

TEACH FOR AMERICA

Passes the Test with Most
Participants in Principal Survey



KEY FINDINGS

- More than 85 percent of principals surveyed were satisfied with the Teach For America (TFA) corps members at their schools—slightly more than in the 2015 survey.
- Though overall satisfaction was high, principals who were TFA alumni or who led charter schools were significantly less satisfied with TFA corps members' abilities than other principals were. The reasons for this are not obvious from the data, but the researchers theorize that those who went through the program may have higher expectations for TFA corps members.
- A majority of principals would hire or recommend hiring a TFA corps member in the future. Still, when considering future hiring decisions, more than one-quarter of principals voiced concerns about corps members' classroom management skills and the short amount of time they commit to teaching under the TFA program (two years).

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principals who partner with Teach For America (TFA) are generally satisfied with the quality of the corps members they receive, their contributions to the classroom and culture, and the professional development and support that TFA provides to them, according to a national survey.

Nevertheless, when considering future hiring decisions, roughly one in four principals have concerns about TFA corps members' classroom management skills and the brevity of their two-year teaching commitment.

Since 1990, TFA has worked to attract more young people with leadership potential to the teaching profession. TFA corps members commit to two years of teaching in rural and urban low-income schools. They attend a summer training program and receive coaching, support, and ongoing professional development throughout their teaching stint. Through TFA's efforts, more than 50,000 individuals have become teachers at schools nationwide.

Today, TFA's mission is still critical. Effective teachers are in short supply in urban, rural, high-poverty, high-minority, and low-achieving schools, which makes it difficult to close the racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps that persist in the public education system.

Teach For America Relies on Principals' Perspectives to Evaluate Programming

Since 1997, TFA has hired external evaluators to administer its biennial TFA National Principal Survey to all partner principals employing TFA corps members. The survey helps TFA assess principals' perceptions of corps members' skills, instructional practices, and effectiveness, as well as the training and support that TFA provides.

The 2017 survey is the second time that RAND has administered the TFA survey; the first was in 2015. Nearly 1,100 principals representing 52 of TFA's regions completed the 2017 survey, for



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an overall response rate of 43 percent. Of those who responded, the majority work in traditional public schools. Approximately one-third were charter school principals.

Most survey questions have changed since 2015, so the majority of 2017 results cannot be directly compared with prior years' results. Consequently, the survey might best be viewed as providing a snapshot in time that reflects principals' perceptions of the program. That said, the 2017 and 2015 results are quite similar.

