

Trends in Professional Learning

A Tennessee Educator Survey Snapshot

March 2019

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ABOUT THIS SNAPSHOT

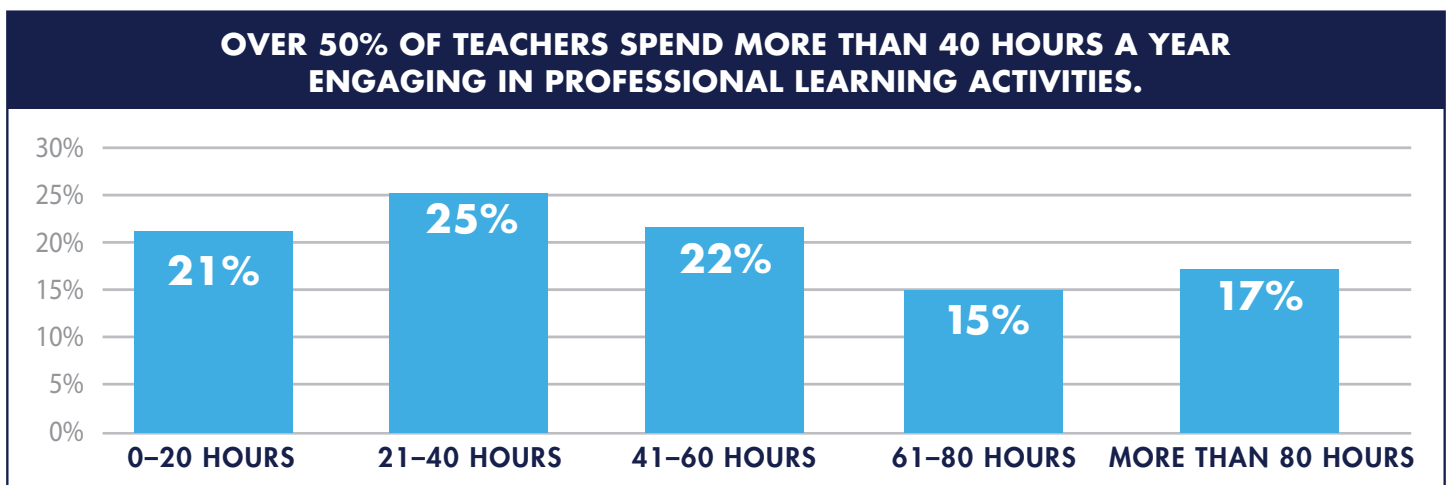
In the 2018 Tennessee Educator Survey, we asked a subset of teachers to report on the frequency and helpfulness of their professional learning activities.¹ Teachers reported on their formal professional development opportunities, personalized support such as mentoring and working with an instructional coach, and collaborative activities with their colleagues that focused on teaching and learning. This snapshot outlines how much time teachers spend participating in professional learning activities, the types of activities in which teachers engage, and how satisfied teachers are with these activities.

These trends matter because there is an increasing recognition that many different types of experiences contribute to teacher professional learning. Activities such as grade-level or subject-area team collaboration, mentoring, working with an instructional coach, or reflecting on evaluation feedback can all help teachers improve their instructional practice.² Yet, as documented below, **there is wide variation in the types of professional learning teachers across Tennessee receive, and some activities may be more helpful than others.** These trends lay the foundation for future TERA research that will look in greater detail at teacher professional learning experiences and examine which ones truly help improve instruction and are more likely to lead to better student outcomes.

KEY TRENDS

Teachers in Tennessee spend considerable time on professional learning activities, but many teachers do not regularly receive personalized support.

More than half of teachers in the sample estimate that they participated in at least 40 hours of professional learning activities during the past year (the equivalent of about an hour a week).

