



# **2023/2024 & 2024/2025 Teach in Nebraska Today Survey**

## Summary Report

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INFORMATION SYSTEMS & SERVICES

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## INTRODUCTION

Teacher attrition remains a persistent and well-documented challenge, drawing critical concern from school administrators, policymakers, and researchers alike. The widespread attention on this issue is indicative of the significant impact that teacher turnover has on student achievement and the overall stability of educational systems.

In response to this issue, the Nebraska Legislature enacted the Nebraska Revised Statute 79-8,148, which established the Teach in Nebraska Today Program (TINTP). This initiative aims to attract individuals interested in the teaching profession and support their employment as classroom teachers by offering a \$5,000 grant for their service within the state.

This article shares the results of a survey conducted by the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) to evaluate the impact of the TINTP on teachers who received the grant since the program's launch in the 2023-2024 school year. As NDE's first effort to assess TINTP's influence on teacher retention, the survey focused on grant recipients from the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 school years currently working as classroom teachers in Nebraska. The goal was to understand how the financial support affected their teaching experience and to collect feedback for future program improvements.

## METHODOLOGY

### Survey Purpose and Content

The survey was designed to assess the impact of the TINTP grant on teacher retention. It included questions about how recipients used the grant funds and the extent to which the grant supported their ability to remain in the teaching profession in the state of Nebraska. Respondents also rated its effect on their overall financial well-being. Additional questions gathered feedback on the grant application process, usage requirements, and suggestions for program improvement. The final section collected demographic data and insights into respondents' personal and professional backgrounds.

### Survey Design Summary

The survey consisted of 22 questions, collaboratively developed by NDE's Data, Research, and Evaluation team and the TINTP grant program specialist. Of these, 18 were multiple-choice (single- or multi-select types), designed to capture structured feedback. The remaining 4 were open-ended questions intended to provide deeper insights and context into the multiple-choice responses.

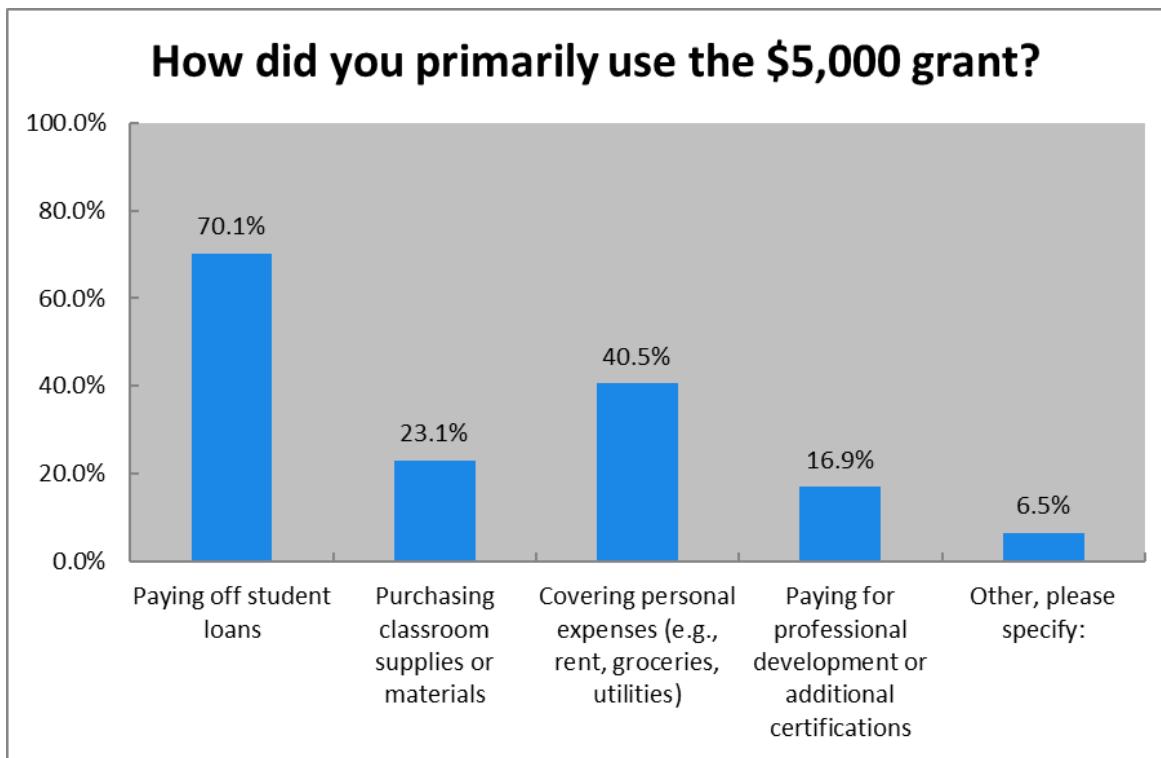
### Survey Distribution Overview

The survey was electronically distributed via Qualtrics' built-in email tools to all teachers who received the grant during the 2023-2024 and/or 2024-2025 school years. A comprehensive mailing list of recipients from both years was compiled and uploaded into the platform to ensure accurate and efficient outreach.

A total of 1,603 survey invitations were sent to TINTP grant recipients from the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 school years. After accounting for 37 undeliverable emails, 585 recipients completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 37.3%.

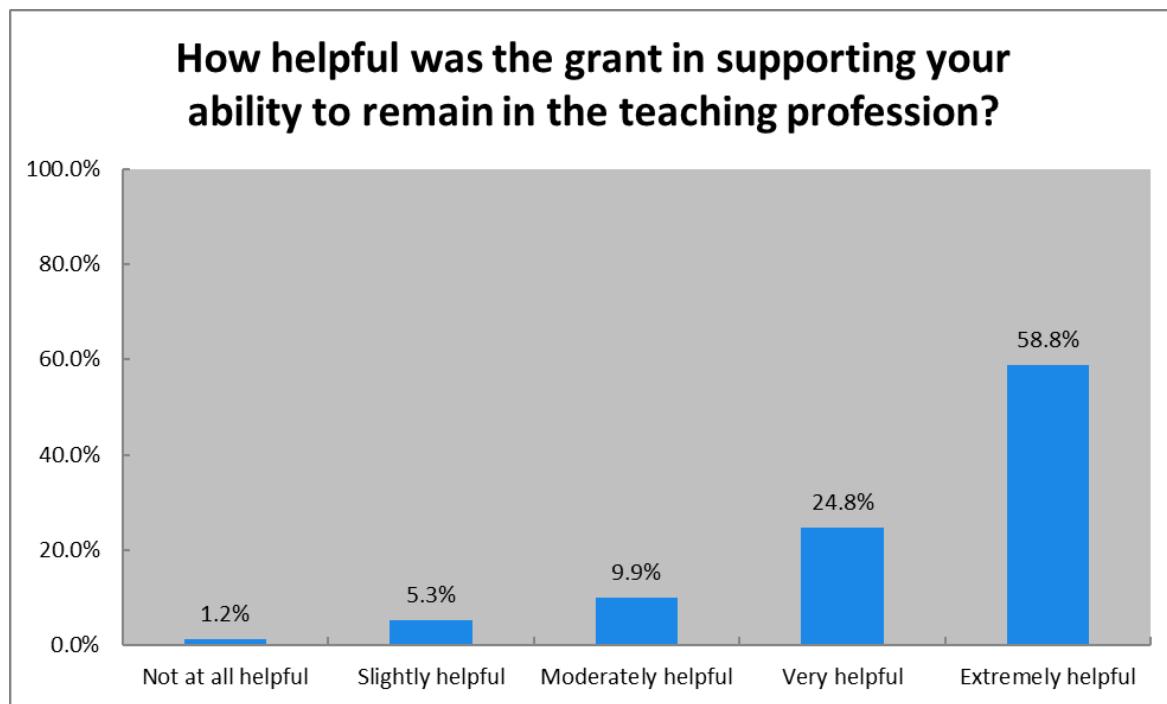
## RESULTS

### Descriptive Statistics



*Figure 1*

Figure 1 above presents the findings from the first survey question, which was a multiple-select type of question inquiring about how teachers who received the \$5,000 grant primarily allocated the funds. 70.09% (410) of teachers reported that they spent all or parts of the grant paying off their student loans. Further, 23.08% (135) of teachers reported spending all or at least some of their grant money purchasing classroom supplies or materials. Another 40.51% (237) of teachers indicated that they spent all or some of their grant money “covering personal expenses,” while 16.92% (99) said that they spent some or all their grant money “paying for professional development or additional certifications”. Finally, 6.5% (38) of teachers indicated spending some or all their grant money in some “other” way. Note that the percentages on the bar graph do not add up to 100% because respondents were instructed to select all options that apply.



