



YEP Voices:

A Report on and by the Next
Generation of Education Leaders

March 2014

“YEP Voices: A Report on and by the Next Generation of Education Leaders” is the first national report from the Young Education Professionals (YEP), capturing the voice and opinions of more than 400 young education professionals from all sectors — policy, practice and research.

YEP’s mission has always been to support and connect the next generation of education leaders, from those in schools and non-profits to those in elected positions and other leadership roles. The *YEP Voices* survey, and this corresponding report, seek to amplify the perspectives, needs and general outlook of these education professionals at the beginning or mid-point of their careers.

What We Found

The “Potential Gap” Between Promising Reforms and Likelihood of Implementation

- Young education professionals believe that early education/pre-K and teacher preparation hold the most promise for impacting positive change for students and the education system.
- The three reforms with the biggest gaps between the promise they hold and the likelihood of being implemented (called the “potential gap”) were teacher preparation, school finance reform and higher education access and affordability.

Many Stops on the Career Pathway

- The majority (84.4 percent) of those surveyed have been at their current job or organization for three or less years.
- About a quarter of respondents plan to leave their organization or job within the next year, while about half see themselves staying for 1-5 years more. Only 11 percent see themselves staying at their current organization for more than five years.
- The most common answer to the question “Where do you see yourself in 10 years?” is in non-profit leadership (35.1 percent). This is the most common choice for those already working in policy and advocacy, as well as the second most common choice for those working in practice.
- The second most common response across all groups was “I don’t know,” demonstrating the uncertainty among many professionals in the early stages of their careers.

A Desire for Skills

- Young education professionals were split on the types of skills they most want or need to develop: leadership (30 percent), management (27 percent) and career development (23 percent).
- The most-desired skill was policy knowledge among those already in policy, those in the field (in practice) and those working in research.

Universal Agreement on the Value of Connecting Policy and Practice

- Nearly all respondents (99.4 percent) said it was “very or somewhat important” for those in the classroom and schools and those in policy and research to come together to discuss education reform. Not one respondent said this was “not very” or “not at all important.”
- Only 14.3 percent of those surveyed say they “very often” have opportunities “to engage with individuals working in a different part of the education sector,” although 47.3 percent reported that they do have “some” opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

“YEP Voices: A Report on and by the Next Generation of Education Leaders” is the first national report from the Young Education Professionals (YEP), capturing the voice and opinions of more than 400 young education professionals from all sectors — policy, practice and research.

YEP’s mission has always been to support and connect the next generation of education leaders, from those in schools and non-profits to those in elected positions and other leadership roles. The *YEP Voices* survey, and this corresponding report, seek to amplify the perspectives, needs and general outlook of these education professionals at the beginning or mid-point of their careers.

Specifically, the survey focuses on those reforms young education professionals believe hold the most promise, and those which they believe will actually have a chance at successful implementation. The survey also asks about those education challenges and reforms not getting enough attention and the role of various public and private entities in education reform.

In addition, the survey explores the current professional development needs of, and opportunities for, young professionals and in particular those skills they want and need to develop in order to advance in their careers. By understanding where these professionals are currently in their career path, and where they want to go, the field can adapt to ensure our next generation of education leaders has the skills and knowledge they need to be successful.

YOUNG EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS’ OPINIONS ON KEY EDUCATION ISSUES

The Promise & Potential of Education Reforms

What We Asked:

- On a scale of 1-4 (1 being “low potential” and 4 being “high potential”), rank how much potential you believe each reform has to impact positive change.
- On a scale of 1-4 (1 being “very unlikely” and 4 being “very likely”), rank how likely you believe it is that each reform will be addressed and/or implemented successfully at scale over the next five years.
- In your opinion, what education issue is not getting enough attention?

What issue isn’t getting enough attention: *“Teacher preparation programs and teacher training programs. The teacher is the key agent of change, and how we prepare and support them (in implementing the CCSS, in best instructional practices) is key.”*

There is consensus across the board that early education/pre-K (3.66) and teacher preparation (3.60) are the two areas that hold the most promise for impacting positive change for students and the education system more broadly. These two issues were ranked highest by both teachers and school administrators and those working in policy, advocacy and research.

However, looking at all of the reforms and issues asked about in the survey, all 10 received positive marks, suggesting young professionals believe in the potential of a wide array of reforms and that it will take multiple strategies and approaches to improve education for all students.

