

Teacher Planning Time in Tennessee: A Comparative Analysis of Teacher Planning Time Laws, Policies, Initiatives, and Practice

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Key Points

- Teacher planning time can be defined as the non-instructional time (i.e., time without students) teachers are given to plan their lessons and complete other tasks.
- There are two types of planning time: individual and common (planning time that is shared by two or more teachers—also referred to as collaborative planning time).
- Research shows that teacher planning time has a direct impact on student achievement and teacher effectiveness.
- Some studies show that guaranteed and common planning time are nonfinancial incentives that districts can use to attract and retain teachers.
- Teachers in other developed countries are given more non-instructional time than their U.S. counterparts.
- Teacher planning time policies are predominantly set at the local level.
- Tennessee is one of only a few states that have a teacher planning time provision in state law.
- Results from the Tennessee Teaching, Empowering, Learning, and Leading (TELL) survey show that teachers in Tennessee believe that they may not have enough non-instructional time, planning time, and common planning time.
 - Approximately one-third of educators in Tennessee believe that teachers are not given enough non-instructional time.
 - 97 percent of educators believe that teachers do not have enough time during the day to complete all of their work-related tasks during their paid working hours.
- According to the Comptroller's Offices of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) survey results, the amount of planning time teachers receive varies widely by school, grade level, and classroom assignment.
 - Most school districts in Tennessee give at least some teachers more individual planning time than state statute requires.
 - On average, high school teachers receive approximately 77 minutes of planning time per day, middle school teachers receive 53 minutes, and elementary school teachers receive 42 minutes.
 - 95 percent of districts give at least some teachers common planning time.
- Based on OREA survey results, at least half of the school districts in Tennessee have created Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and approximately 18 percent are in the process of creating or expanding them.
- Many districts plan to use a portion of their First to the Top (FTTT) funding to create or expand PLCs and give teachers more time to collaborate.
- Some of the policy issues relative to teacher planning time in Tennessee are:
 - Increasing the amount of individual planning time teachers are given per week.
 - Giving teachers common planning time per week including giving new and/or struggling teachers common planning time with experienced, effective teachers.
- Increasing the amount of teacher planning time may be difficult and expensive for districts.

Introduction

Teacher planning time can be defined as the non-instructional time (i.e., time without students) teachers are given to plan their lessons and complete other tasks.¹ Teachers may use this time to prepare for lessons, grade student assignments, contact parents, attend parent-teacher conferences, collaborate with other teachers, attend professional development, assist with extracurricular activities, participate in research or book studies, attend Individualized Education Program (IEP) student conferences, or complete paperwork or other tasks as assigned by the school principal and the school district. The amount of planning time teachers are given varies by state, local education agency (LEA), school, and teacher. On average, teachers in the U.S. are given less planning time than teachers in other countries.² Decisions about how to use planning time are mostly left up to the individual teacher; however, teachers are often required by school administrators or LEAs to complete paperwork or perform tasks during planning periods.

There are two types of planning time: individual and common (also referred to as collaborative planning time). Common planning time can be defined as planning time shared by multiple teachers and focused on collaboration. A number of recent education policy developments, including the Race to the Top (RTTT) competition, have generated a renewed focus on teacher collaboration and common planning time.³ Teachers may be given common planning time with other teachers based on grade assignment (e.g., 1st grade, 8th grade),

Some schools divide teachers into teams based on either grade or subject assignment. Teachers in a team share a common planning time with other team members, which facilitates collaboration. Teams often spend their time together planning lessons and discussing the needs of individual students.

Common planning time is planning time that is shared by two or more teachers and is focused on collaboration.

subject assignment (e.g., math, science, history), or team assignment. Common planning time is usually part of LEA or school level policy and is implemented by school administrators.

Studies have shown that teacher effectiveness is one of the most important factors that affect student achievement.⁴ The amount of common planning time teachers are given is one aspect of teacher working conditions that may have a significant impact on teacher effectiveness and student achievement.⁵ For example, one study found that three hours or more of teacher planning time (in an average work week) has a statistically significant positive effect on student achievement in math and reading.⁶ Teacher planning time is also linked to:

1. Higher teacher recruitment rates at hard-to-staff schools,⁷
2. Higher teacher retention rates,⁸ and
3. Lower teacher attrition rates to other professions.⁹

In February 2011, Tennessee administered its first Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL) Survey.^{10,A} Based on results from the survey, 97 percent of educators (a group that includes principals and other administrators) believe that teachers don't have enough time during the regular school day to complete all of their work;¹¹ and 66 percent of educators reported that they have less than or equal to one hour per week of common planning time.¹²

While research suggests that increasing the amount of time teachers have to plan and giving teachers common planning time may be beneficial for students and

^A The TELL Tennessee Survey is a teaching and learning conditions survey that is administered statewide to principals, teachers, and other licensed educators. The TELL survey is based on a Teaching and Learning Conditions survey that was developed by the New Teacher Center. The New Teacher Center, an independent, nonprofit organization originally established by the University of California, now works with other states to develop and administer the TELL survey. Although each state develops its own unique form of the survey, many states use similar or identical questions. To date, the New Teacher Center has worked with 18 states, including Tennessee, to develop and administer teaching and learning conditions surveys. The TELL Tennessee Survey includes questions on teacher planning time policies and practices. Approximately 77 percent of educators in the state responded to the survey. The TELL Tennessee Survey will be administered again in spring 2013. Sources: New Teacher Center, "TELL Tennessee," 2011, pp. 1, 3, 6, 12, 21, <http://telltennessee.org/> (accessed June 29, 2012); The New Teacher Center, "About the New Teacher Center," <http://www.newteachercenter.org/> (accessed May 13, 2011); TELL Tennessee Survey, 2011, <http://telltennessee.org/index> (accessed May 3, 2011).

teachers, it may be a significant challenge for school districts to implement in part because it may be too expensive or difficult to schedule. Districts may not believe teachers need more planning time or that they will use planning time constructively. Increased planning time may require additional positions, and it may be difficult for districts to find quality teachers to fill them. This may particularly apply to positions at hard-to-staff schools and in hard-to-staff subjects (e.g., math and science). Increased planning time may also decrease the amount of time individual teachers spend with students. If a teacher is highly effective, school districts may be hesitant to reduce the number of classes/ students taught by that teacher.

This report:

- presents an overview of teacher planning time,
- compares teacher planning time policies in Tennessee to policies across other states and countries,
- reviews state, LEA, and school level policies relevant to teacher planning time, and
- reviews surveys of LEAs and education professionals (i.e., teachers, school administrators, school guidance counselors, etc.) in Tennessee and other states including a Teacher Planning Time Survey of LEAs conducted by the Comptroller's Offices of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) in spring 2011.

