Teacher Evaluation Report

Tennessee Department of Education | January 2026

TN Department of Education

Executive Summary

In the 2025 legislative session, the Tennessee General Assembly passed Chapter 325 of the Public Acts of 2025 (PC 325). PC 325 is reflective of the General Assembly's commitment to supporting teachers in Tennessee and ensuring that Tennessee schools are staffed with qualified and effective teachers. PC 325 requires the Tennessee Department of Education (department) to undertake several actions in addressing teacher evaluation:

- **Prepare a landscape analysis of teacher evaluation practices in Tennessee and in other states.** The landscape analysis was developed in consultation with the State Board of Education (State Board). Department staff shared initial findings from the landscape analysis and teacher evaluation advisory committee at the quarterly State Board workshop on November 21, 2025. An additional opportunity for consultation was provided prior to publication of the report.
- **Convene a teacher evaluation advisory committee.** The Chapter requires the advisory committee to be composed of experienced educators in this state and other experts to review and evaluate current teacher practices in the state. This report is organized around the requirements for the landscape analysis outlined in PC 325 and includes the following sections: The History of Teacher Evaluation in Tennessee, Tennessee's Current Practices, Other States' Teacher Evaluation Practices, Recommendations from the Teacher Evaluation Advisory Committee, and Final Thoughts from the department.

Key Findings

- Tennessee has undertaken significant changes in the field of teacher evaluation. These changes addressed state-specific challenges in student performance and teacher effectiveness, supporting overall accountability measures with schools and districts across the state.
- Teacher evaluation continues to play an important role in Tennessee's educational progress. Existing data and research analyzing teacher performance and experience, local determination of evaluation components and uses, and teacher environment in relation to teacher evaluation highlights both areas of strength and improvement in the current evaluation system. Education Preparation Provider (EPP) data and educator perspectives also provide information on the effectiveness of the state's teacher evaluation system.
- Many states align with emerging themes in teacher evaluation across the country, including Tennessee. However, the strategies for implementing these themes—particularly in terms of state-level involvement in setting evaluation expectations—are dependent on state and local context.
- Research suggests that current evaluation systems could benefit from revisions to the state and local models created at the peak of federal teacher evaluation initiatives. Revisions suggested by the research center around the components of teacher evaluation, professional development tied to teacher evaluation, and implementation and utility of teacher evaluation.
- The advisory committee convened for the purposes of this report affirms that the teacher evaluation in the state is a robust system that holds teachers accountable in their practices and is useful in providing teachers with feedback on potential improvements. Recommended revisions proposed by this committee support observation flexibility and the development of teacher evaluation resources,

including implementation guidance, observation rubrics based on educator role and experience, and growth score calculation guidance.

History of Teacher Evaluation Reforms in Tennessee

Teacher Evaluation: 1984-2010

Career Ladder Program

In 1984, the Comprehensive Education Reform Act (CERA) introduced the Career Ladder Program. Career Ladder was a voluntary program that rewarded teachers with higher pay, in part based on classroom observations. The program is broken down into three career ladder levels that yield different rewards based on each level's eligibility requirements, including teacher stipends and eligibility to move to higher levels. [1] Teachers were also eligible for extended summer contracts based on their career ladder level.

However, the program's implementation raised concerns about developing the teacher workforce: teacher performance was found not to be differentiated, rewarding almost all teachers regardless of performance. Additionally, teachers eligible for extended contracts lacked the background or experience for courses provided in the summer, neglecting to address gaps in the teacher workforce across schools and districts in the state. The Tennessee General Assembly ended the Career Ladder Program for all new teachers in 1997. Existing teachers who had already achieved Career Ladder status were allowed to continue receiving stipends.

Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth

In 1997, the Framework for Evaluation and Professional Growth (FEPG) was developed by the department as the state's teacher evaluation model and was approved by the State Board. Framework guidelines, developed by the State Board, detailed the evaluation process, including allowable data sources incorporated into teacher evaluation and required procedures LEAs must follow when developing local evaluations. FEPG was piloted from 1997 to 1999 in 50 schools across the state and was implemented statewide in July 2000.[2]

During the implementation of the framework, in 2007, state law was amended to require teachers with a professional license to be formally evaluated under FEPG once every five years. Early career teachers in their

[1] Teacher Compensation in TN; March 2009: OREA

[2] Recent Teacher Policy Changes in Tennessee: Teacher Evaluations; OREA; March 2012

first three years were required to be observed more on an annual basis as compared to teachers with a professional license, and teachers with a professional license were required to be observed at least twice during the year they are evaluated.

FEPG also recommended that all LEAs utilize the Comprehensive Assessment in their evaluation, which required teachers to complete specific documentation as part of their evaluation, including self-assessments, observation reflections, student growth and professional development information, and a future growth plan.[3] This assessment was required to be used in evaluation for early career teachers, but almost all districts used this assessment.[4]

In January 2010, the First to the Top Act created a new teacher evaluation system, which would eventually become the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM), currently in use today.[5]

Rationale for Teacher Evaluation Reforms in 2010

Since 2010, Tennessee has undertaken significant changes in the field of teacher evaluation. These changes addressed state-specific challenges in student performance and teacher effectiveness, which were then mirrored by other states across the national landscape. The purpose of these reforms was to enhance the quality of education by improving teacher performance, ensuring accountability, and fostering student achievement.

Several factors contributed to the demand for teacher evaluation reform in the state:

1. **Research Findings**: Growing evidence suggested that teacher effectiveness was the key in-school factor driving student success.[6] Research such as the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) Project emphasized the importance of systematic and comprehensive evaluation systems that went beyond traditional observation and included multiple measures of teacher effectiveness.
2. **Public Demands for Accountability**: Beginning in the early 2000s, emerging trends in education policy called for more stringent standards and accountability for schools and educators in the state. Tennessee faced scrutiny for underperforming schools, a significant achievement gap between different student populations, public transparency surrounding student proficiency, and low

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[3] Recent Teacher Policy Changes in Tennessee: Teacher Evaluations; OREA; March 2012

[4] Recent Teacher Policy Changes in Tennessee: Teacher Evaluations; OREA; March 2012

[5] For an in depth comparison of FEPG and TEAM please see Recent Teacher Policy Changes in Tennessee: Teacher Evaluations; OREA; March 2012

[6] Rivkin, S. G., Hanushek, E. A., & Kain, J. F. (2005). Teachers, schools, and academic achievement. *Econometrica*, *73*(2), 417-458.

graduation outcomes as compared to national averages.[7] Projects prioritizing high academic standards and graduation outcomes, paired with enacted legislation calling for education reform in the state, creating opportunities for student gains in the classroom.

3. **Disparities in Teacher Quality**: Tennessee, like many other states, experienced challenges related to the uneven distribution of high-quality teachers. This led policymakers to focus on teacher quality as a primary lever for improving student outcomes.

4. **Federal Incentives**: In 2010, Tennessee was awarded approximately $500 million in Race to the Top funds, which provided significant federal support for educational reforms, including the overhaul of teacher evaluations. This grant incentivized Tennessee to embrace more rigorous and transparent teacher evaluation practices.

Taken together, these factors led Tennessee policymakers to adopt a new teacher evaluation system in 2010. The First to the Top Act of 2010 was adopted with bipartisan support from the Tennessee General Assembly to support the state's subsequent federal Race to the Top grant, which funded the state's initiatives to improve student performance and teacher effectiveness. The Act made several changes to teacher evaluation in the state, including:

- **Creating a new teacher evaluation system in the state, the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM)**. Components and other details of the new system are outlined in the following sections.
- **Requiring annual evaluations of teachers and principals**. The results of these evaluations were also required to be a factor in employment decisions.
- **Creating a teacher evaluation advisory committee** (TEAC) to develop guidelines and criteria for the annual evaluations that would be adopted by the State Board. The legislation required the 15-person committee to have representation from K-12 public school teachers and principals in the state, parents of public school students, legislative members, and State Board and department leadership.
- **Allowing LEAs to create alternative salary schedules for educators.** Such schedules require approval from the state.
- **Removing limitations on the use of student proficiency data in teacher evaluations**. Prior to this legislation, this data could not be used for teacher evaluation until data from three complete academic years were obtained.

[7] Institute for a Competitive Workforce. (2007). Leaders and laggards: A state-by-state report card on educational effectiveness. https://www.uschamber.com/assets/archived/images/2007-_us-chamber-leaders-and-laggards.pdf.

Tennessee Teacher Evaluation Reforms in 2011

The first substantial reform to teacher evaluations in Tennessee came in 2011, when the state introduced a new evaluation framework based on state law, State Board rules and policies, and department guidance and frameworks. The new system, TEAM, sought to address previous concerns about the lack of rigorous, objective standards for teacher quality and the over-reliance on subjective assessments. Key components of the TEAM evaluation system included:

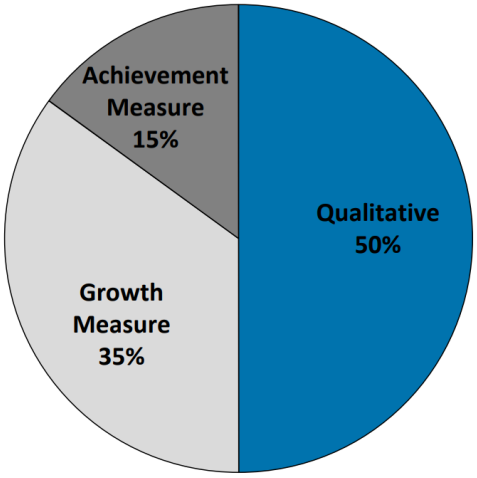
1. **Multiple Measures**: TEAM introduced multiple measures of teacher effectiveness, shifting away from an approach based on observations, educator self-reflection, and a review of educator professional development. These measures included:

    a. **Classroom Observations**: In the original TEAM model, 50-60 percent of a teacher's overall evaluation score was based on qualitative data, i.e., classroom observations. Teachers were observed by evaluators, such as principals or assistant principals, who had been trained by the department to use the TEAM observation rubric[8] to assess performance.
    b. **Student Growth**: A key feature of the system was the inclusion of student growth data, which accounted for 25-35 percent of a teacher's evaluation, depending on whether the teacher taught a tested grade or subject. For teachers of subjects with standardized tests, the growth in student test scores on the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) was used to evaluate effectiveness. Teachers in non-tested grades and subjects are selected from schoolwide TVAAS indicators.
    c. **Student Achievement**. The final 15 percent of the TEAM evaluation was based on other measures of student achievement. The State Board approved a matrix of options for teachers and principals, and teachers met with their evaluators to choose achievement measures for this portion of the evaluation.

[8] Districts may, in lieu of TEAM, use a different observation model that has been approved by the State Board. As of the 2025-26 school year, approved models as listed in the State Board's Educator Evaluation Policy 5.201 are: Teacher Instructional Growth for Effectiveness and Results (TIGER), Project COACH, Teacher Effectiveness Model (TEM), and Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). CLASS is available for pre-K only. Finally, state law allows charter school operators to submit observation models unique to their program for State Board approval. Those charter-specific models are also listed in Policy 5.201.

Figure 1

Components of Evaluation for Teachers in Tested Grades and subjects, 2013.



2. **Tiered Ratings**: The 2011 system introduced a five-tiered evaluation scale, ranging from "Significantly Below Expectations" to "Significantly Above Expectations." This "levels of effectiveness" (LOE) scale provided a more nuanced understanding of teacher performance.
3. **Professional Growth and Development**: The new system placed significant emphasis on the professional development of teachers. Evaluation outcomes were linked to opportunities for growth and support, ensuring that teachers receiving lower ratings could access targeted training and assistance.
4. **Teacher Accountability**: The 2011 reforms made teacher evaluation results an important factor in personnel decisions, such as tenure, promotions, and layoffs.[9] This aligned with broader trends in educational reform that sought to hold educators accountable for student performance.

The TEAM model represented a major shift in how teachers' performance was evaluated. The department, along with researchers at Vanderbilt University, closely examined evaluation results and teachers' and administrators' perspectives on the process for several years following initial implementation.[10] Based on that research, as well as input from policymakers and stakeholder groups, Tennessee made changes to refine its evaluation system.

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[9] Tenn. R. &. Regs. 0520-02-01-.02(7).

[10] Teacher Department of Education. (2012). Evaluation in Tennessee: A Report on Year 1 Implementation. https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/reports/rpt_teacher_evaluation_year_1.pdf

Figure 3

Tennessee Teacher Evaluation Timeline

Refinements to Tennessee's Teacher Evaluation System since 2011

Since 2011, the teacher evaluation system in Tennessee has continued to evolve. The Tennessee General Assembly, State Board, and department made several key modifications in response to emerging challenges, feedback from educators, and findings from research.

Student Growth Measures

The Tennessee General Assembly, State Board, and department have refined several topics related to the student growth measure portion of evaluation.

One type of refinement includes the addition of new methods for educators to earn individual growth scores. Historically, teachers in grades and subjects assessed by the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) suite of tests earned individual growth scores while other educators used schoolwide growth scores. The introduction of portfolio growth models for teachers in subjects including fine arts, physical education, world language, pre-K-K, and grades 1-2 expanded the number of teachers eligible to earn their own growth scores. State law requires districts to implement at least one alternative growth model for those grades and subjects.

In addition to portfolio models, in 2021, the Tennessee General Assembly approved the use of universal reading screener data for generating individual growth scores for educators in grades pre-K-2. Districts may opt into that flexibility, though, in 2025, passed legislation requires districts who offer a pre-K screener to allow teachers to use the screener as a growth measure.

