



# TEACH FOR AMERICA

**Principals Report Increasingly Positive Views  
of Corps Members and Alumni in National Survey**

Teach For America (TFA) is one of the largest educational leadership development organizations in the U.S. and is committed to “ensuring an equitable and excellent education for all children, regardless of zip code.” Founded in 1990, TFA recruits outstanding and diverse leaders to become TFA “corps members.”

Corps members commit to teaching for two years in a low-income community, where they are employed by local schools and work to expand opportunities for kids. After two years, they become part of the TFA alumni network, with many continuing to teach. Others pursue leadership roles in schools and school systems or launch careers in other fields that shape educational access and opportunity.

### Teach For America Relies on Principals’ Perspectives for Program Planning

TFA regularly conducts, sponsors, or supports independent research efforts to assess its impact and inform the continuous development of its programming. TFA’s National Principal Survey serves as one source of evidence about the impact of TFA and provides an important lens on the practices of its corps members and alumni.

Principals provide a unique and important perspective on teachers’ preparation, performance, and overall contributions to the schools in which they work. Therefore, the National Principal Survey helps TFA assess principals’ perceptions of corps members’ skills, instructional practices, and effectiveness, as well as the training and support that TFA provides to its corps members. Specifically, the results are used by TFA’s national and regional leadership to plan its corps member and alumni activities and programming and to reflect on its approaches with regard to recruiting, training, and supporting corps members and alumni.

For over 20 years, TFA has hired external researchers to administer its National Principal Survey. The survey is conducted biennially, with the last survey conducted in 2019. The 2021 survey was administered by Westat. A total of 2,047 principals were identified as having corps members in their school building and thus were included in the 2021 survey. Of the 2,047 principals, 1,225 responded to the survey, for an overall response rate of 60 percent.



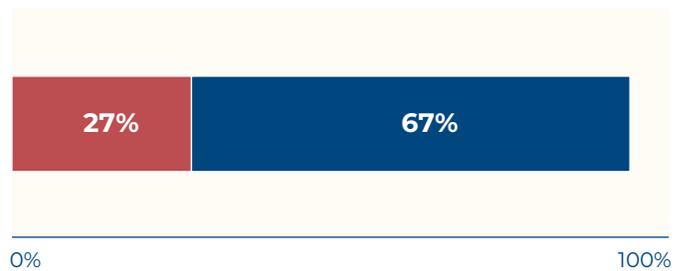


**Overall, Principals Had Very High Levels of Satisfaction with TFA Corps Members, and Principals Cited Important Contributions Made by Corps Members both in the Classroom and to the School**

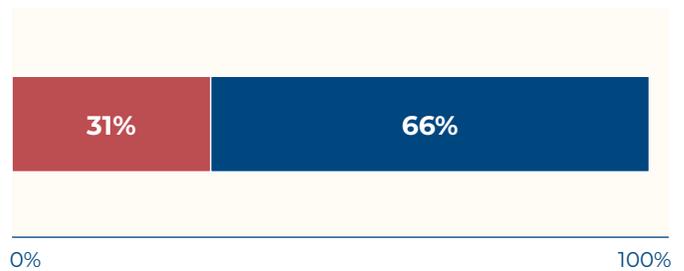
More than 9 out of 10 principals (94%) reported that they were satisfied with the corps members in their school. Similar proportions of principals reported that they would hire another corps member to fill a vacancy (91%) and would recommend hiring a corps member to other school leaders (93%), while nearly 9 out of 10 principals (89%) reported that corps members were effective at delivering instruction. As shown in Figure 1, more than 9 out 10 principals agreed that corps members have a positive impact on students' academic growth; students' personal growth (e.g., socio-emotional development, growth mindset); and students' development of positive social identities.

**Figure 1** Principals' perceptions of TFA corps members' impacts on students

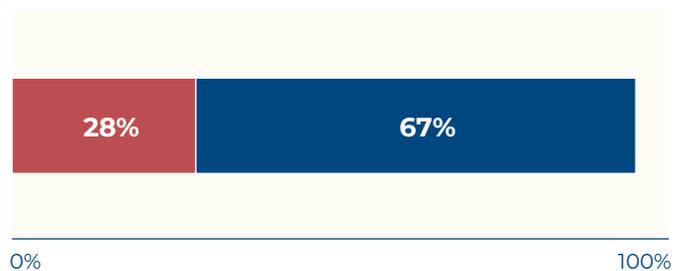
Positive impact on students' academic growth



Positive impact on students' personal growth (e.g., socio-emotional development, growth mindset)



