



Tennessee Educator Survey

2023 Overview

A Report from the Tennessee Department of Education



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Introduction

The Tennessee Educator Survey (TES) is a comprehensive annual survey used to gather information about the experience of educators across Tennessee. Each year, the Tennessee Department of Education (department) and Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA) gather information to inform and empower stakeholders and decision-makers across the state to better meet the needs of teachers. The TES intends to give researchers and policymakers key insights on a variety of topics including teacher satisfaction, preparedness, workload, and engagement with key department initiatives.

This report highlights the major takeaways from the 12th annual TES administered in spring 2023. Housing over a decade's worth of information, the TES continues to build on years of insights and policy implementation strategies, providing an excellent roadmap of where we go now as a state to continue to attract and retain Tennessee educators. Key policies informed by the TES include school funding, teacher licensure initiatives, and learning acceleration implementation.

Several takeaways from the 2023 TES are related to the state's bold policies and initiatives to boost student achievement and outcomes, including the Tennessee Literacy Success Act, Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act, Reading 360, TN ALL Corps, Innovative School Models, Grow Your Own, and the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA) Act.

Visit the TES website to explore survey results at the state, district, and school levels at educatorsurvey.tnk12.gov.

About the TES

Administered under a partnership between the department and TERA, the TES is **the state's most comprehensive tool for gathering input from Tennessee teachers and administrators**. For over a decade, the TES has provided Tennessee with valuable insight into educator's perceptions of practice, policy, and school climate across the state. The TES is a key initiative in the partnership between TERA and the department. TERA, a research-practice partnership based out of Vanderbilt University, conducts high-quality, rigorous research to encourage evidence-driven decision-making across the department's Best for All strategic plan.

Best for All aims to set all Tennessee students on a path to success through strategic policies and strong practices.

The department understands the importance of using evidence-based decisions to close gaps, provide resources for educators, strategically invest in proven initiatives, and accelerate student academic achievement. TERA's research highlights much of the work of the department, including ways to recruit, prepare, support, and retain educators. By utilizing the strong connections and data capabilities of an institution such as Vanderbilt, TERA provides the department with valuable support in administering and collecting TES results.





Survey Data

The following analyses use data from the 2023 TES, primarily responses collected from teachers and school leaders. Overall, nearly half of Tennessee teachers (N=37,056, 50% response rate) and school leaders (N=1,910, 47% response rate) responded to the survey.

To account for differential response rates across school type, region, and economically disadvantaged students served, the analyses incorporate weighting to produce results that are more representative of all public school teachers and school leaders in Tennessee.

We analyze responses taken from the Teacher Core and Administrator Core (given to all teachers and school leaders, respectively), as well as responses from the English Language Arts (ELA) Branch (given to teachers who teach English Language Arts, N=9,830), the Early Career Branch (given to teachers in their first 3 years of teaching, N=3,821), the Career and Technical Education (CTE) Branch (given to CTE teachers, N=1,571), the Academics Module (one of three randomly assigned teacher modules, N=9,743), and the Student Readiness Module (one of three randomly assigned teacher modules, N=9,791).

THE 2023 TES WAS CONDUCTED



37,056
TEACHERS (50%)



+ 1,910
SCHOOL LEADERS (47%)

completed the TES & provided
*reflections of educators
across Tennessee*

TES PARTICIPANTS STATS BY BRANCH...

9,830
ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA)

3,821
EARLY CAREER

1,571
CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE)

9,743
ACADEMICS MODULE

9,791
STUDENT READINESS MODULE



ACADEMICS & Tennessee's Strategy for Learning Acceleration

First and foremost, our teachers are focused on student learning and creating rich and rigorous educational experiences for every student. Tennessee has focused on ensuring strong foundations for learning are in place for students at schools and districts across the state.



Overall, teachers' responses on this year's TES indicate that perceptions of curriculum materials, trainings, professional development, and tutoring support have increased over time. This suggests the state's plan to utilize a data-centered approach to learning acceleration and give students unique learning experiences has garnered support from the educator workforce.

Tennessee Literacy Success Act and Reading 360

The Tennessee Literacy Success Act and Reading 360 is Tennessee's comprehensive early literacy initiative that aims to support Tennessee students in attaining strong reading skills in early elementary school. Launched in December 2020, Reading 360 provides grants, tools, and resources to ensure Tennessee students develop strong phonics-based reading skills by supporting districts, teachers, families, and communities. Responses from the TES can inform these efforts by providing the state with teachers' feedback on the ELA curriculum, trainings, and instructional supports.