*Figure 2*

Figure 2 above presents the result of the second question on the survey which was a multiple-choice question asking teachers who received the grant how helpful it was in supporting their ability to remain in the teaching profession. There were 585 responses to this question of which 58.80% (344) stated that the grant was 'extremely helpful' in supporting their ability to remain in the teaching profession. Further 24.79% (145) of respondents indicated that the grant was 'very helpful', while 9.91% (58) of respondents indicated the grant was 'moderately helpful'. 5.3% (31) of respondents said the grant was 'slightly helpful', and 1.2% (7) of respondents said the grant was 'not at all helpful'.

Figure 3 below presents the result of survey question 3. This question inquired from grant recipients the extent to which receiving the grant influenced their decision to continue teaching in Nebraska. 3.93% (23) of respondents indicated that it was the main reason they stayed, while 42.22% (244) indicated that it significantly influenced their decision. A further 25.47% (149) said the grant moderately influenced their decision to continue teaching in Nebraska, 13.85% (81) of respondents said it slightly influenced their decision, and 14.53% (85) of respondents indicated that the grant did not influence their decision to continue teaching in Nebraska at all.

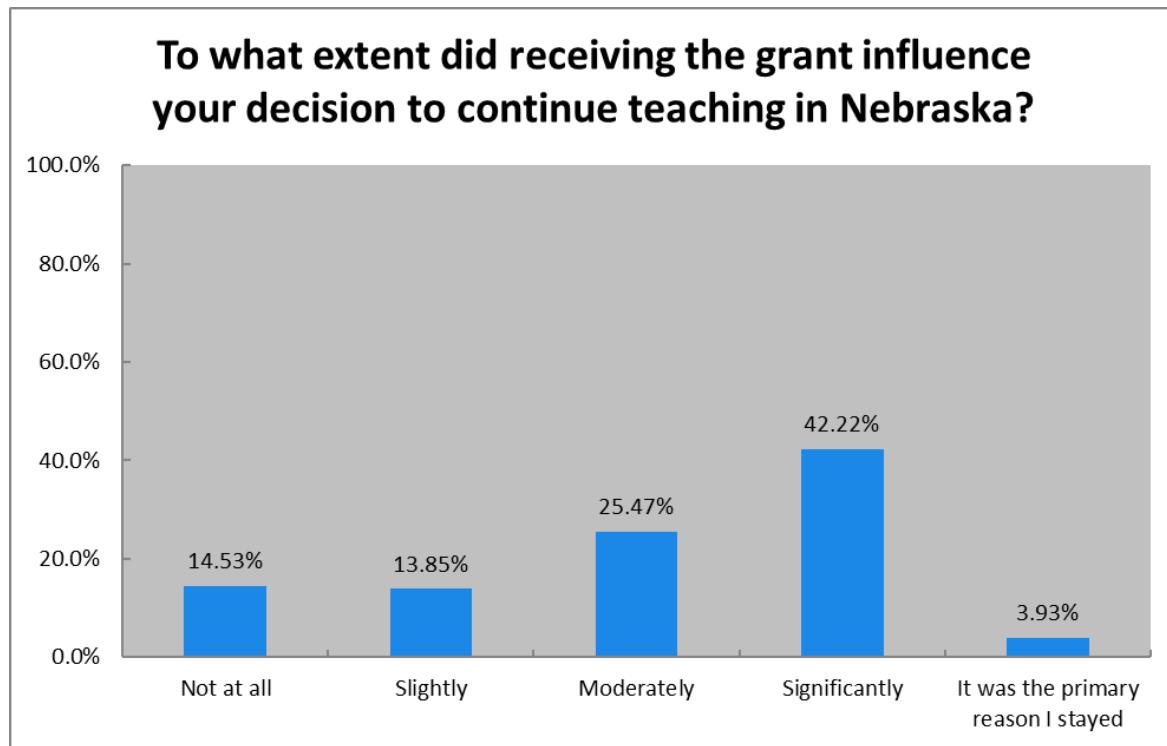


Figure 3

Figure 4 below displays the result of survey question 5 which was a multiple-choice, multi-select question inquiring about how the grant affected recipients' financial well-being. 83.59% (489) of teachers surveyed indicated that the grant reduced their financial stress, while 48.21% (282) said that it helped them avoid taking on additional debt. Further, 24.79% (145) indicated that it allowed them to invest in their professional growth, 5.3% (31) said it had minimal impact on their financial situation, and 2.74% (16) of teachers surveyed noted that it had some 'other' effect on their financial well-being.