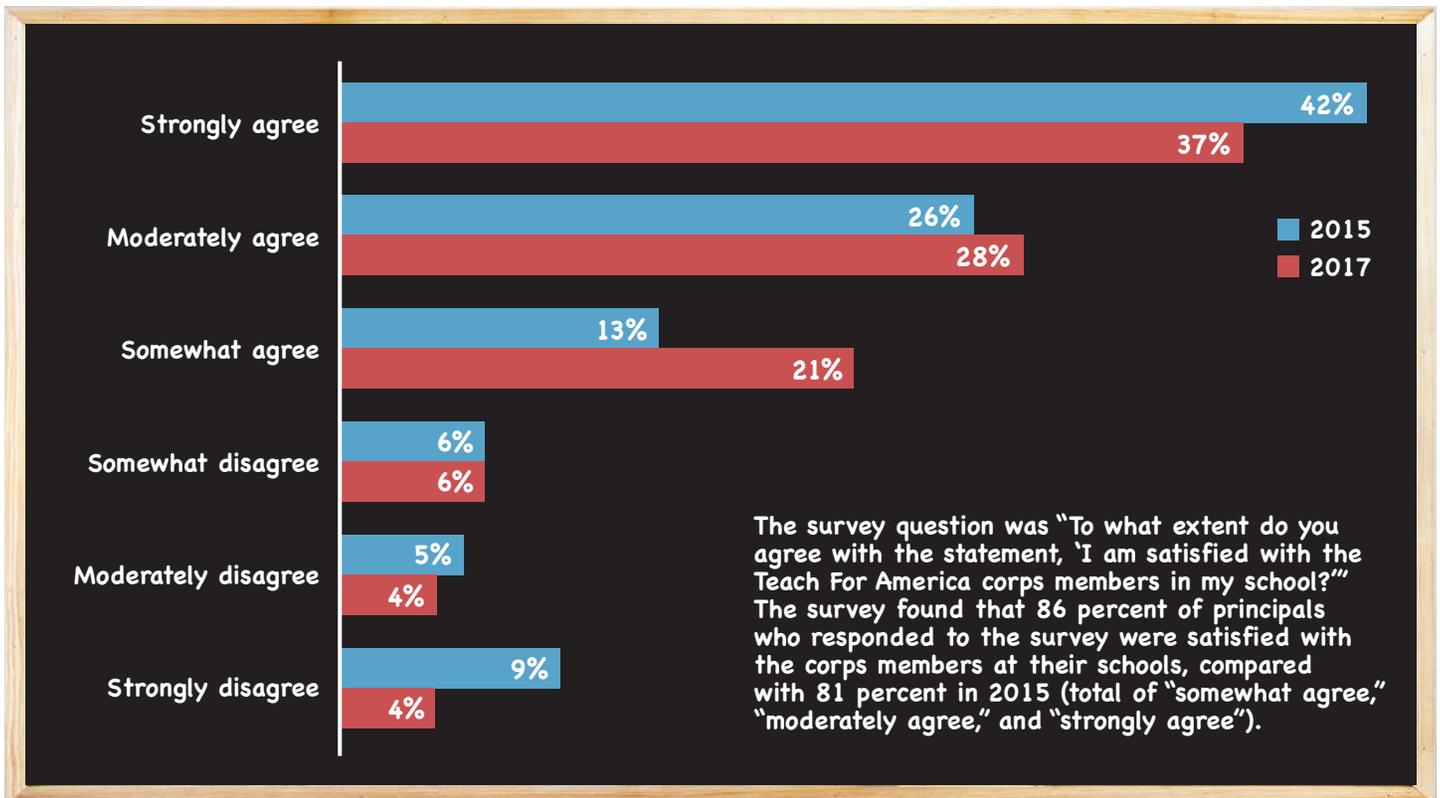
Principals Are Generally Satisfied with Teach For America Corps Members

The survey found that 86 percent of principals who responded to the survey were satisfied with the corps members at their schools, compared with 81 percent in 2015 (total of "somewhat agree," "moderately agree," and "strongly agree"; see Figure 1). Principals reported that TFA corps members had a positive impact on student growth (78 percent); contributed to a positive, collaborative professional culture (89 percent); built strong relationships within the school community (88 percent); and demonstrated leadership (81 percent).

When comparing TFA corps members with other novice teachers, principals gave TFA corps members higher ratings on their ability to create classroom environments that support student growth and achievement. Principals reported that both sets of teachers participated in school activities, such as sponsoring a student organization or serving on a committee, at similar rates. However, principals reported that the TFA corps members working at their schools were less likely to coach a sport than the novice teachers were.



Figure 1. Principals Are Generally Satisfied with Teach For America Corps Members



Most principals were satisfied with the quality and diversity of the pool of TFA corps members they had to choose from. More than three-quarters of principals believed that the pool of TFA corps members had the orientations, skills, and content knowledge needed to be successful at their school (79 percent); met or exceeded the hiring principals' expectations for them (83 percent); and reflected the diversity that their school looks for in teaching staff (76 percent).

More than 90 percent of principals were familiar with at least one aspect of the training and support activities that TFA provides to corps members. Further, the vast majority of those respondents (88 percent) found the training and support activities to be satisfactory. Activities include a summer institute, coaching, group professional development sessions, access to the broader TFA network, access to university partners, and experiential community-learning opportunities.