What issue isn't getting enough attention: *"From my personal perspective, I don't think that school finance/funding is given enough attention, especially in light of the tremendous impact funding systems have on issues of equity. And while Common Core is receiving a tremendous amount of attention, I'm not sure the issues surrounding implementation (i.e. what schools and districts really need to make it work) are receiving enough kind of coverage, or the right kind of coverage."*

Generally, though, there is a lower level of optimism about the chances of these reforms reaching implementation at scale in the next five years— even those believed to have the most potential. Respondents consider the Common Core State Standards (2.77), early education/pre-K (2.78), and science,

technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education (2.73) as the three most likely to be implemented successfully, while school finance reform (1.96) was ranked the least likely to be implemented.

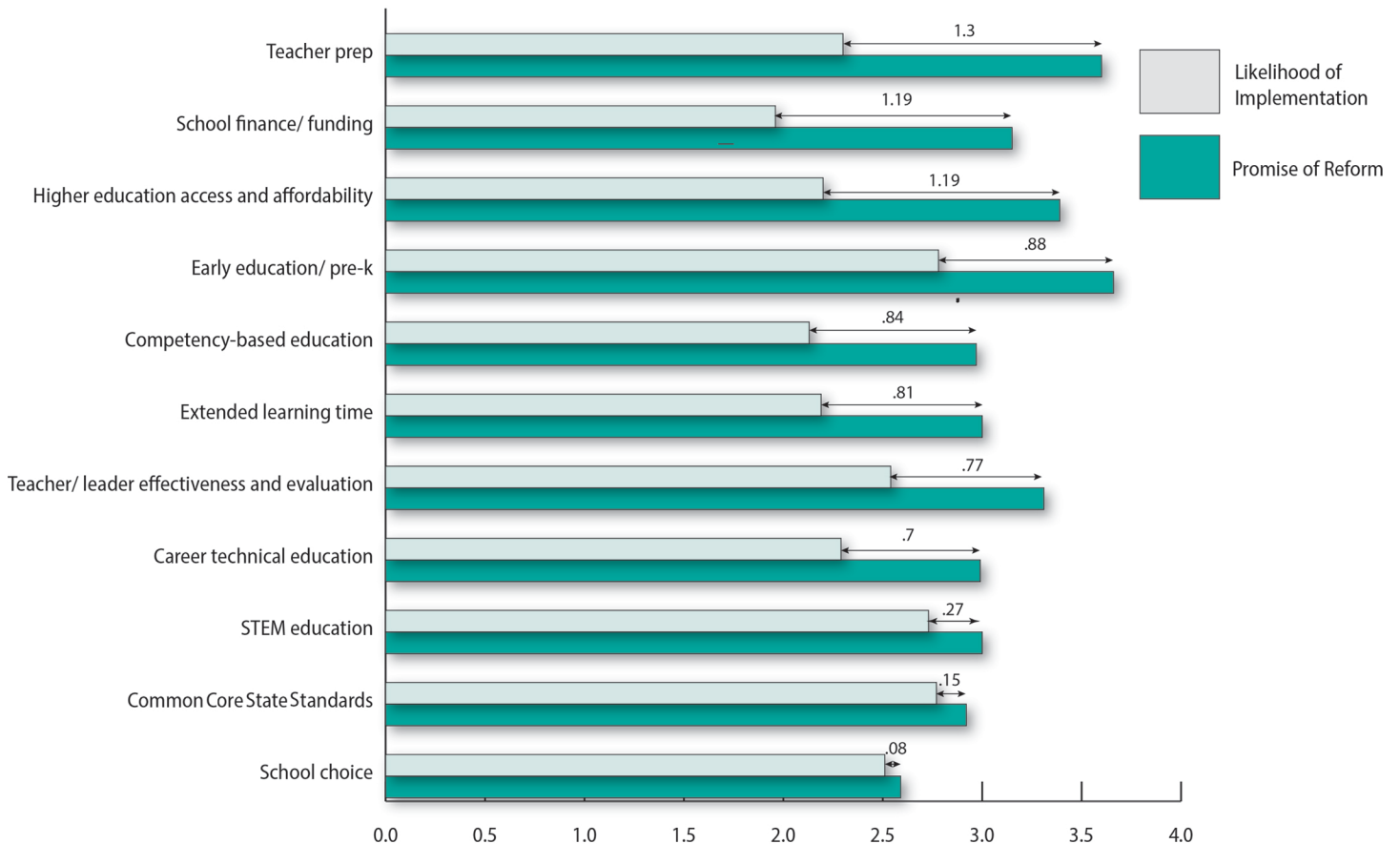
Looking at those reforms or strategies with the biggest gaps between the promise they hold and the likelihood of being implemented (called the "potential gap"), the top three are teacher preparation, school finance reform and higher education access and affordability.

