

Listen to Us:

Teacher Views and Voices

*[I became a teacher]
to create adults who can
care for themselves and make
a difference in the world,
not be a burden
on society.*

**I love the joy
when kids
embrace
learning; they
are magnificent
to be with
every day.**

Listen to what
the teachers tell you. The
changes [states] make are not
helping the students!

*[It's rewarding] giving dignity
to students who are generally
regarded as being "less" than
other students.*

*Having the students come
back and tell you how you helped
inspire or motivate them ...
That's pretty powerful!*

Far too much of my school day is
dictated by administration, district,
state, federal government.

**Stop demanding that teachers be solely
responsible for their students' success.
We all know that it is a trifecta
of teacher, student, and parent.**

**I believe that teachers need
to be trusted to teach.**

*Administrators at all levels
need to listen to teachers.
We are the researchers. We are
the most important component in
education and the powers that be
do not want to listen to us.*

**Education is the only way
to achieve social justice.**

*[A major challenge is]
being the scapegoat for every
problem in America.*

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Summary & Commentary

Introduction

Education policymakers and leaders often say that the opinions and observations of teachers are among the most important information we have to help explain and understand what is happening in schools. Teachers' voices can inject a sense of classroom and school-level realism into those discussions and add clarity and credibility to issues that are often clouded by competing interests.

The Center on Education Policy (CEP), in an effort to gather and amplify teachers' voices about current education issues and their own profession, conducted a national survey of public school K-12 teachers in the winter of 2015-16. The survey focused on a strategic set of issues for policymakers, educators, business leaders, and the public, including teachers' views on their profession, standards, testing, and evaluations. The nationally representative sample surveyed for this report included elementary, middle, and high school teachers of a range of subjects in a variety of communities across the nation.

The survey responses presented in the report tell us a great deal about how teachers are managing the many changes currently taking place in public schools. The responses portray a profession that is increasingly complex and under pressure: nearly all states have new, more rigorous academic standards in place along with school accountability systems that revolve around student assessment results. Many states also evaluate teachers using student test scores. For many teachers, this recent political and pedagogical upheaval in public education has made the profession more challenging and less rewarding. Our survey aimed to learn more about teachers' views on these and other issues.

Summary of Key Findings

Key findings appear at the beginning of each part of the report. The most important findings are summarized below.

The teaching profession

- **Teachers enter the profession for altruistic reasons.** Sixty-eight percent said they became a teacher to make a difference in students' lives, and 45% said they wanted to help students reach their full potential.
- **The most rewarding aspects of teaching involve helping students.** Large majorities of the nation's teachers said that making a difference in students' lives (82%) and seeing students succeed academically (69%) are among the most rewarding aspects of teaching.
- **Some of the greatest challenges faced by teachers come from external policies and constantly changing demands.** Almost half (46%) of teachers cited state or district policies that get in the way of teaching as a major challenge, and about one-third cited constantly changing demands placed on teachers and students.

- **While most teachers report satisfaction with their school and colleagues, other aspects of their job seem to be taking a toll.** On the positive side, 60% or more of teachers said they like their school and are part of “a satisfied group” of teachers. On the negative side, 60% of teachers said their enthusiasm for teaching has lessened; 49% agreed that the stress and disappointments at their school “aren’t really worth it”; and 49% said they would leave teaching soon if they could get a higher paying job.
- **Large majorities of teachers believe their voices are not often factored into the decision-making process at the district (76%), state (94%), or national (94%) levels.** However, 53% of teachers agreed that their opinions are considered most of the time at the school level. Moreover, teachers’ perceptions of whether their opinions are factored into school-level decisions appear to be related to their job satisfaction. Specifically, the percentages of teachers who agreed with positive statements about their profession were higher among teachers who believed their opinions were considered in school decisions and lower among those who did *not* believe they had a voice. For negative statements about the profession, the pattern was reversed.
- **Time and class size matter to teachers.** When asked to choose which actions would significantly help to improve their day-to-day work, about half of public school teachers said smaller class sizes and/or more planning time would be most helpful.
- **Nearly all teachers (96%) report taking on leadership or student support activities in addition to their regular classroom roles but many are not paid for these extra tasks.** Indeed, two-thirds of teachers reported taking on *multiple* extra leadership roles or activities. Only about one-fourth of teachers who took on any additional activities received extra pay for their work. The exception was coaching sports — just 13% of teachers said they coached a sport, but most (79%) were paid for doing so.
- **Nearly all public school teachers (94%) engage in collaborative activities with other teachers in their school.** Most of their collaboration is with other teachers of the same subject and/or grade level. Nearly all of the collaborating teachers (90%) believe this collaboration was somewhat or greatly helpful and a good use of their time.

Standards and assessments: Teachers of math and English language arts (ELA)

- **Most math and ELA teachers say they have maintained professional autonomy under more rigorous state standards.** Between 57% and 73% of math and ELA teachers who had taught their state’s previous standards indicated that their autonomy over instruction, curriculum, or teacher collaboration has stayed the same or increased under new state standards.
- **Teachers are using curricula from various sources to teach the current math and ELA standards.** School districts were the source of standards-based curriculum cited by the greatest proportions of teachers (72% of math teachers and 68% of ELA teachers). Many teachers also relied on curricula provided by their state or school. In addition, 55% of math teachers and 61% of ELA teachers developed or revised curricula for the new standards alone or with other teachers, or adapted curricula from online sources or existing texts.
- **Teachers are using various approaches to understand student results from new state tests aligned to new standards.** A large majority (83%) of math or ELA teachers who received student performance data from spring 2015 testing said they worked collaboratively with other teachers in their school to understand these data. Other approaches being used by a majority of these teachers to better understand spring test results include

engaging in self-study, participating in school- or district-sponsored professional development, using online resources, and working with their principal.

- **Most math and ELA teachers are using student results from new assessments to change how they teach.** More than two-thirds of the teachers of math (68%) and ELA (71%) who received student data from spring 2015 testing noted that the data caused them to modify their teaching at least somewhat.
- **Teachers who are uncertain about the future of their state’s standards and assessments report challenges in teaching the standards.** About half of math and ELA teachers are unsure if their state will keep their current math and ELA standards and assessments. Among these teachers, 80% said this lack of certainty presents at least somewhat of a challenge to their efforts to teach the standards.

Standards and assessments: Teachers of subjects other than math and ELA

- **About half of the teachers of other subjects report that they are teaching college- and career-readiness (CCR) skills associated with state math and ELA standards, but few have changed their practice to do so.** Specifically, 56% of teachers of subjects other than math or ELA said they are teaching at least one of the following CCR skills: nonfiction reading, nonfiction writing, problem solving, and reasoning. Among teachers who have been teaching long enough to compare their behavior under old and new standards, about two-thirds reported that they were previously teaching these skills to the same degree as they are now.

Testing time

- **An estimated 37% of teachers indicated that they spend one week or less out of the school year preparing students for district-mandated tests, while about 26% reported spending more than a month on these activities.** For state-mandated tests, 30% of teachers estimated devoting less than a week to test-prep, and 29% estimated spending more than a month. A greater share of teachers in high- and medium-poverty schools than in low-poverty schools reported spending more than a month on test-prep activities for district and state tests.
- **A majority of teachers believe they spend too much time *preparing* students for state-mandated tests (62%) and district-mandated tests (51%).** Very few teachers believed they spent too little time preparing students for district and/or state-mandated tests.
- **When asked how much time their students spend *taking* mandated tests, sizable proportions of teachers estimated one week or less for district-mandated (40%) and state-mandated (45%) tests.** The remaining teachers reported that their students spend more than a week taking these tests.
- **An overwhelming majority of teachers (81%) believe students spend too much time *taking* district- and/or state-mandated tests.** About 16% said the time students spend taking tests is about right, while 1% believe it is too little.
- **Many teachers would prefer to cut the frequency and length of state- and district-mandated tests rather than eliminate them altogether.** Teachers who believe students spend too much time taking tests were asked which tests should be eliminated, reduced, or kept. The vast majority of these teachers would keep teacher-created quizzes (88%) and

teacher-created tests (86%). For state-mandated tests, less than a third (31%) of these teachers wanted to eliminate them, while 60% preferred to reduce their frequency or length; only 7% wanted to keep them as they are. For district-mandated tests, 22% wanted to eliminate them, 63% suggested reducing their frequency or length, and 13% advised keeping them as they are.

Teacher evaluation

- **Many teachers have been evaluated based on student test scores.** Among the 82% of teachers who received a performance evaluation in 2014-15, more than half (54%) indicated that student test scores were among the evaluation criteria, while 39% said student scores were not included, and 8% did not know.
- **Most teachers received feedback from their performance evaluation, but only some found it helpful.** The vast majority (89%) of the teachers who were given an evaluation in school year 2014-15 also received written or oral feedback on their teaching. These teachers were divided fairly evenly about the helpfulness of the feedback in improving specific areas of their teaching practice. For example, about 49% said the feedback was somewhat or very helpful in improving their instruction, while 51% said it was minimally or not at all helpful. A greater share of elementary school than of high school teachers found the evaluation feedback to be somewhat or very helpful.

Commentary

While the teaching profession in the U.S. may not be in full-blown crisis, the results of CEP's national survey suggest that forces outside of teachers' control may be taxing their good will and dedication. Although teachers report being drawn to the profession for mostly selfless reasons, many are concerned or frustrated about aspects of their job. And although a majority of teachers say they like their school and are part of a satisfied group of colleagues, about half or more agree with statements that indicate diminished enthusiasm, high stress, and a desire to leave the profession if they could get a higher-paying job. The most notable stressors revealed by the survey are the time devoted to testing, changing demands from outside the classroom, and teachers' perceptions that they lack a voice in major decisions. In the survey sections that invited open comments, teachers wrote in almost equal measures about their desire to help and support students *and* their frustration with an education system that is too focused on testing.

These survey results may shed some light on why a growing number of school systems are having trouble recruiting and retaining teachers. Research-based estimates of the percentage of teachers who leave the profession after five or fewer years on the job range from 17% to as high as 50% (Gray & Taie, 2015; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2012). In addition, enrollments in teacher preparation programs have declined nationally, with steep drops in some large states (U.S. Department of Education, 2015; Sawchuk, 2014).

Still, the survey results also suggest that in the midst of several challenges, teachers are taking seriously their professional responsibilities. They are developing curricula to teach their state's standards, using test data to change their teaching, and collaborating with each other, among other actions.

The focus on testing, accountability, and standards

The growing reliance on student test scores as the arbiter of both student and teacher performance is a source of some concern among teachers.

Many teachers believe too much time is spent preparing students for state- and district-mandated tests and administering the tests. This is especially true in high-poverty schools, where roughly one-third of teachers estimate that they spend more than a month out of the school year preparing students for state- and/or district-mandated exams.

While teachers see their own teacher-developed quizzes and tests as more useful than the assessments required by their state or district, most teachers do not want to eliminate state- and district-mandated tests altogether. Instead, a majority of teachers support reducing the frequency or length of state and district tests.

Additional challenges arise from the use of student test results to evaluate teacher performance. Our survey shows that student test scores are being used to evaluate many teachers and that most of these teachers received feedback based on those evaluations. Teachers had fairly tepid opinions of the value of that feedback, however. Assuming that many states will continue to evaluate teachers based in part on test scores, the survey responses suggest that states and districts could improve the usefulness of the feedback from these evaluations.

Within this environment of test-based accountability, teachers appear to be maintaining a degree of professional independence. Contrary to the opinions and fears of some Common Core opponents that teachers are losing autonomy under these new, more rigorous standards (see, for example, Chicago Teachers Union, 2014; Heritage Foundation, 2013), our survey indicates that most teachers who teach the math and/or ELA standards have maintained or increased their control over instruction, curriculum, and teacher collaboration. Many teachers also said they believe it is important for students to develop critical thinking and problem solving skills, as emphasized in many states' standards, in order to be ready for college and careers.

Teachers who are charged with helping students master more rigorous math and ELA standards — whether the Common Core or other new state standards — are relying on various sources of curricular materials. Although states, districts, and schools are providing many teachers with curricula aligned to state standards, other teachers are making autonomous decisions about developing and/or revising their own curricula. While this autonomy is no doubt welcome to those who feared too much top-down control under the standards, it does raise questions about the continuity and quality of the curricula being used to teach the standards. If teachers have not been provided with high-quality professional development and other opportunities to deeply understand the standards and are left on their own to develop curricula, what gets lost in translation? Moving forward, it will be important to study the impact of using a wide variety of curricula to teach the new standards.

It is noteworthy that more teachers in high-poverty schools report receiving curricula from their state than do teachers in low-poverty schools. This suggests that states are placing their curriculum emphasis (and resources) on high-poverty schools.

Professional responsibilities and demands

As policy agendas change, so do the demands placed on teachers and students. Almost half of all teachers view systemic policies from the state or district level as a major challenge that gets in the way of teaching, and one-third cited constantly changing demands as a major challenge.

A specific example of the changing education landscape pertains to the potential instability of state standards and assessments. With the controversy around the Common Core, some states are debating whether to keep their current standards and assessments. A majority of teachers who expressed uncertainty about the future of their state's current standards and assessments also said that this lack of certainty presented a challenge to their teaching.

While the regular work of teachers is already demanding, the survey points out that almost all teachers take on additional leadership roles or activities, such as tutoring students, mentoring other teachers, or leading a student club. Indeed, two-thirds of teachers report taking on more than one of these extra responsibilities, and 25% have taken on four or more. Despite the extra time teachers devote to activities such as mentoring other teachers and tutoring students, only a small fraction of teachers who take on these duties actually get compensated for the additional work. It is a telling statement about priorities when the only additional activity for which a majority of teachers are compensated for their time is coaching a sport.

Responses to other survey questions affirm that time is a precious commodity for teachers. Teachers chose more planning time and reductions in class size as two of the most helpful actions that could improve their day-to-day work. These survey responses about planning time reinforce the findings from CEP's 2015 study of expanded learning time. In that report, state and local education leaders emphasized that setting aside more time for teachers to plan and collaborate was a constructive way to improve instructional quality, and some maintained that expanding teacher collaboration time was even more important than expanding learning time for students.

Our survey indicates that nearly all public school teachers are collaborating with other teachers in their school, and that nearly all of those who do collaborate agree it is helpful and a good use of their time. Among teachers who teach their state's math or ELA standards, a majority report collaborating with other teachers in their school to understand recent test data in these subjects.

Teachers' influence on decisions and implications for future policy

Perhaps the most troubling findings in this survey highlight the frustrations teachers feel about their lack of voice and influence. Large majorities of teachers believe their opinions are not factored into the decision-making process at the district, state, or national levels. Furthermore, teachers who feel their voices are not heard in school-level decisions are more likely to agree with statements that indicate dissatisfaction with their job. These results are especially unsettling when considered alongside other survey responses indicating how much teachers feel challenged by state and district policies that get in the way of teaching and by changing demands from others.

Teachers will continue to sit at the center of an increasingly heavy and unpredictable set of demands as state and local leaders usher in a new era of federal education policies under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Although ESSA has blunted the rigid accountability requirements of No Child Left Behind, it still maintains the requirement for states to test students in math and ELA in grades 3-8 and once in high school. ESSA also specifies, however, that federal funds can be used by states and districts to identify and eliminate low-quality, redundant or unhelpful testing. While teachers strongly agree that test-prep and testing take up too much time, they generally do not support the wholesale scrapping of mandated tests. Thus, teachers should be included in local and state discussions about which tests can be eliminated and which should be maintained.

After considering the implications of the survey responses, we propose other steps that states and districts could take to improve conditions for teachers. These include providing more time for teachers to plan and collaborate and reducing class sizes. Other steps include examining teacher

evaluation systems to improve the usefulness of the feedback provided to educators, and perhaps considering compensating teachers for the additional roles and responsibilities they take on.

Perhaps the most productive path forward — for teachers and public schools writ large — is to create a more systemic process for teachers to share their views and expertise. The results from this survey seem to indicate that at least for some teachers, there are not enough opportunities to meaningfully engage in decision-making that affects teaching and learning. As state and local leaders continue to support the implementation of more rigorous standards and assessments and work to improve struggling schools, the role teachers play in school-level decision-making is a topic worthy of reflection. Policymakers at all levels — school, district, state, and federal — need to listen to teachers and seek their guidance and advice on policies that impact student learning and the teaching profession. If teachers continue to feel unheard or powerless, then declining enrollments in teacher preparation programs and shortages of K-12 teachers could become just one part of a much larger problem.

Organization of This Report

This report is divided into five parts that mirror the main topics covered by the survey:

- I. The Teaching Profession
- II. Standards and Assessments: Teachers of Math and ELA
- III. Standards and Assessments: Teachers of Other Subjects
- IV. Testing Time
- V. Teacher Evaluation

There are also two online appendices accompanying the report. Appendix 1 describes the study methods in detail, and Appendix 2 contains tables with the confidence intervals of the survey data presented in this report. Both appendices can be accessed and downloaded at cep-dc.org.

About the Survey and Methods

The survey was developed, administered, and analyzed by CEP with support from Policy Studies Associates (PSA). (See Appendix 1 for more detailed information about study methods.)

Survey administration and data analysis

The nationally representative sample of teachers for the survey was obtained from an education data company that provided contact information for traditional public school teachers across the country (no charter or private school teachers were included). PSA verified the company's sample by checking it against data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

The 67-question survey was administered online by PSA between mid-November and mid-December of 2015. To ensure a sufficient number of teachers responded to the survey within a limited window of time, a purposefully large sample was drawn (129,735 teachers were invited to participate in the study) with the goal of obtaining at least 3,000 completed surveys. At the close of survey administration, 3,328 teachers had completed the online survey and qualified for the study.

As explained in Appendix 1, accepted statistical techniques were used to ensure the responses were representative of the group being analyzed and to determine the significance of differences between response options and groups.

It is important to remember that *all of the percentages cited in the report are estimates*. The actual percentage could fall within a range from somewhat lower to somewhat higher based on a 95% confidence interval. Confidence intervals are shown in the detailed tables in Appendix 2.

Categories of teachers

The responses of teachers were analyzed by three different categories: school poverty, type of community, and school level.

School poverty. Teachers were categorized according to the percentage of the student population from low-income families, as determined by U.S. Census data. The following categories of poverty were used in this survey:

- High-poverty schools — 31% or more of the students are from low-income families
- Medium-poverty schools — 16% to 30.9% of the students are from low-income families
- Low-poverty schools — less than 16% of the students are from low-income families

Type of community. Teachers were categorized according to whether they worked in an urban, suburban, or town/rural district. The definitions are from the urban-centric locale codes used by NCES's Common Core of Data:

- Urban schools — locale codes 11, 12, and 13
- Suburban schools — locale codes 21, 22, and 23
- Rural/town schools — locale codes 31, 32, and 33 (town) and 41, 42, and 43 (rural)

School level. Teachers were divided according to whether they taught at the elementary, middle, or high school level. The specific grade configurations for each of these three levels varied by district.

We analyzed the data for each of these categories to see if there were statistically significant differences between groups. In many cases, the differences were not statistically significant, and even when they were, they were not always noteworthy. In this report, we point out differences between teachers by school poverty, type of community, and school level when they are statistically significant and likely to be of interest.

The survey was designed so that not all questions were answered by all participating teachers. Each part of the report contains more specific information about the baseline groups for various questions. In the “Table reads” or “Figure reads” explanations below each table or figure, we provide details about the group of respondents for that question.

Abbreviations and definition

Throughout this report *ELA* stands for English language arts and *CCSS* stands for Common Core State Standards.

