

EdWeek[™]
Research Center

Personalized Learning

Results of a National Survey



Support for this study provided by
the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative

About Editorial Projects In Education

Editorial Projects in Education (EPE) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization based in Bethesda, Md. Its primary mission is to help raise the level of awareness and understanding among professionals and the public of important issues in American education. EPE covers local, state, national, and international news and issues from preschool through the 12th grade. Editorial Projects in Education publishes Education Week, America's newspaper of record for precollegiate education, the online EdWeek Teacher, EdWeek Market Brief, and the EdWeek TopSchoolJobs employment resource. It also produces periodic special reports on issues ranging from technology to textbooks, as well as books of special interest to educators.

The EdWeek Research Center conducts surveys, collects data, and performs analyses that appear in Education Week and special reports such as Quality Counts, and Technology Counts. The center also conducts independent research studies and maintains the Education Counts online data resource.

REPORT:

- Holly Kurtz, Director, EdWeek Research Center
- Sterling Lloyd, Assistant Director
- Alex Harwin, Research Analyst
- Xinchun Chen, Research Intern
- Yukiko Furuya, Research Intern

EdWeek[™] Research Center

6935 Arlington Road
Bethesda, MD 20814
www.edweek.org/rc | rcinfo@epe.org
Copyright © 2019 by Editorial Projects in Education Inc.

Inside

Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
Overall Attitudes About Personalized Learning	6
Personalized Learning and Digital Technology	7
Professional Development and Support	12
Teaching Practices	14
Demographics	26

Executive Summary

Teachers have diverse views and experiences regarding personalized learning, a high-profile educational strategy that focuses on customizing instruction based on the needs and interests of individual students. To learn more about educators' perspectives, the EdWeek Research Center conducted a nationally-representative survey of nearly 600 pre-K-12 teachers in July and August of 2019.

Survey results indicate that there's an almost even split between teachers who have a generally positive impression of the personalized learning movement and those who are either neutral or more negative. Similarly, teachers are split on technology's role in personalized learning.

In addition to gauging teachers' philosophical leanings, the study also drills down to capture their instructional approaches. Some elements and key tenets of personalized learning are frequently incorporated into teachers' day-to-day classroom practices while others are rarely employed.

Major findings include:

- Nearly half of teachers (46%) are positive and optimistic about personalized learning. They see it as either a transformational way to improve public education or at least a promising idea.
- On the other hand, almost 3 in 10 survey respondents think the movement toward personalization is a passing fad, something that's not on their radar, or a threat to public education. Another one-quarter think that personalized learning is just one of many school improvement strategies.
- Almost all teachers (96%) indicate that their schools are using digital technologies to help personalize the learning experience based on each student's strengths, weaknesses, and preferences. The majority of teachers (55%) report that their schools are using digital tools as an important supplemental resource. Only 15 percent say those tools are central to their schools' mission and operation.
- Nearly half of teachers (47%) indicate that personalized learning focuses just the right amount on the use of digital tools. But almost as many (42%) think there's too much emphasis on technology. That's almost four times more than the share saying that it doesn't have enough of a role.
- Most survey respondents (91%) are at least somewhat confident that digital tools can help to customize instruction for each student but only 10 percent have a great deal of confidence.
- Nearly three-quarters have quite a lot or a great deal of concern that use of technology to personalize learning will contribute to students spending too much time on screens.
- Nearly three-quarters of teachers always or often integrate students' own personal interests into classroom assignments and projects. But only 23 percent frequently ask students to select the metrics that determine whether they are making progress toward their learning goals.

In November 2019, Education Week published **Personalized Learning: What Educators Really Think and Do**, a special report featuring highlights from this survey. This additional report provides full survey results.

Introduction

To better understand the practices that teachers employ to personalize instruction and the attitudes or experiences that shape those strategies, the EdWeek Research Center surveyed nearly 600 pre-K-12 teachers. The survey included a definition of personalized learning developed by iNACOL (now known as the Aurora Institute). The definition, shown on the right, served as a guide for respondents.

The nationally-representative survey, conducted in July and August of 2019, gauges teachers' overall attitudes on the personalized learning movement. It also examines their views and experiences regarding several key factors affecting implementation: technology's role, professional development and support, and day-to-day classroom practices.

Overall, the survey results demonstrate the diversity of teacher perspectives. Nearly half of teachers (46%) see personalized learning as either a transformational way to improve public education or a promising idea. But the remaining respondents aren't so positive or optimistic. They see the movement toward personalization as just one of many school improvement strategies, a passing fad, something that's not on their radar, or a threat to public education.

Similarly, almost half of teachers (47%) think technology's role in personalized learning is just about right. Nearly the same share (42%), however, believe there's too much emphasis on digital tools.

Beyond those broad attitudinal measures, survey results also indicate that some classroom practices are more common than others. For instance, nearly three-quarters of teachers always or often integrate students' own personal interests into classroom assignments and projects. But only 23 percent frequently ask students to select the metrics that determine whether they are making progress toward their learning goals.

SURVEY DETAILS

Survey AdministeredJuly-August 2019, online
Respondentspre-K-12 teachers
Total Respondents..... 593
Total Questions27

Definition of personalized learning from iNACOL, now known as the Aurora Institute:

Tailoring learning for each student's strengths, needs, and interests—including enabling student voice and choice in what, how, when and where they learn—to provide flexibility and supports to ensure mastery of the highest standards possible.