Overview of teacher planning time laws and policies

Researchers have found that in general teachers across the nation lack sufficient time for planning and collaboration.¹³ According to a report released by the Consortium for Policy Research and Education at the University of Pennsylvania, “teacher planning time is sparse, fragmented, and uncoordinated.”¹⁴ In the United States teachers have approximately 84 to 96 minutes of non-instructional time per day and teach approximately six hours per day.¹⁵ Equally distributed, teachers have approximately 14 to 16 minutes per school day to plan, grade assignments, and contact parents for each class (assuming an average of six classes per teacher per day). High school teachers are often given more individual planning time than elementary school teachers but are less likely to have common planning

Schools deemed as “hard-to-staff”—those with high concentrations of low-performing, low-income students, high teacher turnover, and relatively high numbers of teachers not fully certified—must constantly scramble...to staff their classrooms...[and] ensure high quality teachers.

Source: Eric Hirsch, “Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Alabama: Educators on What It Will Take to Staff All Classrooms with Quality Teachers,” Center for Teaching Quality, February 2006, p. 1, <http://eric.ed.gov/>.

time with other teachers. Many teachers accomplish lesson planning, grading, and other such tasks after regular school hours.

Research shows that common planning time promotes collaboration among, and may increase the effectiveness of, teachers.¹⁶ When teachers are asked what additional tools or resources they need, they often list planning time and common planning time.

The following list of best practices for teacher planning time was derived from policy research groups that conducted studies of successful schools in Tennessee, North Carolina, and other states.

Best practices for teacher planning time

1. Planning time should be scheduled regularly per day.
2. Common planning time should be given to:
 - a. teachers in the same grade level,
 - b. teachers in the same subject area,
 - c. new teachers and their mentors,
 - d. struggling teachers and experienced, effective teachers, and
 - e. general education teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals.
3. Administrators should not assign too many additional tasks during planning time.
4. A Professional Learning Community should be established and sustained over time.

Sources: Developed by OREA using materials from AFT West Virginia, ASCD, the Center for Teaching Quality, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, the Education Consumers Foundation, and the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality.

While research suggests that increasing the amount of time teachers have to plan may be beneficial for students and teachers, it may be a significant challenge for school districts to implement. Increasing the amount of teacher planning time may be a difficult task for states and school districts for the following reasons:

1. Increasing the amount of teacher planning time may be expensive for school districts: If teachers spend more time planning during the workday, they spend less time teaching; therefore, in order for districts to increase the amount of teacher planning time, they may have to hire and pay more teachers to compensate for the loss of instructional time.
2. It may be difficult for districts to find quality teachers to fill the new positions created by the increase in planning time, especially those positions at hard-to-staff schools and in hard-to-staff subjects (i.e., math and science).
3. Increased planning time will decrease the amount of time individual teachers spend with students. If a teacher is highly effective, school districts may be hesitant to reduce the number of classes or students taught by that teacher.
4. Districts may believe that some or all teachers do not need more planning time.
5. Districts may believe that some teachers may not be using planning time constructively and that additional planning time is unwarranted.
6. Scheduling planning time may be a challenge, especially for elementary schools. Common planning time may be especially difficult to

schedule since more teachers in a particular grade or subject area will be affected.

Teacher planning time laws and policies in Tennessee and other states

Teacher planning time laws and policies vary from state to state; policies are predominantly set at the local level. Tennessee is one of 10 states (Arkansas, Louisiana, Rhode Island, Minnesota, North Carolina, North Dakota, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia) that have teacher planning time requirements included in state law. (See Exhibit 1.)¹⁷ One state, Rhode Island, includes a common planning time provision in state statutes.¹⁸ The average amount of statutorily required planning time across these seven states is three hours and four minutes per week, or 37 minutes per day. Tennessee statute requires two hours and 30 minutes of planning time per week, and does not require common planning time.¹⁹ School districts are not required to report the amount of planning time—either individual or common—teachers receive, but they are required to report annually to the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) whether they are in compliance with the duty-free planning time required by state law.²⁰ Schools may choose to include the information in the Preliminary Reports they submit to the TDOE, but few actually do.

Six states (Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Minnesota, and Oregon) specify that teacher planning time policies must be decided at the local level.²¹ In the 37 states that do not have a planning time statute,

Non-instructional time in the U.S. compared to other countries

Teachers in other countries spend less workday time teaching, and more time completing other tasks, compared to teachers in the U.S. In a study of 30 countries, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that the amount of non-instructional time teachers in the U.S. have per year is below the average of the 30 countries at the primary and secondary levels (96 hours and 161 hours below the OECD average, respectively). The same study found that public school teachers in the U.S. teach approximately 1,080 hours per year in both primary and secondary schools, the highest number of teaching hours among all countries in the study. The average number of teaching hours for all 30 countries was 803 hours for primary and 686 hours for secondary. Teachers in the U.S. also teach more hours per day (six hours) than teachers in any of the other countries in the study. Another study comparing teachers in the U.S. to teachers in South Korea found that teachers in the U.S. spend 80 percent of their day with students while teachers in South Korea spend only 35 percent of their day with students.

Sources: Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, “Education at a Glance 2007: OECD Indicators,” 2007, pp. 404, 405, 411, <http://www.oecd.org/> (accessed May 13, 2011); Nam-Hwa Kang and Miyoung Hong, “Achieving Excellence in Teacher Workforce and Equity in Learning Opportunities in South Korea,” *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 37, Issue 4, 2008, p. 201, <http://image.sciencenet.cn/> (accessed Jun. 29, 2012).

planning time is the purview of districts. In states with planning time laws, districts and schools can give teachers planning time above the minimum requirement.

Is teacher planning time a component of the new teacher evaluations in Tennessee?

In the new state teacher evaluation model, Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM), the degree to which teachers adequately prepare their lessons and the degree to which teachers collaboratively plan with other educators are evaluated.²² One performance standard included in the “TEAM Professionalism Rating Report” is: “The educator contributes to the school community by assisting/mentoring others, including collaborative planning, coaching, or mentoring other educators, or supervising clinical experiences for aspiring teachers.”²³ One shortcoming of TEAM may be that planning time varies from district to district, and may vary from school to school within districts. There is no formal correlation in the model with the actual amount of time teachers are given to plan and collaborate.

