

Educator Insights from Pandemic to Recovery: Trends from the 2022 Tennessee Educator Survey

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January 2023



Introduction

Following significant COVID-19 pandemic disruptions in 2020-21 schools, Tennessee and many other states largely returned to in-person instruction during the 2021-22 school year. Since the onset of the pandemic, teacher responses to the Tennessee Educator Survey have provided essential insights into the challenges faced in the classroom and the schooling innovations that took place in response to the pandemic. Each year the Tennessee Educator survey asks teachers to report on their overall job satisfaction and perceptions of school climate, and in recent years, their concerns related to COVID-19.

This analysis of 2022 Tennessee Educator survey responses explores teachers' concerns about pandemic-related challenges in their school as recovery efforts continue, and examines trends in teachers' job satisfaction, perceptions of school climate, and student discipline.

Key Findings:

- 1** *While teacher satisfaction has returned to pre-pandemic levels, overall job satisfaction and feelings about school climate remain high.*
- 2** *Teachers identified student attendance as the top challenge in the 2021-22 school year.*
- 3** *Teachers reported spending more time on student disciplinary issues in the 2021-22 school year compared to previous years.*
- 4** *In 2021-22, more teachers reported that they were able to cover a similar amount of content from their formal curriculum as they would have expected to in a pre-pandemic year.*

DATA AND METHODS

In this brief, we used data from the 2022 Tennessee Educator Survey (TES), specifically responses collected from teachers. A little over half of all Tennessee teachers responded to the TES (N=37,036 teachers - 51% response rate).¹

¹ To better account for differential response rates, we used analytic weighting in the analysis to produce results broadly representative of all public school teachers in Tennessee.

