



# Feelings of Preparedness Among Tennessee's Early-Career Teachers:

## *Trends from the 2022 Tennessee Educator Survey*



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December 2022

### Introduction

Early-career teachers represent a significant percentage of the teacher workforce.

This analysis draws from the 2022 Tennessee Educator Survey (TES) and assesses feelings of preparedness among Tennessee's early-career teachers. These teachers are defined as those in their first three years as professional teachers. This brief examines responses from the core questions asked of all teachers and data from the early-career branch of the TES.

The survey revealed that feelings of preparedness are strongly associated with teachers' satisfaction with their current school, as well as their intent to remain in their current school. Studying early-career teacher preparedness may therefore help in reducing staffing shortages by promoting retention.

### Key Findings:

- 1 *Most early-career teacher respondents reported that they feel prepared for their current roles; however, levels of preparedness dropped in 2022 compared to the previous years.*
- 2 *Early-career teacher respondents reported that student-teaching and coaching were more beneficial to their professional preparation than academic coursework.*
- 3 *Early-career teacher respondents who reported that their preparation programs offered career services resources were more likely to report that they feel prepared for their current roles. However, reported use of these resources among early-career teachers was not associated with feelings of preparedness, except for the use of an advisor.*
- 4 *Early-career teacher respondents who reported spending less time on student discipline and those who felt that students respected adults in their school were more likely to report feeling prepared for their current roles.*

# DATA AND METHODS

In this brief, we use data from the 2022 Tennessee Educator Survey (TES), specifically responses from early-career teachers, or teachers in their first three years on the job.

To account for differential response rates across school type, region, and economically disadvantaged students served, we use analytic weighting to produce results that are more representative of public school teachers and school leaders in Tennessee. This brief focuses on survey responses from early-career teachers, or those in their first three years of teaching. Overall, 35% of teachers in their first three years of teaching responded to the survey. Teachers are only asked to take the early-career branch once in their first three years of teaching. If they don't take it in the first year, they receive the items in subsequent years.

## KEY FINDINGS



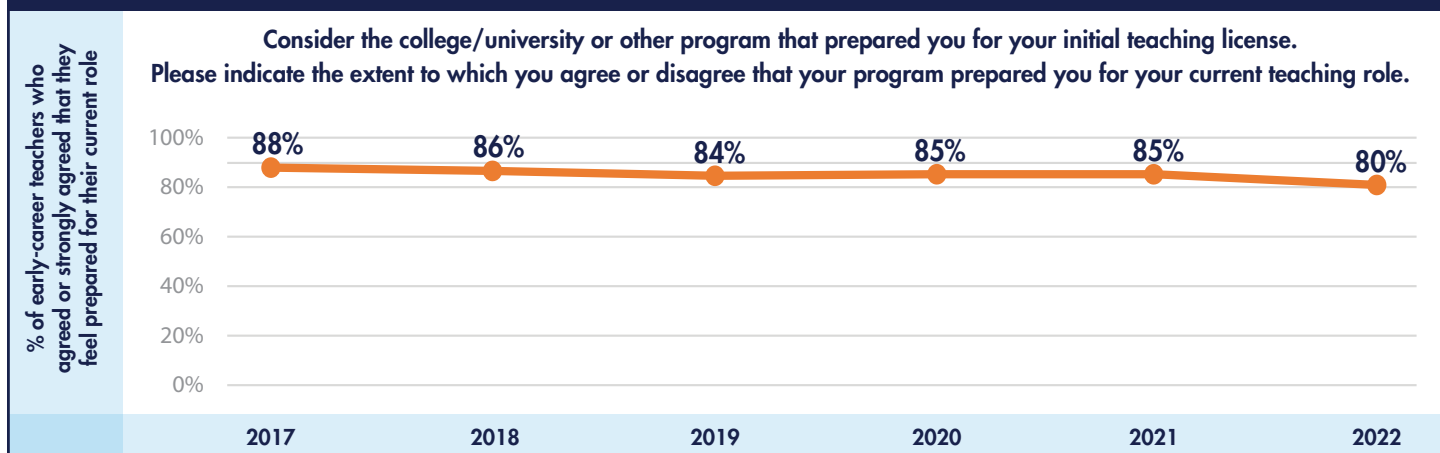
### KEY FINDING 1

**Most early-career teacher respondents reported that they feel prepared for their current roles; however, levels of preparedness dropped in 2022 compared to the previous years.**

Overall, most respondents reported that they feel prepared for their current roles. About 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their Educator Preparation Program (EPP) prepared them for their current roles. Feelings of preparedness did not vary greatly by teacher gender or race. We also did not see variance based on or whether they taught in a tested grade or subject. However, 2022 saw a decline compared to previous years, as displayed in Figure 1. From 2017 to 2021, feelings of preparedness due to EPP intervention held steady at about 86% on average.