Teacher planning time policies at the school district level in Tennessee

In Tennessee, the amount of planning time that teachers receive is based on state law, individual teacher or LEA

Tennessee Code Annotated 49-1-302(e)(2):
 The board [State Board of Education] shall develop and adopt rules and regulations providing teachers in kindergarten through grade twelve (K–12) with duty-free planning periods during the established instructional day. The rules shall provide for annual reporting to the state department [Tennessee Department of Education] of LEA compliance by board policy or negotiations with a recognized professional employees’ organization. At least two and one half (2.5) hours of planning time shall be provided each week during which teachers have no other assigned duties or responsibilities, other than planning for instruction. The two and one half (2.5) hours may be divided on a daily or other basis. Duty-free planning time shall not occur during any period that teachers are entitled to duty-free lunch. Any LEA that is providing a duty-free planning period by extending the school day by thirty (30) minutes as of the beginning of the 2000–2001 school year may continue that practice and satisfy the requirements of this section.

This language is echoed in the Tennessee State Board of Education (SBOE) Rules Chapter 0520-01-03.03(4).

Exhibit 1: Amount of teacher planning time provided in state statutes

Arkansas	3 hours, 20 minutes weekly distributed in increments of no less than forty minutes during the student instructional day.
Louisiana	At least 45 minutes daily or the equivalent weekly.
Minnesota	At least 5 minutes of preparation time for every 25 minutes of classroom time per day. Preparation time shall be provided in 1 or 2 uninterrupted blocks during the student day.
North Carolina	All full-time classroom teachers are to be provided a duty-free instructional planning time to the extent that supervision of the children and funds allow.
North Dakota	A teacher's schedule must include preparation time during the teacher's working day.
Rhode Island	Weekly common planning time is required; a specific amount of time is not stated except 1 hour of common planning time is required if the school is in Multi-Year Intervention status.
Tennessee	2 hours, 30 minutes per week.
Texas	7 hours, 30 minutes every 2 weeks.
Virginia	At least an average of 30 minutes per day.
West Virginia	1 period of at least 30 minutes; the preparation period must be the length of a usual class period and must be at least 30 minutes in duration.

Source: National Council on Teacher Quality, “Teacher Rules, Roles, and Rights: Custom Report,” 2009, <http://www.nctq.org/> (accessed May 13, 2011).

contracts, school district policy, and school policy. According to the Tennessee Education Association (TEA), 92 LEAs currently have teacher collective bargaining agreements. Teacher contracts within those LEAs include provisions related to how much time a teacher is required to be at school per day, how much non-instructional time teachers receive, and other time-related issues. Thirty-nine LEAs have teacher contracts that include specific provisions related to how much planning time teachers receive, when their planning time is scheduled, and what they can do during that time, and restrictions on what they can be required to do during that time.²⁴ With the passage of the “Professional Educators Collaborative Conferencing Act” (PECCA) in June 2011, new teacher contracts and memorandums of understanding (MOU) will change and this may affect planning time.²⁵ Under the new law, teacher planning time can be discussed in collaborative conferencing as long as districts follow the state requirements.

Individual teacher planning time

In 2011, the Comptroller’s Offices of Research and Education Accountability (OREA) conducted a telephone survey of school districts in Tennessee that asked district personnel questions about teacher planning time. Of the 136 school districts, 120 responded to the survey (a response rate of 88 percent).²⁶ All LEAs reported that they were in compliance with the state teacher planning time statutory requirement of 150 minutes of planning time per week. Most districts include the state teacher planning time statute either in board policies, teacher contracts, or MOUs with local teacher associations. In 34 districts, either the board policy, teacher contract, or the MOU states that teachers will have more planning time than the state minimum, typically specifying that teachers will be guaranteed one planning period per day for the length of a regular class period.²⁷ Most responding LEAs also stated that, in practice, at least

Approximately one-third of education professionals in Tennessee do not believe that teachers are given enough non-instructional time.

Block schedule: class periods last longer than the traditional 50 minutes (usually close to 90 minutes). Students attend each course every other day (as opposed to having the same classes every day) or students attend the same class every day and complete a course in one semester (as opposed to the traditional two semesters).

some teachers receive more planning time than the state minimum. In addition to their set planning time, teachers receive a duty-free lunch period daily.²⁸ Teachers may also receive additional non-instructional time before and after school, which they can use for planning; however, this time is usually minimal and teachers may have other duties during this time (e.g., bus duty). More specific information on teacher planning time was limited at the district level because planning time policies are predominantly determined at the school level.

According to the OREA survey, the amount of planning time that teachers receive varies widely by school, grade level, and classroom assignment. On average, high school teachers receive approximately 77 minutes of planning time per day, middle school teachers receive 53 minutes, and elementary teachers receive 42 minutes.²⁹ For example, teachers at high schools that operate on a block schedule^B may receive 90 minutes of planning time per day, while teachers at elementary schools in the same district may receive 30 minutes per day because their planning time occurs while their students are attending other classes (e.g., P.E. or art). Special education and English Language Learner (ELL) teachers may receive more or less planning time than regular education teachers depending on how the school schedules classes and whether teachers are given a paraprofessional or co-teacher. Most, but not all, districts reported that teachers are rarely required to complete other tasks during their planning time; however, they may be assigned tasks which they cannot complete during any time other than their planning time. Requirements may vary from school to school. Some schools may require teachers to spend a portion of their planning time completing other tasks

^B Block schedule: class periods last longer than the traditional 50 minutes (usually close to 90 minutes per day), students attend each course every other day (as opposed to having the same classes every day), and students complete a course in one semester as opposed to the traditional two semesters.

(e.g., paperwork) or attending meetings, professional development, or school activities (such as assemblies).

According to the TELL Tennessee Survey, approximately one-third of education professionals in the state do not believe that teachers are given enough non-instructional time.³⁰ (See Exhibit 2.) For a complete listing of how much time teachers spend on various education activities as reported by the TELL Survey, see Appendix A. When asked about planning time specifically, 45 percent of survey respondents reported that they devote at least three hours of time for individual planning in an average week while 31 percent reported they devoted between one and three hours, and 24 percent reported they devoted less than one hour. (See Exhibit 3.)³¹ The amount of time that teachers devote to individual planning is not the same as the amount of planning time that teachers are given. For example, teachers may be given three hours of planning time per week, and devote one hour to individual planning, one hour to common planning, 30 minutes to completing paperwork, and 30 minutes to attending meetings. These results are similar to those from TELL surveys in Maryland, Colorado, North Carolina, and West Virginia.³²

According to the TELL Survey, 97 percent of teachers in Tennessee do not believe they have enough time during their regular working hours to complete all of their assignments.³³ Almost two-thirds of educators believe that teachers are given sufficient non-instructional time, but teachers spend significant time on school-related

According to the TELL Survey, 97 percent of teachers in Tennessee do not have enough time during their regular paid working hours to complete all of their assignments.