Overall Attitudes About Personalized Learning

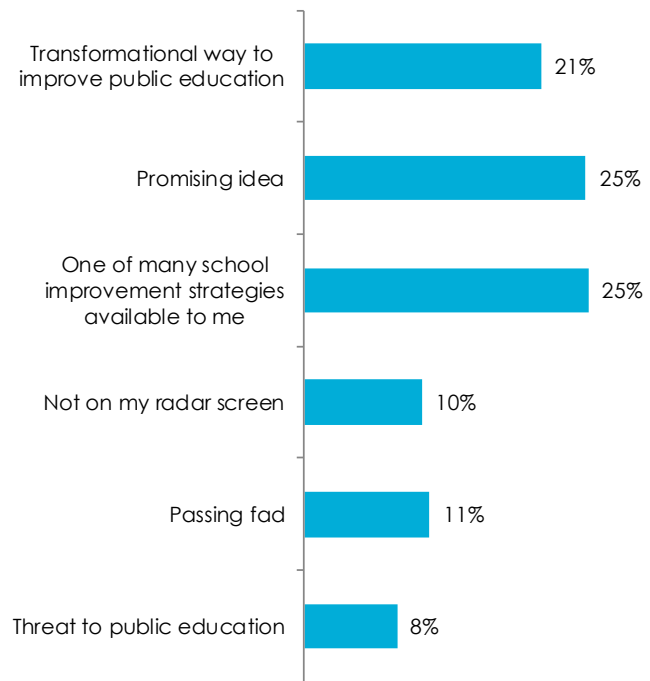
To understand teachers' views on more detailed and nuanced questions about personalized learning, it's important to first gauge their overall outlook about this high-profile educational movement.

A Promising Idea or a Threat?

Nearly half of teachers (46%) are positive and optimistic about personalized learning. They see it as either a transformational way to improve public education or at least a promising idea.

On the other hand, almost 3 in 10 survey respondents think the movement toward personalization is a passing fad, something that's not on their radar, or a threat to public education. Another one-quarter think that personalized learning is just one of many school improvement strategies.

Which of the following best describes how you perceive the personalized learning movement?



Personalized Learning And Digital Technology

Strategies to personalize learning can take many forms. Technology can be employed in efforts to tailor curriculum and instruction to students' strengths and weaknesses or to their interests. But access to technology can vary across schools and classrooms. Educators, like the public at large, might also be concerned about technology's growing impact on their daily lives and practices. Even when adequate technology is available to teachers, some are skeptical about the extent to which digital tools help schools realize the goals associated with personalized learning.

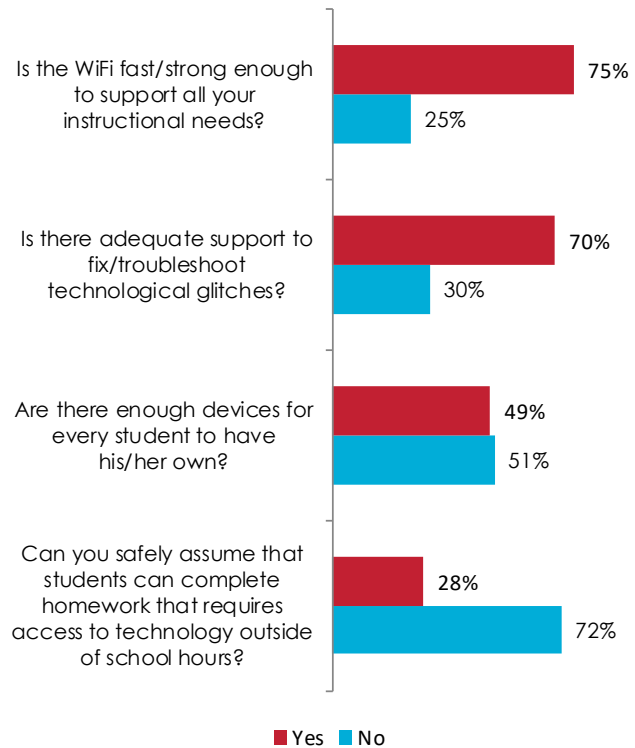
Tech Basics

Technology might have the potential to help teachers tailor instruction to student needs. But when basic hardware and reliable internet access aren't available, technology challenges can be barriers to personalized learning. Do students and teachers have access to the fundamental building blocks that make tech-related personalization possible? Teachers responded to a survey question that sheds light on that larger issue.

Most teachers say that their schools provide WiFi that is fast/strong enough to support all their instructional needs along with adequate support to fix/troubleshoot technological glitches. At least 7 in 10 respondents believe adequate internet and IT resources are in place where they work.

The data tell a different tale with respect to students' access to the digital tools that can help them complete assignments in the classroom and beyond the schoolhouse doors. The majority of teachers (51%) say their district doesn't have enough devices for every student to have his/her own. And nearly three-quarters can't safely assume that students can complete homework that requires access to technology outside of school hours.

