators in Town and Rural settings report higher increases in conditions related to Teacher Leadership (between one and two percentage points). Town school educators report the highest agreement rate of 86 percent in this area.
- Educators in Town and Rural settings report slightly higher increases on questions related to Professional Development (five percentage points compared to three). In the Professional Development construct, City school educators report the highest rate of agreement at 82 percent.

TABLE 1. TEACHING CONDITIONS ACROSS KEY CONSTRUCTS BY URBANICITY: 2013 TO 2011

Construct	City		Suburb		Town		Rural	
	2013 RA*	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011
Time	70%	8	68%	5	73%	7	73%	6
Teacher Leadership	84%	5	85%	6	86%	7	85%	7
Professional Development	82%	3	78%	3	81%	5	79%	5

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

EDUCATORS FROM THE DIFFERENT DESIGNATIONS generally view their conditions similarly, although educators assigned to schools in the Town category are slightly more positive than the other groups.

Time

While rates of agreement increased from 2011 and 2013 across all urbanicity groups, the City group demonstrates large increases for several items (Table 2).

- Educators in City schools report between a higher rate of agreement (between four and seven percentage points) from 2011 that efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do compared to other groups. Educators in Town schools exhibit the highest agreement at 72 percent.
- City school educators report between three and five percentage points increases above the other groups that teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students. Town school educators report the highest agreement rate at 72 percent.
- A similar pattern is exhibited for the item, 'Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students.' On this item, educators in Rural schools exhibit the highest agreement of the four groups (77 percent).

TABLE 2. SELECT TIME QUESTIONS BY URBANICITY: 2013 TO 2011

Select Time Questions	City		Suburb		Town		Rural	
	2013 RA*	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011
Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine administrative paperwork teachers are required to do.	66%	15	66%	8	72%	11	70%	10
Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	69%	10	66%	5	72%	7	71%	7
Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students.	73%	7	72%	5	76%	5	77%	4

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

WHILE RATES OF AGREEMENT increased from 2011 and 2013 across all urbanicity groups, the City group demonstrates large increases for several items.

Teacher Leadership

Rates of agreement for the Teacher Leadership items increased from 2011 and 2013 across all urbanicity groups and the amount of increase across groups is similar (Table 3).

- Town school educators report more of an increase (five percentage points) than City school educators (two

percentage points) that teachers are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles. All groups indicate 87 percent agreement or higher.

- Town and Rural school educators report slightly higher increases that their faculty has an effective process for making group decisions to solve problems. Town school educators indicate the highest agreement of 78 percent.

TABLE 3. SELECT TEACHER LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS BY URBANICITY: 2013 TO 2011

Select Teacher Leadership Questions	City		Suburb		Town		Rural	
	2013 RA*	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011
Teachers are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles.	87%	2	91%	4	90%	5	89%	4
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions to solve problems.	75%	3	76%	5	78%	7	77%	6

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

RATES OF AGREEMENT for the Teacher Leadership items increased from 2011 and 2013 across all urbanicity groups and the amount of increase across groups is similar.

Professional Development

While increases from 2011 and 2013 are present across all urbanicity groups, the percentage-point increase for Town and Rural schools is greater than their peers on some questions related to Professional Development. Educators in schools designated as City report the highest agreement across items related to Professional Development (Table 4).

- Educators in Rural schools report more of an increase (eight percentage points) in rates of agreement than Suburb school educators (three percentage points) and City school educators (five percentage points) that professional development is differentiated to meet the needs of individual teachers. City school educators report the highest agreement of 72 percent.
- Town school educators report higher increases in agreement (eight percentage points) than Suburb school educators (five percentage points) and City school educators (four percentage points) that professional development provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices. City school educators report the highest agreement of 83 percent.
- Town school educators report higher increases in agreement (seven percentage points) than Suburb and City school educators (three percentage points) that professional development deepens teachers' content knowledge. City school educators report the highest agreement of the four groups at 81 percent.

TABLE 4. SELECT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONS BY URBANICITY: 2013 TO 2011

Select Professional Development Questions	City		Suburb		Town		Rural	
	2013 RA*	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011	2013 RA	Change from 2011
Professional development is differentiated to meet the needs of individual teachers.	72%	5	65%	3	69%	7	69%	8
Professional development provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices.	83%	4	80%	5	80%	8	79%	6
Professional development deepens teachers' content knowledge.	81%	3	75%	3	78%	7	77%	5

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

INCREASES FROM 2011 and 2013 are present across all urbanicity groups,

Teacher Evaluation

Almost all educators across the urbanicity categories agree that teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction. Across all groups, educators report lower rates of agreement on the other two items related to teacher evaluation in 2013 than in 2011 (Table 5). However, 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.

A decline between five and eight percentage points is present across groups regarding the consistency of teacher evaluation procedures. All groups report a three-percentage-point decline or greater that teacher performance is assessed objectively.

Summary

Across urbanicity designations, all rates of agreement increased from 2011. Educators report the lowest rate of agreement for Time and the highest rates of agreement for Teacher Leadership. The same two constructs demonstrate similar patterns of increase between administrations. Educators across categories generally view the items related to teacher evaluation the same. Most agree teachers are held to high standards but view teacher assessment and evaluation less positively. Results disaggregated by urbanicity status do not reveal consistent patterns in the data.

TABLE 5. SELECT TEACHER EVALUATION QUESTIONS BY URBANICITY: 2013 TO 2011

Select Teacher Evaluation Questions	City		Suburb		Town		Rural	
	2013 RA*	Change from 2011	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.	95%	2	96%	2	96%	2	96%	3
The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	80%	-5	79%	-8	82%	-8	82%	-7
Teacher performance is assessed objectively.	83%	-3	83%	-4	86%	-4	85%	-3

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

ALMOST ALL EDUCATORS across the urbanicity categories agree that teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.

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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