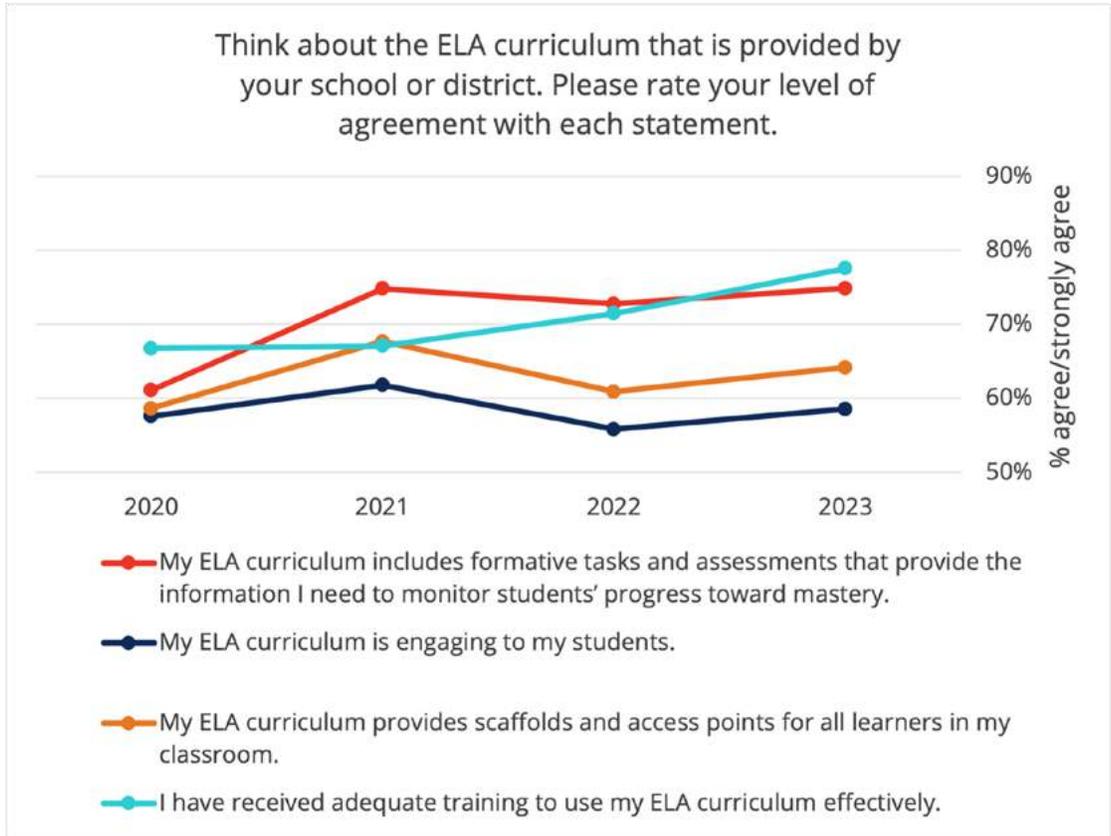




In 2023, teachers reported higher satisfaction with their school- or district-provided curriculum than in previous years.

Roughly 78% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they received adequate training to use their ELA curriculum effectively – up from 71% in 2022 and 67% in 2020. Further, more teachers in 2023 also agreed or strongly agreed that their ELA curriculum includes formative tasks and assessments to monitor students’ progress toward mastery (75% vs. 73% in 2022), provides scaffolds and access points for all learners (64% vs. 61% in 2022), and is engaging to students (59% vs. 56% in 2022).

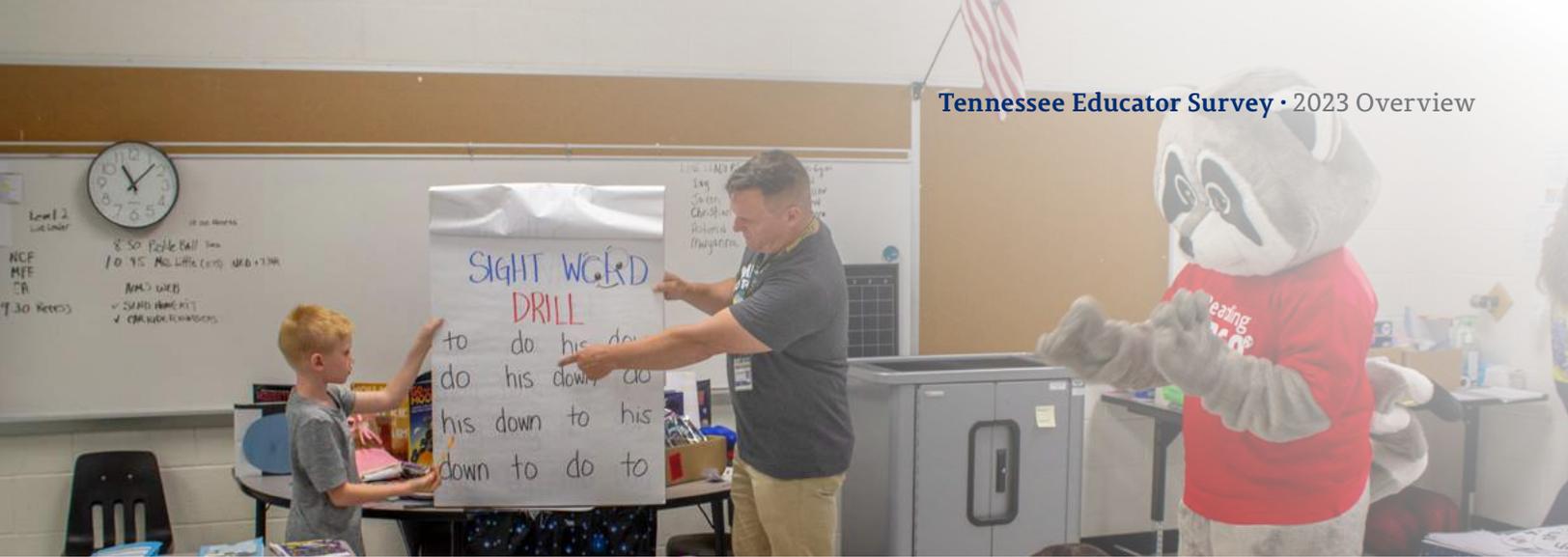
Figure 1: Teachers’ perceptions of the ELA curriculum have improved from 2022.



ELA teachers in Kindergarten-2nd grade (K-2) had even more favorable views of their ELA curriculum.

- 79%** of K-2 teachers agreed that they received adequate training to use the curriculum effectively,
- 76%** agreed that the curriculum included formative tasks and assessments to monitor students’ progress toward mastery,
- 66%** agreed that the curriculum provides scaffolds and access points for all learners, and
- 61%** agreed that the curriculum is engaging to students.





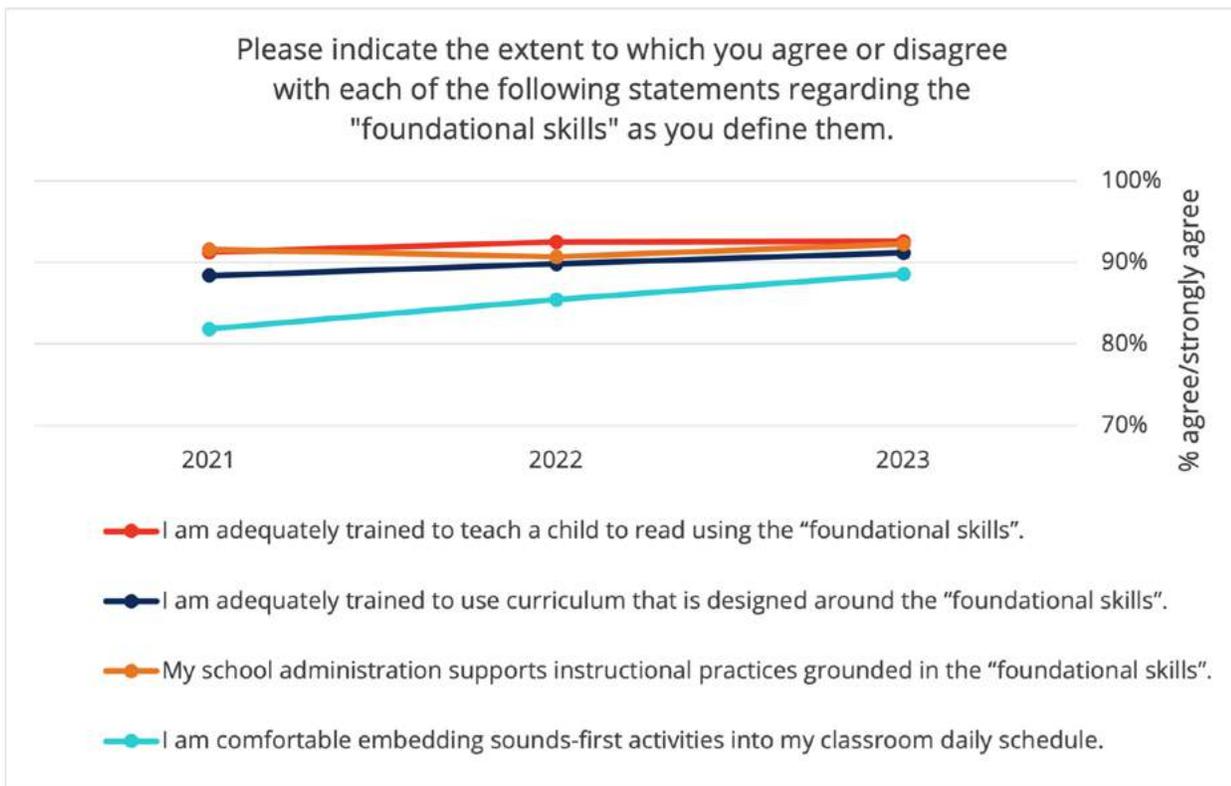
As part of the Tennessee Literacy Success Act and the Reading 360 initiative, the state has invested heavily in training and resources around foundational, phonics-based literacy skills primarily taught in early elementary grades.