A final change to the evaluation process allows increased district flexibility. Districts may opt in to the "4/5 trump rule," which means that an educator whose individual TVAAS score is a level 4 or 5 may use that score for his or her entire evaluation score, if doing so results in a higher overall level of effectiveness score. For example, if an educator's level of effectiveness score would have been a 3.5, but he or she earned a level 4 on TVAAS, he or she could use the level 4 TVAAS score as his or her entire LOE.[11]

[11] Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-302(d)(2)(B)(v).

Student Achievement Measures

Student achievement measures comprise 15-25 percent of educators' evaluation scores, depending on their grade and subject. The department, in collaboration with the State Board, continually monitors and makes recommendations to update the list of achievement measures from which educators may select. The list is included as an appendix in the State Board's Educator Evaluation Policy 5.201.

Since 2011, the department and State Board have clarified rules and policies around the selection of the achievement measure; for example, providing guidance for educators who work in more than one classroom or building. In addition, educators may choose to apply their TVAAS score of level 3, 4, or 5 in lieu of a separate achievement measure score, if doing so leads to a higher overall evaluation score.[12] Finally, the rules shifted to favor the educator's selection of achievement measure over the evaluator's, in the instance that they disagreed about the measure to select. The chosen measure must still be aligned as closely as possible to the teaching and duty assignments of educators, and the department will verify alignment when requested.

Changes and Alternatives to the TEAM Observation Rubric

The third component of teacher evaluation, qualitative observation, has also experienced updates. The original rubric was based on work by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) and aligned with the research-based Danielson Framework for Teaching. The rubric includes domains related to:

- Designing and Planning Instruction,
- Learning Environment,
- Instruction, and
- Professionalism.

There are several observation indicators included under each domain. For example, in the Designing and Planning Instruction domain, evaluators look for evidence related to instructional plans, student work assignments, and the design of student assessments.[13]

The department has made several updates to the rubric used for most classroom teachers. These updates include adding the use of high-quality instructional materials, when available, to multiple domains of the educator rubric.

In addition, the department has developed several resources including rubrics, guidance, and a video library that are specific to educator roles outside the general education classroom. Those roles include library media specialists, school services personnel (like school counselors or school social workers), special

[12] Tenn. R. & Regs. 0520-02-01-.03(2)(c); Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-302(d)(2)(B)(iv).

[13] Rubrics are available on the TEAM website: https://team-tn.org/teacher-evaluation-2-2/.

educators, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) educators, among others. These resources support evaluators in understanding what strong instruction in those settings looks like and in providing educators with relevant and accurate feedback.

Finally, the state has updated the recommended observation cadence for novice and experienced educators. Educators who earned a level 5 LOE in the previous year have fewer observations than those who scored a level 1-4 LOE. These changes help evaluators streamline their work and focus attention on newer educators or those in need of additional support, while still providing opportunities for advanced educators to receive regular feedback and hone their craft.

Adaptations for Years with Testing Anomalies

Tennessee has experienced several years in which teacher evaluation was modified due to unexpected circumstances. In 2015-16, 2016-17, and 2017-18, there were challenges related to online test administration and scoring procedures. In 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22, there were disruptions to the school year due to the COVID pandemic.

To mitigate challenges due to disruptions with test administrations, the Tennessee General Assembly acted to ensure educators were held harmless from circumstances outside their control.[14] Depending on the type of challenge experienced, options included nullifying evaluation scores overall or not counting student growth measures from a specific school year. However, if the discounted scores or evaluations had helped the educator, they would have been used; for example, if the educator had earned a higher score, that would have supported his or her attainment of tenure.

Finally, Chapter 1096 of the Public Acts of 2022 amended Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-302(d)(2)(B) by adding a new subdivision to the law allowing a tested teacher's LOE score to be comprised of 15 percent student achievement data and 85 percent observation score if the teacher does not have access to individual growth data due to changes in academic standards or assessment design requiring standards validation or standards setting in the teacher's current evaluation year.

Other Changes Related to Evaluation

Laws related to evaluation have adapted over the years to give teachers more options for indicating when a student has not been in their classroom for a full calendar year, including the 150-day rule, which determines that the student is included in the teacher's TVAAS scores if he or she has been present for 150 or more days in a traditional school schedule. This change helps make the evaluation process fair for teachers in that they are held accountable for students whom they taught the majority of the school year.

[14] Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-302(d)(2)(E) through (H).

Additionally, teachers who are employed under contracts of 120 days per school year or fewer or who are not employed full-time receive a partial year exemption (PYE), and these teachers do not receive an evaluation score for that school year. Teachers who would otherwise receive evaluation scores for a school year are eligible for PYE if they were unable to provide 120 days of instruction to students, such as those on extended leave, transferring to different schools, or moving into roles that affect their ability to provide instruction. For the following school year, the number of required observations for these educators is then determined by their performance level in the school year immediately preceding the year in which they received the PYE, ensuring continued accountability following reported challenges faced by some teachers.

Positive Outcomes for Teachers and Students

Despite the changes described in this section, the TEAM evaluation model in effect in the 2025-26 school year maintains important similarities with the original 2011 reforms, including the use of multiple measures and the emphasis on student growth and achievement. A ten-year retrospective study by the Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA) at Vanderbilt University found four positive outcomes of Tennessee's implementation of teacher evaluation reform. According to TERA:

1. *Student achievement improved more after Tennessee's evaluation reform than we would have expected otherwise.*
2. *Teacher retention decisions became more selective with respect to teacher performance following evaluation reform.*
3. *The rate of teachers' year-over-year improvement increased following evaluation reform.*
4. *Tennessee's teachers increasingly perceive the evaluation system to be leading to improvements in their practice and students' achievement.*[15]

These findings suggest that the adaptations described in this section have helped keep the model relevant as educational needs and practices have advanced over time.

Tennessee Teacher Evaluation Today

Teacher evaluation continues to play an important role in Tennessee's educational progress. Beyond providing opportunities for feedback for individual educators, it is also incorporated into strategic compensation, tenure decisions, and educator preparation accountability.

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[15] Guthrie, J.E., Hernandez, M., and J.A. Grissom. (2021.) Teacher Evaluation in Tennessee: What We Have Learned from a Decade of Research. *Tennessee Education Research Alliance.* https://cdn.vanderbilt.edu/vu-sub/wp-content/uploads/sites/280/2023/07/Teacher_Evaluation_Synthesis_FINAL.pdf.

Teacher evaluation is regulated by State Board Rule 0520-02-01 and Policy 5.201. The department also provides extensive guidance, rubrics, training resources, and more on its TEAM-TN website.

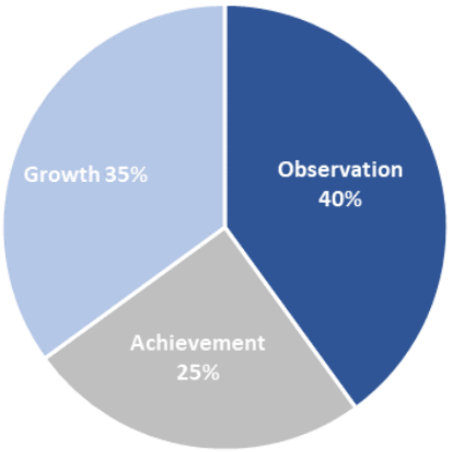
TEAM Model Components

In the 2024-25 school year, the components of TEAM varied based on educators' roles. The components that make up the TEAM model are observation, achievement, and growth. The weights of these components are represented in Figure 4 below, and the data that comprises the components is described in further detail in the following subsections.[16]

Tested grades and subjects include grades/subjects with a TCAP or end-of-course test, teachers implementing student growth portfolios, and teachers implementing SBE-approved universal reading screeners for growth measures. For non-tested teachers, Chapter 158 of the Public Acts of 2015 (codified at Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-302) increased the observation component weighting from 60 percent to 70 percent and reduced the growth measure weighting from 25 percent to 15 percent. For teachers with individual growth measures, Chapter 991 of the Public Acts of 2022, codified at Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-302(d)(2)(B), decreased the observation score weighting from 50 percent to 40 percent and increased the achievement score weighting from 15 percent to 25 percent.

Figure 4

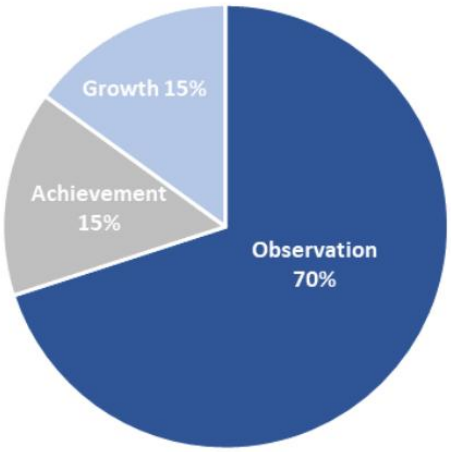
Components of Evaluation for Teachers in Tested Grades and Subjects, 2025



[16] https://team-tn.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/2024-25-Evaluation-Composite-Weighting.pdf

Figure 5

Components of Evaluation for Teachers in Non-Tested Grades and Subjects, 2025.



Observation Cadence

To ensure teachers receive regular feedback on their instructional practices, with teachers who have less experience or lower evaluation scores receiving the most support, the State Board approved a cadence for observations that is included in Policy 5.201. The pacing guide in Figure 6 applies to teachers, school services personnel, and library media specialists.

Figure 6

Observation Requirements by Licensure Status

Licensure Status	Individual Growth or LOE Score[17]	Minimum Required Observations	Minimum Required Observations per Domain	Minimum Number of Minutes per School Year
Practitioner	Levels 1-4	All domains observed, with a minimum of three domains observed in each semester and a minimum of three formal observations.	3 Instruction 2 Planning 2 Environment	90 minutes
Practitioner	Level 5	One formal observation covering all domains first	1 Instruction 1 Planning	60 minutes

[17] LEAs may elect to base pacing on a teacher's previous year individual growth or on level of overall effectiveness, pursuant to local policy.

Licensure Status	Individual Growth or LOE Score[17]	Minimum Required Observations	Minimum Required Observations per Domain	Minimum Number of Minutes per School Year
		semester; two walk-throughs second semester	1 Environment	
Professional	Level 1	All domains observed, with a minimum of three domains observed in each semester and a minimum of three formal observations.	3 Instruction 2 Planning 2 Environment	90 minutes
Professional	Levels 2-4	All domains observed, with a minimum of two domains observed in each semester and a minimum of two formal observations.	2 Instruction 1 Planning 1 Environment	60 minutes
Professional	Level 5	One formal observation covering all domains first semester; two walk-throughs second semester	1 Instruction 1 Planning 1 Environment	60 minutes

Policy 5.201 includes additional details about observation pacing, including the ability to observe more than one domain per observation, how to pace observations for educators who received a partial-year exemption the previous year, and observation timing for school administrators.

Further, State Board Rule 0520-02-01-.03 requires that half of all observations be unannounced, except for school services personnel. The rule also requires evaluators to provide written feedback and hold a post-conference within one week of conducting the observation.

Principals and assistant principals conduct most observations. Principals are more likely to conduct scored observations, and assistant principals are more likely to conduct walkthrough observations.

Observation Outcomes

Although average scores across all domains within the TEAM rubric for qualitative observations have improved, teachers, on average, score the highest in *environment* and the lowest in *instruction*. Throughout this section, data analysis will prioritize the two lowest-scoring domains, as shown in Figure 7 below: planning and instruction.

Figure 7

2024 Average Scores for the General Educator Rubric

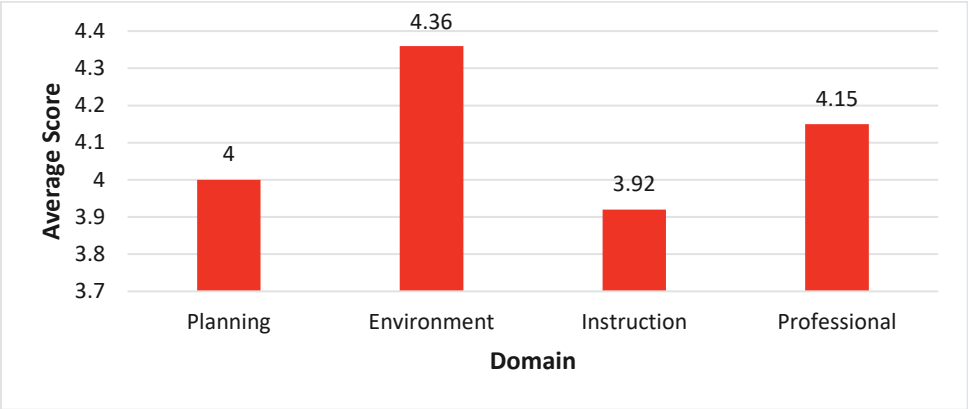
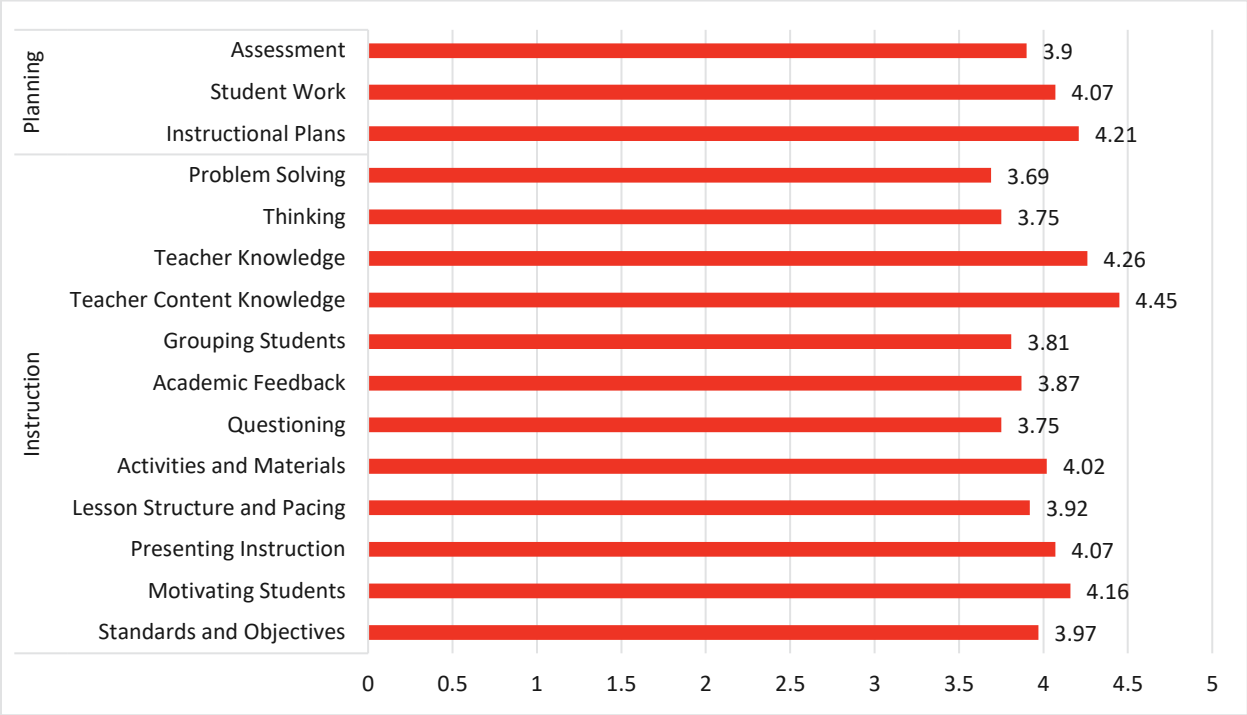


