Lessons from the
LEADING EDGE:
Teachers' Views on the Impact of Evaluation Reform

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Introduction

Over the past five years, the teaching profession and the policy context that surrounds teaching have shifted profoundly. Teaching has historically been a field in which standards of practice have been poorly defined and decades of precedent defined "fair" as a quality-blind system in which greater seniority translated to greater job security and opportunity. As the research base demonstrating the importance of teachers and the variation among teachers in terms of effectiveness with students grew, so too did the urgency of education leaders to transform teaching into a profession in which teacher performance and improvement mattered. In its landmark 2009 report, *The Widget Effect,* the nonprofit organization TNTP defined the zeitgeist*: A teacher's effectiveness—the most important factor for schools in improving student achievement—is not measured, recorded, or used to inform decision-making in any meaningful way.*[1]

By 2011, thirty-two states as well as the District of Columbia had undergone significant legislative and regulatory changes to reform teacher evaluation,[2] spurred in large part by the federal Race to the Top competition, which offered $4.5 billion to states willing to shift toward a performance-driven teaching profession. While changes have been made at the policy level, most states are still in the early stages of implementation at the school level. One notable exception is Memphis City Schools (MCS) in Memphis, Tennessee, which began implementation of its new evaluation system in 2011. This study examines five key implementation questions:

1. Do teachers understand the new standards and expectations?
2. Do teachers believe the new evaluation system is leading to improvements in teaching and learning?
3. Do teachers across all ratings categories from TEM 1 (weak) to TEM 5 (excellent) report equal access to information, resources and support?
4. Which dimensions of the evaluation process are considered most useful to teacher improvement? Which are considered least useful?
5. Are relationships among teachers changing as the new system takes effect?

Teach Plus partnered with the Memphis Education Association (MEA) to administer an electronic survey to every teacher in the district. Our findings are based on 1,092 responses, which is approximately an 18 percent response rate. Teachers were asked to self-identify their most recent evaluation rating, known as their "Teacher Effectiveness Measure" or TEM rating. There are five evaluation rating levels, from the lowest-rated TEM 1 to the highest-rated TEM 5. Among the 1,092 respondents, 445 or 41 percent self-identified as having received a TEM 5 during their most recent evaluation, 404 or 37 percent as TEM 4, 186 or 17 percent as TEM 3, 54 or 5 percent as TEM 2, and just 3 or less than 1 percent as TEM 1 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Distribution of teachers responding to
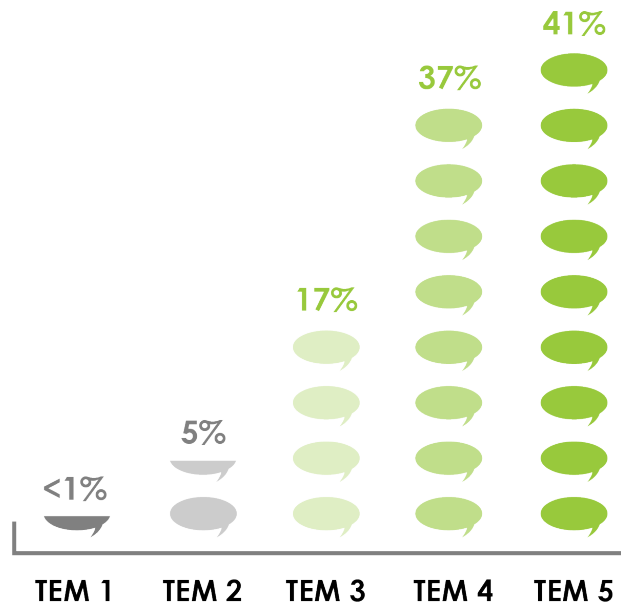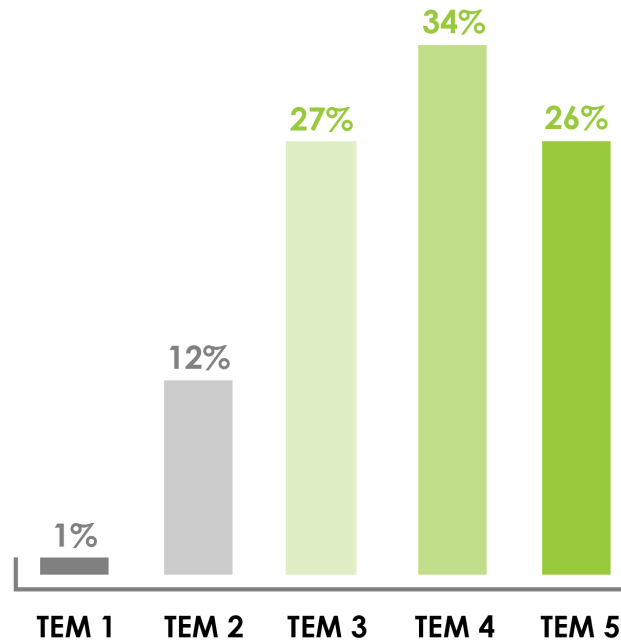a May 2013 survey by TEM rating
(n=1,092)

<1%	5%	17%	37%	41%
TEM 1	TEM 2	TEM 3	TEM 4	TEM 5

Figure 2. Actual distribution of teachers by TEM
rating in 2011-2012 (n=6,051)

1%	12%	27%	34%	26%
TEM 1	TEM 2	TEM 3	TEM 4	TEM 5

Using the distribution of teachers by TEM level from 2011-2012 for comparison purposes, the sample of 1,092 teachers who responded to our May 2013 survey shows that the survey sample has a smaller proportion of TEM 2 and TEM 3 teachers and a greater proportion of TEM 4 and TEM 5 teachers (see Figure 2).[3] While this is not a representative sample, it provides significant insight into the group that is arguably of most interest, those with TEM 4 and 5 ratings who are having the greatest impact on student learning. We disaggregate the data by TEM rating in later sections of this report.