As used in this report, the term *college and career readiness (CCR)* skills means the skills students need to be ready for postsecondary education and careers, including making sense of problems and persevering in solving them; reading and writing nonfiction passages; and constructing viable arguments and criticizing the reasoning of others. These skills are embodied in many states' standards for mathematics and/or ELA.

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I.

The Teaching Profession

Concerns about the competitiveness of U.S. students in a global society have increased the demands placed on public education and created new challenges and opportunities for educators. The emphasis on raising student achievement may require many teachers to learn new skills and adjust to new expectations for their own performance. It may also mean more work, less time, and greater public scrutiny. In the last decade alone, teachers have been asked to teach new and more rigorous standards of learning in math and English language arts and to prepare students for new exams. Many have also been subject to teacher evaluation systems that take student test scores into account.

To learn more about teachers' views of their profession, we asked a range of questions focusing on different aspects of teachers' careers and classroom practice.

Key Findings

- **Teachers enter the profession for altruistic reasons.** Sixty-eight percent said they became a teacher to make a difference in students' lives, and 45% said they wanted to help students reach their full potential.
- **The most rewarding aspects of teaching involve helping students.** Large majorities of the nation's teachers said that making a difference in students' lives (82%) and seeing students succeed academically (69%) are among the most rewarding aspects of teaching.
- **Some of the greatest challenges faced by teachers come from external policies and constantly changing demands.** Almost half (46%) of teachers cited state or district policies that get in the way of teaching as a major challenge, and about one-third cited constantly changing demands placed on teachers and students.
- **While most teachers report satisfaction with their school and colleagues, other aspects of their job seem to be taking a toll.** On the positive side, about 60% or more of teachers agreed that they like being at their school, described themselves and their colleagues as "a satisfied group," and like the way things are run at their school. On a more pessimistic note, about 60% of teachers agreed that they "don't seem to have as much enthusiasm now" as when they started teaching. And roughly half (49%) said that the stress and disappointments at their school "aren't really worth it," and/or that they would leave teaching as soon as possible if they could get a higher paying job.
- **Time and class size matter to teachers.** When asked to choose which actions would significantly help to improve their day-to-day work, about half of public school teachers said smaller class sizes and/or more planning time would be most helpful. Other responses included more time to collaborate with other teachers in their school (34%), more financial compensation (28%), and more instructional time with students (27%).

- **Large majorities of teachers believe their voices are not often factored into the decision-making process at the district (76%), state (94%), or national (94%) levels.** Only 19% of teachers reported that their opinions are factored most of the time into district-level decisions about such issues as standards, assessments, evaluation, or instructional practices. Very few teachers said their opinions are often considered at the state (2%) or national level (1%). However, 53% of teachers agreed that their opinions are considered most of the time at the school level.
- **Teachers’ perceptions of whether their opinions are considered in school-level decisions appear to be related to their job satisfaction.** For example, greater proportions of teachers who believe their opinions are factored into school decisions agreed with statements indicating that they liked their school and that they and their colleagues are satisfied, compared with teachers who do not believe their voice is reflected in school-level decision making. Indeed, higher percentages of teachers who do not believe their opinions are considered in school-level decisions agreed they have less enthusiasm for teaching or that the job is not worth the stress and disappointments.
- **Nearly all teachers (96%) report taking on leadership or student support activities in addition to their regular classroom roles but many are not paid for these extra tasks.** Activities in which the highest proportions of teachers participated were tutoring students (45%) and mentoring other teachers (43%). But only about one-fourth of teachers who took on these activities received extra pay for their work. The exception was coaching sports — just 13% of teachers said they coached a sport, but most (79%) were paid for doing so.
- **Most novice teachers feel they are prepared for their job.** About half (52%) of teachers in their first three years of teaching consider themselves “adequately” prepared to do their job, and 32% say they are “very well” prepared. For veteran teachers looking back on their early years, 46% considered themselves adequately prepared at that time, and 20% said they were very well prepared.
- **Nearly all public school teachers (94%) engage in collaborative activities with other teachers in their school.** Most of their collaboration is with other teachers of the same subject and/or grade level. Nearly all of the collaborating teachers (90%) believe this collaboration was somewhat or greatly helpful and a good use of their time.
- **When asked about the skills (other than mastery of academic subjects) that students need to possess in order to succeed in college and careers, secondary school teachers indicated that critical thinking and problem solving skills (64%), life and career skills (58%), and social-emotional skills (58%) are among the most important.** Yet, these teachers also reported that their schools did not place a lot of emphasis on these skills. For example, only 28% of the teachers who selected critical thinking and problem solving said that this skill received a lot of emphasis in their school.



I see this as a career where I can sing a little, dance a little, do math, study history and science, and teach from the heart. I know I am gifted and need to share what I have been given.



Reasons Why Teachers Enter the Teaching Profession

We asked all public school teachers about the most significant reasons why they became teachers and provided a range of options from which they could select up to three responses. Several of the top responses reveal a desire to help others. About two-thirds of teachers said they entered the profession to make a difference in students’ lives. A little less than half said they became teachers to help students reach their full potential. Roughly one-third of teachers chose one or more of the following among their top reasons: because a teacher inspired them when they were young; because they wanted to be part of those “aha” moments when things just click for students; and because they wanted to share their enthusiasm for their subject. About one-quarter said they pursued a teaching career to make a difference in the larger community.

Smaller percentages of teachers mentioned job-related factors as motivations for entering the profession, including a good work/family balance (15%), the nontraditional schedule (time off in summer) (7%), job availability (5%), and earning potential (1%). Other responses chosen by small percentages of teachers are shown in the figure below.

Figure 1-A. Most significant reasons why teachers joined the profession

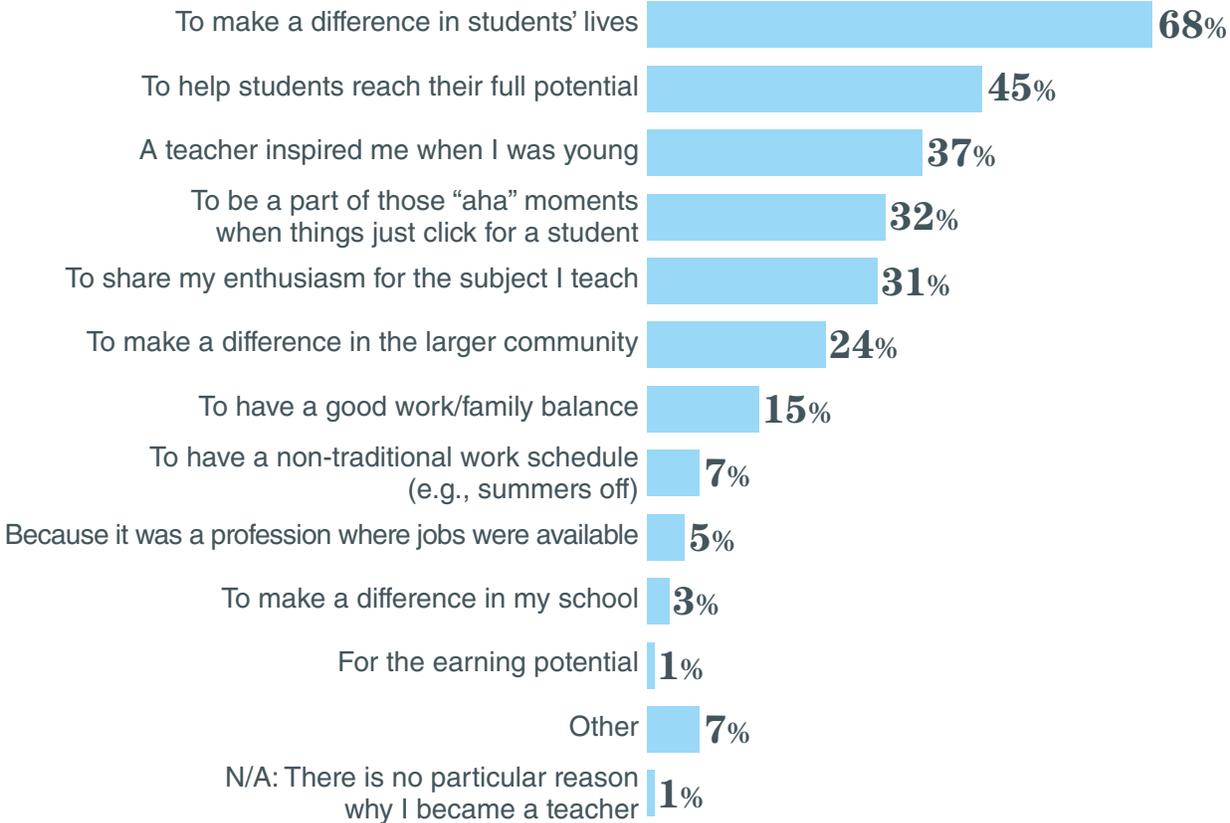


Figure reads: An estimated 68% of public school teachers reported that one of the most significant reasons they became a teacher was to make a difference in students’ lives.

Note: Teachers could select up to three responses.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

The 2013 *Primary Sources* survey by Scholastic and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation included a similar question about why teachers teach, and the responses chosen by the largest percentages of teachers in that survey were akin to those in the CEP survey. (Respondents to the 2013 survey could choose all of the answers that applied instead of picking only three.) The largest percentage of teachers in 2013 said they became a teacher “to make a difference in children’s lives” (85%). Other top responses in 2013 included “to share my love of learning and teaching (74%); “to help students reach their full potential (71%); and “to be a part of those ‘aha’ moments” (66%).

Most Rewarding Aspects of Teaching

When asked to select the most rewarding aspects of the teaching profession, large majorities of teachers pointed to making a difference in students’ lives (82%) and seeing students succeed academically (69%). About a quarter of teachers said they find teaching rewarding because there is never a boring day and because they are making a difference in their school community or the larger community. Smaller proportions of teachers (about 17%) mentioned collaborating with other teachers and administrators and the nontraditional work schedule as rewarding aspects of their profession. Less than 5% cited financial reasons such as competitive benefits and competitive salaries.

Table 1-A. The most rewarding aspects of being a teacher

Most rewarding aspect of being a teacher	Percentage of all teachers
Making a difference in students’ lives	82%
Seeing my students succeed academically	69%
Never a boring day	29%
Making a difference in my school community	26%
Making a difference in the larger community	22%
Collaborating with other teachers and administrators	17%
Nontraditional work schedule	17%
Competitive benefits (pension, health insurance, tuition subsidies) for my region	4%
Competitive salary for my region	2%
Other	5%
N/A: I do not find teaching to have any rewards	<1%

Table reads: An estimated 82% of public school teachers reported that making a difference in students’ lives was among the most rewarding aspects of being a teacher.

Note: Teachers could select up to three responses.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Greatest Challenges Teachers Face

When asked to select the three most significant challenges in their profession, the largest percentages of teachers chose systemic factors. Specifically, 46% of all public school teachers cited state or district policies that get in the way of teaching, and about one-third pointed to constantly changing demands placed on teachers (38%) and students (34%).

Table 1-B. The most significant challenges teachers face

Most significant challenges	Percentage of all teachers
<i>Challenges from systemic factors</i>	
State or district policies that get in the way of teaching	46%
Constantly changing demands placed on teachers	38%
Constantly changing demands placed on students	34%
<i>Challenges within the school</i>	
Managing student behavior	26%
Addressing the needs of economically disadvantaged students	24%
Large class sizes	23%
Lack of sufficient time for teachers to collaborate with each other	19%
Lack of sufficient instructional time for students	18%
Lack of supportive leadership in my school	12%
Lack of supplemental academic support for struggling students	10%
Need for more parent-teacher collaboration	7%
Unsafe working conditions	1%
<i>Challenges related to the profession</i>	
My limited earning potential	21%
Lack of career ladder/opportunity to advance in profession	7%
Lack of sufficient professional development to ensure my growth	5%
N/A: I don't face challenges as a teacher	<1%

Table reads: An estimated 46% of public school teachers reported that state or district policies that get in the way of teaching are among the most significant challenges they face as a teacher.

Note: Teachers could select up to three responses.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Notable shares of teachers also mentioned factors within schools as one of their top challenges. In particular, about one-quarter of teachers cited the challenges of managing student behavior, addressing the needs of economically disadvantaged students, and/or dealing with large class sizes. Just under one-fifth of teachers reported being challenged by a lack of sufficient time to collaborate with other teachers and a lack of sufficient instructional time.

Among career-related factors, 21% cited their limited earning potential as a main challenge. Less than 1% of teachers said they did not face any challenges.

The 2013 *Primary Sources* report (Scholastic & Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013) also asked teachers about their most significant challenges, although the possible responses did not mention state or district policies that get in the way of teaching, as the CEP survey did. In the 2013 survey, “constantly changing demands on teachers and students” was the challenge cited by the largest percentage of teachers (82%), while 51% said that “not enough time collaborating with colleagues” was a significant challenge.

“*The joy and reward have been all but sucked out of teaching and have been replaced with unending paperwork, staff meetings, and Professional Learning Community meetings — generally to be completed either before or after school hours.*”

“*I like bringing out each and every student’s special talents and interests.*”

Meeting the Needs of Economically Disadvantaged Students

Because many state and federal education policies and funding programs focus on raising the achievement of economically disadvantaged students, we further explored the views of teachers who said that addressing the needs of these students was one of their greatest challenges. Specifically, the survey asked this subset of teachers whether the social, emotional, or academic needs of economically disadvantaged students posed the most significant teaching challenge. Similar proportions of teachers chose emotional needs (42%) and academic needs (40%). About 18% of these teachers considered the social needs of economically disadvantaged students to be the greatest challenge.

Figure 1-B. Biggest challenges in educating economically disadvantaged children



Figure reads: Of the public school teachers who selected “addressing the needs of economically disadvantaged students” as one of their top teaching challenges, an estimated 42% considered the emotional needs of these students as the most challenging need.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Teachers’ Attitudes toward Their School, Job, and Colleagues

To learn more about teachers’ job satisfaction, our survey included a question from the 2011-12 Schools and Staffing Survey¹ to draw out teachers’ perceptions of their school, colleagues, and job.

A majority of teachers (64%) agreed that they like being at their school and described themselves and their colleagues as “a satisfied group.” About 60% said they “like the way things are run” at their school.

At the same time, 60% of teachers agreed strongly or somewhat that “I don’t seem to have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began teaching.” While this sentiment may be true of anyone after a few years on the job, it does raise concerns when considered alongside other responses to this

¹ The Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) is system of nationally representative surveys overseen by the National Center for Education Statistics (<https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/overview.asp>). The CEP teacher survey included question 65 from the 2011-12 SASS for teachers.

set of questions. In particular, about half of teachers (49%) agreed that the stress and disappointments at their school “aren’t really worth it,” and a similar proportion said that if they could get a higher paying job, they would leave teaching as soon as possible. Lower but still sizable proportions of teachers reported that they are thinking about transferring to another school (44%) and/or that they think about staying home from school because they just too tired to go (42%).

While these sentiments are probably not unique to the teaching profession, they are worrisome in light of the percentage of teachers who leave the profession within their first five years and the difficulties experienced by many schools of education in recruiting students (see the Commentary section of this report).

Figure 1-C. Teachers’ perceptions of their school, colleagues, and job

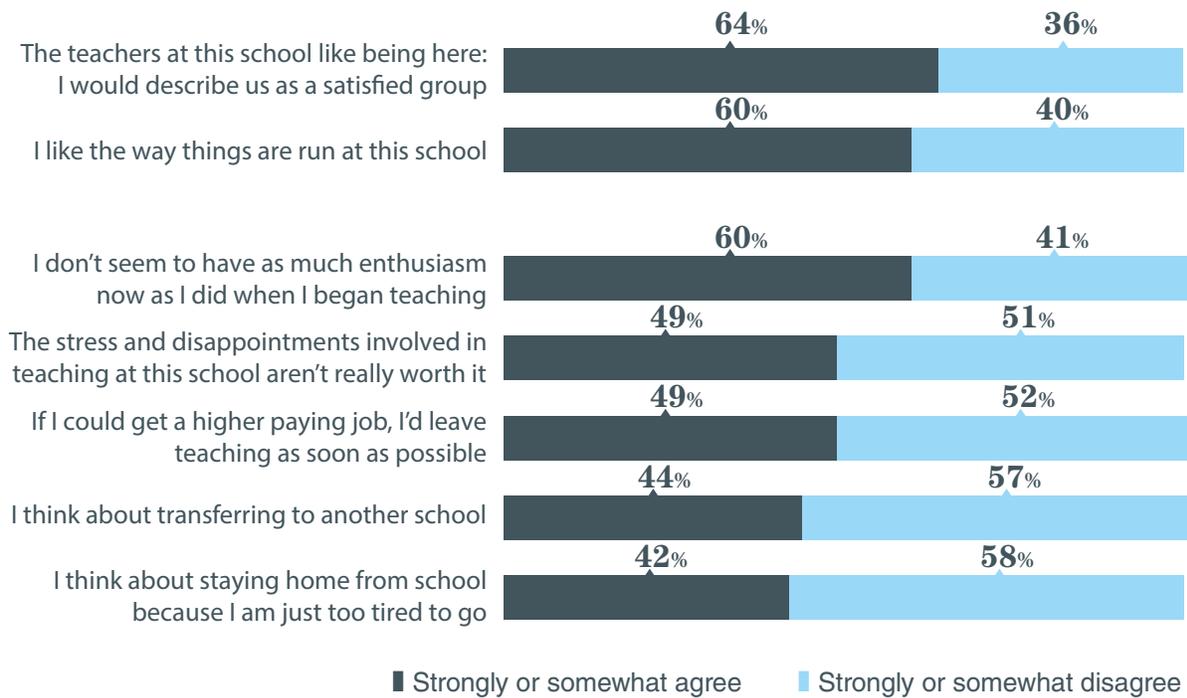


Figure reads: An estimated 64% of public school teachers agree somewhat or strongly with the statement, “The teachers at this school like being there; I would describe us as a satisfied group.”

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

“*I want children to take risks, think, and be a productive member of our class.*”

Actions That Would Improve Teaching

The survey asked all public school teachers to choose up to three actions they believed would help them in their day-to-day teaching. Similar proportions of teachers selected more planning time during the school day (49%) and smaller class sizes (47%) as the most helpful actions. About one-third said more time to collaborate with other teachers in their school would be helpful. More financial compensation (28%) and more instructional time with students (27%) were seen as beneficial by more than one-fourth of teachers. Smaller proportions (11% to 17%) of teachers said their teaching would be helped by greater access to classroom-based technology, more high-quality professional development, curricula that is better aligned to state standards, and more parent-teacher collaboration. Less than 10% of teachers chose other actions listed in the table below.

Table 1-C. Actions that would help teachers in their day-to-day teaching

Actions/Activities	Percentage of teachers reporting this would help them
More planning time during the school day	49%
Smaller class sizes	47%
More time to collaborate with other teachers in my school	34%
More financial compensation (higher salary, cash bonus, etc.)	28%
More instructional time with my students	27%
Greater access to classroom-based technology (smart boards, tablets, computers, etc.)	17%
More high-quality professional development	15%
Curricula that is better aligned to my state's standards	12%
More parent-teacher collaboration	11%
Better benefits (e.g., pension, health insurance, tuition subsidies)	7%
Greater access to mentors to help me address areas where I need improvement	6%
Greater access to digital content (e.g., curriculum) and resources	6%
Greater access to school-based instructional leaders	3%
Safer working conditions	2%
More education (e.g., an advanced degree)	2%
Other	14%
None of the above; I have adequate support for my day-to-day teaching	1%

Table reads: An estimated 49% of public school teachers agreed that more planning time during the school day would help them in their day-to-day teaching.