Figure 8 breaks down the 2024 average scores by indicator within the *instruction* and *planning* domains. Among the instruction domain, teacher content knowledge and teacher knowledge indicators present the highest average score, and problem solving, thinking, and questioning present the lowest average scores. Similarly, in the planning domain, the instructional plans indicator presents the highest average score, and assessment presents the lowest average score.

The higher average scores across both domains are related to the preparatory pieces of student-teacher interactions, particularly those that can be built outside of the classroom setting, whereas areas of improvement are associated with more responsive, engaging teacher practices that are observed either during instruction or post-evaluation of instruction.

Figure 8

Average Score by Indicator, 2024 General Educator Rubric [18]



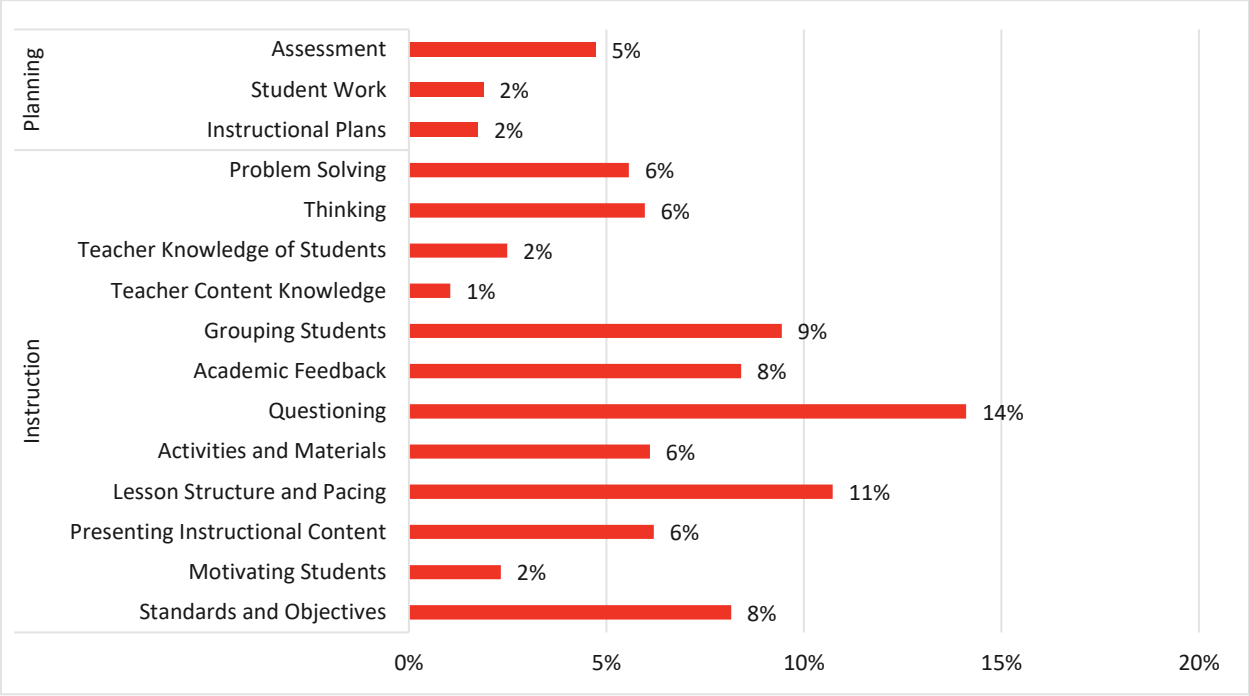
As a part of the evaluation process, teachers receive one area of reinforcement and one area of refinement as part of their required feedback, and despite the previously mentioned findings, most identified reinforcement and refinement areas are within the instruction domain. Figures 9 and 10 present the reporting percentages for identified areas of refinement and reinforcement within the instruction domain. As shown in Figure 9, questioning, lesson structure and pacing, and grouping students are the most selected areas of refinement, signaling a need for improvement in instruction execution.

These areas indicate a potential misalignment between the lowest average observation scores (problem solving, thinking, and questioning) and the indicators chosen for refinement (questioning, lesson structure and pacing, and grouping students), and therefore the feedback educators are receiving, as only one of the three low-scoring indicators is a commonly selected area of refinement.

[18] Please see Appendix A for the average score of each indicator across all domains included in the General Educator Rubric.

Figure 9

Areas of Refinement, 2024

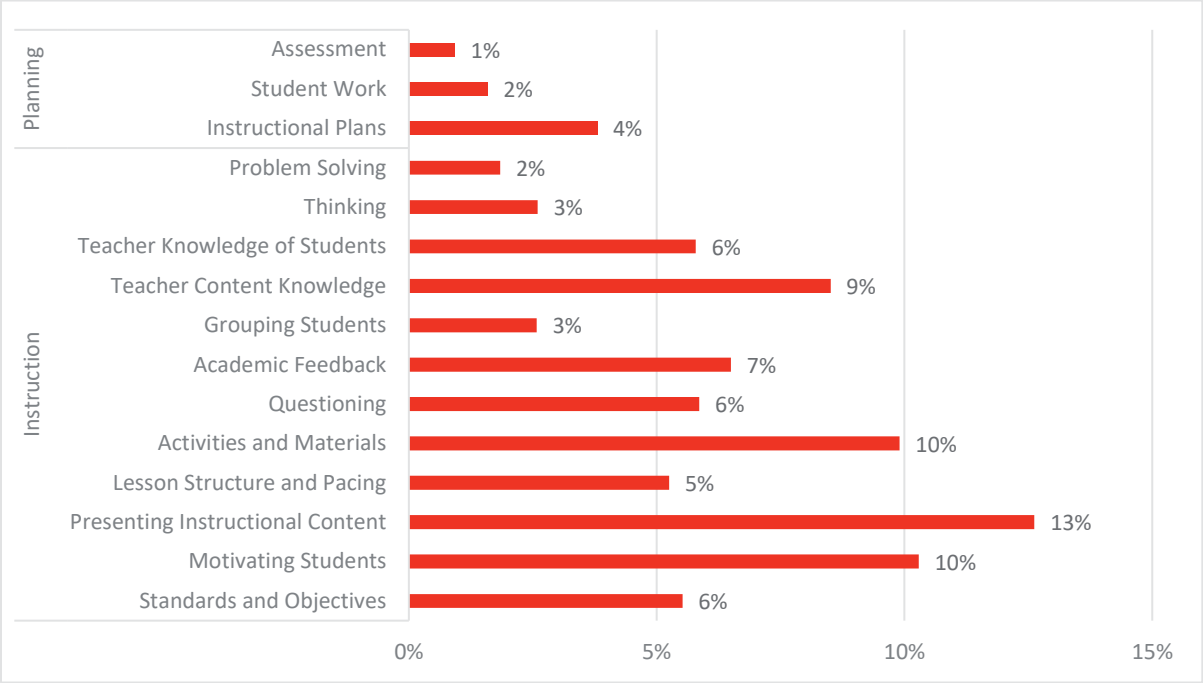


Note: The Environment and Professionalism domains are not included in Figure 9. Thus, the totals do not represent all evaluation feedback but the vast majority of responses.

In terms of areas of strength, Figure 10 shows that presenting instructional content, motivating students, and activities and materials are the most commonly selected areas of reinforcement. This data aligns more closely with the 2024 average observation scores across indicators, where areas of reinforcement tend to be more closely related to teacher real-time instruction, and lower reported areas of reinforcement are related to student-teacher interactions following instruction.

Figure 10

Areas of Reinforcement Responses, 2024



Note: The Environment and Professionalism domains are not included in Figure 10. Thus, the totals do not represent all evaluation feedback but the vast majority of responses.

Alternative Observation Models

TEAM utilizes a system-specific observation model to compile qualitative data calculated into teachers' final evaluation scores. While this model, termed as the TEAM observation model, is the state's primary observation model, there are several additional models that the State Board has approved for use both statewide and in specific charter schools.

Of the approved statewide teacher observation models, TEAM is used by almost 85 percent of school districts. Figure 11 identifies which models districts used in the 2024-25 school year. Eighteen districts have changed models at least once, with some districts changing models more than once, since 2012.

Figure 11

Teacher Observation Model Distribution, 2024

Teacher Observation Model	# Districts Currently Using	PERCENT () Of Districts	Districts
The Teacher Instructional Growth for Effectiveness and Results (TIGER)	12	8%	Alcoa, Maryville, Alamo, Trenton, Bradford, Greeneville, Lexington, Paris, Knox, Lenoir City, Trousdale, Lebanon
Project COACH	11	8%	Anderson, Blount, Bradley, Franklin, Giles, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lawrence, Rhea, Tullahoma, Warren
Teacher Effectiveness Model (TEM)	1	1%	Memphis-Shelby County Schools
Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM)	124	84%	All other districts

Average observation scores for each observation model, excluding COACH, are somewhat similar. However, teachers evaluated under TEAM and TIGER have the lowest standard deviation, indicating more consistent evaluation scores across teachers within each model. This finding suggests that these models are more likely to produce more reliable and accurate results for teacher effectiveness via observation, as compared to other models.

Figure 12

Teacher Observation Model Average Metrics, 2024

Teacher Observation Model	Average Observation Score
TIGER (n=36,089)	4.10 (0.51)
Project COACH (n=59,894)	3.79 (0.81)

Teacher Observation Model	Average Observation Score
TEM (n=75,465)	4.12 (0.65)
TEAM (n=586,434)	4.07 (0.56)

Note: It is important to note that observation is just one component of overall teacher evaluation scores, which are calculated within the same evaluation system, TEAM.

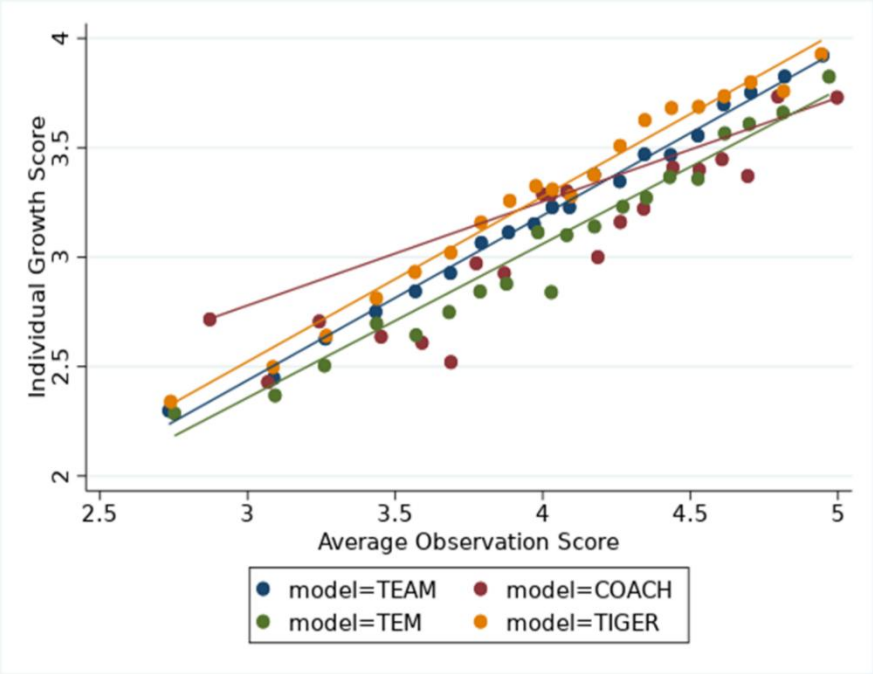
Individual Growth Measures

Growth refers to: an individual educator's TVAAS score for teachers in a tested grade or subject, who are implementing portfolio models, or who are implementing State Board-approved URS as a growth measure, or to schoolwide TVAAS for teachers in non-tested grades and subjects and school administrators.

