



# Teacher Hiring, Support, and Evaluation in Thompson School District, CO

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Report from The New Teacher Project | August 2008



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## About The New Teacher Project (TNTP)

- TNTP is a national non-profit organization, founded by teachers in 1997.
- Our clients are school districts, charter schools, state education agencies, colleges and universities, and other educational entities.
- TNTP partners with its clients to:
  - Increase the number of outstanding individuals who become public school teachers; and
  - Create environments for all educators that maximize their impact on student achievement.
- TNTP's clients, past and present, include school districts in cities such as Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Memphis, Miami, Oakland, Philadelphia, New York and Washington, DC; and states such as Alaska, Arkansas, Louisiana, Texas and Virginia.

### Our totals to date

28,000

**Teachers** recruited, prepared and/or certified

55

**Programs** established

27

**States** in which TNTP has worked

200+

**School districts** with which TNTP has partnered

~3,800,000

**Students** taught by TNTP-recruited/trained teachers (estimated)



## Background

The Thompson School District (TSD) has a strong record of academic performance that reflects the district's ability to successfully hire and retain high-quality teachers. TSD has avoided some of the common teacher staffing challenges that The New Teacher Project (TNTP) has documented in districts across the country. Yet TSD struggles to effectively fill some vacancies, particularly in high-need subject areas at the middle and high school level.

In the spring of 2008, TNTP partnered with TSD to analyze current practices in the district and to make recommendations to further build the concentration of highly effective teachers in TSD schools.

As the first step in this analysis, TNTP explored several key areas through interviews with central district leadership, principals and teachers. These areas included: **Teacher Recruitment and Supply; Hiring and Staffing Process; New Teacher Support and Development; and Evaluation.**

Using the information gained through these stakeholder interviews, TNTP then identified areas for further investigation and conducted a detailed data analysis using two avenues\*.

- 1** Analysis of district employee transaction data, including records on hiring, non-renewal, retirements and resignations.
- 2** Surveys of principals and teachers.



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## Summary of Findings

### Teacher Recruitment and Supply

- **Some schools, many at the middle and high school level, experience applicant shortages and struggle to fill all vacancies with high-quality teachers.** However, the TSD applicant pool is abundant at the elementary level and for many specific subject areas.

### Hiring and Staffing Process

- **TSD Human Resources has recently streamlined and standardized its hiring and staffing processes,** and schools can fill most vacancies with teachers of their choice through a process of mutual consent.
- **A late hiring timeline weakens the district,** costing TSD many high-quality new teacher candidates.

*continued >*



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## Summary of Findings (cont'd.)

### New Teacher Support

- **The new teacher induction process does not meet its objective** of improving new teachers' skills and effectiveness.
- **Many new teachers regard colleague collaboration as the most useful method of support**, and look for more opportunities to engage with their subject-area and grade-level peers.
- **Teachers have uneven access to mentors and coaches**, despite the fact that these helpful resources provide effective support to new teachers.

### Evaluation

- **The evaluation process, though regarded as satisfactory by some, often lacks meaningful feedback for teachers** as well as specificity for specialized positions (counselors, school psychologists and other special service providers).



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**#1**

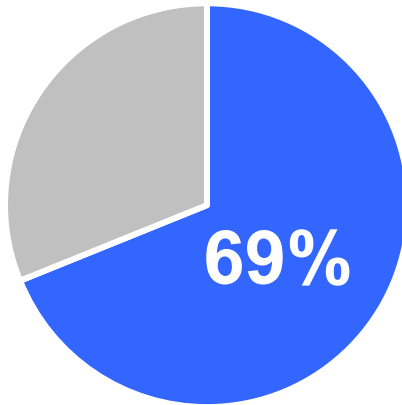
**Increase the applicant pool in shortage areas by providing better information about district needs to prospective teachers and by expanding financial recruitment incentives.**

Note: Teacher survey data in this section include teachers hired by TSD only over the last three years.

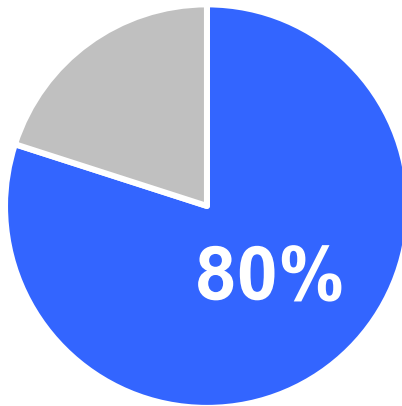


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**TSD's geographic location appears to make it a district of choice for prospective candidates.**



Of the 36 percent of recent hires who accepted a job offer from TSD over an offer from another district in the last three years, geographic location was a factor for 69 percent.



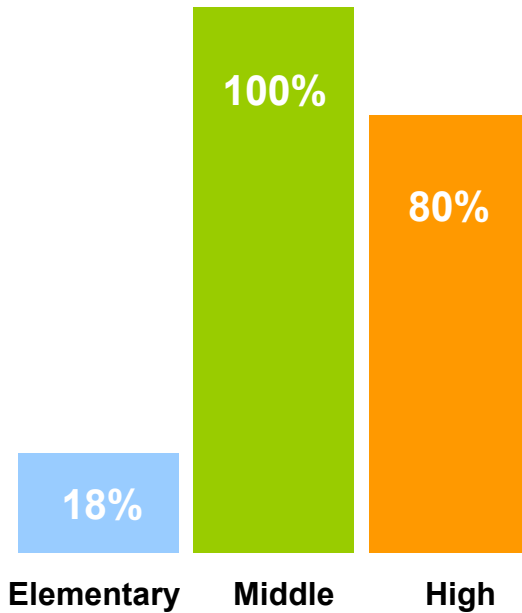
80% of recent hires cited geographic location as a factor in their decision to apply to TSD.

Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 784 TSD teachers, 204 of whom were hired in the last three years.

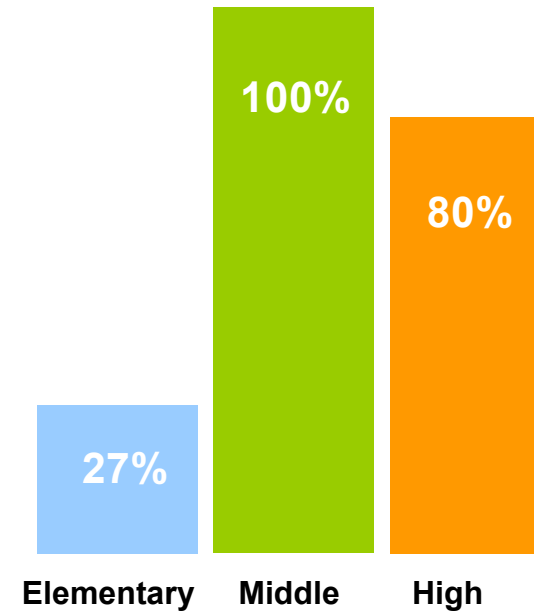


However, the applicant pool fails to meet demand for all vacancies, especially at the secondary level.