Note: Teachers could select up to three responses.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Teachers' Views of Whether Their Opinions Are Factored into Decisions

As noted above, many teachers cited state or district policies as among their greatest professional challenges. Consistent with that view, just 19% of teachers said that their opinions are considered at least most of the time in decision-making at the district level. Even fewer teachers think their opinions are considered at least most of the time in state (2%) or national level (1%) decisions about issues such as standards, assessments, instructional practices, and evaluation.

Teachers feel they have a stronger voice at the school level: 53% agreed that their opinions are considered at least most of the time at the school level, while 45% disagreed with this statement.

Figure 1-D. Teacher perceptions about whether their opinions are factored into decision-making

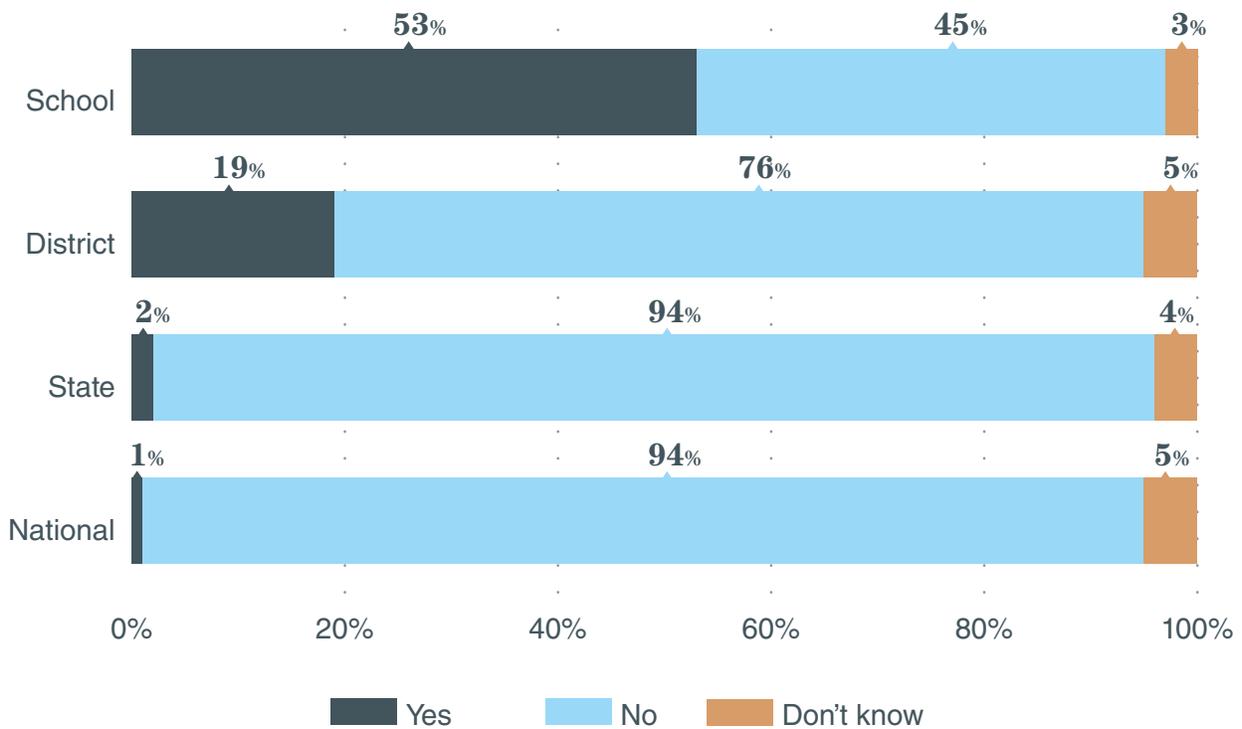


Figure reads: An estimated 53% of public school teachers said they believed teachers' opinions were factored at least most of the time into decision making at the school level.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

The percentage of teachers who feel their voices are being heard appears to have declined in recent years according to a comparison of responses to the CEP survey and a similar question on the 2013 *Primary Sources* survey (Scholastic & Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2013). *Primary Sources* asked teachers whether their opinions were heard and valued at least most of the time in the decision-making process. Compared with the 2015-16 CEP survey, the responses were higher in 2013: 69% of teachers said their opinions were heard in decisions at the school level, 32% at the district level,

5% at the state level, 2% at the national level. These data suggest teachers feel increasingly left out of decisions that affect them, especially decisions made at the higher levels of the education system.

Moreover, teachers’ feelings about whether their opinions are factored into decisions at their school appear to be related to their job satisfaction, according to our cross-tabulation of the responses reported in figure 1-C with those in figure 1-D. As shown in table 1-D below, greater proportions of teachers who reported that their opinions are heard at their school agreed with positive statements about their workplace (“The teachers at this school like being here; I would describe us as a satisfied group” and “I like the way things are run at this school”). Conversely, greater proportions of teachers who did not feel their opinions are factored into school decisions agreed with negative statements about their job, such as, “The stress and disappointments involved in teaching at this school aren’t really worth it.”

Table 1-D. Teachers’ perceptions of their school, colleagues, and job according to whether teachers feel their opinions are factored into school-level decisions

	Percentage of teachers who feel their opinion IS heard at the school level and strongly or somewhat agree with the statement	Percentage of teachers who feel their opinion IS NOT heard at the school level and strongly or somewhat agree with the statement
I like the way things are run at this school	79%	37%
The teachers at this school like being here; I would describe us as a satisfied group	60%	46%
I don’t seem to have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began teaching	51%	70%
If I could get a higher paying job, I’d leave teaching as soon as possible	40%	59%
I think about staying home from school because I am just too tired to go	35%	50%
The stress and disappointments involved in teaching at this school aren’t really worth it	34%	67%
I think about transferring to another school	32%	58%

Table reads: Among public school teachers who said their opinions are factored into the decision-making process at their school, 79% agreed strongly or somewhat with the statement, “I like the way things are run at this school.” Among teachers who said their opinions are not factored into decisions at their school, 37% agreed with this statement.

Teacher Participation and Compensation for Extra Activities

In addition to their main work of educating students in the classroom, about 96% of teachers reported taking on additional leadership roles or activities. The activities in which the highest proportions of teachers participated were tutoring students (45%) and mentoring other teachers (43%). But just one-fourth or so of the teachers who participated in these activities received additional compensation for their work. And while only 13% of teachers said they coached a sport, most (79%) of them were paid for doing so.

Figure 1-E. Teachers' participation in and compensation for leadership and student support activities

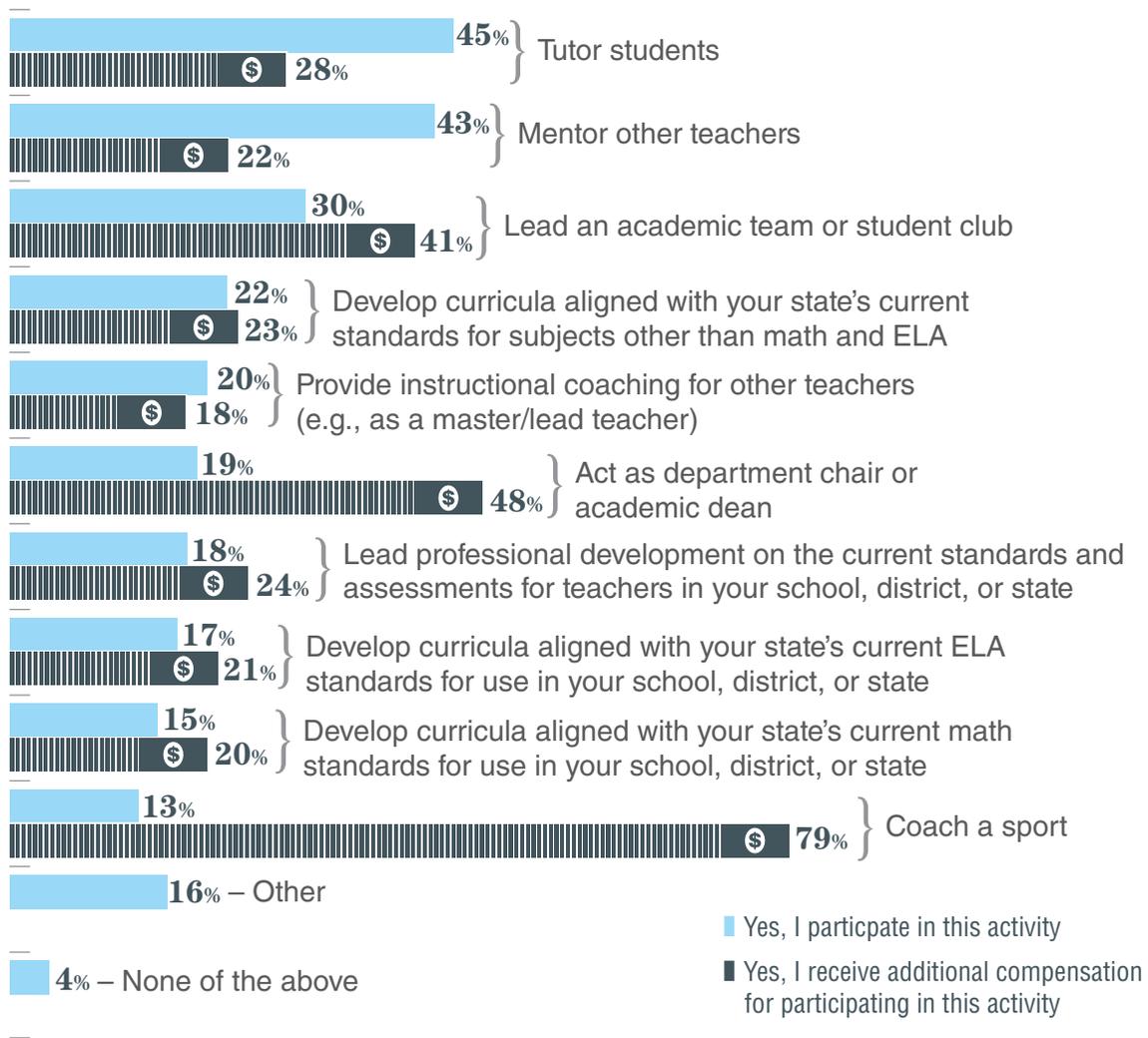


Figure reads: An estimated 45% of public school teachers reported that they tutor students; only 28% of those who tutored students said they received financial compensation for this extra activity.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

It's important to note that about two-thirds of teachers are taking on more than one of the additional leadership roles or activities shown in figure 1-E. While 30% indicated they are engaging in just one of the leadership roles/activities listed in the survey, 23% said they had taken on two activities in addition to their regular classroom roles, 19% reported three activities, and 25% reported four or more.

Adequacy of Preparation in Early Years of Teaching

The effectiveness of teachers' preparation for their early years on the job has implications for teacher quality, retention, mentoring, and professional development. We wanted to elicit teachers' own perceptions about their preparedness to teach. We asked novice teachers (those who had been teaching for three years or fewer at the time of the survey) how well prepared they felt to do their job. As a comparison, we also asked veteran teachers (those who had been teaching for more than three years) to reflect on how well prepared they were during their first three years of teaching.

About half of each group (52% of novices, 46% of veterans) reported that they are/were adequately prepared to do their jobs in their early years as teachers. One-third of novice teachers (32%) responded that they are very well prepared for their jobs, but just 20% of veteran teachers said they were very well prepared in the first three years of their career. Only 15% of novices said they are minimally prepared, compared with 28% of veterans who said they were minimally prepared in their early years on the job.

The more positive self-assessments by novice teachers could suggest that teachers who entered the profession more recently received better education, training, and support. Or, it could mean that when veteran teachers compare their skills in their early years with the teaching skills they have now, they realize they were not as well prepared as they could have been.

Table 1-E. Extent of teachers' preparedness to teach

Level of Preparedness	Novice teachers	Veteran teachers
Very well prepared	32%	20%
Adequately prepared	52%	46%
Minimally prepared	15%	28%
Not at all prepared	1%	6%
Don't know	0	<1%

Table reads: An estimated 32% of public school novice teachers (those teaching for three years or fewer) indicated that they felt very well prepared to do their job as a teacher. An estimated 20% of public school veteran teachers (those teaching for more than three years) said they had felt very well prepared in their early years of teaching.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Extent of Teacher Collaboration

An array of studies suggests that more time for teacher collaboration can help improve teaching and learning. Teacher collaboration has been shown to increase teacher retention (Borman & Dowling, 2008), improve teachers’ practice (Huffman & Kalnin, 2003), and positively affect student achievement (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007).

The vast majority of teachers reported collaborating with other teachers in their school, with little or no differences by school level, school poverty, or type of community. About 94% of all public school teachers indicated that they collaborate with other teachers in their school. Of these teachers, nearly half (49%) said they collaborated to a great extent with others who teach the same subject area, and 42% collaborated to a great extent with other teachers in their grade level. Fewer teachers collaborated to a great extent across grade levels (14%) or across subjects (16%). Nineteen percent reported that they do not collaborate with teachers across subjects; this is a larger percentage than the 16% who said they collaborated to a great extent across subjects.



Table 1-F. The extent to which teachers collaborate with other teachers in their school

	To a great extent	Somewhat	Minimally	Not at all
Teachers in my subject area	49%	32%	13%	6%
Teachers in my grade level	42%	33%	16%	9%
Teachers across grade levels	14%	36%	35%	16%
Teachers across subject areas	16%	33%	32%	19%

Table reads: Of the public school teachers who reported collaborating with other teachers in their school, an estimated 49% said they collaborate “to a great extent” with other teachers in their subject area.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.



Of the 6% of teachers who do not collaborate, the majority (53%) said that one reason they do not collaborate is because their position in their school is unique and they lack peers with whom they can collaborate. A similar proportion (46%) reported that their school does not provide time specifically designated for teacher collaboration.

Reasons for Teacher Collaboration

Teachers collaborate for various purposes — to exchange resources, learn from others’ successes and challenges, and review student data, among other reasons.

Roughly one-third of those teachers who collaborate reported that they collaborate to a great extent to exchange resources and lesson plans (38%), learn from each other’s successes and challenges (36%), address individual student learning needs (34%), or review student data (31%). Fewer of these teachers (18%) said they collaborate to discuss classroom management skills. A notable share of teachers (14%) said they did not collaborate at all about classroom management.

Table 1-G. Reasons for collaborating with other teachers in the school

	To a great extent	Somewhat	Minimally	Not at all
Exchange resources and lesson plans	38%	36%	19%	7%
Learn from each other’s successes and challenges	36%	41%	19%	5%
Review student data	31%	37%	24%	8%
Address individual student learning needs	34%	41%	21%	4%
Discuss classroom management skills	18%	35%	33%	14%

Table reads: An estimated 38% of public school teachers who collaborate with other teachers in their school reported collaborating “to a great extent” to exchange resources and lesson plans.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

We discuss successful ways to work with students who need additional help/guidance, including strategies that worked in the past.

Times When Teachers Collaborate

An estimated 80% of the teachers who collaborate with other teachers said they do it informally during the regular school day, such as when they pass a colleague in the hall. In addition, about two-thirds of teachers said collaboration occurs during times set aside for this purpose, during professional development sessions, and/or informally via email, online forums, or other information networks. About 58% of teachers collaborate during their teacher planning time, while 44% use non-work hours to collaborate.

Table 1-H. When teachers collaborate with their peers

Informally during the regular school day (e.g. when passing a colleague in the hall)	80%
During the time that my school schedules specifically for teacher collaboration	66%
During teacher professional development sessions	66%
Informally via email, online forums, or other informal networks	65%
During the time that my school has set aside for teacher preparation	58%
Informally, during non-work hour engagements (e.g. social gatherings outside of school)	44%
Other	11%

Table reads: Of the public school teachers who reported collaborating with other teachers in their school, an estimated 80% indicated that they collaborate informally during the regular school day.

Note: Teachers could select as many responses as apply.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Of the teachers who said they collaborate with other teachers, about one-third (34%) indicated they spent 31-60 minutes per week in collaboration. Another 22% reported that they collaborated for 61-90 minutes per week, and 21% collaborated for more than 90 minutes per week. Thus, about three-fourths (77%) of collaborating teachers reported spending more than 30 minutes a week in collaboration. The remaining collaborating teachers spend less than 30 minutes per week doing so.

Helpfulness of Teacher Collaboration

Most (60%) of the teachers who collaborate believe that collaboration is helpful to a great extent and is a good use of their time. About 31% found it somewhat helpful. Only 7% viewed collaboration as minimally helpful.

Figure 1-F. Extent to which teachers view collaborating with other teachers in their school as helpful

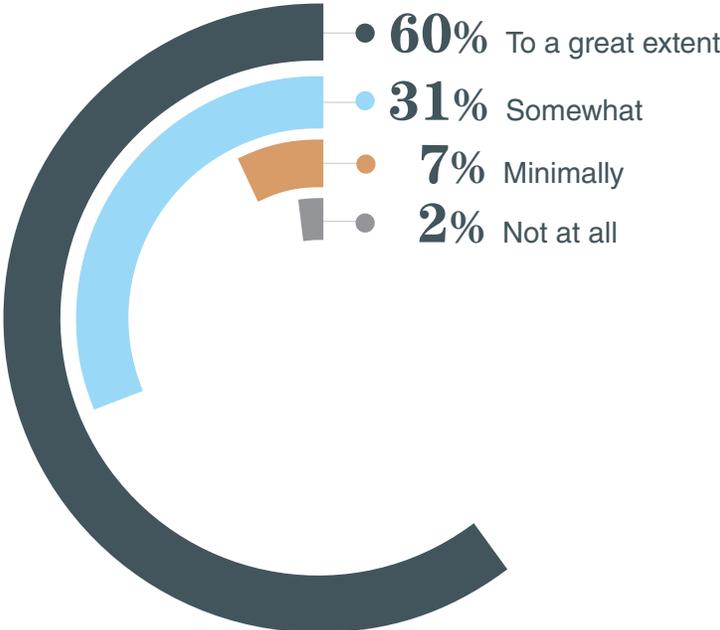


Figure reads: Of those public school teachers who collaborate with other teachers in their school, an estimated 60% believe that this collaboration is helpful to a great extent and good use of their time.

Note: Less than 1% of respondents were not sure if collaboration was helpful or said it was too soon to tell.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Differences in Collaboration by School Level

There were some differences between elementary and high school teachers in their responses about collaboration.

- About 23% of elementary school teachers said they collaborate with other teachers for more than 90 minutes a week, compared with 16% of high school teachers. Conversely, 31% of high school teachers said they collaborate for 30 minutes or less per week, compared with 20% of elementary teachers.
- A larger proportion of elementary teachers (54%) than high school teachers (25%) collaborated with other teachers in their grade level “to a great extent.”

Views of Middle and High School Teachers about Other College- and Career-Ready Skills

Students need more than just academic knowledge to be ready for college or careers. Research on students' college performance, business surveys, and other studies demonstrate that other skills, such as critical thinking, collaboration, self-discipline, and social-emotional skills, are an important part of being successful in college and the workplace (ACT, 2015; American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2008; Karp & Bork, 2014; National Network of Business and Industry Associates, 2014).

