



2021 Virginia School Survey Research Brief Series: Professional Growth Opportunities

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Key Findings

The 2021 Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions asked teachers, teacher's aides, licensed staff, and non-licensed staff to indicate their degree of agreement with five statements to gauge the effectiveness of their professional growth opportunities (PGO) were. [1] In total, 101,691 individuals responded. We analyzed their responses and found:

- Teachers were the least likely to report that they received effective PGO among the four employee groups. Licensed staff were the most likely to report they received effective PGO.
 - There were no meaningful differences in perceived PGO effectiveness across schools whose student bodies have lower or higher concentrations of Black and Hispanic students or economically disadvantaged students.
 - Employees who reported more effective PGO were more satisfied with their job than were employees more critical of their PGO's effectiveness.
 - Employees were more likely to report that they intended to remain at the same school for another year when they reported more effective PGO.
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Professional Growth Opportunities

Effective professional growth opportunities (PGO) equip school employees with new skills and knowledge to best educate and support their students. School employees are more satisfied and more likely to remain in their schools when they are provided with effective PGO. [2, 3] Effective PGO focuses on increasing a recipient's content knowledge and mastery, promotes active learning, and ensures there is a coherence with other learning events. [4] It is delivered through high quality sustained activities that bring together employees from the same school, grade, or subject. [5] The purpose of this brief is to summarize Virginia public school employees' satisfaction with their PGO.

Measuring Professional Growth Opportunities

The wording for all five survey items and responses aggregated across employee groups are provided in Table 1. Employees expressed the highest agreement with the statement that they had "sufficient resources" for their professional development (20% strongly agreed). They were most critical of the "follow-up after professional development activities" (24% either somewhat disagreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed).

Table 1. Responses to Professional Growth Opportunities Survey Items Aggregated Across All Employees

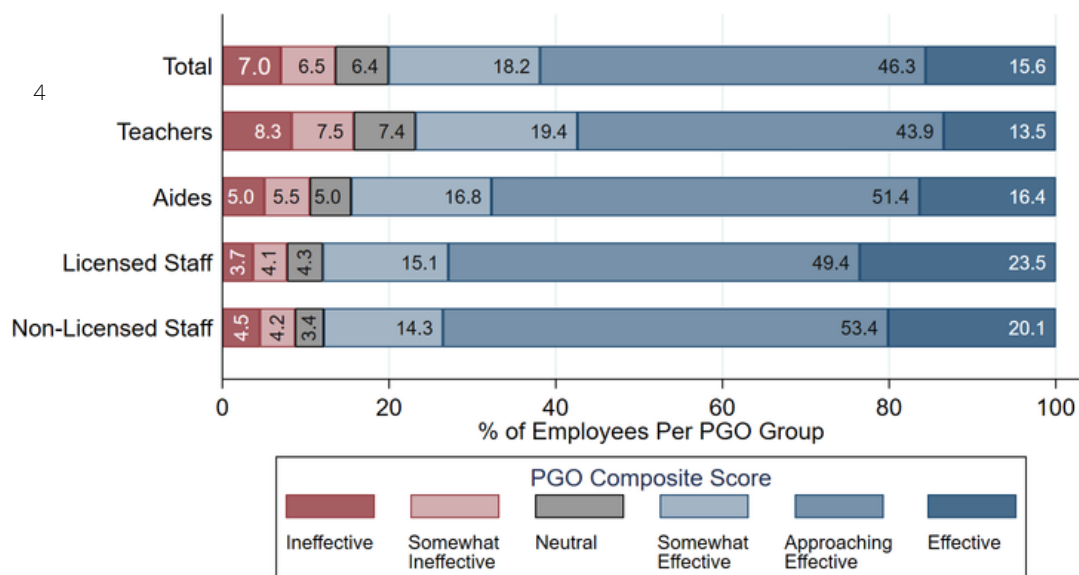
Survey Item	Mean	% Of All Respondents					
		Strongly Disagree (1)	Dis-agree (2)	Somewhat Disagree (3)	Somewhat Agree (4)	Agree (5)	Strongly Agree (6)
I have sufficient resources for my professional development.	4.7	1.9	4.1	7.9	22.6	43.3	20.1
The professional development I receive meets my needs.	4.6	3.0	5.8	10.6	26.1	38.0	16.4
Professional development provides ongoing opportunities for me to work with colleagues to refine my practice.	4.7	2.3	4.9	9.1	24.5	40.8	18.4
I receive follow-up after professional development activities to give me additional support.	4.4	3.0	7.6	13.1	26.8	35.0	14.5
Professional development enhances my ability to meet student needs.	4.7	2.3	4.7	8.1	25.2	40.6	19.1