Across all teacher observation models, observation scores have a somewhat strong correlation with individual growth scores. This finding carries important implications. First, it indicates that alternative observation models yield similar results to the state's primary observation model, supporting the models' validity in accurately measuring teacher effectiveness. Second, teachers with higher observation scores are likely to have higher individual growth scores, which demonstrates that observation scores are a useful measure in predicting student growth.

Figure 13

Average Observation Scores and Individual Growth Scores Across Observation Models



Correlation Coefficients:

TEAM = 0.30

COACH = 0.28

TEM = 0.31

TIGER = 0.28

Other Growth Measures

After an increase following the 2016 Pre-K Quality Act that required the use of portfolio growth models (PGM) for districts that received Voluntary Pre-K grants, PGMs have become less commonly used. The most commonly used PGM as of the 2023-24 school year are the pre-K and Kindergarten PGM, though districts now have additional options to meet the requirements in law. Art, music, and PE combine to form the next most common category of PGM in use today.

Figure 14

Portfolio Growth Models (PGM) Distribution

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021	2022	2023	2024
Number of Districts Using at Least One PGM	23	26	138	137	50	139	128	124
Number of Teachers Evaluated Using PGM	1,833	2,112	5,254	6,018	1,243	4,301	3,488	2,644
Percent of Teachers Evaluated Using PGM	3%	3%	8%	8%	2%	6%	5%	4%
Teachers' Average Score on PGM	3.68	3.99	3.87	4.62	4.81	4.56	4.55	4.64

Teachers who do not have an individual growth score select a school- or district-wide growth measure that comprises the growth portion of their evaluation. Educators have flexibility on which growth measure to

select. In the 2023-24 school year, the most commonly selected growth measures were general TCAP composite measures, meaning they include grades 4 through 12 in the state assessments, and grades 3-12 for districts who participate in the optional second grade TCAP assessment for the current and previous school years. These have consistently been the most common growth measures since Tennessee implemented the TEAM model.

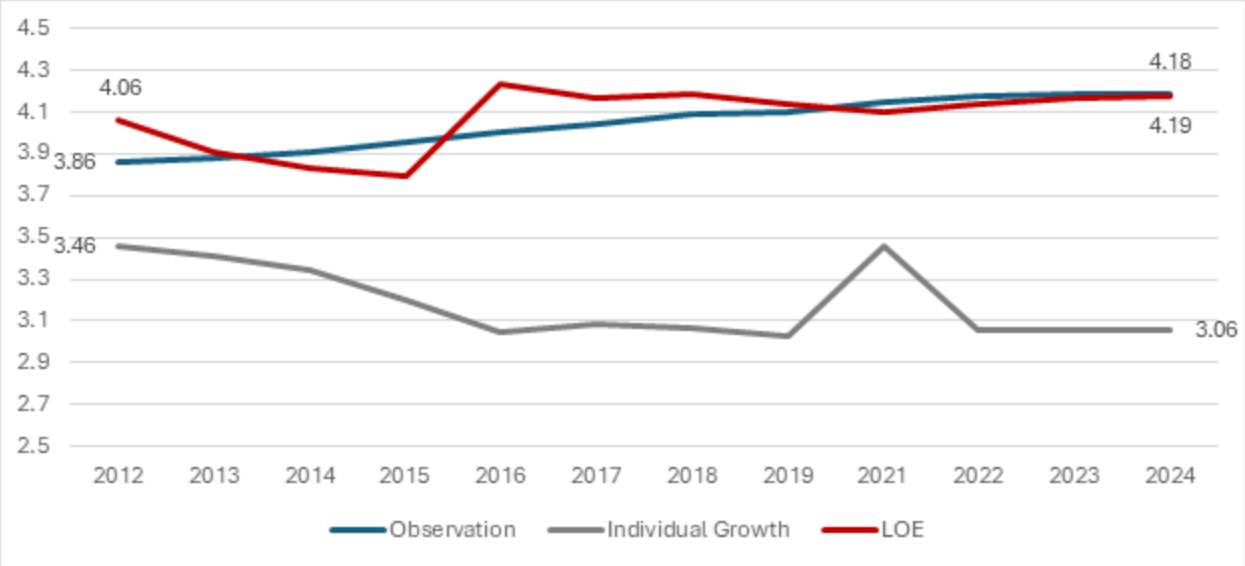
Achievement Measures

Achievement refers to the measure of student achievement selected by the educator in consultation with their evaluator. Approved options are listed in State Board Policy 5.201. Measures focused on individual educators' classroom-level tests have become more common, indicating that teachers are seeking measures that reflect student performance and are based on more locally- or classroom-utilized assessments. This trend holds true across rural, town, suburban, and city schools, though the trend is more pronounced for teachers in rural and town schools.

Evaluation Score Distributions

In 2024, over three-quarters of teachers statewide received an LOE score of 4 or 5. Statewide individual growth scores are more evenly distributed, with only 39 percent of teachers receiving a 4 or 5 on the metric. Over time, observation and LOE scores have increased, and individual growth scores have varied but generally decreased. Figure 15 demonstrates the gap between the more subjective, higher-scoring metrics and the objective, lower-scoring metric.

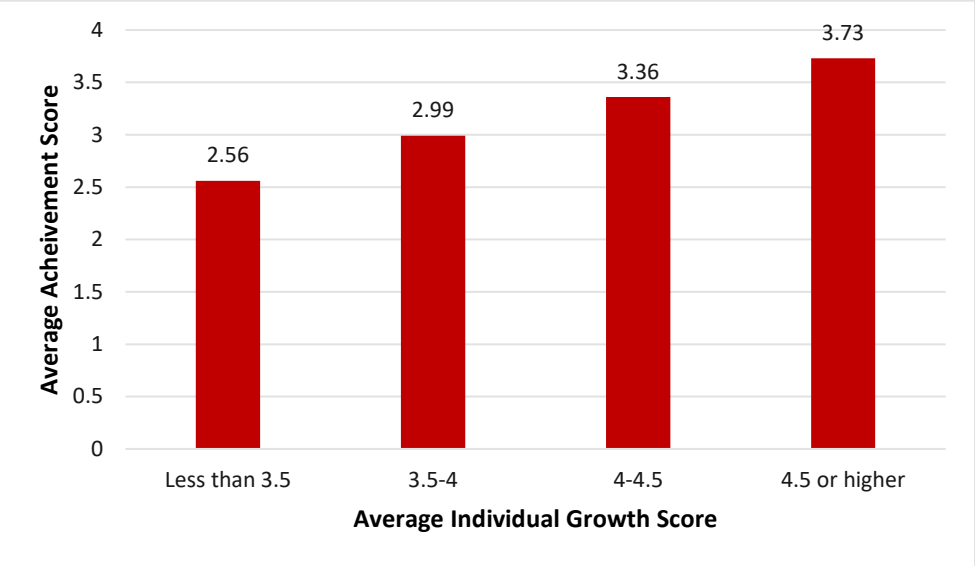
Figure 15
Average Scores by Metric, 2012-2024



Teachers with the highest observation scores have the highest individual growth score on average. Additionally, most teachers' LOE and individual growth scores remain consistent each year.

Figure 16

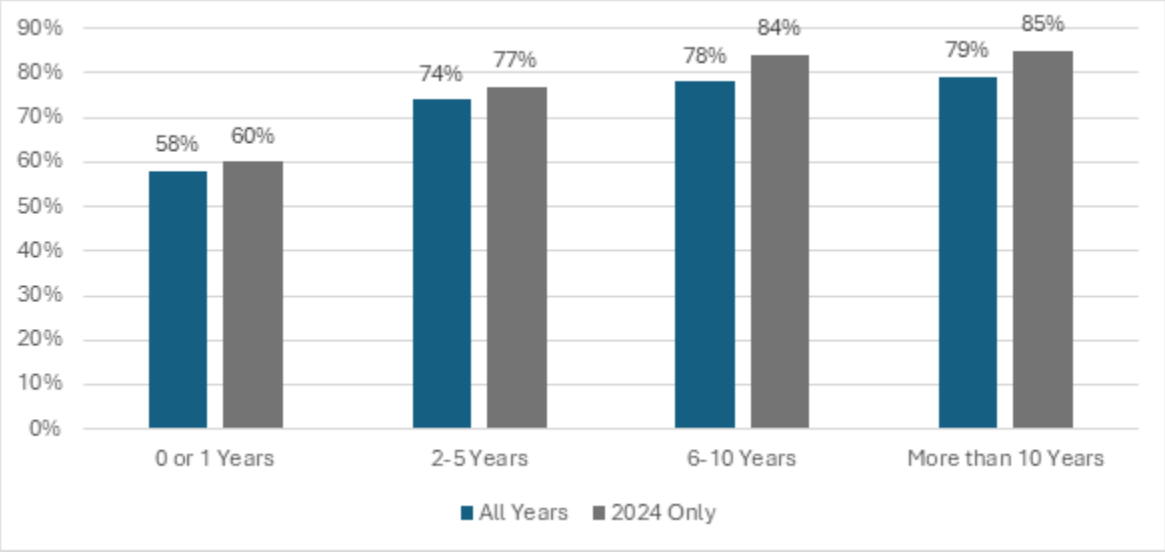
Growth and Achievement Scores by Observation Score



Lastly, teachers with more than five years of experience are more likely to receive a 4 or 5 on the LOE metric than teachers with less experience.

Figure 17

Percentage of Teacher with 4 or 5 LOE by Years of Experience



Teacher Evaluation, Tenure, and Compensation

Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-5-503 lays out the requirements for teachers to earn tenure in Tennessee. In addition to requirements related to preparation, licensure, and years of experience, the law establishes that teachers must earn a level of overall effectiveness (LOE) score of "above expectations" (level four) or "significantly above expectations" (level five) during the last two years of their five-year probationary period.[19] This expectation ensures that teachers who earn tenure are consistently providing students with high-quality instructional opportunities.

Furthermore, State Board 0520-02-01(7) states that: "evaluation scores shall be a factor in employment decisions, including, but not limited to, promotion, retention, termination, compensation, and the attainment of tenure status; however, nothing shall require an LEA to use student achievement data based on state assessments as the sole factor in employment decisions." As such, teacher evaluation can play a role in teacher compensation.

Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-3-306(h), LEAs must implement differentiated pay plans to "aid in staffing hard to staff subject areas and schools and in hiring and retaining highly qualified teachers." State Board Policy 5.600 further defines this law and requires LEAs to submit these plans to the department for approval annually. The State Board policy allows LEAs to choose at least one of three criteria for differentiated pay plans: teaching in hard-to-staff subjects or schools, taking on additional instructional roles or responsibilities, or performance, including LOE and other accountability data. If LEAs include a performance metric, they may differentiate pay by providing stipends, increasing teachers' base pay, or a combination of those tools. LEAs have discretion on which LOE scores earn performance bonuses.

In the 2024-25 school year, 38 LEAs used the performance component of their differentiated pay plan. Of those LEAs, 23 use LOEs as a criterion for receiving a bonus, and 6 of the 23 have an approved alternative salary schedule that uses LOE as a criterion for advancing on the pay scale. Other performance measures include individual growth scores or schoolwide growth scores.

Evaluation and Educator Preparation Accountability

Tennessee is home to 45 State Board-approved educator preparation providers (EPPs). There are several types of EPPs, including public and private universities, alternative certification providers like Teach for America, and school district-run EPPs. Pursuant to Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-5-108(f), the State Board produces an annual Educator Preparation Report Card (EPRC) that assesses the effectiveness of EPPs.

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[19] The law includes exemptions for specific scenarios; for example, if a teacher did not earn an official evaluation score in one of the last two years due to approved extended leave, transferring to another school or position, the availability of TCAP data, or a successful local-level evaluation grievance. In these circumstances, teachers may use their two *most recent* LOE scores rather than their scores from the *last two years.*

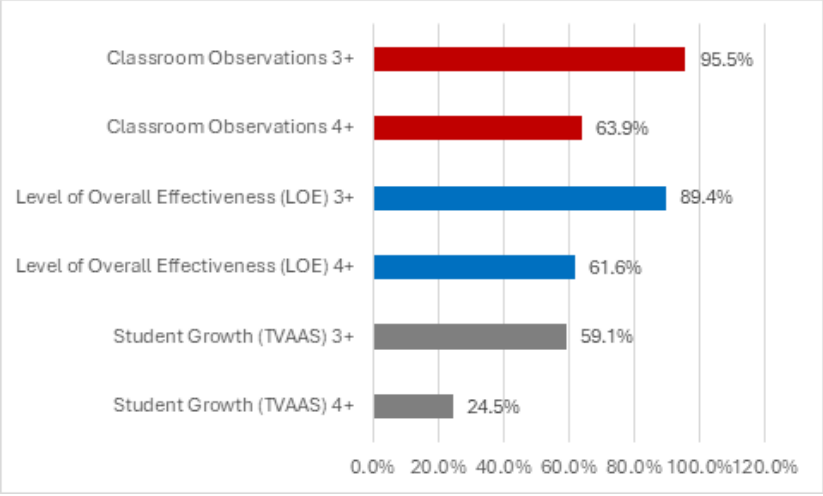
State law requires the EPRC to include teacher effect data (i.e., TVAAS), and the State Board also includes a scored metric related to teacher observation and an unscored, informational metric on teacher LOE. All metrics include data on teachers prepared by each EPP in their first three years in the classroom, when the impact of EPP programming is likely to have the strongest influence on new teachers.