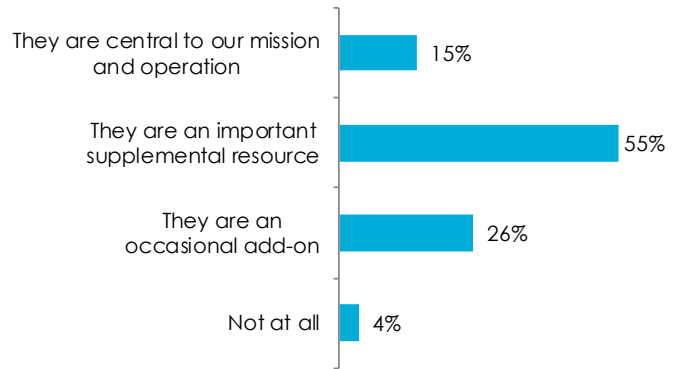
At your school:



Digital Technology Use

Almost all teachers (96%) indicate that their schools are using digital technologies to help personalize the learning experience based on each student's strengths, weaknesses, and preferences. The majority of teachers (55%) report that their schools are using digital tools as an important supplemental resource. Only 15 percent say those tools are central to their schools' mission and operation.

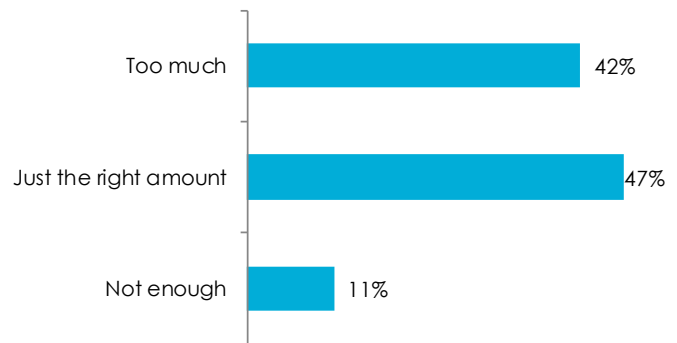
To what extent is your school using digital technologies to help personalize the learning experience based on each student's strengths, weaknesses, and preferences?



Too Much Focus on Digital Tools or Not Enough?

Nearly half of teachers (47%) indicate that personalized learning focuses just the right amount on the use of digital tools. But almost as many (42%) think there's too much emphasis on technology. That's almost four times more than the share saying that it doesn't have enough of a role.

Do you think personalized learning focuses too much or not enough on the use of digital tools?



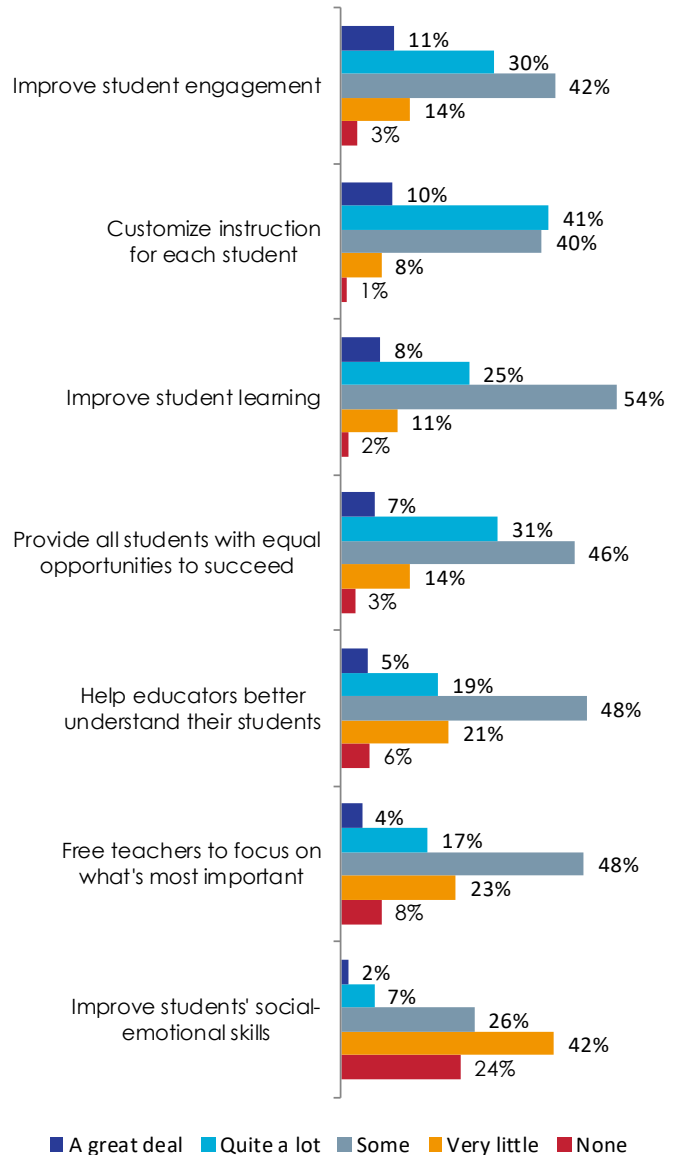
Confidence in the Role of Digital Tools

More than 60 percent of teachers have at least some confidence that digital technologies can help schools realize six different goals associated with personalized learning. But no more than 11 percent have a great deal of confidence regarding any of those key goals. For instance, 91 percent of survey respondents are at least somewhat confident that digital tools can help to customize instruction for each student but only 10 percent have a great deal of confidence.

Views on one potential goal stand out because they diverge from the general pattern. Just 35 percent of teachers have at least some confidence that technology can assist in improving students' social-emotional skills.

Technology and social skills might be seen as at odds with each other in a variety of contexts both inside and outside of school. Most people have experiences in which technology seems to interfere with social interaction. For instance, someone might stare at a cell phone screen rather than talking with the people across the table at a restaurant. Do teachers' experiences with technology in daily life outside of school explain their skepticism about its role in social-emotional learning? Or, do their personal experiences with technology in the classroom have a measurable impact? Further research could shed light on those questions.