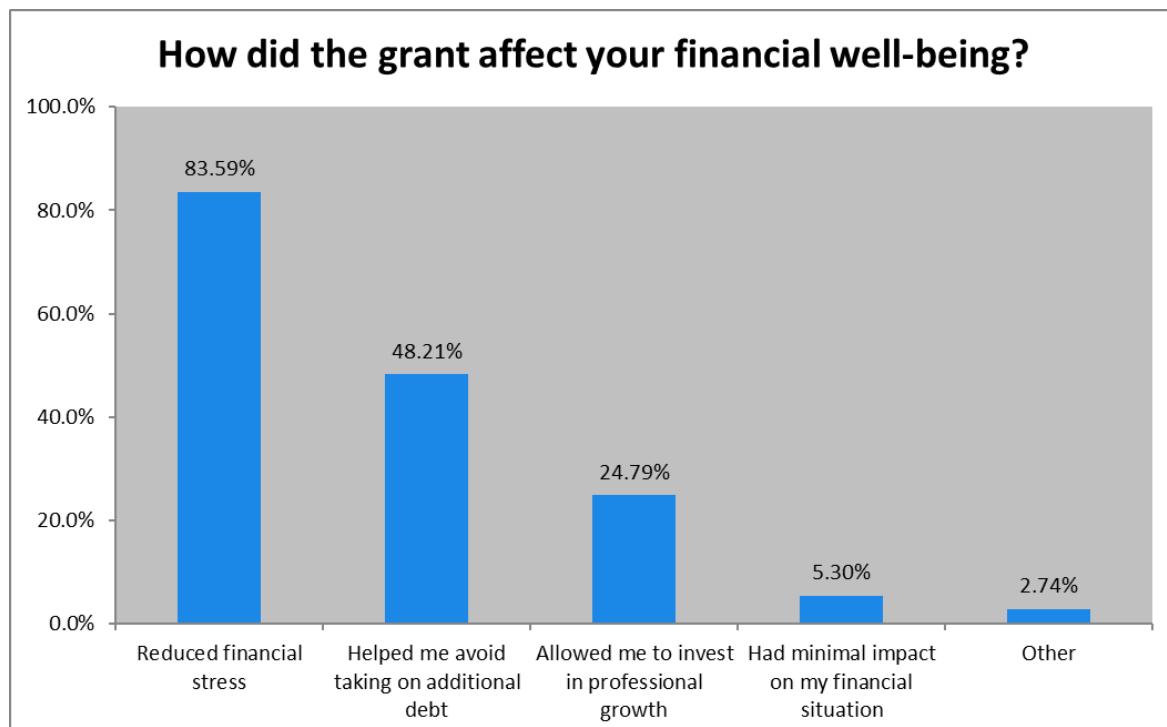
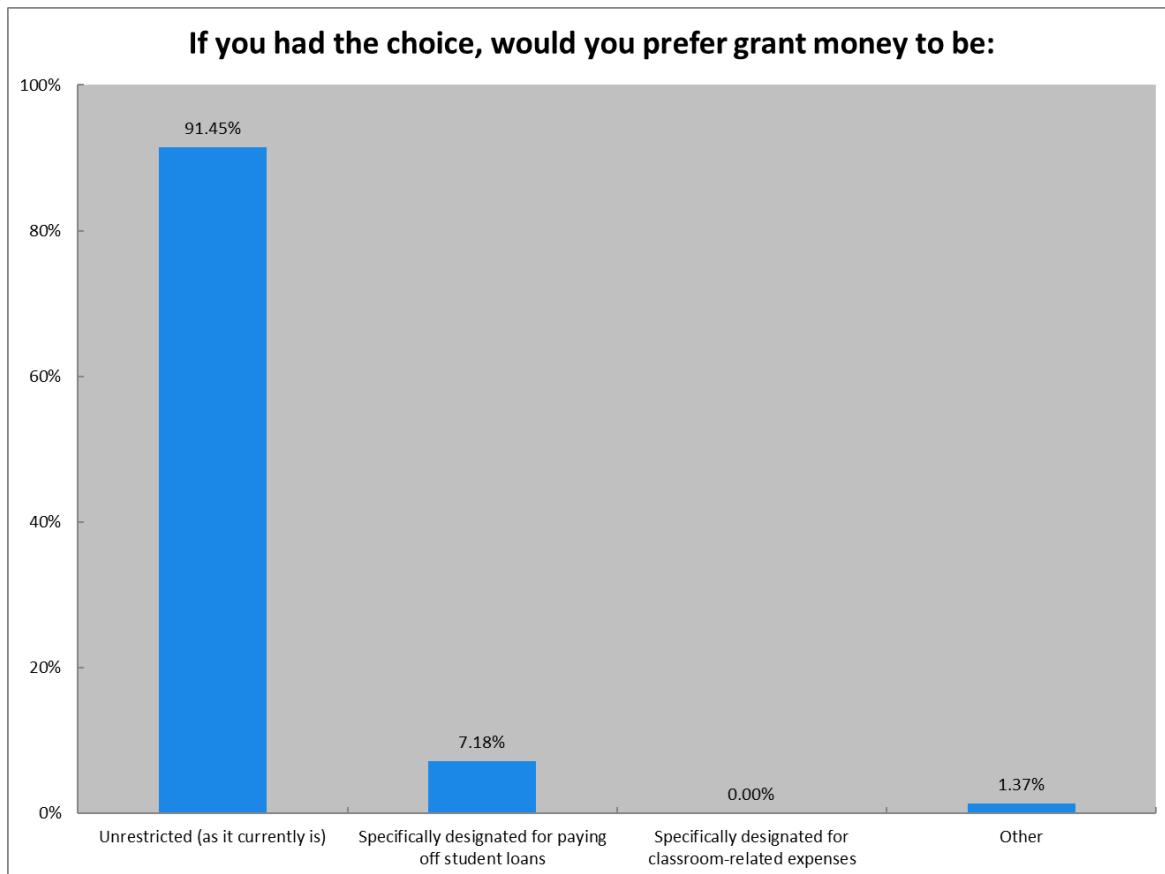


Figure 4

TINTP funds disseminated in the first year of the grants' administration in 2023 came with a stipulation that the funds be used to pay off student loans, however, this condition was removed during the second year of the grants' administration in 2024.



*Figure 5*

Figure 5 above displays the result of survey question 6 which inquired whether grant recipients would prefer the grant to have stipulations imposing limitations on how it is spent or not. 91.45% (535) of grant recipients said they prefer the funds to be unrestricted and without any stipulations for how it should be spent as it currently is, while 7.28% (42) of respondents selected the response option indicating preference for the grant funds being restricted and designated for paying off student loans. Further, 1.37% (8) of grant recipients selected the response option other indicating preference for a different kind of stipulation being attached to receiving the grant funds, and 0.0% of respondents selected the response option indicating preference for the grant funds being specifically designated for covering classroom expenses.

Figure 6 below displays the result for survey question 9 which was a multiple-choice question inquiring about what year(s) respondents received the Teach in Nebraska Today Grant. 22.3% (130) said they received the grant in 2023, 60.21% (351) indicated that they received the grant in the 2024 school year, while 17.5% (102) said they received the grant in both years.

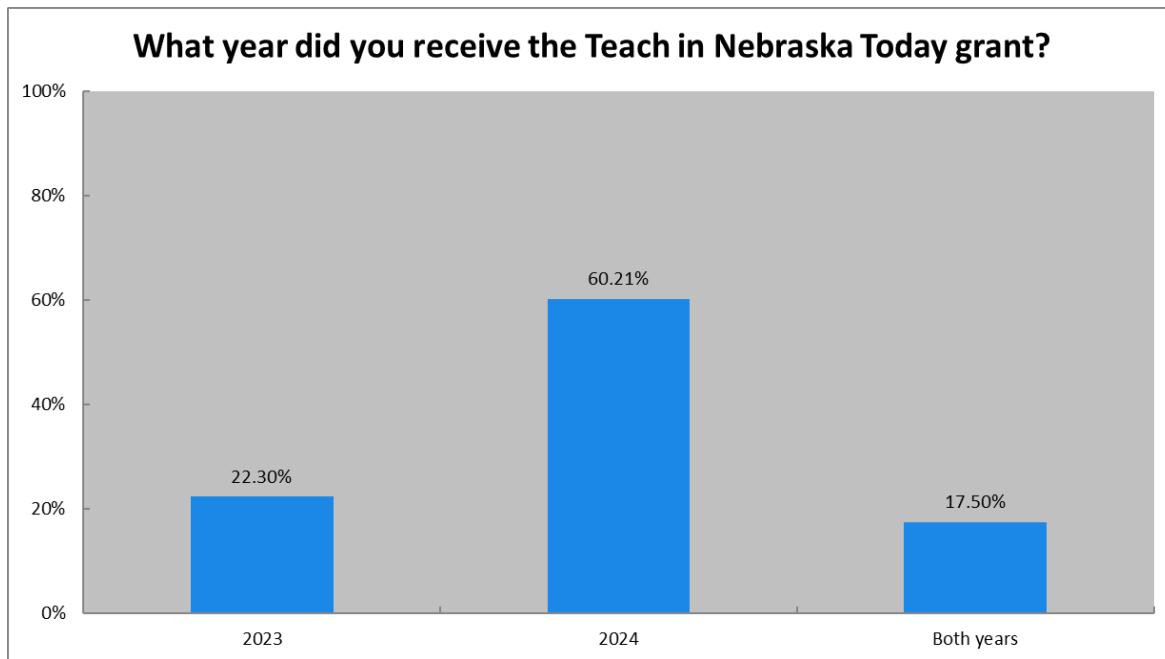


Figure 6

Question 10 inquired whether grant recipients had received any other grants or financial incentives to support their work as a teacher. The results presented in figure 7 below indicate that 32.59% (190) answered yes, 51.80% (302) said no, while 15.61% (91) indicated that they were not sure whether they had received any other grants or financial incentives to support their work as a teacher.

