

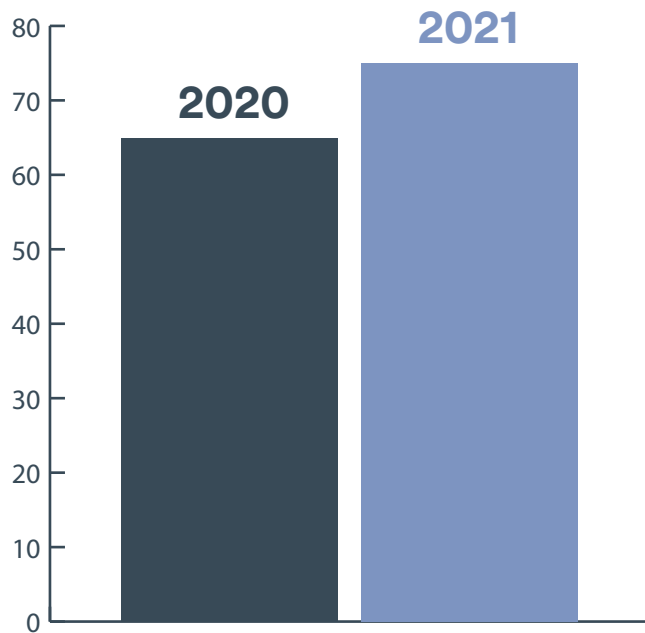


# 2021 District Leaders Survey

# RESPONDENTS:

75 responses for a 73% completion rate, compared to last year's 65 responses for a 44.52% completion rate.

## Survey Respondents



## Completion Rate



# KEY TAKEAWAYS:

**1**

When asked what limitations or constraints hinder their ability to improve student outcomes, the percentage of district leaders who reported “budget” dropped nearly 12% from last year. The percentage of district leaders who reported “staffing” increased 15%.

**2**

When given the opportunity to comment, respondents reported that to better recruit, hire and support principals they would need additional funding, support with strategic recruitment or training and an ability to pay competitive salaries.

**3**

Respondents are contacting elected officials less than in previous years. The percentage of respondents who contact their elected officials multiple times per month decreased nearly 16%, while those who contact elected officials once or twice a year increased 23%.

**4**

For the second year in a row, more district leaders report having the resources and support to obtain quality materials and equipment.

**5**

When asked how Tennessee should handle the BEP funding formula going forward, fewer respondents were unsure (-14.09%) while half of all respondents suggested overhauling the BEP completely and creating a new school funding formula.

- When given an opportunity to elaborate, respondents largely felt that while an increase in funding is critical - especially funding for staffing - school and district leaders who are most familiar with the needs of schools must be consulted by lawmakers if they choose to change the formula.
- There was a 10.85% decrease in the number of district leaders who would like to make small changes or tweaks to the BEP.

# RESPONSES:

## How many years have you been a district leader?

**1-3 years:** 26.67% (-2.33%)<sup>1</sup>

**4-9 years:** 36% (-0.90%)

**10-19 years:** 25.33% (+8.43%)

**20+ years:** 12.00% (-4.90%)

## Were you a school leader/principal before leading a district?

**YES:** 94.67% (+3.90%)

**NO:** 5.33% (-3.90%)

<sup>1</sup>+/- numbers show 2021 compared to 2020 results, reflected as a percent increase or decrease year over year.

## Have you been a classroom educator in the past?

**YES:** 100% (+1.55%)

**NO:** 0% (-1.55%)

## Have you ever led a district other than the one you currently lead?

**YES:** 16.00% (-4.00%)

**NO:** 84.00% (+4.00%)

## Have you ever led a district in another state?

**YES:** 5.33% (-0.82%)

**NO:** 94.67% (+0.82%)

## Approximately how many students are enrolled in your district?

**Less than 2,000:** 44.00% (+4.00%)

**Between 2,000 to 10,000:** 48.00% (-1.23%)

**Between 10,000 to 15,000:** 2.67% (-3.48%)

**Greater than 15,000:** 5.33% (+0.71%)

## What is your perception of the state of education in Tennessee?

**Excellent:** 7.58% (-2.42%)

**Needs some improvement:** 15.15% (-6.52%)

**Good:** 62.12% (+0.45%)

**Needs dramatic improvement:** 3.03% (-0.03%)

**Neutral:** 10.61% (+7.28%)

**Unsure:** 1.52% (+1.52%)

## What limitations or constraints do you feel hinder your ability to improve student outcomes?

**Budget:** 86.36% (-11.97%)

**Transportation:** 15.15% (+3.48%)

**Staffing:** 81.82% (+15.15%)

**Curriculum Quality:** 16.67% (+5.00%)

**Scheduling:** 19.70% (+1.37%)

**Other:** 18.18% (+3.49%)

### Some of the most common “Other” responses include:

- attendance, quarantining of students, Covid-19 guidance and teacher recruitment/retention in smaller districts. Priorities



## What are the three most important areas in education policy that should be addressed immediately?

- **BEP:** Almost 35% of respondents expressed concern that the BEP and/or budgeting process was affecting their ability to hire the teachers and support staff they needed.
- **Covid:** Respondents lamented that the guidance from the state was inconsistent and the options for students when in quarantine were harmful. They also expressed concern about learning loss.
- **Teacher quality/teacher shortage:** Respondents - many from rural or small school districts - mentioned their struggles to recruit and retain high-quality teachers.