When asked about the issues not getting enough attention, many young education professionals cite teacher quality and effectiveness, as well as the effectiveness of school and district leaders in their ability to implement evaluation systems and support teachers through the implementation of such systems.

Many others identified various outside factors — poverty, the whole child, parental engagement — as not getting enough attention. Career technical education and digital or blended learning also came up repeatedly as reforms that are now beginning to become part of the conversation but are still misunderstood by many in the field.

What issue isn't getting enough attention: *"The impact of poverty on children is something that continues to be talked about but is something that schools truly do not know how to deal with. Finding ways to support low-income kids without 'making excuses' for them seems to be a constant struggle with schools and is a problem that must be solved."*

Potential of Reforms to Impact Positive Change vs. Likelihood of Reforms Being Implemented Successfully In Next Five Years



International Rankings

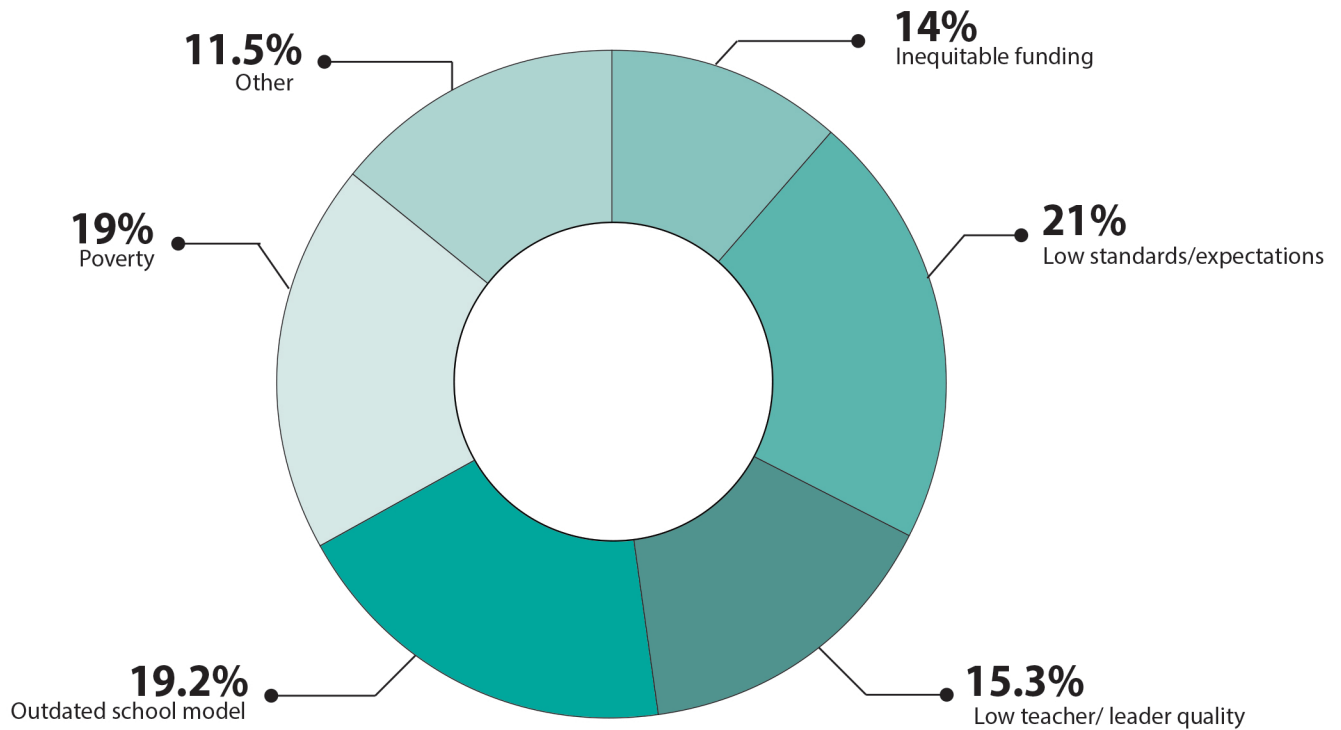
What We Asked:

- The U.S. recently ranked 30th in mathematics, 23rd in science and 20th in reading on an international assessment of 15-year-old students. In your opinion, what factor most contributes to the U.S.'s low ranking?