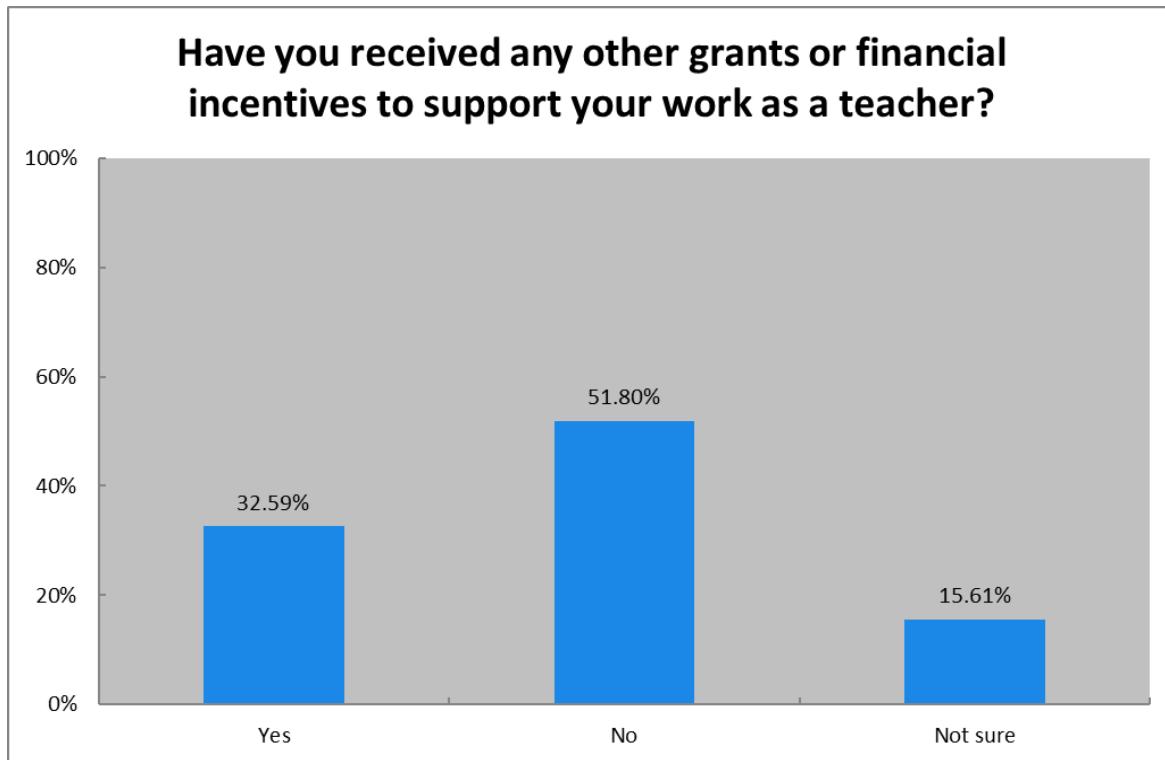
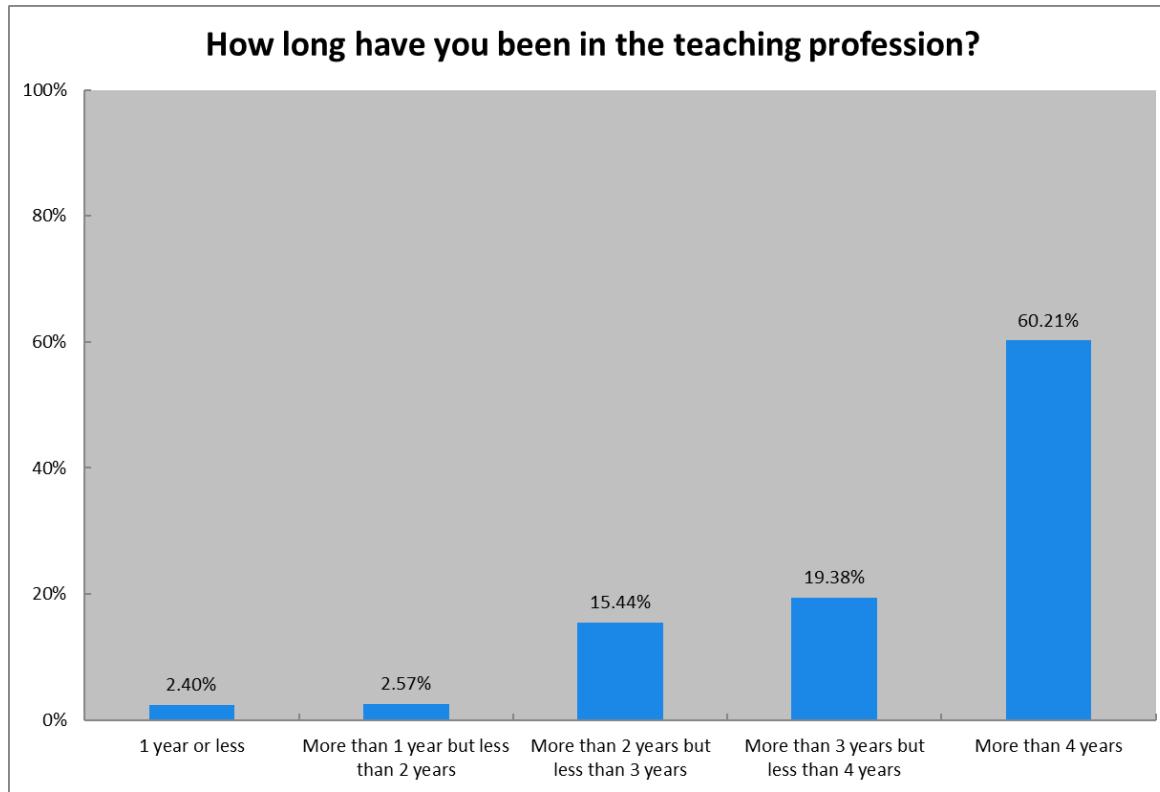