K-2 ELA teachers generally agreed that they feel comfortable incorporating foundational literacy skills into their teaching.

About 93% of K-2 ELA teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they are adequately trained to teach a child to read using the foundational skills, up from 91% in 2021. Further, 92% agreed that their school administration supports instructional practices grounded in foundational skills, and 91% agreed that they are adequately trained to use curriculum designed around foundational skills. 89% of K-2 ELA teachers agreed that they felt comfortable embedding sounds-first activities into their daily classroom schedule, a 7-percentage point increase from 2021.

Figure 2: Teachers’ perceptions of their training and ability to incorporate foundational skills into their instruction have improved since 2021.





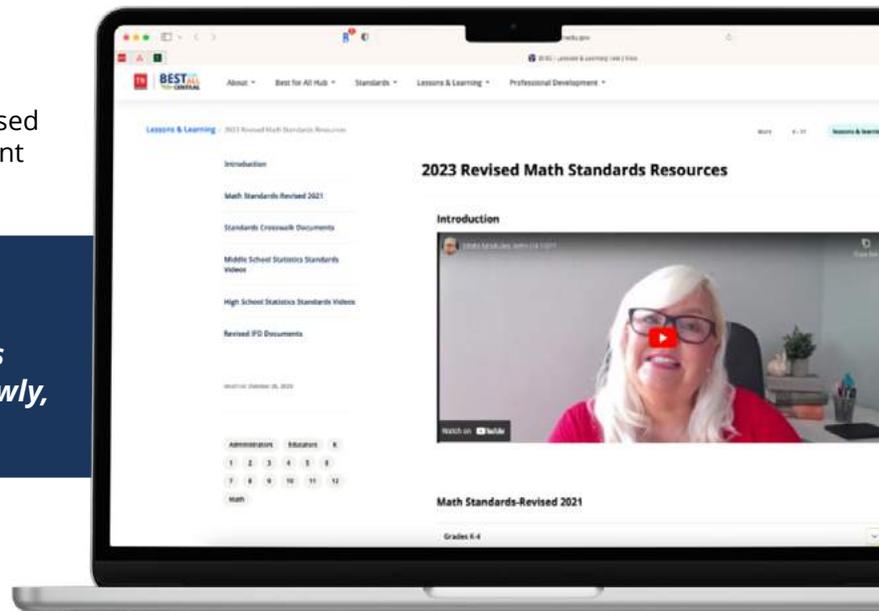
Mathematics Instruction and Support

Tennessee has a significant interest in the success of all students in the field of mathematics. In early 2021, the Tennessee State Board of Education adopted revised state math standards. These revised standards are due to be implemented in the current 2023-24 school year.

To support educators in understanding and implementing curriculum designed to meet these standards, the department has released instructional resources on the newly revamped Best for All Central website.

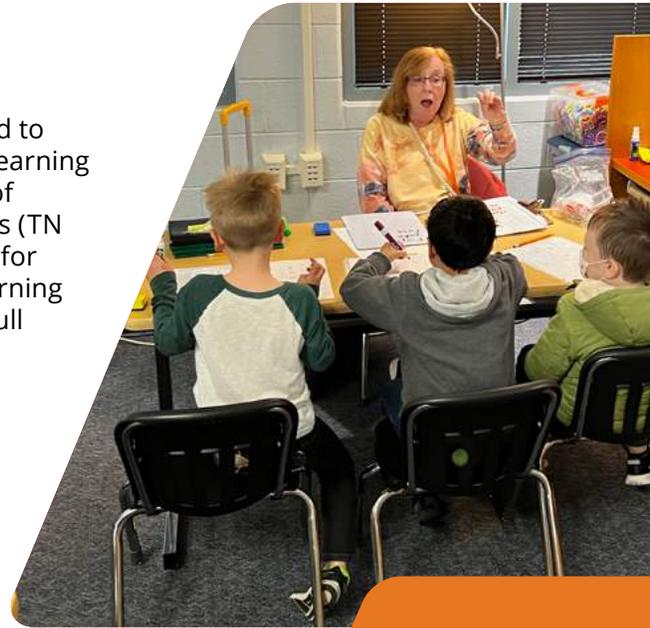
All math professional development resources provided by the department aim at aligning aspects of rigor (conceptual understanding, procedural skill and fluency, and application), providing evidence of learning statements that connect outcomes and expectations, and supporting increased instructional focus for providing guidance for Tier 1 instruction. The revised standards can also be found on the Best for All Central website.

