

Results of Online
Survey of Second-
Year
Teach For America
South Carolina
Corps Members



SC EDUCATION
OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE

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Background: Founded in 1990 by Wendy Kopp who proposed the idea for Teach For America in her undergraduate thesis for Princeton University, Teach For America has as its mission the following:

All kids—no matter where they live, how much money their parents make, or what their skin color is – deserve access to a great education. But in our country today, low-income children do not have the same access to a great education as their wealthier peers. It's not easy to close this gap, but hundreds of proof points show that it's possible. It takes committed leaders in our classrooms today who will continue to fight for students tomorrow. Teach For America's mission is to build the movement to eliminate educational inequity by developing such leaders.

- We recruit committed recent college graduates and professionals of all backgrounds to teach for two years in urban and rural public schools
- We train and develop these corps members so that they have an immediate positive impact on their students
- We foster the leadership of our alumni as they address this problem from all sectors¹

Teach For America was first implemented in South Carolina in school year 2011-12 with private donations that funded 30 charter corps members.² In Fiscal Year 2012-13 the General Assembly appropriated \$2.0 million in Education Improvement Act (EIA) funds to expand the number of Teach For America corps members employed in public schools in South Carolina. Beginning in the fall of 2012 there were 113 corps members teaching in South Carolina.³ The EIA appropriation for Fiscal Year 2013-14 is \$3.0 million.

¹ Teach For America website. Retrieved on May 31, 2013. <<http://www.teachforamerica.org/our-organization>>.

² Teach for America website. Retrieved on May 31, 2013. <<http://www.teachforamerica.org/where-we-work/south-carolina>>.

³ Ibid.

In April of 2013 the Education Oversight Committee (EOC) staff, in collaboration with Teach For America South Carolina staff, designed an online survey consisting of twenty-two (22) questions to be administered to the first cohort who were in the process of completing the second year of their two-year commitment.

As of May 15, 2013, of the 30 charter members of Teach For America South Carolina, twenty-eight (28) were still teaching in public schools in South Carolina. On May 15, Teach For America South Carolina staff emailed to the 28 second-year corps members the following message from the EOC and a link to the online survey, which provided opportunities for open-ended comments.

The South Carolina Education Oversight Committee is most appreciative of your willingness to dedicate at least two years of your life to teaching children in our state. We thank you for your commitment to these children and their future success. Members of the Oversight Committee are interested in knowing more about your experience here in South Carolina and are asking you to complete a survey that was designed with Teach For America South Carolina. A link to the survey is below. The results of the survey will be made public; however, information obtained from the survey will not be used to identify you, your school or district. Teach for America SC assisted the Oversight Committee in developing the survey. Please complete the online survey by the end of May. Again, thank you! Your participation in the survey is much appreciated as are you!

It should be noted that the Teach For America SC staff also forwarded the survey to first-year corps members. In analyzing the responses it was determined that 11 first-year corps members completed the survey. Their responses were deleted from the following analysis.

Results: A total of 24 of the 28 corps members completed the survey for a response rate of 86 percent. The results of the survey follow. Percentages are calculated based on the number of responses given to each individual question.

Questions 1 through 4 addressed the type and location of schools in which the Teach for America corps members taught as well as the content areas. The responses revealed the following:

- All but one Teach For America corps member who responded to the survey taught in a rural school in one of five counties.
- Half of the respondents taught in high schools.
- Approximately 70 percent of the Teach For America corps members who were employed in middle and high schools taught the critical need subject areas of mathematics, science and special education.

Question 1: How would you describe the school in which you have taught for the past two years?

	Number	Percentage
Rural	23	96%
Suburban	1	4%

Question 2: In what county was the school located where you taught?

County	Number	Percentage
Clarendon	5	21%
Darlington	5	21%
Florence	6	25%
Marlboro	2	8%
Orangeburg	6	25%

Question 3: How would you describe the type of school in which you taught for the past two years?

Type of School	Number	Percentage
Primary	0	0%
Elementary	7	29%
Middle	4	17%
High	12	50%
Other: K-12 Charter	1	4%

Question 4: What content area did you teach in? Please indicate all.