Recognizing this, our survey asked *all middle and high school teachers*, regardless of the subject they taught, to select the college and career skills they believe are most important for students as they progress through college and the workplace. Teachers could select no more than three. We also asked these teachers how much the skills they chose are emphasized at their own school.

As shown in table 1-I, nearly two-thirds (64%) of secondary school teachers cited critical thinking and problem solving as among the most important skills for student success in college and careers. Only 28% of the teachers who selected this skill said their school emphasizes critical thinking and problem solving a lot, while 54% said it receives some emphasis.

About 58% of teachers viewed life and career skills — such as adaptability, initiative, and social skills — as important for college and career readiness. Just 12% of the teachers who chose this skill set as important noted their school emphasized these skills a lot; 45% said they received some emphasis, and 43% said very little.

An estimated 57% of middle and high school teachers cited social-emotional skills as one of their three most important skill sets. Only 14% noted that their school gives a lot of emphasis to social-emotional skills, while 44% said these skills receive some attention, and 41% said very little.

One-third or fewer of secondary teachers chose the other nonacademic skills listed in the table as among the most important. A mere 5% cited knowledge of non-core subjects, such as art, gym, music, or foreign languages, in their top three, but 32% of these teachers said that their school gives a lot of emphasis to non-core subjects.

[One of the most rewarding aspects of teaching is] helping students realize that it's alright to have dreams and goals and they CAN reach those dreams and goals.

Table 1-I. Most important skills for college and careers

Skills	Percentage of secondary teachers citing skill as one of the most important	Emphasis your school places on this skill			
		A lot	Some	Very little	Don't know/not sure
Critical thinking and problem solving	64%	28%	54%	17%	1%
Life and career skills*	58%	12%	45%	43%	1%
Social-emotional skills*	57%	14%	44%	41%	1%
Communication skills*	32%	32%	52%	16%	>1%
Professionalism/work ethic	30%	12%	36%	50%	2%
Financial management skills*	17%	5%	26%	64%	4%
Executive function skills*	17%	15%	44%	40%	1%
Information, media, and technology skills	13%	32%	52%	15%	1%
Knowledge of non-core academic subjects (e.g., art, gym, music, foreign language)	5%	32%	49%	18%	2%

Table reads: An estimated 64% of public middle and high school teachers reported that critical thinking and problem solving were among the most important skills for students to develop in order to be college- and career-ready. Among these teachers, 28% also reported that their school placed a lot of emphasis on giving students the opportunity to acquire those skills.

*Life and career skills include, for example, flexibility and adaptability; initiative and self-direction; social and cross-cultural skills; productivity and accountability; leadership and responsibility; collaboration; and creativity and innovation. Social and emotional skills include, for example, self-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. Communication skills include oral, written, and nonverbal communication. Executive function skills include, for example, organization, preparation, and planning. Financial management skills include, for example, paying bills on time, balancing a checkbook, saving, and investing.

Note: Teachers could select up to three responses.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

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III.

Standards and Assessments: Teachers of Math and ELA

Since 2010, nearly all states have adopted new or revised standards specifying the knowledge and skills students should learn in math and English language arts to be ready for college and career paths by the time they graduate high school. Forty-two states and DC are implementing the Common Core State Standards in both math and ELA, while Minnesota has adopted the CCSS in ELA only.¹ But most states that are not implementing the CCSS have still changed their standards with an eye toward making them more rigorous. Studies of five states that are not implementing the CCSS — Alaska, Indiana, Nebraska, South Carolina, and Virginia — found the math and ELA standards to be very similar to the CCSS, and an independent evaluation of the math standards in Texas found them to be similar to the CCSS in math.² Most states are also administering new tests to go along with their revamped math and ELA standards.

This movement toward rigorous “college- and career-ready” standards affects many aspects of public education systems, perhaps none more so than classroom instruction. The new standards and aligned assessments require changes in curriculum and practice and present teachers with new forms of student data to interpret. To that end, teachers are spending time and effort navigating new and sometimes challenging demands.

Since the large majority of states are implementing new college- and career-ready standards, the CEP survey included several questions about standards and aligned assessments for teachers in all states.

The survey questions described in this part of the report were directed specifically to teachers who indicated that they are teaching their state’s current math and/or ELA standards in school year 2015-16. For the sake of simplicity, we refer to this group as “math and ELA teachers” in this report. This is a sizable group — about 50% of teachers nationwide reported teaching their state’s current standards in math, and 57% of teachers said they teach the ELA standards. The percentages of elementary, middle, and high school teachers in our survey who indicated that they are teaching their state’s math and ELA standards are as follows:

- Elementary — 74% math, 76% ELA
- Middle — 28% math, 42% ELA
- High School — 21% math, 33% ELA

1 States that are not currently implementing the CCSS in either math or ELA include Alaska, Indiana, Nebraska, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia (<http://www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state/>).

2 Achieve, 2014; Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, n.d.; Kaplinsky, n.d.; Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning, 2013; South Carolina Education Oversight Committee, 2015; Virginia Department of Education, 2010; and Virginia Department of Education, 2011. A recent evaluation of Oklahoma’s standards found that they more closely resemble earlier iterations of state standards, not college- and career-ready standards (Achieve, 2016). See the reference list for full listings.

Key Findings

- **Most math and ELA teachers say they have maintained professional autonomy under more rigorous state standards.** Between 57% and 73% of math and ELA teachers who had taught their state's previous standards indicated that their autonomy over instruction, curriculum, or teacher collaboration has stayed the same or increased under new state standards.
- **Teachers are using curricula from various sources to teach the current math and ELA standards.** School districts were the source of standards-based curriculum cited by the greatest proportions of teachers (72% of math teachers and 68% of ELA teachers). Many teachers also relied on curricula provided by their state or school. In addition, 55% of math teachers and 61% of ELA teachers developed or revised curricula for the new standards alone or with other teachers, or adapted curricula from online sources or existing texts. Roughly four-fifths of teachers who developed, revised, or adapted curricula also reported sharing these curricula with other teachers, often through informal discussions at school or more formal meetings.
- **Teachers are using various approaches to understand student results from new state tests aligned to new standards.** A large majority (83%) of math or ELA teachers who received student performance data from spring 2015 testing said they worked collaboratively with other teachers in their school to understand these data. Other approaches being used by a majority of these teachers to better understand spring test results include engaging in self-study, participating in school- or district-sponsored professional development, using online resources, and working with their principal.
- **Most math and ELA teachers are using student results from new assessments to change how they teach.** More than two-thirds of the teachers of math (68%) and ELA (71%) who received student data from spring 2015 testing noted that the data caused them to modify their teaching at least somewhat. For example, nearly three-quarters of these teachers reported using the spring test results to differentiate instruction based on students' needs, and nearly two-thirds are using student test data to improve instruction for the whole class.
- **Teachers' views vary about how well new state tests are aligned with new state standards.** Just over half of the math and ELA teachers who used student test data to modify their practice agreed that their state's 2015 assessments cover the same knowledge and skills as the state's current standards; only about one third said the test and standards were not aligned in this way. But these data-using teachers were divided (roughly 40% on each side) about whether the state assessments require the same cognitive demands of the students as the standards and cover the same depth and breadth of content.
- **Teachers who are uncertain about the future of their state's standards and assessments report challenges in teaching the standards.** About half of math and ELA teachers are unsure if their state will keep their current math and ELA standards and assessments. Among these teachers, 80% said this lack of certainty presents at least somewhat of a challenge to their efforts to teach the standards.

Teacher Autonomy under More Rigorous Standards

Among the criticisms aimed at the Common Core and the movement toward more consistent and rigorous standards across states is the concern that more uniform standards represent a threat to teacher autonomy. We asked teachers who had taught their state’s previous math or ELA standards and now teach the current standards whether their level of autonomy has changed in three important areas of practice — determining instructional strategies, developing curriculum, or collaborating with other teachers.

In all three areas, a majority of the teachers who have taught using both sets of standards said their autonomy has stayed the same or increased with the shift in standards. From 57% to 73% of these teachers, depending on the subject and area of practice, reported having the same or greater autonomy than they previously did.

Figure 2-A. Teacher autonomy under current state standards compared with previous standards

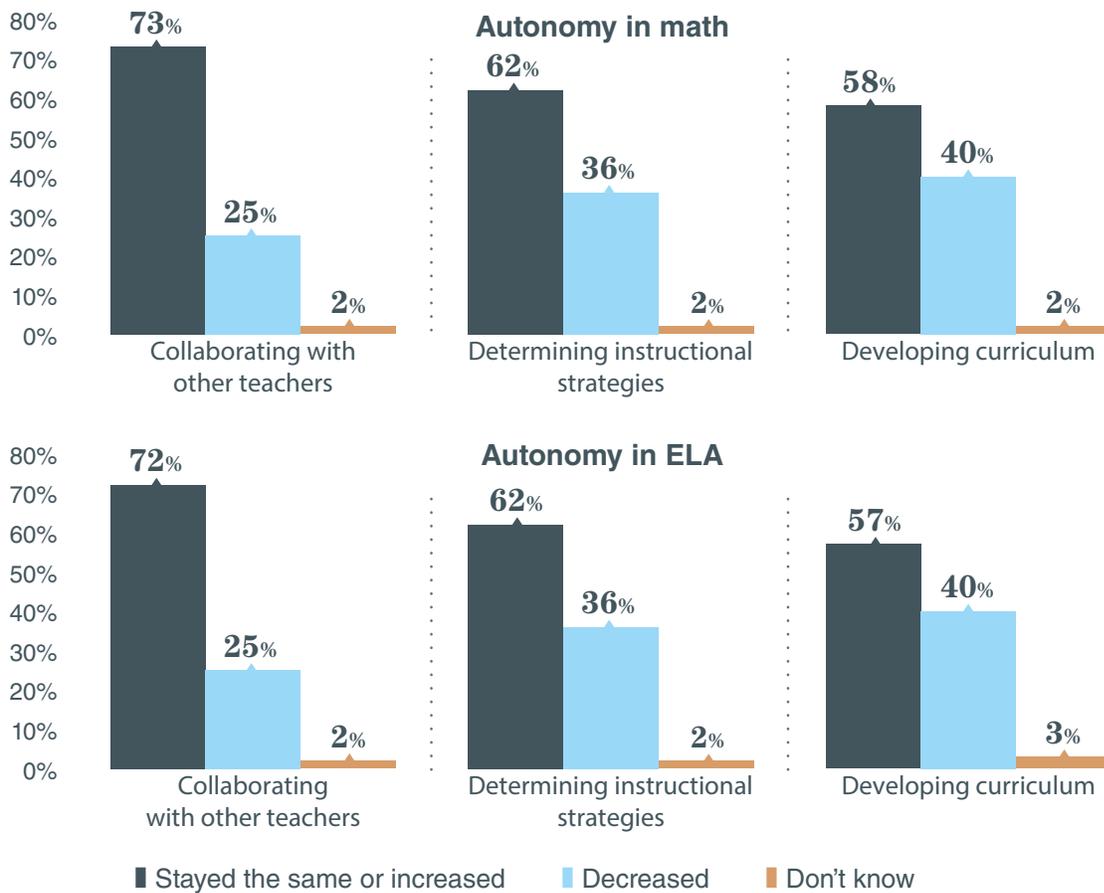


Figure reads: Of the public school teachers who reported that they have taught both the previous and current math standards in their state, an estimated 73% said their level of autonomy in collaborating with other teachers has stayed the same or increased with the change to the current standards.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Sources of Curricula for New Math and ELA Standards

An important issue facing teachers as they implement new college- and career-ready standards is the availability of curricula. Do teachers have access to curricula aligned to their state's standards, and from what sources? If not, are they developing their own curricula? The answers to these questions are important for several reasons. First, if teachers do not have access to curricula aligned to their state's standards, their efforts to teach to the standards become far more complicated. Teachers' efforts to develop curricula may be challenging because of limited resources, such as access to high-quality professional development and time designated for curriculum design. Second, if teachers do not fully understand the content of the standards, the curricula they develop may not convey all the necessary information that students need to learn. Finally, a lack of curricular uniformity could impact the overall integrity of the standards, especially for states using the Common Core. Since one of the explicit goals of the Common Core was to bring consistency and uniformity to state math and ELA standards, large variations in curricula might compromise that goal both within and among states.

To better understand the curricular materials available to teachers for state math and ELA standards, the survey included several questions about sources of curricula, shown in table 2-A.

School districts were the source of curriculum cited by the highest percentages of teachers: 72% of math teachers and 68% of ELA teachers said their districts provided them with curricula or curriculum frameworks to teach the standards. Smaller proportions of teachers reported receiving curricula from their state (38% for both subjects) or school (30% math, 29% ELA). And 31% of math and ELA teachers drew curricula from online sources.

Table 2-A. Curricular resources for teaching state math and ELA standards in 2015-16

Source	Math	ELA
My state provided me with curricula/curriculum frameworks	38%	38%
My district provided me with curricula/curriculum frameworks	72%	68%
My school provided me with curricula/curriculum frameworks	30%	29%
I developed my own curricula	18%	25%
I revised my own curricula	20%	25%
I worked with other teachers to develop curricula	24%	28%
I worked with other teachers to revise curricula	25%	27%
I drew my curricula from online resources	31%	31%
I drew my curricula from other existing texts and materials that are not online	21%	24%
Other	1%	<1%

Table reads: Of the public school teachers who reported teaching their state's current math standards in 2015-16, an estimated 38% said their state had provided them with curricula/curriculum frameworks for teaching the standards.

Note: Teachers could give more than one response to this question about curriculum sources.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Consistent with other findings in the survey, many teachers said they did work independently and/or with other teachers to develop and revise curricula for teaching the standards in their subject. One-fourth of ELA teachers developed curricula (25%) or revised curricula (25%) themselves — slightly higher than the comparable percentages in math (18% and 20%). In both math and ELA, about one-fourth or more of teachers reported working with other teachers to develop curricula or revise curricula aligned to standards.

We also took a special look at the data (not shown in the table) to determine the *total* percentages of math and ELA teachers who developed, revised, or adapted curricula for the standards either alone or with their peers. (By “adapted,” we mean they drew curricula from online sources or existing texts.) Overall, 55% of math teachers and 61% of ELA teachers said they obtained curricula in one or more of these ways.

Sharing of Teacher-Developed Math and ELA Curricula

As displayed in the figure below, about four-fifths of teachers who said they developed, revised, or adapted curricula (alone or with others) also reported sharing these curricula with other teachers.

Figure 2-B. Sharing of math and ELA curricula developed, revised, or adapted by teachers

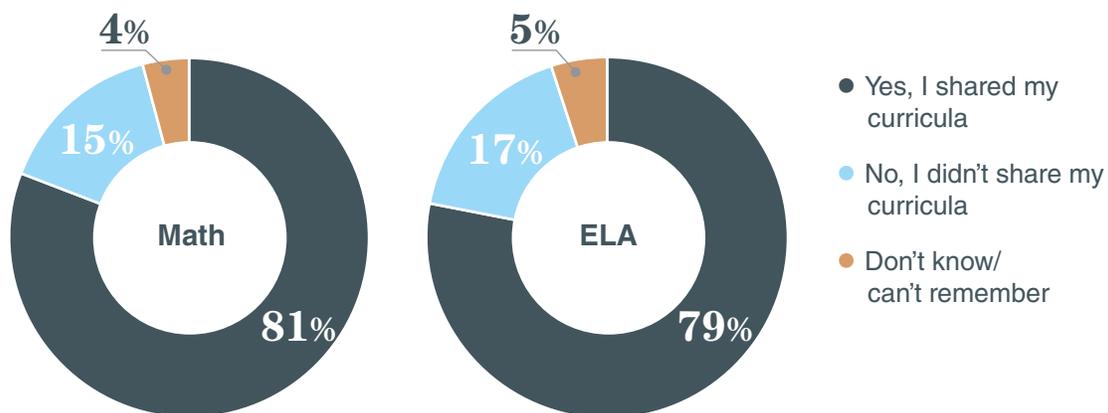


Figure reads: Of the public school teachers who reported teaching state math standards and who said they developed, revised, or adapted curricula for the math standards, an estimated 81% indicated that they shared their curricula with other teachers, 15% did not share their teacher-developed curricula, and 4% did not know or did not remember.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

About three-quarters of the teachers who shared their math and ELA curricula did so through informal discussions with other teachers at their school. More than half shared standards-aligned curricula through more formal settings, such as meetings of professional learning communities, academic departments, or subject area teachers. About one-fifth of teachers who developed, revised, or adapted their own curricula for math and ELA shared it online.

Curriculum Development and Sharing by Poverty and Type of Community

We found some differences in the responses of teachers to questions about standards-based curricula when we examined the data by school poverty level³ and type of community. These findings seem to confirm what previous research has shown about the disparity in resources available to teachers in both rural and high-poverty schools. Here are the highlights:

School poverty

- A greater percentage of teachers in high-poverty schools (47%) than in low-poverty schools (33%) reported that their state provided them with curricula. The additional state support may explain why only about 10% of math teachers in high-poverty schools developed their own curricula to teach current math standards, compared with 20% in low-poverty schools.
- Only 8% of math teachers in high-poverty schools shared their teacher-developed curricula through online postings, compared with 24% of math teachers in low-poverty schools.

Type of community

- The proportion of teachers who received curricula aligned to the standards from their district was lower in town/rural districts (59% math, 56% ELA) than in urban districts (77% math, 72% ELA) or suburban districts (77% math, 73% ELA).
- The percentage of teachers who said they shared their curricula through informal discussions was lower in rural/town districts (69% math, 72% ELA) than in urban districts (84% math, 84% ELA).

³ For this survey, high-poverty schools are defined as those in which more than 31% of students are from low-income families; medium-poverty schools are 16% to 30.9% low-income; and low-poverty schools are less than 16% low-income.

Understanding Student Test Data from New Assessments

About 86% of math teachers and 85% of ELA teachers reported that since the 2010-11 school year, their state has administered new assessments to measure students' mastery of the standards in these subjects. Among this group of teachers, 69% in either subject said that at the time of the survey (winter 2015-16) they had received student performance data from the state assessments given in spring 2015. Responses to the survey questions about the use of student test data come from this subset of teachers who had received data from spring 2015 state assessments.

As shown in figure 2-C, a large majority (83%) of teachers who had received results from spring 2015 assessments said they are working collaboratively with other teachers in their school to understand student performance data in math and ELA. Other approaches being used by a majority of teachers to better understand these test results include engaging in self-study, participating in school or district-sponsored professional development, using online resources, and working with their principal.

Smaller percentages of these teachers indicated that they are working with other teachers in their district to understand test results, working with a coach/instructional facilitator, using online professional networks, and relying on other approaches listed in the figure below.