Most Principals Would Hire Another Teach For America Corps Member, Though Some Have Concerns

Eighty-two percent of principals were willing to hire another TFA corps member in the future, and 88 percent would recommend hiring corps members to other principals. The reasons they cited

most were the corps members' fit with school culture (84 percent), level of collaboration with staff (83 percent), and impact on student outcomes (82 percent; see Figure 2).

Still, more than one-quarter of survey respondents voiced concerns about TFA corps members' classroom management skills (29 percent) and the brevity of their two-year teaching commitment (27 percent). That said, unrelated surveys have shown similar concerns about novice teachers' classroom management skills and overall preparedness.

Principals Who Were TFA Alumni or Who Led Charter Schools Were Significantly More Critical of TFA Corps Members Than Other Principals Were

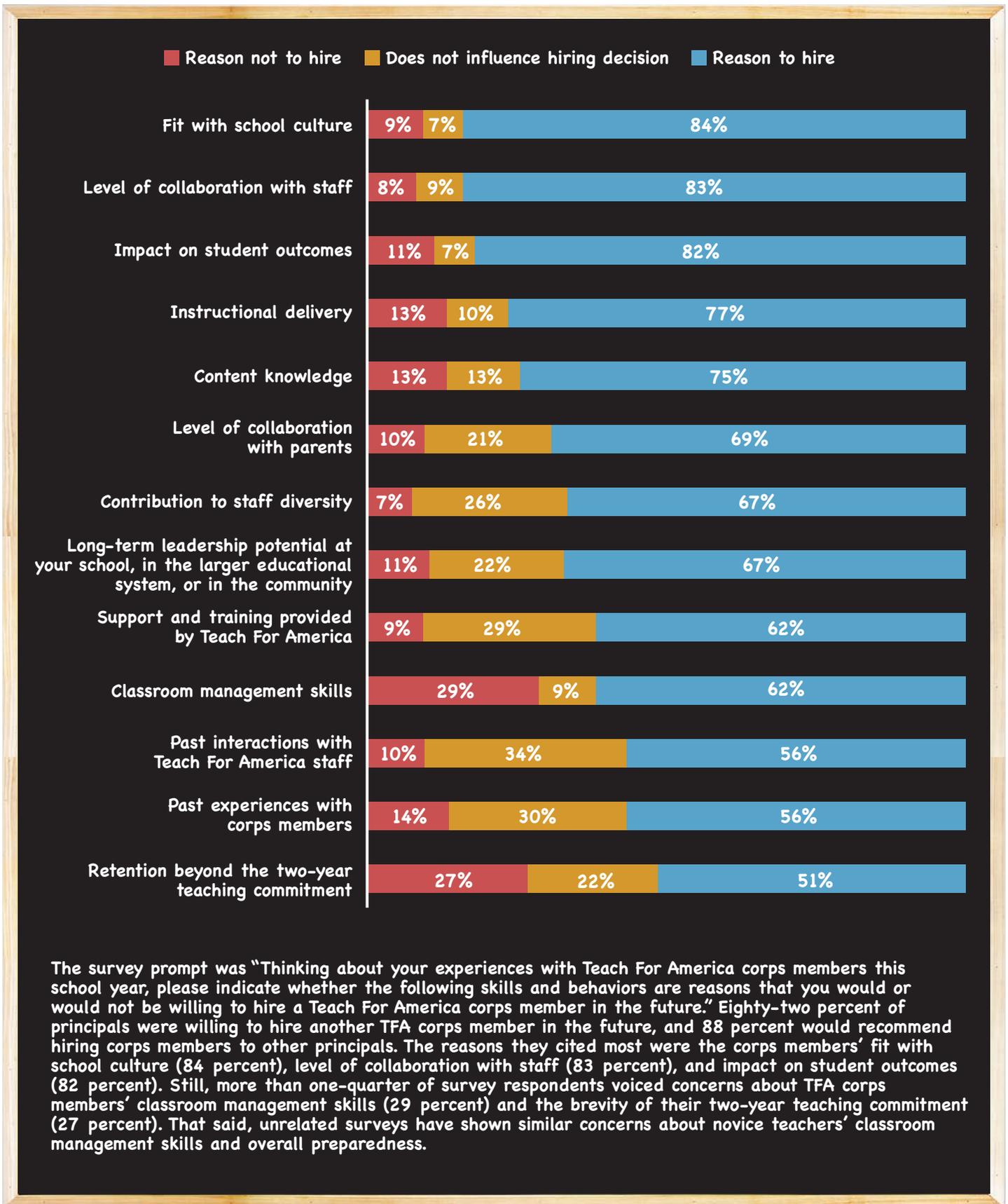
As with the 2015 survey, though satisfaction was high among all principals, those who were TFA alumni or who led charter schools were significantly less likely than other principals to report positive feedback about corps members' abilities to create classroom environments that supported student growth and achievement.