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A Basic TEM Primer [4]

Key Vocabulary Terms
- MCS: Memphis City Schools
- MEA: Memphis Education Association
- TEI: Teacher Effectiveness Initiative
- TEM: Teacher Effectiveness Measure

TEM Components
- 40% Observation
- 35% Student Growth
- 15% Student Achievement
- 5% Stakeholder Perceptions
- 5% Content Knowledge

MCS Teaching and Learning Framework
- **Plan:** The end goal of the plan element is instructional effectiveness via teachers knowing their students, setting goals and creating standards-based lessons and assessments guided by district academic tools.
- **Teach:** Ultimately this element assesses teachers' level of student engagement, specifically as it pertains to lesson objectives, content, levels of learning, mastery and instructional time.
- **Cultivate the Learning Environment:** Classroom community is the focus of this element. Is it a respectful, learning-focused place with procedures, routines, space and resources to support learning, and is behavior properly managed?
- **Reflect and Adjust:** This element assesses educators' capacity to monitor progress relative to goals and data for instructional practice.

Stages of Implementation
- **2009 to 2011:** Planning and development
- **TEM 1.0 (2011-12):** First year of implementation
- **TEM 2.0 (2012-13):** Second year of implementation with minor tweaks (e.g. incorporating Common Core language into the rubric, reducing number of observations for TEM 5 teachers, and implementation of the Fine Arts Portfolio growth measure)
- **TEM 3.0 (2013-14):** Third year of implementation, Professionalism will replace Content Knowledge in the TEM Components

Major Sources of Funding
- **Race to the Top:** TN was one of the first two states to win the federal competition in 2010, receiving over $501 million to devote, in part, to re-vamping teacher evaluation.
- **The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation:** In 2009, Memphis City Schools secured a $92 million grant to build a new system of teacher evaluation and support and participate in the Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) research project.

Question 1. Do teachers understand the new standards and expectations?

The risk in any sweeping policy change is that victory is declared at the state house or in the district central office and never gets translated into changed practice in the school. The question on the minds of district officials around the country who are at the beginning stages of embarking on evaluation reform is: is it possible to implement the system we have developed in a way that allows all teachers to understand the new standards and expectations? If teachers do not understand what is expected of them, the system is at risk of becoming a proof point that reforming teaching and learning is not possible.

Leaders in Memphis spent two years preparing and piloting the elements of the evaluation system before district-wide implementation began in 2011. MCS, MEA, and other stakeholders met every three weeks, beginning in 2010, to develop a comprehensive observation rubric with indicators focused around effective instructional practices that were measurable. Classroom teachers were involved in this work at every stage.[5]

First, we find that a majority of Memphis teachers, 87 percent, say that the observation rubric is somewhat to extremely clear (see Figure 3).
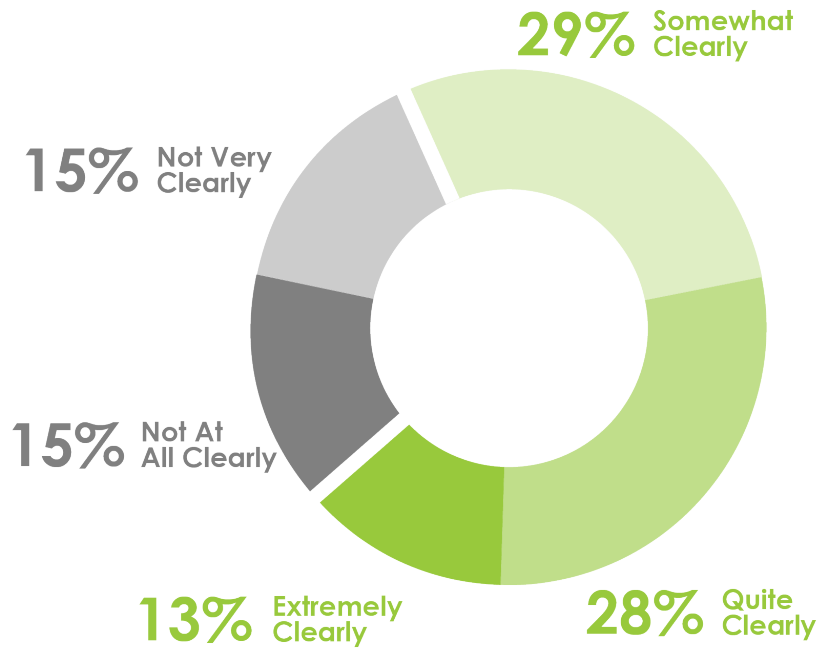
Figure 3. How clear is the observation rubric in terms of laying out what is needed to receive a TEM 3, 4, or 5?