KEY FINDINGS



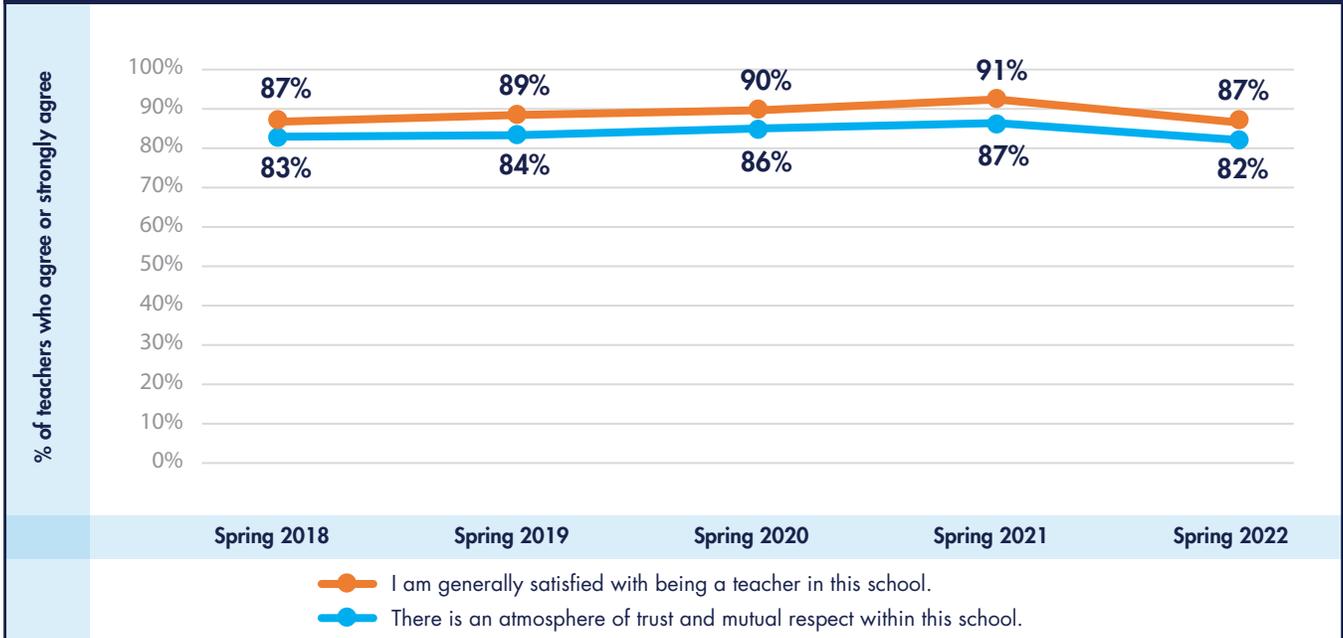
KEY FINDING 1

While teacher satisfaction has returned to pre-pandemic levels, overall job satisfaction and feelings about school climate remain high.

Over the past five years, teacher satisfaction rates and teachers' perceptions of their school climate have been overwhelmingly high. In fact, as Figure 1 shows, teacher satisfaction reached an all-time high in 2021 when 91% of Tennessee teachers agreed that they were satisfied with being a teacher in their school. While there was a slight dip in satisfaction from 2021 to 2022 (87% of teachers reported being satisfied in their current school in 2022), these rates have only declined to pre-pandemic levels and remain high even as schools and districts continue to navigate pandemic recovery efforts. This trend also holds true across teacher years of experience in the classroom, school tiers (elementary, middle, high school), and varying levels of economic disadvantage between schools.

Additionally, teachers reported feeling favorable about the climate in their schools. Similar to teacher satisfaction rates, educator perceptions of school climate peaked in 2021 when 87% said they agree that there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in their school. While the percentage of teachers who agreed with this statement dipped to 82% in 2022, positive feelings about school climate have generally returned to pre-pandemic levels and remain very high across the board. In 2022, 86% of teachers reported they would recommend their school to parents seeking a place for their child.

FIGURE 1: Despite a slight dip in 2022, teacher satisfaction and perceptions of school climate remain high.



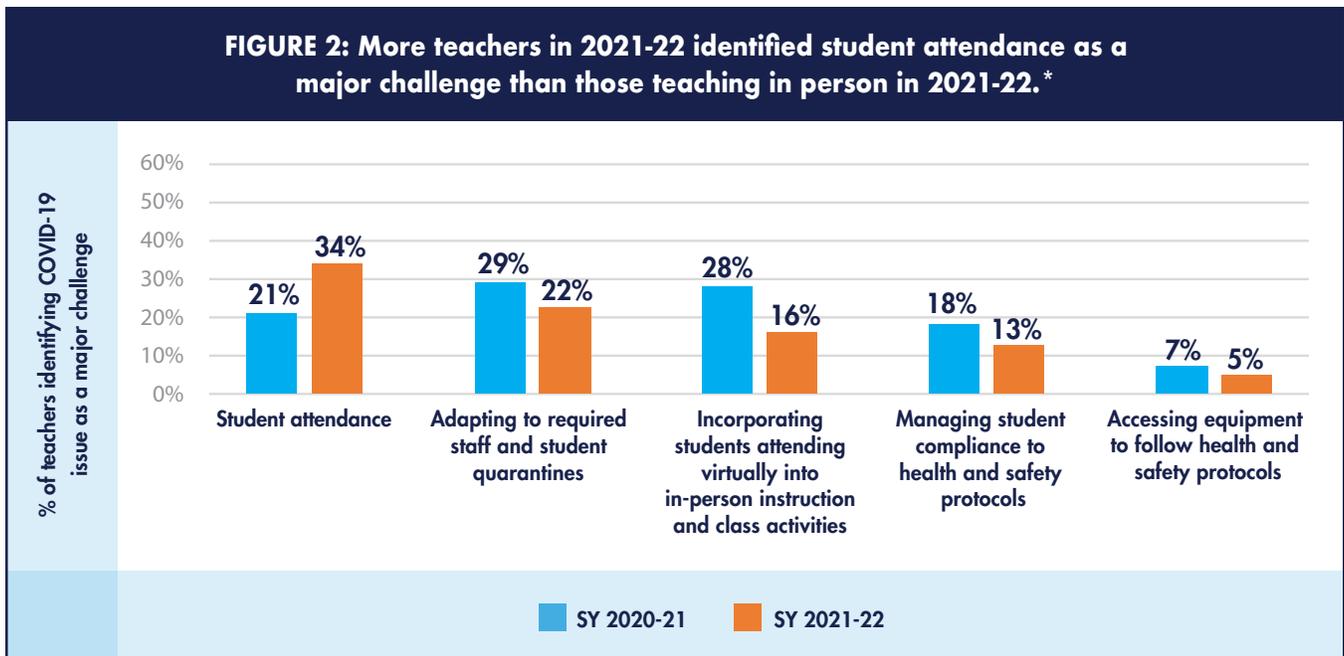
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KEY FINDING 2

