



Trends across Early-Career Principal Experiences



A Tennessee Educator Survey Snapshot

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ABOUT THIS SNAPSHOT

In the 2018 Tennessee Educator Survey, we asked a series of questions about job preparedness to administrators who indicated that they were in their **first three years on the job**. This snapshot provides a look into some key trends across the experiences of early-career administrators—both principals and assistant principals.

These trends matter because great leaders are key to school success. Previous [TERA research](#) shows that more effective principals strategically retain effective teachers, and lead schools with higher student achievement and better school climate ratings. Examining feelings of preparedness among early-career leaders can provide insights into how Tennessee can better prepare its school leader workforce.

What do we know about Tennessee's early career principals?

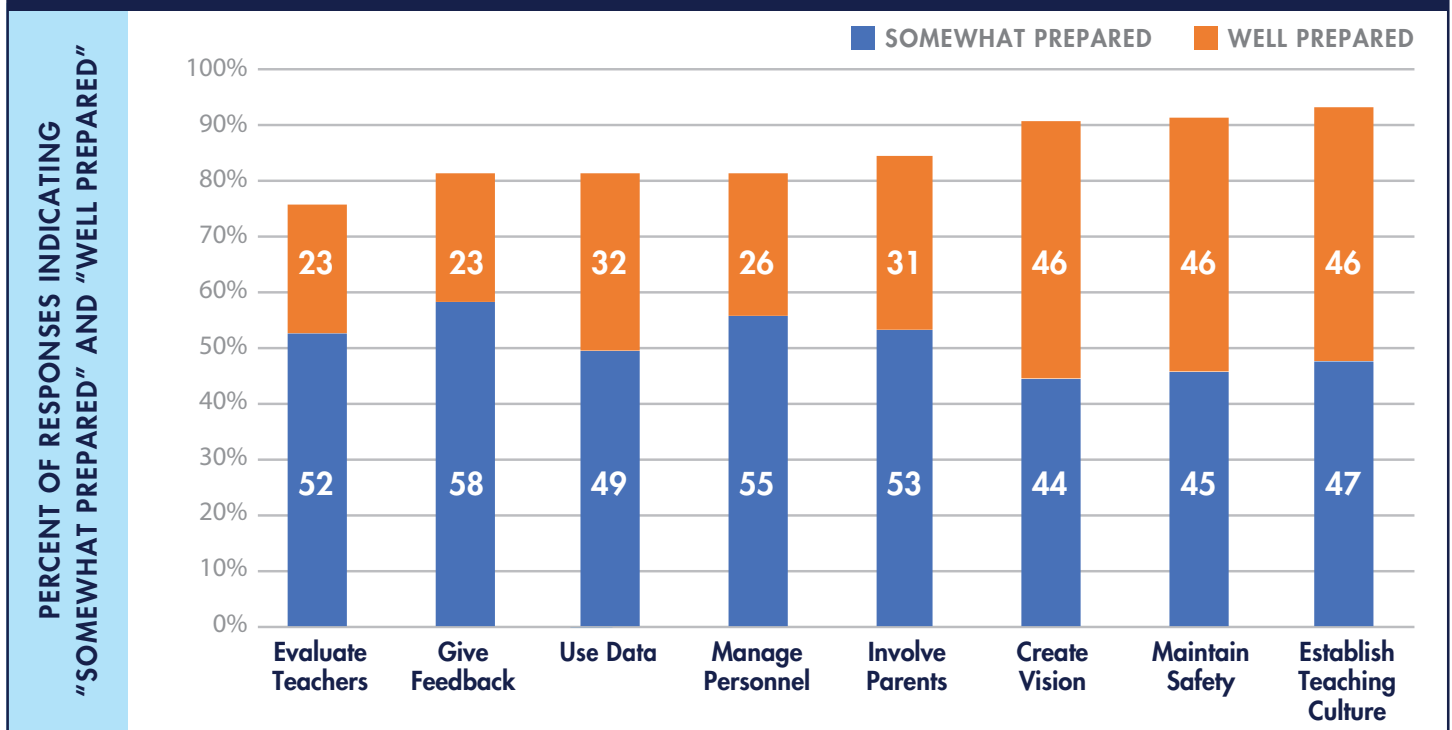
- *There are 805 principals and assistant principals in their first three years on the job (of those, 465 participated in the survey).*
- *The principals surveyed had an average of 13 years of teaching experience prior to their administration position.*
- *Principals who answered the survey came from 18 different preparation programs across Tennessee.*



Among their primary job responsibilities, early-career administrators feel the least prepared to evaluate teachers.