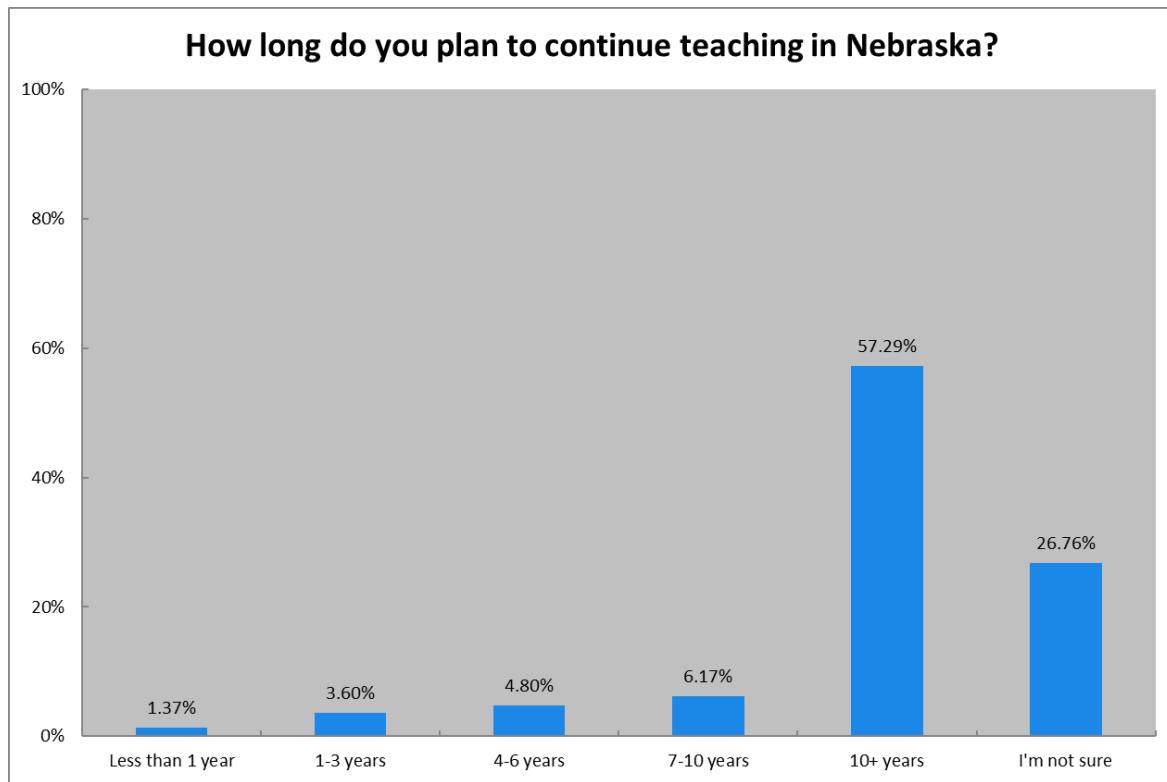
Figure 7

Question 12 asked grant recipients how long they had been in the teaching profession. The result depicted in figure 8 below shows 2.40% (14) of them indicating they had been in the teaching profession for one year or less, while 2.57% (15) said they had been in the teaching profession for more than one year but less than two years. Further, 15.44% (90) indicated they had been in the teaching profession for between two and three years, 19.38% (113) had been teaching for between three years and four years, while a whopping 60.21% (351) had been teaching for more than 4 years. It is important to note that the TINTP is limited to educators in their first five years of service in the state of Nebraska, therefore it is safe to say that 60.21% (351) of the grant recipients were in their last year of eligibility for the TINTP grant.



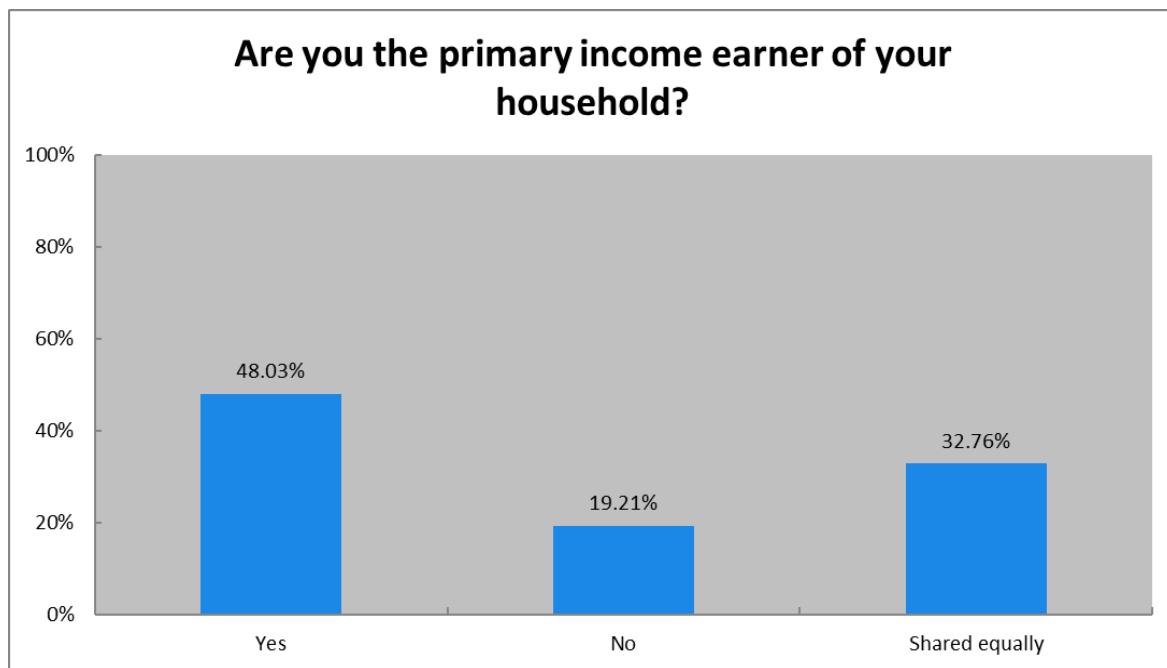
*Figure 8*

Question 13 inquired about how long grant recipients planned to continue teaching in Nebraska. The result displayed in figure 9 shows that 26.76% (156 respondents) indicated not being sure how long they plan to continue teaching in the state of Nebraska, while over half of the respondents 57.29% (334 respondents) said that they plan to continue teaching in Nebraska for ten years or more. 6.17% (36 respondents) said they plan to continue teaching in Nebraska for between seven to ten years, 4.80% (28 respondents) indicated that to continue to teach in Nebraska for between four to six years, 3.60% responded that they plan to continue teaching in Nebraska for one to three years. Finally, 1.37% (8 respondents) of grant recipients indicate having a plan to continue teaching in Nebraska for less than one year.