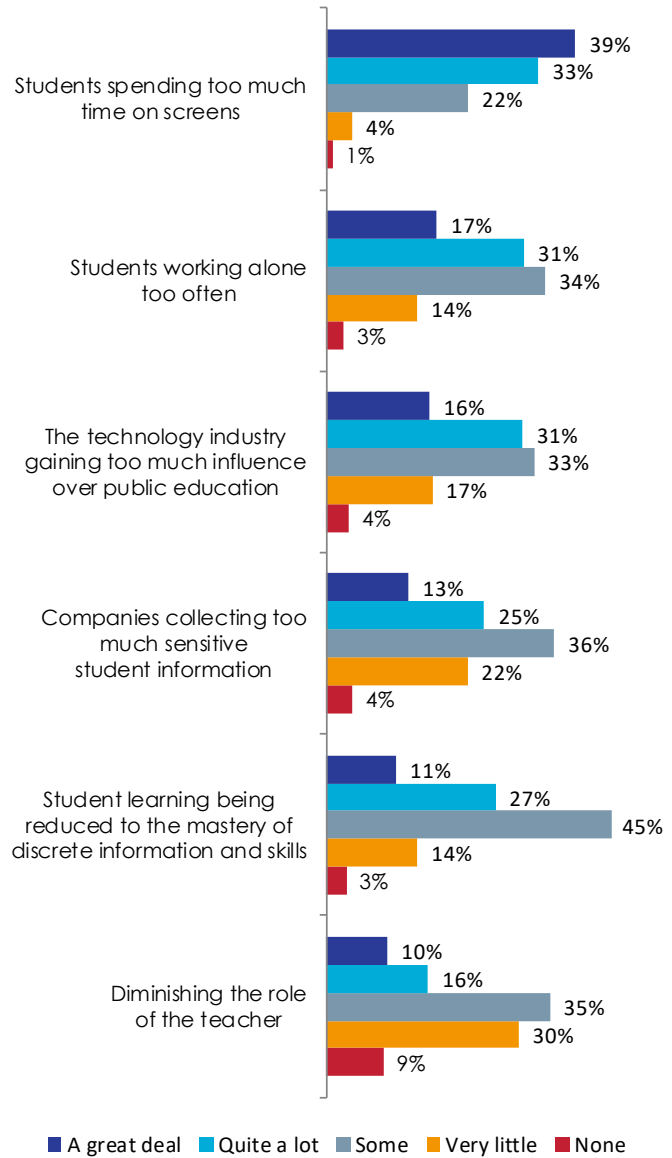
How much confidence do you have that digital technologies can help schools realize the following goals associated with personalized learning?



Concerns About the Role of Digital Tech

More than 6 in 10 teachers have at least some concern that digital technologies used to personalize learning will contribute to six different problems asked about in the survey. They are most worried about the impact on screen time. Nearly three-quarters have quite a lot or a great deal of concern that use of technology to personalize learning will contribute to students spending too much time on screens.

How much concern do you have that digital technologies used to personalize learning will contribute to the following problems?



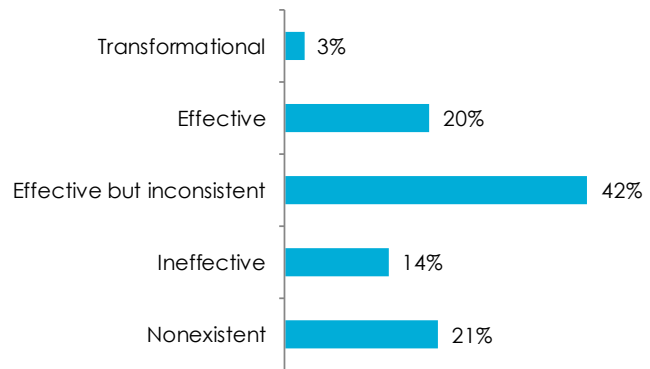
Professional Development And Support

Successful implementation of personalized learning can hinge on the professional development and support teachers receive to put strategies into practice. Responses to several survey questions shed light on teachers' views about their training experiences. Although most teachers have had some positive experiences, many also point to challenges and flaws.

Rating Professional Development

Teachers responding to the survey were asked to rate the professional development they receive to integrate personalized learning into their classrooms. Just three percent call it transformational. Another one-fifth describe it as effective. But more than three-fourths either haven't received any training or believe the training they have received could be better with respect to effectiveness or consistency.

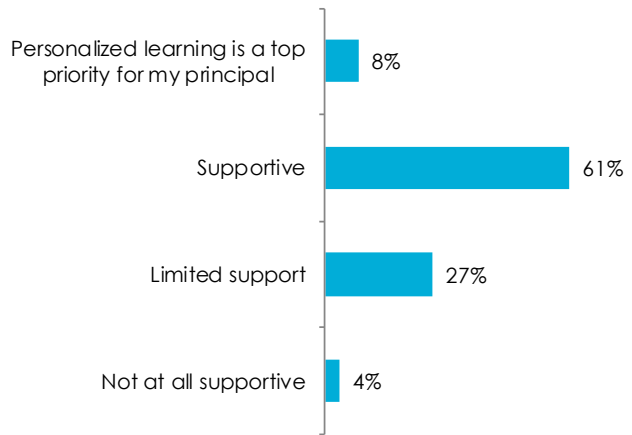
How would you describe the professional development you have received to integrate personalized learning approaches into your classroom?