The EPRC identifies EPPs as not meeting, meeting, or exceeding expectations across all metrics. In terms of evaluation-related metrics, about 96 percent of new teachers earned at least a level 3, "meeting expectations," on classroom observations. Similarly, about 89 percent of those same teachers earned at least three as their overall level of effectiveness. The EPRC also identifies the percentage of teachers in their first three years who earn at least a 4, "above expectations," on each of those three metrics. That percentage is lower both statewide and across EPPs, which is perhaps unsurprising given that new teachers often experience challenges that they learn to navigate as they gain more experience. Still, over 60 percent of new teachers statewide earn at least a 4 on both their observation and LOE scores.

An average of 59 percent of EPP-trained teachers in the state received at least a 3 on student growth in 2024. More variation exists among the percentage of EPP candidates receiving a three or higher on their student growth scores, ranging from approximately 25 percent to 94 percent across state EPPs. There is also a substantial drop-off regarding growth scores, with less than one in four new teachers earning at least a 4 on their growth score. Appendix B shows EPPs and the percentage of EPP candidates earning a 3 or 4 across these evaluation metrics.

Figure 18

Percent of TN-EPP Trained Teachers Earning Each Evaluation Score in their First Three Years, 2024[20]



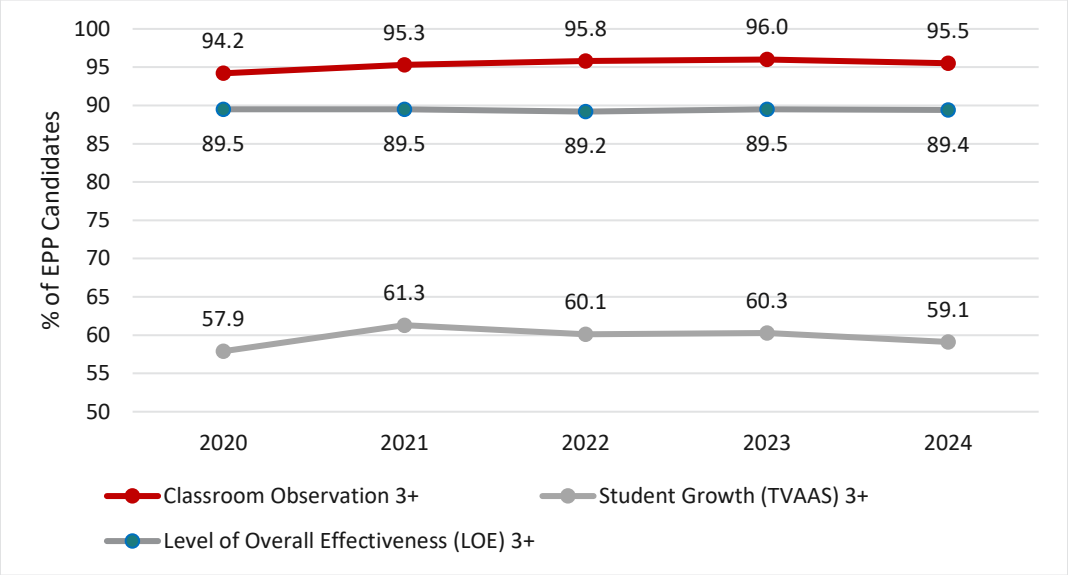
Statewide performance across the three measures has remained somewhat consistent over the past five years. Although classroom observations and level of overall effectiveness calculations have remained

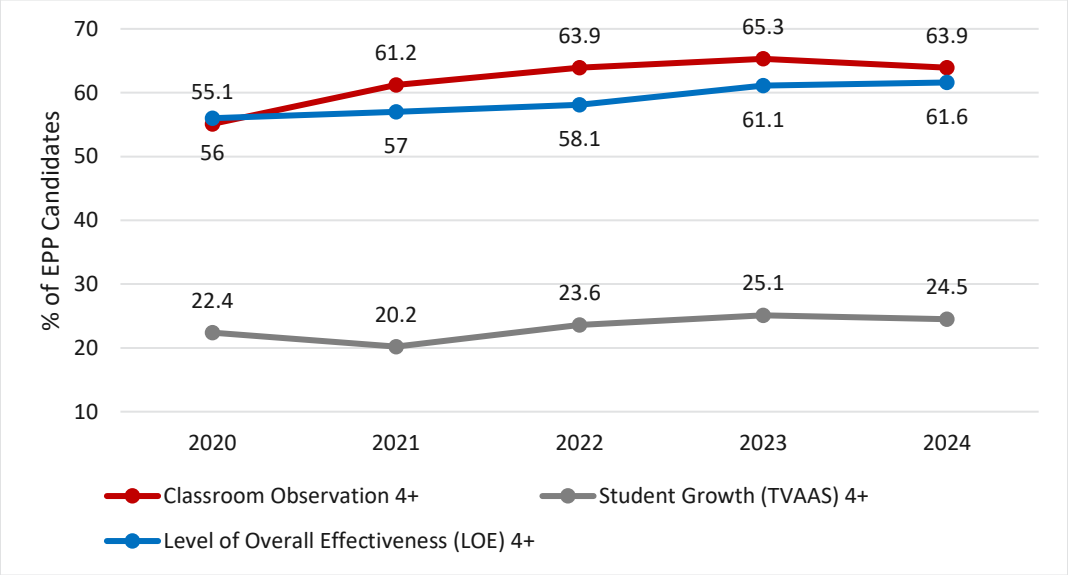
[20] EPPs with available data for each evaluation metric were included in this data analysis.

relatively high, student growth is consistently low in comparison, particularly for the percentage of EPP candidates receiving at least a four across these measures.

Figures 19-20

Statewide EPP Scoring, 2020-2024





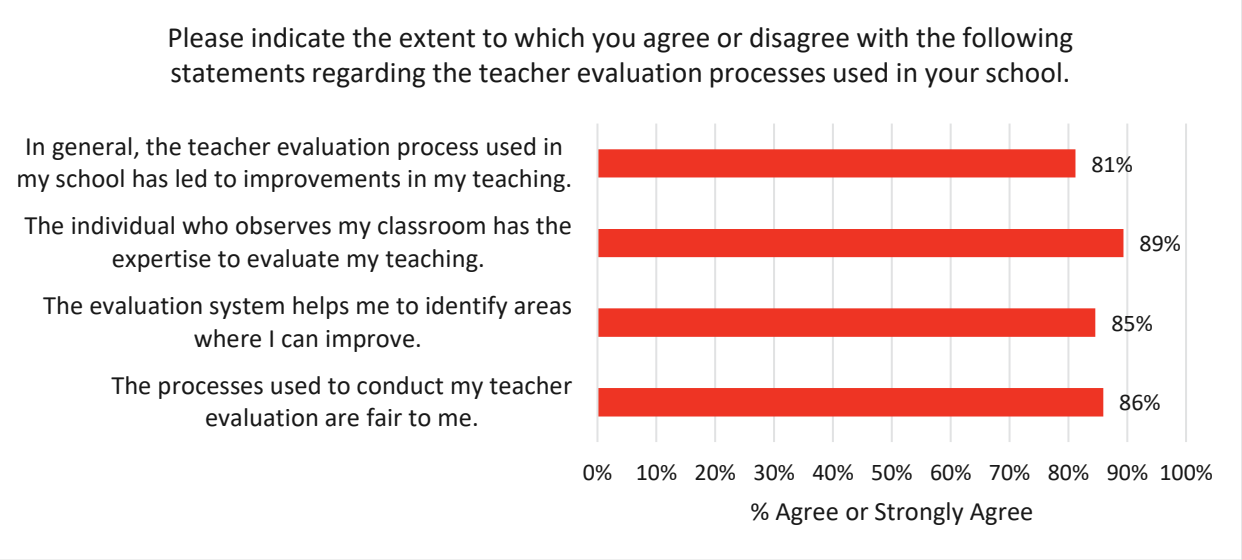
Educator Perspectives

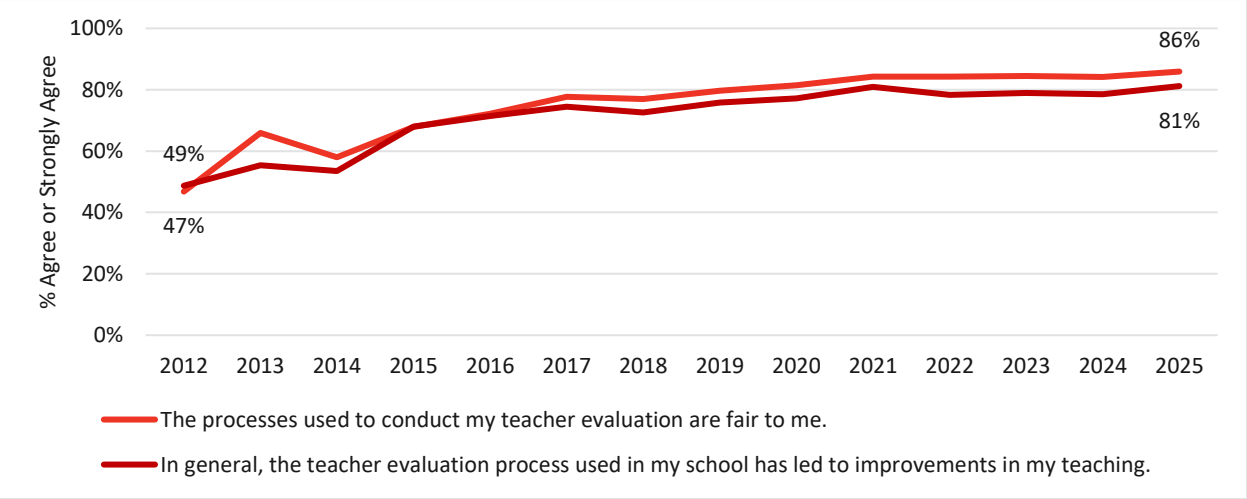
Overall, teachers report positive perceptions of teacher evaluation, particularly regarding improvements in teaching, observer expertise in teacher evaluation, and evaluation fairness. Additionally, since 2012, more

teachers continue to report that the teacher evaluation process is fair and leads to improvements in teaching.

Figures 21-22

Teacher Perceptions of the Teacher Evaluation Process

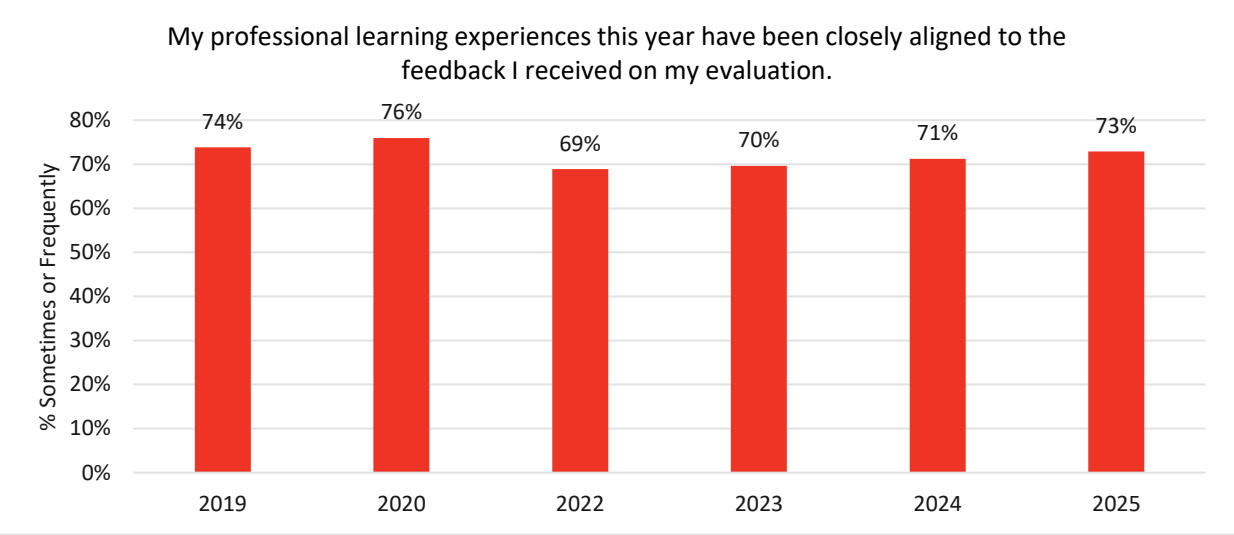




Though it is still an area of improvement, teacher perception on professional training alignment with evaluation feedback has increased since 2022, denoting increased coherence in the evaluation process. Teachers were most likely to report participating in professional development in the 2024-25 school year focusing on analyzing and interpreting student data, content-specific instruction, and general instructional strategies and practices, areas connected to the assessed areas of teacher evaluation.