Respondents were very divided on the top factor contributing to U.S. 15-year olds' low performance on the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA). Low standards (21 percent), poverty (19 percent) and an outdated school model (e.g., length of school day and year, reliance on Carnegie unit, etc.) (19 percent) filled out the top three responses. When taken together, however, "poverty" and "inequitable funding" account for almost one-third of the responses.

Some of the most common "other" responses spoke to a culture that may not value education as much as other countries and that it is a combination of all of these factors that leads to the U.S. remaining stagnant on such an international comparison.

What Factor MOST Contributes to the U.S.'s Low Ranking on PISA?



Organizations' Role in Education Reform

What We Asked:

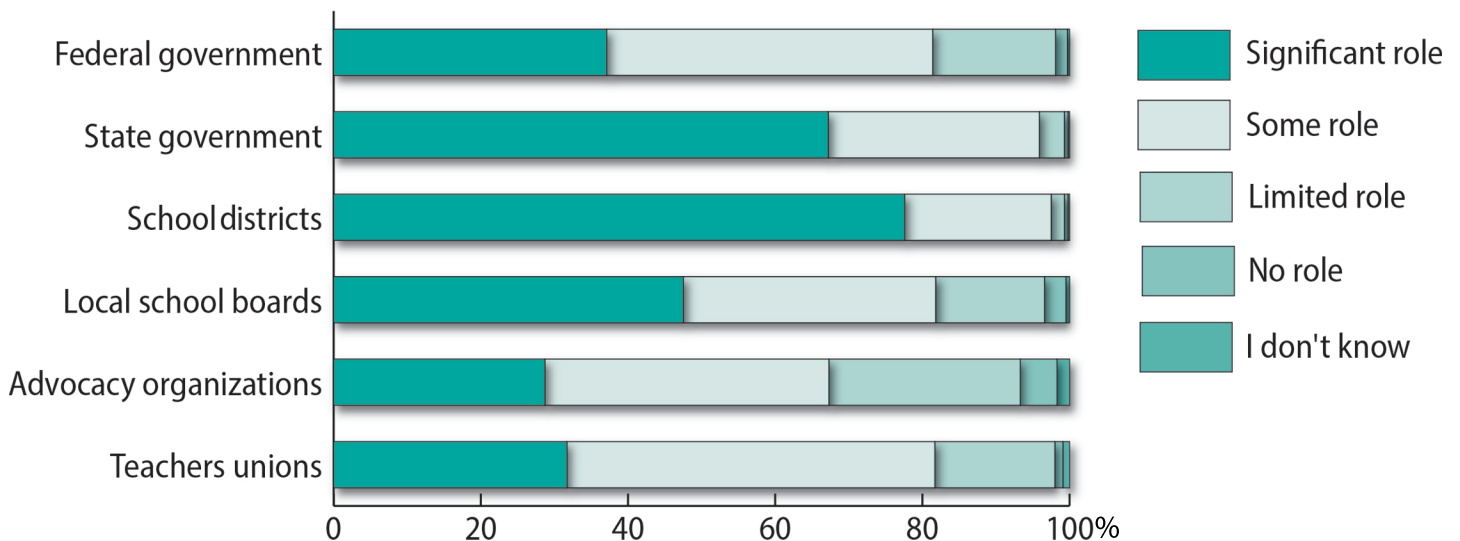
- *What role do you believe each of the following entities should be playing in education reform, if any?*

We turned to the various entities currently playing leadership roles in education reform: the federal government, state government (including state departments of education, state boards of education, state legislatures, governors' offices, among other state-level agencies), school districts, local school boards, teachers unions, and advocacy organizations (either at the national or local level). Increasingly, all of these entities are playing a larger role in setting education policy and supporting implementation — and young education professionals appear to be generally supportive of this fact.

