



Tennessee Educator Survey

2021 Overview

A report from the Tennessee Department of Education



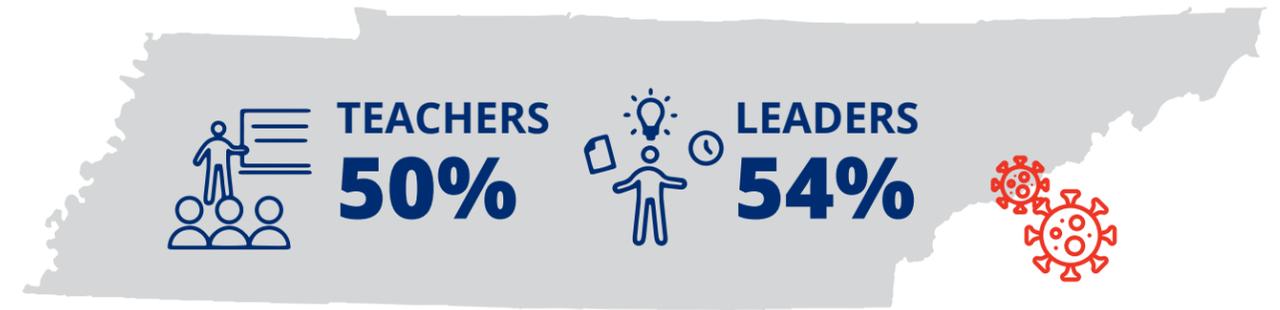
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The 2021 survey was conducted between March 8 and April 31, 2021, with 50% of teachers and 54% of administrators in Tennessee completing the survey and providing reflections representative of educators across Tennessee.

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The following report displays survey findings grouped to align with the department's Best for All strategic priority areas of Academics, Student Readiness, and Educators. In addition to providing feedback to help shape initiatives in these strategic priority areas, this year's survey results shed light on the experience of educators as they adapted to the challenges of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

INTRODUCTION

The Tennessee Educator Survey (TES) is the most comprehensive annual survey used to understand the experience of educators across Tennessee.

Each year, the Department of Education and Tennessee Education Research Alliance gather this information to **empower stakeholders and decision-makers across the state to better meet the needs of teachers.**



About the Survey

The Tennessee Educator Survey (TES), created by a partnership between the Tennessee Department of Education (the department) and the Tennessee Education Research Alliance at Vanderbilt University (TERA), is the state's most comprehensive tool for gathering input from Tennessee teachers and administrators. For over a decade, the survey has provided Tennessee with valuable insight into educator's perceptions of practice, policy, and school climate across the state.

COVID-19

The health and safety challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic required educators to fundamentally shift instructional practices. Last year's TES contained a set of questions designed to provide unique insights into the experience of educators after schools initially closed statewide in the Spring of 2020. Because the 2021 TES contained the same set of questions, this

year's responses show how educators experiences have shifted between the first and second year of the pandemic. In addition, the 2021 TES contained new questions designed to explore the challenges educators experienced while teaching during an entire year of various school operating models.

Tennessee educators' top COVID-19 related concern was students missing instructional time during the school year. Teachers indicated fewer challenges for in-person instruction than for remote learning during the 2020-21 school year.

While all educators faced challenges during the 2021 school year, survey responses indicate that teaching virtually was much more difficult than in-person instruction. Teachers providing virtual instruction were more than twice as likely to indicate challenges with important functions such as taking student attendance, facilitating participation in class activities, and finding reliable instructional plans and materials.



What was the impact of virtual instruction and school closure on student achievement?

Results on the 2020-21 Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) indicated that proficiency rates dropped across the state for all subjects and grade levels, however, students learning in remote settings were more likely to score Below or Approaching on TCAP, and students learning in person were more likely to score On Track or Mastered. These assessment results align with experiences educators had in the classroom. Over half of teachers indicated "students missing instructional time" as their greatest COVID-19 related concern.

Tennessee's Proactive Response:

Tennessee has led the nation in pandemic recovery and has already put strategic measures in motion to combat predicted negative impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thanks to Tennessee Governor Bill Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly, the state had a special legislative session focused on education in January, which passed legislation to put in place strong investments in summer programming, which launched this past summer.

Additionally, through over \$4 billion in historic federal funding, the department has launched statewide literacy and high-dosage, low ratio tutoring initiatives, and additional planned investments and grant opportunities for districts.