It is important that educators continue to express a deep understanding of ELA curriculum for many reasons. As outlined in the literacy standards for mathematical proficiency, literacy skills are needed for math achievement such as using multiple reading strategies, understanding and using correct vocabulary, discussing and articulating mathematical ideas, and writing mathematical arguments. With increased focus on mathematics achievement, and its direct ties to literacy, the instructional resources provided this year will support educators in continuing to deliver content to students that supports mastery. **Future TES questions will examine educators' experiences with the newly adopted mathematics curriculum.**



TN ALL Corps Tutoring

To ensure all students can receive the learning supports they may need to succeed, Tennessee has targeted many resources towards increasing learning time for Tennessee students to accelerate student achievement. One of these efforts is the Tennessee Accelerating Literacy and Learning Corps (TN ALL Corps), a research-based high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring program for elementary and middle school students outlined in the Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act. Following its second full school year of implementation, the 2023 TES included questions for teachers and administrators to learn about what is going well with TN ALL Corps and how the tutoring programs can be improved.



Teachers identified high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring among the top three school efforts that had the most positive impact on students, behind summer learning programs and other efforts to reduce absenteeism.

Teachers who served as tutors had high perceptions of the programs, with:

90% agreeing that the program they tutored in was well-run.

These teachers also had particularly favorable views of the program’s student impacts:

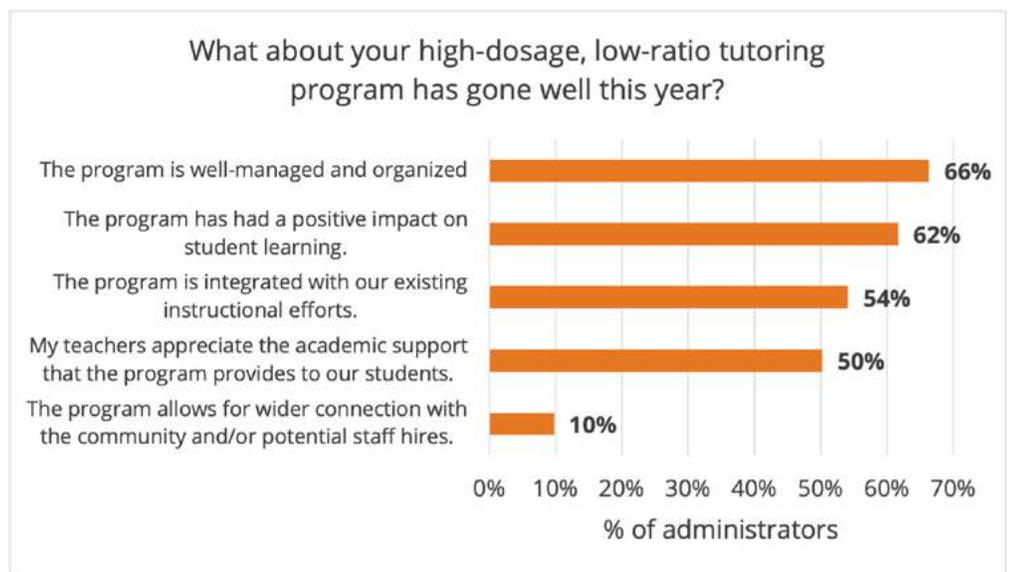
67% & 89% of teachers of teacher-tutors agreed or strongly agreed that they saw noticeable improvement in the academic performance of students who received tutoring.

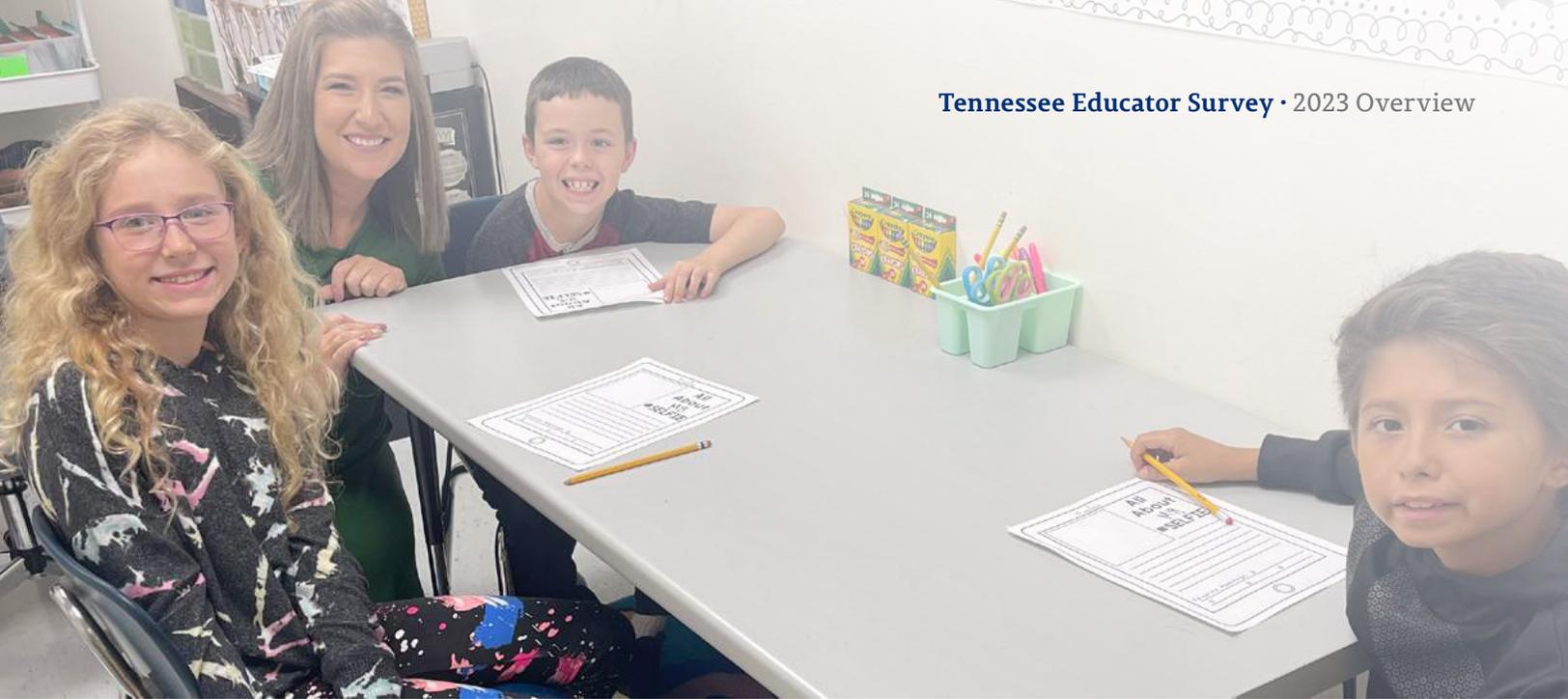


School leaders similarly identified program management/organization and positive impacts on student learning as the top two aspects of the tutoring program that have gone well.