41% Somewhat Clear

10% Not Very Clear

3% Not At All Clear

7% Extremely Clear

39% Quite Clear
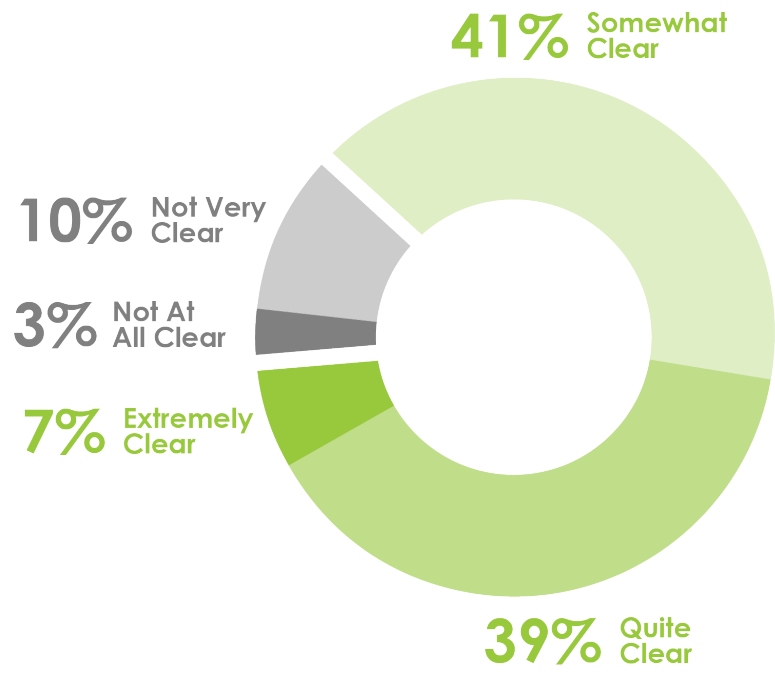
Teachers understand the observation rubric and expectations for earning sequentially higher TEM ratings, an important step toward successful implementation. The vast majority of teachers, 87 percent, report feeling some level of clarity on the rubric, with almost half saying they are "quite" or "extremely clear." It should be noted, however, that the modal teacher (41 percent of respondents) feels only somewhat clear, indicating that there is room to go deeper with most teachers on the specifics of what improved practice on each indicator looks like.

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Memphis invested heavily in training administrators to observe teachers using the TEM rubric and to communicate the new expectations. The goal of the rubric is to allow observers to provide accurate assessments of teacher performance that are as objective as possible. Observers make multiple visits to each classroom, totaling an hour or more of time each year.[6]

Figure 4. How clearly do administrators in your school communicate what TEM 5 teaching looks like?

29% Somewhat Clearly

15% Not Very Clearly

15% Not At All Clearly
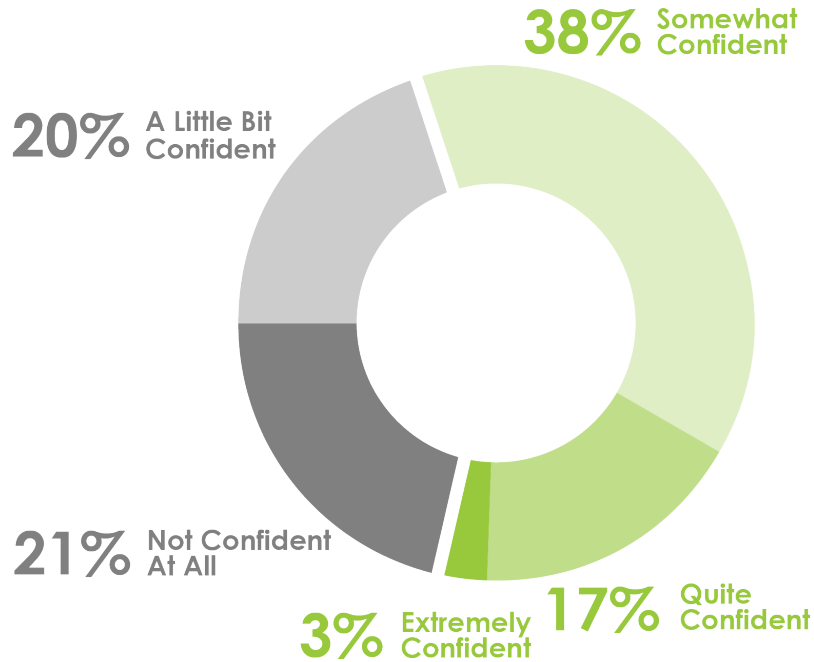
13% Extremely Clearly

28% Quite Clearly

Survey responses indicate that teachers generally find their administrators to be doing a solid job of communicating expectations for earning the top TEM rating. Seventy percent of teachers report a level of confidence in their administrator's ability to describe what TEM 5 teaching looks like in the classroom. While the 30 percent who lack confidence in their administrator's instructional leadership is a large enough number to cause concern, it is clear that Memphis leadership has made significant progress on promoting teacher understanding throughout the district (see Figure 4).

Question 2. Do teachers believe the new evaluation system will lead to improvements in teaching and learning?

Another indicator of implementation progress is the amount of credibility the system has among teachers. Teachers have to believe that making the required changes will ultimately benefit their students and improve their teaching. We asked teachers for their perspectives on where they place the system with regards to leading to improvement in student achievement and how they describe the quality of systemic supports designed to help improve their teaching practices. Specifically, we were interested in how teachers viewed feedback from their administrators, how accessible resources were to help improve their practice, and how aligned professional development topics were to the evaluation.

38% Somewhat Confident

20% A Little Bit Confident

21% Not Confident At All

3% Extremely Confident

17% Quite Confident

The majority of teachers (58 percent) see a direct link between the "teaching practices exemplified in the TEM" and "increased student achievement." Only 21 percent of teachers have no confidence at all that the new system would have a positive impact on student achievement (see Figure 5). Perhaps surprisingly, teachers across elementary, middle, and high school grades were consistent in their levels of optimism about the new evaluation system.