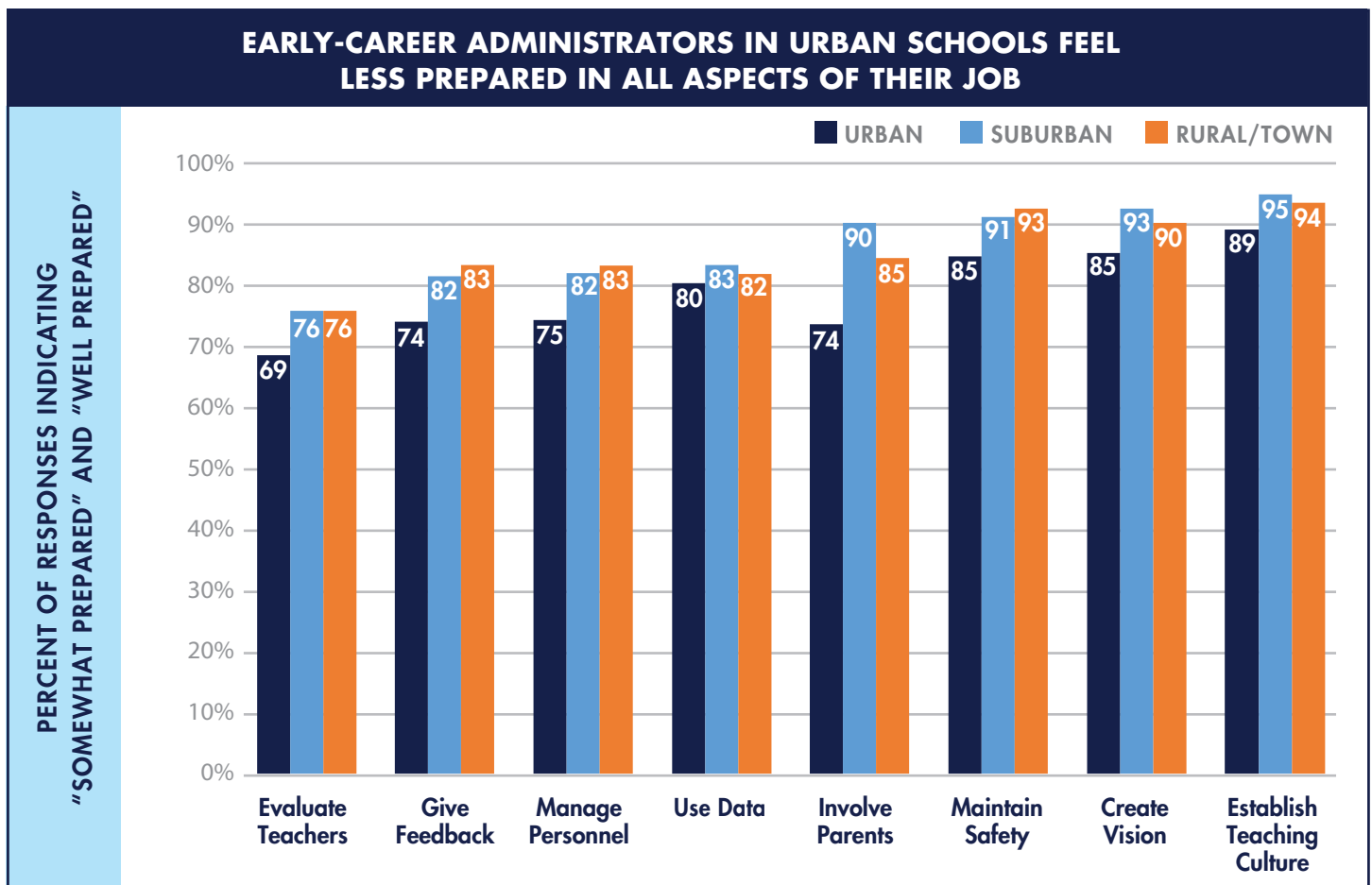
Coming out of their preparation programs, early-career administrators generally feel the most prepared to craft a vision for their school, establish a teaching culture, and foster a safe environment. However, fewer early-career principals and assistant principals feel prepared to evaluate teachers, provide feedback, and manage their staff. **Roughly 75% of all early-career administrators indicate they feel at least somewhat prepared to evaluate teachers, though another 25% do not feel prepared for this important task.** Digging a little deeper, we also see that less than 25% of early-career principals feel well prepared to conduct teacher evaluations and provide feedback to teachers. This is notable given the importance of educator evaluation in state policy and the links research has established among evaluation, feedback, and teacher improvement.

ON AVERAGE, EARLY-CAREER ADMINISTRATORS FEEL THE LEAST PREPARED TO EVALUATE TEACHERS



Early-career administrators who work in urban schools feel less prepared in all aspects of their job than those in suburban and rural schools.