Content area by Type of School

No. Respondents	Elementary
2	ELA, Mathematics, Social Studies & Science
2	Special Education
1	Mathematics, Social Studies & Science
1	ELA & Science
1	Mathematics & Science
7	

ELA = English Language Arts

Content area by Type of School

No. Respondents	Middle
2	Mathematics
2	Science
4	

Content area by Type of School

No. Respondents	High
4	Science
2	ELA
2	Mathematics
2	Social Studies
1	Foreign Language
1	Special Education
12	

Content area by Type of School

No. Respondents	Other
1	Mathematics and Science

Questions 5 and 6 dealt with examples of leadership that corps members assumed while teaching and the perceived success of the respondents in engaging students in the extracurricular activities.

The responses revealed the following:

- Overwhelmingly, the respondents listed multiple extracurricular activities which they led or participated in.
 - Half (12) of the respondents reported tutoring students either before, during or after school hours.
 - One-third reported being a coach or an assistant coach for one or more athletic teams.
 - Fourteen or 58 percent noted being advisors for clubs and special activities.
 - One-fourth of the Teach for America corps members were in school leadership positions.

- Teach For America SC corps members consistently pointed to transportation as the greatest obstacle to student engagement in extracurricular activities or tutoring. Two respondents also noted that lack of motivation and inspiration from the school also reduced student participation as well as not having support from the school in advertising and encouraging the students to attend the activities.

- Finally, for those corps members who had the support of the school, who had after-school transportation or who provided transportation themselves to students, enrollment in the activities increased during the two years. The evidence reported by the corps members included implementation of sports teams for the first time in the school.

Question 5: What, if any, extracurricular activities did you lead, facilitate or volunteer at the school either before, during or after the regular school hours?

Often, respondents listed being involved in multiple activities.

Activity (Number of Individuals Indicating Involvement)	Examples of Extracurricular Activities	
Clubs, Service Organizations (n = 14)	Key Club; Girl Scouts Yearbook Drama Club Student Pep Club Dance Team Mock Trial	Recycling Program West African Dance Program Spelling Bee Academic Challenge Team Cheerleading Service organization Student Council Running Club
Academic Assistance (n = 13)	Tutoring SAT Prep	Saturday Classes After-School programs
Sports (Coach of Assistant Coach) (n = 8)	Athletic training Baseball Basketball Cross Country	Girls' Soccer Soccer Track and Field Volleyball
Leadership (n=6)	Department Chair Graduation Committee School Improvement Council Dropout Prevention Safe Schools Committee	Disability Awareness Discipline Committee Science Fair Coordinator STEM Program Leader Managed pacing guide for teachers

Question 6: How would you describe the level of student participation in each extracurricular activity listed above? Were students engaged? Did participation increase over time? Were there obstacles to the students' participating such as transportation?

Below are excerpts from some of the responses:

"My Key Club started with 30 kids and grew to over 130 students my second year. Participation definitely increased but transportation was very difficult."

"It was difficult to keep students interested long term."

“Students loved tutoring. They were sad when it was over at the end of the year. It was a great time to get to know the kids and really work on specific skills. Some students were not able to participate because of transportation.”

“Student participation was low due to the lack of motivation and inspiration. The athletes and students in extracurriculars should be held to a higher standard and it should be an honor to be a part of a specific program, but that does not seem to be the case in my school setting.”

Question 7 addressed the relationship of corps members with the school administration.

Question 7: How would you describe your relationship with your school administrator? How has your relationship with your administrator contributed to your school experience?

Each respondent to the survey commented about the school administration. Of the 24 respondents:

- 14 referred to the relationship as *outstanding, very positive, supportive, excellent, very close, or wonderful.*
- 7 referred to the relationship as *pleasant, positive, cordial, professional, productive or average.*
- 1 referred to the relationship as *fair.*
- 2 experienced different administrations each year and had mixed comments.

Below are examples from each of the above:

Outstanding, very positive, very supportive, excellent, very close, or wonderful

“All administrators at my school were crucial to my success as a teacher. They showed consistent support for my effort and helped me improve.”

“I have a very positive relationship with my administrator. This relationship has created a positive and productive school and work environment.”

“My administrator was a key player in my success as a teacher. She was very helpful and welcoming.”