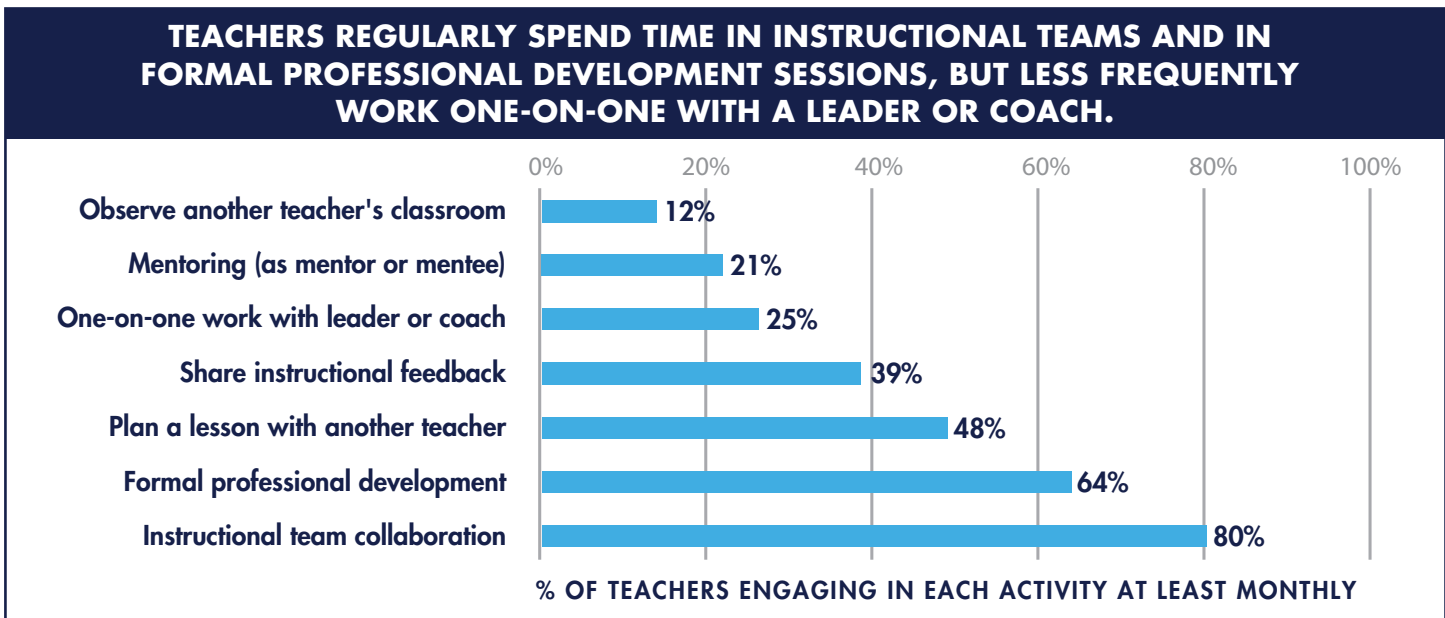


¹ About one-third of teachers were randomly assigned to answer questions on professional learning. In total, approximately 11,000 teachers answered questions on their professional learning experiences.

² Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Opfer & Pedder, 2011; Parise & Spillane, 2010; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015

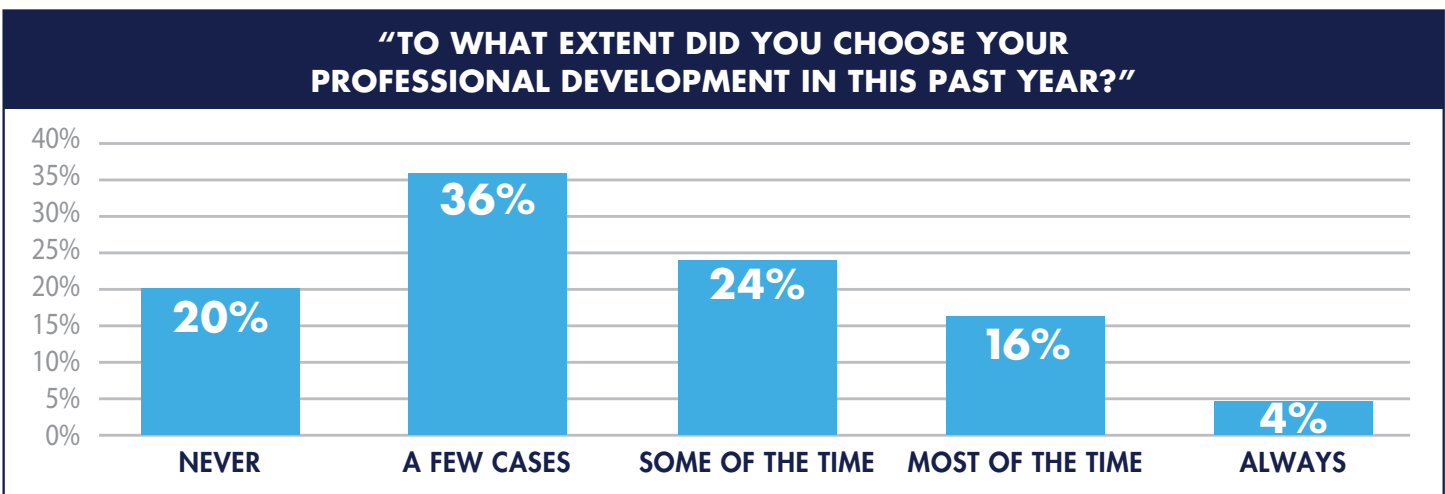
Teachers report that they engage in professional learning frequently. Ninety percent of teachers report engaging in at least one type of professional learning activity—such as formal professional development, mentoring, or working with an instructional team—on a regular basis (i.e. at least monthly). Eighty percent of teachers indicate that they regularly collaborate with teachers on an instructional team (e.g. grade-level or subject-area team) and approximately two-thirds of teachers report that they regularly participated in formal professional development.