Positive impact on students' development of positive social identities



Strongly agree Agree

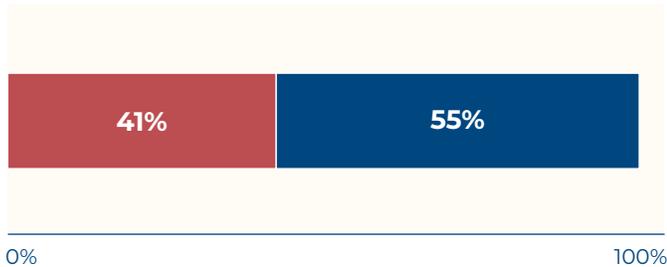


In addition, as Figure 2 shows, more than 9 out of 10 principals overall agreed that corps members maintain a positive learning environment in their classroom and that they contributed to a positive, collaborative culture in the school. More than 8 out of 10 principals overall agreed that corps members demonstrated leadership, formal or informal, in the school.

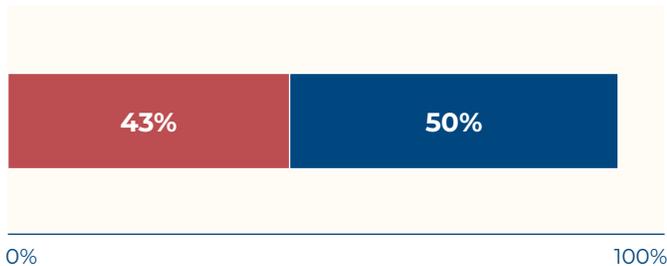
**Figure 2** Principals' perceptions of TFA corps members' capacities and contributions



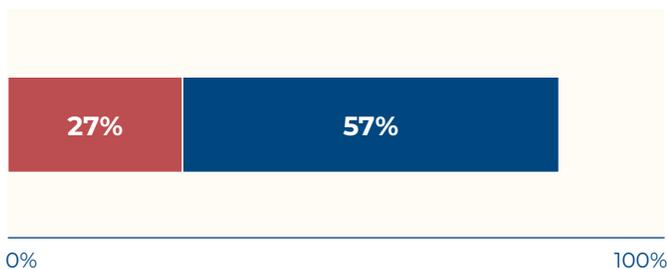
Maintain a positive learning environment in their classrooms



Contribute to a positive, collaborative professional culture in the school



Demonstrate leadership, formal or informal, in the school



Strongly agree Agree

**Many Principals Reported That TFA Corps Members Were Better Than Other Novice Teachers at Making Impacts on Students and Other Aspects of Teaching**

As in the 2019 survey, one particularly noteworthy finding from this year's survey was that many principals expressed very favorable perceptions of TFA corps members when asked to make direct comparisons between corps members and other novice teachers (i.e., those with less than two years of experience) in their building with regard to their impact on students' academic growth and other related areas. While most principals found no difference between the two groups, approximately one-third of principals felt that corps members were better than other novice teachers at making impacts in areas such as students' academic growth (30%) and students' personal growth (e.g., socio-emotional development, growth mindset) (34%). In contrast, only 3 to 4 percent of principals felt that other novice teachers were better than corps members at making impacts in those areas. Similarly, more than 4 out of 10 principals (41%) felt that corps members were better than other novice teachers at continuously learning and improving their practice and impact, while 3 out of 10 principals felt that corps members were better than other novice teachers in three other key aspects of teaching—building trusting relationships with their students, parents,



and community members (30%); choosing their actions or approaches strategically and responsibly (31%); and seeking ways to contribute to a wider-reaching or more lasting impact in the broader school or community (32%).

### **Generally Speaking, Principals Were Familiar with and Expressed Satisfaction with the Training and Support Provided by TFA to its Corps Members**

When asked about their familiarity with the various aspects of training and support provided to corps members, about three-fourths of all principals were either very familiar or somewhat familiar with most aspects of training and support. Virtually all principals expressed at least some degree of satisfaction with the training and support provided to corps members, with nearly three-fourths reporting they were satisfied or very satisfied, while 25 percent were somewhat satisfied and 4 percent were not satisfied.



