

# Kentucky Principals' Perceptions of Preparedness in Behavior Management

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In faculty meetings, professional development sessions, and in casual conversation, teachers frequently remark that classroom management is the hardest part of their job and the part for which they felt least prepared when entering the profession. The stress that this causes undoubtedly is compounded by public opinion. Polls dating back to 1972 show the public ranks discipline as the number one problem in the schools (Curwin and Mendler, 1980). As recently as September 2001, the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll of classroom teachers reported that lack of discipline/more control and lack of financial support were the most frequently cited problems facing public schools.

Kentucky school principals begin their career as classroom teachers. When they move into administration, the expectation is that they know classroom management and can now apply those same management skills to a school-wide plan. However, if teachers are feeling unprepared in classroom management, how do Kentucky principals view their training and competence in the area of behavior management vs. content instruction?

## The Survey and Results

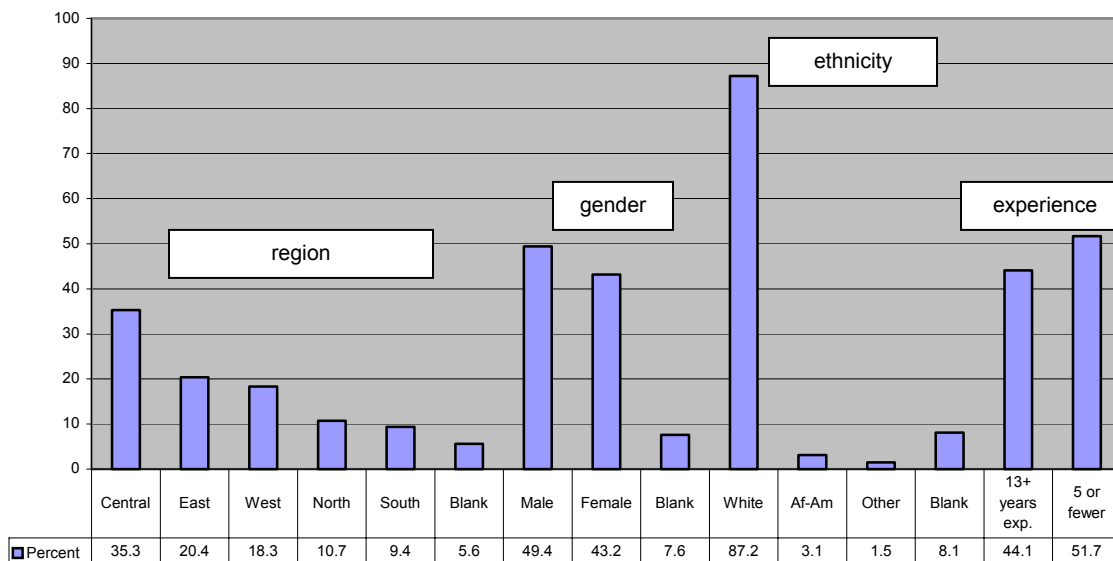
The Kentucky Association of School Administrators, in conjunction with the Kentucky Center for School Safety, conducted a survey of principals regarding their perceptions of preparedness for teaching and discipline. All Kentucky principals were asked to respond to the three-page survey by the end of January 2002.

Participants were given six choices to eleven questions relating to preparation as a teacher and principal. Additionally, ten questions asked respondents to rate the responsibility of institutions of higher learning and school districts regarding the provision of services to pre-service and new teachers and principals.

The response rate for the survey was 31.9% (447 returned out of 1400 mailed). See Chart 1 for a profile of the respondents.