Other professional learning activities are not as common. Notably, only 12% of teachers report that they regularly engage in peer observation and only one-quarter of teachers regularly work one-on-one with an instructional coach or leader.



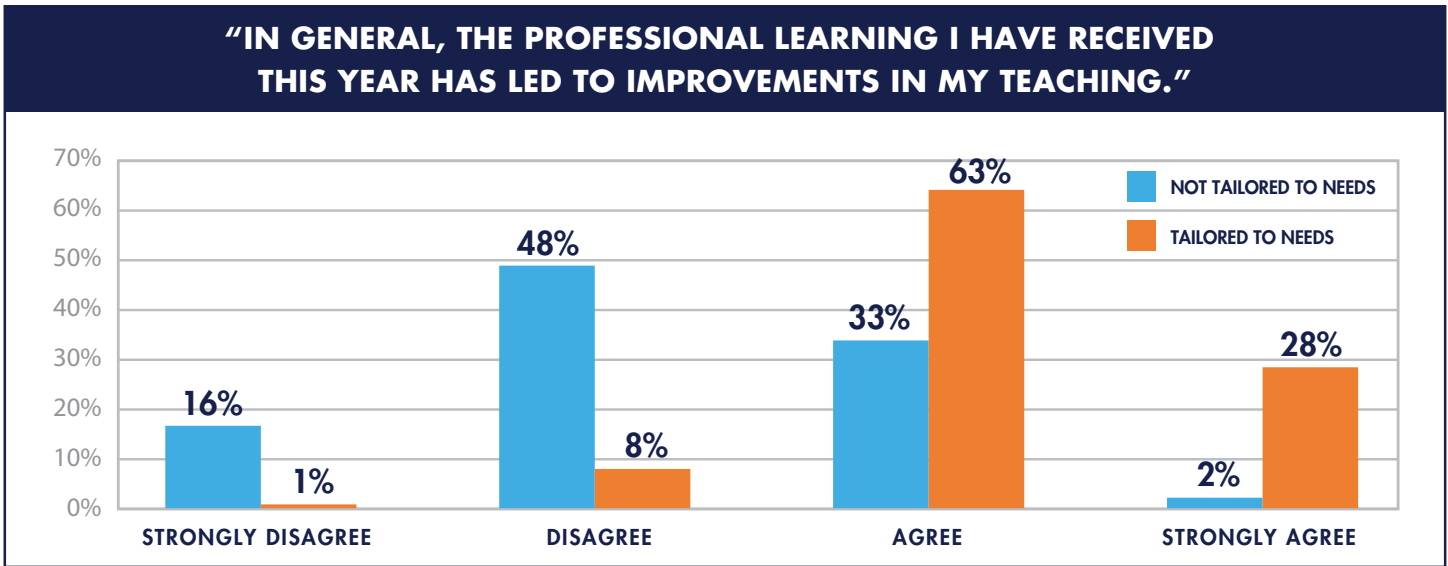
Teachers often have little choice in determining their professional learning activities.