Support from Principals

Nearly 7 in 10 teachers believe their principal is supportive of personalized learning or that it is a top priority. Only 4 percent say their principal is not at all supportive.

How would you describe your principal's support of personalized learning approaches in the classroom?



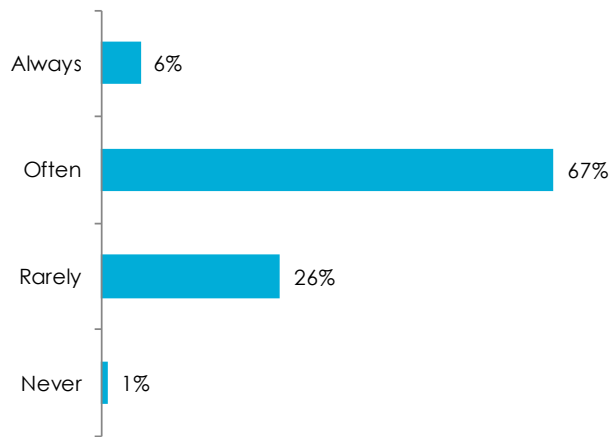
Teaching Practices

Teachers' views and attitudes about personalized learning shape their instructional practices. Those day-to-day practices and interactions with students are where the rubber really hits the road. The survey includes a range of questions examining what teachers actually do to personalize learning in the classroom. Responses offer perspective on the extent to which teachers use adaptive software, present content in differing formats, and allow students to make choices. Some personalized learning practices prove to be more common than others.

Integrating Students' Personal Interests

Nearly three-quarters of teachers always or often integrate students' own personal interests into classroom assignments and projects.

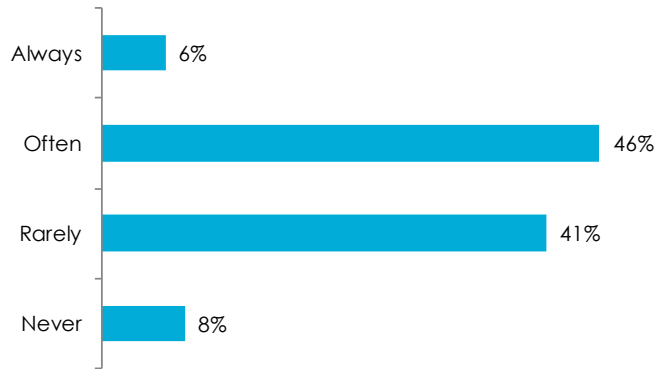
How often do you integrate students' own personal interests into specific classroom assignments and projects?



Pacing for Individual Students

Just over half (52%) of teachers always or often move individual students through material based on what they have mastered as opposed to moving everyone through the curriculum at a similar pace.

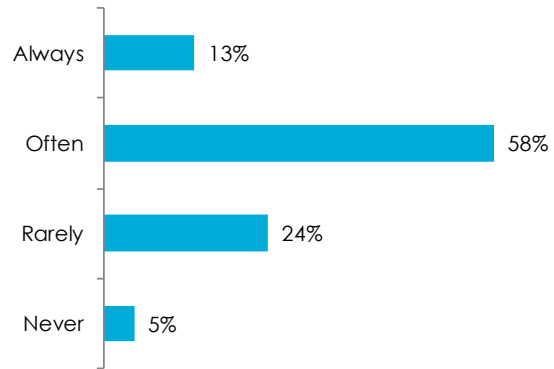
How often do you move individual students through learning material based on what they've mastered [versus moving everyone through the curriculum at a similar pace]?



Presenting Material in Different Formats

More than 7 in 10 teachers always or often use different formats, such as audio or video, to present the same material to students based on their individual preferences. Just five percent never present content in varying formats.

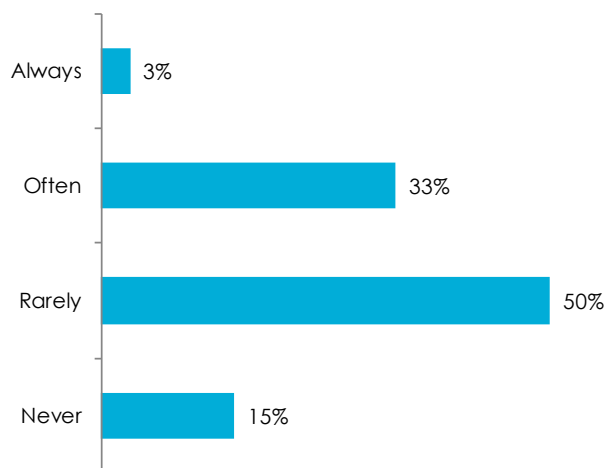
How often do you use different formats (text, video, audio, interactives, etc.) to present the same material to your students, based on their individual preferences?



Setting Goals for Learning

Only 36 percent of teachers always or often have students set their own learning goals. Fifteen percent never employ this strategy.