Principals reporting one or more vacancies a year for which the teacher applicant pool was insufficient in quantity



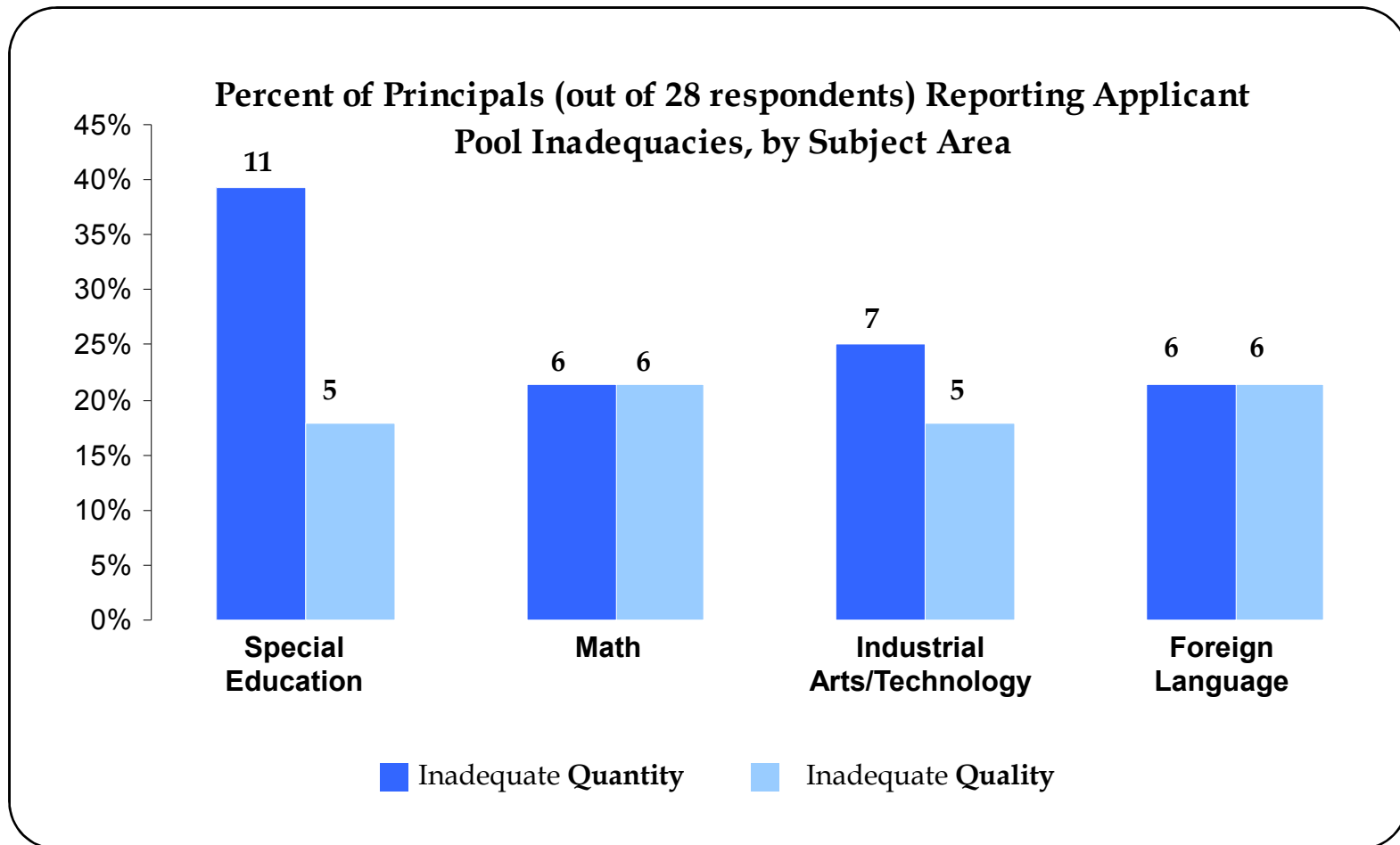
Principals reporting one or more vacancies a year for which the teacher applicant pool was unsatisfactory in quality



Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 28 TSD principals.



**Principals reported the most severe shortages in special education, math, industrial arts/technology and foreign language.**

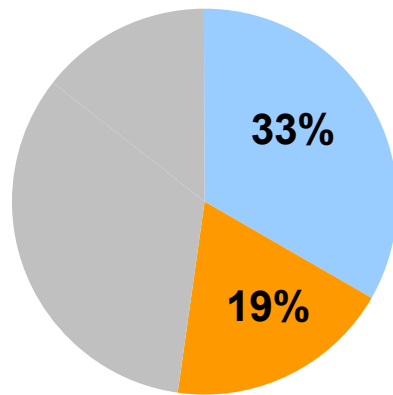


Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 28 TSD principals.



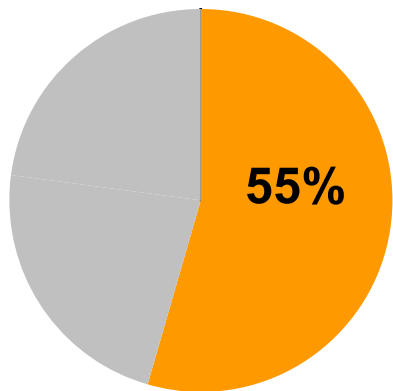
## Principals try to recruit additional candidates but must sometimes resort to hiring lower-quality teachers.

“When the applicant pool for a vacancy at my school was insufficient in either quality or quantity. . .”

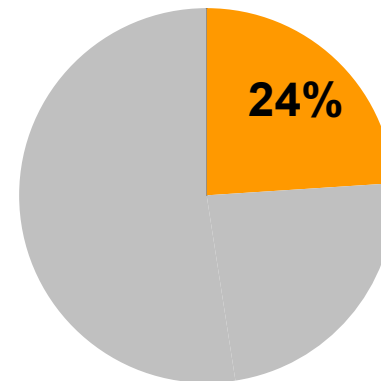


52% of principals frequently or sometimes **recruited additional candidates themselves**

■ Frequently  
■ Sometimes



55% of principals sometimes **hired a candidate of lower quality** than they would have preferred



24% of principals sometimes **hired a candidate who lacked the appropriate certification**

Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 28 TSD principals.



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## Providing financial recruitment incentives and better information about district needs could bolster TSD's applicant pool in shortage areas.