Teachers were asked how much choice they have over selecting their formal professional development or activities during their collaborative time. Less than one-quarter of teachers report that they chose their professional development most of the time over the past year.

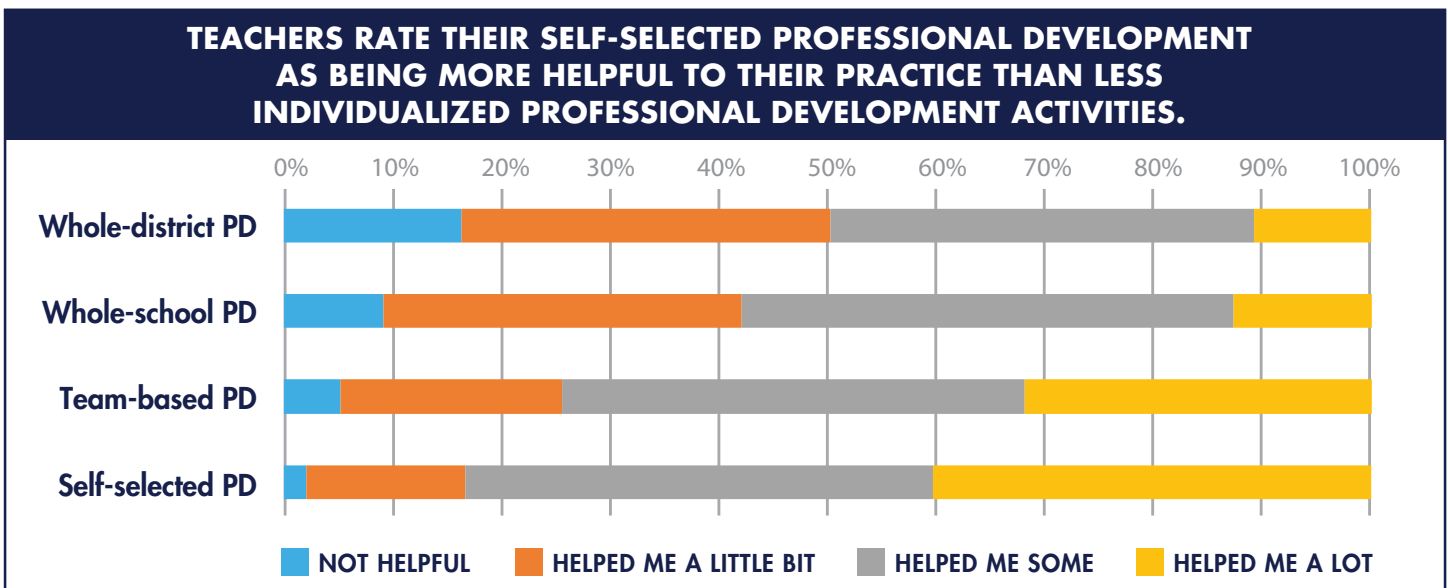


Teachers think their professional learning improves their practice, especially when it is tailored to their needs.

Given the time that teachers dedicate to professional learning activities, it is important to understand whether teachers believe these activities are helpful to support or improve their classroom instruction. Approximately 78% of surveyed teachers agree that the professional learning they received led to improvements in their teaching. However, as shown below, teachers are much more likely to indicate that the professional learning they receive is helpful when it is tailored to their specific needs.



Teachers were also asked to rate the extent to which specific activities were helpful in making decisions about the teaching activities or strategies used in their classrooms.³ Overall, teachers rate professional development that they select as more helpful than professional development that is required for all teachers in their school or district.



³ Due to an issue with the survey design, not all teachers answered questions on the helpfulness of these professional learning activities. Approximately 55-60% of applicable respondents answered the questions on helpfulness.



NEXT STEPS FOR RESEARCH

Overall, survey results indicate that while teachers spend considerable time on professional learning, many teachers have limited choice over their professional learning activities, and not all teachers find these activities helpful. In a series of upcoming briefs, TERA will further explore Tennessee teachers' experiences with their professional learning and how these experiences vary across districts, schools, and teachers. We'll also look at how professional learning activities relate to teacher and student outcomes.

REFERENCES

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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, and other state initiatives. Survey responses directly inform state research and decision-making processes and are a tool for schools and districts to inform their practice.

In this series, 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.