Elementary school leaders were the most likely to say that the tutoring program at their school was well-managed and organized (70%) and that the program had a positive impact on student learning (66%).

Figure 3: Most administrators identified program management/organization and positive impacts on student learning as aspects of the program that have gone well.



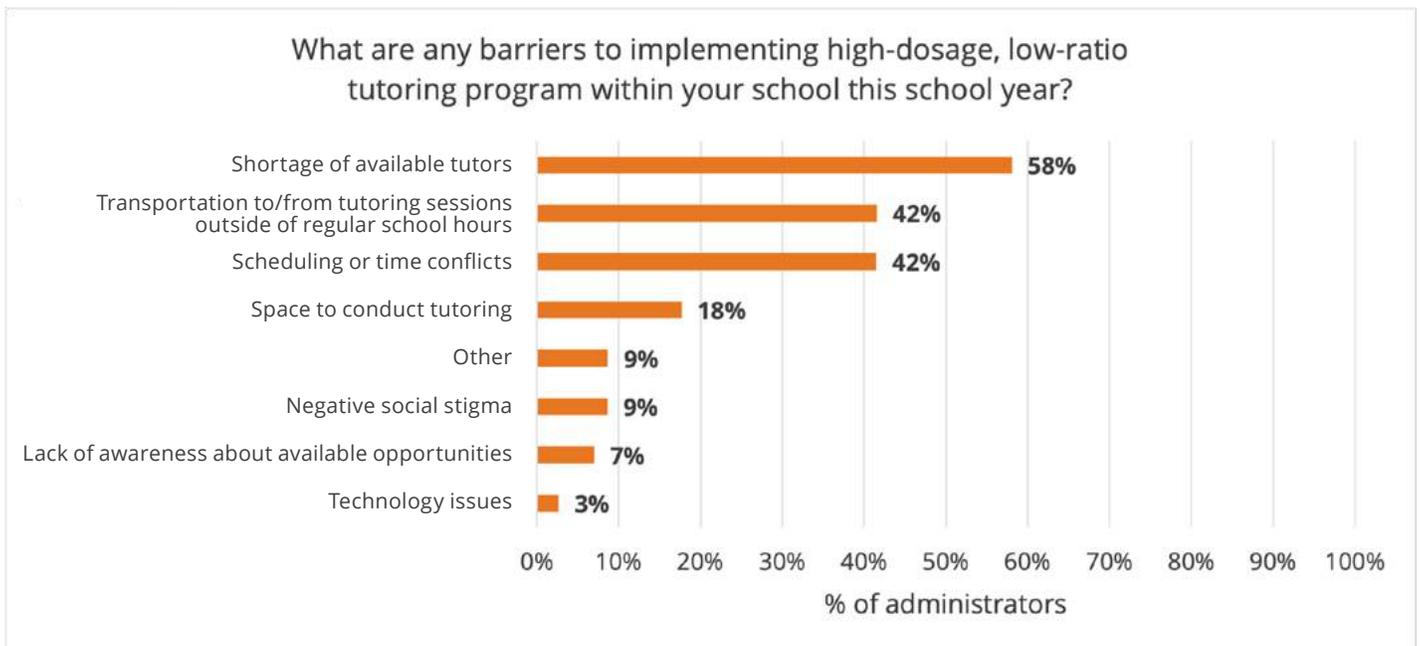


While teachers' participating as tutors perceptions of their school's tutoring programs were very positive, over a quarter of teachers had concerns about their school's program capacity to serve all of the students in the school who need it.

For elementary school tutors, this percentage was even higher – 30%.

Administrators' responses also reflect some concerns with program capacity. Roughly 58% of elementary school leaders and 56% of middle school leaders estimated that 10% or fewer of their school's students were enrolled in high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring at some point in the school year. Approximately 58% of administrators identified a shortage of available tutors as a barrier to implementing the high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring program within their schools. For elementary school leaders, this number was even higher – 68%. Most administrators reported using teachers (85%) followed by paraprofessionals (37%) to provide tutoring to students. Very few said they used paid staff (15%), trained volunteers (8%), external partners (4%) or other (5%) tutoring personnel.

Figure 4: Administrators identified a shortage of available tutors as the most common barrier to implementing tutoring programs at their schools.



STUDENT READINESS

For years, Tennessee has made strong investments in preparing students for success beyond the classroom, and teachers in Tennessee support these strategies. Tennessee continues to be a leader in the nation for policies and initiatives that create innovative pathways to postsecondary opportunities for students and has recently invested \$500 million in middle and high schools across the state to ensure students can get the educational experiences they need to be successful after high school graduation.



Innovative School Models and CTE

INNOVATIVE
SCHOOL MODELS

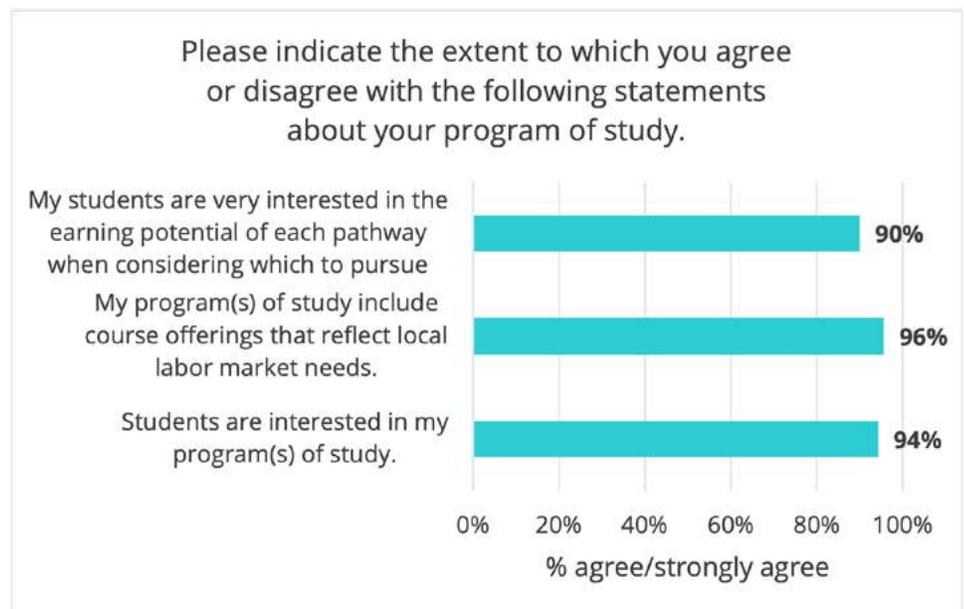
Innovative learning experiences prepare students for the workforce and success after graduation through participation in innovative local programs aligned to Tennessee's highest-demand skills and careers. Career and Technical Education (CTE) teacher responses on the TES can provide insight into the success of these programs.