“My school administrator is very supportive and we have a positive relationship. She has helped make my experience extremely positive and one of the main reasons I am returning for a third year.”

“Very close with my school administrator; she was in my room often, knew how my kids were doing in class, and always provided feedback.”

“I have a very positive relationship with all of my school administrators. Having such a good relationship with them has made my TFA experience much more pleasant and I feel like I can ask them for anything.”

“I have a great relationship with my school administration. I respect them and feel respected and supported in return.”

Pleasant, cordial, professional, productive or average

“Cordial. We had very few interactions, none of serious consequence.”

“Moderate. It could have been better.”

“Pleasant. She’s been very open to answering any questions I had at any time.”

“I feel my relationship with my school administrator is average. For one, our friendly relationship has made me feel extremely comfortable in school and has really allowed me to love all aspects of my job. On the other hand, I do not feel comfortable with bringing thoughts and concerns to the leaders in my school because I am confident nothing substantial will come of our conversation.”

“My relationship with my school administrator is professional. We do not have a personal relationship or comfort level. My school experience may have been more pleasant if we had a more comfortable/personal relationship or if I felt she knew me better as a teacher.”

Fair

“Sometimes communication was difficult. She supported me personally but not always as much in the classroom.”

Different Administrations

“My administrator changed twice in the two years. My first administrator was very approachable, my current administrator is not much of a ‘team player,’ and is not as approachable.”

“During my first year of TFA my relationships with my administrator could not have been any better. He was supporting, helpful, and a constant encouraging staff member of the district. My second year I did not have a strong relationship with my administrator; this drastically changed my school experience from the first year.”

Questions 8 and 9 asked the corps members to reflect upon their greatest *personal* accomplishments and challenges over the two years in the program while **Questions 10 and 11** asked them to reflect upon their greatest *professional* accomplishments and challenges.

- Overwhelmingly, Teach for America corps members pointed to their greatest *personal accomplishment* being the development of relationships with the community and their students that culminated in them becoming more successful teachers and their students succeeding. In turn, they noted that their greatest *professional accomplishments* were documented, improved student academic success, followed closely by assuming leadership positions at their school. The responses demonstrate that the Teach For America corps members see their professional and personal accomplishments as one in the same and their leadership abilities as key to their ultimate success.
- *Personal challenges* mirrored many issues raised by novice teachers including time management and classroom management issues. Corps members noted that adjusting to the community and being so far from family and friends were also challenges.
- Regarding *professional accomplishments*, the majority of Teach For America corps members pointed to student academic gains on standardized assessments and end-of-course assessments. Others pointed out that they had developed stronger leadership skills by “being open-minded and willing to learn.”
- *Professional challenges* focused on a lack of administrative support for the corps members followed closely by a lack of resources, professional development and content knowledge. Corps members also referred to low academic expectations by students and teachers alike as professional challenges.

Question 8: In reflecting on the past two years, what would you say were your greatest personal accomplishments and why?

Question 9: In reflecting on the past two years, what would you say were your greatest personal challenges or obstacles and why?

Question 10: In reflecting on the past two years, what would you say were your greatest professional accomplishments and why?

Question 11: In reflecting on the past two years, what would you say were your greatest professional challenges or obstacles and why?

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Personal	Professional
Building strong relationships with teachers, administrators, parents, and community members (n= 6)	Improving student academic success through documented scores and evidence (n=7)
Building strong relationships with students and gaining their respect (n=4)	Assuming leadership positions (n=6)
Seeing all students grow over the school year, "some by several grade levels" (n=4)	Becoming a better teacher and acknowledged for that success (n=5)
Participating in and completing two-year commitment which involved developing independence, leadership, etc. (n=4)	Building relationships with parents and teachers (n=4)
Becoming a better teacher (n=3)	Motivating students for higher aspirations(n=2)
Gaining a new perspective on the causes of achievement gap in SC (n=1)	
<i>"Engaging over 200 students in community service activities."</i> (n=1)	
Accomplishing personal habits and goals like reading, exercise (n=1)	

Some quotes regarding Personal Accomplishments:

“Gaining the respect of our students. I have noticed that teachers in my school have difficulty gaining the respect of the students in their classes, and I have been fortunate enough to achieve that personal goal I had set when coming in.”