Moreover, strong agreement from respondents in terms of preparedness to teach has been declining continuously since 2018. In 2022, only 30% of first-year teacher respondents strongly agreed that they feel prepared for the current role, down slightly from 35% in 2021 and down substantially from 53% in 2018.

**FIGURE 1: Although high overall, feelings of preparedness among early-career teacher respondents declined in the 2021-22 school year in comparison to respondents in 2021.**



*1 Teachers are only asked to take the early-career branch once in their first three years of teaching. If they don't take it in the first year, they receive the items in subsequent years.*

# 2

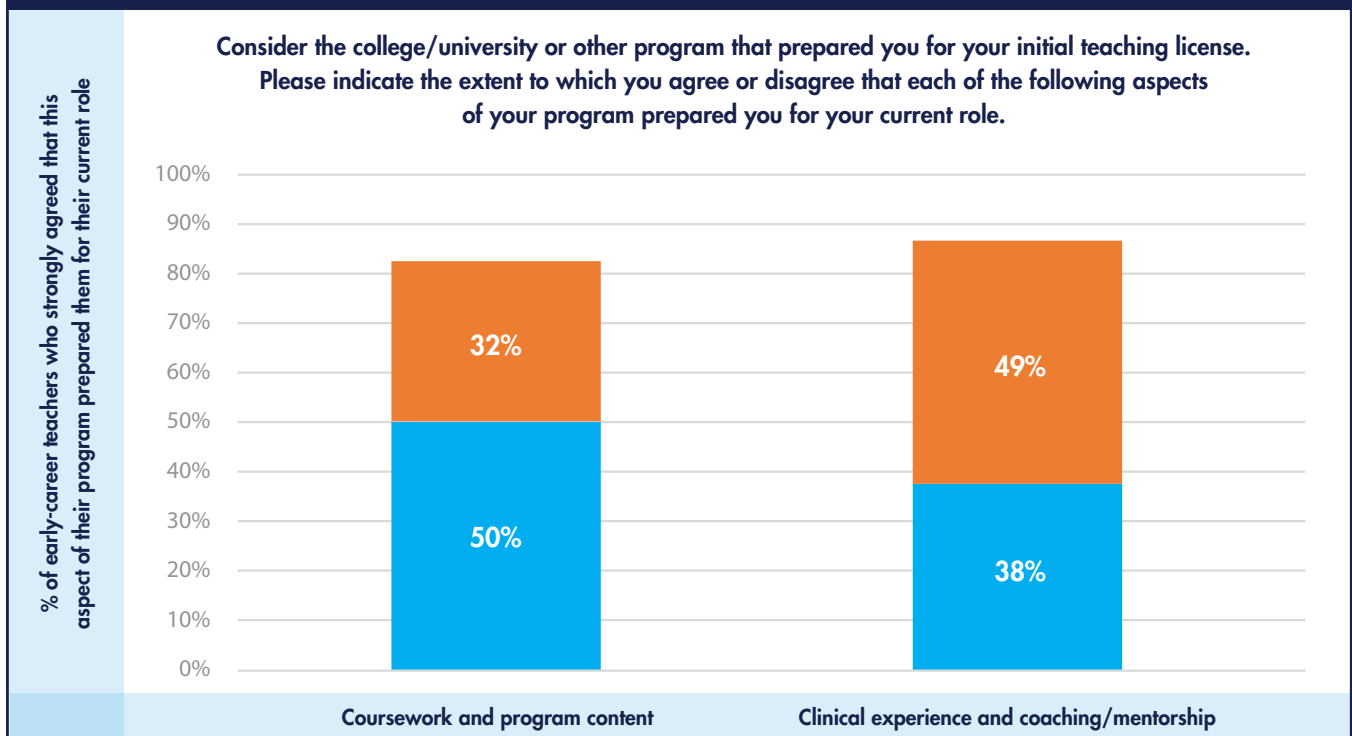
## KEY FINDING 2

**Early-career teacher respondents reported that student-teaching and coaching were more beneficial to their professional preparation than academic coursework.**

Early-career teacher respondents broadly cited clinical experiences and coaching or mentorship as effective preparatory experiences but regarded program coursework as being slightly less useful in preparing them for their current work. Indeed, 87% of early career teacher respondents agreed or strongly agreed that student-teaching and coaching or mentorship helped prepare them for their current role and 82% reported that their coursework helped prepare them.

However, examining just the portion of respondents who strongly agreed with these statements reveals a bigger gap: As shown in Figure 3, 49% of early-career teachers strongly agreed that those hands-on experiences prepared them for their roles, whereas only 32% strongly agreed that their EPP coursework and program content contributed to their professional preparation.