Exhibit 3: Amount of individual teacher planning time per week

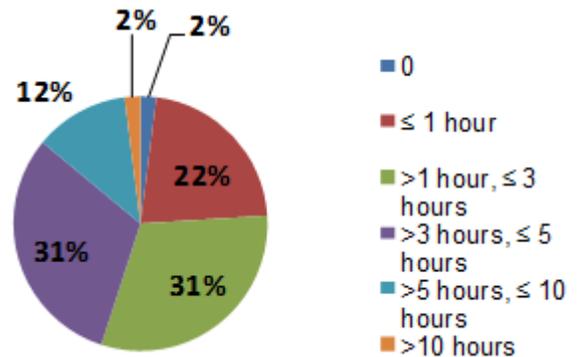
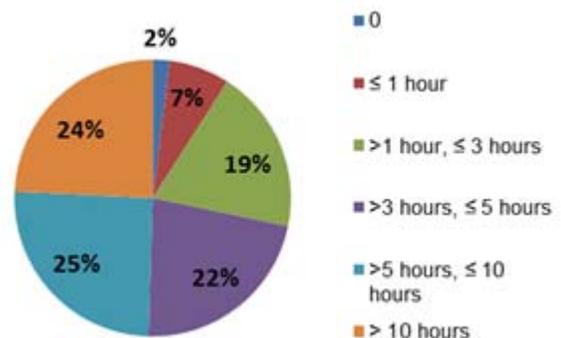
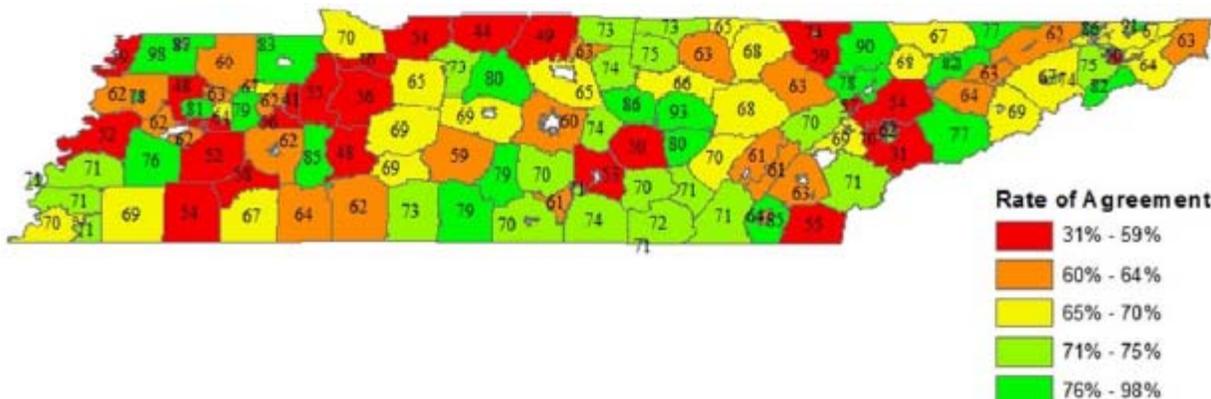


Exhibit 4: Number of hours teachers spend on work-related assignments outside of their paid working hours



Source: TELL Tennessee Survey, "Survey Results: Questions 2.2(a), and 2.3," 2011, <http://telltennessee.org/> (accessed May 3, 2011).

Exhibit 2: Percentage of TELL Tennessee survey respondents reporting that non-instructional time in their school is sufficient



Source: Eric Hirsch, Andrew Sioberg, Patrick Dougherty, Ann Maddock, and Keri Church, *2011 TELL Tennessee Initiative: Creating Schools that Catalyze Teacher Effectiveness*, New Teacher Center, p. 5, <http://telltennessee.org/> (accessed Jul. 19, 2012).

activities outside of the regular school day: 24 percent of teachers spend more than ten hours per week, 25 percent spend more than five hours, 22 percent spend more than three hours, and at least 26 percent spend less than three hours. (See Exhibit 4.)³⁴ See the pullout box titled “TELL Tennessee Survey: Survey participants’ responses to teacher planning time questions” for a quick summary and analysis of the TELL survey results relative to planning time.

Common planning time

Although it is a district-level requirement in some LEAs, common planning time is usually a school-level policy. Of the LEAs that responded to the OREA Teacher Planning Time survey, 114 (95 percent) have some schools that give teachers common planning time.³⁵ The amount and structure of common planning time varies widely from school to school. Common planning time is usually given to teachers within the same grade level at elementary schools and middle schools, and teachers within the same subject area at high schools; however, common planning time can be structured in many different ways. For example, some high schools give all 9th grade teachers common planning time, some middle schools give teacher teams common planning time, and some elementary schools give teachers across grade levels common planning time. Common planning time is usually provided during teachers’ normal planning period, but some districts give teachers additional time to collaborate during staff development days, early release days, and professional development days.

Research suggests that new and struggling teachers benefit from common planning time with experienced, effective teachers and that general education teachers who teach inclusion classes (i.e., classes in which special education students are included in regular education classes) benefit from common planning time with special education teachers and paraprofessionals.³⁶ Common planning time may be a challenge for schools to schedule, especially for elementary schools.

According to the TELL Tennessee Survey, 68 percent of teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they have time available to collaborate with colleagues; 66 percent of teachers reported less than one hour of collaborative planning in an average

week, 26 percent reported between one and three hours, and eight percent reported more than three hours. (See Exhibit 5.)³⁷ These results are similar to those from other states, such as Colorado and West Virginia.³⁸ Some districts have partnered with organizations to

TELL Tennessee Survey: Survey participants’ responses to teacher planning time questions

- 1. Teachers believe planning time is important:** 15 percent stated that time during the workday (which includes planning time) is the most important aspect of their teaching conditions that promotes student learning; 12 percent stated that it is the one aspect of teaching that most affects their willingness to keep teaching at their school.
- 2. Teachers do not receive enough planning time:** 37 percent do not believe that the non-instructional time provided for teachers in their school is sufficient. 97 percent do not have enough time during their regular working hours to complete all of their work. 49 percent spend more than 5 hours per week on school related activities outside of the regular school day.
- 3. Teachers do not have enough individual planning time:** 24 percent reported that they devote up to 1 hour per week to individual planning time. 31 percent reported they devoted more than 1 hour but up to 3 hours per week to individual planning time.
- 4. Teachers do not receive enough common planning time:** 72 percent of beginning teachers reported that they received common planning time with other teachers; however, 66 percent of all teachers (including new and veteran teachers) reported that they had less than or up to 1 hour of collaborative planning in an average week.
- 5. Most teachers have access to Professional Learning Communities (PLCs):** 80 percent indicated that teachers in their school participate in PLCs and 68 percent of beginning teachers reported that they had access to a PLC.