What Contributes Most to U.S.'s Low Ranking on PISA: *"I think that trying to target the one factor that contributes most to our low ranking is problematic. We need to be looking at the intersection of all of these issues (because all contribute to our struggles), not just one at a time."*

Across the board, respondents in different sectors of education trended with the average results, agreeing that state governments, school districts and local school boards should play a “significant role,” while the federal government, advocacy organizations and teachers unions should each play “some role.” These findings suggest that young education professionals appreciate the value add each of these types of entities can bring to the education reform table, in particular state governments, a growing presence in educational reform and implementation over the last decade, and local school districts.

What Role Should Each of These Entities Be Playing in Education Reform?



YOUNG EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS' DEVELOPMENT NEEDS & CAREER PATHS

Career Pathway

What We Asked:

- How long have you worked in the education sector?
- How long have you worked at your current job/organization?
- How long do you plan to stay at your current job/organization?
- Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

It is not uncommon to hear anecdotes or read reports about high turnover rates in the U.S. education talent pool. This survey reinforces those other findings, as the majority (84.4 percent) of young education professionals surveyed have been at their current job or organization for three years or less.

Given this is a survey of young education professionals (either defined by age or experience in the field), it comes as no surprise that a little over a third (36.7 percent) of respondents have worked in the education sector for 4-6 years, and another third (32.4 percent) are still in their first three years in the field.

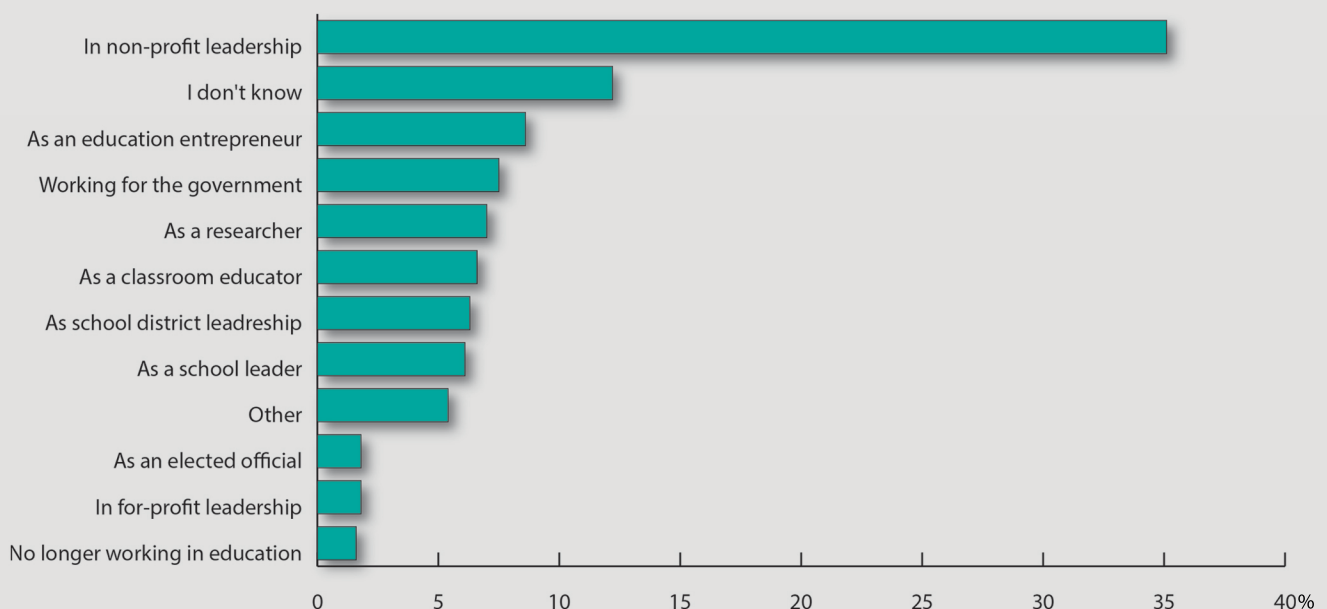
Also in line with trends among young professionals in other sectors, about a quarter of respondents plan to leave their organization or job within the next year, while about half see themselves staying for 1-5 years more. Only 11 percent plan to stay at their current organization for more than five years.