52%

52 percent of recent hires in non-shortage areas would have been more likely to pursue licensure in shortage<sup>1</sup> areas **if there had been financial incentives** to do so.

38%

38 percent of recent hires in non-shortage areas would have been more likely to pursue licensure in shortage<sup>1</sup> areas **if they had better information** about district needs in those areas.

27%

27 percent of recent hires in shortage<sup>1</sup> areas were **motivated by district demand** and said they had pursued licensure in their area because they thought it would give them a **better chance of finding a job**.

1. Shortage areas were specified as math, science, special education, school speech and language pathologist, school psychologist and industrial arts.

Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 784 TSD teachers, 204 of whom were hired in the last three years.



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**The district website is an efficient and effective means of communicating district needs and recruitment efforts to the applicant pool.**

**69%**

of candidates hired in the last three years learned about openings on the district website.

Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 784 TSD teachers, 204 of whom were hired in the last three years.



## Teacher Supply Summary

### Findings

- Despite the district's desirable geographic location, schools face subject-specific applicant shortages.
- Principals try to supplement the applicant pool for their vacancies, but must sometimes hire lower-quality candidates than desired.
- Teachers would be more likely to pursue licensure in shortage areas if provided financial recruitment incentives or better information about district needs.
- The district website is an efficient and effective means of communicating district needs and recruitment efforts to applicants.

### Recommendations

- Utilize applicant-per-hire ratios to prioritize subject areas as Critical Need, Moderate Need, and Low Need. Publicize this information on the TSD website.
- Leverage relationships with local schools of education to strategically funnel teacher candidates into Critical Need areas.
- Expand the number of teachers eligible for recruitment incentives or implement alternate incentives for candidates in shortage areas, such as a one-time signing bonus. Advertise incentives on the district website and allow schools to use incentives to attract particularly high-quality candidates in addition to those with licensure in high-need areas.



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# #2

**Move up the hiring timeline to allow schools to capture the highest-quality new teacher candidates.**

Note: Teacher survey data in this section include only teachers hired by TSD in the last three years.



## District Hiring Timeline Overview

To be eligible for the district's severance plan, teachers must give notification of their intent to retire **by the first Monday in February**.



### Impact:

**94%** of teachers who have retired in the past four years have given notification in February, allowing for the early identification of approximately 25 -30 vacancies each year.



## District Hiring Timeline Overview

Vacancies are not posted until after the spring caucus, which occurred on **March 21 this year**. At this event, schools receive final staffing plans and unassigned non-probationary teachers receive new placements. When a school posts a vacancy, it must be posted internally for five days and then externally for five days before schools can interview candidates, a process which can take two weeks or more.



### Impact:

Vacancies can be posted after the caucus, but the required hiring process **delays the start of hiring until May**.



## District Hiring Timeline Overview

**The Board of Education approves non-renewals of probationary teachers in April or May.**

District representatives report that many non-renewals are due to budget and enrollment uncertainty, as opposed to performance concerns.



### Impact:

The district non-renewed 164 teachers in 2005 and 128 teachers in 2007<sup>1</sup>, creating a **large number of potential vacancies** that could not be posted until May.

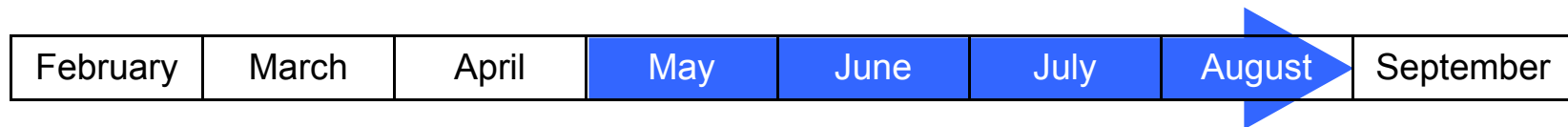
1. Data on non-renewals was only available for 2005 and 2007.

Source: TSD board agendas



## District Hiring Timeline Overview

The district does not have a policy governing notification of *intent to resign*. Teachers who resign can give notice at any point during the summer.



### Impact:

In the past four years, notifications for 61% of the resignations that were effective at the end of the school year were **given after May 1.**



## District Hiring Timeline Overview

In each of the past four years, new hiring has not begun until May and the bulk of hiring has taken place in the summer months of June, July, and August. Over the past four years, 59% of new hire contracts have been approved after July 1 and 17% have been approved after the start of school.



### Impact:

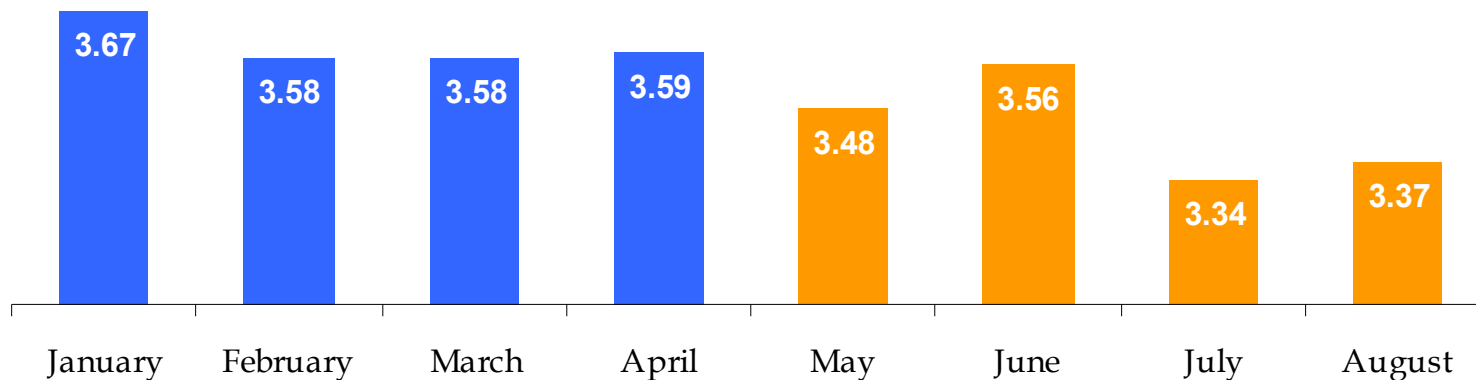
**The best-qualified candidates may be lost.** Previous research by TNTP has shown that districts must complete the bulk of hiring by May 1 to capture the highest-quality new teacher applicants<sup>1</sup>.

1. Levin, J. and Quinn, M. (2003.) *Missed Opportunities: How We Keep High Quality Teachers Out of Urban Classrooms*. The New Teacher Project. Source: TSD board agendas



As measured by the self-reported GPA of recent hires, a proxy for quality<sup>1</sup>, TSD candidates who apply earlier in the hiring season are of higher quality than those applying later.