## What areas of policymaking do you feel are outside of your influence?

**State-level policy and law:** 83.33% (+1.66%)

**State-level programming:** 68.18% (-5.15%)

**District-level policy:** 0.00% (-1.67%)

**District-level programming:** 1.52% (-0.15%)

**Other:** 10.61% (+7.28%)

## How often do you contact elected officials?

**Never:** 1.52% (-0.15%)

**Once or twice a year:** 45.45% (+23.78%)

**Once a month:** 27.27% (-7.73%)

**Multiple times per month:** 25.76% (-15.91%)

## If you do contact elected officials, what education topics do you discuss? \*This was an open-ended question.\*

**Funding:** 30.91%

**Legislation:** 10.91%

**Covid:** 12.73%

**Education:** 10.91%

## How would you describe your relationship with your school board?

**Excellent:** 75.76% (+15.76%)

**Poor:** 1.52% (-0.15%)

**Good:** 21.21% (-15.46%)

**Very Poor:** 1.52% (+1.52)

**Neutral:** 0.00% (-1.67%)



## Do you feel that the principals in your district are prepared to be effective leaders?

**YES:** 81.82% (-4.85%)

**NO:** 9.09% (+0.76%)

**Unsure:** 9.09% (+4.09%)

## Do you have the capacity and resources to recruit, hire, and support principals?

**YES:** 65.15% (-4.85%)

**NO:** 30.30% (+5.30%)

**Unsure:** 4.55% (-3.78%)

- When given the opportunity to comment, respondents reported that to better recruit, hire and support principals they would need additional funding, strategic recruitment or training and an ability to pay competitive salaries.

## Student assignment/placement decisions in my district are primarily made by...

**Me (The Director of Schools):** 4.55% (-0.45%)

**The School Board:** 1.52% (+1.52%)

**School leaders:** 81.82% (+3.49%)

**Teachers:** 4.55% (-2.12%)

**Other:** 7.58% (-2.42%)

**Unsure:** 0.00% (No change)

**When assigning students to classrooms, do you consider the effectiveness of the teacher/classroom the student had the previous year relative to the effectiveness of the teacher/classroom you would place them in for the coming year?**

**YES: 56.06%** (+2.73%)

**NO: 3.03%** (-5.30%)

**Not applicable/I do not make student assignment decisions: 40.91%** (+2.58%)

**Alternatively, when assigning students to classrooms, do you give consideration to the student's individual achievement levels from the previous year relative to the teacher/classroom performance where they will be assigned? (Ex: Student X is somewhat behind from the past year so they should be placed in one of your higher performing classrooms in the coming year.)**

**YES: 50.00%** (-1.67%)

**NO: 4.55%** (-0.45%)

**Not applicable/I do not make student assignment decisions: 45.45%** (+2.01%)

## Do you have the resources and support to get quality materials and equipment?

**YES:** 68.18% (+6.51%)

**NO:** 9.09% (-7.58%)

**Depends:** 22.73% (+4.48%)

- Respondents elaborate that the problem is not so much the amount of resources but the varying priorities of how to spend funds and allocate resources, long-term concerns about resources with fewer students and how responsive the county is in passing a budget then subsequently ordering materials.

## Do you have the resources and support to build and maintain adequate facilities?

**YES:** 33.33% (No change%)

**NO:** 66.67% (No change)

- Respondents share that federal ESSER dollars have helped but are concerned that local governments long-term plan to be debt-free and keep taxes low.

## Would you support removing class-size mandates in order to receive more funding flexibility?

**YES:** 36.36% (-8.64%)

**NO:** 43.94% (+3.94%)

**Depends:** 19.70% (+4.70%)

- Respondents admit that this all depends on funding flexibility and express concerns that educators who are in school buildings must form this policy, not lawmakers.