Source: TELL Tennessee Survey, Survey Results: Questions 2.1(d), 2.2(a), 2.2(b), 2.3, 9.1(d), 10.3, 10.5, 11.1(d), 11.1 (h), 2011, <http://telltennessee.org/> (accessed May 3, 2011).

implement education initiatives in schools that impact teacher planning time. (See the pullout box titled “Benwood Initiative in Chattanooga.”)

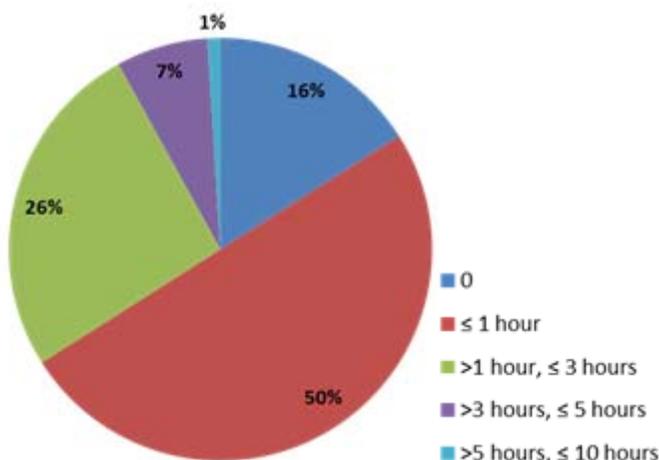
Common planning time for new and/or struggling teachers and experienced, effective teachers

Studies show that new and struggling teachers benefit from common planning time with experienced, effective teachers.³⁹ Researchers have found that common planning time with teachers in the same subject area is a significant factor in the decision of beginning teachers to remain at a school.⁴⁰ In a study of schools in Tennessee, the Education Consumers Foundation found that high performing schools provide struggling and/or new teachers common planning time with experienced, effective teachers who mentor them and provide feedback to help them improve. On average, beginning teachers in Tennessee report receiving more common planning time with experienced teachers than beginning teachers in most other TELL survey states. (See Exhibit 6.)

Common planning time in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are small learning communities within schools with a focus on collaboration among educators.⁴¹ Common planning time is an important component of PLCs. The collaboration fostered by PLCs is increasingly being recognized as a tool for improving teacher effectiveness.⁴² The TDOE’s guide for school

Exhibit 5: Amount of collaborative teacher planning time per week



Source: TELL Tennessee Survey, “Survey Results: Questions 2.2(b),” 2011, <http://telltennessee.org/> (accessed May 3, 2011).

improvement suggests that PLCs are “needed to support the continuous improvement effort” in Tennessee schools.⁴³ A Tennessee State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) report released in 2009 recommended that school administrators should create PLCs and provide collaborative common planning time for teachers.⁴⁴ PLCs are usually initiated at the school level, but districts can foster their implementation by providing professional development on PLCs and collaboration to teachers and school administrators.

According to the OREA Teacher Planning Time Survey, approximately 63 LEAs (53 percent) currently have PLCs and 16 districts (13 percent) have similar programs.⁴⁵ At least 25 districts (21 percent) have PLCs in every school and 22 districts (18 percent) are in the process of either starting PLCs or expanding their current PLC program.⁴⁶ Based on results from the TELL

Benwood Initiative in Chattanooga

In 2001, the Public Education Foundation (PEF) and the Benwood Foundation partnered with Hamilton County Schools and created the Benwood Initiative. The primary focus of the Benwood Initiative has been to improve student literacy and teacher effectiveness in elementary schools. There are currently 15 Benwood schools.

The Benwood Initiative uses numerous strategies in its school improvement efforts, including the use of common planning time. One of the initiative’s goals is for the school leadership team to oversee horizontal planning (teachers in the same grade level) and vertical planning (teachers in the same subject area).

PEF also partnered with Hamilton County Schools to create the Schools for a New Society Program in middle and high schools. One of the main goals of the program is to create Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in middle and high schools. Many of the schools incorporate planning time (especially vertical and horizontal common planning time) in their school’s learning community plan.

Sources: Public Education Foundation, “Benwood Initiative,” <http://www.pefchattanooga.org/> (accessed Jul. 3, 2012); Public Education Foundation, “Overview,” <http://www.pefchattanooga.org/> (accessed Jul. 3, 2012); Public Education Foundation, “2009-2010 MSNS Reform Booklet,” 2009, p. 1, 3, 9, 15, 17, 20, <http://www.pefchattanooga.org/> (accessed Jul. 3, 2012).

survey, 80 percent of respondents indicated that teachers in their school participate in PLCs, and 68 percent of beginning teachers reported that they had access to a PLC.⁴⁷

Common planning time as an incentive for teachers

Studies show that common planning time can be used as an incentive to attract teachers to hard-to-staff schools, and can be a factor when teachers consider whether or not to stay at a school. Researchers in a number of states suggest that teachers prefer nonfinancial incentives, such as guaranteed planning time, over financial incentives, such as bonuses.⁴⁸ Studies show that if teachers are given more individual and common planning time, they are less likely to leave a school. Although common planning time is considered a nonfinancial incentive, increasing the amount of planning time may increase costs for school districts, particularly if scheduling proves problematic.

Common planning time: Best practices

Researchers have found that for common planning time to be effective, administrators must not give teachers too many additional tasks that will reduce collaboration time with other teachers.⁴⁹ Some schools use common

planning time to provide professional development for teachers, but school administrators must be careful not to use common planning time solely for this purpose. It

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

PLCs are small learning communities within schools that focus on improving classroom practice. PLCs are collaborations among educators, where student learning is the focal point and improved student achievement the goal. Some studies have shown that PLCs, when implemented correctly, increase teacher collaboration, increase teacher effectiveness, and improve student achievement.

In order to function effectively in PLCs, teachers must be provided with the information and facilities necessary to collaborate effectively with one another. This includes setting aside sufficient time to collaborate. It is the responsibility of educators, schools and school districts to promote the creation of PLCs and sustain their use over time.