Based off TCAP results, we know in-person learning is the most effective way to educate students.



“ I am proud to work in a state that is helping to support its teachers, parents, and students with engaging curricula.

- Brian McLaughlin
2019-20 Tennessee Teacher of the Year

Statewide investments in technology and student supports during the pandemic helped districts and educators start to bridge an access gap during periods of temporary school closures or remote learning.

After schools closed in the Spring of 2020, the TES asked educators to list their top concerns for students. Educators were most likely to indicate concerns with students having access to technology and missing crucial services/supports. Furthermore, 96 percent of districts indicated they had no device access plan to facilitate remote instruction for students.

But survey responses to the same questions on the 2021 TES indicate that far fewer teachers and administrators saw technology as a barrier to virtual learning, and schools were better able to provide critical services and supports to students. Between the Spring of 2020 and the Spring of 2021, the percentage of teachers who listed access to technology as a barrier to virtual learning as their top concern for students decreased by 17 percentage points. Furthermore, between the Spring of 2020 and the Spring of 2021, the percentage of teachers who listed students missing critical services and supports as their top concern for students decreased by 21 percentage points.

Tennessee's Proactive Response:

In response to district technology needs, the department invested \$50 million in technology grants, \$15 million in WiFi and support grants (for tech) and \$11 million in reopening grants.

The department launched Best for All Central: Tennessee's Hub for Learning and Teaching, an online tool designed to provide school leaders, educators, and families an extensive collection of high-quality, optional resources to support teaching and learning, as well as features for locating specific resources quickly and easily.

Utilizing federal relief funding, through a partnership with Niswonger Foundation, the department created the AP Access for ALL program to provide students across the state access to AP courses virtually, ultimately eliminating financial barriers and supporting student enrollment in AP coursework not currently offered at their home high school. Additionally, the program provides teacher training to advance current teachers' skillsets in teaching AP classes virtually and in-person.

COVID-19 (continued)

Targeted tutoring and summer learning opportunities will be essential tools to help students recover academically from the effects of the pandemic.

Although districts worked hard to provide high-quality instruction to students during the 2020-21 school year, roughly 60% of teachers reported they were only able to cover 75% or less of the curriculum they would cover in a normal year. In districts where teachers were not able to cover the entire curriculum, it will be crucial to provide ongoing support to help students catch up. The 2021 TES provided valuable insight into how educators think the state and districts can help address learning loss. In their open-ended survey responses, educators were most likely to recommend summer school, extended school days, additional instructional time in specific subjects like reading, and individualized supports as approaches to accelerate student learning.

Top recommendations based on open-ended questions
(provided by teachers and administrators)



Percentages rounded to nearest figure

Tennessee Proactive Response:

In January 2021, Governor Bill Lee and the Tennessee General Assembly convened a [special legislative session](#) on education, which addressed urgent issues facing Tennessee students and schools as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the special legislative session passed legislation on accountability, learning loss, literacy, and teacher pay. The [Tennessee Learning Loss Remediation and Student Acceleration Act](#) established summer learning camps for elementary school students to help them recover learning loss and accelerate their achievement.

In alignment with the Best for All strategic plan, the department recognized the impending impact the global pandemic would have on K-12 education in Tennessee and has proactively and strategically committed investments to prioritize meeting the needs of all Tennessee students through the [state's ARP ESSER plan](#), which lays out the state's spending strategy for its portion of federal COVID-19 relief and stimulus funding to benefit K-12 education in Tennessee. Specifically, the state plan highlights combatting existing gaps in student achievement and opportunity, addressing the needs of rural communities, improving early literacy, investing in a statewide tutoring corps, TN ALL Corps, and accelerating student academic achievement across the state.

“Tennessee has led the nation in getting students back in the classroom and swiftly addressing learning loss. As we continue to prioritize our students, I'm encouraged to share positive outcomes of priorities established in our historic special session. I am hopeful for our state and thank the legislature for their partnership to turn the tide for Tennessee students.