Figure 23

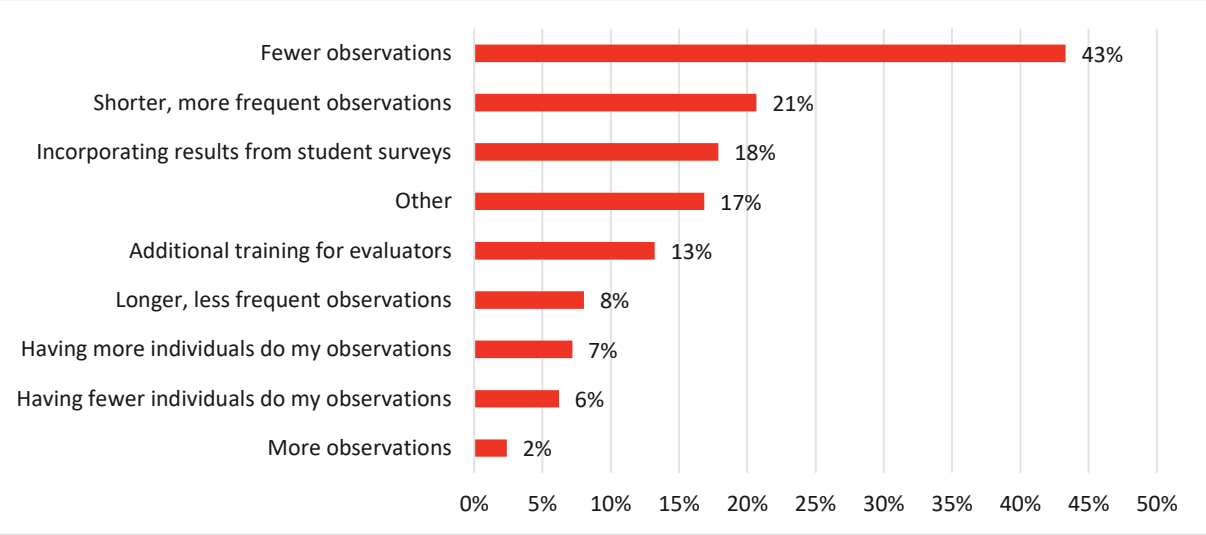
Teacher Perceptions, Professional Learning and Teacher Evaluation Feedback



Decreasing the number of observations, as reported by nearly half of the surveyed teachers, is a suggested change to the current teacher evaluation process. Additionally, less than 10 percent of teachers who plan not to teach the next school year cite teacher observation and evaluation practices as the reason for not returning.

Figure 24

Teacher Recommendations for the Teacher Evaluation Process



Other States' Teacher Evaluation Practices

Throughout the 2000s, particularly following the introduction of a "highly qualified teacher" in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) and the infusion of federal dollars supporting education reform from Race to the Top (RTTT), states developed responses to the federal requirements and incentives for effective teacher evaluation systems that aimed to support increased student achievement.21 However, in December 2015, the reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provided flexibility in states' approaches to teacher evaluation to best meet the unique needs of each state.[22] As in many areas where flexibility is allowed in federal law, Tennessee leverages those flexibilities to address state and local level contexts. Most states align with emerging themes identified in this section, but the strategies for implementing these themes–particularly in terms of state-level involvement in setting evaluation expectations vary. This section will analyze the similarities and differences between states with an emphasis on Tennessee's teacher evaluation system.

Current State Practices

Development of State and Local Teacher Evaluation Systems

Currently, most states require that school districts develop teacher evaluation systems individual to each district, provided that certain expectations set at the state level are met within these systems.[23] Some states require that districts use a state-developed evaluation system with fidelity, but states have slowly moved to allow more local flexibility, such as allowing districts to either use a state-developed evaluation system or develop their own, with varying requirements for alignment with the state system. Examples of states that have policies designed to strike a balance between state and local control include:

- **Florida** requires that districts develop teacher evaluation systems for local use but provides explicit requirements that each evaluation system must meet. All district evaluation systems are submitted to the department for approval, and the department lists all approved systems on its website.[24]

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[21] Remer, C. W. (2017, October). *ESSA educator policies: The Every Student Succeeds Act*. The Hunt Institute. https://www.hunt-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/ESSA-Educator-Policies-The-Every-Student-Succeeds-Act.pdf

[22] Paige, M., Beardsley, A. A., Close, K. (2021, July). *Tennessee's national impact on teacher evaluation law & policy: An assessment of value-added model litigation*. *Tennessee Journal of Law and Policy*, *13*(2), Article 3. https://doi.org/10.70658/1940-4131.1007

[23] National Council on Teacher Quality. (2022). *State of the states 2022: Teacher and principal evaluation policies*. National Council on Teacher Quality. https://www.nctq.org/publications/State-of-the-States-2022:-Teacher-and-Principal-Evaluation-Policies

[24] Florida Department of Education. (n.d.). *Performance evaluation*. https://www.fldoe.org/teaching/performance-evaluation/

- **Alabama** allows school districts to use locally adopted evaluation systems in place of the state system, but districts are required to incorporate the Alabama Teacher Observation Tool (ATOT), which collects and reports relevant evaluation data to the state department of education.[25]
- **Louisiana,** after piloting in select districts in the 2024-2025 school year, will implement a statewide evaluation system, Louisiana Educator Advancement and Development System (LEADS), across all districts in the 2025-26 school year; however, districts can choose to opt out of using the state-provided rubric for the qualitative portion of teacher evaluation, substituting a locally adopted rubric in its place.[26]

Components of Teacher Evaluation Systems

Teacher evaluation systems are commonly a composite of quantitative and qualitative measures, providing a diverse set of data in evaluating teachers' effectiveness in meeting both school district and state goals. Again, states vary in the inclusion of these data sources and how they are weighted to calculate teacher effectiveness.

Qualitative Component of Teacher Evaluation

Observations are typically the most prominent qualitative measure in teacher evaluation systems, allowing an evaluator to observe teacher instruction in real-time and capture data not as easily observed in quantitative measures like student assessment scores.

- **Missouri** provides guidance on the state's Educator Evaluation System that addresses seven indicators of effective evaluations that local districts must adhere to in their evaluation process. The guidance provides resources and information on observations, but the state does not require observations as an explicit component of the evaluation process.[27]
- In **Texas**, the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) allows districts to determine the number, timing, and procedures for informal observations and only encourages one formal observation to be included in a teacher's evaluation. However, all observations measure four

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[25] Alabama State Department of Education. (2023, October). *Alabama teacher growth program (ATGP) manual (Version 1.0)*. https://www.alabamaachieves.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/PD_2022819_Alabama-Teacher-Growth-Program-ATGP_manual_V1.0.pdf

[26] Louisiana Department of Education. (2024, August 14). *Louisiana's new educator evaluation system rewards effective teachers with fewer observations*. https://doe.louisiana.gov/about/newsroom/news-releases/release/2024/08/14/louisiana-s-new-educator-evaluation-system-rewards-effective-teachers-with-fewer-observations

[27] Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (n.d.). *Teacher evaluation: Missouri's educator evaluation system*. https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/teacherevaluationcompletedoc

domains of teaching, each with individual subdomains including: planning, instruction, learning environment, and professional practices and responsibilities.[28]

Quantitative Components of Teacher Evaluation

Quantitative measures, such as student growth and achievement data, provide objective indicators of student success associated with a teacher's instruction of academic standards in the classroom. The number of states that require quantitative measures related to student proficiency and progress in teacher evaluations has steadily declined.[29]

- **Florida** law requires that district evaluation systems support "effective instruction and student growth" but remains open-ended as to how districts meet this requirement. Student performance must be included as a third of a teacher's performance evaluation, but this evaluation criteria can include student growth or achievement data.[30]
- **Texas** and **Mississippi** list student growth processes and student data as possible sources of evidence to be used in teacher evaluation but do not require them to be used.[31]
- Per State Board General Requirements for Evaluation Rule 0520-02-01-.02, **Tennessee** requires that sixty percent of evaluation criteria be comprised of student achievement data for teachers with individual growth data.

Student surveys can incorporate qualitative information in a quantitative form, yet the explicit inclusion or requirement of this data source in state evaluation systems has also declined.[32]

- States such as **Florida** and **Arkansas** allow for student surveys to be used in teacher evaluations per the determination of each district.[33]
- **Mississippi's** Professional Growth System (PGS) requires student surveys be included in teacher evaluation.[34]
- Under State Board Educator Evaluation Policy 5.201, **Tennessee** allows student surveys to be used in evaluation and provides both a list of State Board-approved student survey instruments and a process to approve new student survey instruments by the State Board.

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[28] Texas Education Agency. (n.d.). *Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS)*. https://teachfortexas.org/

[29] National Council on Teacher Quality, 2022

[30] Florida Department of Education, n.d.

[31] Texas Education Agency, n.d.; Mississippi Code Annotated § 37-1-3

[32] National Council on Teacher Quality, 2022

[33] Florida Department of Education, n.d.; 6 Code of Arkansas Rules § 181-201.

[34] Mississippi Code Annotated § 37-1-3

Teacher Evaluation Feedback

Teacher performance is determined by using evidence from the selected data sources which typically place a teacher within a set of ratings or categories of teacher effectiveness. Evaluation systems range from two to five categories, with most states utilizing at least three in evaluation. [35] Once teachers are given an evaluation rating, the availability and complexity of feedback vary by state and local decision. Many states do not explicitly require that teachers receive feedback after observations and evaluations occur, but states that allow or require feedback have varying provisions on how feedback is administered.

- **North Carolina's** Educator Evaluation System provides multiple opportunities for conferences between a teacher and an evaluator across the annual evaluation process. State policy requires that evaluators and teachers discuss and document strengths and weaknesses during these convenings.[36]
- **Florida** and **Louisiana** require evaluators to provide written feedback to teachers after a specified number of days following a teacher's observation or evaluation.[37]
- **Georgia's** Teacher Keys Effectiveness System (TKES) requires that each teacher have access to the results of their annual evaluation and allows teachers to request conferences with evaluators to discuss any results or feedback.[38]
- Per State Board Evaluation Components Rule 0520-02-01-.03, **Tennessee** requires that evaluators provide written feedback and an in-person conference with teachers within one week of the teacher's observation.

Professional Development for Teachers Post-Evaluation

After teachers receive the results of evaluation and any feedback shared by evaluators, professional development can be integrated into the final steps of teacher evaluation to address areas of improvement. Compared to the other components listed in this section, aligning professional development to each teacher's evaluation is not common practice, yet states have different degrees of professional development inclusion in their teacher evaluation systems.

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[35] National Council on Teacher Quality, 2022

[36] North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. (n.d.). *NC educator effectiveness system (NCEES)*. https://www.dpi.nc.gov/educators/home-base/nc-educator-effectiveness-system-ncees

[37] Florida Department of Education, n.d.; Louisiana Department of Education. (n.d.). *Louisiana educator rubric evaluation handbook*. https://doe.louisiana.gov/docs/default-source/key-compass-resources/la-educator-rubric-evaluation-handbook.pdf?sfvrsn=55106e18_4

[38] Georgia Compilation Rules and Regulations Rule 160-5-1-.37

- **Georgia's** evaluation system requires that evaluation results are used to provide professional development for teachers and that it be aligned to the needs identified in each teacher's evaluation.[39]
- **North Carolina** requires that all teachers have a professional development plan that is specific to the ratings received on the teacher's final evaluation, providing more direct guidance for teachers who did not meet expectations.[40]
- **Missouri** provides guidance for developing professional development plans, but these are not explicitly required to be a part of teacher evaluation.[41]
- **Tennessee** educators automatically earn professional development points toward renewing their license by earning at least a level 3 LOE in a given school year.

Operations of Teacher Evaluation Systems

Apart from the components of teacher evaluations systems, states also vary in how much flexibility they provide to districts in determining the logistics of evaluations, such as the timing of teacher evaluations and the qualifications of the evaluators. Because of this variability, states have diverse requirements and allowances when determining how to best implement teacher evaluation systems, including the components comprising the system, such as observation.

States have the authority to determine how often teachers are evaluated during a school year. Many states require that teacher evaluations occur annually, with exceptions for more experienced teachers or teachers who previously demonstrated performance that met or exceeded expectations. Additionally, some states require that novice teachers or teachers with low ratings of performance from previous years undergo evaluation more frequently.

- **Texas** requires that teacher evaluations occur at least once a year. However, a teacher whose most recent evaluation was identified as at least proficient or an equivalency of proficient and who had no identified area of deficiency in the teacher's evaluation can agree in writing to undergo evaluations once every five years.[42]

[39] Georgia Compilation Rules and Regulations Rule 160-5-1-.37

[40] North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.

[41] Missouri 5 Code of State Regulations 20-400.375

[42] 19 TAC §150.1003

- **Kentucky**, outlined in the Kentucky Framework for Personnel Evaluation, requires annual evaluation of all teachers until a teacher reaches "continuing" status, meaning that the teacher obtains tenure as defined by state law, and will then be evaluated once every three years.[43]
- **Florida** requires that all teachers be evaluated annually, and that newly hired teachers be evaluated twice during the teacher's first year at the district they teach in.[44]

The qualifications and training requirements for individuals conducting evaluations also vary by state. Most states require that observers and evaluators are trained to conduct teacher evaluations to ensure that instruction is aligned to state academic standards. However, not all states have specific requirements for training or qualifications, and some instead allow districts to make local determinations on an observer's or evaluator's experience and training.

- **Arkansas'** Teacher Excellence and Support System (TESS) defines an "evaluator" as a licensed administrator employed by the same educational entity as the teacher who is designated as the responsible person for evaluating teachers. The state encourages districts to provide training for evaluators, but no requirements for training are provided.[45]
- **North Carolina** requires all teachers, principals, and peer evaluators to participate in state-approved training to discuss the teacher evaluation process and rubric used during evaluation; peer evaluators participate in this training but only act as observers for teachers that have not been employed for three consecutive years.[46]
- **South Carolina's** Expanded Assisting, Developing, and Evaluating Professional Teaching (ADEPT) Support and Evaluation System requires that the principal or certified designee participate in evaluation teams for all teachers. The remainder of the team is developed depending on the teacher's contract status. Teachers with contracts indicating fewer years of experience and experienced teachers identified as needing diagnostic assistance are also assigned a mentor, but the mentor does not participate in evaluation. More experienced teachers are assigned a content expert in their area of instruction in addition to the evaluator. All evaluators must meet training requirements.[47]

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[43] Kentucky Revised Statutes § 156.557

[44] Florida Department of Education, n.d.