Teachers identified student attendance as the top-most major challenge in the 2021-22 school year.

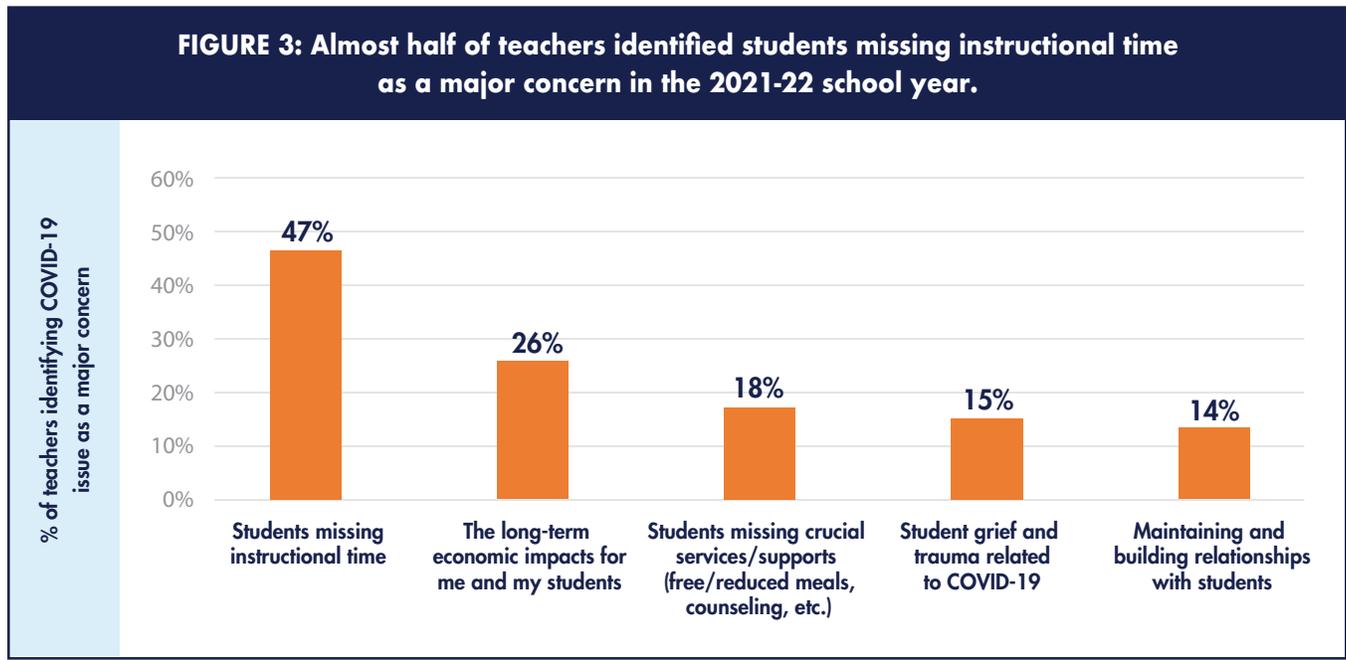
Since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, schools have faced challenge each year. In spring 2020, schools and districts contended with moving to virtual instruction whereas in the 2020-21 school year, many pivoted to provide hybrid instruction, resulting in new issues with student and teacher quarantines. As the pandemic progressed into the 2021-22 school year and students largely returned to in-person learning – many for the first time in over a year – new challenges emerged around attendance and student mental health.