Note: N=101,691

We theorized that these five survey items were each an indicator of the employees' views of the effectiveness of their PGO. Specifically, we theorized that employees who strongly agreed with all the statements viewed their PGO as the most effective while those who strongly disagreed with all statements viewed their PGO as the most ineffective. Psychometric analysis confirmed our theory. We created the effective PGO composite score as the average response across the five items and mapped these scores onto degrees of

PGO effectiveness. As shown in Figure 1, only 16% of employees felt they received effective PGO, suggesting a majority felt their PGO could be improved."

Only 7% reported receiving ineffective PGO. Of the four employee groups, teachers were the most negative of their PGO. They were the least likely to receive effective PGO (13%) and the most likely to receive ineffective PGO (8%). Licensed staff were most positive. They were the most likely to receive

**Figure 1.** Receiving Effective Professional Growth Opportunities by Employee Group

Note: Composite scores are mapped to the categories as follows: 1.00 to 2.74 = ineffective, 2.75 to 3.25 = somewhat ineffective, 3.26 to 3.74 = neutral, 3.75 to 4.25 = somewhat effective, 4.26 to 5.49 = approaching effective, and 5.50 to 6.00 = effective.

effective PGO (24%) and least likely to receive ineffective PGO (4%). [6] In the remainder of this brief, we focused on three groups of employees that differ in their perceptions on the effectiveness of their PGO: those whose responses describe their PGO as effective, somewhat effective, and somewhat ineffective PGO. We used these three groups to demonstrate how effective PGO is related to job satisfaction and retention intentions.

PGO and Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is highest among employees who received effective PGO. As shown in Figure 2, the portion that strongly agreed that their school was “a good place to work and learn” was much higher among the effective PGO group than the others. Among teachers, for example, only 16% of the somewhat ineffective PGO group expressed the highest level of job satisfaction compared to 77% of the effective PGO group. This roughly 60-percentage-point gap held across the other employee groups.

PGO and Retention

Employees who received effective PGO were more likely to intend to continue working at their current school than employees who received less effective PGO, as shown in Figure 3. The percent that intended to remain at their school was roughly 15-percentage-points higher among the effective PGO group than among the somewhat ineffective PGO group (e.g., 91% versus 76% among teacher’s aides). This difference held across all employee groups.

Defining Meaningful Differences Across Groups

When comparing responses to the PGO composite and survey items across employee groups or across types of schools, we needed a way to determine if the observed differences were meaningful and worth highlighting in this brief. We adopted the commonly used definition of a meaningful difference: a difference greater than or equal to 0.2 standard deviations. The Effective PGO scores and survey item responses were standardized on the pooled sample in order to allow comparisons both across and within employee groups.

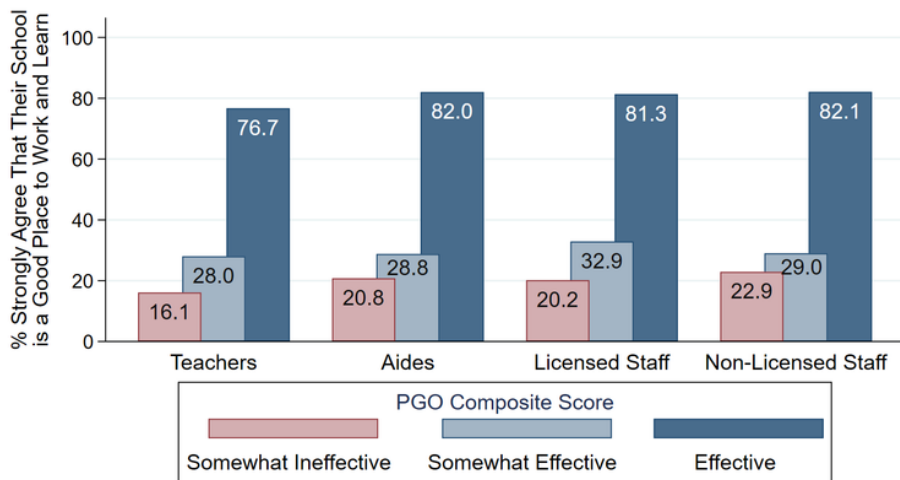


Figure 2. Percent Expressing the Highest Job Satisfaction by PGO Effectiveness and Employee Groups