“Building the relationship with my students that allowed for them to be so successful in the classroom. I knew nothing about teaching, but with a lot of hard work and dedication, their scores increased tremendously. I also trained and completed a half marathon.”

Developing partnership with college, including pen pal program and field study to the college. *“I think this is the best thing I gave to my students because it helped expand their horizons outside of . . . and motivated a lot of them to work harder toward college.”*

Becoming extremely independent. *“I know now that I can do anything and everything with very little or no help. I feel like my confidence has soared and I am almost fearless.”*

Surviving 2 years” in an area that is completely foreign to me with no family or friends close by. *It was a huge culture shock and now that I have experienced living in multiple types of areas I feel like it has prepared me to live anywhere in the country.”*

Learning *“how to see failure as an opportunity for growth and learning. This was a huge accomplishment because it enabled me to find new ways to motivate my students and seek out more creative teaching methods.”*

“Making lasting connections with people who are now very important to me.”

Being *“nominated as Teacher of the month.*

Pushed boarder-line student into the college track.”

Being able *“to remove a student completely from special services.”*

“Teaching my students to love science.

Some quotes regarding Professional Accomplishments:

“I was able to revitalize my students’ appreciation for learning and to get them involved in class culture.”

“I exited 22 out of 33 students from Special Education. This is my greatest accomplishment because these students have been stagnant in the SPED environment, and now they finally know that they do not need to have the SPED stigma attached to their name, and they can go farther in life if they should choose to do so.”

“The creation of a foreign language department at the high school, . . .the creation of a Honors Level Spanish 2, and a new found love of Spanish for many students at my school.”

“My great professional accomplishment is changing the aspirations of 2 students regarding their future. They did not want to go to a 4 year school for many reasons but it took almost the entire 2 school years to get them to change their minds and apply to schools.”

“I became a voice and leader for my science department. They respect me and value my opinion.”

“I helped my school devise new curriculum documents, which provide rigorous packing calendars and challenging activities to push students further.”

“My greatest personal accomplishments were being able to be the team leader and make changes for my team based on a student led initiative.”

“Founding a leadership development teachers.”

CHALLENGES

Personal	Professional
Being away from family and living alone (n = 7)	Lack of Administrative Support or Effective Communication (n=6)
Time and stress management (n = 7)	Lack of content knowledge, skills, resources (n =5)
Classroom management (n = 4)	Lack of expertise in classroom and behavior management t (n = 4)
Adjusting to culture of community (n = 4)	Other Teachers' Biases (n =3)
Building relationships with other teachers and community (n= 2)	Limited or constrained in classroom curriculum, instruction (n=2)
	Teaching unmotivated students (n = 2)

Some Quotes Regarding Personal Challenges:

“Time management and stress management. It was difficult to have a healthy work/life balance.”

“Understanding some of the cultural differences has been very challenging. I was raised on different morals and values and sometimes I struggle to understand where student's are coming from; i.e. if someone tries to fight me, fight back. I often find it difficult to see things from their perspective.”

“The hardest part was being so far away from my family and friends. It was very lonely to be on my own with no one to care for me if I got sick, or had a rough day, etc.”

“My greatest personal challenge was persevering through the long, hard days of work, which of course did not end at the end of the school day.”

“Classroom management and understanding/accepting the culture and nature of my school. I went to school in a very different area and it was very hard to get used to how things are done in my school, including interactions with parents and students.”

Some Quotes Regarding Professional Challenges:

“One of the greatest challenges I faced was trying to find enough time to get what needed to get done and prioritize and organize all of the things I wanted to get done with the things that needed to get done. I wanted to do so much for my students, but had to decide what I thought was the most immediate need for them. I guess the greatest professional challenge was just realizing that I couldn't do everything for everyone all the time.”

My biggest professional challenge was feeling limited in my classroom. I often wanted to make large scale change but felt restricted because as a teacher I did not have say in a lot of programs or curriculum decisions.”

“My biggest professional challenges have been dealing with inefficient school administration and staff. I often find that their responsibilities are not fulfilled as they should be, and many things take way longer than they should take to be completed.