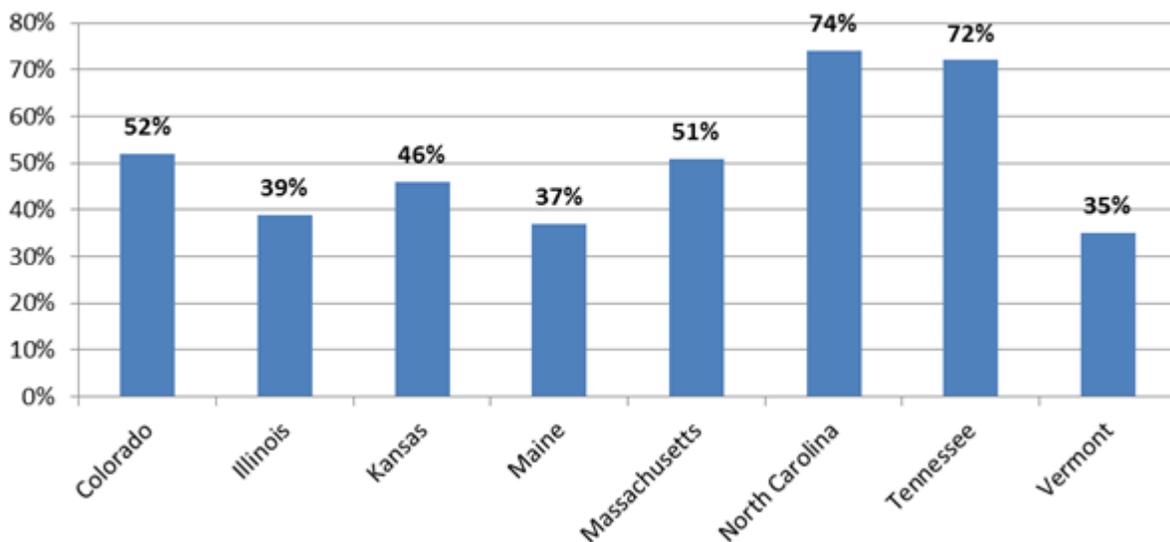
To find more information on PLCs, see

<http://www.allthingsplc.info>.

To view an informational video on PLCs, see

<http://www.youtube.com/user/SolutionTree#p/search/17/vEgmHHeCl4U>.

Exhibit 6: Rate of common planning time given to beginning teachers with experienced teachers



Source: Eric Hirsch, Casia Freitas, and Stephen Fletcher, *TELL Maine Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey: An Interim Report*, New Teacher Center, May 2008, p. 14, <http://tellmaine.org/> (accessed Mar. 16, 2011); Massachusetts, "TELL Survey: Question 11.7(d)," 2008, <http://www.masstells.org/> (accessed May 11, 2011); Kansas, "Teaching, Learning, and Leadership Survey: Question 9.2," 2008, <http://www.kantell.org/> (Accessed May 11, 2011); Illinois, "TELL Survey: Question 9.1," 2008, <http://www.tellillinois.org/> (accessed May 11, 2011); Vermont, "Survey Results: Question 10.1(d)," 2009, <http://www.vtteachingandlearning.net/> (accessed May 11, 2011); Colorado TELL Survey, "2009 Results Details: Question 10.1(d)," 2009, <http://tellcolorado.org/> (accessed May 11, 2011); North Carolina, "Teacher Working Conditions Survey 2010 Results: Question 11.1(d)," 2010, <http://ncteachingconditions.org/> (accessed May 11, 2011); TELL Tennessee Survey, "Survey Results: Questions 11.1(d)," 2011, <http://telltennessee.org/> (accessed May 3, 2011).

may be difficult for districts to reduce the amount of assignments (e.g., paperwork) that teachers complete during their planning period, especially if these assignments are required by state or federal law.

The impact of Race to the Top on teacher planning time in Tennessee

Some school districts in Tennessee are including teacher planning time in their First to the Top (FTTT) initiatives. (See Exhibit 6.) FTTT has not had significant effects on teacher planning time laws and policies at the state level, but some LEAs are changing teacher planning time policies as part of their plans to use FTTT funds. The FTTT Act of 2010 did not contain specific language related to teacher planning time.⁵⁰ Tennessee's Race to the Top (RTTT) application referred briefly to planning time, noting that Renewal Schools (schools in the Corrective Action or Restructuring) would have additional resources, including common planning time.⁵¹ Otherwise, FTTT did not change teacher planning time policies at the state level.

Some districts mentioned teacher planning time in the FTTT Scopes of Work submitted to the TDOE. Of those LEAs that mentioned teacher planning time, most generally referred to teacher planning time as follows:

1. Planning time will be used to provide professional development to teachers,
2. Teachers will be given common planning time,
3. Teachers will use common planning time to discuss new FTTT related activities,
4. Additional personnel (such as instructional coaches) will be hired to assist teachers in developing lesson plans and incorporating data in lesson plans [during their planning time], and
5. Teachers will use some of their planning time to meet together and create new curriculum.

At least 11 LEAs specifically mentioned teacher planning time (individual and/or common planning time) as an element of their FTTT initiatives. (See Exhibit 7.) Of these, three districts specifically mentioned teacher planning time within PLCs.

At least seven LEAs outlined "Performance Targets" (their goals) and "Performance Measures" (the method used to measure performance) for FTTT initiatives relative to teacher planning time.^c (See Appendix B for a complete listing.) Examples of performance targets LEAs listed for initiatives that impact teacher planning time include:

1. Improved student achievement, and
2. Improved teacher effectiveness / instructional quality.

One district, Trousdale County, listed the successful implementation of PLCs in each school and documented common planning time. Examples of ways LEAs plan to use performance measures include:

1. Formative and summative measures of student achievement (including Tennessee Value Added Assessment System individual and school wide scores),
2. Classroom observations,
3. Teacher evaluations,
4. Teacher surveys,
5. Program attendance, participation, completion rates, and
6. Documentation of teacher collaboration during common planning time.

Two LEAs' Scopes of Work indicate that approximately \$240,684 (0.1 percent of the \$250 million in RTTT funding distributed to LEAs) was earmarked to provide teachers more planning time. (See Exhibit 8.)^d According to SCORE, 15 LEAs earmarked \$3,832,991 in RTTT for training on PLCs.⁵² None of the expenses for teacher planning time FTTT initiatives are recurring (i.e., the expenditures for these initiatives are one-time expenditures and LEAs did not indicate that they plan to fund these initiatives in subsequent fiscal years). At least one LEA, Trousdale County Schools, included plans in its Scope of Work to increase planning time for teachers without the use of additional funding.⁵³

^c Most LEA FTTT initiatives relative to planning time include multiple components; therefore, it is not possible to determine whether the performance targets and performance measures for these initiatives are specifically for teacher planning time.