Average Undergraduate GPA by Application Month



The average Grade Point Average of candidates who applied in April or earlier was 3.59, while the average GPA of those who applied in May or later was 3.45<sup>2</sup>.

1. For research linking undergraduate GPA to applicant quality, see Andrew J. Wayne and Peter Youngs, "Teacher Characteristics and Student Achievement Gains: A Review," *Review of Educational Research*, 73 (1) (2003), 89-122; and Cathy W. Hall, Kris M. Smith, and Rosina Chia, "Relationship Between Metacognition and Affective Variables in College Achievement," *National Social Science Journal* 19(1), (2002), 43-50.

2. This difference is statistically significant for  $p < .01$ .

Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 784 TSD teachers, 204 of whom were hired in the last three years.



## Principals confirm that the district's late hiring timeline causes schools to lose high-quality new hires, particularly at the secondary level.

79%

79% of principals, including 100% of middle and high school principals, said that they **have lost a high-quality applicant** for a vacancy at their school because they could not offer that candidate a job in a timely fashion.

58%

58% of principals, including 75% of middle school principals and 80% of high school principals, **said that the current hiring timeline does not allow them to hire early enough** to capture the highest-quality new teacher applicants<sup>1</sup>.



### Principals' thoughts on the hiring timeline

*We have lost quality people every year. Just study how few people get hired off the all-star recruiter lists. It's sad how few we actually hire.*

- High school principal

*When we send people to job fairs, they should be authorized to offer contracts. Now there is little point in going.*

- High school principal



1. Principals responding "Strongly disagree", "Disagree", or "Somewhat disagree."  
Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 28 TSD principals.  
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## Hiring Timeline Summary

### Findings

- Posting of vacancies and new hiring are delayed until after the spring caucus.
- New teacher hiring begins in May or June and a majority of hiring is completed after July 1.
- This late hiring timeline causes schools to lose quality candidates.

### Recommendations

- Set a district goal of holding the spring caucus in February.
  1. Make timely resolution of decisions regarding school-level FTEs a priority at all levels of the district.
  2. Streamline the process for developing school-level FTE's and provide appropriate training to those involved.
- Pilot an initiative to extend early contracts to a select group of new hires in shortage areas and/or of especially high quality. Coordinate this initiative with principals to ensure that those hired meet schools' needs.



## Hiring Timeline Summary (continued)

### Findings

- The timeline for approval of non-renewals and the lack of a policy for notification of resignations leads to late vacancy postings.

### Recommendations

- Implement a district-wide policy requiring notification of the intent to resign by March. This policy should offer both incentives for teachers who resign by the deadline and penalties for those who do not.
- Identify probationary teachers for non-renewal in March.
- Train principals in soliciting honest feedback from teachers about their intent to resign or return in the coming school year.



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# #3

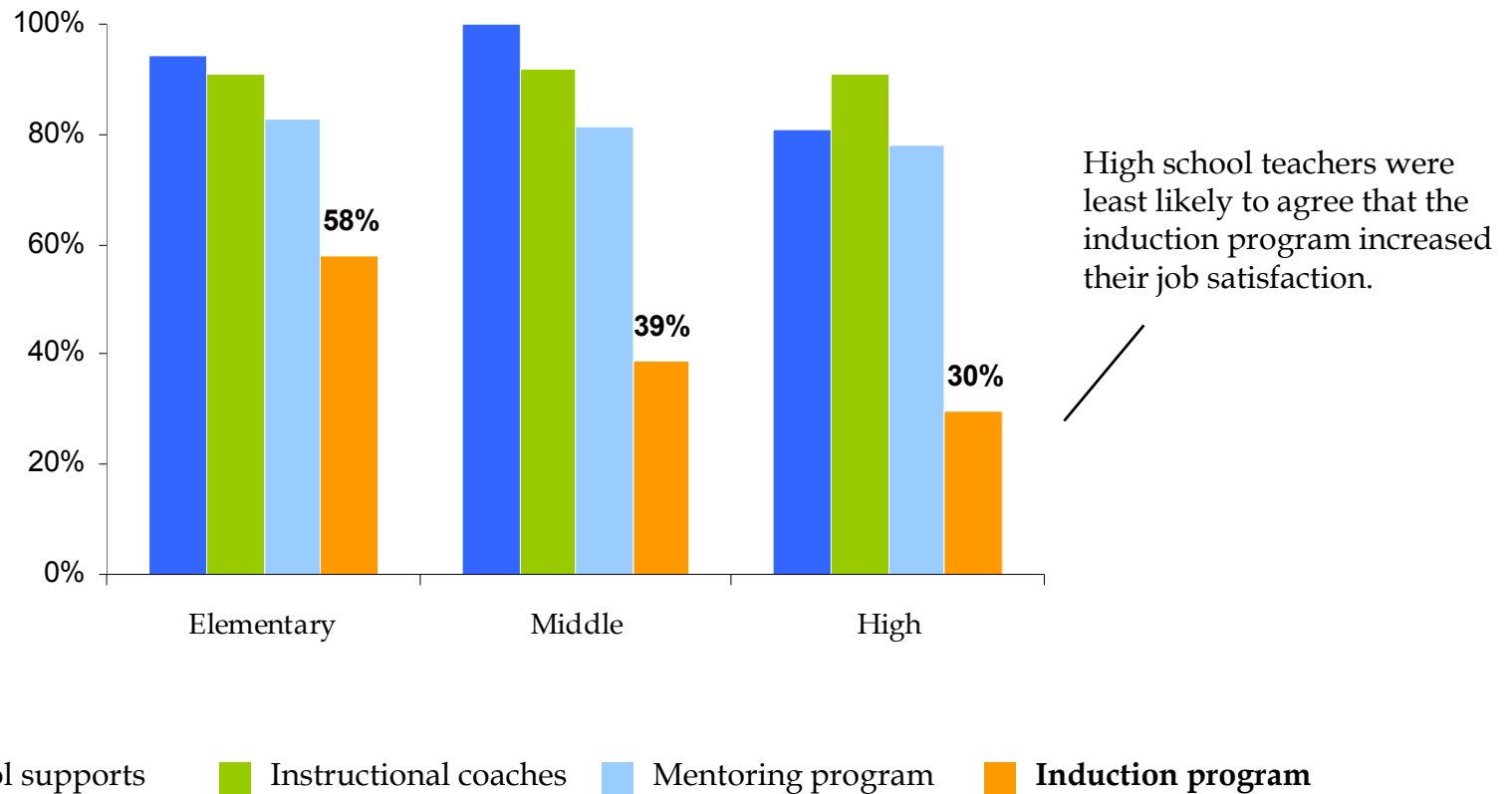
**Increase the efficacy of new teacher support by reforming the induction program and expanding opportunities for new teachers to engage in professional collaboration with their colleagues.**

Note: Teacher survey data in this section include only teachers hired by TSD in the last three years.



