

## School Leader Experiences in Tennessee:

*Trends from the 2022 Tennessee Educator Survey*



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### Introduction

As we know from [previous TERA research](#), effective school leadership matters for creating a positive school climate, retaining effective teachers, and promoting high levels of student achievement. With pandemic recovery in full swing across districts in Tennessee and the country, strong and stable leadership in schools will likely be ever-more important. Learning more about the experiences of school leaders across Tennessee can provide critical insights into how schools are run, particularly coming out of the pandemic.

This analysis draws from administrator responses to the 2022 Tennessee Educator Survey, which asks school leaders questions about their overall satisfaction with their job and school climate and how they most spend their time during the day. These responses provide a glimpse into the day-to-day experiences of Tennessee school leaders and offer some insights into how the pandemic has shaped these experiences.

### Key Findings:

- 1 School leaders reported high levels of job satisfaction in the 2021-22 school year.
- 2 School leaders cited discipline as the top-most activity to which they devoted their time in the 2021-22 school year.
- 3 School leaders in the most economically disadvantaged schools did not report spending any more time on student discipline than their peers in other schools.
- 4 School leaders working in elementary schools and in the most economically disadvantaged schools reported spending more of their time on instructional leadership activities than their peers in other schools.

## DATA AND METHODS

In this brief, we used data from the 2022 Tennessee Educator Survey (TES), specifically responses collected from school leaders. For the purposes of this analysis, we define school leaders as principals and assistant principals ultimately responsible for the governing operations of schools. A little over half of all Tennessee school leaders responded to the TES (N=1,996 - 51% response rate). Of those school leader respondents, 971 were principals, and 1,025 were assistant principals. Additionally, 816 were located in elementary schools, 384 were in middle schools, and 457 were in high schools. Further, 191 were in K-8 schools, 47 were in K-12 schools, and 101 were in an “other” category. To better account for differential response rates, we used analytic weighting to produce results broadly representative of all public school teachers and school leaders in Tennessee. Analysis of Tennessee Educator Survey data presented here uses analytical weighting to account for differential response rates of teachers from varying regions, school type, and school demographics.