^d A portion of the funding listed in Exhibit 6 may be used by districts for initiatives other than teacher planning time; thus the actual amount of funding is likely less than the dollar amounts shown.

Exhibit 7: Teacher planning time initiatives in LEAs' First to the Top Scopes of Work

	Individual Planning Time	Common Planning Time	Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)
Anderson County		Toward Our Potential (TOP) Coaches will collaborate with teachers during common planning time to ensure vertical alignment and continuity of a program of study for all students.	
Bells City		Teachers will be given common planning time to collaborate.	
Coffee County		Common planning time for new teachers and an Instructional Coordinator.	
Franklin County	Teachers will receive job-embedded professional development during their planning time.		
Franklin SSD		Common planning time for all teachers.	An infrastructure will be created to support PLCs.
Lebanon SSD		Common planning time for new teachers and their mentors, and teacher teams.	
Manchester City		Vertical and horizontal common planning time will be given to teachers in grades K–9 to identify curriculum standards that are critical to academic success. Teachers will be given a substitute teacher and will meet for half a day. Teachers in grades K–3 will meet two times per year and teachers in grades 4–9 will meet one time in Year 1 and two times in Years 2 through 4.	
Memphis City (MCS)			The school year for MCS teachers in low-performing schools and schools in the Achievement School District (ASD) will be extended to include an additional 2 days per year during the first two years of FTTT implementation. These days will be used for teacher planning time with the principal and PLCs. These days may be reduced to 1 day per year in Years 3 and 4.

	Individual Planning Time	Common Planning Time	Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)
Trousdale County		Common planning time for teachers in grades K–12 within a PLC culture. Horizontal (grade-level) common planning time for teachers in grades K–8.	PLCs will be implemented in grades 3–12. School administrators will be trained to implement PLCs. PLCs will be expanded from the administrative level to the teacher team level. The effectiveness of PLCs will be enhanced to improve student learning.
Weakley County		Common planning time for new and struggling teachers with their mentors.	
Wilson County			Teachers and school administrators will attend a workshop to learn how to implement PLCs.

Sources: LEA Scopes of Work, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop/resources.html>.

Exhibit 8: Budget for FTTT Teacher Planning Time and Related Initiatives in LEAs

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
Manchester City	\$2,880	\$3,840	\$3,840	\$3,840	\$14,400
Memphis City	\$56,571*	\$56,571	\$56,571	\$56,571	\$226,284
Total	\$59,451	\$60,411	\$60,411	\$60,411	\$240,684

* MCS expects to receive additional funding from the School Improvement Grant and anticipated funding from the state for schools in the Achievement School District.

Sources: Manchester City, "Tennessee First to the Top: Local System Scope of Work – Amendment," pp. 3, 6, 9, and 12, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop/> (accessed Apr. 19, 2011); Memphis City, "Tennessee First to the Top: Local System Scope of Work," pp. 3, 5, 7, and 9, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop/> (accessed Apr. 19, 2011).

Conclusions

- Appropriately scheduled and structured teacher planning time positively impacts teacher effectiveness and student achievement.
- Teachers in other developed countries are given more non-instructional time, including planning, than their U.S. counterparts.
- Tennessee is one of only a few states that have a teacher planning time provision in state law.
- Most school districts in Tennessee give at least some teachers more planning time than the state statute requires.
- The amount of planning time varies widely by district, school, and teacher.
- Approximately one-third of education professionals in the state do not believe that teachers are given enough non-instructional time.
- Ninety-eight percent of educators believe that teachers do not have enough time to complete all of their work-related tasks during their paid working hours.
- Most districts have initiated efforts to establish common planning time and Professional Learning Communities, activities that research shows improves teacher effectiveness. These efforts are still in the early stages of development. The majority of teachers reported receiving less than one hour of common planning time per week.
- Many districts plan to use a portion of their FTTT funding to give teachers more planning time and more time to collaborate. Ten districts specifically included teacher planning time initiatives in their FTTT Scopes of Work. Sustaining funding for these efforts may be challenging following the expiration of RTTT funding.

Policy Considerations

These policy considerations, intended for government officials at the state and local levels, include both advantages and disadvantages (“pros” and “cons”) of implementation. The policy considerations were formulated by OREA and are based on concepts and best practices found by researchers to improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

Policy Considerations

The Tennessee General Assembly, the State Board of Education, local boards of education, and/or school principals may wish to consider the following:

1. Increasing the amount of individual planning time teachers are given per week.*

State law requires that teachers be given 150 minutes of planning time per week. Results from an OREA survey of LEAs found that in most districts, at least some teachers receive more planning time than the state minimum. The amount of planning varies widely by district, school, and teacher. According to the TELL survey, 97 percent of educators in Tennessee do not believe that teachers have enough time during their regular working hours to complete all of their assignments/tasks and 49 percent spend more than five hours per week on school related activities outside of the regular school day.

Pros: Research shows that planning time impacts teacher effectiveness, student achievement, teacher retention, and teacher recruitment. One study found that the provision of three or more hours of planning time per week had a statistically significant positive effect on student achievement scores in math and reading.

Cons: Increasing the amount of teacher planning time may be a difficult task for states, school districts, and schools for the following reasons: (1) It may be too expensive for school districts; (2) It may be difficult for districts to find enough quality teachers to fill the new positions created by the increase in planning time, especially those positions at hard-to-staff schools and in hard-to-staff subjects (e.g., math and science); (3) Increased planning time will decrease the amount of time individual teachers spend with students; (4) Some districts may believe that some or all teachers do not need any more planning time; and (5) Some districts may believe that some teachers may not be using their planning time constructively.

*Schools may also consider: (1) limiting the amount of time during their planning period that teachers are required to attend meetings, professional development, or be assigned additional tasks, and (2) giving teachers additional time and/or staff development days during the school year to complete these tasks.

2. Giving teachers common planning time per week. Teachers at the middle and high school level could be given common planning time with teachers who teach the same academic subject area (vertical common planning time) and teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels could be given common planning time with teachers who teach the same grade level (horizontal common planning time). State law currently does not have a common planning time requirement. Results from the TELL Tennessee survey show that the majority of teachers in Tennessee reported that they received less than one hour of common planning time per week. According to an OREA survey of LEAS, at least 114 districts have some schools that give teachers common planning time; however, the amount and structure of common planning time, as well as which teachers participate, varies widely from school to school.