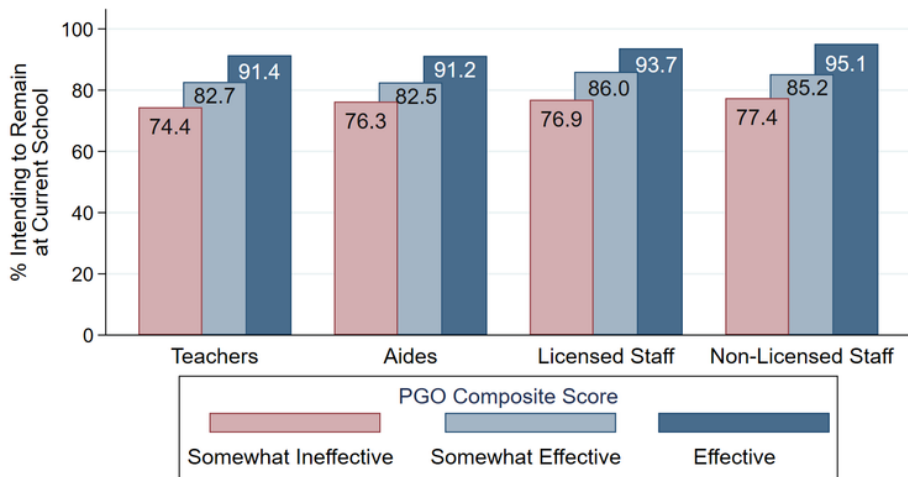


Figure 3. Percent Intending to Remain at Current School by PGO Effectiveness and Employee Groups

PGO and School Characteristics

The first research brief in this series showed that job satisfaction and retention rates are lower in schools serving higher concentrations of Black and Hispanic and economically disadvantaged students. [7] Our findings in this brief show that job satisfaction and retention rates are higher when employees receive effective PGO. We, therefore, further examined the survey responses to see whether the effectiveness of PGO varied with a school's student population. We divided the schools into quartiles based on the student body's concentration of Black and Hispanic or economically disadvantaged students such that the first quartile had the lowest concentration, and the fourth quartile had the highest. There were no consistent patterns or meaningful differences in how PGO effectiveness varied with schools' student body characteristics. Employees in schools with the lowest concentrations of Black and Hispanic students and in schools with the highest concentrations of economically disadvantaged tended to receive the most effective PGO; however, the differences with employees in other types of schools were small and none were meaningful. This held for all employee groups.

Closing

By providing employees with effective professional growth opportunities, Virginia divisions may increase job satisfaction and retention rates. Since most employees reported receiving less than effective PGO, there is opportunity for improvement. The results of the 2021 Virginia School Survey point to the need for divisions to better align PGO with employee needs and provide more follow-up to help employees implement what they learn. Future administrations of this survey will empower divisions to monitor the impacts of any new policies they implement to make offered PGO more effective. To support these local efforts, the Virginia Department of Education should offer

targeted resources, support, and technical assistance aimed at improving PGO.

End Notes

[1] Licensed staff include principals, assistant principals, guidance counselors and other student facing employees who hold a state professional license. Non-licensed staff include secretaries and other staff members who do not hold a state professional license and whose primary responsibilities are not student facing. Throughout the brief, we referred to teacher's aides as aides.

[2] Renbarger, R., & Davis, B. K. (2019). Mentors, self-efficacy, or professional development: Which mediate job satisfaction for new teachers? A regression examination. *Journal of Teacher Education and Educators*, 8(1): 21-34.

[3] Ingersoll, R., & Smith, T. M. (2004). Do teacher induction and mentoring matter? *NAASP Bulletin*, 88(638): 28-40.

[4] Garet, M. S., Porter, A. C., Desimone, L., Birman, B. F., & Yoon, K. S. (2001). What makes professional development effective? Results from a national sample of teachers. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38(4): 915-945.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Total N=101,691; Teacher N=68,419; Aides N=12,416; Licensed Staff N=13,229; Non-Licensed Staff N=7,627

[7] Miller, L. C., & Reynolds, A. L. (2022). *An Introduction to the 2021 Virginia School Survey Research Brief Series*. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia.

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