TENNESSEE
CTE

CTE teachers in Tennessee teach students in a variety of content areas. The most common content areas are business administration, STEM, and health science. CTE teachers reported high levels of satisfaction with their programs of study – **94% agreed or strongly agreed that students were interested in their program of study, and 96% agreed or strongly agreed that their programs included course offerings that reflect local labor market needs.** CTE teachers in government and public administration; agriculture, food, and natural resources; architecture and construction; and marketing, distribution, and logistics were the most likely to agree that students were interested in their program of study (98%), while CTE teachers in education and training were the least likely to agree (85%).

CTE teachers also indicated that their programs contain important learning experiences for students to prepare them for success in the workforce. **In fact, 93% said their program has career exploration opportunities, 73% said their program offers at least one Early Post-Secondary Opportunity (EPSO) or industry credential, and 66% said their program has a work-based learning component. Among high school counselors, there was also high agreement (95%) that students are aware of available EPSOs.**

Figure 5: CTE teachers reported high satisfaction with their programs of study.



EDUCATORS

The primary goal of the TES is to support leaders in understanding the experiences of educators across the state. Teacher responses are particularly helpful in gauging professional satisfaction, as well as in understanding the implementation of key initiatives needed to support educators.



Pipeline Strategies Including Grow Your Own

Tennessee’s work to provide innovative, highly-subsidized pathways to the teaching profession focuses on creating strong partnerships between Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Education Preparation Providers (EPPs), bolstered by additional supports and resources at the state and local level, to ensure communities are able to develop strong local pipelines that attract talented educators into the classroom. The TES can help inform this work, providing insight from teachers and school leaders on recruitment and preparation.

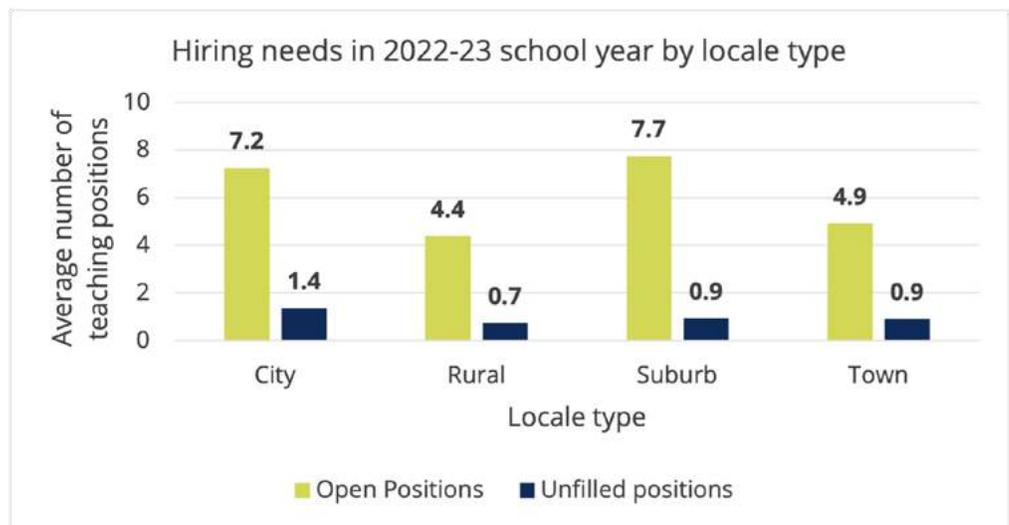


On average, Tennessee school leaders reported going into the 2022-23 school year with 5.7 open positions and starting the school year with 0.9 unfilled positions, with larger schools having more hiring needs.

Leaders in schools with fewer than 250 students reported an average of 2.4 open positions going into the school year and 0.4 unfilled positions after the start of the school year. In contrast, leaders in the largest schools (1,000 or more students) reported an average of 12.9 open positions going into the school year and 2.5 unfilled positions after the start of the school year.

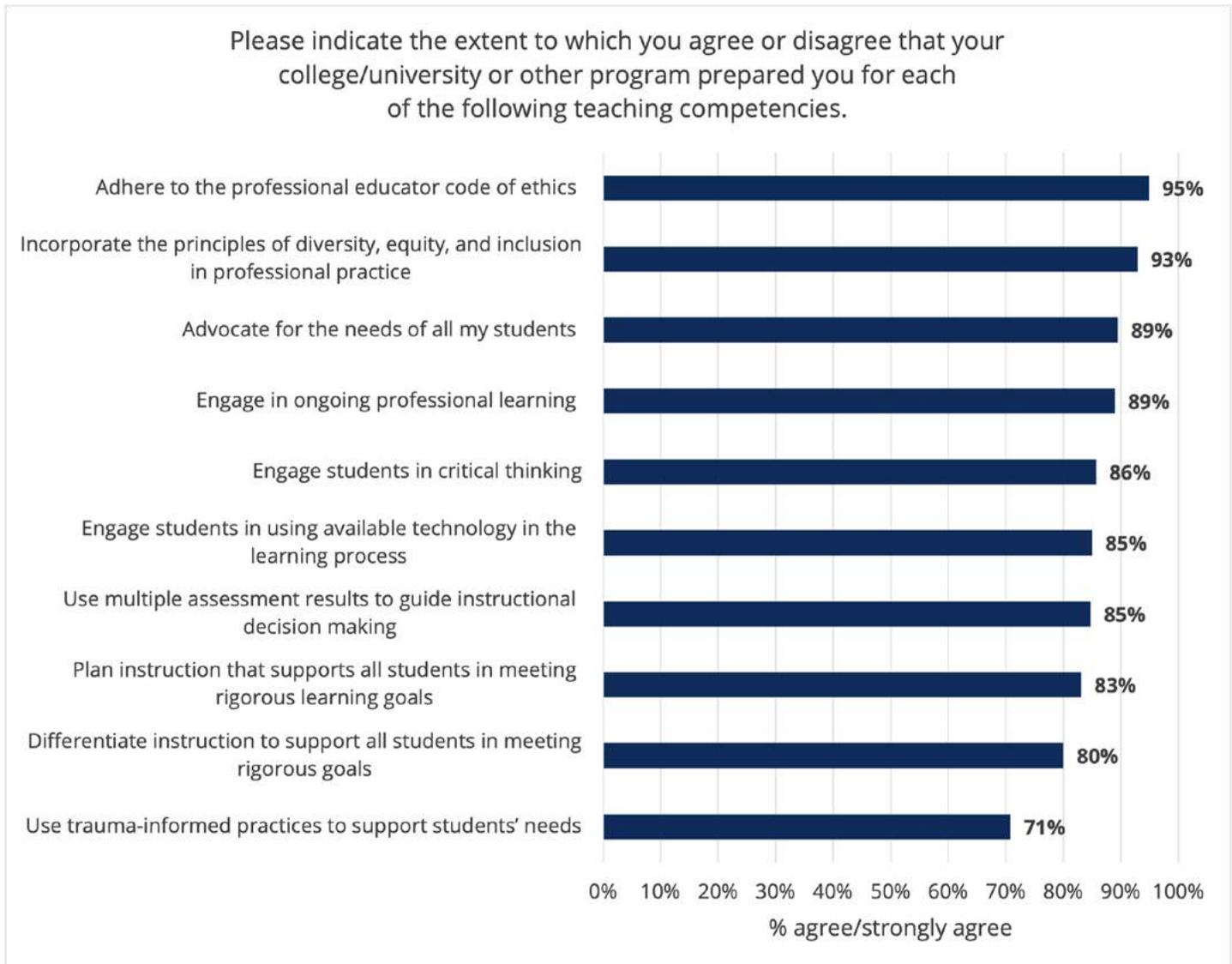
Breaking this data down by locale type reveals that schools in suburban contexts tend to be more successful in filling their open positions. Administrators in suburban schools reported an average of 7.7 open positions going into the 2022-23 school year; after the start of the school year, an average of 0.9 (about 12%) of the open positions remained unfilled. Leaders in city schools, on the other hand, reported an average of 7.2 open positions going into the school year, with an average of 1.4 (about 19%) of these positions remaining unfilled after the start of the school year. Leaders in town schools and rural schools reported about 19% and 17% (respectively) of their open positions were unfilled.

