Teacher Perceptions of Evaluation Fairness and Burden

About this Snapshot

In the seven years since Tennessee implemented a statewide teacher evaluation system, the percent of Tennessee teachers who agree that evaluation has improved their teaching has doubled, going from 38% in 2012 to 76% in 2019. This rise in satisfaction with evaluation has coincided with increases in student performance on the National Assessment of Education Progress (especially in 2013) and teacher effectiveness.

Still, there is room for improvement. One-quarter of current teachers don't agree that evaluation has improved their teaching, and this group of teachers are especially likely to view the system as unfair and burdensome. Furthermore, over 5,000 new teachers experience the evaluation system for the first time, and evaluation serves as a key lever for providing them with feedback and support.

Using data from the annual Tennessee Educator Survey, we investigate ways that teacher preparation programs, districts, and schools are providing teachers with information and supports for evaluation and how these supports are associated with teacher perceptions of evaluation fairness and burden. Better understanding how teachers feel about the evaluation process and what supports they receive provides insight into next steps for research related to potential levers for improvement of Tennessee’s statewide educator evaluation system.

Teachers who say evaluation was embedded within their preparation programs and their student teaching are more likely to view evaluation as fair.

Teachers’ perceptions of evaluation are likely shaped long before they step into their own classroom. Even though evaluation is a given for all Tennessee teachers, the degree to which preparation programs discuss the components of evaluation varies across the state. About 70% of teachers say that TEAM or another state-approved observation system was significantly or moderately discussed within their teacher preparation program, 16% report only some cursory discussion, and 14% of teachers still say that observation systems were not discussed.

Perceptions of fairness are generally high (80% agree or strongly the process is fair), but perceptions do differ by reports of evaluation coverage during preparation. Ninety percent of teachers whose preparation covered evaluation at least moderately say evaluation is fair compared to 75% who say evaluation was not covered.

Note. Tennessee’s statewide teacher evaluations system consists of a combination of classroom observations and student achievement and growth data. Most survey questions asked about teachers’ perceptions about the evaluation system as a whole.
Having discussions about evaluation in educator preparation coursework isn’t the only way new teachers can learn about evaluation. They can also experience the system firsthand through their student teaching/clinical experience. Sixty percent of teachers report that they had significant exposure to the observation system during their student teaching, while 27% report being exposed but not in a substantial way, and 13% report not being exposed at all. Of those with significant exposure, nearly 90% agree that evaluation is fair.

This evidence suggests that coverage of evaluation in preparation coursework or via a clinical experience may be helpful to teacher understanding of the evaluation systems. However, it is possible that current perceptions of evaluation’s fairness may also be related to other factors related to quality of preparation.
Teachers who report receiving information and supports related to evaluation report that evaluation is less of a burden.

Like teacher preparation programs, districts and schools can also play an important role in preparing teachers for evaluation. Providing support throughout the evaluation process is one way schools and districts may reduce the burden of the evaluation process. Schools can support teachers’ participation in the evaluation process by providing access to resources such as:

- Information and communication
- Time (such as planning or release time to complete evaluation materials)
- Materials (such as guidelines to facilitate the process), and
- Access to staff with specific expertise (such as instructional coaches).

Most teachers report at least some support related to information and communication (82%), time (71%), materials (75%), and access to staff expertise (74%). Teachers who report receiving more support view the evaluation process as less burdensome compared to those teachers who receive less support. For example, teachers who report significant support around information and communication about evaluation report a moderate level of burden (rating of 3) while teachers who reported receiving a little or no support reported a high burden (rating close to 4).

![Chart showing the level of burden felt by teachers receiving different types of support.](chart.png)
Next Steps for Research References

Teacher perceptions of fairness and burden are closely related to their beliefs about the usefulness of the evaluation system. A larger body of research about performance management supports this same idea, that fairness or perceived fairness is key to utility of evaluation systems (Jawahar, 2007; Lau et al., 2008).

The trends reported in this brief suggest that increasing transparency and information about how evaluation works may improve perceptions of fairness and utility. Preparation programs can provide opportunities for teachers to learn about, discuss, and be evaluated based on a state approved observation program before they enter the profession. Schools can support teacher perceptions of evaluation by providing resources such as information, communication, time, materials, and access to staff with specific expertise.

Teacher evaluation in Tennessee has served as a critical lever for educator accountability and improvement. Future research should further investigate how embedding evaluation in educator preparation and providing adequate school and district supports improve teachers views of evaluation.

About This Series

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

In a series of survey snapshots, TERA will provide a broad look at responses and trends from the 2020 survey in several key areas relating to educators in Tennessee. Topics include job satisfaction, hiring patterns, growth and professional learning, educator evaluation, aspects of school support roles (assistant principals and instructional coaches), and more.

References