# KEY FINDINGS

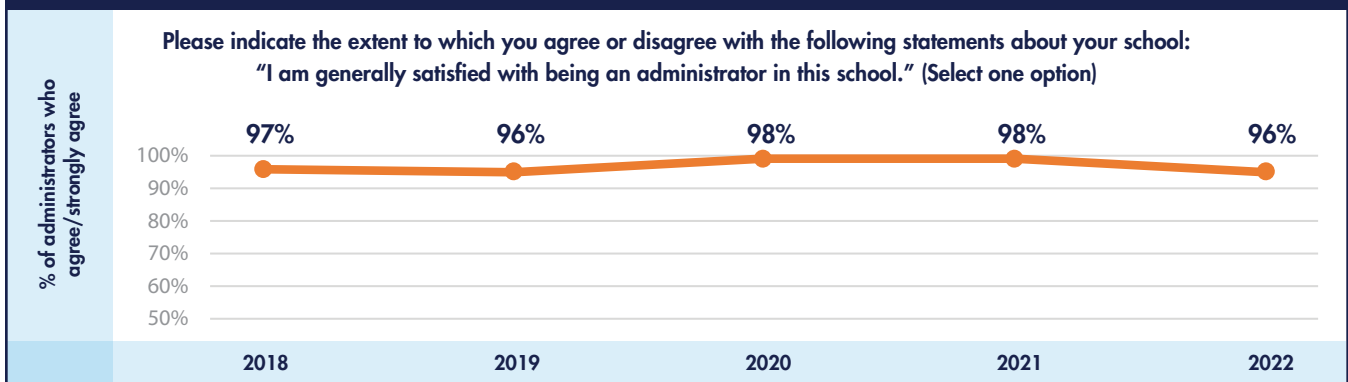


## KEY FINDING 1

**School leader respondents reported high levels of job satisfaction in the 2021-22 school year.**

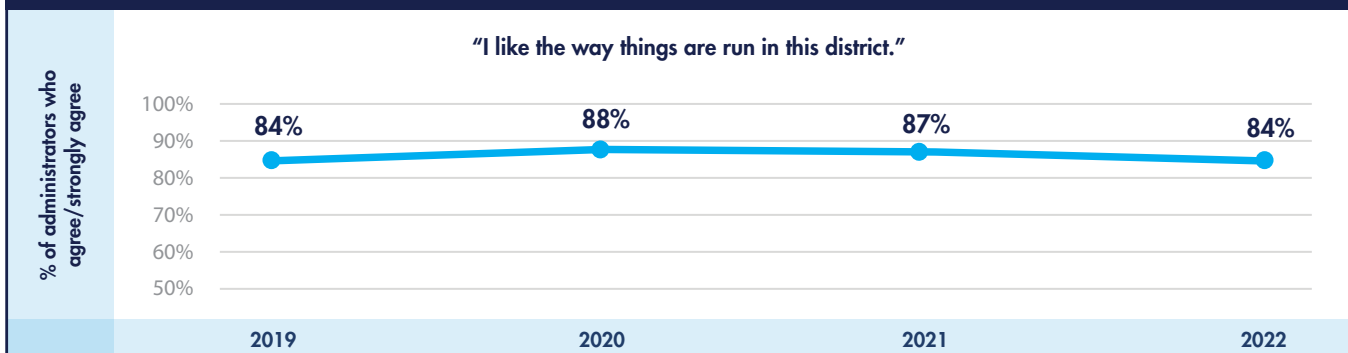
While we may have expected to see a dip in job satisfaction levels following the COVID-19 pandemic, Tennessee school leader respondents reported high levels of job satisfaction, continuing the trend from prior years. As shown in Figure 1 and consistent with the previous four years, 96% of school leader respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are satisfied with being an administrator in their school. These levels of satisfaction did not vary among administrator type (early career principals, assistant principals, and experienced principals) or grade level (elementary, middle, or high school).

**FIGURE 1: Consistent with prior years, 96% of school leader respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they are satisfied with being an administrator in their school.**



Additionally, school leader respondents indicated that they generally approved of district leadership. However, there was a slight decrease in approval rates from 2021 to 2022. As displayed in Figure 2, 87% of school leader respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they liked the way things were run in their district in 2021, compared to a slightly lower 84% in 2022.

**FIGURE 2: In 2022, 84% of school leader respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they liked the way things were run in their district – a slight dip from the previous two years.**