Figure 6: Administrators in suburban schools reported more unfilled positions going into the school year, while administrators in city schools reported more unfilled positions after the start of the school year.



Early-career teachers generally agreed that their educator preparation programs effectively prepared them for various aspects of their jobs. Indeed, 95% agreed or strongly agreed that they feel prepared to adhere to the professional code of ethics, and 93% felt prepared to incorporate principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion into their professional practice. Fewer teachers (71%) reported feeling prepared to use trauma-informed practices to support students' needs.

Figure 7: Early career teachers reported feeling well prepared to adhere to the professional code of ethics and incorporate DEI principles into their practice, but they feel less prepared to use trauma-informed practices.



Teachers also felt their programs prepared them to support students academically. About 85% agreed or strongly agreed that their educator preparation program prepared them to support all students' academic development, and 84% said they felt prepared to practice content-specific pedagogy. Fewer teachers (65%) felt prepared to effectively teach students how to read; however, this number was higher for K-2 teachers (73%), who primarily teach foundational reading skills.

Teacher satisfaction measurements increased slightly in 2023, following a decrease from 2021 to 2022. In 2023, 88% of teachers agreed that they were generally satisfied with being a teacher in their school, compared with 87% and 91% in 2022 and 2021 respectively. Seventy-eight percent (78%) of teachers reported planning to continue teaching in their current school next year, compared with 77% in 2022 and 82% in 2021.

STRATEGIC INVESTMENTS

Tennessee schools and districts leverage funding from federal, state and local governments to invest in student learning and outcomes. Further, teachers, community organizations, and nonprofits or philanthropic organizations contribute additional resources to invest in our students and their success.



The TES includes several questions asking teachers about their satisfaction with the resources they receive to effectively serve their students. Results from this year's survey indicate that educators believe their students need and could benefit from additional funds and supports.

Teacher responses from this year's TES indicate a desire for more resources/ supports dedicated to students from special student groups and students with mental health challenges. **When asked to identify the most urgent need(s) for additional support/resources at their schools, 68% of teachers and 81% of mental health professionals selected counseling, psychological, and social services. Further, less than half of teachers (45%) said they had adequate resources and training to support students with mental health challenges.**

Slightly over half of teachers felt they had adequate resources and training to support students with disabilities (56%) and English language learners (52%). Similarly, nearly a third of teachers indicated they did not have the necessary curricular materials to meet the needs of their English language learner students, and almost half said they did not have the necessary curricular materials to meet the needs of students with severe disabilities.