Pros: Research shows that common planning time increases collaboration among teachers and improves teacher effectiveness. Research shows that common planning time is an important component of Professional Learning Communities.

Cons: Giving teachers common planning time is a challenge for schools, especially for elementary schools, with regard to scheduling. If teachers are given common planning time, their students must be assigned to other classes during this time.

a. Giving new and struggling teachers common planning time with experienced, effective teachers. This is already common practice in most schools. The TELL Tennessee survey found that 72 percent of beginning teachers reported that they received common planning time with other teachers.

Pros: Studies show that new and struggling teachers benefit from common planning time with experienced, effective teachers. Giving new teachers common planning time with mentors is an essential component of a successful induction program. In a study of schools in Tennessee, the Education Consumers Foundation found that *high performing schools* provided struggling and/or new teachers common planning time with

experienced, effective teachers who were able to mentor them and provide feedback to help them improve.

Cons: It may be difficult for schools to schedule this planning time and struggling teachers may resist this change. It may be difficult for schools to find enough effective, experienced teachers to implement this change and effective, experienced teachers may not want to participate.

b. Giving regular education teachers who teach inclusion classes common planning time with either a special education teacher or a special education paraprofessional. This decision is currently made at the local or school level. Neither state law nor State Board of Education policy or rule currently address this issue.

Pros: Research suggests that general education teachers who teach inclusion classes (i.e., classes in which special education students are included in regular education classes) would benefit from common planning time with special education teachers and paraprofessionals, and vice versa.

Cons: It may be difficult for schools to schedule this planning time and inclusion teachers may not want to plan with special education teachers/paraprofessionals, or vice-versa.

Endnotes

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Appendix A: TELL Tennessee Survey – Activity Time

Q2.2 In an AVERAGE WEEK, how much time do you devote to the following activities during the school day (i.e., time for which you are under contract to be at the school)?

	0	≤ 1 hour	>1 hour, ≤ 3 hours	>3 hours, ≤ 5 hours	>5 hours, ≤ 10 hours	>10 hours
Individual planning time	2%	22%	31%	31%	12%	2%
Collaborative planning time	16%	50%	26%	7%	1%	0
Supervisory duties	10%	42%	32%	11%	4%	1%
Required committees and/or staff meetings	5%	60%	30%	4%	1%	0
Completing required administrative paperwork	4%	48%	34%	9%	3%	1%
Communicating with parents/guardians and/or the community	2%	52%	37%	7%	2%	1%
Addressing student discipline issues	3%	54%	30%	8%	3%	2%
Professional development	15%	52%	23%	5%	2%	3%
Preparation for required federal, state, and local assessments	8%	30%	28%	15%	9%	9%
Delivery of assessments	7%	34%	39%	13%	5%	2%
Utilizing results of assessments	6%	35%	37%	13%	5%	3%

Source: TELL Tennessee Survey, "Survey Results: Question 2.2," 2011, <http://telltennessee.org/> (accessed May 3, 2011).

Appendix B: Performance Measure Target for Teacher Planning Time Initiatives in LEAs' FTTT Scopes of Work*

	Performance Target	Performance Measure
Anderson County	1. 10% improvement in language arts and math AYP proficient and advanced percentages in all subgroups failing to make AYP benchmarks the previous school year (Year 1 – grades 6–8; Year 2 – grades 6–9, Year 3 – grades 6–10).	1. TCAP scores for students in grades 6-8.
Bells City	1. Enhanced instructional quality.	1. Classroom observations 2. Teacher evaluations 3. Teacher surveys 4. Teacher feedback
Franklin County	1. All teachers in each building will have visited the exemplary classrooms at least five times during the year and documented the ways they have, in turn used the technology in their own classrooms. 2. Instruction in Math and Science will be improved. 3. Student achievement and learning in Math and Science will be improved.	1. Teacher documentation 2. ACT scores 3. CTE performance standards
Lebanon SSD	1. Enhanced teaching of standards and teacher analysis of student data. 2. Improved teacher effect scores.	1. Collaborative planning sessions 2. PIT/RTI process 3. Teacher evaluations 4. Quarterly reports of student progress/ needs based on analysis of formative data and plan for improvement communicated in collaborative planning and in the lab setting. 5. Analysis of student data in laboratory cohort. 6. Teacher Effect scores for grades 4–8 as part of the Individual Teacher Professional Plan. 7. Test Ready benchmarks (gr. 3–6) 8. Discovery Ed (gr. 7–8) 9. TN Balanced Assessment Program (gr. 1–8) 10. LSSD Writing Progress Monitoring (gr. K–8) 11. Children's Progress (PreK–3) 12. Successmaker (K–8) 13. DIBELS (K–3) 14. Other non-academic indicators of attendance, discipline, and referrals
Manchester City	1. Evidence of teacher effectiveness. 2. Increase in student proficient percentage in 7th grade math and in 3rd grade reading. Percent proficient will increase at all grade levels.	1. Teacher observations 2. Discovery assessment for students in grades 3–8
Memphis City	1. Increase in the number of effective teachers.	
Trousdale Co.	1. Common planning time for all teachers in grades K–12. 2. Implementation of PLCs in grades 3–12. 3. Increased student achievement. 4. Increased school effect scores as evidenced by measures of student achievement.	1. Documentation of common planning time in grades K–12 2. PLC implementation by August 2011 3. Individual and school-wide Tennessee Value Added Assessment System (TVAAS) scores

*The Performance Measure Target could not be determined for Franklin Special School District and Coffee County School District. Sources: Anderson County, "Tennessee First to the Top: Local System Scope of Work," pp. 1, 4, 6, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop/> (accessed Apr. 19, 2011); Bells City, "Tennessee First to the Top: Local System Scope of Work," p. 2, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop/> (accessed Apr. 19, 2011); Franklin County, "Tennessee First to the Top: Local System Scope of Work," pp. 3, 9, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop/> (accessed Apr. 19, 2011); Lebanon SSD, "Tennessee First to the Top: Local System Scope of Work," p. 7, <http://www.tn.gov/> (accessed Apr. 19, 2011); Lebanon SSD, "Tennessee First to the Top: Local System Scope of Work - Amendment," p. 3, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop/> (accessed Apr. 19, 2011); Manchester City, "Tennessee First to the Top: Local System Scope of Work - Amendment," p. 3, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop/> (accessed Apr. 19, 2011); Memphis City, "Tennessee First to the Top: Local System Scope of Work," p. 5, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop/> (accessed Apr. 19, 2011); Trousdale County, "Tennessee First to the Top: Local System Scope of Work," pp. 8-9, <http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop/> (accessed Apr. 19, 2011).



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