# 2

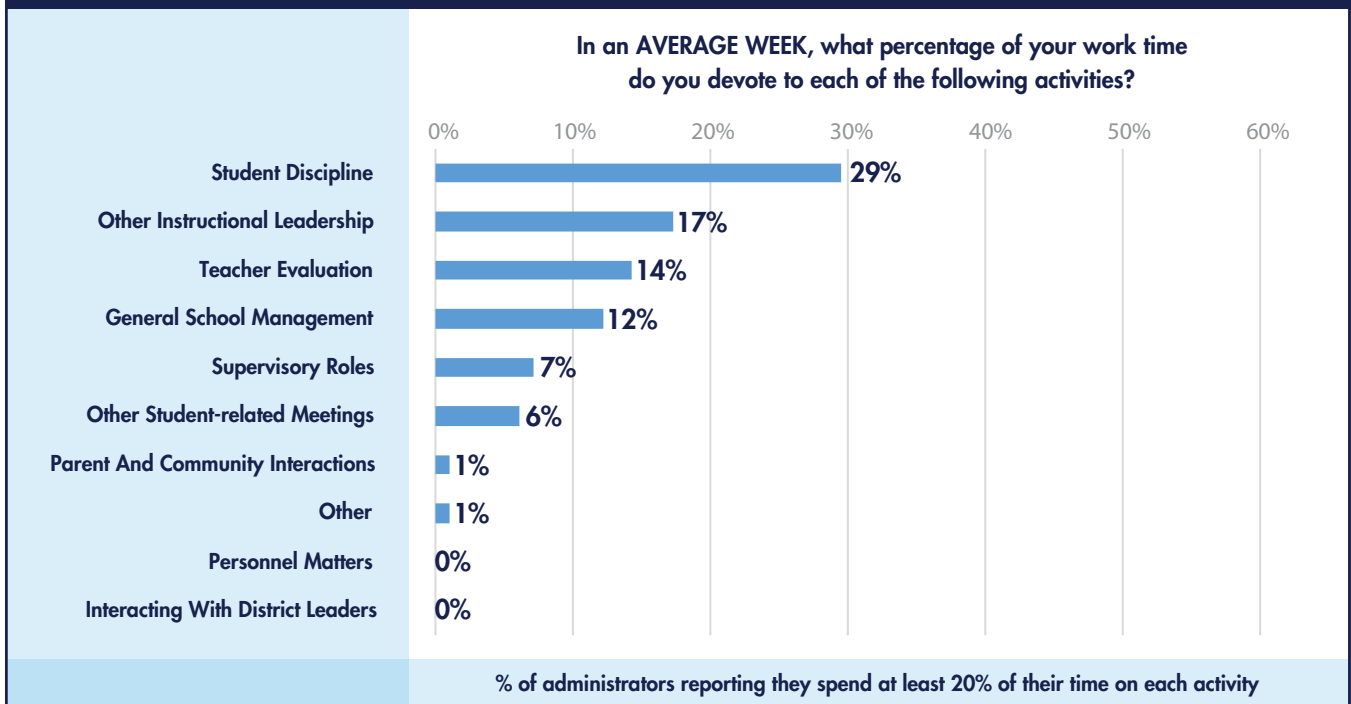
## KEY FINDING 2

### School leader respondents cited discipline as the top-most activity to which they devoted their time in the 2021-22 school year.

Despite high levels of overall satisfaction in their jobs, school leader respondents reported spending considerable time on student discipline issues. As shown in Figure 3, nearly three in ten school leader respondents (29%) reported spending 20% or more of their time on student disciplinary issues and attending to student discipline topped the list for where they estimated they devoted their time. By comparison, less than one-fifth of school leader respondents reported spending 20% or more of their time on instructional leadership and teacher evaluation (17% and 14%, respectively).

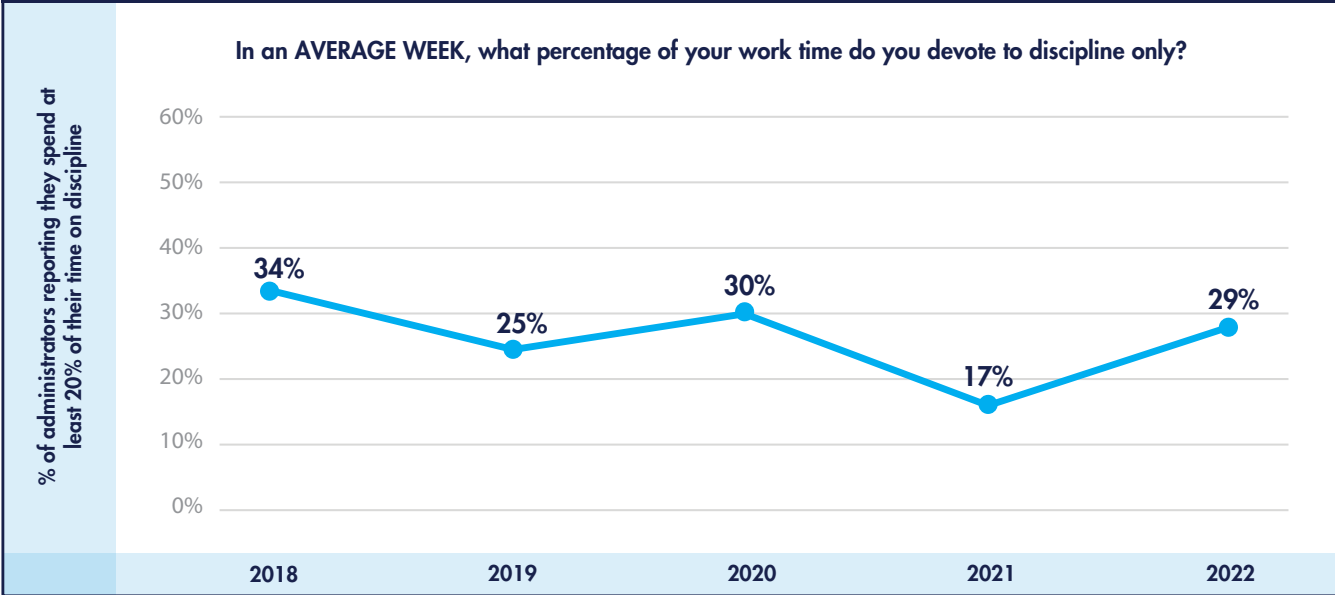
Perhaps unsurprisingly, this trend appears to be mostly driven by middle and high school leader respondents who reported spending much more of their time on student discipline than those working in elementary schools. In fact, only 19% of elementary school principals reported spending more than 20% of their time on student discipline, compared to 45% of middle school principals and 37% high school principals.