To learn more about the challenges in the classroom both during the height of the pandemic and in the first full year of recovery, the survey asked teachers to gauge the extent to which they had certain instructional challenges. As Figure 2 illustrates, a third of teachers (34%) in 2021-22 reported that student attendance was a major challenge for teaching in person – up from 21% in 2020-21. Further, nearly half of high school teachers (46%) said student attendance was a major challenge.



*The 2021 percentages represent only teachers who indicated they were teaching in person.

Similarly, teachers were asked the extent to which various pandemic-related issues were a concern during the 2021-22 school year. Figure 3 shows that teachers cited students missing instructional time as their top concern with 47% reporting that it was a major concern. Comparatively, only 26% of teachers reported the long-term economic impacts of the pandemic were a major concern for students – the second-most-selected choice.



Teachers’ concerns about attendance reflect trends in state [chronic absentee data](#). In the 2021-22 school year, one-fifth (20%) of Tennessee students were chronically absent, up from 16% in 2020-21, and 119 districts saw increases in the percent of students who were chronically absent. In 21 districts, the percentage of students who were chronically absent increased by more than 10 percentage points from 2020-21 to 2021-22. Statewide, over a quarter (27%) of high school students were chronically absent in the 2021-22 school year (up from 19% the previous year), and in 30 districts more than 30% of high school students were chronically absent.



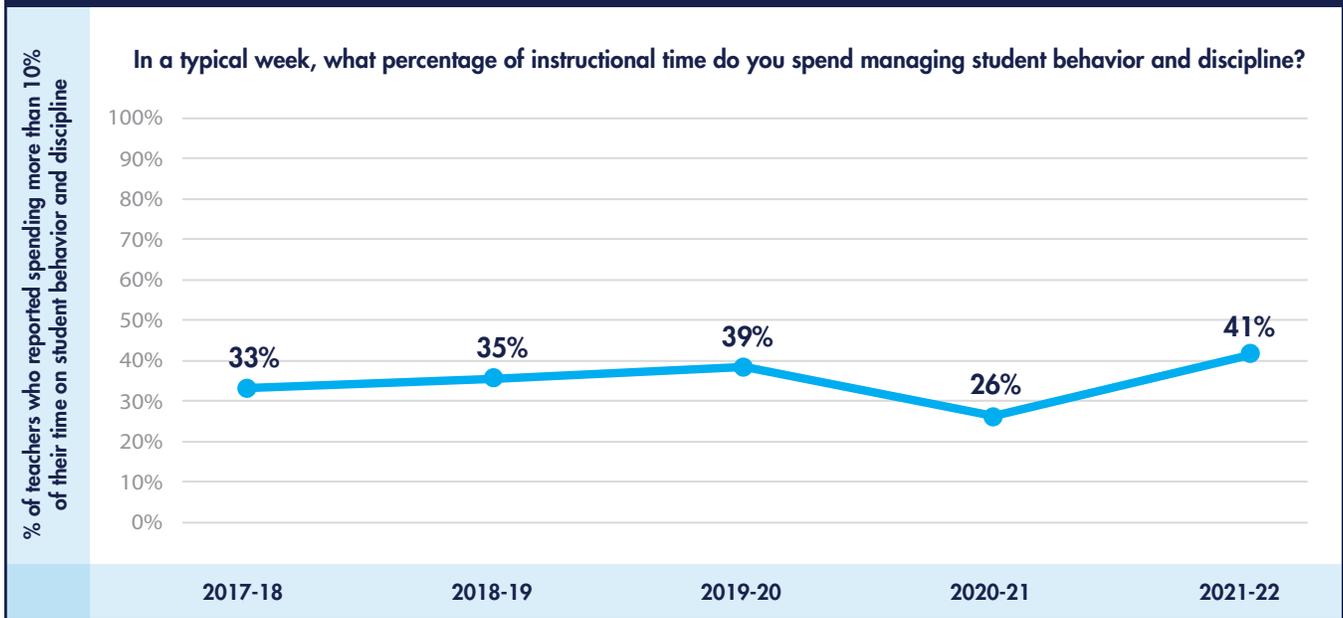
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KEY FINDING 3