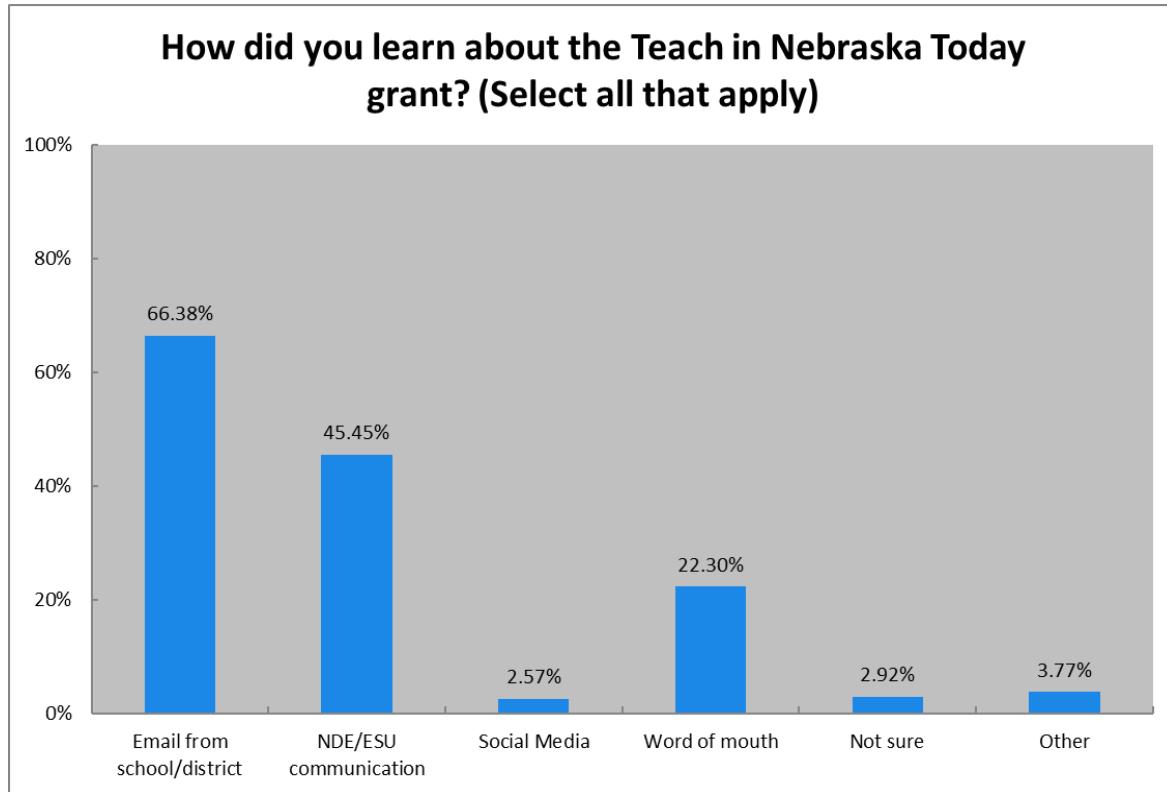
*Figure 9*

Question 14 inquired about the primary income earner in the household of the grant recipient, and as shown in figure 10 below, 48.03% (280) of respondents said yes to being the primary income earner of their household. 19.21% (112) of respondents indicated that they were not the primary income earner of their household, while 32.76% (191) of respondents said the income earning responsibility of their household id equally shared with someone else.



*Figure 10*

Figure 11 below displays the result to question 15, a multiple-choice, multi-select type of question inquiring about how grant recipients learned of the Teach in Nebraska Today grant. 66.38% (387) respondents indicated that they discovered the grant through an email they received from the school district. 45.45% (265) of respondents said they heard about the grant through communication with their ESU or NDE, while 2.57% (15) respondents said they discovered the grant through social media. Another 22.3% (130) of respondents said they found out about the grant through word of mouth, while 2.92% (17) of respondents said they were not sure how they learned about the grant, and finally 3.77% (22) of the respondents said they discovered the grant through some other means.



*Figure 11*

Question 16 was a multiple-choice Likert scale style question inquiring about the ease/difficulty of the grant application process.

Figure 12 below indicates that an overwhelmingly high proportion of respondents found the application process to be easy, with 60.89% (355) of them saying that the application process was extremely easy, and 30.53% (178) of respondents indicating that the grant application process was somewhat easy. 6.6% (39) of respondents said the grant application process was neither easy nor difficult, 1.72% (10) of the participants indicated finding the grant application process somewhat difficult, and 0.17% (1) respondents found the grant application process to be extremely difficult.

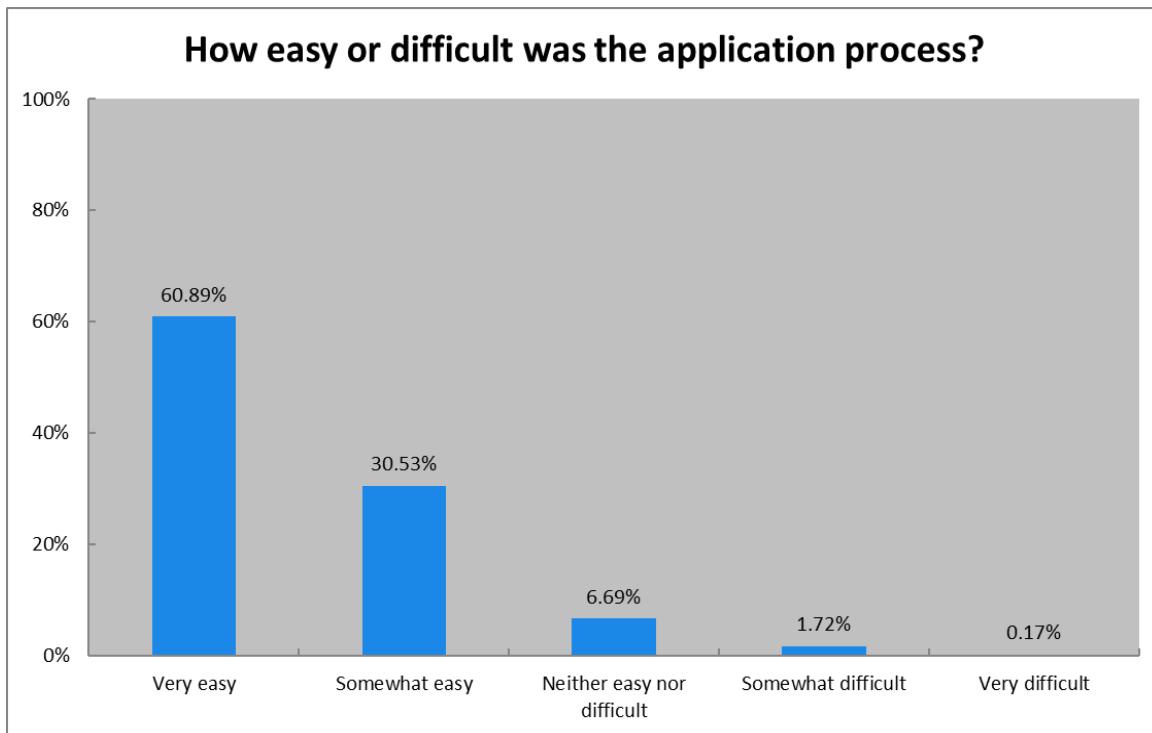


Figure 12

When asked whether they would recommend the grant program to others in question 17,