Figure 2-C. Resources being used by teachers to understand student assessment data

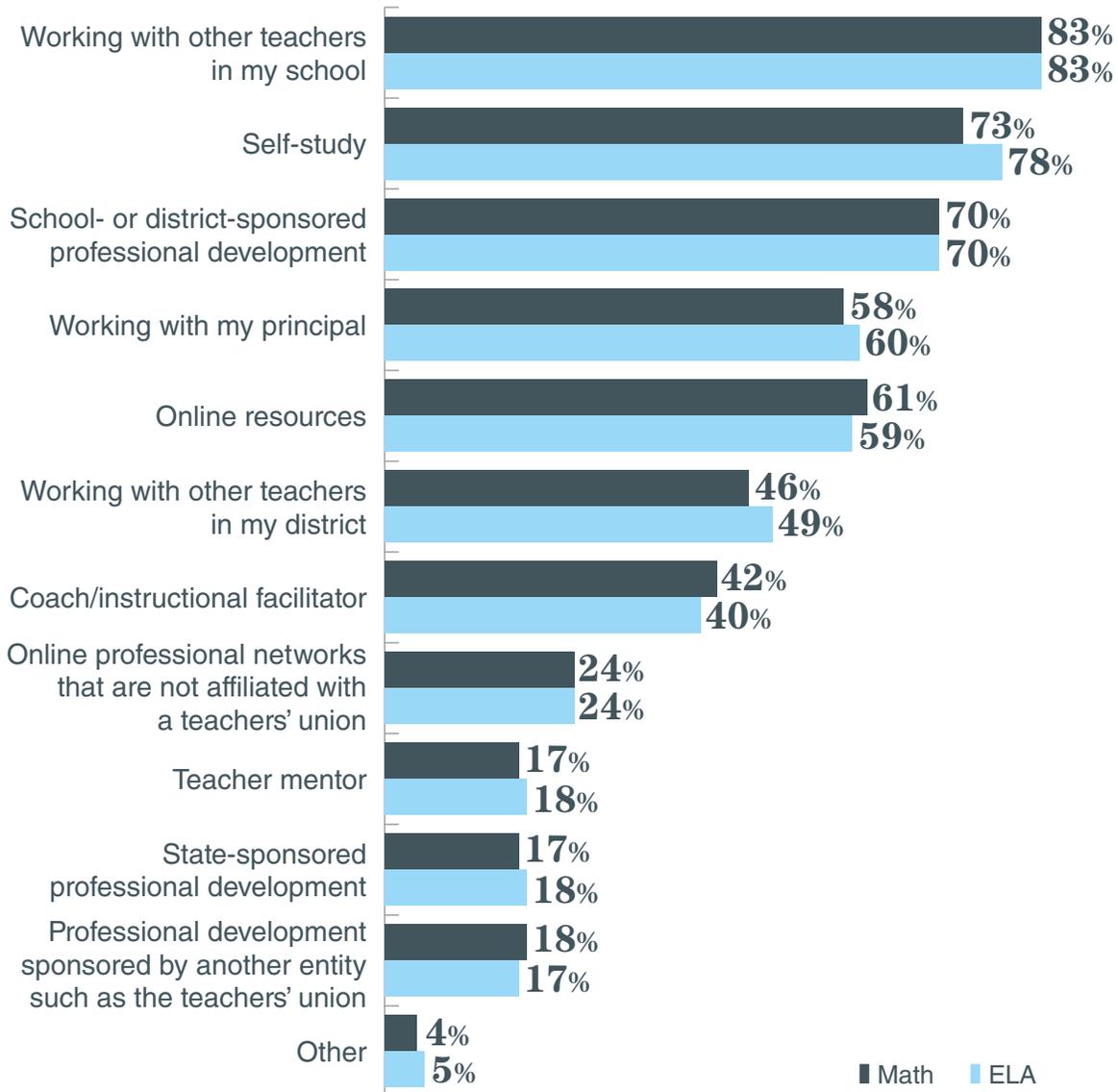


Figure reads: Of the public school teachers who reported that they teach the state math standards and have received student data from their state's spring 2015 math assessment, an estimated 83% said they are working with other teachers in their school to understand the assessment data.

Note: Teachers could select all the responses that apply.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Using Student Test Data to Modify Teaching Practice

More than two-thirds of the math teachers (68%) and ELA teachers (71%) who had received student test results from spring 2015 reported using those data to a great extent or somewhat to modify their teaching practice. Very small percentages of math and ELA teachers who received student test data said they are not using the data at all to modify practice.

Figure 2-D. Extent to which spring 2015 assessment data caused teachers to modify their practice

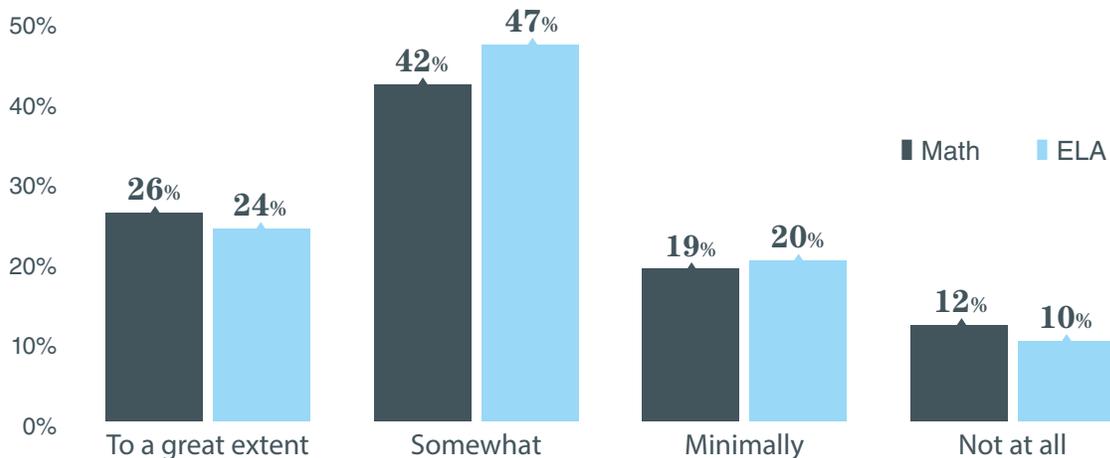


Figure reads: Of the public school teachers who reported that they teach the math standards and have received student data from their state's spring 2015 math assessment, an estimated 26% said the student data has caused them to modify their practice to a great extent.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

“One size does not fit all. I differentiate my instruction; the state needs to differentiate their testing.”

We also asked data-using math and ELA teachers⁴ how they are applying the spring 2015 state test data to change their teaching. Nearly three-quarters of those teachers said they are applying 2015 test results to differentiate instruction based on students' needs. Nearly two-thirds reported using these data to improve instruction for the whole class. Smaller proportions of teachers (44% in math, 52% in ELA) reported revising their curriculum based on student test data.

Relatively low percentages of math and ELA teachers are using test data to build supportive relationships with parents or improve classroom management.

Figure 2-E. How teachers are using spring 2015 state test data to modify their practice

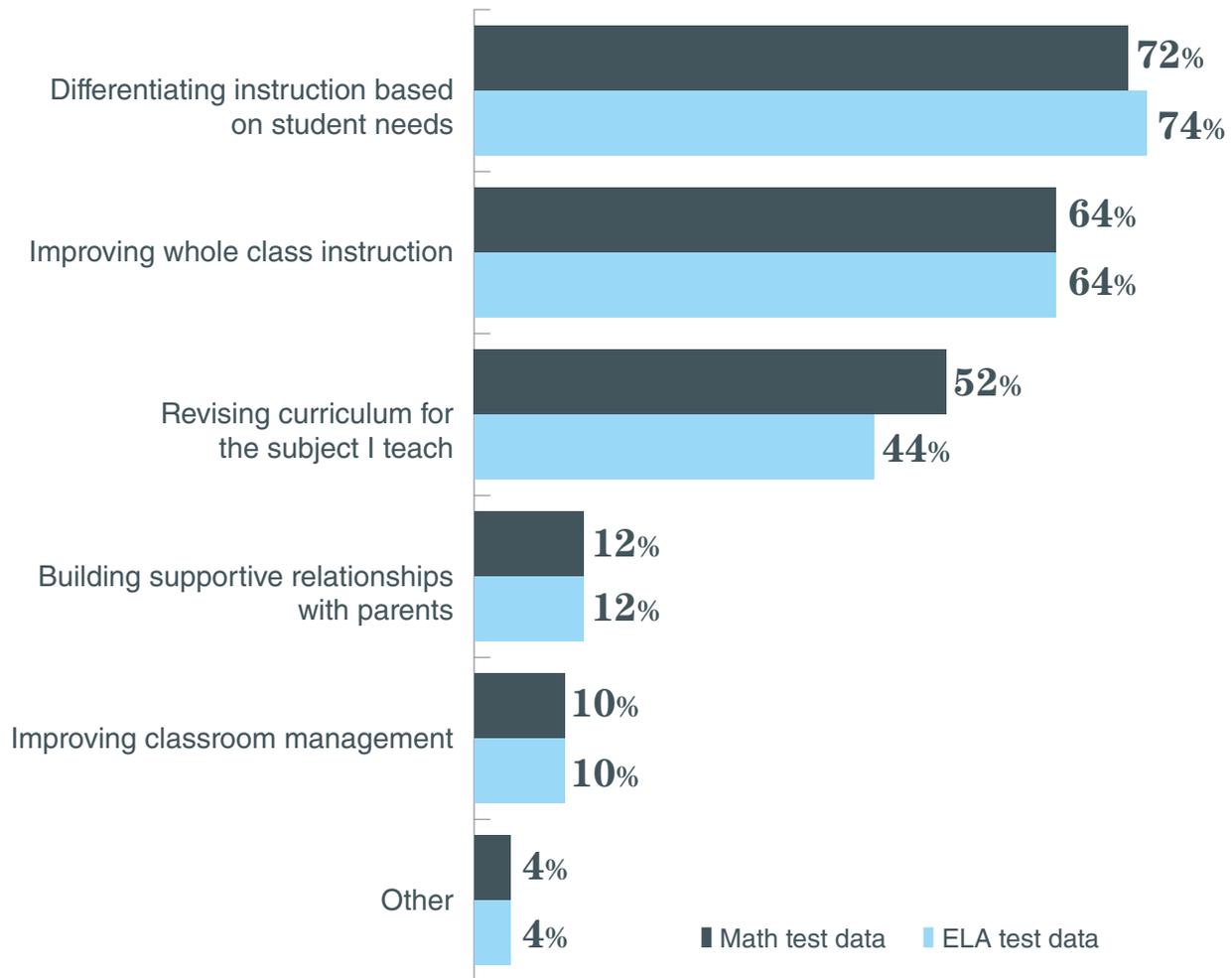


Figure reads: Of the public school teachers who reported that they are teaching state math standards, have received student data from their state's spring 2015 math assessment, and have used that data to modify their practice, an estimated 72% said they are using test data to help them differentiate instruction based on student needs.

Note: Teachers could select all responses that apply.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

4 Includes teachers who reported using spring 2015 test data to any extent (great, somewhat, or minimally).

Differences in Use of State Test Data by Poverty and School Level

Further analyses revealed a few differences in teachers' uses of spring 2015 state test data by school poverty and school level.

School poverty

- A larger proportion of math teachers in high-poverty schools (32%) than in medium- (14%) or low-poverty (15%) schools reported participating in state-sponsored professional development to help them understand state test data. The patterns were similar for ELA teachers.
- Larger percentages of teachers in high-poverty schools (39% math, 40% ELA) than in low-poverty schools (21% math, 18% ELA) reported using test data to a great extent to modify their practice.
- Teachers' specific uses of test data varied by school poverty. For example, a greater proportion of math teachers in high-poverty schools (80%) than in medium- (61%) or low-poverty schools (60%) reported using 2015 student test results to improve whole-class instruction.
- Greater proportions of teachers in high-poverty schools (19% math, 18% ELA) than in low-poverty schools (6% math, 7% ELA) used test data to improve classroom management. And a greater proportion of ELA teachers in high-poverty schools (25%) than in medium- (12%) or low-poverty schools (8%) used test data to build supportive relationships with parents.

School level

- Greater proportions of math teachers at the elementary level (63%) than at the middle (46%) or high school level (43%) reported working with their principal to better understand test data. This was also the case in ELA.
- Larger percentages of ELA teachers in high school (62%) and middle school (66%) used test data to revise their curricula than did those in elementary school (46%).

This is my fourth year teaching, and every year I have had to prepare my students for a different state assessment along with a revision of the standards. It is hard to build a curriculum and develop deep content knowledge when it constantly changes.

Alignment between New State Tests and New Standards

The issue of alignment as it pertains to new state assessments and new standards is particularly important for teachers, especially when student test data are being used to evaluate the performance of schools and individual teachers. A majority of teachers who used test data to inform their practice agreed that their state’s 2015 assessments in math and ELA cover the same knowledge and skills as the state’s current standards; only about one-third disagreed with this statement. Teachers were divided (roughly 40% on each side) about whether the state math and ELA assessments make the same cognitive demands of students as the math and ELA standards do. Teachers were also divided about whether the assessments cover the same depth and breadth of content as the standards.

For each of these aspects of alignment — knowledge and skills, cognitive demands, and depth and breadth — sizable minorities of teachers, from 14% to 18%, did not know if their state’s assessments were well aligned with standards.

Figure 2-F. Teachers’ views of alignment between state assessments and standards

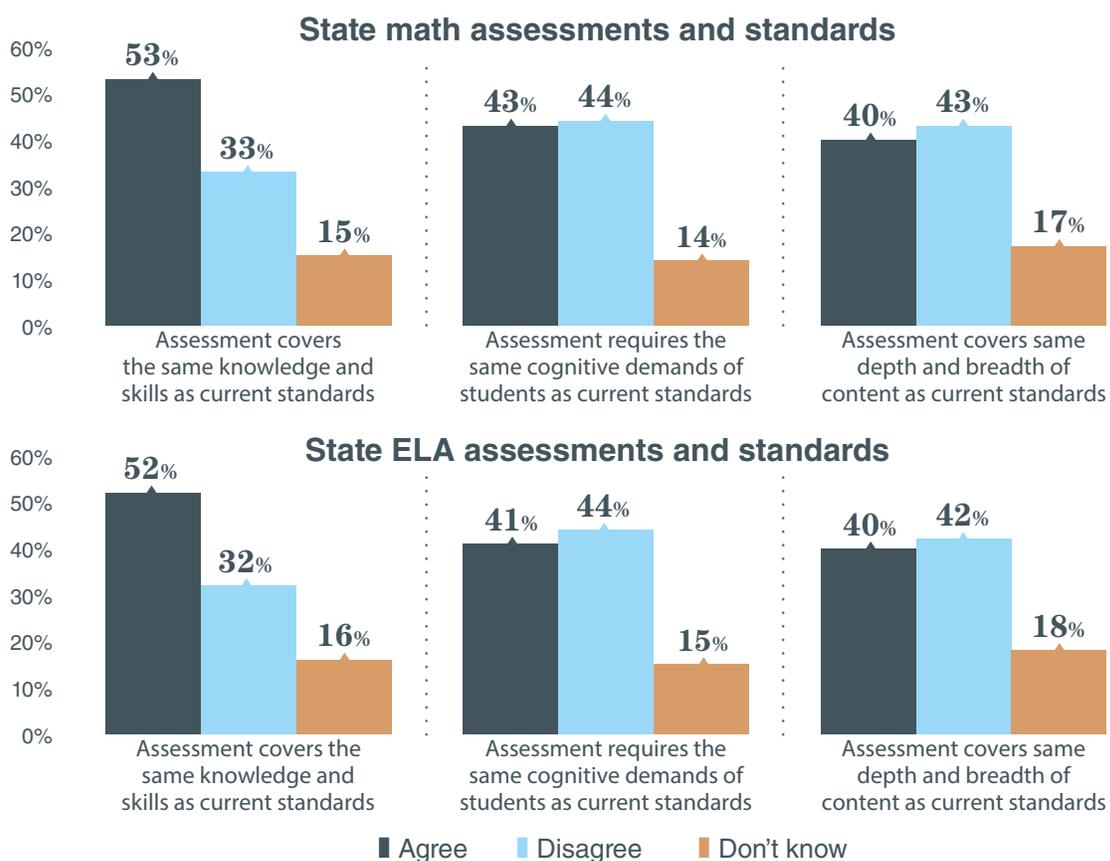


Figure reads: Of the public school teachers who reported that they teach the state math standards and used data from the spring 2015 state math assessment to modify their practice, an estimated 53% agreed that their state’s assessments cover the same knowledge and skills as the state’s current math standards. An estimated 33% of this group of teachers disagreed with this statement, and 15% did not know.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Uncertainty about the Future of State Standards and Assessments

Math and ELA teachers were asked how certain they were that their state would continue using its current standards and aligned assessments in these subjects. Teachers were fairly evenly divided. Regarding standards, about 51% of math and ELA teachers indicated they were certain that their state would keep using its standards in their subject and about 49% were not certain. Regarding assessments, about half of math (48%) and ELA teachers (47%) indicated they were certain that their state would keep their aligned assessments in these subjects, and the remainder were not certain.

We asked the teachers who expressed uncertainty about the future of their state standards and assessments about the challenge this posed to their teaching of the standards. Eighty percent of these teachers indicated that their lack of certainty somewhat (36%) or significantly (44%) challenged their efforts to teach the standards.

Figure 2-G. Extent to which uncertainty about state standards and assessments impacts teaching

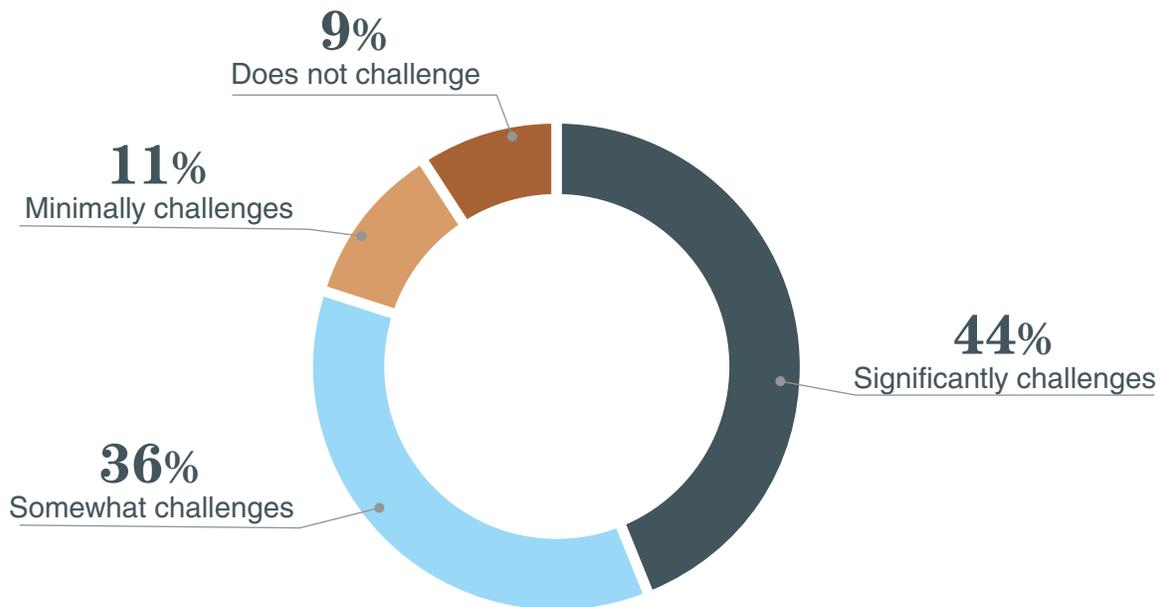


Figure reads: Of the public school teachers who said they were uncertain about their state's plans to continue using its current math and/or ELA standards and aligned assessments or were certain their state plans to discontinue its standards and assessments, an estimated 44% reported that their lack of certainty significantly challenges their efforts to teach the standards.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Differences in Teacher Views in Common Core and Non-Common Core States

The Common Core State Standards and the CCSS-aligned assessments have at times been the source of controversy in some states. Amid the debate, some states have revoked their earlier adoption of the CCSS and developed their own college- and career-ready standards and assessments. Other states have kept the CCSS but dropped a consortia assessment in favor of a test they developed themselves. Another group of states did not participate in the CCSS from the outset but implemented their own new standards and aligned assessments.