[45] Arkansas Department of Education Rules Governing Educator Performance 005.16.4.15

[46] North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, n.d.

[47] South Carolina Department of Education (2018, July). *Expanded ADEPT process overview*. https://ed.sc.gov/educators/educator-effectiveness/expanded-adept-resources/https-ed-sc-gov-educators-educator-effectiveness-expanded-adept-resources-educator-evaluation-guidance/evaluation-process-overview-for-teachers/

Research on Teacher Evaluation Systems

Teacher evaluation systems are intended to identify areas of strength and improvement for teachers to ultimately improve student outcomes. Research suggests that current evaluation systems could benefit from revisions to the state and local models created at the peak of federal teacher evaluation initiatives.

A recent study supports that most evaluation systems developed in response to Race to the Top (RTTT) lacked sufficient consequences or incentives to drive improvement.[48] This research points to the low percentage of teachers rated as not meeting expectations, creating inconsistencies among evidence of improvement in teaching practices under these systems.[49] For example, a study conducted on Chicago Public Schools RTTT-era evaluation model, Recognizing Educators Advancing Chicago Students (REACH), indicates the significance of replacing lower-performing teachers with higher-performing teachers in increasing student performance.[50] However, those exiting the teacher pipeline through this identification and removal were more likely to be new to the profession, despite tenured teachers receiving similar ratings.[51] Researchers suggest that evaluation reforms that create processes to remove low-performing teachers regardless of tenure status would increase the distribution of high-quality teachers over time, bolstering student achievement.[52]

Taking note of the opportunity for reform, some states have explored novel or altered versions of existing teacher evaluations to better serve students of underserved populations. Most research addressing teacher evaluation focuses on urbanized areas to prioritize generalizability of results; however, this approach leaves some populations, such as teachers and students in rural school settings, subject to reform that may not best fit their needs and contexts.[53]

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[48] Hanushek, E. A., Luo, J., Morgan, A. J., Nguyen, M., Ost, B., Rivkin, S. G., & Shakeel, A. (2023). *The effects of comprehensive educator evaluation and pay reform on achievement* (No. w31073). National Bureau of Economic Research.

[49] Hanushek et al., 2023

[50] Sartain, L., and Steinberg, M. P. (2021). Can Personnel Policy Improve Teacher Quality? The Role of Evaluation and the Impact of Exiting Low-Performing Teachers. (EdWorkingPaper: 21-486). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: https://doi.org/10.26300/d201-7y89

[51] Sartain & Steinberg, 2021

[52] Sartain & Steinberg, 2021

[53] Hunter, S. B., and Bowser, K. M. (2024). Next-Generation Teacher Evaluation in Rural Missouri: Main and Moderated Effects on Student Achievement and Effects-to-Expenditure Ratios. (EdWorkingPaper: 24-935). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: https://doi.org/10.26300/x36v-vs97

Missouri, a state with many rural schools, allows districts to implement locally adopted teacher evaluation systems. Researchers studied the effects of districts utilizing the Network for Educator Effectiveness (NEE), a teacher evaluation system that mitigates constraints that are historically relevant to rural schools by addressing financial burdens of system implementation and limited local resources in rural areas.[54] Analysis of the districts utilizing the system found that it was positively associated with increased student performance in core subject areas.[55] These findings support the argument that tailoring teacher evaluation systems to the unique needs of students and teachers within a school or district could be a potential solution in promoting positive instructional practices that are relevant and reliable in predicting student success.

Components of Teacher Evaluation Systems

To study the effectiveness of state or locally adopted teacher evaluation systems, researchers have utilized the causal link between teacher quality and student achievement to identify areas of high and low student achievement and compare the characteristics of evaluation systems associated with those outcomes.[56] This approach helps pinpoint specific facets of teacher evaluation that are best practices in measuring teacher effectiveness.

Observations

Observations are a major component in most evaluation systems and continue to be an area of focus in teacher evaluation research. Despite the importance of this metric, there remain challenges in implementing observations consistently, ensuring they accurately capture important aspects of teachers' performance, and lead to clear next steps for teachers to improve their instructional practices.

For instance, research indicates that the reliability and validity of scores produced by school personnel during observations tend to vary, both in terms of consistency across raters and stability over time. There is evidence of variability in observation scores, both when a single evaluator observes the same teacher multiple times and when multiple evaluators observe the same teacher, raising concern about the

[54] Hunter & Bowser, 2024

[55] Hunter & Bowser, 2024

[56] Chetty, R., Friedman, J. N., Hilger, N., Saez, E., Schanzenbach, D. W., & Yagan, D. (2011). How does your Kindergarten classroom affect your earnings? Evidence from Project STAR. The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 126(4), 1593–1660. https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjr041

consistency and interpretation of scores that are shared with teachers.[57] Additionally, one study on potential biases in observation scores found a direct association between teacher observation scores and teachers with students of varying incoming achievement in their classrooms: those serving higher incoming achievement were more likely to receive higher observation scores, on average. [58] These findings indicate that challenges associated with incorporating observation in teacher evaluation may stem from a potential, inherent subjectivity of observations that could yield insufficient results of teacher effectiveness.

In response to these findings, researchers have studied models that include safeguards to encourage objectivity of the qualitative measure. Some research supports the inclusion of subject-based instruments in conducting observations so that teachers are evaluated fairly based on the use of instructional practice relevant to a specific content area. [59]

Student Assessment Data

Researchers have also studied the role of student assessment data in teacher evaluation, particularly value-added scores (e.g., TVAAS in Tennessee). Value-added scores represent the difference between a teacher's actual student achievement and the expected student achievement, as predicted by the scores of other teachers' students with similar backgrounds and previous academic achievement. [60] This statistical estimate approximates the causal relationship between teacher quality and student success. [61]

Researchers have followed elementary students with teachers assessed by value-added scores over the course of their K-12 education to determine the reliability of these quantitative measures.[62] This research found a correlation between teacher's impact and the long-term outcomes for students, such as college

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[57] Ho, A. D. & Kane, T. J. (2013). *The Reliability of Classroom Observations by School Personnel. Research Paper*. Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Measures of Effective Teaching project

[58] Whitehurst, G., Chingos, M. M., & Lindquist, K. M. (2014). Evaluating teachers with classroom observations. *Brown Center on Education Policy: Brookings Institute*.

[59] Ho & Kane, 2013

[60] Taylor, E. (2025, March). "Teacher Evaluation," in *Live Handbook of Education Policy Research*, in Douglas Harris (ed.), Association for Education Finance and Policy, viewed 03/25/2025, https://livehandbook.org/k-12-education/workforce-teachers/teacher-evaluation/.

[61] Taylor, 2025

[62] Chetty, Raj, John N. Friedman, and Jonah E. Rockoff. (2014). Measuring the Impacts of Teachers II: Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood. *American Economic Review* 104(9): 2633–2679.

graduation rates and labor market success.[63] However, as with any statistical measure, value-added scores can include an element of error.[64] States, such as Tennessee, account for this potential error in developing their growth models, and studies continue to verify these models as effective means of reducing bias in measuring teacher effectiveness and its impact on student growth. [65] Researchers continue to learn more about the inclusion of student assessment data and how to reliably account for this measure in teacher evaluation.

Alternative Measures

Some research points to increasing investments in alternative measures of teacher performance to create a more holistic picture of teacher performance and evaluation, thus relying less on student assessment and observations scores. Incorporating student perspective into teacher evaluation has become popularized among researchers as students are active participants in interactions with teachers and their learning environment. [66] A study of middle grades math students and their math teachers finds that the results of student surveys on teacher performance are associated with increased student learning and increased alignment with existing teacher evaluation results. [67] This research counters current trends of declining student survey use in state evaluation systems, providing justification for either allowing or requiring this measure in future evaluative practices.

Additionally, researchers have studied the impact of teacher effectiveness on other non-test outcomes related to student achievement, such as students' unexcused absences, grade progression, and longitudinal postsecondary outcomes, and found correlation among teacher effects and these outcomes.[68] Although not used in common practice, researchers continue to study these and other nonconventional measures that may provide options for more reliable and valid calculation of teacher performance.

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[63] Chetty et al., 2014

[64] Taylor, 2025

[65] J.R. Lockwood and Daniel F. McCaffrey, "Controlling for Individual Heterogeneity in Longitudinal Models, with Applications to Student Achievement," Electronic Journal of Statistics, 1 (2007): 244.

[66] Wallace, T., Kelcey, B., & Ruzek, E. (2016). What can student perception surveys tell us about teaching? Empirically testing the underlying structure of the Tripod student perception survey. *American Educational Research Journal, 53*(6), 1834-1868, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED540960.pdf

[67] Wallace et al., 2016

[68] Jackson, C. Kirabo. (2018). What Do Test Scores Miss? The Importance of Teacher Effects on Non-Test Score Outcomes. *Journal of Political Economy* 126(5): 2072–2107; Backes, Ben, James Cowan, Dan Goldhaber, and Roddy Theobald. (2024). How to Measure a Teacher: The Influence of Test and Non-Test Value-Added on Long-Run Student Outcomes. *Journal of Human Resources*.

Professional Development for Teachers Post-Evaluation

After receiving the results of an evaluation, teachers have an opportunity to identify both strengths and weaknesses in their instruction through professional development; however, this practice is not always required of teachers, with research indicating that the cost of resources is a factor in the lack of follow-up.[69] Researchers have studied the effects of providing professional development opportunities to teachers post-evaluation to determine if this strategy is a cost-effective approach to improving teacher quality. One study evaluated over 100 districts across 27 states that provided teachers with access to an online database that had on-demand professional development resources aligned with identified areas of improvement from teacher observations.[70] Teachers who utilized the resources showed increases in student reading and math achievement, demonstrating even more significant increases when coupled with teachers receiving an increased number of observations and thus more feedback from evaluators.[71]

Looking at survey data specific to Tennessee educators in rural districts, an area that has historically faced limited access to high-quality professional development, teachers who reported increased opportunities aligned to their areas for improvement showed increased observation scores as compared to teachers who did report access to these resources.[72] This research concludes that providing professional development opportunities to teachers that is relevant to their evaluation could impact teacher quality and even lead to higher rates of teacher retention and student achievement.

Implementation Challenges

Current research seeks to address the utility of teacher evaluation in terms of evaluator quality and its impact on producing accurate evaluations of teacher effectiveness. This research originates from concerns of decreased objectivity demonstrated in the operation of teacher evaluation systems. Observations are

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[69] Taylor, 2025

[70] Shaha, S. H., Glassett, K. F., & Copas, A. (2015). The impact of teacher observations with coordinated professional development on student performance: A 27-state program evaluation. *Journal of College Teaching & Learning*, *12*(1), 55

[71] Shaha et al., 2015

[72] Hunter, S. B. (2022). High-leverage teacher evaluation practices for instructional improvement. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership.* doi:10.1177/17411432221112995.; Lavalley, M. (2018). Out of the loop: Rural schools are largely left out of research and policy discussions, exacerbating poverty, inequity, and isolation. *Center for Public Education*. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED60884

commonly subject to evaluator bias due to human error in accurately measuring teacher performance.[73] Although many states either require or include a rubric to be used in observations to mitigate potential bias, research suggests that observer approaches to rubric interpretation and an observer's individual perception of teacher quality can jeopardize the intended objectivity of observation scores.[74]

Some researchers recommend changing the number of individuals involved in teacher observations. Research on video-based observation systems indicates that having more observers increases the reliability of results and minimizes the variability of teachers' observation scores.[75] Increasing the numbers of observers may also address the quantity and quality of observation feedback between an observer and a teacher. Research on Tennessee school administrator time use finds that observers trade off an increase in time observing teachers for a decrease in time participating in conferences before and after conducting observations, thus decreasing the purpose of observations in strengthening teacher quality.[76] This proposal aligns with existing practices in teacher observation in other states' evaluation systems that require evaluation teams with multiple participants. Such participants can include principals, content experts in the teacher's subject, and other relevant stakeholders who participate in observations either over multiple observations completed by each team member or team members collectively completing a single observation.

Another way to increase the reliability of observations is to develop or alter training requirements for individuals who conduct teacher observations to more accurately assess teacher effectiveness and align with a district's evaluation system. Research on observer quality finds that existing training practices used in accordance with a Missouri teacher evaluation system prepare observers to evaluate some teaching practices better than others, leaving gaps in assessment and teacher improvement.[77] Researchers conclude

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[73] White, M., & Klette, K. (2024). Signal, error, or bias? exploring the uses of scores from observation systems. *Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability*, *36*(4), 505–528. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11092-024-09427-8

[74] White & Klette, 2024

[75] Cantrell, S. & Kane, T. J. (2013). *Ensuring Fair and Reliable Measures of Effective Teaching: Culminating Findings from the MET Project's Three-Year Study*. Seattle, WA: Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Policy and Practice Brief, Measures of Effective Teaching project.