**FIGURE 3: Nearly three in ten school leader respondents reported spending at least 20% of their time on student discipline.**



Further, reported time spent on student discipline has returned to pre-pandemic levels after decreasing in the 2020-21 school year. As demonstrated in Figure 4, 29% of school leader respondents estimated they devoted 20% or more of their time on student discipline during the 2021-22 school year, compared to just 17% during the 2020-21 school year when many more schools across the state moved to virtual or hybrid instruction in response to the pandemic.

**FIGURE 4: Reported time spent on student discipline has returned to pre-pandemic levels.**



# 3

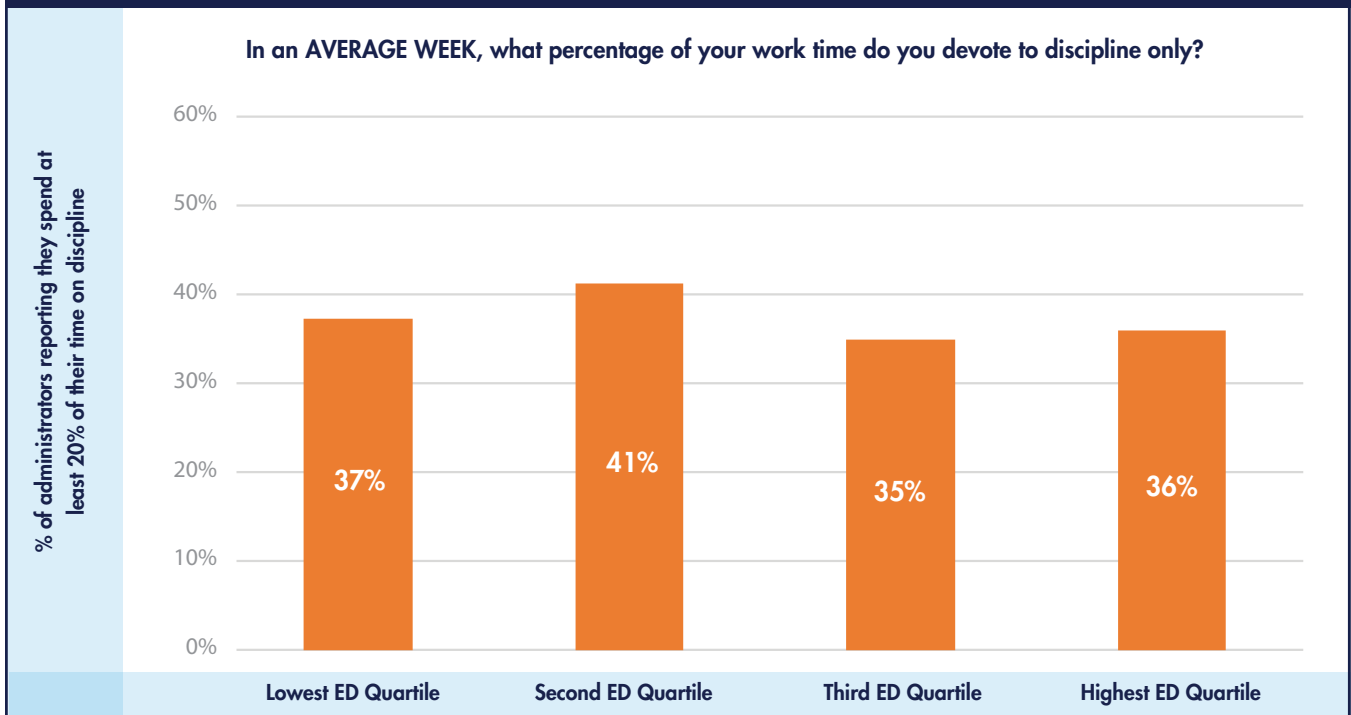
## KEY FINDING 3

### School leader respondents in more economically disadvantaged schools did not report spending any more time on student discipline than their peers in other schools.