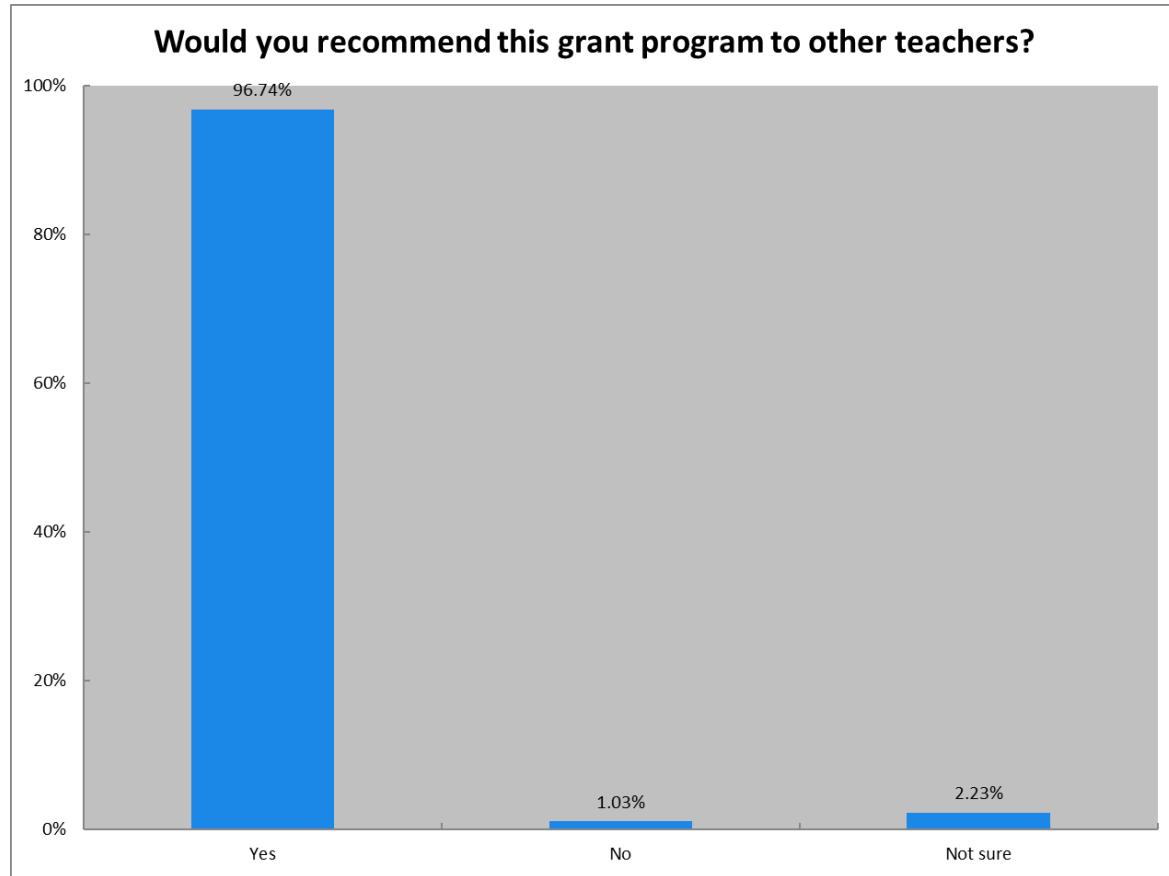


Figure 13

Figure 13 above shows that 96.74% (583) of respondents said yes, they would recommend the grant program to other teachers, while 1.03% (6) respondents said no, they wouldn't

recommend the grant program to other teachers, and 2.23% (13) respondents indicated that they were unsure whether they would recommend the grant program to other teachers or not.

Figure 14 below displays the result of question 18 which was a demographic question inquiring about the gender of grant recipients participating in the survey. 78.39% (457) of respondents indicated being female, 20.93% (122) of respondents said they were male, while 0.69% (4) of respondents indicated a preference for not disclosing their gender.

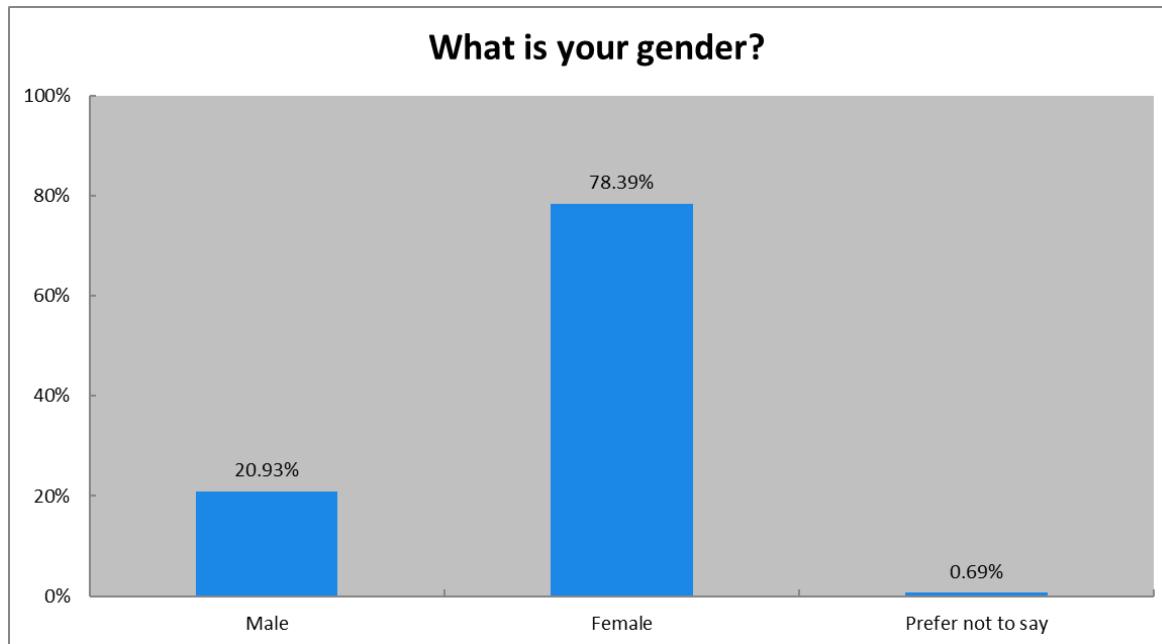


Figure 14

Respondents were asked to report their race and/or ethnicity in question 19 which was a multiple-choice, multi-select question type.

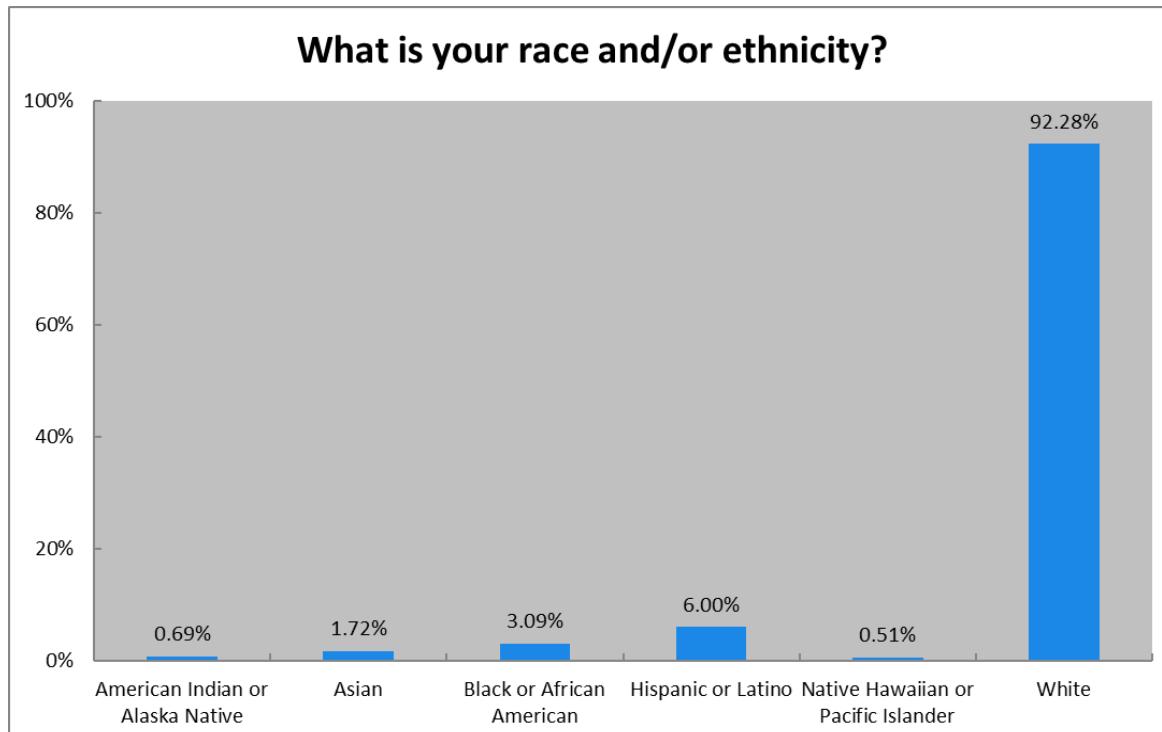


Figure 15

The result displayed in figure 15 above shows that 92.28% (538) of respondents indicated that they were white, while 0.51% (3) said they were Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 6% (35) of respondents reported being Hispanic or Latino, 3.09% (18) of the respondents indicated that they were Black or African American, 1.72% (10) of respondents reported being Asian, and 0.69% (4) of respondents said they were American Indian or Alaska Native.