## Teachers rated the induction program as the least beneficial of the district's new teacher support and development offerings.

Teachers' net agreement that district support offerings increased their job satisfaction<sup>1</sup>



1. Teachers responding "Strongly agree", "Agree" or "Somewhat agree."

Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 784 TSD teachers, 204 of whom were hired in the last three years.

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**Many teachers report that the current induction program does not accomplish its goal of developing teachers' skills and effectiveness.**

**51%**

Only 51% of teachers who participated in the induction program **said that it increased their effectiveness<sup>1</sup>**. About a third (35%) of teachers disagreed that it increased their effectiveness (including 19% who strongly disagreed that it did so).

**59%**

Only 59% of teachers who participated in the induction program **said that it addressed their needs** as new teachers<sup>1</sup>.

*“New teacher training and induction classes have a ‘one size fits all’ approach and do not meet everyone's needs. We are expected to tailor our teaching in the classroom based on individual student needs, but the district doesn't at all model that with new teacher training and induction.”*

*- High school science teacher*

1. Teachers responding “Strongly agree”, “Agree” or “Somewhat agree.”



## New teachers consider their colleagues to be the most effective source of support and are eager for opportunities for professional collaboration.

	What were effective sources of support for you? <sup>1</sup>	What was the MOST IMPORTANT source of support for you?
Another teacher at school	83%	38%
Department/grade chair	38%	16%
Mentor	51%	14%
Principal	59%	11%
Instructional Coach	46%	9%



When asked what additional types of classroom instruction support would have been valuable, respondents most frequently requested *additional opportunities for professional collaboration*, such as team teaching, team planning and grade level or subject area meetings.

1. Top five responses

Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 784 TSD teachers, 204 of whom were hired in the last three years



## Survey respondents expressed particular interest in collaborating with colleagues in their grade level, subject area and position type.

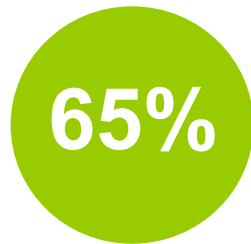
As a new teacher, what additional supports in classroom instruction, networking, and accessing a professional community of support would have been valuable to you?

- *“Special education-specific trainings regarding the district's style/ expectations for IEP writing, special ed process, legal implications of such, further training in district sped computer program.”*
- *“More content area meetings across the district.”*
- *“More specific and detailed information about teaching gifted and talented students and ways to collaborate with the gifted education specialist.”*
- *“Grade-level meetings with mental health professionals.”*
- *“More time with actual department in my school . . . since it more directly affects what we teach and how than any other training.”*
- *“Positive associations with other teachers in the same subject matter and grades.”*
- *“Networking with other teachers in my area of teaching.”*

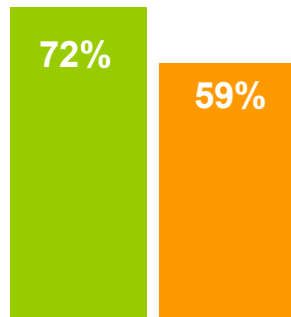
Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 784 TSD teachers, 204 of whom were hired in the last three years.



The district's mentor program provides an effective opportunity for new teacher support, especially when the mentor teaches in the same subject area/grade level as the new teacher.



65% of new teachers who had mentors in their first year in the district **cited the mentor as an effective form of support**; 17% said it was the single most important source of support.



Teachers with mentors in the same subject area/grade level were 22% more likely to say their mentor was an effective source of support than those whose mentors taught in a different area.

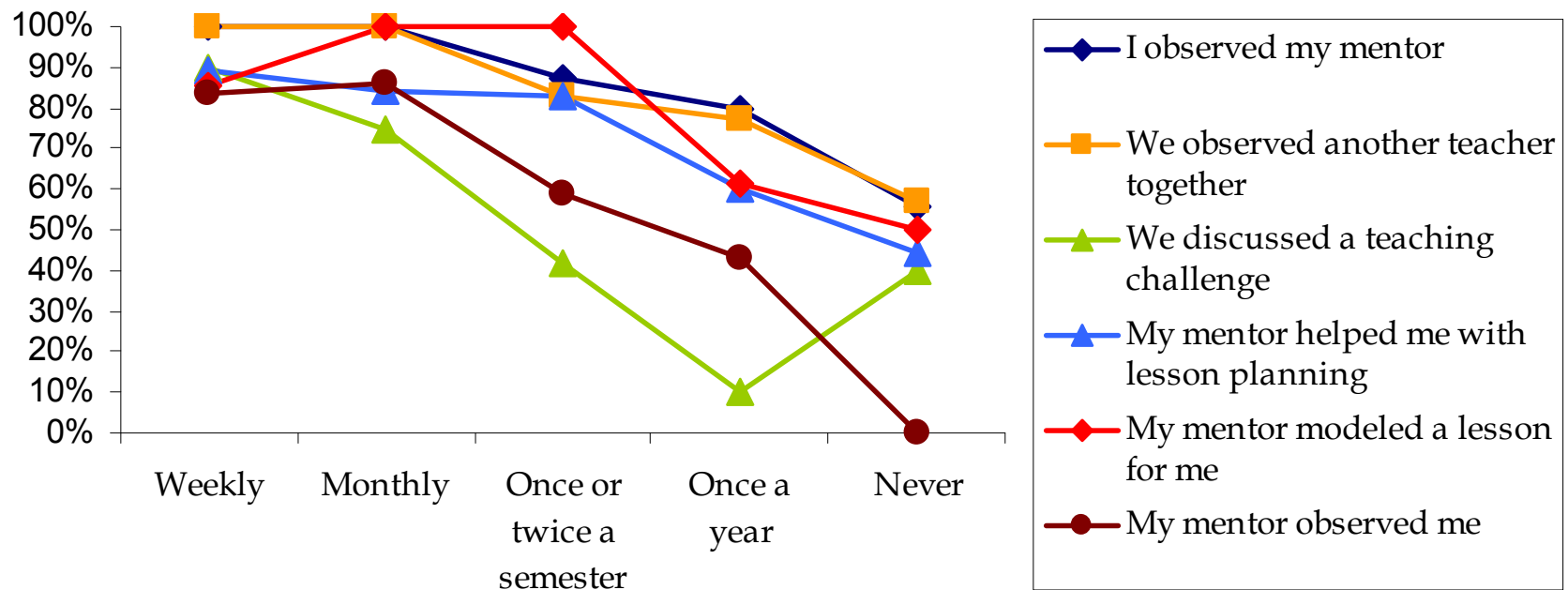
■ Mentor in same area   ■ Mentor in different area

Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 784 TSD teachers, 204 of whom were hired in the last three years.