In order to learn if teachers in states implementing the Common Core had different views and experiences from teachers in states with their own standards, we compared the responses of these two groups. We similarly compared these two groups to learn if teachers in states with consortia assessments were having different experiences than teachers in states with their own assessments.⁵ The differences were few, and the highlights are discussed below.

Common Core and non-Common Core states

- The percentages of teachers who said their *district* provided them with curricula or curriculum frameworks to teach state standards were higher in non-CCSS states (80% in math, 75% in ELA) than in CCSS states (70% math, 66% ELA). The percentage of teachers who indicated that their *state* provided them with curricula to teach the standards was also higher in ELA for non-CCSS states (45%) than for CCSS states (36%).
- Greater proportions of ELA teachers in CCSS states (27%) than in non-CCSS states (18%) reported that they revised their own curricula; the percentages who drew ELA curricula from online resources was also higher in CCSS states (33%) than in non-CCSS states (25%).

Consortia assessment states and states with other assessments

- Higher percentages of teachers in non-consortia states (75% math, 76% ELA) than in consortia states (62% math, 61% ELA) report that they received student performance data from their state's spring 2015 assessments.
- A greater proportion of ELA teachers in consortia states (15%) than in non-consortia states (7%) indicated that they did not modify their teaching at all based on the 2015 student test data received.
- Greater proportions of math and ELA teachers in non-consortia states perceived their state assessments to be aligned in key respects with state standards. In particular, more than half of the math (59%) and ELA (58%) teachers in non-consortia states agreed that the state assessment covers the same knowledge and skills as the current state standards; this compares with 44% of math teachers and 43% of ELA teachers in consortia states.

⁵ In the spring of 2015, 18 states administered the Smarter Balanced assessment, 10 states and the District of Columbia administered the PARCC assessment, and 22 states administered their own assessment. Fewer states plan on using Smarter Balanced and PARCC assessment in 2016; instead states will use their own assessments or those developed by a third party. (See Gewertz, 2016 for more information.)

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Standards and Assessments: Teachers of Other Subjects

The Common Core State Standards and many other state math and English language arts standards encompass certain skills that are important for students to learn and master across all disciplines, not just math and ELA. These skills, which some consider foundational for college and career readiness, include making sense of problems and persevering in solving them; reading and writing nonfiction passages; and constructing viable arguments and criticizing the reasoning of others. In this report, we refer to these as *college- and career-ready (CCR) skills*. Many states, districts, and schools now call on teachers of subjects other than math and ELA to teach these CCR skills as part of their subject-matter instruction.

We explored this aspect of implementation because much of the research on the new standards has neglected teachers of subjects other than math and ELA even though their practice is likely affected by state math and ELA standards. We posed a set of survey questions to teachers who do *not* teach math or ELA but do teach other subjects — referred to as *teachers of other subjects* in this report. This group includes teachers of social studies, natural sciences, foreign languages, visual and performing arts, physical education, and health; as well as general elementary, middle, and high school teachers who teach more than one subject (but not math or ELA). Teachers of special education, English learners, and career and technical education are also included. The survey asked these teachers about their experiences teaching the CCR skills associated with many states' math and ELA standards.

Key Findings

- **About half of the teachers of other subjects report that they are teaching CCR skills associated with state math and ELA standards, but few have changed their practice to do so.** Specifically, 56% of teachers of subjects other than math or ELA said they are teaching at least one of the following CCR skills: nonfiction reading, nonfiction writing, problem solving, and reasoning. Among teachers who have been teaching long enough to compare their behavior under old and new standards, about two-thirds reported that they were previously teaching these skills to the same degree as they are now.
- **About half of the teachers of other subjects who teach CCR skills rely solely on curricula they developed, revised, or adapted for this purpose, alone or with other teachers.** This far exceeds the 11% of math teachers and 14% of ELA teachers who report that they relied solely on teacher-developed curricula to teach math or ELA standards.
- **More than half of teachers of other subjects say they received student results from their state's spring 2015 math and ELA assessments, and some are using the data to modify their teaching.** A notable share of these teachers who received test data said they are using the data in math (38%) or ELA (45%) to modify how they teach CCR skills. Of those teachers who are modifying their practice based on test data, about 60% are differentiating their instruction based on student needs.

Teaching of CCR Skills by Teachers of Subjects Other Than Math and ELA

Fifty-six percent of teachers of other subjects said they are teaching one or more of the CCR skills. The remaining 44% reported that they were not teaching any of the skills.

Figure 3-A. Percentage of teachers of other subjects teaching CCR skills

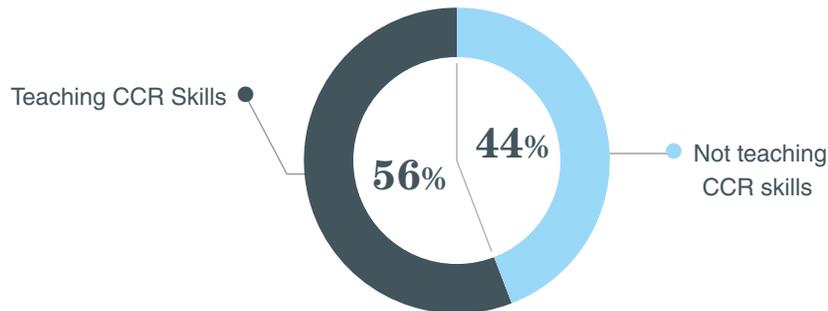


Figure reads: An estimated 56% of public school teachers who do *not* teach math or ELA report that they teach one or more of the college- and career-ready skills associated with their state’s current math or ELA standards.

While states adopt standards to guide curriculum and instruction, some teachers emphasize particular skills without consulting their state’s standards. Indeed, 48% of the teachers of other subjects who reported teaching CCR skills said they are not using their state’s standards to do so; the remaining 52% are using state standards.

About 90% of the teachers of other subjects who reported teaching CCR skills have been in the classroom long enough to compare their behavior under their state’s previous and current standards. As shown in figure 3-B, about two-thirds of these teachers noted that they were previously teaching the skills to the same degree as they are now.

Figure 3-B. Degree to which teachers of other subjects taught CCR skills under previous state standards

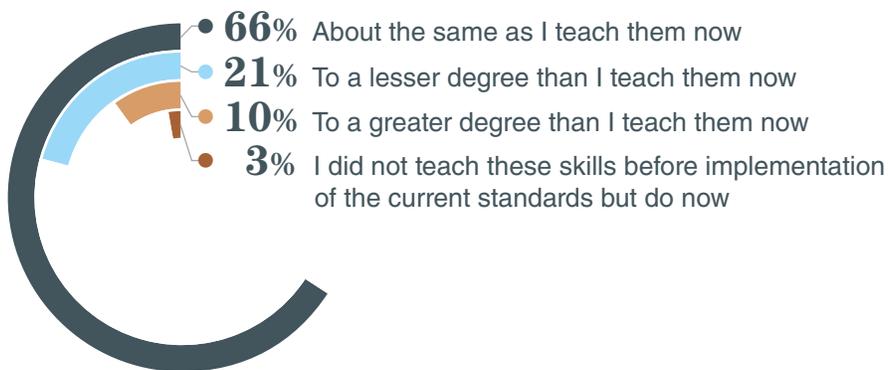


Figure reads: Of the public school teachers who a) teach subjects *other than* ELA or math, b) teach CCR skills associated with current state math and ELA standards, and c) were teachers when their state’s previous math and ELA standards were in place, an estimated 66% reported that they previously taught the CCR skills to same degree as they do now.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

About 21% said they taught the skills to a lesser degree under the previous standards. About 10% taught the skills to a greater degree under the old standards. And 3% did not teach the skills under the previous state standards, but they do now.

Teachers of other subjects who reported changing the degree to which they teach CCR skills under current standards were asked *why* they changed their practice. About 55% said they were required to make this change by their state, district, or school. Lower proportions of teachers reported changing their emphasis on CCR skills to prepare students for college and careers, to make their subject as rigorous as possible, or because the current standards were a natural fit for their curriculum. Roughly 44% made the change to improve cross-disciplinary instruction.

Table 3-A. Why teachers changed the degree to which they teach CCR skills under current standards

Reason	Percentage of teachers of other subjects
Required to by my state, district, or school	55%
To improve cross-disciplinary instruction	44%
To prepare my students for college and careers	37%
To make my subject as rigorous as possible	34%
Because the current standards were a natural fit for my curriculum	24%
I don't remember	3%
Other	12%

Table reads: Of the public school teachers who do *not* teach ELA or math but changed their practice after their state implemented new math and/or ELA standards, an estimated 55% reported that their state, district, or school required them to change their practice.

Note: Teachers could select all the responses that apply.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

It appears that many teachers, not just those focusing on math and ELA standards, see value in the CCR skills associated with the new standards. Indeed, a large majority of teachers of other subjects who are teaching CCR skills believe these skills should be taught schoolwide: 87% of these teachers believe that making sense of problems and persevering in solving them should be taught throughout the school, while 80% believe that teaching students how to construct viable arguments and criticize the reasoning of others is important for all students to learn. In addition, just over three-quarters of these teachers believe that nonfiction reading (77%) and nonfiction writing (77%) should be taught schoolwide.

Curricula Used by Teachers of Other Subjects to Teach CCR Skills

As discussed in Part II of this report, large percentages of math and ELA teachers¹ have received curricula for teaching their current state standards in these subjects from the state, district, or school. By contrast, significantly fewer teachers of other subjects said they have received curriculum for teaching CCR skills from these institutional sources. Instead, they are developing, revising, or adapting² their own curricula for CCR skills, alone or with other teachers.

Indeed, about half of the teachers of other subjects reported relying *solely* on curricula that they developed, revised, or adapted to teach the CCR skills associated with state math (51%) or ELA (49%) standards. This far exceeds the 11% of math teachers and 14% of ELA teachers who said they only used curricula from these teacher sources.

Conversely, smaller proportions of teachers of other subjects said they relied solely on curricula provided by institutional sources — their state, district, and/or school — to teach the CCR skills associated with their state’s math (25%) and ELA (30%) standards. This compares with the 45% of math teachers and 39% of ELA teachers who relied solely on institutional sources for standards-aligned curricula in their subject. This difference in curricular resources could be impacting the consistency of instruction around the CCR skills.

Figure 3-C. Main sources of curricula

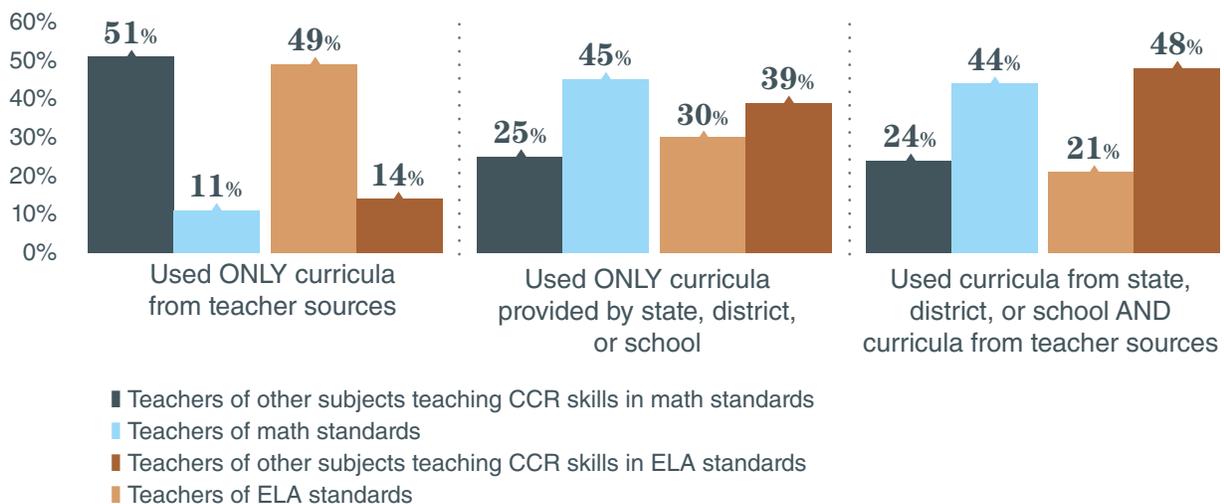


Figure reads: Of public school teachers who teach subjects other than math or ELA and are teaching CCR skills associated with the state math standards, an estimated 51% reported that they *only* use curricula that they developed, revised, or adapted, alone or with other teachers, to teach these CCR skills. By comparison, an estimated 11% of teachers who indicated they teach the math standards said that they are *only* using curricula that they developed, revised, or adapted, alone or with other teachers, to teach current state math standards.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

1 Includes elementary, middle, and high school teachers who teach their state’s current math and/or ELA standards.

2 By “adapted,” we mean they drew curricula from online sources or existing texts.

Math and ELA Test Data Used by Teachers of Other Subjects

Since many teachers of other subjects are incorporating CCR skills into their instruction, we also asked whether these teachers receive student performance data from state math and ELA tests and how they use these data. These questions were aimed specifically at teachers of other subjects who indicated their state had administered new math or ELA exams since 2010-11.

A majority of teachers of other subjects reported that their state has administered new assessments in recent years in math (65%) and ELA (60%). About one-third of teachers of other subjects did not know (31% math, 36% ELA), and a small percentage said their state had *not* administered new math (4%) and ELA (5%) assessments. These numbers are lower than the percentages of math and ELA teachers who said their state had adopted new assessments. The disparities may exist because teachers of other subjects may be less familiar with their state’s math and ELA tests and may not know when the current tests were introduced.

More than half of these teachers of other subjects said they received student performance data from the spring 2015 administration of their state’s math (56%) and ELA (58%) tests.

Not surprisingly, these are smaller shares than the 69% of math teachers and 69% of ELA teachers who reported receiving student data from spring 2015 math and ELA tests. Still, the survey responses suggest awareness by local leaders that teachers of other subjects may find it helpful to know how students are performing on math and ELA tests.

Using Student Test Data to Modify Teaching in Other Subjects

A noteworthy percentage of teachers of other subjects are using student data from math and ELA tests to change how they teach. Thirty-eight percent of teachers of other subjects who received spring 2015 test data said they are using the math results to modify their practice somewhat or to a great extent; 45% of these teachers reported they used ELA results in this way.

Table 3-B. Extent to which spring 2015 test data caused teachers of other subjects to modify practice

	Math student test data	ELA student test data
To a great extent	11%	10%
Somewhat	27%	35%
Minimally	25%	25%
Not at all	37%	30%

Table reads: Of the public school teachers who a) do *not* teach ELA or math, b) reported receiving student performance data from the spring 2015 administration of their state’s math assessment, and c) said they use data from the state assessment to inform their teaching, an estimated 11% noted that they modified one or more aspects of their practice to a great extent based on this math test data.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Teachers of other subjects who reported using math and ELA test data at least minimally were asked *how* they changed their practice based on spring 2015 state assessments. About three-fifths said they are using test data in math (61%) and ELA (60%) to differentiate instruction based on student needs. One-third or more are using test data to improve whole class instruction (48% math, 53% ELA) or revise curriculum in their subject (34%, 39%).

Figure 3-D. How teachers of other subjects are using data from math and ELA tests to modify their practice

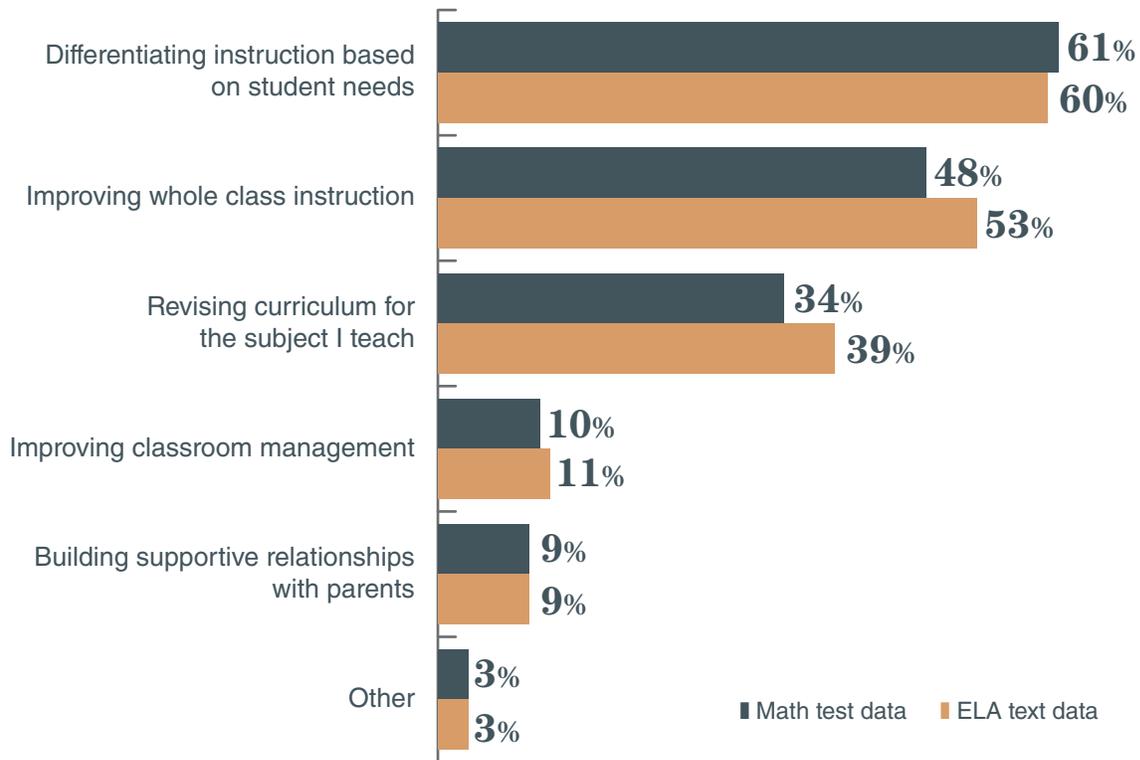


Figure reads: Of the public school teachers who a) do *not* teach ELA or math, b) reported receiving student performance data from the spring 2015 state math assessment, and c) said they are using these data to modify their teaching, an estimated 61% indicated they are using math test data to differentiate instruction based on student needs.

Note: Teachers could select more than one response.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

IV.

Testing Time

The amount of school time devoted to preparing students for standardized tests and administering the tests is a hot topic in education today. The Council of the Great City Schools (2015) estimated that the average student in the nation's large city school systems will take roughly 112 mandatory standardized tests between pre-kindergarten and high school graduation, and will spend an average of 20-25 hours each year taking these tests. Two-thirds of public school parents agree there is too much emphasis on standardized testing in their community's public schools, according to the 2015 national PDK/Gallup poll (PDK International, 2015). Some students and parents have expressed their frustration by deciding to "opt out" of state or locally mandated testing.

Prompted by concerns about over-testing, federal leaders have made funds available to states through the Every Student Succeeds Act (the latest version of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965) to conduct audits of state testing systems. These audits "are intended to eliminate unnecessary and low-quality assessments while protecting the vital role that good state-wide assessments play in measuring student progress, improving outcomes for all learners, and ensuring equity" (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Our survey asked teachers to weigh in on these issues with a series of questions about the time spent on test-preparation activities and test-taking. The survey defined "preparing" students for tests as drilling students on specific content and skills covered on the tests, using practice tests, and/or teaching test-taking skills such as time-management, pacing, and other strategies. Our questions are not meant to imply that all test-prep activities are an ineffective use of time — if the activities are helping students master the knowledge and skills in the standards they can be useful.