We probed deeper about the information, resources and supports that teachers are receiving to change their instruction and meet the standards. Overall, we find that teachers are optimistic that the new evaluation system is on track to providing them with the information, resources, and supports they need to improve.

Teachers generally believe that they are getting the kind of feedback needed to help improve their teaching. Two-thirds of teachers (67 percent) are somewhat to extremely confident that their administrators are able to provide them with information to improve their teaching practices (see Figure 6). Teachers are particularly positive that the resources they need to improve their instruction are readily available to them. Seventy-eight percent of teachers report that resources that would help them improve their teaching are somewhat to extremely accessible to them (see Figure 7). Finally, professional development offered through the school or districts are also seen as being fairly well aligned to areas covered in teacher evaluations. A majority of teachers, 65 percent, report that there is some level of alignment between where their evaluations call for improvement and the professional development topics available to them through their school or district (see Figure 8).

In short, about two-thirds of teachers are getting most of what they need to be successful. Given the complexity of the shift from the old system of superficial evaluation or none at all, this is positive progress. Yet, it is clear that plenty of teachers still need additional support.

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Figure 6. How confident are you that administrators in your school can provide you with significant feedback to improve your teaching practice?
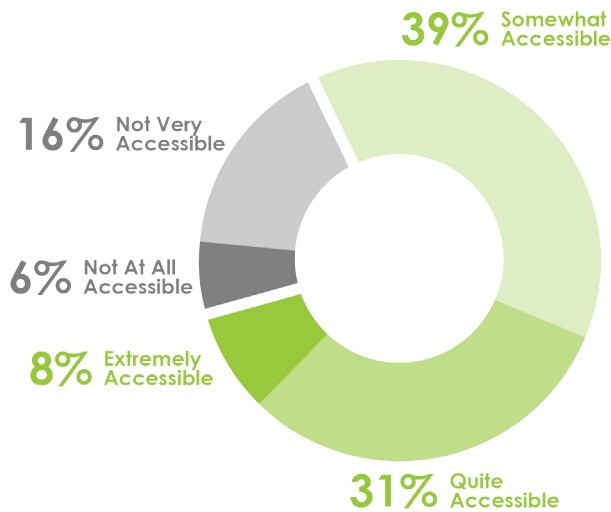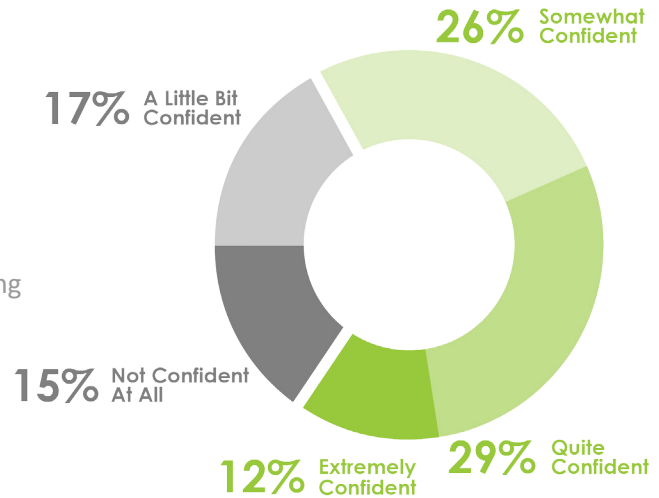
26% Somewhat Confident

17% A Little Bit Confident

15% Not Confident At All

12% Extremely Confident

29% Quite Confident

39% Somewhat Accessible

16% Not Very Accessible

6% Not At All Accessible

8% Extremely Accessible

31% Quite Accessible

Figure 7. How accessible are resources that will help improve your teaching?

32% Somewhat Well

20% A Little Bit Well

15% Not Well At All

6% Extremely Well

27% Quite Well

Figure 8. How well aligned are the professional development topics offered to you by your school or your school district to areas of improvement identified in your evaluation?
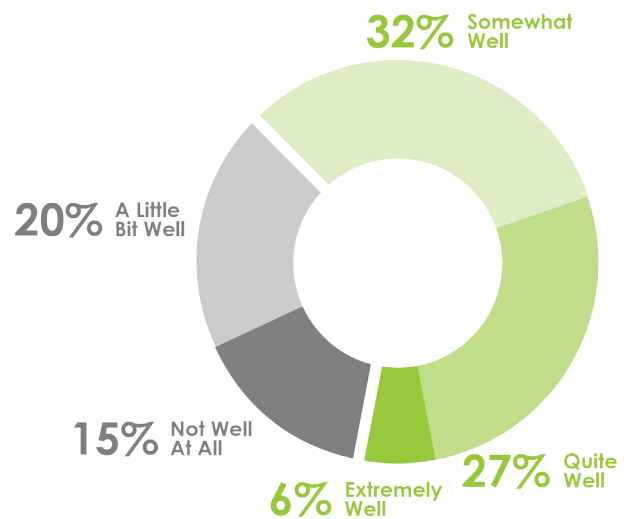
How have professional development (PD) and support changed since the introduction of TEM ratings?