	How long have you worked in the education sector?	How long have you worked at your current job/organization?	How long do you plan to stay at your current job/organization?
Less than 1 year	5.0%	38.7%	24.7%
1-3 years	27.4%	45.7%	48.2% (1-5 years)
4-6 years	36.7%	11.3%	
7-9 years	17.6%	2.7%	11.1% (More than five years)
10 years+	12.4%	1.6%	
I don't know/Other	0.9%		16.1%

Looking ahead, the most common answer to the question “Where do you see yourself in 10 years?” is in non-profit leadership (35.1 percent). This is partially reflective of the fact that a significant percentage of the survey respondents currently work at a non-profit (42.4 percent). But it is telling that non-profit leadership is not only the most common choice for those already working in policy and advocacy, but also the second most common choice for those working in practice. The second most common response is “I don’t know,” demonstrating the uncertainty among many professionals in the early stages of their careers.

On a positive note, less than 2 percent of all respondents say they plan to leave the education field in 10 years.

Where Do You See Yourself In 10 Years?

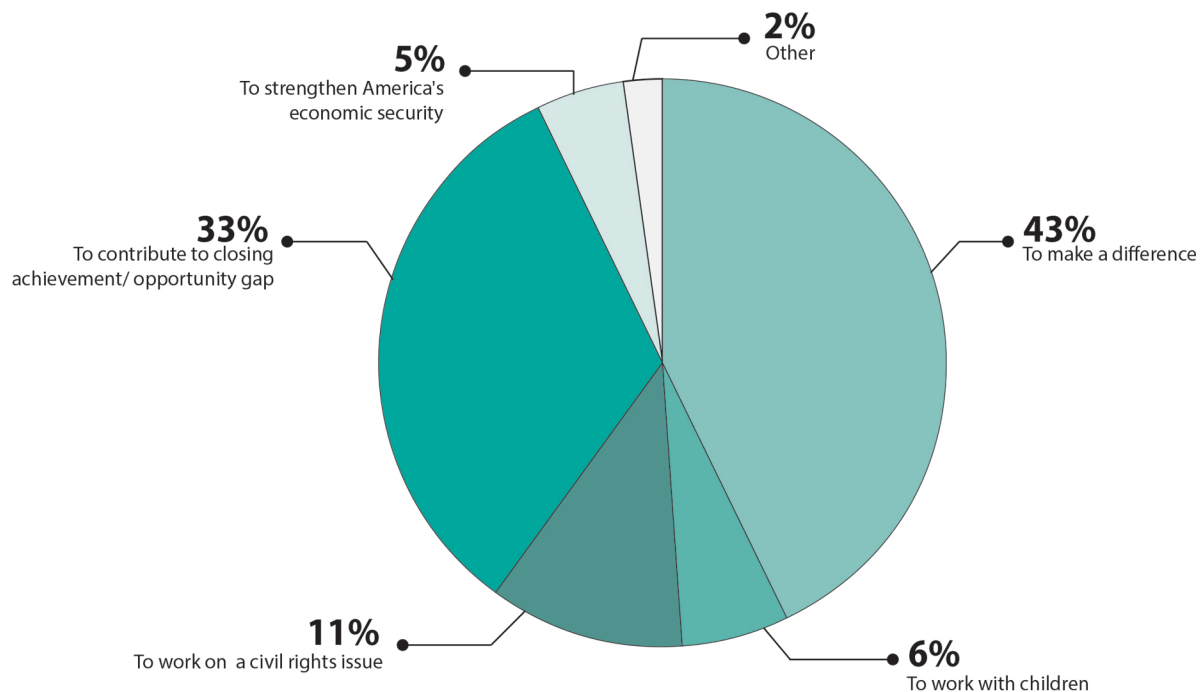


Skills Development

What We Asked:

- *What most motivates you to work in the education sector?*
- *What types of skills do you most want or need to develop?*
- *Which three skills do you most want to develop to help you advance in your career?*

What MOST Motivates You to Work in the Education Sector?