Key Findings

- **An estimated 37% of teachers indicated that they spend one week or less out of the school year preparing students for district-mandated tests, while about 26% reported spending more than a month on these activities.** For state-mandated tests, 30% of teachers estimated devoting less than a week to test-prep, and 29% estimated spending more than a month. A greater share of teachers in high- and medium-poverty schools than in low-poverty schools reported spending more than a month on test-prep activities for district and state tests.
- **A majority of teachers believe they spend too much time preparing students for state-mandated tests (62%) and district-mandated tests (51%).** Very few teachers believed they spent too little time preparing students for district and/or state-mandated tests.
- **When asked how much time their students spend taking mandated tests, sizable proportions of teachers estimated one week or less for district-mandated (40%) and state-mandated (45%) tests.** The remaining teachers reported that their students spend more than a week taking these tests.

- **An overwhelming majority of teachers (81%) believe students spend too much time taking district- and/or state mandated tests.** About 16% said the time students spend taking tests is about right, while 1% believe it is too little.
- **Many teachers would prefer to cut the frequency and length of state- and district-mandated tests rather than eliminate them altogether.** Teachers who believe students spend too much time taking tests were asked which tests should be eliminated, reduced, or kept. The vast majority of these teachers would keep teacher-created quizzes (88%) and teacher-created tests (86%). For state-mandated tests, less than a third (31%) of these teachers wanted to eliminate them, while 60% preferred to reduce their frequency or length; only 7% wanted to keep them as they are. For district-mandated tests, 22% wanted to eliminate them, 63% suggested reducing their frequency or length, and 13% advised keeping them as they are.

Time Spent on Test Preparation

On average, teachers estimated spending 12 days over the course of a school year preparing students for district-mandated tests and 14 days preparing students for state-mandated tests.¹

For district-mandated tests, 37% of teachers reported spending a week or less on test preparation for their students, while 26% said they spend more than a month. For state-mandated tests, the proportion of teachers who said they spend less than a week on test-preparation activities (30%) was nearly equal to the proportion that spend more than a month (29%) on test-prep.

Figure 4-A. Teacher-estimated time per year spent preparing students for mandated tests

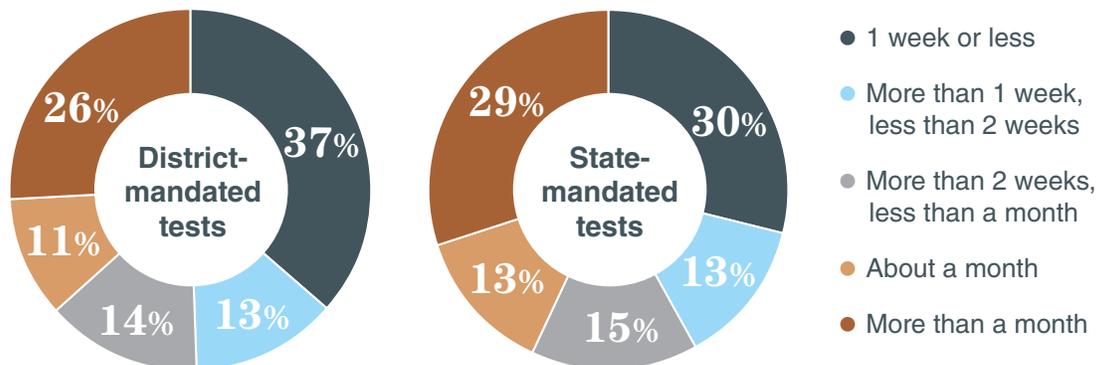


Figure reads: An estimated 37% of public school teachers whose students take district- or state-mandated tests reported spending one week or less per year preparing students to take *district-mandated* tests, and about 30% of teachers spent one week or less per year preparing students for *state-mandated* tests.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

¹ To estimate the mean number of days spent on test preparation, each day range was ascribed a number that best fit the range description. For example, one week equaled 5 days — more than one week but less than two weeks equaled 7.5 days. About a month was considered to be 19 days and more than a month, 24 days. These substitute values were totaled and then divided by the number of respondents for that question.

Differences in Test-Prep Time by Poverty and School Level

School poverty

A greater share of teachers in high-poverty² and medium-poverty schools than in low-poverty schools reported spending more than a month of the school year preparing students for district- and state-mandated tests. Specifically, 34% of teachers in high-poverty schools and 30% of teachers in medium-poverty schools estimated spending more than a month preparing students for district-mandated tests, compared with 21% of teachers in low-poverty schools. For state-mandated tests, 36% of teachers in high-poverty schools and 33% in medium-poverty schools devoted more than one month to test-prep, compared with 23% of teachers in low-poverty schools. Conversely, greater proportions of teachers in low-poverty schools than in medium- or high-poverty schools estimated spending one week or less per school year on test-prep, as displayed in the figure 4-B below. In the ranges of time between one week and one month, the percentages did not differ significantly among any the three poverty levels.

Figure 4-B. Time spent per year preparing students for district- or state-mandated tests by poverty

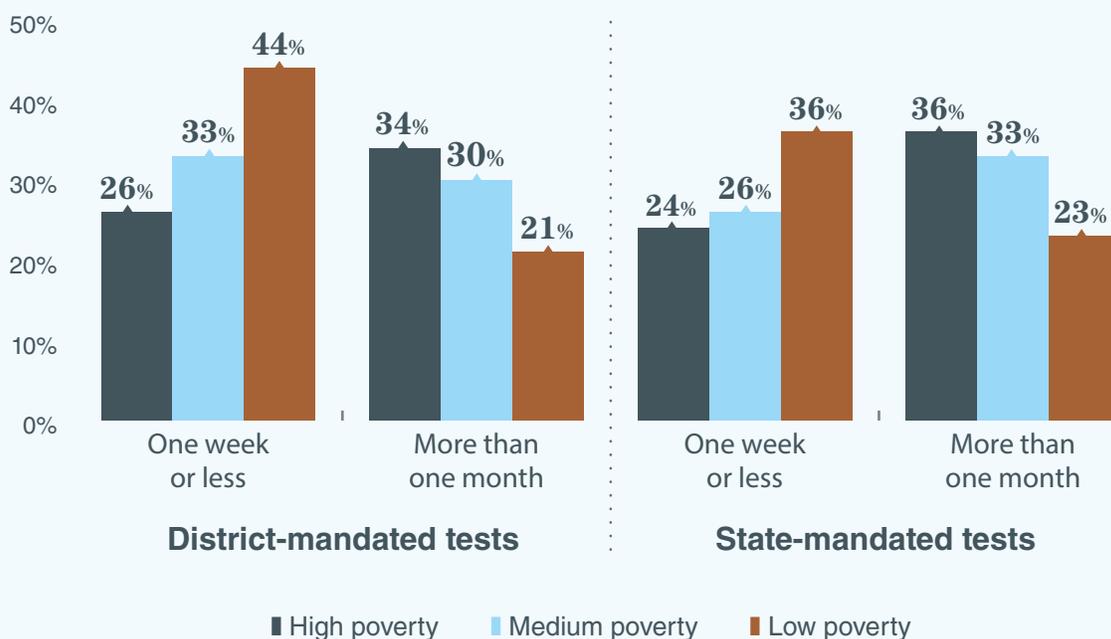


Figure reads: An estimated 26% of teachers in high-poverty public schools reported spending one week or less per year preparing students for district-mandated tests, compared with 33% of teachers in medium-poverty schools and 44% in low-poverty schools. The apparent differences between high- and medium-poverty schools are not statistically significant.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

continued >

² For this survey, high-poverty schools are defined as those in which more than 31% of students are from low-income families; medium-poverty schools are 16% to 30.9% low-income; and low-poverty schools are less than 16% low-income.

School level

A greater share of elementary school teachers than of high school teachers estimated that they spent more than a month of the school year preparing students for district- and state-mandated tests. Specifically, 31% of elementary school teachers reported spending more than a month each year on preparation activities for district-mandated tests, compared with 19% of high school teachers. An estimated 35% of elementary school teachers, compared with 21% of high school teachers, reported spending more than a month annually readying students for state exams. Conversely, greater percentages of high school teachers (48%) than of elementary school teachers (30%) reported spending one week or less annually on test-prep activities for district-mandated tests. The proportions were similar for state-mandated tests: 24% of elementary school teachers and 40% of high school teachers estimated spending a week or less per year getting students ready for these exams.

An estimated 62% of teachers believe they spend too much time preparing students for state-mandated tests, and 51% believe they spend too much time preparing students for district-mandated tests. The percentage of teachers who thought they spend about the right amount of time preparing students for tests was 39% for district tests and 27% for state tests. Very few teachers indicated they spend too little time preparing students for either type of test.

Figure 4-C. Teacher views on whether the time spent preparing students for tests is appropriate

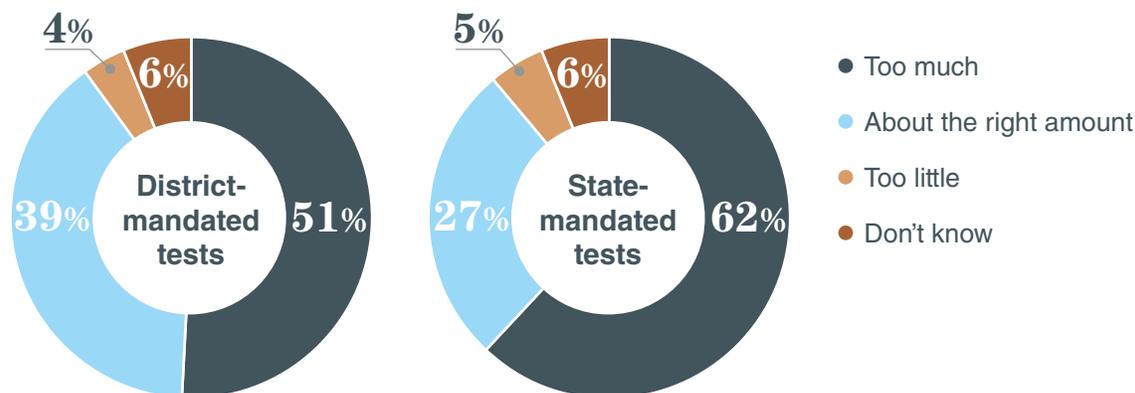


Figure reads: Of public school teachers who spend time preparing students for district-mandated assessments, an estimated 51% reported they spend too much time on this kind of test preparation.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Differences in Views about Amount of Time Spent on Test Prep by Poverty and School Level

School poverty

More teachers in high-poverty (59%) and medium-poverty (55%) schools than in low-poverty schools (45%) believe too much time is spent preparing students for district-mandated tests. However, a greater percentage of teachers in low-poverty (45%) schools said they spend about the right amount of time preparing students for district-mandated tests, compared with teachers in medium- (36%) and high-poverty (29%) schools. This finding is not surprising given the amount of time teachers in high-poverty schools said they spend on test-prep (see the preceding box).

School level

Greater proportions of elementary teachers than of high school teachers believe they spend too much time preparing students for district-mandated and state-mandated tests. For example, 54% of elementary school teachers said they spend too much time preparing students for district-mandated tests, compared with 45% of high school teachers. The figures are similar for state-mandated tests: 66% of elementary school teachers report devoting too much time to test-prep compared with 52% of high school teachers. This is not surprising, since elementary teachers said they spent more time on test prep, as noted above.

Because the data from state and district mandated tests is used to evaluate me but does not contain information to guide my instruction, I have to give alternative tests that do. This is especially problematic because as a dual language teacher, I have no instrument that effectively measures the wealth of knowledge a child has in their two languages.

Formative assessments of student progress as they are actively involved in real-life problem solving tasks are the most valuable assessments.

Time Students Spend Taking Tests

Teachers reported that their students spend an average of 10 days out of the school year taking district-mandated tests and 9 days taking state-mandated tests.³ For district-required tests, the largest proportion of teachers (40%) said their students spend a week or less taking these tests, while 8% said students spend more than a month. The responses were similar for state-mandated tests: 45% of teachers said students take these tests for a week or less per year, and 6% said students spend more than a month per year.

Figure 4-D. Teacher-estimated time per year that students spend taking mandated tests

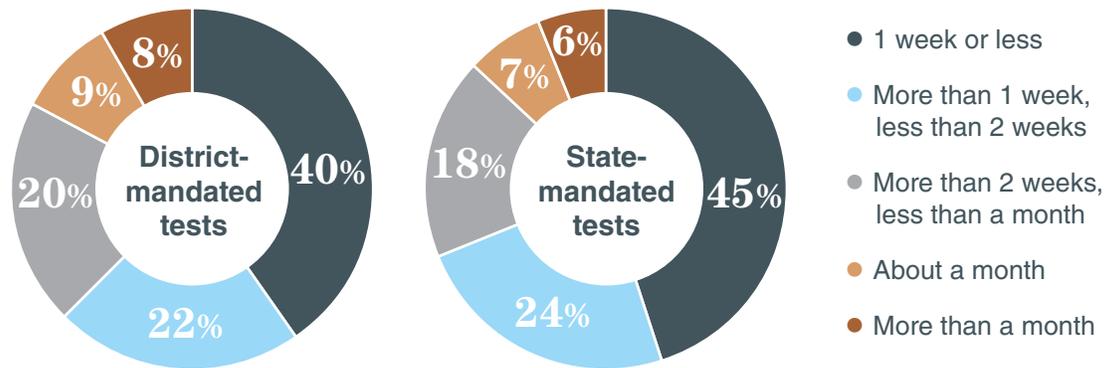


Figure reads: An estimated 40% of public school teachers reported that the average student in their class spent one week or less per year taking district-mandated tests.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.



Between screening tests, monitoring tests, and state testing, kids stop caring. They don't really see the impact of these scores, as they do not affect grades, and some of them don't care, especially students in high-poverty schools. All it does is reduce the amount of instructional time available to teachers.



³ To estimate the mean number of days spent on test preparation, each day range was ascribed a number that best fit the range description. For example, one week equaled 5 days — more than one week but less than two weeks equaled 7.5 days. About a month was considered to be 19 days and more than a month, 24 days. These substitute values were totaled and then divided by the number of respondents for that question.

An overwhelming majority of teachers (81%) believe that students spend too much time during the school year taking district- and state-mandated tests. About 16% said the amount of time taking tests is about right, while 1% said it is too little.

Figure 4-E. Teacher views on whether the time students spend taking tests is appropriate

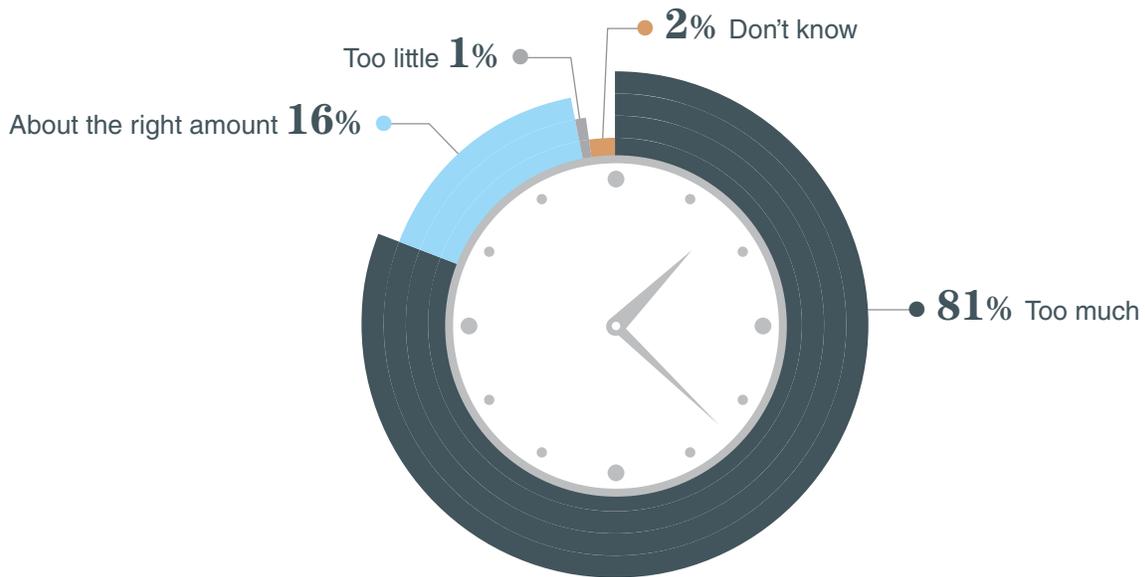


Figure reads: An estimated 81% of public school teachers whose students take district- and/or state-mandated assessments said that too much time is spent taking these assessments.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.



Every year my students are given the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills, on the pretense that we are to use the results to plan for student achievement. By the time we get the results it is second semester and just about time for kids to take [the] state mandated test. It is a waste of time...



Teacher Views on Which Tests to Keep, Reduce, or Eliminate

We asked teachers who thought their students spend too much time taking district- or state-mandated tests which tests — including teacher-developed quizzes and tests — should be kept, reduced, or eliminated. A large majority of these teachers recommended keeping teacher-developed quizzes (88%) and tests (86%).

For district-mandated tests, only 22% of these teachers recommended eliminating these tests altogether, while 63% would reduce their frequency of administration or length, and 13% would keep district tests as they are. The pattern was similar for state-mandated tests: 31% of these teachers recommended eliminating these tests, while 60% would reduce their frequency or length and only 7% would keep state tests as they are. Teachers were a bit more divided on what to do with other tests, such as language proficiency tests or college entrance tests. About 8% wanted to eliminate them, one-third said they should be reduced, and another third suggested keeping those tests. About 22% of teachers did not know what to do about these other types of tests.