Teachers reported spending more time on student disciplinary issues in the 2021-22 school year compared to previous years.

In the 2021-22 school year, about 41% of teachers reported spending more than 10% of their time managing student behavioral and disciplinary issues – an increase from previous years as shown in Figure 4. Indeed, since 2017, teachers have increasingly reported spending more time on student behavioral and disciplinary issues, though teachers reported spending less of their time on these issues in the 2020-21 school year when many schools shifted toward virtual and hybrid instruction. Further, the rebound to pre-pandemic levels appears across all school tiers. Nearly half of elementary school teachers (46%) and middle school teachers (47%) reported spending more than 10% of their classroom time on behavioral and discipline issues, up from 32% and 28%, respectively. High school teachers’ estimates increased from 16% in 2021 to 30% in 2022.

FIGURE 4: With the exception of the 2020-21 school year, teachers have increasingly reported spending more time on student behavior and discipline since 2017.



Additionally, the rising estimates of time spent on discipline issues were accompanied by other shifts in teachers’ perceptions of school climate. After jumping to 85% in the 2020-21 school year, the percentage of teachers who agreed or strongly agreed that students treat adults with respect at their school fell to 70% in 2021-22, and 68% of teachers agreed that their school leadership effectively handles student discipline and behavioral problems, down from 80% in 2021.

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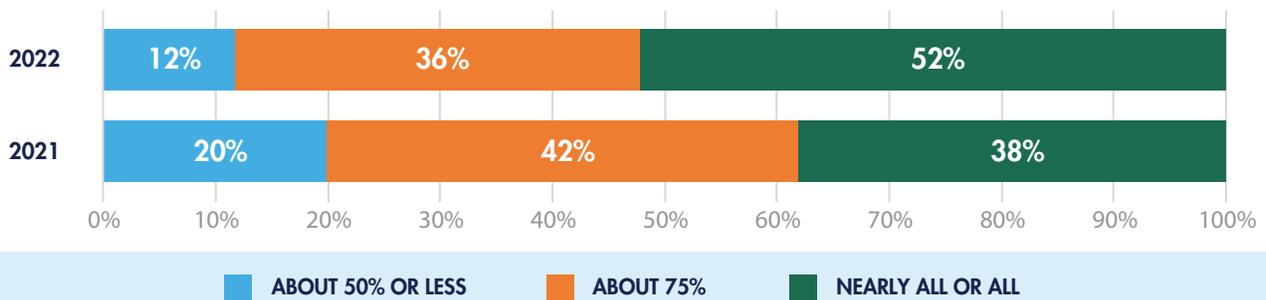
KEY FINDING 4

In 2021-22, more teachers reported that they were able to cover a similar amount of content from their formal curriculum as they would have expected to in a pre-pandemic year.