**FIGURE 3: Early-career teacher respondents reported that student-teaching and coaching/mentorship better prepared them for their current roles than EPP coursework and other program contents.**



Digging deeper, we also examined the relationship between the length of early-career teachers’ student-teaching experiences and how that correlates to feelings of preparedness in their current roles. Only 71% of respondents who experienced five weeks or less of student teaching strongly agreed that their field placements prepared them for their current roles, compared to 85% of those who experienced 30 weeks or more of student teaching. This suggests that the more field experience early-career teachers receive, the better prepared they feel when they step into their own classrooms.

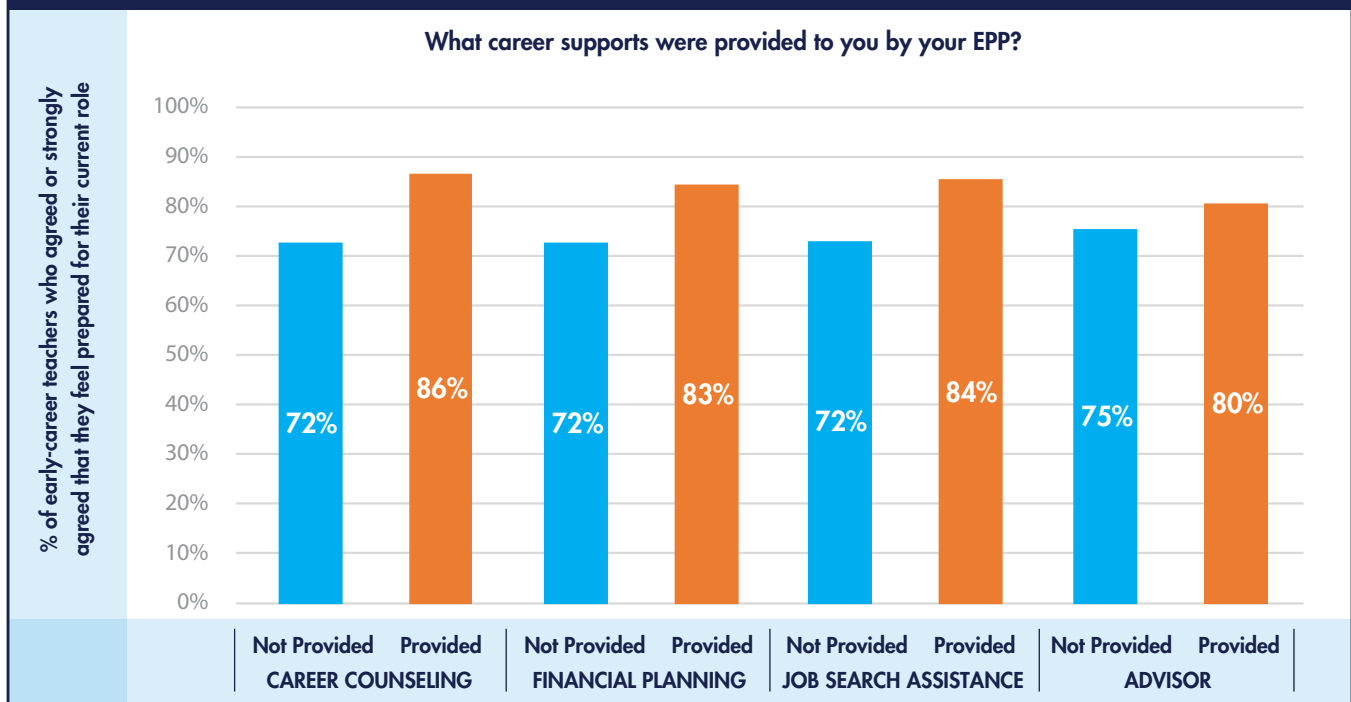
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## KEY FINDING 3

**Early-career teacher respondents who reported that their preparation programs offered career services resources were more likely to report that they feel prepared for their current role. However, reported use of these resources among early-career teachers was not associated with feelings of preparedness, except for the use of an advisor.**

The survey asked early-career teachers whether their EPPs provided advisors, job search assistance, financial planning guidance, and career counseling. Graduates of programs that offered each of these supports generally reported feeling more prepared in their current roles. For example, as Figure 3 shows, 86% of respondents who graduated from an EPP that provided career counseling said they feel prepared for their current roles, compared to only 72% of those who graduated from an EPP that did not offer this service. Similarly, 83% of respondents whose EPP provided financial planning said they feel prepared for the current role, compared to 72% of those whose EPP did not provide that service.