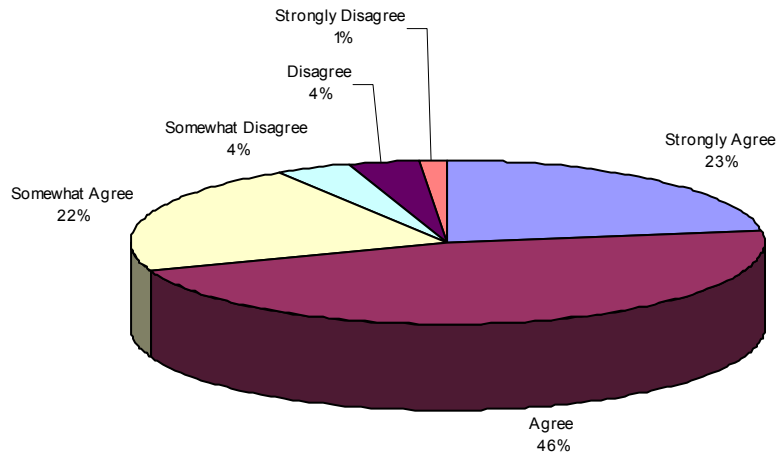
### Profile of Respondents

Chart 1

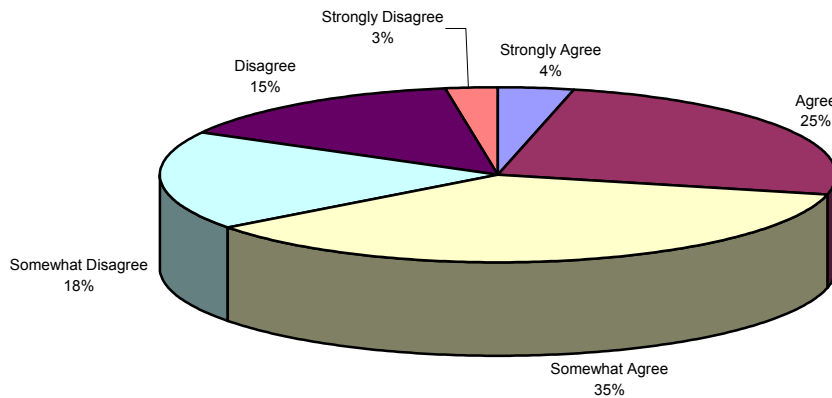


As a beginning teacher, principals reported that they felt much more prepared to teach in their content area than to manage behavior (See Charts 2 and 3).

**As a new teacher, I felt prepared to teach in my content area.**

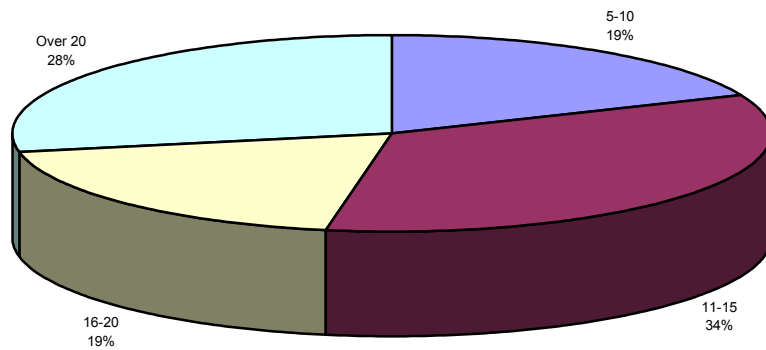


**As a new teacher, I felt prepared to manage behavior.**



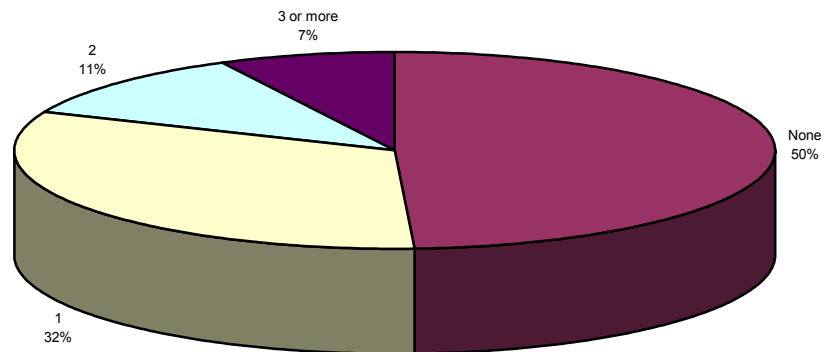
Respondents reported taking far fewer classes in classroom management than in their content area (Charts 4 and 5).