To learn more about the experiences of school leader respondents across different types of schools, we further broke down responses by four quartiles of school income levels based on the percentage of students identified as economically disadvantaged during the 2021-22 academic year (described below as ED quartile). Figure 5 shows the reported time school leader respondents said they spent on student discipline based on these quartiles.

Perhaps contrary to what we might assume, school leader respondents in more economically disadvantaged schools did not report spending any more time on discipline than their peers in other schools. In fact, Figure 5 shows that 36% of principals serving the greatest proportion of economically disadvantaged students reported spending at least 20% of their time on student discipline compared to 37% of principals serving in schools with the fewest economically disadvantaged students.

**FIGURE 5: School leader respondents in more economically disadvantaged schools did not report spending any more time on student discipline than their peers in other schools.**



# 4

## KEY FINDING 4

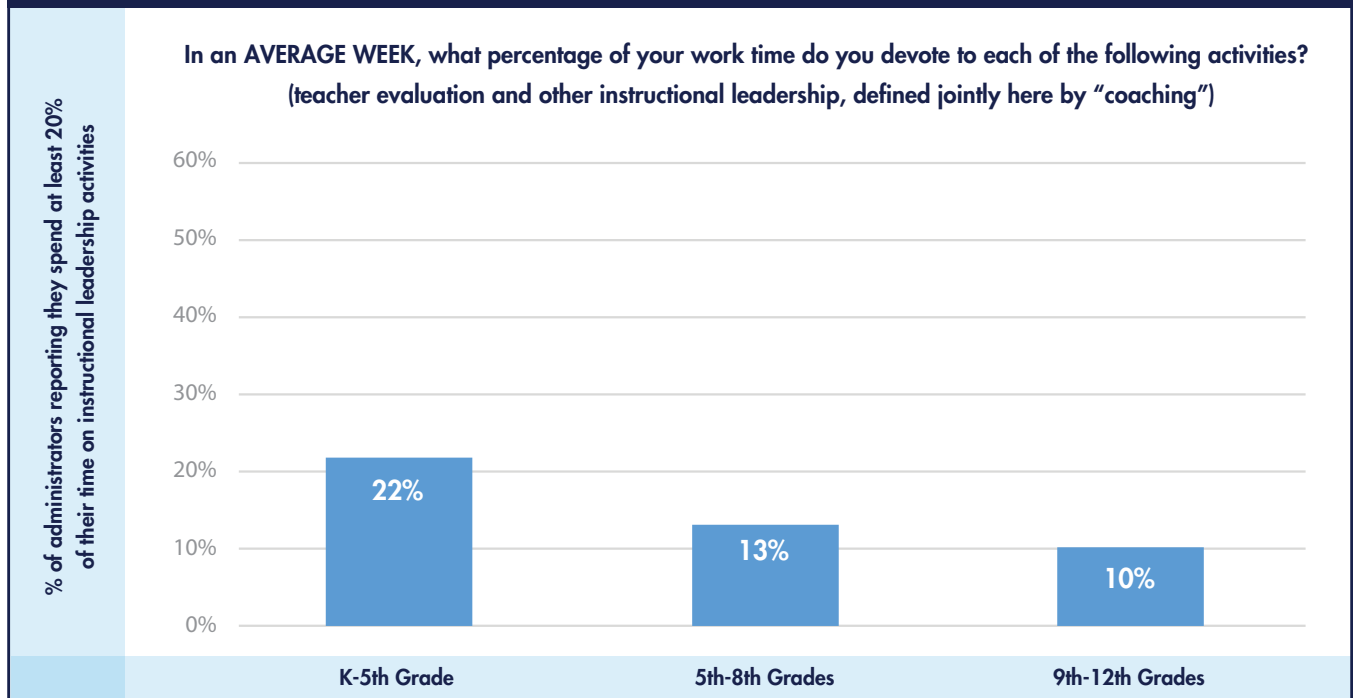
**School leader respondents working in elementary schools and in the most economically disadvantaged schools reported spending more of their time on instructional leadership activities than their peers in other schools.**

For the purposes of this brief, we define instructional leadership in a few ways:

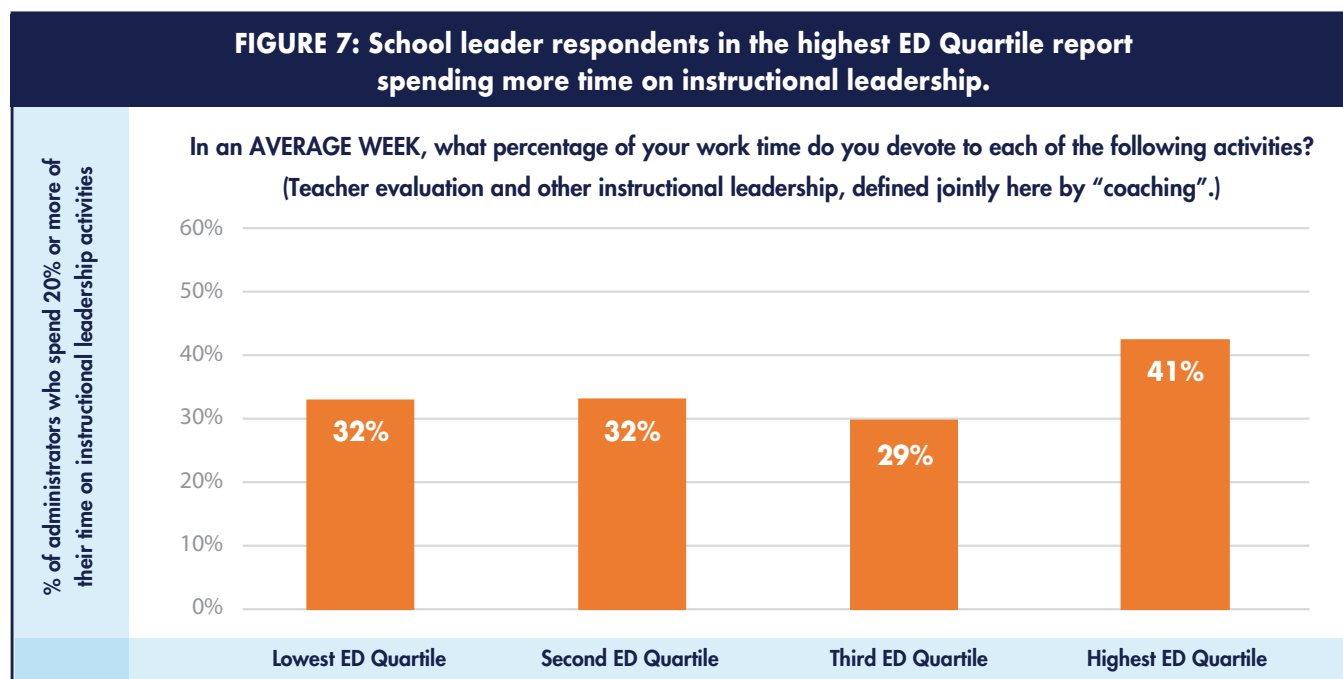
- Teacher evaluation, including instructional coaching and observation
- Miscellaneous instructional leadership, such as informal classroom visits, professional development, or curriculum

While more middle and high school leader respondents reported that they spend more of their time attending to disciplinary issues rather than providing instructional leadership, more elementary school leader respondents said the opposite. In fact, Figure 6 shows that 22% of school leader respondents in elementary schools reported that they spend 20% or more of their time on coaching and instructional leadership, compared to 13% of middle school leader respondents and only 10% of high school leader respondents.

**FIGURE 6: 22% of school leader respondents in elementary schools estimated that they spent 20% or more of their time on instructional leadership compared to 13% of administrators in middle schools and 10% of high school administrators.**



Further, school leader respondents in economically disadvantaged schools reported spending more time on coaching than their peers in other schools. Figure 7 shows that 41% of principals in the most economically disadvantaged schools reported spending at least 20% of their time on coaching compared to 32% of principals in the least economically disadvantaged schools.



## 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, school leaders, 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

Blanchard, A. (2018). *How principals drive school success: A brief of strengthening Tennessee's education labor market*. Tennessee Education Research Alliance. [https://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/TERA/principal\\_quality.php](https://peabody.vanderbilt.edu/TERA/principal_quality.php)