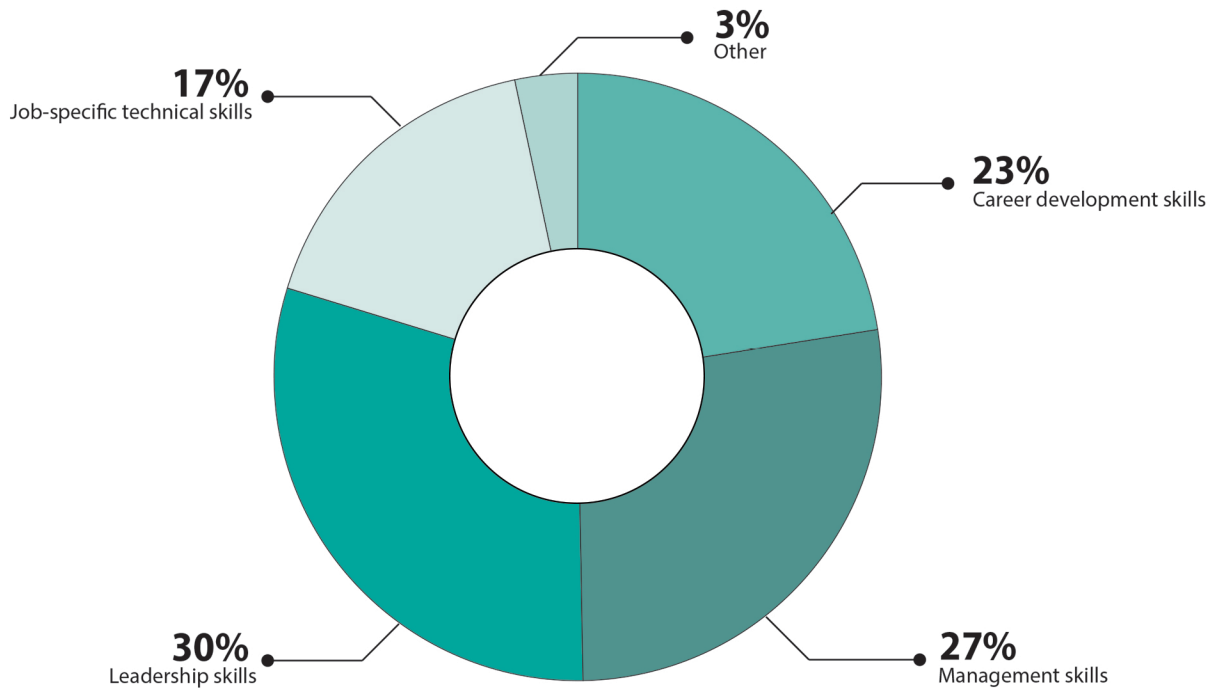
There is a very clear interest among young education professionals to gain and improve upon their skills. When asked what types of skills they most want or need to develop, young education professionals are split across leadership (30 percent), management (27 percent) and career development (23 percent).

When asked about specific skills they want to develop in order to advance in their career, the most popular choices are nearly all under the category of management skills, including strategic planning (34.6 percent), staff development (26.2 percent) and project management (29.2 percent).

The most-selected skill is “policy knowledge,” demonstrating a desire among those in the field to better understand the policy environment and for those in the policy environment to deepen and widen their grasp of policy issues.

There is also definite interest in a range of other skills used in the education field, including public speaking (15.8 percent), research (15.8 percent), technology/software (15.8 percent) and networking (16.5 percent).

Most Wanted/Needed Types of Skills



Type of Skills	Among Top 3 Skills Wanted/Needed
MANAGEMENT SKILLS	
Organizational management	34.4%
Project management	29.2%
Staff development/management	26.2%
Strategic planning	34.6%
LEADERSHIP SKILLS	
Entrepreneurship	13.3%
Presentations/public speaking	15.8%
CONTENT KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT	
Policy knowledge	39.1%
JOB-SPECIFIC SKILLS	
Classroom management	7.5%
Fundraising	14.3%
Instructional strategies	10.2%
Research skills	15.8%
Student development strategies	11.1%
Technology/software skills	15.8%
Writing skills	8.1%
CAREER DEVELOPMENT SKILLS	
Networking	16.5%
Resume/cover letter writing	2.0%

THE POLICY-PRACTICE DIVIDE

What We Asked:

- *How important is it for those in the classroom and schools and those in policy and research to come together to discuss education reform?*
- *How often do you have opportunities to engage with individuals working in a different part of the education sector from you?*
- *How often do you think these cross-sector engagement opportunities exist among education professionals in general?*