**In your preparation as a teacher, how many courses did you have in your subject area?**



**Chart 4**

**In your preparation as a teacher, how many courses did you have in classroom behavior management?**



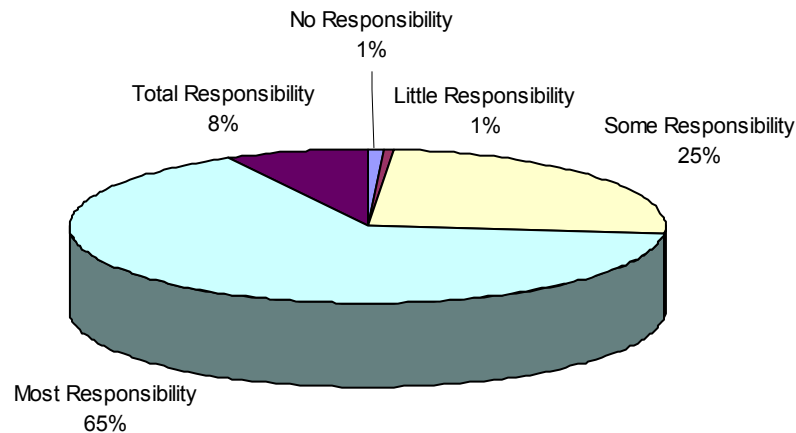
**Chart 5**

This lack of course work may explain why principals felt less prepared to manage behavior than they did to teach content. Principals rated the adequacy of professional development more favorably in content areas than in behavior management with 51.7% choosing strongly agree, agree or somewhat agree for content training as opposed to only 36.7% selecting the three agree choices for behavior management training. On the other hand, as a new principal, 54.2% of respondents felt capable of handling discipline matters while only 41.8% felt capable acting as an instructional leader, and 42% felt able to coach teachers who were struggling with classroom behavior management. Conversely, more principals, (47.4%), felt that districts provided adequate professional development for their role as an instructional leader than for their role as classroom behavior management coach, (25.8%).

Principals responded that institutions of higher learning shouldered the most responsibility for teaching subject content, (63.8%), and behavior management, (64.7%), to new teachers (Chart 6). On the other hand, 51.7% of the principals held school districts more accountable for providing professional development in subject content and 57.3% in behavior management.

## Institutions of higher education have what responsibility to teach behavior management to new teachers?

Chart 6



Results of the survey indicate that principals see institutions of higher learning as preparing teachers more thoroughly to teach content to students than to manage student behavior. Likewise, school districts were seen as providing more adequate professional development in content areas than in behavior management. Given this information, institutions of higher learning and school districts should carefully examine the pressing need for required pre-service training in basic foundations of behavior management and the school district's role in refining these skills.

### ***Addressing the Issue: Plans for the Future***

The Kentucky Center for School Safety is a consortium of four partners that have a specific function in the overall role of promoting safe and healthy learning environments in Kentucky. Partners include: Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), University of Kentucky (UK), Murray State University and the Kentucky School Board Association (KSBA). EKU is responsible for managing the Center's activities to provide safe and secure learning environments where all Kentucky children can achieve. Murray State University addresses pre-service training issues for teachers and administrators. UK operates the center's website and acts as a clearinghouse for resources. KSBA facilitates training and technical assistance for Kentucky schools and communities. Currently, KCSS is providing behavior management programs throughout the state for teachers and administrators. Instructional assistants and paraprofessionals are encouraged to participate in behavior management trainings as well.

Since the results of this survey suggest that past efforts have not adequately addressed the preparation of educators to manage student behavior, KCSS urges all school districts to reflect internally to assess their needs in the area of behavior management training for current practitioners. If KCSS can be of assistance, please contact staff at (toll free) 1-877-805-4277.

***For behavior management resources visit the Behavior Home page:***

[www.state.ky.us/agencies/behave/bi/universal.html](http://www.state.ky.us/agencies/behave/bi/universal.html)