[76] Hunter, S. B., & Rodriguez, L. A. (2021). Examining the demands of teacher evaluation: time use, strain and turnover among Tennessee school administrators. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *59*(6), 739–758. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-07-2020-0165

[77] Bergin, C., Wind, S. A., Grajeda, S., & Tsai, C.-L. (2017). Teacher evaluation: Are principals' classroom observations accurate at the conclusion of training? *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, *55*, 19–26. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2017.05.002

that criterion-referenced models of evaluation measurement can be used to determine a system's ability to accurately measure teacher performance within contextual constraints of each system.[78]

Research also supports evaluating observer quality prior to completing teacher observations, such as requiring observers to assess teacher performance on a pre-recorded, pre-scored observation or alongside an expert observer, so that evaluation is screened for inaccuracies or misalignment with purposes of the [79].[80]This practice evaluation helps ensure observers are normed across schools and districts and minimizes the risk of subjectivity in observation.[81] Implications of this research support requiring or strengthening the training and norming of evaluators in decreasing variance in evaluation feedback introduced by evaluators. Researchers continue to encourage states and districts to develop and implement such training; however, there is a lack of investigation on specific approaches [82].[83]

Recommendations

Advisory Committee Recommendations

In alignment with PC 325, the department convened a 15-member teacher evaluation advisory committee composed of experienced Tennessee educators and experts to review and evaluate current teacher

[78] Bergin et al., 2017

[79] Kane, Thomas J., and Douglas O. Staiger. 2012. *Gathering Feedback for Teaching: Combining High-Quality Observations with Student Surveys and Achievement Gains* (MET Project Research Paper). Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

[80] Kane & Staiger, 2012

[81] Bergin et al., 2017

[83] Radley, K. C., Dart, E. H., Lewis, H. L. J., & Peterson, K. D. (2022). An Evaluation of Real-Time Feedback for Training Classroom Observers. *Contemporary School Psychology, 26*(2), 241-247. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40688-020-00304-x

evaluation practices. The committee met in October 2025 and December 2025 to discuss potential recommendations and participated in a consensus protocol to determine recommendations.

While the committee discussed a wide variety of topics and potential recommendations, only those recommendations that received a positive recommendation from an 80 percent or greater threshold of voting committee members are shared in this report.

Recommendation 1: Maintain annual evaluations, and both unannounced and announced observations, as part of the evaluation system for all teachers.

- It is a robust system that holds teachers accountable in their practices and is useful in providing teachers with feedback on potential improvements, particularly novice teachers and teachers in need of additional support. Many teachers agree that all teachers should be evaluated so that they remain accountable for their practice.

Recommendation 2: Incorporate flexibility in observation structuring based on a teacher's previous performance.

- Lessening the number of formal observations for experienced or high-performing teachers by rewarding teachers with higher scores with more announced observations than unannounced observations and vice versa for those with lower scores can incentivize high-performing teachers and allow administrators to spend more time working alongside teachers in need of additional support. Educators teaching multiple grades or subject areas would also like to have flexibility in choosing what subject they are observed on to alleviate unnecessary burdens.

Recommendation 3: Develop additional guidance or professional development opportunities on using observation rubrics, for both evaluators and observed teachers.

- Teachers recommend keeping the 5-point scale but also creating clearer guidance on score differentiation. Such guidance, along with recommended training on the rubric for both administrators and incoming educators, could create clearer expectations across all evaluated educator populations. Committee members also support the development of additional resources on the observation rubrics, similar to Instructional Practice Guides (IPGs) that administrators are already familiar with, to ensure consistent scoring across all evaluators.

Recommendation 4: Create new observation rubrics for school service personnel and novice educators.

- Additional observation rubrics should be developed to ensure that educators in more specialized school services personnel roles are being appropriately evaluated. Novice educators should have access to a rubric with fewer indicators so they can focus their practice on a narrower range of skills for their first years in the classroom.

Recommendation 5: Provide additional resources on growth score calculations.

- Some teachers report having not fully understood how growth scores are calculated, which may lead to misconceptions of meaning related to teacher efficacy and the impact of student performance. Creating accessible resources or wider scale distribution of existing statewide resources for administrators and teachers could demystify this piece of the evaluation and influence buy-in into the system as a whole.

Department Response

The department appreciates the thoughtful work of the Teacher Advisory Committee and values its partnership in strengthening Tennessee's educator evaluation system. The department recognizes the leadership of the General Assembly in establishing and sustaining policies that ensure high-quality teaching and improved student outcomes. This collaborative approach with educators, the State Board, and the department ensures that Tennessee maintains a rigorous, responsive evaluation system that promotes educator growth and advances instructional excellence and outcomes for all students.

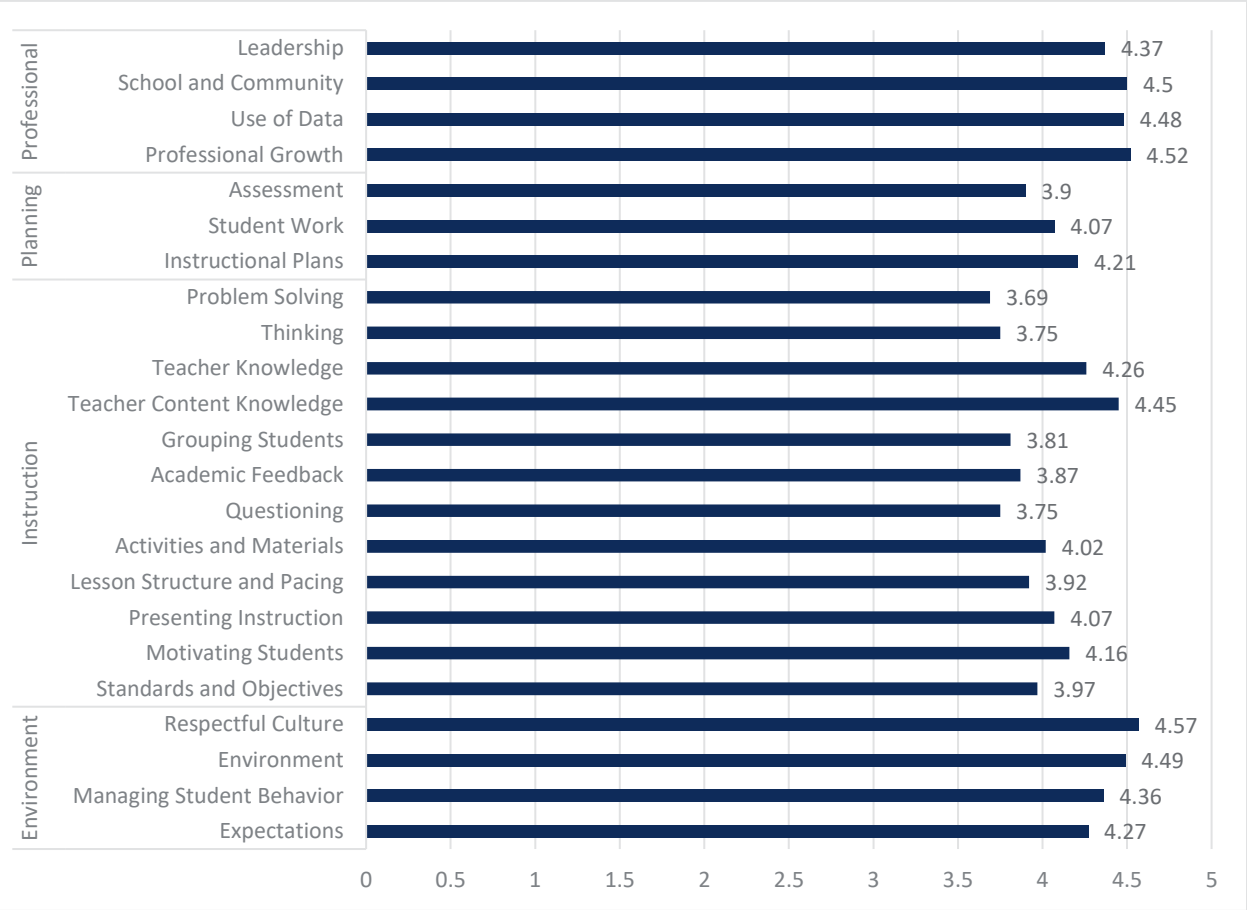
The department is committed to the further development of professional learning opportunities and additional resources to improve overall understanding and implementation of the evaluation system. In addition, the department supports allowing individual districts to propose observation component pilot projects as a possible mechanism for allowing recommended flexibilities.

Final Thoughts

Tennessee has demonstrated a longstanding commitment to ensuring that educators across the state are best equipped to provide quality instruction to all students. Initiatives led by the Tennessee General Assembly, the department, the State Board, EPPs, local school and district leaders, and other vital stakeholders continue this work and provide opportunities for system improvements that support teacher development throughout their careers. Sustainable research and policy analysis incorporated into the state's current evaluation system allow educators and the appropriate stakeholders to study and implement appropriate measures that accurately evaluate teacher practice in the classroom, ultimately setting up all students for success. The department will continue working alongside educators to address any areas of improvement in the current teacher evaluation system to support all students and teachers in Tennessee.

Appendix A

Average Score by Indicator, 2024 General Educator Rubric



Appendix B

EPP Candidate Evaluations Metrics by EPP

Note: Cells with unavailable data or an n-count of fewer than ten are represented by a dash (-)

EPP	Classroom Observation 3+	Classroom Observation 4+	Student Growth (TVAAS) 3+	Student Growth (TVAAS) 4+	Level of Overall Effectiveness (LOE) 3+	Level of Overall Effectiveness (LOE) 4+
Aquinas College	-	-	-	-	-	-
Austin Peay State University	94.9%	56.8%	55.2%	19.3%	87.3%	53.7%
Belmont University	93.2%	69.5%	58.7%	30.4%	91.3%	68.2%
Bethel University	95.2%	67.3%	45.8%	8.3%	89.1%	56.4%
Bryan College	94.3%	54.3%	60.0%	20.0%	88.2%	64.7%
Carson-Newman University	92.8%	59.7%	58.6%	20.0%	86.6%	61.2%
Christian Brothers University	97.8%	76.1%	94.4%	38.9%	97.6%	73.2%
Cumberland University	97.4%	67.4%	63.2%	23.7%	94.9%	68.2%
East Tennessee State University	97.0%	66.9%	52.6%	21.8%	90.7%	63.7%

EPP	Classroom Observation 3+	Classroom Observation 4+	Student Growth (TVAAS) 3+	Student Growth (TVAAS) 4+	Level of Overall Effectiveness (LOE) 3+	Level of Overall Effectiveness (LOE) 4+
Freed-Hardeman University	98.3%	65.8%	56.5%	30.4%	91.7%	66.7%
Johnson University	95.6%	67.6%	46.7%	26.7%	82.4%	54.4%
KCS EPP	97.4%	61.4%	-	-	86.1%	60.4%
King University	94.8%	64.6%	36.0%	24.0%	87.6%	57.3%
Lee University	87.9%	36.8%	48.2%	13.4%	80.2%	43.4%
Lincoln Memorial University	97.2%	70.5%	56.1%	26.8%	94.0%	65.9%
Lipscomb University	96.0%	62.2%	70.1%	28.4%	92.2%	64.9%
Maryville College	100.0%	68.4%	26.7%	13.3%	91.9%	48.6%
Memphis Teacher Residency	99.3%	88.1%	75.0%	45.5%	87.6%	74.4%
Middle Tennessee State University	96.9%	74.7%	60.8%	29.2%	95.2%	73.2%
Milligan University	97.1%	72.1%	59.1%	22.7%	83.3%	63.6%

EPP	Classroom Observation 3+	Classroom Observation 4+	Student Growth (TVAAS) 3+	Student Growth (TVAAS) 4+	Level of Overall Effectiveness (LOE) 3+	Level of Overall Effectiveness (LOE) 4+
Nashville Teacher Residency	91.2%	38.5%	67.5%	30.0%	84.4%	42.2%
Relay Graduate School of Education	93.6%	70.9%	83.5%	51.9%	93.7%	72.4%
Rhodes College	100.0%	53.8%	-	-	81.8%	45.5%
Rutherford Teach Now	98.0%	81.9%	50.0%	21.4%	96.6%	80.0%
South College	95.2%	47.6%	-	-	90.5%	71.4%
Southern Adventist University	-	-	-	-	-	-
Teach For America - Memphis	95.0%	61.9%	79.5%	31.5%	86.7%	55.2%
Teach For America - Nashville-Chattanooga	92.2%	50.5%	76.7%	40.7%	89.0%	59.2%
Tennessee State University	94.5%	68.0%	81.8%	31.8%	93.4%	67.8%

EPP	Classroom Observation 3+	Classroom Observation 4+	Student Growth (TVAAS) 3+	Student Growth (TVAAS) 4+	Level of Overall Effectiveness (LOE) 3+	Level of Overall Effectiveness (LOE) 4+
Tennessee Technological University	96.7%	64.6%	54.1%	20.1%	89.1%	61.7%
Tennessee Wesleyan University	94.0%	60.9%	45.9%	10.8%	88.0%	52.6%
Trevecca Nazarene University	99.2%	81.0%	63.6%	30.3%	93.3%	72.5%
Tusculum University	97.4%	62.6%	45.9%	14.8%	86.0%	54.5%
Union University	96.7%	71.2%	67.9%	33.3%	87.6%	67.9%
University of Memphis	97.6%	76.8%	54.4%	21.1%	90.7%	70.9%
University of Tennessee - Chattanooga	90.4%	37.1%	56.0%	19.4%	82.0%	46.9%
University of Tennessee - Knoxville	94.7%	60.9%	56.2%	23.2%	85.2%	53.3%
University of Tennessee - Martin	96.7%	67.4%	50.2%	16.0%	90.9%	60.3%

EPP	Classroom Observation 3+	Classroom Observation 4+	Student Growth (TVAAS) 3+	Student Growth (TVAAS) 4+	Level of Overall Effectiveness (LOE) 3+	Level of Overall Effectiveness (LOE) 4+
University of Tennessee - Southern	93.8%	50.0%	25.0%	0.0%	87.5%	53.1%
Vanderbilt University	97.4%	69.8%	61.5%	28.2%	91.7%	71.3%
Welch College	100.0%	68.9%	76.9%	46.2%	90.9%	63.6%
Western Governors University	95.0%	70.0%	-	-	78.9%	68.4%

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