Memphis City Schools has worked to rapidly expand and improve professional development as part of the new evaluation system. Some key steps the district (as well as the union) have taken include:[7]

Re-organizing the district central office and stakeholder relationships	• Created the Office of the Teacher Effectiveness Measurement. • Developed new working relationships within MCS among the Office of the TEM, the Professional Development division and the Curriculum and Instruction division, as well as with the Memphis Education Association and other stakeholders, with the goal of developing cohesive PD offerings aligned with evaluation.
Aligning PD to the evaluation standards	• Mapped existing and new PD and organized it by framework, indicator, type of PD, grade level, and location in the *TEM Resource Guide*. The resource guide includes a range of Summer Support course options. • Built and regularly add to to the TEI website with documents that help teachers understand and successfully apply all components of the TEM.
Communicating about available resources	• Encourage principal and teacher use of the *TEM Resource Guide* (available online and in print) to create a continuous support plan.
Creating diverse options	• Varied PD formats to reach all teachers, such as computer-based, in-service, regional meetings, district meetings, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), and by observing videos and rating them by the TEM framework rubric. • Annual 2-3 day Practitioners' Summit with hundreds of sessions before the start of school.
Building teacher leadership opportunities	• TEI Ambassador Program (run in partnership with Teach Plus). • Master Teacher Initiative piloted during SY2012-13.

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Question 3. Do teachers across all ratings categories from TEM 1 (weak) to TEM 5 (excellent) report equal access to information, resources and support?

While most survey respondents report a generally positive experience with the TEM, our respondents were disproportionately from the top two ratings categories. Disaggregating the data by TEM rating reveals a remarkably consistent picture across each of the questions in the survey.

There is a strong positive correlation between a teacher's TEM rating and a teacher's perceptions of the system overall and of the supports he or she is receiving to be successful. Top-rated teachers, by and large, understand the expectations, have confidence that they are evaluated on practices that impact student achievement, and report access to necessary resources. Lower-rated teachers, by contrast, report much less understanding of and confidence in the system, and they report less access to the supports they need to improve.

To illustrate this stratification by ranking, we disaggregated the results from the questions featured in the prior section of the report.[8]

- The proportion of TEM 1, 2, and 3 teachers who have no confidence at all in their administrators being able to provide them with significant feedback (30 percent) is more than four times as great as TEM 5 teachers (7 percent).
- The proportion of TEM 5 teachers who say that resources are quite or extremely accessible to help improve their teaching (48 percent) is almost twice as great as TEM 1, 2, and 3 teachers (28 percent).
- The proportion of TEM 5 teachers who say that professional development topics are quite or extremely well aligned to areas of improvement identified in their evaluation (44 percent) is almost three times as great as TEM 1, 2, and 3 teachers (15 percent).

Figure 9. How confident are you that administrators in your school can provide you with significant feedback to improve your teaching practice? Results disaggregated by TEM rating (%).
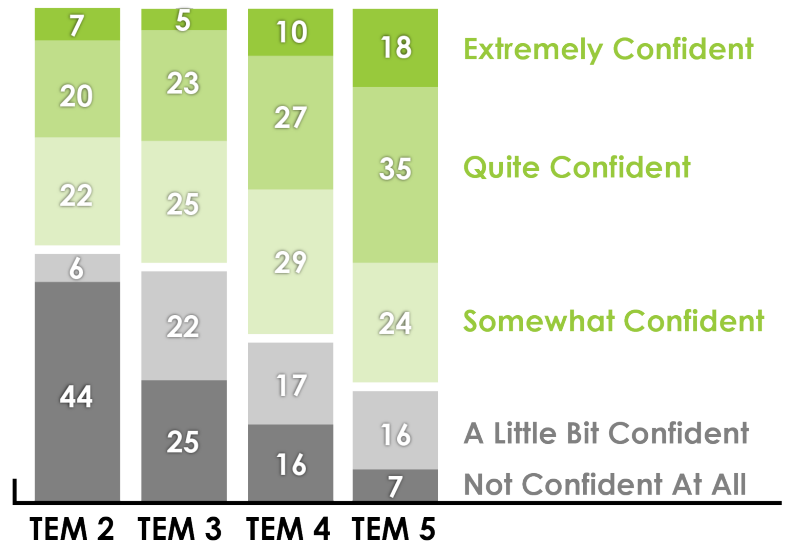
	TEM 2	TEM 3	TEM 4	TEM 5	
Extremely Confident	7	5	10	18	
Quite Confident	20	23	27	35	
Somewhat Confident	22	25	29	24	
A Little Bit Confident	6	22	17	16	
Not Confident At All	44	25	16	7	

Figure 10. How accessible are resources that will help improve your teaching? Results disaggregated by TEM rating (%).