- Tennessee Governor Bill Lee



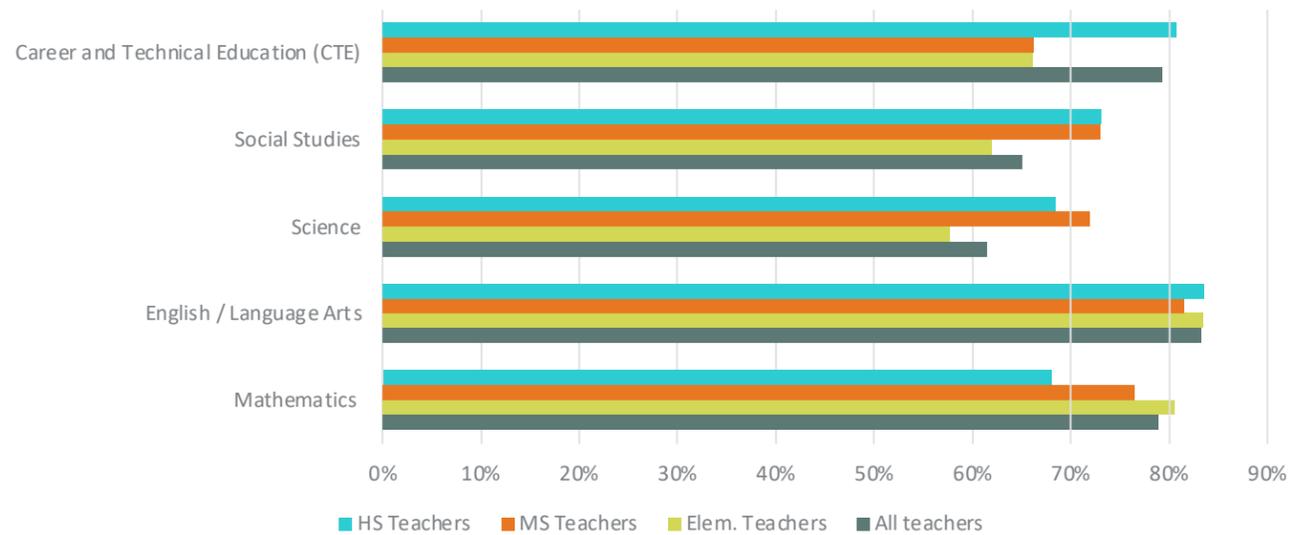
“We witnessed innovative lessons, targeted instruction, and thoughtful practices that we know are not limited to the schools and districts we visited on the tour. This good work is happening across the state and we must continue this momentum to ensure Tennessee continues to accelerate achievement and lead the nation.

- Dr. Penny Schwinn
Commissioner of Education

More than 8 in 10 Tennessee teachers reported they have access to English Language Arts curricular materials while access to curricular materials in other subject areas was inconsistent and varied by grade level.

The 2021 TES asked teachers a variety of questions about curriculum and teaching resources to determine where more supports may be needed at the district or state level. Across all grade bands, over 80 percent of teachers reported being provided access to English Language Arts (ELA) curricular materials, and 83 percent of teachers agreed district-provided ELA curriculum materials set them up to be successful. While responses indicated that access to ELA materials is widespread, access to Career and Technical Education (CTE), Social Studies, Science, and Math materials were less widespread and varied across grade band. Generally, teachers in urban schools or schools serving large populations of economically disadvantaged students were less likely to report being provided access to curricular materials by their school district.

Curricular Materials Provided by District as Reported by Grade Band
(% of teachers reporting access)



Tennessee’s Proactive Response:

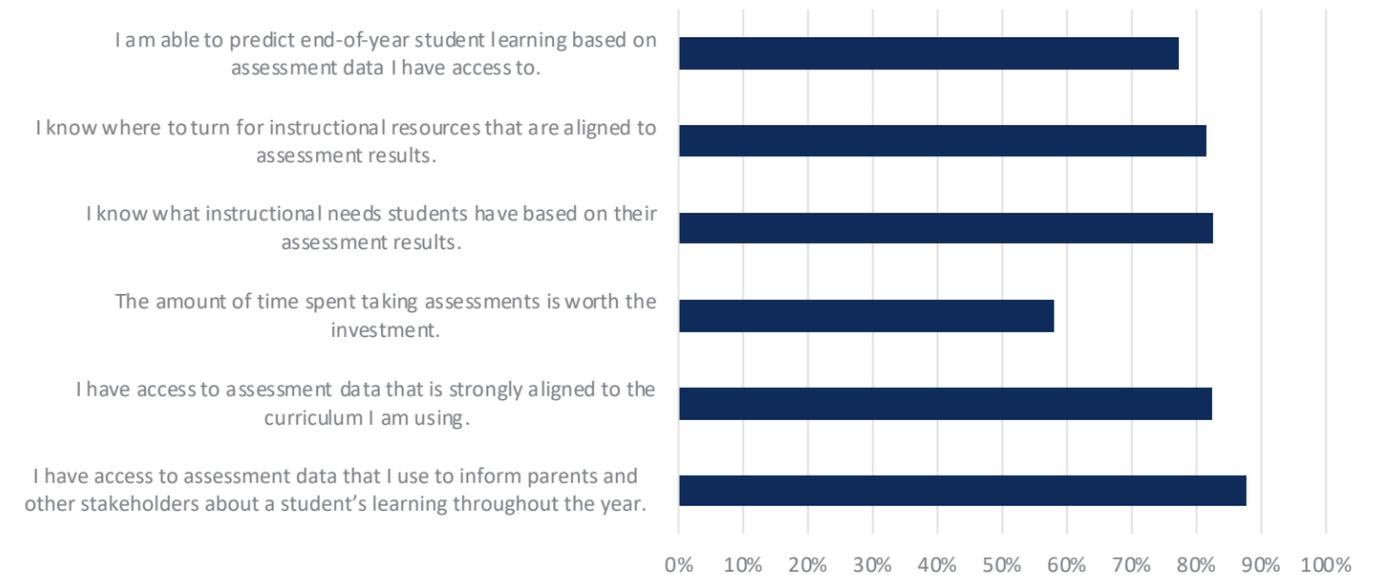
Part of the state’s Reading 360 initiative to help boost strong reading skills amongst Tennessee students, the two-week [Early Reading Training](#) provided over 12,000 educators with access to the latest research, implications for instruction, and practical tools to apply new learning for free to supporting foundational literacy instruction in grades pre-K through 5.

“The Early Reading Training has prepared me to better support my students in developing phonics-based reading skills.” - Tennessee Educator

Teachers reported having access to aligned assessment data and were able to utilize results and make instructional decisions to support students.

Across the state, school districts use a variety of formative and summative assessments to measure student learning, including locally determined benchmark testing, and end of year assessments like the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP). A rigorous assessment system aligned to high-quality, Tennessee specific academic standards is one factor that has helped Tennessee continue to make academic progress. The 2021 TES asked teachers to report on their access to and use of assessments, and teachers indicated assessments are effective teaching tools that help monitor and predict student achievement.

Teacher Access to and Use of Assessments
(% of teachers reporting access)



Tennessee’s Proactive Response:

In January 2020, the department launched the TCAP Educator Portal to provide all educators in tested grades and subjects with results by student roster, ability to create custom reports and print individual student score reports, and historical data for tested students.

Additionally, the online [State Report Card](#) provides stakeholders with information and data about how Tennessee schools and districts are performing to inform decisions and strategic investments to best support students. The 2020-21 State Report Card has been updated and improved to enhance user experience and provide additional data and information. Assessment data is crucial to informing efforts by the state, school districts, educators and families to help students recover from the pandemic and accelerate their learning. During the pandemic, the state has maintained its strong commitment to assessments in order to provide reliable data about where students are and where they need additional support. To ensure strong student participation in spring 2021 TCAP assessments, the department provided flexibilities to support districts, including an extended assessment window, off-site testing options, and individualized consultation and service to districts. As a state, Tennessee’s overall student participation rate for spring TCAP was 95%.

STUDENT READINESS

STUDENT READINESS

Tennessee public schools will be equipped to serve the academic and non-academic needs of all students.