**The frequency with which mentors and mentees engage in professional development activities strongly influences the effectiveness of the relationship.**

### Teachers who identify their mentor as an effective source of support



### Frequency of mentor/mentee activities

Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 784 TSD teachers, 204 of whom were hired in the last three years



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**A significant number of teachers had minimal contact with their mentor and lost out on the benefits of that relationship.**

**24%**

of teachers who had been assigned a mentor reported that they spent an **average of 0 hours a week with them.**

Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 784 TSD teachers, 204 of whom were hired in the last three years.



## Teachers found the instructional coaches to be another valuable source of colleague support.

94%

94% of teachers who worked with an instructional coach in the 2007-08 school year said it had increased their effectiveness<sup>1</sup>.

92%

92% of teachers who worked with an instructional coach in the 2007-08 school year **said it increased their job satisfaction<sup>1</sup>**.

*"Instructional coaches are fabulous."*

- Elementary teacher

*"I have truly appreciated the support I have received from the instructional coaches in my building--both literacy and technology."*

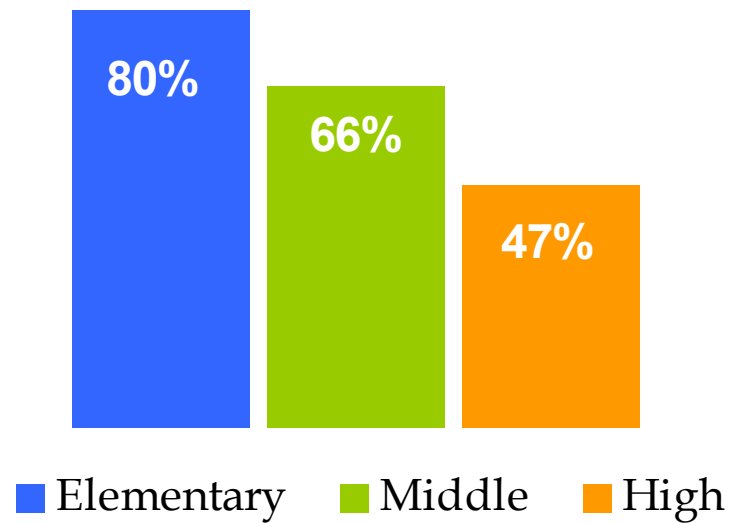
- Middle school language arts teacher

1. Teachers responding "Strongly agree", "Agree" or "Somewhat agree."



**The potential for effective support offered by instructional coaches is undercut by their uneven contact with teachers, especially at the high school level.**

**Percent of new teachers who received personal coaching or support from instructional coaches in the 2007-08 school year (by school level)**



Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 784 TSD teachers, 204 of whom were hired in the last three years.



## New Teacher Support Summary

### Findings

- The induction program is the least effective new teacher support offering.
- Support from colleagues is the most effective form of support for new teachers.
- Teachers want more opportunities for professional collaboration, particularly in their grade level and subject area.

### Recommendations

- Reform the induction program to ensure efficacy for each grade level, subject area and specialty position.
- Use feedback from induction participants to make real-time adjustments to curriculum and format.
- In collaboration with the TEA, implement grade level, subject area and specialty position “affinity groups.” Groups should meet regularly, with structured agendas and clear objectives.
- Incorporate additional opportunities for team teaching and vertical teaming.
- Offer regularly scheduled new teacher networking opportunities.
- If possible, integrate these supports into the induction program.



## New Teacher Support Summary (continued)

### Findings

- Mentorship is most effective when mentors and teachers have regular and meaningful interaction. A significant number of teachers are deprived of the benefits of having a mentor because of a lack of contact with them.
- Instructional coaches are an effective source of support, but some teachers, particularly at the high school level, do not have the opportunity to work with them.

### Recommendations

- Tighten oversight of the mentor program to ensure that teacher/mentor pairs engage in substantive professional development activities on a regular basis.
- Empower new teachers to give regular feedback on the consistency and effectiveness of their mentor relationship and to have a new mentor assigned if necessary.
- Expand opportunities for teachers to work with instructional coaches, particularly at the high school level.



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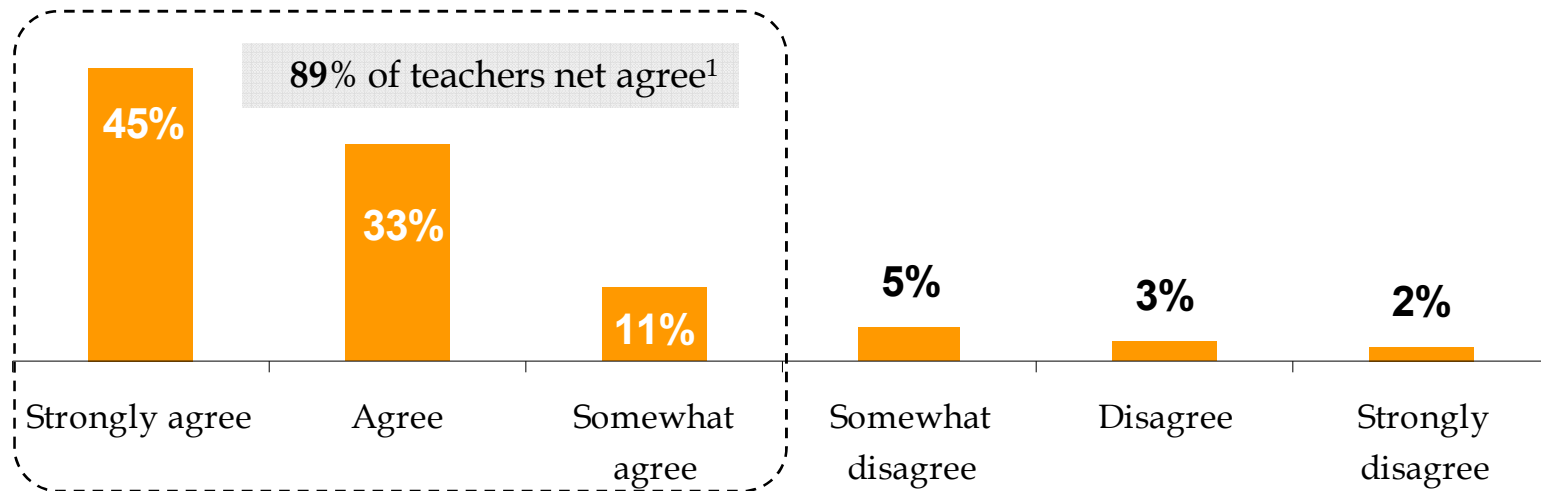
# #4

**Address weaknesses in the evaluation system to ensure that all teachers receive meaningful feedback about their performance and get the support they need to improve.**



**There is a consensus among teachers that the evaluation process is important and that it adds value.**

**"The evaluation process is an important part of developing and maintaining a high quality teaching staff at my school."**



83% of teachers agreed that the evaluation process was worth the time and effort required of them to complete it<sup>1</sup>.