Figure 4-F. Teacher views about which tests to keep, reduce, or eliminate

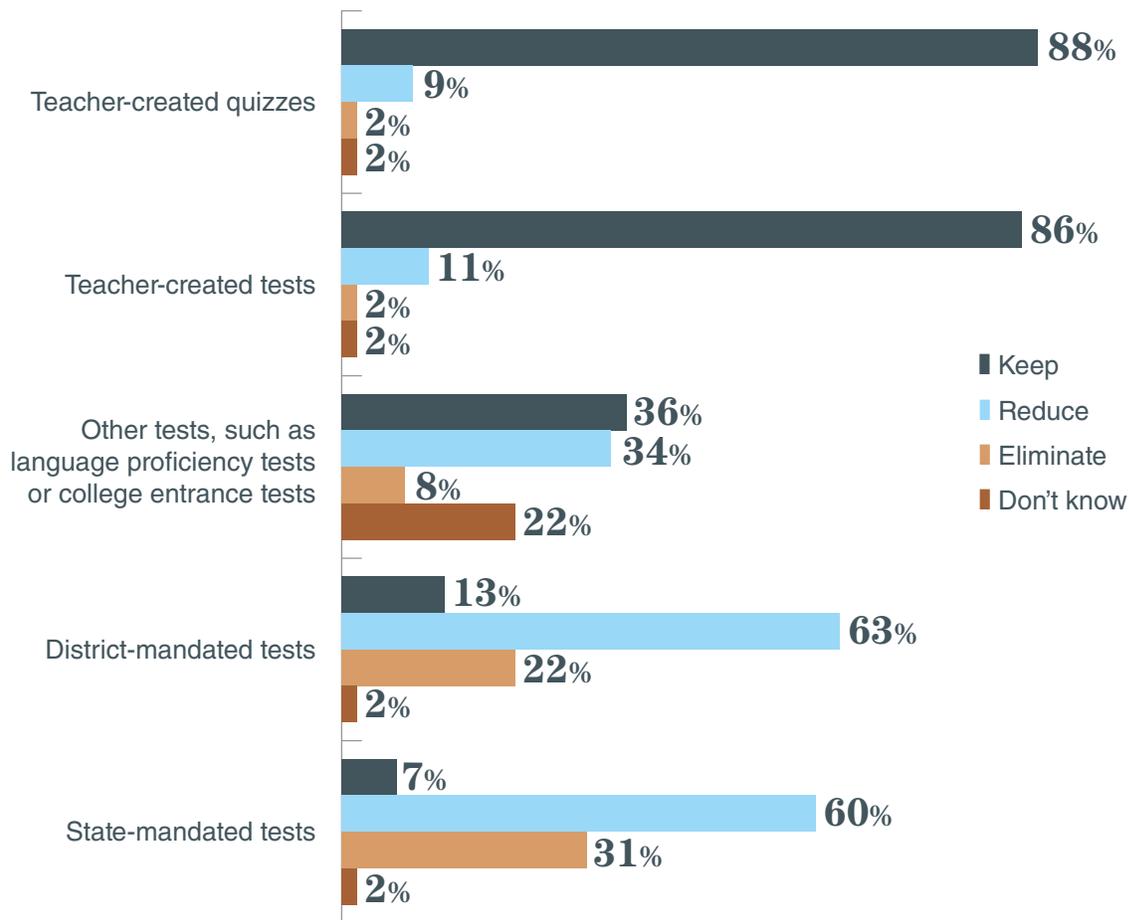


Figure reads: Of the public school teachers who said the average student in their class spends too much time taking district and/or state-mandated assessments, an estimated 88% wanted to keep their own teacher-created quizzes.

Note: Percentages do not always total 100% due to rounding.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

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V.

Teacher Evaluation

In recent years, many states have revamped their systems for evaluating teachers to include student performance data based on assessments. As of 2015, all but five states had formal policies requiring teacher evaluations to be based to some extent on measures of student achievement (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2015). This shift has generated considerable controversy. Advocates maintain that these newer evaluation systems will give teachers more constructive feedback for improvement while ensuring that all students are taught by high-performing teachers. Opponents contend that it is unfair to judge teachers based on student performance on assessments because a host of factors, in addition to teacher quality, affects student test scores.

To learn more about the views of teachers on this issue, the survey asked all public school teachers a set of questions about current evaluation policies.

Key Findings

- **Many teachers have been evaluated based on student test scores.** Among the 82% of teachers who received a performance evaluation in 2014-15, more than half (54%) indicated that student test scores were among the evaluation criteria, while 39% said student scores were not included, and 8% did not know.
- **Most teachers received feedback from their performance evaluation, but only some found it helpful.** The vast majority (89%) of the teachers who were given an evaluation in school year 2014-15 also received written or oral feedback on their teaching. These teachers were divided fairly evenly about the helpfulness of the feedback in improving specific areas of their teaching practice. For example, about 49% said the feedback was somewhat or very helpful in improving their instruction, while 51% said it was minimally or not at all helpful. A greater share of elementary school than of high school teachers found the evaluation feedback to be somewhat or very helpful.
- **The percentages of teachers who rated their evaluation feedback as somewhat or very helpful were higher for teachers whose evaluations did not include student test scores.** For example, 54% of teachers who were evaluated without student test scores found the feedback to be somewhat or very helpful in improving their instruction; this compares with 44% of teachers who were evaluated with student scores.



The feedback is there but the time to implement all those strategies is overwhelming.



Percentage of Teachers Evaluated Based on Student Test Scores

An estimated 82% of teachers reported that they received an evaluation of their performance in school year 2014-15 that was used for decisions such as salaries, tenure, personnel assignments, and dismissals. A majority of these teachers (54%) said that student test scores were among the criteria used to evaluate them, while 39% said student scores were not included, and 8% did not know.

Figure 5-A. Percentage of teachers whose evaluations included student test scores

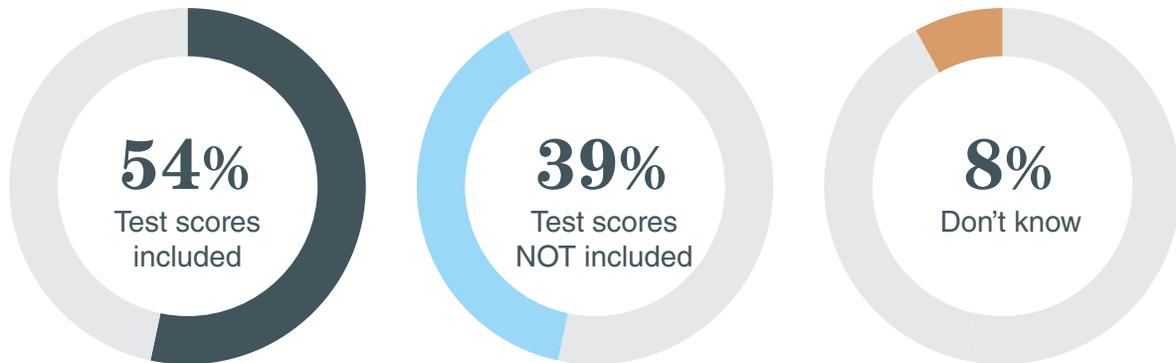


Figure reads: Of the public school teachers who received a summative evaluation of their performance in school year 2014-15, an estimated 54% reported that student test scores (such as outcomes or growth) were among the criteria used in this evaluation.

“

The feedback I received has NOT been helpful nor has it refined or improved my teaching practice. The evaluation system/accountability measures in place have done nothing but motivate me to leave the profession. I write this as a veteran teacher who has earned National Board Certification, a doctorate, and been nominated several times for teacher of the year.

”

“

My principal offered great specific strategies ... for meeting individual student needs while maintaining the flow of the general class.

”

Feedback from Performance Evaluations

The vast majority (89%) of the teachers who received an evaluation for school year 2014-15 received written or oral feedback on their teaching practice.

The teachers who received this feedback did not always agree about how helpful it was in refining or improving their teaching. For certain areas of teaching practice, the percentages of teachers who found the feedback somewhat or very helpful were roughly equal to the percentages who found it minimally or not at all helpful. These areas included maximizing student engagement, addressing student learning needs, creating a positive classroom environment, maintaining high standards and expectations for student achievement, and improving instruction. For other areas of practice — improving the quality of lesson planning and managing student behavior — the proportion of teachers who decided the feedback was minimally or not at all helpful exceeded the proportion who found it somewhat or very helpful.

Figure 5-B. Helpfulness of feedback from teachers' evaluation for refining or improving their practice

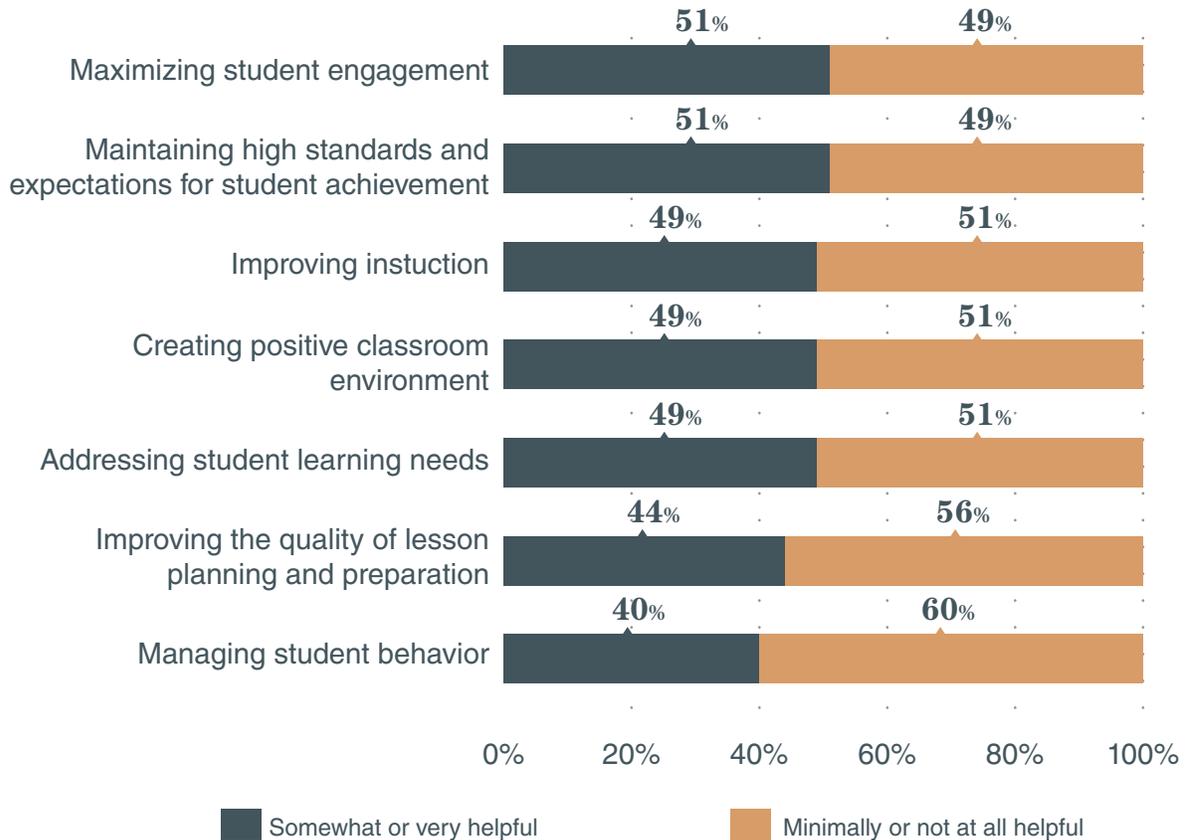


Figure reads: Of the public school teachers who received feedback on their 2014-15 summative evaluation, an estimated 51% reported that the feedback was somewhat or very helpful in refining or improving their ability to maximize student engagement.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Helpfulness of Feedback When Student Test Scores Are and Are Not Included

The percentages of teachers who said the feedback from their evaluation was somewhat or very helpful were often higher for teachers whose evaluations were *not* based on student test scores. For example, 58% of teachers who were evaluated *without* student scores found the feedback to be somewhat or very helpful in maximizing student engagement, compared with 45% of teachers evaluated *with* student scores. Similar differences were apparent for other areas of practice shown in the figure below.

Figure 5-C. Percentages of teachers who rated evaluation feedback as somewhat or very helpful

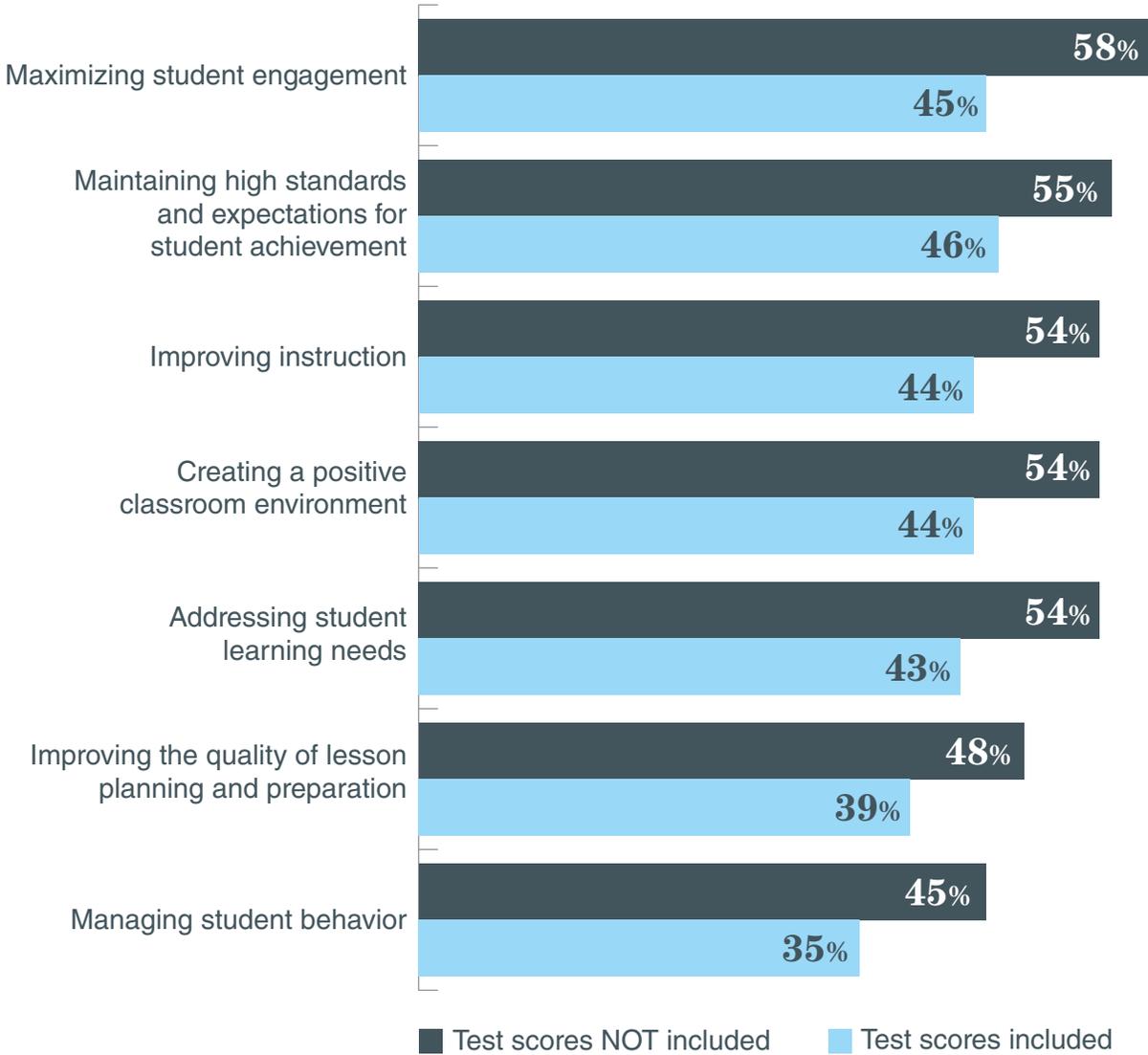


Figure reads: Among public school teachers who received feedback from their 2014-15 summative evaluation, an estimated 58% of teachers whose evaluations were *not* based on student test scores found the feedback to be somewhat or very helpful in improving their ability to maximize student engagement. This is higher than the 45% of teachers who gave the same responses but were evaluated based in part on student test scores.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Differences in Perceptions of Evaluation Feedback by School Level

A greater share of elementary teachers than of high school teachers found the feedback from their evaluations somewhat or very helpful in improving several areas of practice, listed in figure 5-D.

Figure 5-D. Percentages of elementary and high school teachers who rated evaluation feedback as somewhat or very helpful

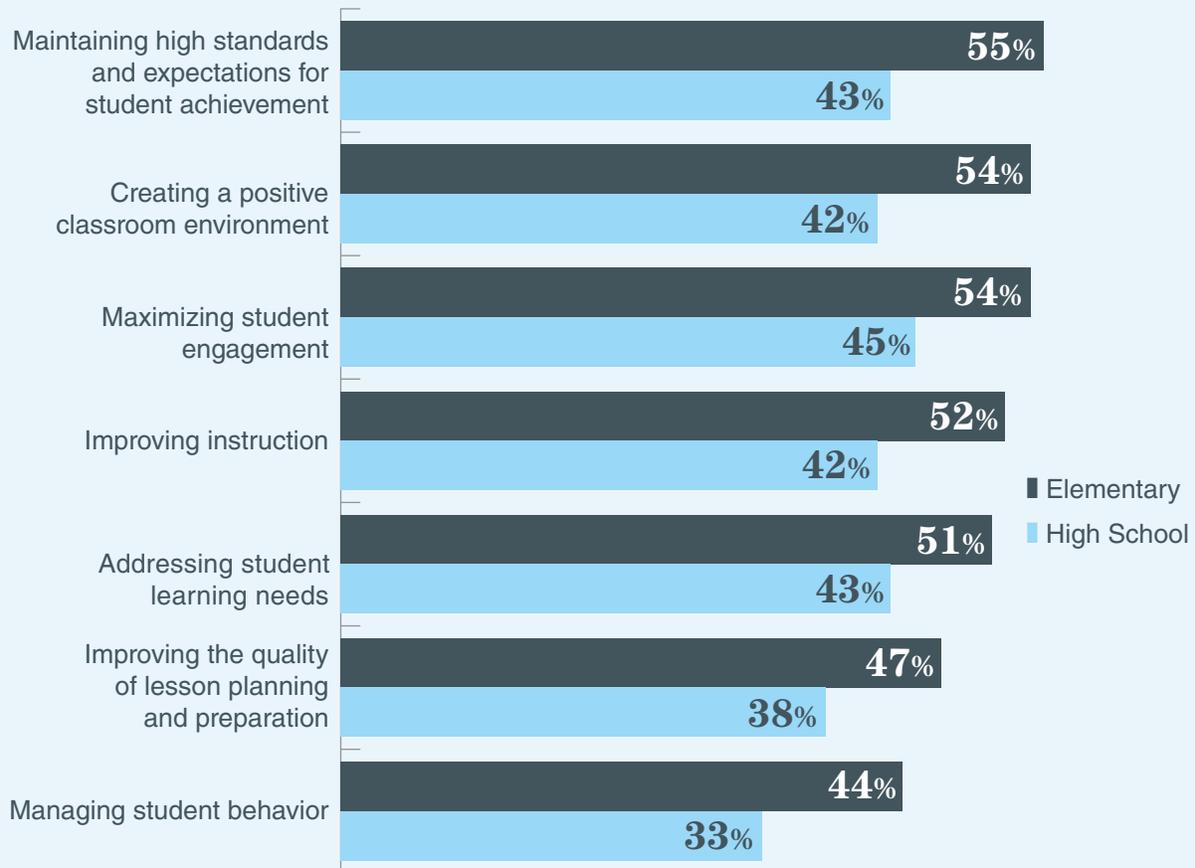


Figure reads: Of the public school teachers who received feedback from their 2014-15 summative evaluation, approximately 55% of elementary school teachers and 43% of high school teachers reported that the feedback was somewhat or very helpful in maintaining high standards and expectations for student achievement.

Note: Not all estimated responses shown in this table are statistically different. Confidence intervals for the estimates in this table can be found in the technical appendix for this report, available at www.cep-dc.org.

Reference

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Credits and Acknowledgments

This report was researched and written by Diane Stark Rentner, CEP’s deputy director; Nancy Kober, CEP’s editorial consultant; Matthew Frizzell, CEP’s senior research associate; and Maria Ferguson, CEP’s executive director. Brandon Aigner, CEP’s graduate research assistant, analyzed the data.

Leslie Anderson of Policy Studies Associates led a team of PSA staff who worked with CEP to develop and administer the district survey and analyze the survey data. Others at PSA who worked on the project include Julie Meredith, Richard White, Alisha Butler, Natalie Orozco, Jackie MacFarlane, and Yvonne Woods.

We are tremendously grateful to teachers who took time from their busy schedules to complete the survey. Thank you for making this report possible!

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The Center on Education Policy receives nearly all of its funding from charitable foundations. We are grateful to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for its support of this project. The statements made and views expressed are solely the responsibility of the Center.

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