Extremely Accessible

Quite Accessible

Somewhat Accessible

Not Very Accessible
Not At All Accessible
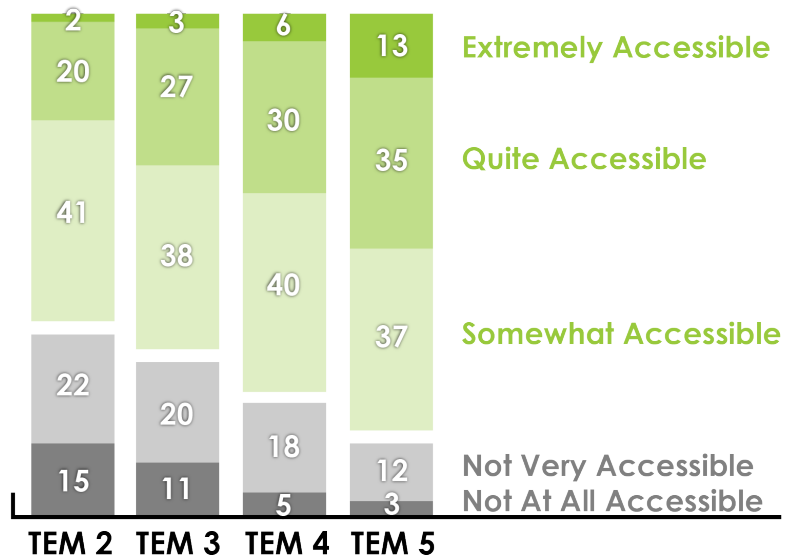
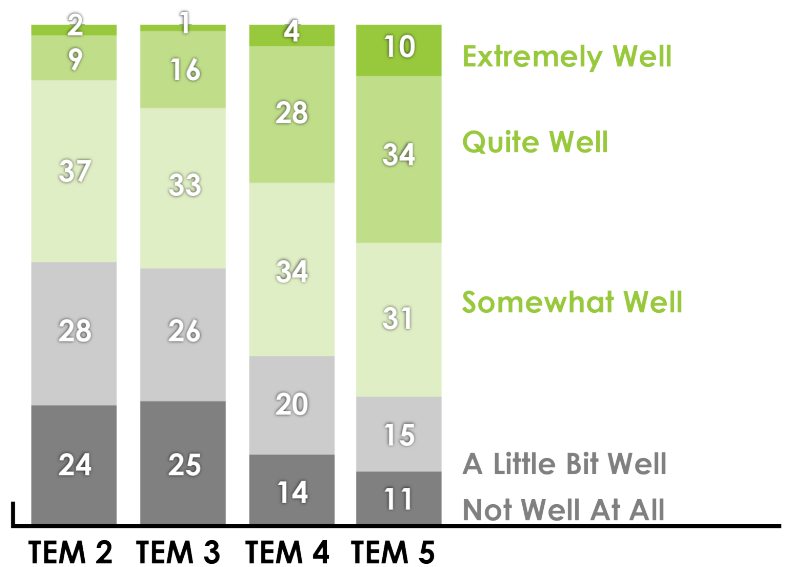TEM 2   TEM 3   TEM 4   TEM 5

Figure 11. How well aligned are the professional development topics offered to you by your school or your school district to areas of improvement identified in your evaluation? Results disaggregated by TEM rating (%).

Extremely Well

Quite Well

Somewhat Well

A Little Bit Well

Not Well At All

TEM 2   TEM 3   TEM 4   TEM 5

While the chicken-and-egg relationship between information/support and teacher performance on the TEM is beyond the scope of this survey, it appears that the rich are getting richer and the poor, poorer under the new system.

Question 4. Which dimensions of the evaluation process are considered most useful to teacher improvement? Which are considered least useful?

The TEM evaluation process consists of several steps, detailed in Figure 12. The classroom-focused components are incorporated into a final TEM score that also includes student growth, student achievement, student surveys, and teacher knowledge (see "A Basic TEM Primer"). Given the number of steps in the process, it is worthwhile to analyze which are valued by teachers as promoting their improvement.[9]

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Figure 12. How teachers experience the TEM process.

Complete educator self-assessment record	Develop professional growth plan with administrator

Complete recommended professional development

Announced Observations
-Prepare for the formal, announced observation
-Reflect on observation(s)
-Participate in post-observation conference

Unannounced Observations
-Have unannounced observations
-Reflect on observation(s)
-Participate in post-observation conference

Participate in summative TEM evaluation conference (final meeting)

Teachers rate the following three elements most useful:[10]

1. Preparing for the formal, announced observation.
2. Reflecting on observation(s). Teachers are required to submit a written reflection, based on the framework and indicators, to their administrator following the observation.
3. Participating in the post-observation conference. The teacher discusses his/her score and evidence with the observer. This must be conducted within seven days of observation.
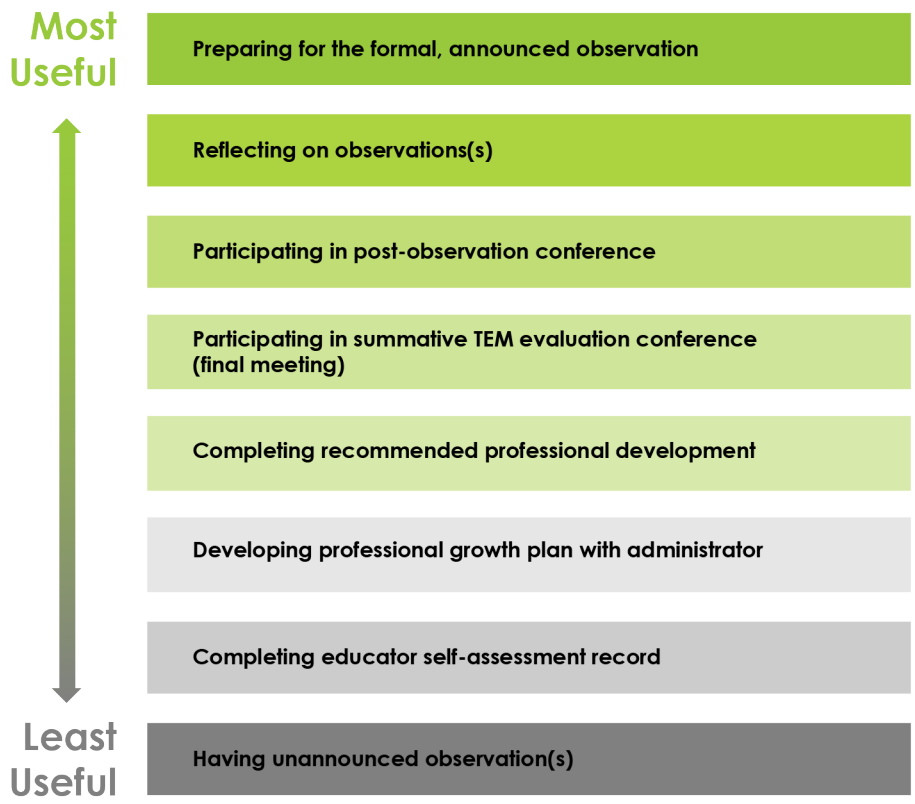
Teachers rate the following three elements least useful:

1. Having unannounced observations. The principal conducts between two and five, based on the teacher's prior TEM score, and can add more.
2. Completing the educator self-assessment record. Teachers reflect on areas of strength and weakness in writing prior to the start of observations.
3. Developing professional growth plan with administrator. During the first post-observation conference of the year, the teacher and administrator establish indicators of student growth, measurable goals for professional growth, and a growth plan with targeted professional development.