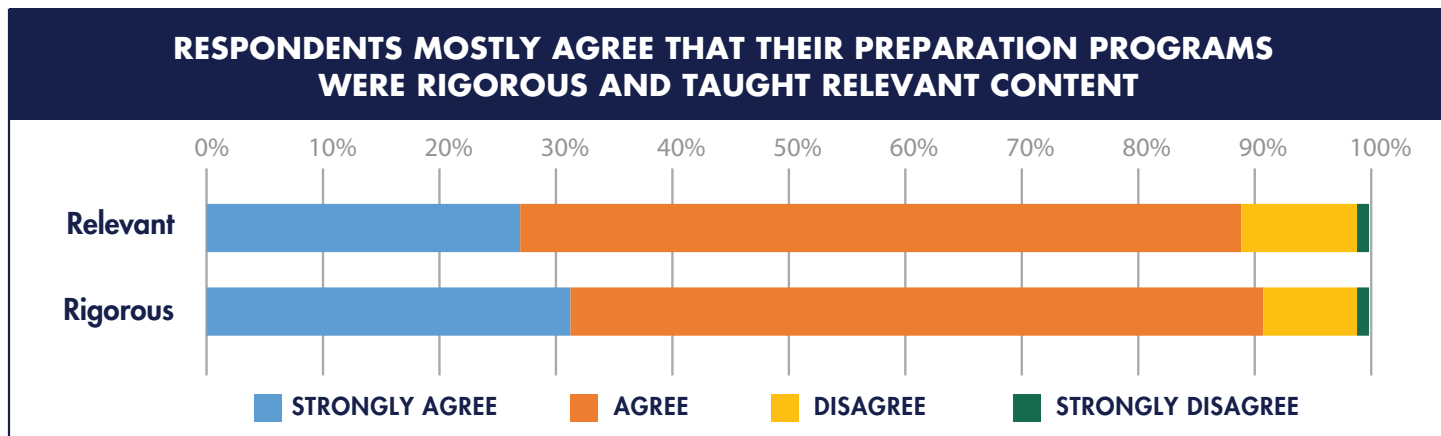
Across key job responsibilities, early-career administrators in urban schools feel less prepared than principals in suburban and rural schools. This trend is consistent with previous research that shows that principals who lead schools in urban areas tend to be less effective than principals in suburban districts (Grissom and Bartanen, 2019). Importantly, early-career administrators across all locale types feel the least prepared to evaluate teachers, provide feedback, and manage their staff.¹ However, fewer early-career principals in urban schools indicate feelings of overall preparedness in these key areas than principals in other locale types (69% compared to 75%). Further, early-career principals in urban schools feel far less prepared to involve parents than those in suburban and rural schools. **These patterns raise questions about whether principal preparation programs effectively differentiate their programming to take into account the unique differences in leading urban schools compared with schools in rural settings.**



¹ Consistent with our findings on page 2, less than 30% of all early-career principals across urban, suburban, and rural schools indicate they feel well-prepared to evaluate teachers and provide feedback.

Even with mixed feelings of job preparedness, early-career administrators tend to think highly of their preparation experience.

When asked to rate different components of their preparation programs, early-career administrators agreed that their programs were rigorous and taught relevant content, despite feeling not as prepared to perform certain aspects of their job. Given the many hats that school leaders often wear, it is possible that their preparation experience was helpful in a general sense even though some aspects of the job are more challenging than others.



NEXT STEPS FOR RESEARCH

Results from this snapshot show that while early-career administrators generally have positive feelings about their preparation experience, they feel the least prepared to provide instructional leadership through evaluating teachers and giving feedback. As policymakers continue to focus on recruiting and retaining strong school leaders, **the quality of Tennessee's principal preparation programs should be of the utmost concern.** Specifically, it is important to learn more about how principal preparation programs can better differentiate their curricula to meet the needs of individual principals who work in different settings, and to best train principals for the many hats that they wear as both administrative and instructional leaders of their school. Future TERA research will look at the effectiveness of principal preparation programs across Tennessee to learn more about how these programs are preparing school leaders and provide guidance on best practices in principal training and support.

REFERENCES

- Grissom, J.A., Blissett, R.S.L., & Mitani, H. (2018). Evaluating school principals: Supervisor ratings of principal practice and principal job performance. Tennessee Education Research Alliance working paper.
- Grissom, J.A., & Bartanen, B. (2018). Strategic retention: Principal effectiveness and teacher turnover in multiple measure teacher evaluation systems. Tennessee Education Research Alliance working paper.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

The Tennessee Educator Survey is an annual joint effort by the Tennessee Department of Education and the Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA) to gather information about schools across the state. Open to all teachers, administrators, and certified staff, the survey is a way for educators to provide feedback about what's working and where improvements can be made in areas like school climate, educator evaluation, state initiatives, and more. Survey responses directly inform state research and decision-making processes and are a tool for schools and districts to inform their practice.

In a series of survey snapshots, TERA will provide a broad look at responses and trends from the 2018 survey in several key areas relating to educators in Tennessee. Topics include job satisfaction, hiring patterns, growth and professional learning, educator evaluation, aspects of school support roles (assistant principals and instructional coaches), and more.