81% of teachers agreed that the evaluation process helped them improve their teaching practice<sup>1</sup>.

1. Teachers responding "Strongly agree", "Agree", or "Somewhat agree."

Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 784 TSD teachers.

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**However, survey data reveal four weaknesses in the evaluation process that should be addressed.**

- 1** Evaluators rarely identify areas of needed improvement.
- 2** The evaluation process is more effective for probationary teachers than for their non-probationary colleagues.
- 3** The district's evaluation tool is out of alignment with some schools' instructional priorities and strategies.
- 4** The district's evaluation tool does not allow for adequate differentiation for individual teachers.



## Evaluators rarely identify areas of needed improvement, which may be due in part to weaknesses in the evaluation tool.

14%

Only 14% of teachers said that their evaluator had identified areas of development on their three most recent evaluations.

*"Even if my teaching is 'acceptable,' there is always something to improve on. I would like that kind of feedback. Not just 'good job'."*

- Elementary reading teacher

62%

Only 62% of principals agreed with the statement "The evaluation tool allows me to identify specific strengths and weaknesses for each teacher<sup>1</sup>."

*"My evaluator wants all of the teachers to feel good and appreciated, but skipping real evaluation limits the growth potential. I have been really evaluated in this district in the past, and benefited from the honest feedback; it is what we all require to improve."*

- High school science teacher

*"Current evaluation process less than adequate in evaluating . . . areas of strength, or coaching/working with teaching as an instructional leadership tool."*

- Elementary principal

1. Principals responding "Strongly agree", "Agree", or "Somewhat agree."

Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 28 TSD principals and 784 TSD teachers.



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**While the probationary evaluation process appears to provide effective feedback for novices, it appears that the non-probationary evaluation process is less effective for experienced teachers.**

	<b>Probationary teachers <u>who</u> <u>agree</u></b>	<b>Non-probationary teachers <u>who</u> <u>agree</u></b>
Evaluation was <b>worth the time and effort</b> required of me to complete it <sup>1</sup>	<b>92%</b>	<b>79%</b>
Evaluation <b>helped me improve</b> my teaching practice <sup>1</sup>	<b>92%</b>	<b>76%</b>
Evaluator <b>identified areas of improvement</b> on three most recent evaluations	<b>24%</b>	<b>9%</b>

1. Teachers responding "Strongly agree", "Agree", or "Somewhat agree."

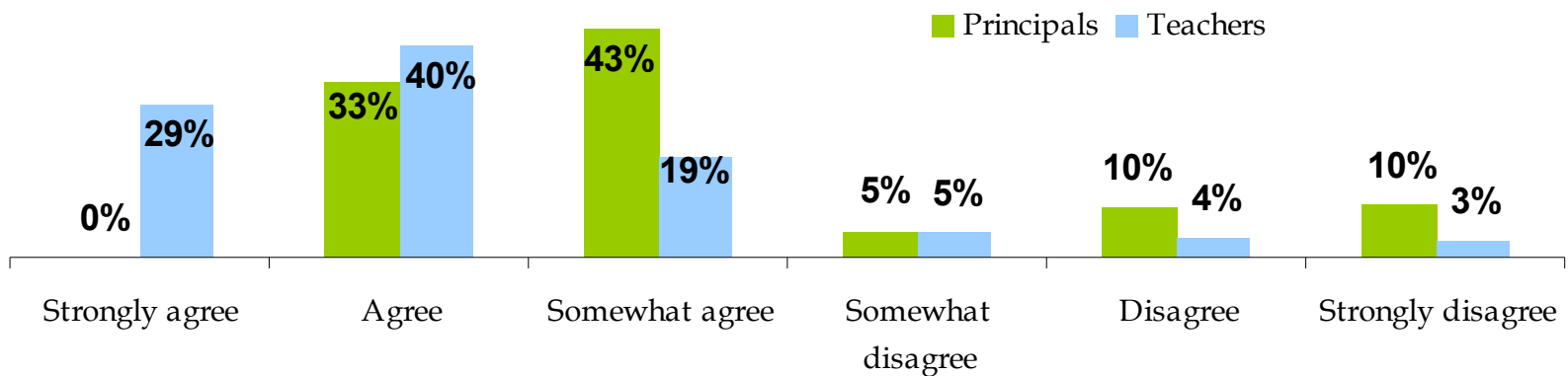
Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 784 TSD teachers.

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## For some principals and teachers, the evaluation tool is out of alignment with their school's instructional priorities and strategies.

"The evaluation tool is aligned with my school's instructional strategies and priorities."



69% of teachers and 33% of principals strongly agree or agree that the evaluation tool is aligned with their school's instructional priorities and strategies.