Why were these principals less satisfied with TFA corps members? The answer is not apparent from the data, but the researchers have a few theories: First, principals who are TFA alumni themselves (one in five survey respondents in 2017) may have higher expectations for TFA corps members. The thinking behind this is that principals who went through TFA have deep knowledge of the program that allows them to be more critical (though it should be noted that TFA has been modified several times, so alumni principals may have outdated expectations). Second, because 45 percent of charter school principals also identify as TFA alumni, this may also contribute to charter school principals being more critical of the corps members than non-charter school principals.



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Figure 2. Reasons Principals Would or Would Not Hire Corps Members



What TFA Can Do to Address the Challenges

Taken together, the results of this survey suggest that principals are generally satisfied with corps members, alumni, and the support that TFA provides to corps members. However, as in 2015, principals voiced some concern about corps members' classroom management skills, and a discrepancy resurfaced in how principals who were TFA alumni and/or charter school leaders view TFA corps members and the support TFA offers, as compared with their peers. Based on the findings, the authors make several recommendations.

Investigate the Sources of Principal Dissatisfaction

Although principal satisfaction is generally quite high, the survey found some dissatisfaction—particularly among principals who were TFA alumni and charter school leaders—with TFA's training and support and with corps members themselves. Interviews or focus groups with charter school leaders and principals who are TFA alumni could shed some light on the source of this dissatisfaction.

Address Concerns About Corps Members' Commitment and Classroom Management Skills

The greatest apprehensions principals reported about hiring corps members were their two-year teaching commitment and classroom management skills. TFA could address the first issue by better communicating to principals the number of corps members who remain in the classroom beyond their two-year commitment and comparing retention rates among new teachers versus TFA corps members. To

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better understand the classroom management issue, TFA could organize follow-up interviews or focus groups with selected principals and use the results to inform its professional development efforts.

Improve Principals' Understanding of Corps Member Training and Support

Most principals were familiar with TFA's summer institute and coaching, but far fewer knew about the other training and support opportunities that TFA provides. TFA should consider educating principals about the full spectrum of TFA professional development. Armed with this knowledge, principals could recommend specific coaching for a corps member or otherwise leverage TFA's training opportunities to the benefit of their schools. ■



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

This brief describes work done in RAND Education and documented in *Results from the Teach For America 2017 National Principal Survey: School Leader Perspectives on Induction, Support, and School Partnerships*, by Amanda F. Edelman, Rachel Perera, and Jonathan Schweig, RR-2192-TFA, 2018 (www.rand.org/t/RR2192). To view this brief online, visit www.rand.org/t/RB9999. The RAND Corporation is a research organization that develops solutions to public policy challenges to help make communities throughout the world safer and more secure, healthier and more prosperous. RAND is nonprofit, nonpartisan, and committed to the public interest. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark. © RAND 2018

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