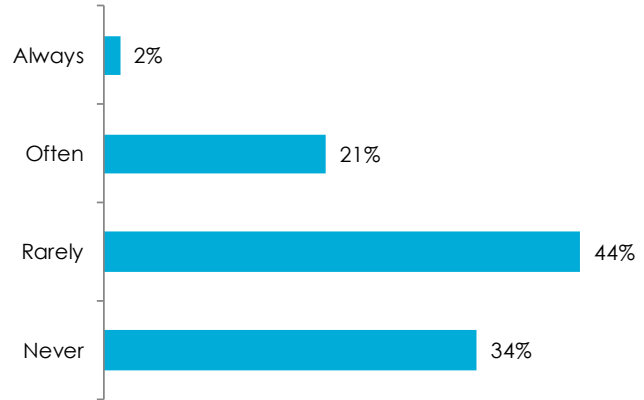
How often do you have students set their own learning goals?



Selecting Progress Metrics

Only 23 percent of teachers always or often ask students to select the metrics that determine whether they are making progress toward their learning goals. Roughly one-third never use this approach.

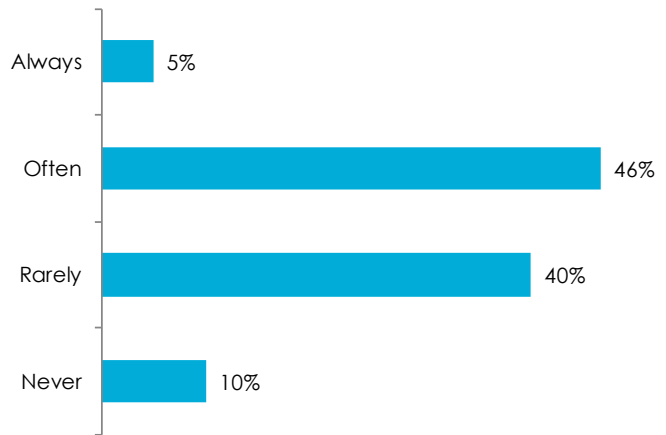
How often do you have students select the metrics that will determine whether they are making progress toward their learning goals?



Meeting With Students

A narrow majority of teachers (51%) always or often hold one-on-one meetings with students to review their learning goals and discuss progress.

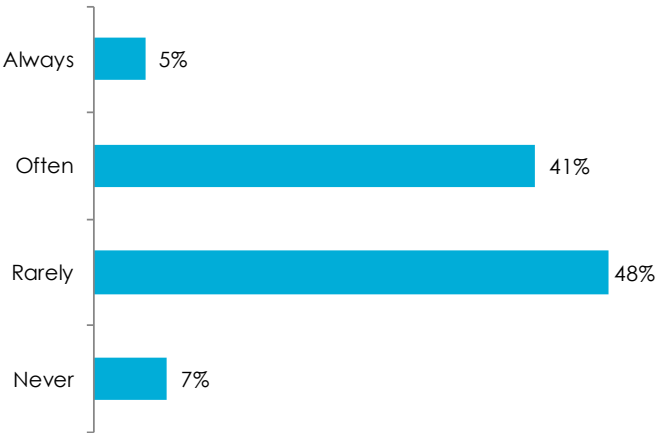
How often do you hold one-on-one meetings with students to review their learning goals and discuss progress?



Choosing Ways to Demonstrate Learning

Just 46 percent of teachers let students choose how they want to demonstrate what they have learned.

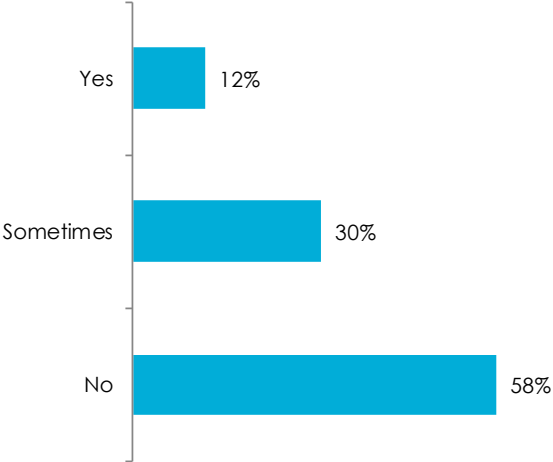
How often do you let students choose how they want to demonstrate what they've learned?



Grouping Students

Roughly 4 in 10 teachers say their schools use multi-age groupings of students at least some of the time.

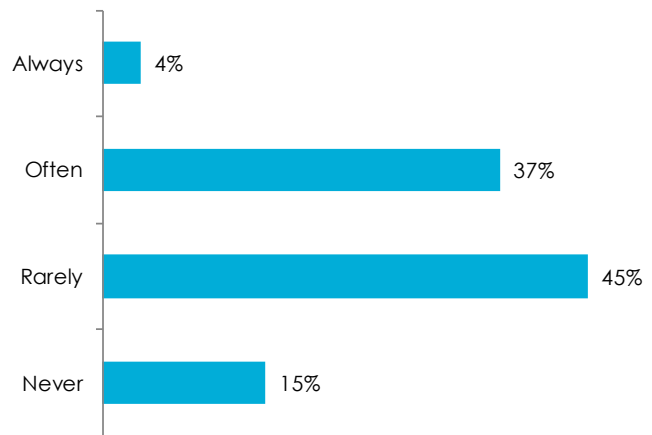
Does your school use multi-age groupings of students?



Using Adaptive Software for Core Learning

Just 41 percent of teachers always or often use adaptive software to let students learn core material at their own pace. Fifteen percent never use that approach.