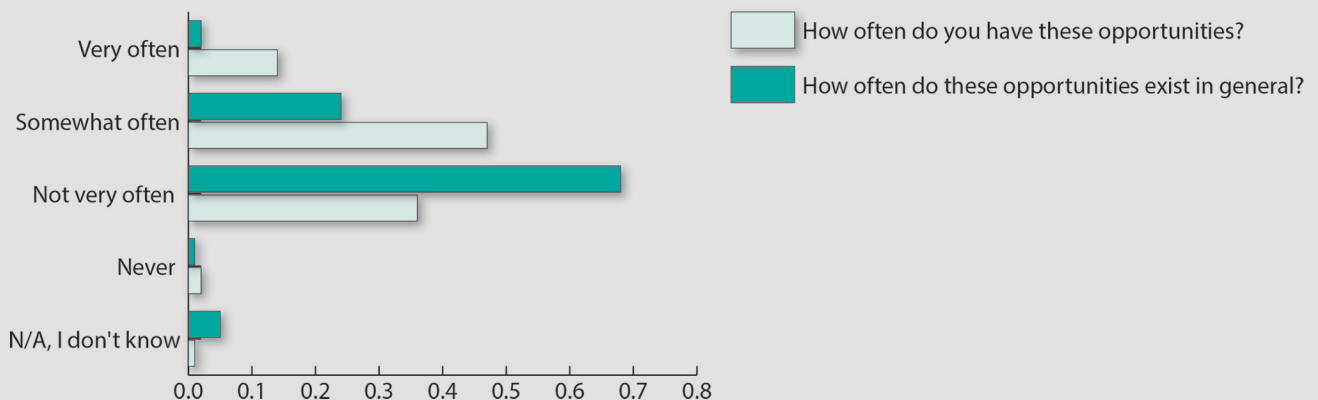
It is all too common to hear about the lack of collaboration, alignment, and discussion across education policy, practice and research. There is widespread agreement that those working in policy and research need to understand the on-the-ground challenges in order to recommend and make effective policies, and those within schools need to understand the policies and their nuances in order to implement them effectively.

This opinion is shared far and wide by young education professionals. In fact, 91 percent of respondents say it was “very important” for those in the classroom and schools and those in policy and research to come together to discuss education reform, with another 8.4 percent saying it was “somewhat important.” Not one respondent said this was “not very” or “not at all important.”

Despite this, only 14.3 percent of those surveyed say they “very often” have opportunities “to engage with individuals working in a different part of the education sector,” although 47.3 percent do have “some” opportunities. About a third of respondents do “not very often” have opportunities to engage with other education professionals outside of their sector.

Interestingly — and perhaps proven inaccurate by the answer to the previous question — 67.9 percent of young education professionals do not think this type of intra-sector engagement happened very often, 23.5 percent think it happens “somewhat often,” and only 2.3% think it happens “very often.” This suggests there are increasingly opportunities for these types of professional development experiences and cross-sector engagement but not enough to be considered the norm by respondents.

Opportunities for Policy/Practice Engagement



CONCLUSION

It is an exciting time to be a young professional in education. With emerging technologies, research and ideas continually pushing the profession and field forward, there are more opportunities for those interested in making a difference, closing the opportunity gap and addressing the major civil rights issue of the day than ever before. This is evident by the rapid growth of a network for and by young education professionals, with YEP chapters now in eight cities across the country.

The voice of young professionals is a critical one for those in the field to listen to and to understand. They are not only today's teachers, policy analysts, research assistants and program officers; they are tomorrow's leaders in the ongoing fight to make a high-quality and affordable education accessible to every child in the nation.

METHODOLOGY

YEP Voices is the result of an open, online survey of 443 young education professionals conducted between Jan. 15 – Feb. 8, 2014. The average age of respondents was 29.8 years old.

About 27 percent of the respondents self-identified as being in policy/advocacy; 24 percent in practice (as a classroom teacher or school leader); 19 percent in administration (state or district); 12 percent in research; and the remaining 17.6 percent are in other areas of the sector or are looking to enter the field.

More than half of the respondents are members of YEP-DC (57.6 percent), about a quarter belong to one of the other seven YEP chapters, and another 19 percent of respondents were not affiliated with any YEP chapter.

What statement best describes you?	
I work in a school (teacher, administration, other)	19.4%
I work for a school district	5.6%
I work for an education non-profit	42.9%
I work for an education for-profit	5.9%
I work for the government	7.9%
I work at an institution of higher education	6.5%
I am currently a student	3.8%
I am currently unemployed / looking for a job	2.7%
Other	3.8%
I do not work in education at this time	1.1%

ABOUT YOUNG EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS

Young Education Professionals (YEP) is a nonpartisan organization, created by and for young professionals, that connects tomorrow's education leaders through relationship-building, knowledge development, career and professional development, and community engagement. YEP National is the umbrella organization for eight YEP chapters across the country, which collectively reach nearly 10,000 young education professionals. For more information, see www.youngedprofessionals.org.