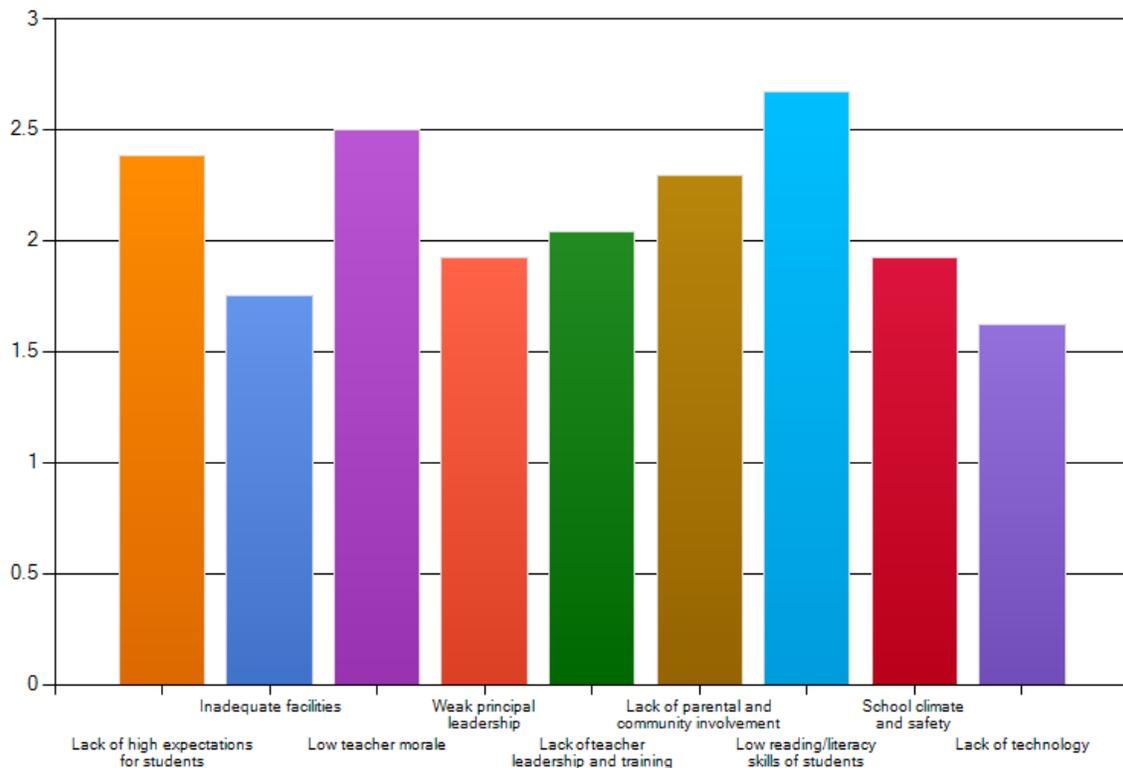
The administration is also almost never prepared for meetings, professional development, etc. These challenges have severely hindered my ability to be the best teacher I can be for my students, and I've often had to take matters into my own hands in order to make sure my students are getting the resources and answers they deserve. I do not think the leadership here has a vision for our school culture or our students.”

“Working with students who are not necessarily motivated to learn and who do not see success as extrinsic motivation has been very difficult. “

The next two questions asked the corps members to reflect on the educational obstacles faced by the students. **Question 12** asked respondents to rate the obstacles as “Not a Challenge,” “Somewhat Challenging,” and “Very Challenging.” Then **Question 13** asked each respondent to review the list of obstacles and determine the three most challenging obstacles affecting student performance.

- Across all responses, low reading/literacy skills of students was cited as the most challenging educational obstacle to children.

In reflecting on the past two years, please provide the level of challenge for each potential obstacle related to the educational performance of students in this school.



Other Obstacles noted were weak district leadership; low math skills; and technology that doesn't work and inability of teachers to access resources (like a copier) when they desire.

- When listing the three most challenging obstacles, Teach For America corps members most often mentioned the following obstacles:
 - Lack of High Expectations for Students
 - Lack of Reading/Literacy Skills
 - Lack of Parent/Community Involvement
 - Low Teacher Morale
 - Weak Leadership
 - Lack of Technology

Questions 14 through 19 and Question 21 and 22 dealt with the future of this first cohort of Teach For America SC corps members.