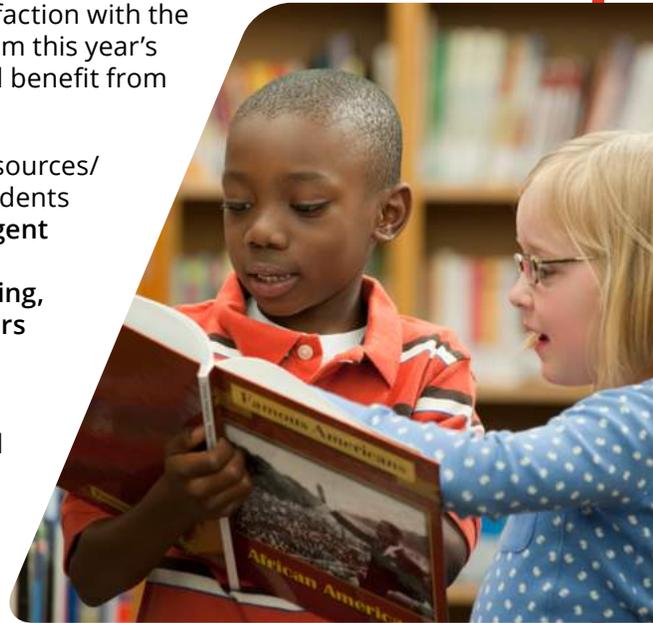
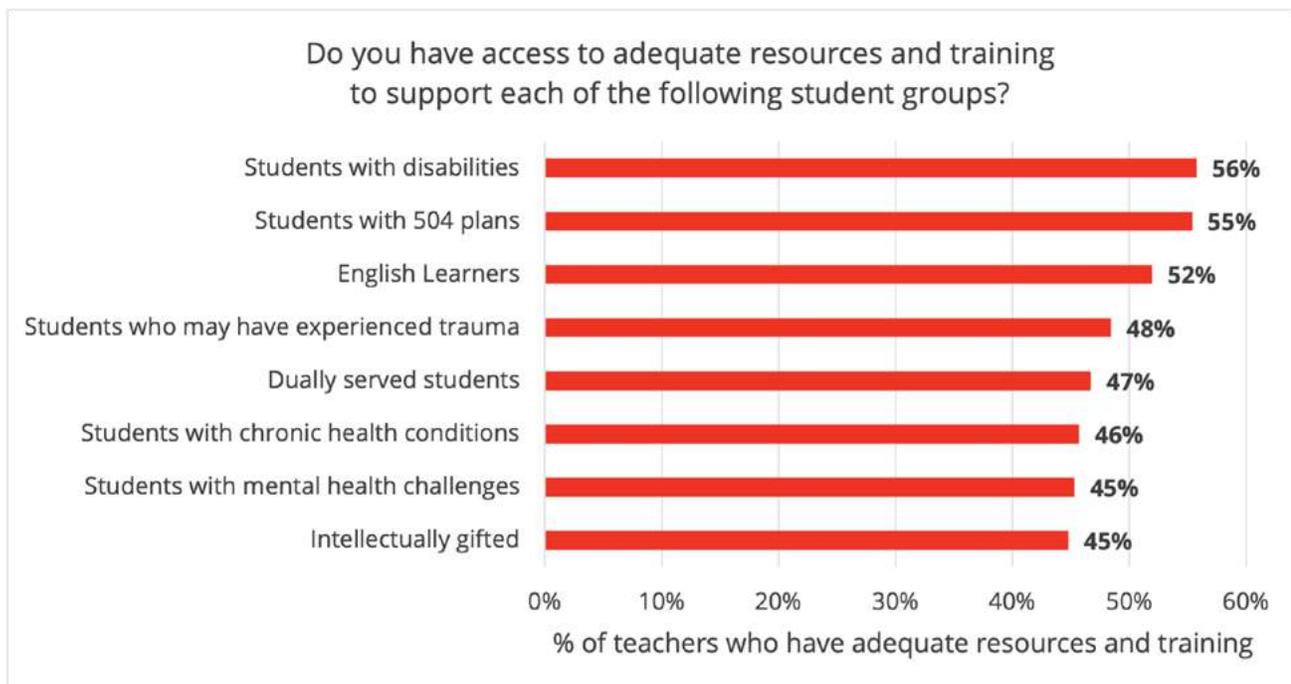


Figure 8: Many teachers reported that they would like access to more resources and/or trainings to support special student groups.





Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement

The Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA) formula transitions Tennessee’s K-12 schools to a student-centered approach to education funding. Through the passage of the TISA Act, signed into law in May 2022 and went into effect in the 2023-24 school year, the state committed over \$1 billion in new funding and investment in K-12 education to support improved student outcomes and ensures schools and districts receive state funding based on the needs and characteristics of each individual student they serve.

TISA brings additional transparency and accountability for spending decisions made at the local level. Since TISA will allow Tennesseans to more easily understand the funding generated by students in a particular school or district, as well as the types of investments and expenses incurred at the school- or district-level, it creates the opportunity for members of the community to engage to support student and school success.



Conclusion

Results from the 2023 TES highlights the experiences of teachers in the state and provide important feedback around implementation of bold new policies targeted at reading in early elementary school, learning acceleration and intervention strategies, tutoring and funding.

Teacher responses from this year's TES indicate continuing improvement in perceptions of the ELA curriculum materials and trainings they receive. Tennessee teachers identified summer learning programs, efforts to reduce absenteeism, and high-dosage tutoring as the pandemic recovery efforts that have had the most positive impacts on their students. The TN ALL Corps tutoring strategy creates opportunities for a research-based high-dosage, low-ratio tutoring program for elementary and middle school students. Following the second full school year of its implementation, 90% of teachers who served as tutors agreed that the tutoring program was well-run, and teachers' responses indicate they see a noticeable improvement in the academic performance of students who receive tutoring.

The state's commitment to preparing students for their chosen postsecondary careers is reflected in the Innovative School Models (ISM) initiative. ISM provides learning experiences to prepare students for the workforce and success after graduation through participation in innovative local programs aligned to the state's highest-demand skills and careers. Teachers in Career and Technical Education programs reported important learning opportunities for students to prepare for success in the workforce.

Teacher responses from this year's TES indicate a desire for more resources and supports dedicated to students from special student groups. For example, nearly one-third of teachers reported that they did not have the necessary curricular materials to meet the needs of their English language learner students. With the Tennessee Investment in Student Achievement (TISA) funding formula, Tennessee has committed to investing one billion dollars in education aimed at empowering students to read proficiently by third grade, preparing high school graduates for postsecondary success, and providing opportunities for all students to succeed.

The survey is an important resource for the Tennessee Department of Education and other education stakeholders in the state to understand what is working and where improvements are needed to better support Tennessee educators and students.

A message from the Tennessee Educator Survey Team

To the teachers, administrators, and other certified staff who participated in the Tennessee Educator Survey this year, we sincerely thank you. Please continue to make your voice heard and hold us

accountable to listen. To all readers, we thank you for your interest in learning from the perspectives of Tennessee's phenomenal educators.

For any questions on this brief, reach out to tdoe.research@tn.gov.



About TN Education Research Alliance

TERA brings together Vanderbilt University's Peabody College and the Tennessee Department of Education to create an expanding body of knowledge that directly impacts Tennessee's school improvement strategies. Through TERA, scholars at Vanderbilt and other leading universities carry out high-quality, practical research that informs state-level policy, impacts the practice in schools and districts across Tennessee, and contributes to national conversations on K-12 education. For more information visit, peabody.vanderbilt.edu/TERA.



About Tennessee Department of Education

The Tennessee Department of Education serves the state's nearly one million PK-12 students in 1,800 schools across 147 diverse districts—with both distinct urban and rural populations. As a department, we are dedicated to the goal of dramatically improving student achievement and committed to the belief that children from all backgrounds can succeed when given the opportunities they deserve. For more information, visit tn.gov/education.



About the Best for All Strategic Plan

The Tennessee Department of Education *Best for All* strategic plan sets a vision and intention that together as a state, we will set all Tennessee students on a path to success. The policies, programs, and practices set forth through these initiatives have allowed Tennessee's districts and schools to make targeted interventions, create innovative programs, and permit a safe, healthy learning environment for teachers and students. Assessment data reveals these interventions are working to move the needle for students. For more information, visit bestforallplan.tnedu.gov.



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#TNBestforAll

We will set all students on a path to success.

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