**Do you agree that teachers and schools have enough time in their day to meet the needs of our students?**

**YES: 36.36%** (-8.64%)

**NO: 63.64%** (+8.64%)

**Do you agree that teachers and schools have enough time in the year to meet the needs of our students?**

**YES: 56.06%** (-10.61%)

**NO: 43.94%** (+10.61%)

**Would you support an extended school year or school day given the necessary resources and state support?**

**YES: 48.00%** (+6.33%)

**NO: 38.67%** (-6.33%)

**Does your district provide school finance and budgetary training to your school leaders?**

**YES: 56.25%** (+7.10%)

**NO: 28.13%** (-15.94%)

**Depends: 15.63%** (+8.85%)

- Reported trainings are limited mostly to bookkeepers; TOSS has available trainings but it would be beneficial if the State also offered trainings.

## If yes, is the finance and budgetary training focused more on budgetary compliance or how to use dollars to impact student achievement?

**Compliance:** 30.61%

**Strategy:** 0.00%

**Both, but mostly compliance:** 59.18%

**Both, but mostly strategy:** 10.20%

## Do you feel that you receive an adequate amount of funding?

**YES:** 6.25% (-0.53%)

**NO:** 81.25% (-1.80%)

**Depends:** 12.50% (+2.33%)

- Respondents elaborate that local governments must commit more to education. Additionally, distressed counties need additional support to recruit/retain teachers.



## Do your schools receive an equitable amount of school funding based on the population of students they serve? (Ex. economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, special education students, etc.)

**YES:** 40.63% (+8.43%)

**NO:** 57.81% (-4.90%)

**Depends:** 1.56% (-3.52%)

- One issue that was flagged was that special education costs increase exponentially each year even though state funding does not.

## Would you support the state weighting per pupil funding based on student need (ex: economically disadvantaged students, English language learners, special education students, etc.) rather than dispersing an average per pupil amount regardless of individual student needs?

**YES:** 45.31% (+19.89%)

**Depends:** 12.50% (+7.42%)

**NO:** 10.94% (-12.79%)

**Unsure:** 31.25% (-14.51%)

- Several respondents mentioned that they'd have to see the numbers first. Overall, sure students with disabilities must receive additional dollars.





**Have you considered implementing student-based budgeting in your district? (Student-based budgeting is a district level method of weighting the funding the district receives and distributing it to schools based on individual student needs while providing increased autonomy for principals over budgetary decisions.)**

**No, I have not considered implementing student-based budgeting in my district: 37.50% (-18.43%)**

**No, I have not considered implementing student-based budgeting in my district, but I would like to learn more about it: 23.44% (+8.19%)**

**Yes, I have considered implementing student-based budgeting in my district, but have not yet implemented it: 15.63% (+2.07%)**

**Yes, I have piloted or implemented student-based budgeting in my district: 7.81% (-2.73%)**

**Not applicable as I have never heard of student-based budgeting: 15.63% (+5.46%)**





Many policymakers, including Governor Bill Lee, have stressed the need to reform our state's school funding formula, the BEP. How should our state handle the BEP funding formula going forward?

**Leave it as is:** 1.56% (+1.56)

**Make small changes or tweaks to improve the BEP:** 28.13% (-10.85%)

**Overhaul the BEP completely and create a new school funding formula:** 50.00% (+21.19%)

**Unsure:** 6.25% (-14.09%)

**Other:** 14.06% (+2.20%)

Some of the most common “Other” responses include:

- an increase in funding is critical, an increase in staffing costs and facilities is necessary but not necessarily true for technology and materials and lawmakers must listen to school and district leaders if the formula is changed.



Tennessee public schools are receiving over \$4.5 billion in federal relief funding for use between spring 2020 and fall 2023—a historic influx of federal funding to support K-12 schools and students across the state. Who was involved in creating the ESSER plan for your district? \*check all that apply\*

**State leaders:** 17.47%

**Teachers:** 87.30%

**District leaders:** 95.24%

**Parents:** 87.30%

**School administration:** 92.06%

**Local health officials:** 47.62%

Which of the following strategies to combat learning loss do you think will be the most impactful in your district?

\*Respondents are asked to check one\*

**After-school programming:** 19.05%

**Summer learning camp (a six-week summer educational program):** 12.70%

**Learning loss bridge camp (a four-week educational program conducted each year before the beginning of the school year):** 15.87%

**Tutoring:** 31.75%

**Other:** 20.63%

- Many respondents shared that all of the above will have the greatest impact on learning loss in their district, especially if there is a 3-5 year commitment to these offerings.

## What resources are available for all of your students if they require remote learning in the 2021-22 school year?

**Laptops/tablets:** 85.71%

**Access to the internet (i.e. at home WiFi, hotspots, etc.):** 53.97%

**Content packets:** 60.32%

**Enrollment in a virtual academy:** 14.29%

**We are not offering remote learning opportunities in the 2021-22 school year.:** 22.22%

**Other:** 11.11%

- Remote learning is only an option for quarantining students.

For more information on the 2021 District Leaders Survey, visit:  
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