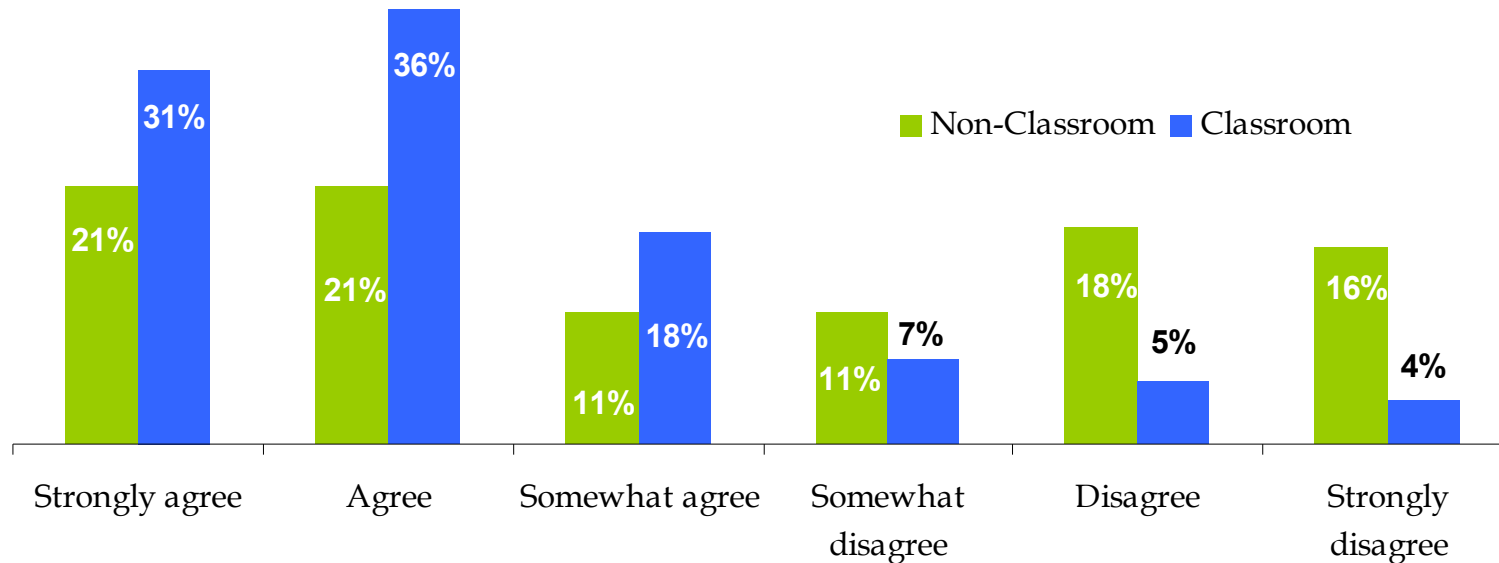
Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 28 TSD principals and 784 TSD teachers.

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## The evaluation tool does not allow for adequate differentiation for individual teachers.

**“The evaluation tool allowed my evaluator to tailor his/her evaluation to my unique needs and circumstances.”**



Teachers in non-classroom positions<sup>1</sup> were much less likely than their classroom teacher colleagues to say the tool could be tailored to their needs and circumstances.

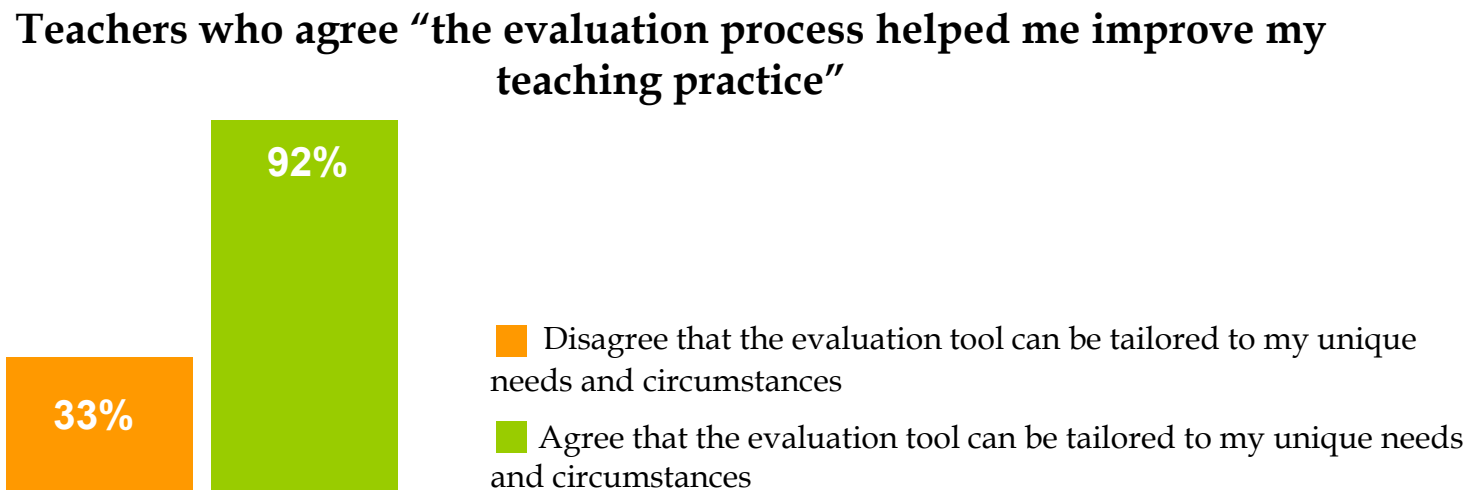


*“The evaluations are all geared towards classroom teachers which makes it difficult to evaluate those that do not work in the classroom.”* – Elementary counselor

1. Non-classroom positions include counselors, librarians, social workers, school psychologists, school orientation/mobility specialists, and speech/language pathologists.



**The evaluation process was not effective for teachers who found the evaluation tool unsuited to their unique needs and circumstances.**



Teachers who disagreed that the evaluation tool could be tailored to their unique needs and circumstances were much less likely to agree that the evaluation process improved their teaching practice<sup>1</sup>.

1. Teachers responding “Strongly agree”, “Agree”, or “Somewhat agree.”

Source: TNTP survey conducted in May 2008 of 784 TSD teachers.



## Evaluation Summary

### Findings

- Although teachers value the evaluation process and believe that it improves their teaching practice, there are several weaknesses that should be addressed.
- Evaluators rarely identify areas of needed improvement for teachers.
- The evaluation tool is out of alignment with some schools' instructional priorities and strategies and does not allow for adequate differentiation for individual teachers.
- Overall, the evaluation process is more effective for probationary teachers than for their non-probationary colleagues.

### Recommendations

- Through a working group of representatives from the administration, schools and the TEA, develop a new evaluation tool and process that:
  1. allows for adequate differentiation for schools and teachers, and
  2. effectively measures performance and identifies areas of improvement for both novice and experienced teachers.
- Implement electronic tracking of evaluation processes and develop summary reports for use at the school and district level. Use the systems to:
  1. track performance trends across the district, and
  2. compare evaluators and norm evaluation ratings.



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Background

Findings and Recommendations



**Appendix**



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## Appendix: Methodology

- The data presented in this report were gathered from four sources:
  - Interviews with district stakeholders conducted by TNTP staff in March 2008.
  - The 1,524 certified employee leaves, hires, transfers and separations listed in Board of Education agendas during the period of April 7, 2004 through April 2, 2008. For each agenda entry, we tracked the action described, the name of the affected teacher, the school and teaching assignment of the affected teacher and the effective date. In addition, we used the agenda date itself as a proxy date for the notification or execution date of each action.
  - An online survey of district teachers, distributed electronically via Surveymonkey.com during the period of May 7 to May 21, 2008. The teacher survey response rate was 75% (784 out of 1,049) and the completion rate was 83% (649 out of 784).
  - An online survey of district principals, distributed electronically via Surveymonkey.com during the period of May 7 to May 21, 2008. The principal survey response rate was 100% (28 out of 28) and the completion rate was 75% (21 out of 28).