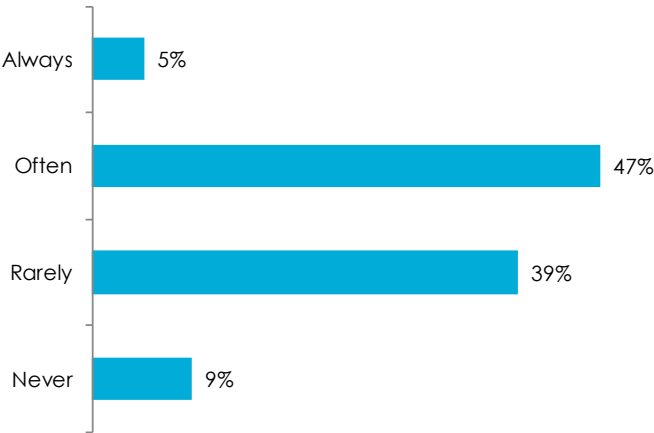
How often do you use adaptive software to let students learn core material at their own pace?



Using Adaptive Software for Enrichment or Remediation

Just over half (52%) of teachers always or often use adaptive software to provide enrichment or remediation to students at their own pace.

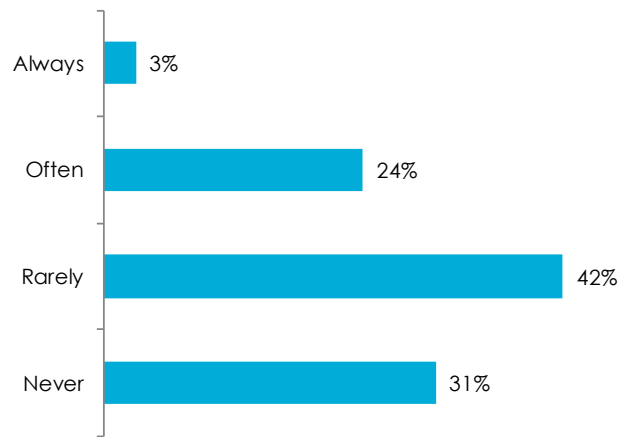
How often do you use adaptive software to provide remediation/enrichment to students at their own pace?



Constructing Learner Profiles

Slightly more than one-quarter (27%) of teachers always or often use digital software to construct learner profiles of individual students. Roughly 3 in 10 never do so.

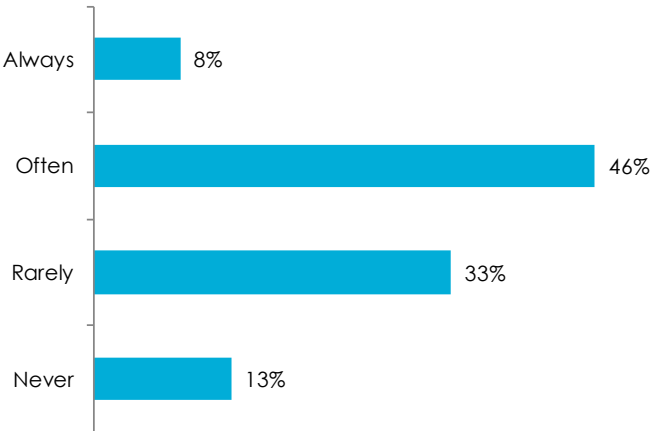
How often do you use digital software to construct “learner profiles” of individual students?



Using Data From Learning Software

The majority of teachers (54%) always or often use data from learning software to decide what and how to teach individual students.

How often do you use data from learning software to decide what and how to teach individual students?



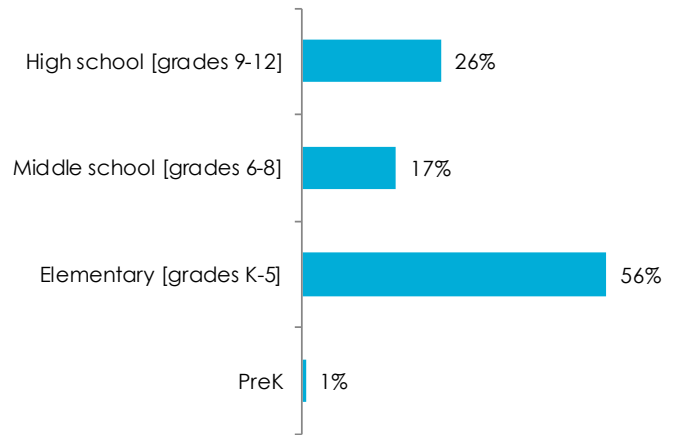
Demographics

Overall, nearly 600 teachers responded to the EdWeek Research Center's online survey about personalized learning. Details on respondents' backgrounds are included in this section of the report.

Grade Level

Most respondents (56%) teach in the elementary grades. More than one-quarter work with high school students.