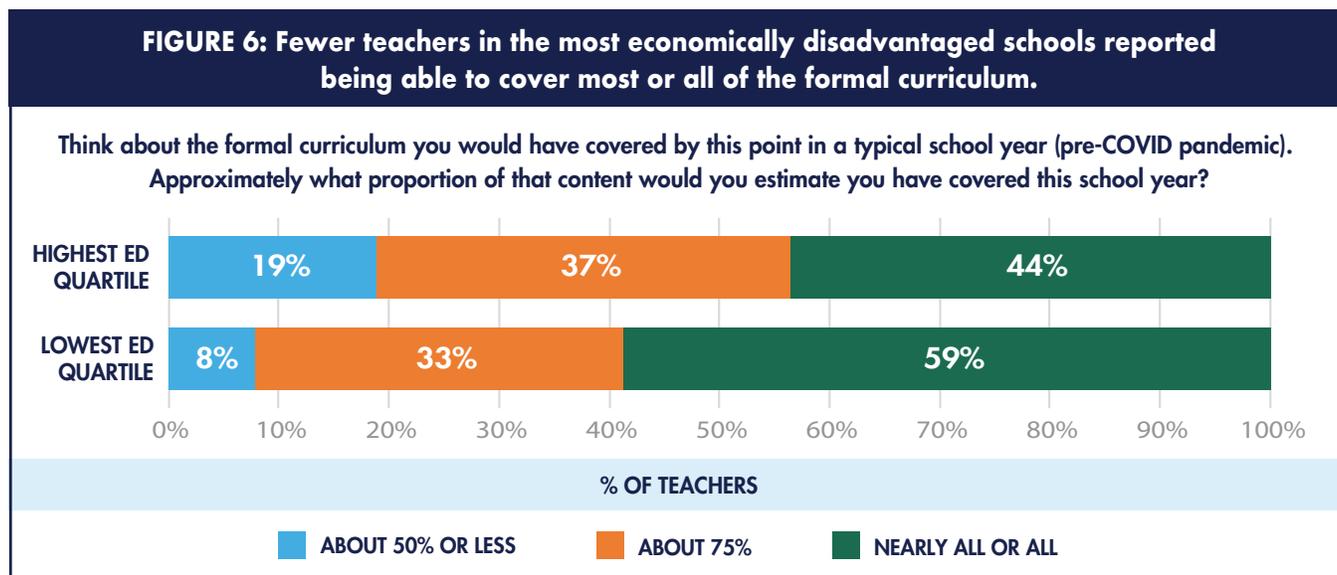
Compared to the 2020-21 school year, more teachers reported being able to cover a similar amount of content from their formal curriculum as they would have expected to cover in a typical, pre-pandemic school year. As shown in Figure 5, 62% of teachers in 2020-21 reported that they had covered 75% or less of the curriculum than they would have normally covered up to that point in the school year. In 2021-22, this percentage shrank to 48%, and over half (52%) of teachers reported that they were able to cover all or nearly all the content than they would expect to have covered in a typical pre-pandemic year.

FIGURE 5: More teachers in 2022 reported being able to cover most or all content from their curriculum than in 2021.

Think about the formal curriculum you would have covered by this point in a typical school year (pre-COVID pandemic). Approximately what proportion of that content would you estimate you have covered this school year?



Further, though a large gap still remains, more teachers working in high-poverty schools reported that they were able to cover more of the formal curriculum than they would have expected in the previous year. Figure 6 shows that 44% of teachers working in schools that served the most economically disadvantaged students estimated that they covered all or nearly all of their curriculum in the 2021-22 school year, up from 29% the previous year. Comparatively, 59% of teachers in schools serving the least economically disadvantaged students reported that they were able to cover all or nearly all of the content in their formal curriculum, up from 44% in the 2020-21 school year.



ABOUT THE TENNESSEE EDUCATOR SURVEY

The Tennessee Educator Survey (TES) is an annual survey administered by the Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA) in partnership with the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE). The survey is available to all teachers, administrators, and certified staff in Tennessee. The 2022 TES included questions that asked teachers to provide their perspectives on challenges and concerns about teaching through the pandemic, thoughts on school climate, and reflections on preparedness.

REFERENCES

Tennessee Department of Education, (2022). Data Downloads & Requests: Chronic Absenteeism. Retrieved November 18, 2022