In an open response question, teachers were able to recommend suggested improvements for the parts of the process they experienced as less useful. Themes that emerge as challenges with the development of the professional growth plan include: administrators making "generic" plans that are the same across teachers with different needs and the desire for additional professional development (PD) options—especially asynchronous, online PD— to allow teachers to meet the expectations laid out in the plan.

In terms of completing the self-assessment record, themes for suggested improvements include: abbreviating the length of the form, allowing teachers to change their self-assessment and growth plans during the year rather than setting an immutable plan at the start of the year, and limiting the areas for improvement to two or three.

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Most Useful

Preparing for the formal, announced observation

Reflecting on observations(s)

Participating in post-observation conference

Participating in summative TEM evaluation conference (final meeting)

Completing recommended professional development

Developing professional growth plan with administrator

Completing educator self-assessment record

Having unannounced observation(s)

Least Useful

Question 5. Are relationships among teachers changing as the new system takes effect?

The introduction of the TEM moved Memphis towards a performance-based teacher evaluation system and replaced a system in which differences in teacher effectiveness were rarely acknowledged and not based on measurable, established standards. Historically, teachers' collaborative relationships have been based on the notion that all teachers are equally proficient practitioners. Thus, it is necessary to determine if relationships among teachers are changing in a more competitive environment.

We find teachers divided on whether their peer professional relationships had changed as a consequence of the new evaluation system, with 50 percent reporting that they had changed at least somewhat while the other half reported little to no change (see Figure 14).

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24% Very Little
29% Some
16% Quite A Bit
5% A Lot
26% Not At All
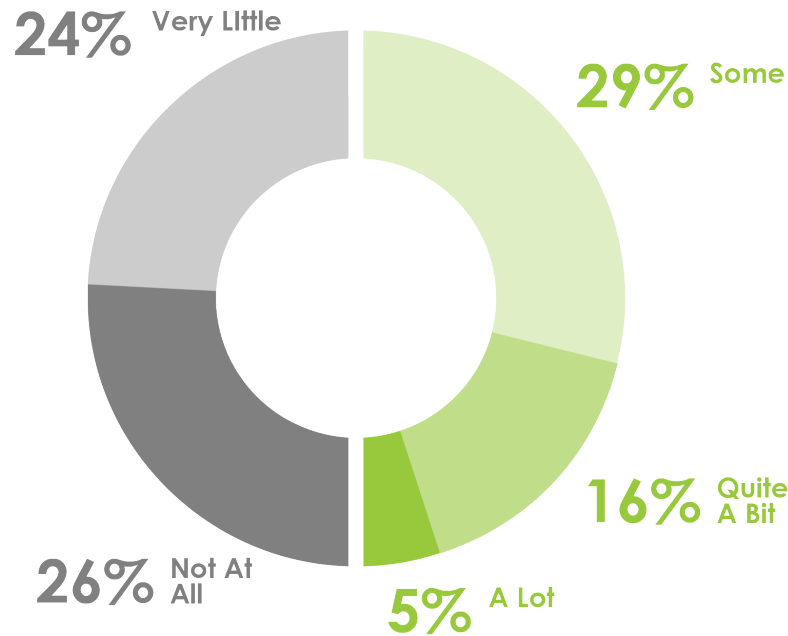
We followed that question with an open response question asking for examples of how relationships had changed. Most teachers report that relationships had changed for the better. Two common examples are:

Greater opportunities for collaboration:
- "I feel confident under the current TEM. Many of my peer relationships have further engaged in designing more lesson planning, adequate usage of the content, and higher order thinking skills utilized with students whom I feel have not been challenged to a higher degree. The current TEM 2.0 does allow teachers to challenge students to reach their highest potential."
- "Teachers are communicating more as it relates to the TEM and are giving feedback as to practices and strategies that can be helpful to successfully implement all components of the rubric."

Greater focus on data and standards:
- "We have done more grade level and across grade level planning as well as becoming more data-driven based on results from assessments."
- "I have had to rely more on my colleagues to gain ideas and insights into how to best implement certain strategies that are rigorous enough for my students. We have been having more meetings and conversations on how to effectively reach a level 5 in each domain."

Despite the general sentiment that collegial relationships had improved, teachers rated in TEM categories 1-3 report a disproportionate dissatisfaction with the way their interactions with other teachers had changed. They cite increased stress and competition in comments like:
- "Peers are less willing to share with one another as if they don't want their ideas taken because they are going to do something for evaluations with it."
- "I continue learning from my peers, young and old, and feel that the stress on evaluations has hindered this quite a bit."