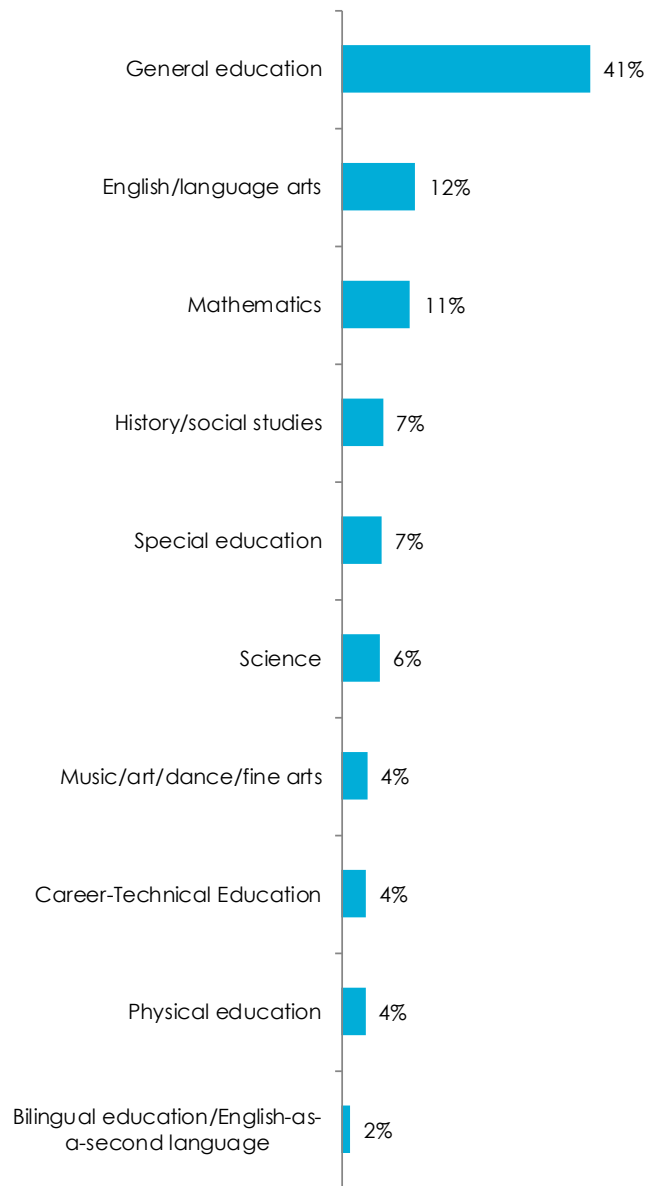
Which of the following best describes the grade level(s) you teach this school year?



Teaching Assignment

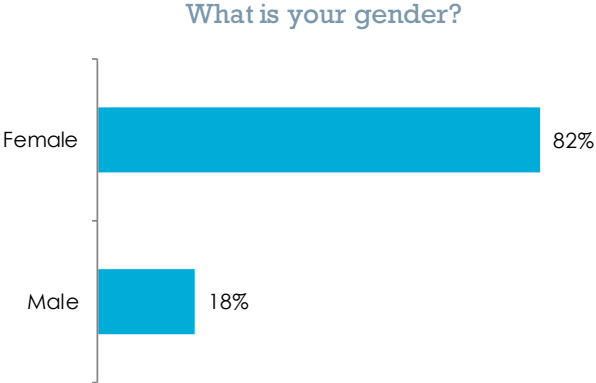
Survey respondents most commonly work as general education teachers in the elementary grades, with roughly 4 in 10 falling into that category.

Which of the following BEST describes the subject you will be teaching this school year?



Gender

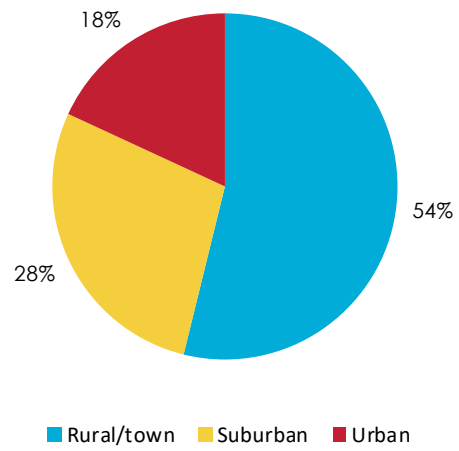
Most survey respondents (82%) are female. The K-12 teaching workforce as a whole is also predominantly female.



Location

Survey respondents hail from every state except for Hawaii. The majority (54%) work in schools located in rural areas or towns. More than one-quarter serve suburban communities.

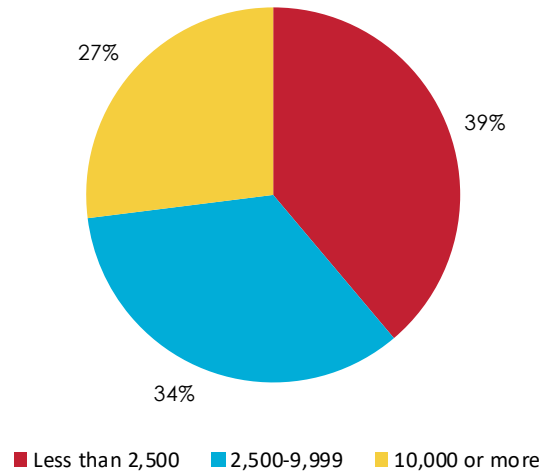
Which of the following best describes the location of your school?



Enrollment

Teachers responding to the survey are most commonly employed in smaller school districts with less than 2,500 students. Almost 4 in 10 work in such districts. Another 34 percent teach in districts enrolling 2,500 to 9,999 students. Just more than one-quarter work in large districts serving 10,000 or more students.

How many students are in your district?



Poverty

Survey participants work in high- and low-poverty schools. Roughly one-fifth serve schools where 25 percent of students or less are from low-income families. About one-quarter serve schools in which low-income students make up more than 75 percent of the population.

Which of the following best describes the percentage of students from low-income families at your school?