**FIGURE 4: Feelings of preparedness to teach were higher among early-career teacher respondents who said that their EPPs provided career services resources.**



Advisors were the counseling resource early-career teachers used most often when it was offered: 93% reported using advisors when they were offered by their programs, 78% reported using available financial planning services, 67% reported using offered job search assistance, and 54% reported using EPP-provided career counselors.

However, and perhaps importantly, reported use of these resources among early-career teachers was not associated with feelings of preparedness, except for those who used an advisor.

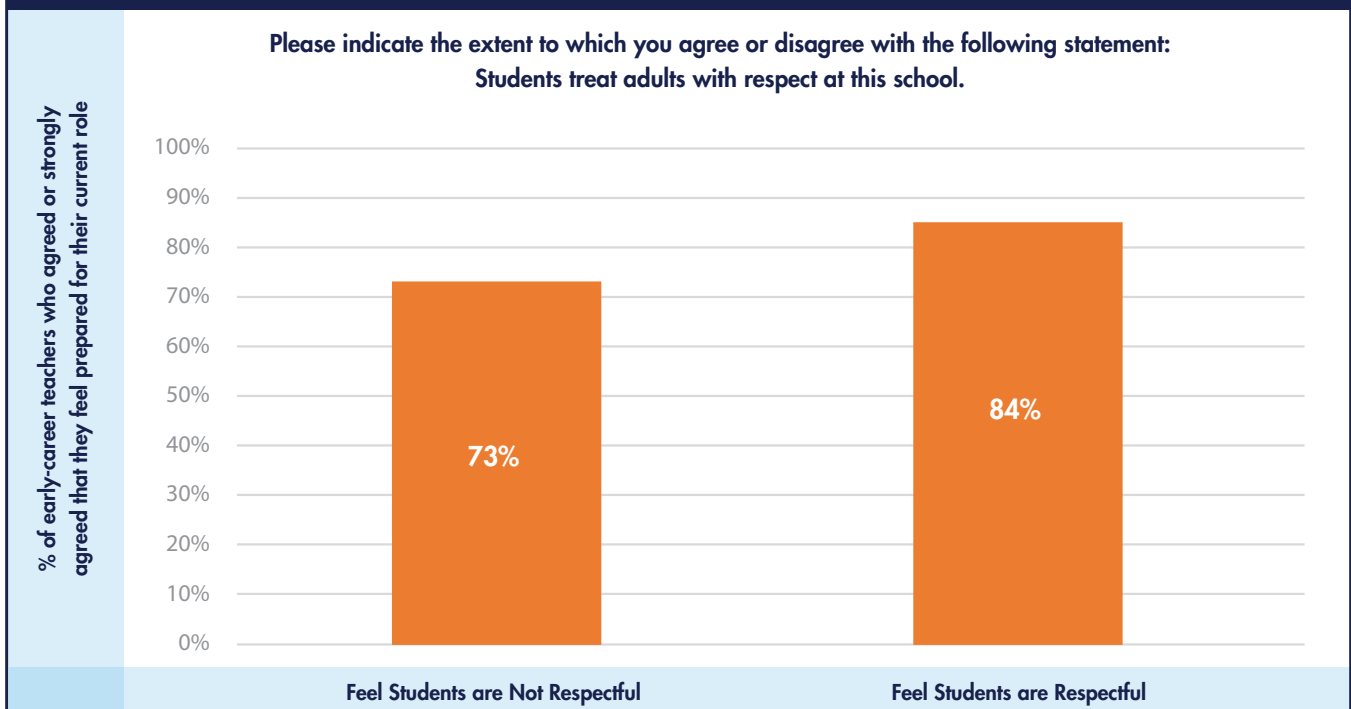
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## KEY FINDING 4

**Early-career teacher respondents who reported spending less time on student discipline and those who felt that students respected adults in their school were more likely to report feeling prepared for their current roles.**

Responses about disciplinary issues tended to be related to differential feelings of preparedness among respondents. As shown in Figure 5, 84% of early-career teachers who said they feel that students are respectful in their school agreed or strongly agreed that they feel prepared for the current role, compared to 73% who said they do not feel like students are respectful of adults in their school.

**FIGURE 5: Early-career teacher respondents who felt that students in their school are respectful to adults reported that they also feel better prepared for their teaching role.**



Further, early-career teacher respondents, and first-year teachers in particular, reported that they spend a disproportionate amount of time on disciplinary tasks relative to more experienced teachers. About 59% of first-year teacher respondents reported spending 11% or more of their work time on discipline and student behavior, compared to 39% of experienced teachers (those with four or more years of teaching experience).

This suggests that working experiences, not only preparation experiences, could be important drivers of feelings of preparedness in early-career educators.

## 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 intended to provide teachers the opportunity to discuss challenges and concerns about teaching through the pandemic, thoughts on school climate, and reflections on preparedness.



## REFERENCES

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