A system that distinguishes between levels of performance challenges long-standing norms in teaching. Stronger teachers appear to be thriving in a system that raises the bar, while many struggling teachers feel anxiety about the shifts in expectations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Memphis has built an evaluation system with many strengths. The survey results suggest a set of modifications that will promote continued progress at the school level. These include:

- **Increase focus on teachers rated TEM 1, 2 and 3.** Teachers rated in the top categories appear to have a clearer understanding of the system and available supports. Teachers with lower ratings need more structured support and guidance than they are currently receiving to make connections between their areas of weakness and how to improve.
- **Streamline the TEM observation process steps.** Teachers report both development of the professional growth plan and the self-assessment record as cumbersome and not closely connected to improving one's instruction. The district should look at ways to keep these brief and make them more meaningful to teachers.
- **Monitor relationships.** This research offers preliminary evidence that relationships among adults in schools are changing as a result of the TEM system. Teachers are more reliant on principals as instructional leaders and more frustrated when the principal cannot play that role. Teacher-to-teacher relationships are also changing as certain teachers ascend into *de facto* expert roles based on their TEM 5 rating, while other teachers experience the negative consequences of a weak rating.

The experience Memphis has had offers valuable lessons for districts around the country in the earlier stages of evaluation reform. These include:

- **Solicit frequent and meaningful teacher feedback.** MCS and MEA have relied heavily on the input of teachers from the pilot stages of the roll-out process. Since 2010, Teach Plus has worked with the district to host 14 events to gather teacher feedback via live-polling, turning out more than 1,500 teachers in total. Teachers played a major role in determining which observation rubric was adopted and how the elements of the system were weighted.
- **Don't re-invent the wheel.** Districts like Memphis can point the way on common challenges like structuring stakeholder participation in the development of the new system and building tools and resources like the *TEM Resource Guide*.
- **Recognize progress locally and beyond.** In a major district-wide undertaking that challenges established norms in education, implementation is destined to be uneven and encounter complications. Memphis is becoming a proof point that change is possible with a concentrated and coordinated effort. Time, money, and persistence are all necessary ingredients.

As MCS merges fully with Shelby County Schools to form one unified district in the 2013-2014 school year, it will be important to continue investing the level of training and support on teacher evaluation across the unified district that has existed in Memphis over the last several years.

Memphis has invested tens of millions of dollars as well as countless hours to improve teaching and learning across every school in the city. The first step in determining whether that investment is paying off is asking the teachers. This report indicates that the transformation is well underway and beginning to impact classroom practice.

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Endnotes

1. Weisberg, D. et al. (2009). The Widget Effect: Our National Failure to Acknowledge and Act on Differences in Teacher Effectiveness. Brooklyn, NY: TNTP.

2. National Council on Teacher Quality (2011). State of the States: Trends and Early Lessons on Teacher Evaluation and Effectiveness Policies. Washington, DC: NCTQ.

3. Office of Teacher Effectiveness Measurement, Memphis City Schools, personal communication, June 18, 2013.

4. Walker, K. (2010). The Teacher Effectiveness Initiative: Empowering Teachers for Students Success. Memphis, TN: MCS; Teacher Effectiveness Initiative. Retrieved from: http://mcsk12.worldspice.net/tem/docs/2010%20TEI%20CASE%20STUDY.pdf; Memphis City Schools Teaching and Learning Framework. Office of Teacher Effectiveness Measurement. Retrieved from: http://mcsk12.worldspice.net/tem/docs/Final%20MCS%20Draft%20Framework,%207.28.pdf; Tennessee Department of Education First to the Top. Retrieved from: http://www.tn.gov/firsttothetop/; TeachMemphis. Retrieved from: http://www.teachmemphis.org/about-teach-memphis/teaching-in-memphis/about-tei/; Wright, R.(2012). Recent Teacher Policy Changes in Tennessee: Teacher Evaluation. Office of Research and Education Accountability. Retrieved from: http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/Repository/RE/Teacher%20Evaluations.pdf; The TN Find Arts Growth Measure System. Retrieved from http://team-tn.org/assets/educator-resources/Fine_Arts_Portfolio_Overview.pdf

5. See Walker, K. (2010)

6. The Teacher Effectiveness Measures (TEM) Manual. Office of Teacher Effectiveness Measurement. Retrieved from: http://mcsk12.worldspice.net/tem/docs/110729%20-%20TEM%20Manual%20for%20Website%20v3.pdf

7. See The Teacher Effectiveness Measures (TEM) Manual; TEM Resource Guide. scribd. Retrieved from: http://www.scribd.com/doc/66591232/TEM-Aligned-PD-Resource-Guide; See Walker, K.; Office of Teacher Effectiveness Measurement. Retrieved from: http://www.mcstei.com/ambassador-program; Memphis Policy Fellows (2011). Fifteen Ideas for Promoting Effective Teaching in MCS with Master Teachers. Memphis, TN: Teach Plus; Teacher Effectiveness Initiative. TEI Fact vs. Fiction. Retrieved from: http://mcsk12.worldspice.net/tei/docs/TEI%20Fact%20vs.%20Fiction.pdf

8. For the purposes of reporting results disaggregated by TEM ratings, we do not include results from TEM 1 teachers as there were fewer than 10 responses from this group.

9. For more information about the TEM process and components, please see http://mcsk12.worldspice.net/tem/ and http://www.mcstei.com/

10. We analyzed teachers ratings of the eight components of the TEM process by translating a teacher response of "not at all useful" as 1 point, "not very useful" as 2 points, "somewhat useful" as 3 points, "quite useful" as 4 points, and "extremely useful" as 5 points. Since all teachers provided a usefulness rating to each component, we summed all points for each component which resulted in the ordering of the eight components from most useful (most total points) to least useful (least total points).

Acknowledgements