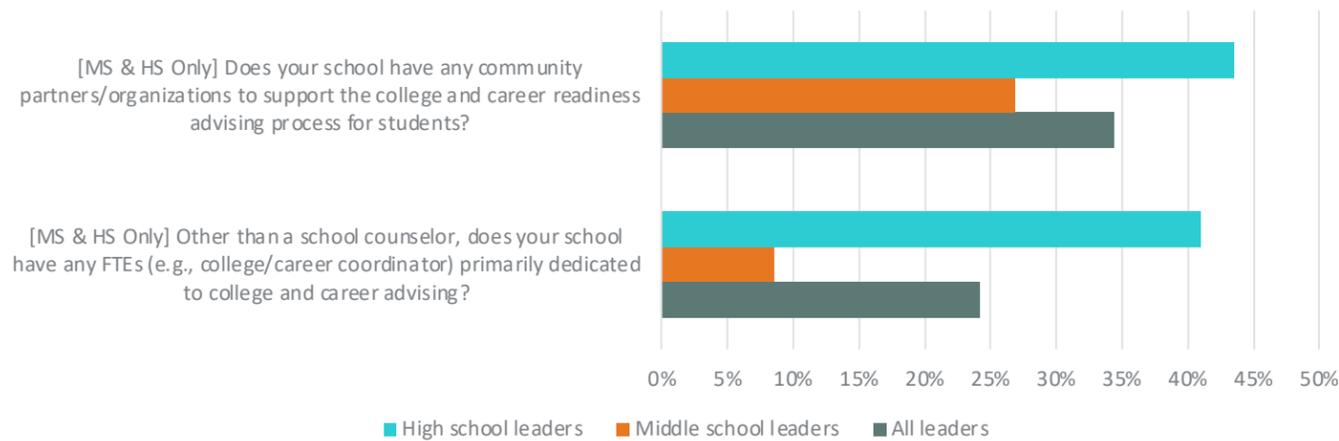


Tennessee high school teachers reported being well-prepared to support students in their postsecondary plans, but continued work is needed to help middle school students explore career options.

The 2021 TES asked middle and high school teachers to reflect on their ability to help students explore postsecondary plans. Overall, high school teachers reported being well-prepared to support students in postsecondary plans, with 93 percent of high school teachers indicating they explicitly connect course content to college and career opportunities for their students, and 94 percent of high school teachers indicating being familiar with students' postsecondary and career goals. Additionally, high school administrators were more likely to indicate having community organizations and specific, building level staff to help support college and career readiness.

However, more targeted support with postsecondary planning is needed in middle school grades, where only 69 percent of middle school teachers reported being familiar with students' postsecondary goals. In addition to indicating targeted support needed for middle school students, survey results indicate a need for continued focus on college and career education overall. Fewer middle and high school teachers in 2021 agreed that their content is related to college and career opportunities and that they are familiar with post-secondary goals and pathways than in 2020.

College and Career Staff in Middle Schools and High Schools
(% of school leaders reporting)



Tennessee's Proactive Response:

In alignment with the Governor's Future Workforce Initiative, the state is committed to aligning curriculum with career pathways to provide students with access to real world experiences earlier on in their educational careers to boost postsecondary success.

Over \$700,000 in additional grants has been awarded to over 30 districts to fund science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) education and middle school career and technical education (CTE).

In partnership with the Tennessee STEM Innovation Network (TSIN), Tennessee districts, educators, and middle and high school students now have free access to [expanded career exploration and advising materials and resources](#) through two new online platforms offering students the opportunity to navigate career pathways, engage in hands-on projects, and explore internships and careers available across the state.

Teachers continued to need more support to help meet the non-academic needs of students and families.

To meet their full academic potential in the classroom, students and their families must be healthy and safe. The 2021 TES asked educators to report on their ability to serve the non-academic needs of students and families, and to list the top non-academic needs for their school.

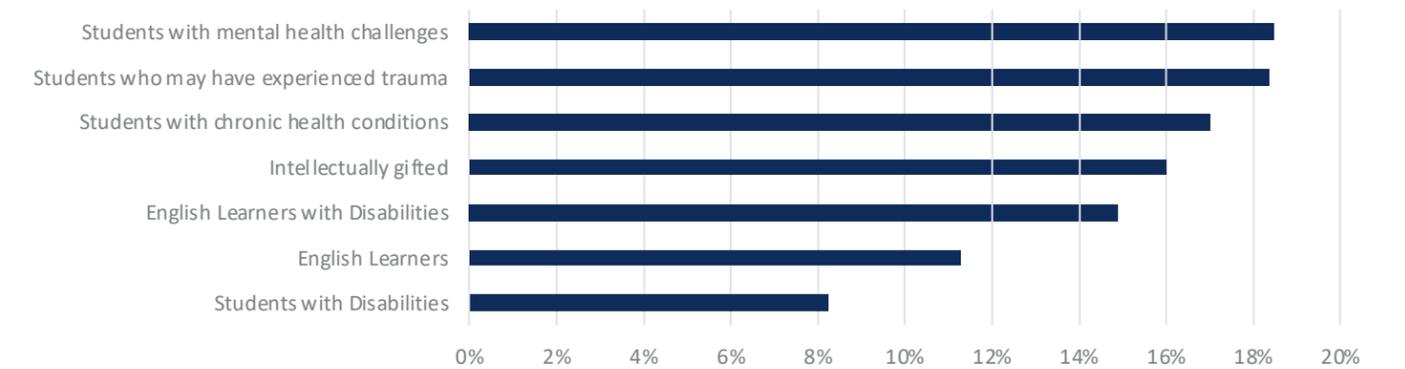
Additionally, fewer than 60 percent of teachers reported that their students have access to nutritious food outside of school, that they know how to refer a student to a Family Resource Center (FRC), or that they know of community partners who can assist with non-academic needs at their school. Finally, approximately 1 in 5 teachers report having access to neither training nor resources to support students with mental health challenges or students experiencing trauma.