- Of the 24 respondents to the survey, 22 indicated that they were offered a long-term position at the school for the 2013-14 school year. Two respondents did not answer the question.
- Of these 22 individuals, 7 accepted the contract. One person indicated that a decision was pending. The remaining corps members will not continue teaching in South Carolina after the two-year commitment.
- Those who did not accept the position were asked to explain why they did not accept the position. The responses varied from financial reasons, to personal issues like wanting to be closer to their home, to the negative environment of the school. Some noted a change in career opportunities as well.
- When asked if there was anything that could have been done to that “would have made you decide to stay in your school,” the respondents answered accordingly:

Response	Number Responding
No	7
Personal Reasons	3
Location	2
More Positive School Environment, Higher Teacher Morale	2
Incentive Pay	1
Student Performance Obstacles	1

- For those corps members not returning, the survey asked them to describe their future plans. The respondents noted that they were going to:
 - Pursue other educational opportunities;
 - Attend medical school, law school, or graduate school;
 - Enter politics;
 - Teach middle school science in a different state;
 - Develop first and second year teachers;
 - Pursue career in non-profit, government or policy, specifically in education;
 - Teach abroad; and
 - Return home.
- Corps members were also asked to look forward to envision what their role in public education might be in the next five to ten years. For those corps members who responded, the answers are included along with the number of respondents who indicated this response:

- Teaching (n=5)
 - Policy making/law (n=4)
 - Academic/education research (n=3)
 - Mentor to teachers and students (n=2)
 - School Leadership =(n=2)
 - School Guidance Counseling (n=1)
 - Curriculum (n=1)
- Corps members were also asked if they would be interested in pursuing a position as leader (principal, assistant principal, facilitator, etc.) of an underperforming school. Ten of the 23 who responded indicated that they would definitely consider such leadership positions.

Finally, the survey asked the corps members to reflect on their time as a teacher in South Carolina and to indicate what the state of South Carolina, schools, communities, or Teach For America organization could do to improve the experience of future Teach For America corps members. The actual responses are below:

More explanation to district about who we are and what we do. More help when navigating policies involving our certificate.

Teachers could be given more of a say in subject and school placement.

There are already a lot of things being done to support the TFA corps members in SC.

Convey to incoming members a clear understanding of the communities they will serve.

The communities can be more welcoming. Other than that, I had a great experience.

I'm not sure. I think it's all a learning experience and no two situations are similar.

Better training for special education teachers, better facilities with more resources for special education students

I think offering more community outreach programs and events to connect TFA cms with parents and community members would be beneficial for future cms,

Provide curriculum for teachers to improve upon

Social networking and support for young people in rural communities. It is very hard to move from a big city to a small town with very few young people, and this problem will continue to affect retention rates beyond the initial commitment.

More partnership between TFA and South Carolina schools/communities for opportunities to be involved in the region after the two-year teaching commitment.

I would LOVE to stay here in South Carolina to continue the work of this movement, but besides teaching another year, there are no available avenues.

Give more support to those who are completely rural

Give them a mentor who has gone through the experience to talk them through it and listen to them.

More observations and specific feedback would lead to improvement

More support from all of the above.

Teach For America could partner with a bigger university such as Clemson or USC to offer a more attractive route to get a masters and stay to teach longer.

Have more of a network for TFA; when we started, there were only 30 of us, so we felt alone.

Improve the leadership, have people from the Dept. of Education more involved in the schools, have more local and national news coverage, be more prominent in the community

Really build the TFA community --- maybe organize trips to the movies, bowling activities, etc. It's too easy to feel caught up in what we're "supposed" to be doing, to the point where corps members feel guilty if all their students haven't advanced by two years, etc., that we sometimes forget it's okay to be human, too.

Increase communication with administration at the school sites and increase the accountability that parents have regarding their students education.

Teach for America needs to provide more content specific help. Schools need to provide curriculum guides for all courses, not just those that have an EOC. Communities need to encourage parental involvement in their child's education.

Offer certification in a smaller amount of time.