### **Principals Who Had TFA Alumni in Their School Had Very Favorable Perceptions of Their Impacts on Students and Their Contributions to the School**

Perceptions of alumni were especially high, with 98 percent of principals who responded to the survey being satisfied overall with the alumni in their building. As with corps members, principals' perceptions of alumni were highest in the areas of effectiveness at delivering instruction, maintaining positive learning environments in their classrooms, and contributing to a positive and collaborative culture in the school. Additionally, virtually all principals (96% or more) reported that alumni had positive impacts in each of the areas they were asked to address, which included students' academic growth; personal growth (e.g., socio-emotional development, growth mindset); development of positive social identities; recognition of injustice in the world; and ability to seek out relationships and resources needed to overcome barriers in pursuit of personal goals.

### **Although the 2020–21 School Year Was an Unprecedented One Given the Effects of COVID-19 and the Disruptions to In-Person Learning, this was not a Major Factor in How Principals Responded to the Survey**

The fact that principals and teachers were not physically together in the building, as they would be in a typical school year, did not preclude principals from feeling capable of assessing corps members' capacities and contributions. When

asked directly about this, nearly nine out of 10 principals (87%) agreed or strongly that they had adequate opportunity this year to assess corps members, despite any disruptions due to COVID-19. This is evidence that COVID-19 and the resulting shift from in-person to virtual learning in schools across the country should not be a major factor in interpreting this year's survey results.

### **Many Principals Reported that TFA Corps Members Were Critical in Helping Their School Shift from In-Person to Virtual Learning in Response to COVID-19**

When considering the items in the survey that were modified to take into account that many schools had to adapt to virtual learning for at least part of the year, principals reported high levels of leadership from corps members in supporting school-wide virtual learning efforts. In fact, although principals indicated that corps members took on various roles within their school, they were more likely to report that corps members supported virtual learning efforts than any other specific role, such as sponsoring a student group, club, or organization or serving on a school-wide committee.

### **Overall, the Results from the 2021 National Principal Survey Were Consistent with Those from the 2019 Survey but Were More Favorable on Several Key Items Pertaining to Satisfaction with Corps Members and Alumni**

Although principals' perceptions of both groups were already high in 2019, principals reported even higher levels of satisfaction this year. For example, while 88 percent of principals overall were satisfied with the corps members in their school and 94 percent were satisfied overall with alumni in 2019, these percentages increased to 94 for corps members and 98 for alumni. Similar increases from 2019 to 2021 were also seen in the results on questions about the impacts corps members and alumni had in their classrooms and on the overall



school culture. Given that the survey response rates and the makeup of the principals who responded (e.g., similar proportions of principals who were TFA alumni and similar distribution of public charter schools versus traditional public schools) were consistent across the years, this suggests that the increasingly favorable perceptions expressed by principals in the survey this year are shared by a broad set of principals across the country who partner with TFA.

### **The Westat Team Identified One Area for Further Research to Help Inform TFA's Training and Support Efforts**

After considering the entire results of the 2021 survey and a comparison of results from 2019 to 2021, Westat suggested it would be useful to determine the reasons for the increases in principals' level of overall satisfaction with corps members and their perceptions of corps members' capacities and contributions in several

key areas. Although perceptions were already high in 2019, there were notable increases in the number of principals who reported overall satisfaction with and positive impacts made by corps members, to the point that virtually all principals reported being satisfied. Furthermore, principals also reported higher levels of satisfaction this year with the pool of TFA corps members who were available to them to hire from, with more than 8 of 10 indicating that the pool of available corps members had the instructional skills and content knowledge needed to be successful (84% and 86%, respectively) and reflected the diversity that the school looks for in its teaching staff (81%). Given this combination of developments, interviewing principals (i.e., those with high levels of experience working with corps members) to

determine more precisely why these perceptions have increased could provide useful information to TFA that could help inform the training and support it provides to its corps members both prior to and during the two-year commitment. Specifically, this research would help shed light on whether more recent cohorts of corps members have adapted to teaching during their first two years and thus experienced a more rapid rate of growth during this window or whether newer corps members are coming into their first year in the classroom better prepared than in prior years. If the latter is found, this would suggest that recent modifications to TFA's approach to training and preparing its corps members have resulted in clear benefits for schools and students.



---

## Acknowledgments

The photos in this brief are of actual Teach For America corps members and students. All photos courtesy of Teach For America and reproduced with permission.

This brief describes key findings from the 2021 Teach For America National Principal Survey, conducted by Westat. Westat is an employee-owned research firm serving Federal and local government agencies, nonprofit organizations, private businesses, and other clients in a broad range of research areas, including survey research, statistical design, and program evaluation. The complete set of survey results is documented in, *Findings from the 2021 Teach For America National Principal Survey*, <https://www.westat.com/sites/default/files/2021-TFA-NationalPrincipalSurvey.pdf>