The top student readiness needs as indicated by teachers were:



Lacking Access to Training and Resources

(% of teachers who report NOT having access to neither training nor resources)



Tennessee's Proactive Response:

In April 2021, 176 schools were selected for the [second cohort of trauma-informed schools](#) in Tennessee. This new cohort more than doubles the original 73 schools from the first trauma-informed schools' cohort which launched in 2018-19, focusing on implementing trauma-informed strategies to provide critical supports for students.

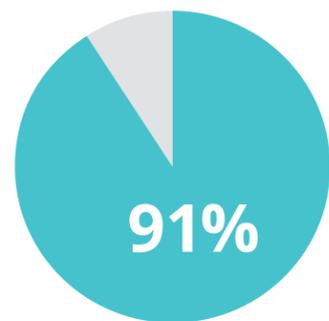
Through a partnership with the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Substance, the department created the [Emotional Support Line for Pandemic Stress](#) and the [Educator Emotional Support video series](#) to support educators and district and school staff experiencing significant stress and anxiety due to the pandemic.



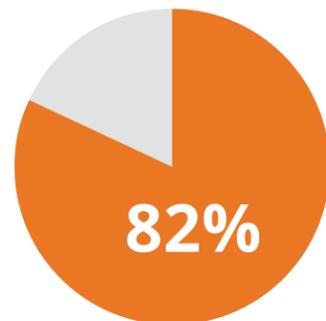
Tennessee will set a new path for the education profession and be the top state to become and remain a teacher and leader

Despite a challenging school year, job satisfaction and perceptions of school climate remained positive among Tennessee educators – continuing a positive trend that began in 2018.

Since 2018, the TES has asked teachers to report on a variety of indicators for school climate and culture, including the atmosphere of trust in a school, general satisfaction with being a teacher, opportunities for leadership roles, perceptions about how things are run at their school, and whether school leadership effectively handles student discipline. Since 2018, nearly every marker of school culture has continued to increase. Despite challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, these positive trends continued during the 2020-21 school year.



teachers reported being *satisfied* with being a teacher in their school



teachers report planning to *continue teaching* in their current school next year

Tennessee's Proactive Response:

The department provides direct support and resources to educators as well as helps equip districts with opportunities to enhance their teachers' overall experience and ways to grow within their school communities. Through the [Teacher Advisory Council \(TAC\)](#), exceptional educators from across the state serve as leaders, ambassadors, advisors, and champions. Over the course of the service year, TAC members meet monthly as a group to provide feedback on department initiatives, policies, and resources. Additionally,

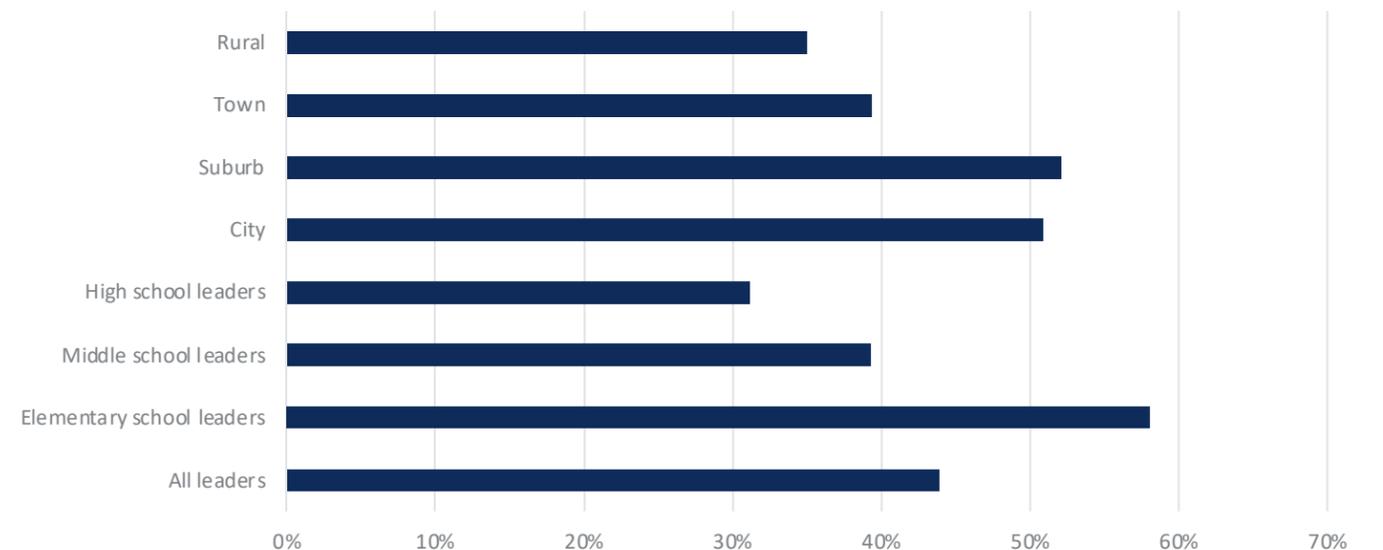
the department is building the leadership pipeline for educators through the [Aspiring Assistant Principals Network](#) and [Diverse Leaders Network](#), which provide pathways for Tennessee's educators to become licensed school administrators and obtain master's degrees and credentials at a partnering higher education institution, at no cost beyond that of the required licensure assessment. In August, the department announced funding has been awarded to Austin Peay State University and Tennessee State University to facilitate programming for participating Tennessee educators, and the second cohorts of each network combined will put leadership credentials in the hands of more than 260 prospective candidates.



Tennessee continued to grapple with teacher shortages, and some geographic areas and grade bands experienced more severe teacher shortages.

Research indicates that teachers are the most important in-school factor that influence student achievement. Given the impact of teachers on student's academic outcomes, it is important to monitor the teacher labor market in Tennessee. The 2021 TES asked administrators to reflect on staffing needs within their district and report whether they have a sufficiently large pool of applicants to choose a qualified applicant for open teaching positions. While responses indicate difficulty with hiring qualified applicants in all subjects and grade bands, staffing challenges are worse in certain areas. Only 35 percent of rural school leaders, and 31 percent of high school administrators reported having a sufficiently large pool of applicants to choose a qualified applicant for open teaching positions.

I have a sufficiently large pool of applicants to choose a qualified candidate for open positions at my school (% of school leaders reporting):



Tennessee's Proactive Response:

Tennessee has invested \$6.5 million in building the teacher talent pipeline in the state through the [Grow Your Own](#) initiative, which establishes partnerships between Educator Preparation Providers (EPPs) and local school districts and create innovative pathways to becoming a teacher in Tennessee for free. Over a third of districts in Tennessee have partnered with EPPs across the state to further this initiative and grow teachers within our communities.

Additionally, since May 2020, the department has launched three initiatives- [TN Teachers Jobs Connection](#), [TN Substitute Teacher Jobs Connection](#), [TN Education Job Board](#)- to support districts and schools in filling critical vacancies, as the COVID-19 pandemic has limited many traditional recruitment methods. Through these three initiatives, over 4,500 educators have been connected with opportunities in Tennessee's districts and schools.

A message from the Tennessee Educator Survey Team

To the more than 40,000 teachers, 2,066 administrators, and 4,547 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

Tennessee's Best for All strategic plan sets a vision and intention that, together as a state, we will set all students on a path to success. The plan focuses the department's work on three strategic priorities: Academics, Whole Child, and Educators. By taking a comprehensive and coherent approach to providing quality academic programs, serving the whole child, and developing and supporting teachers and leaders, we can ensure Tennessee is the best for all students. For more information, visit bestforallplan.tnedu.gov.

**We will set
all students
on a path
to success.**