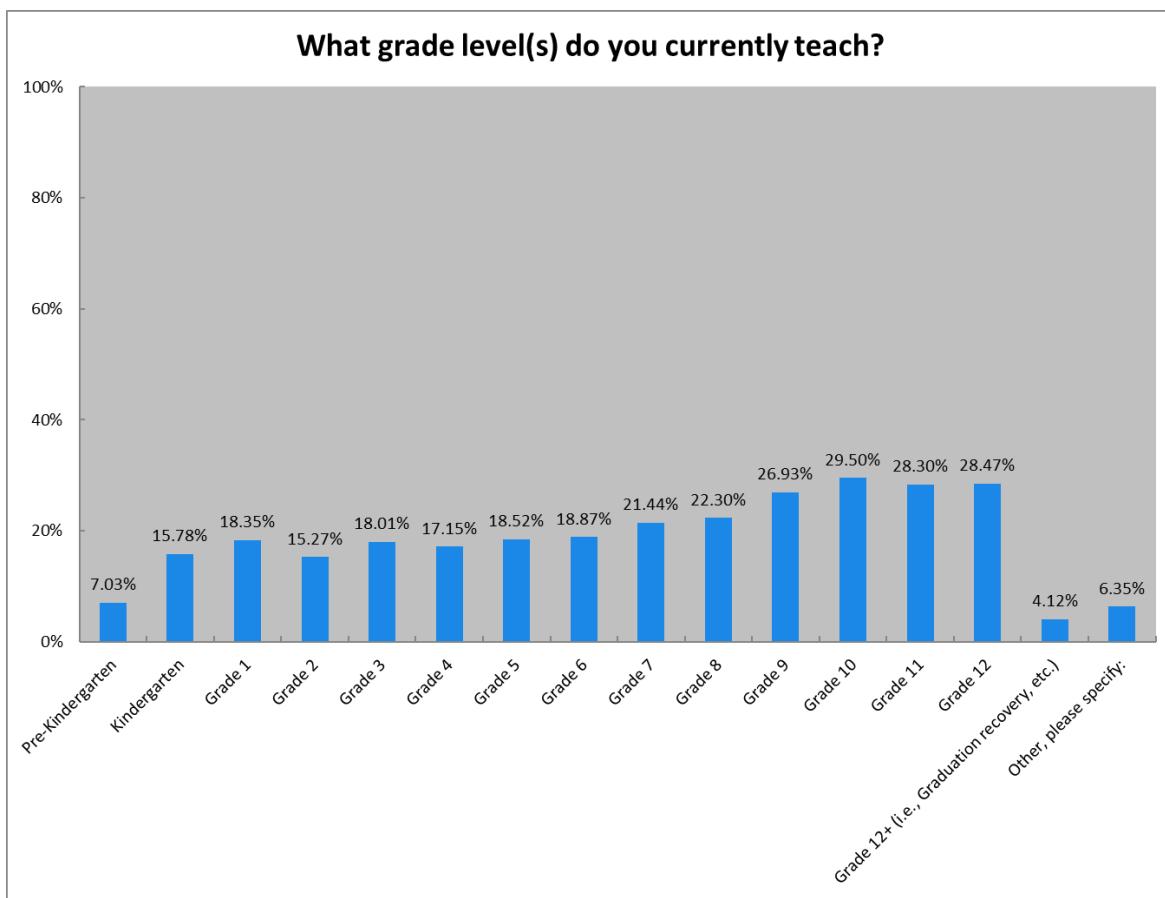


Figure 16

Questions 20 and 21 were multiple-choice, multi-select question types inquiring about the grades that grant recipients teach and the subjects they teach respectively. Only the five highest selected response options are reported here since both questions have quite a long list of response options and it is apparent that teachers in the survey taught multiple grades and multiple courses. With regards to question 20, figure 16 above shows that 29.50% (172) of respondents said that they teach Grade 10, 28.47% (166) indicated that they teach grade 12, while 28.30% (165) indicated that they teach grade 11. An additional 26.93% (157) indicated teaching in grade 9 while 22.3% (130) said that they teach grade 8 students.

Now regarding question 21, figure 17 below indicates that 40.65% (237) of respondents said that they teach English language arts, 37.39% (218) indicated that they teach grade Math, while 35.68% (208) taught Science. An additional 35.33% (206) indicated teaching social studies, while 19.04% (111) said that they teach Special education.

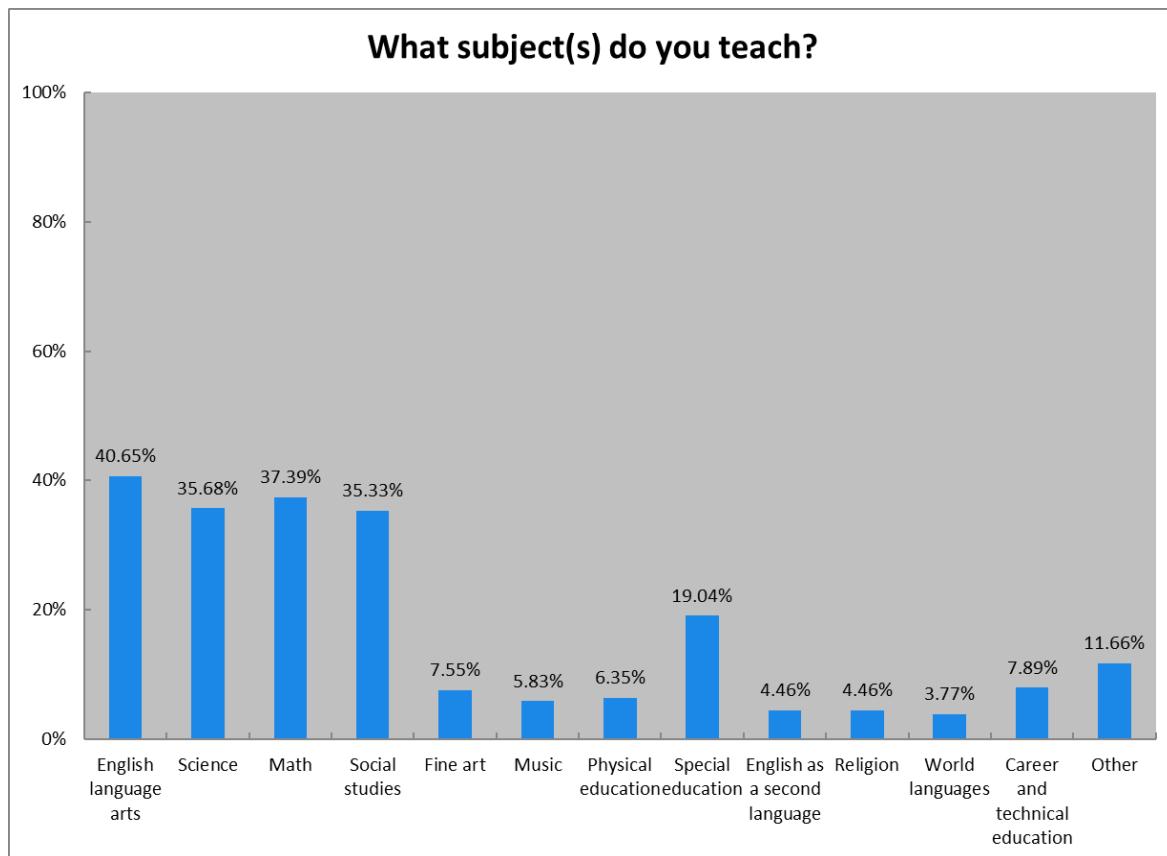


Figure 17

Question 22 inquired about the ruralness or urbanicity of the school and/or district where teachers currently teach.

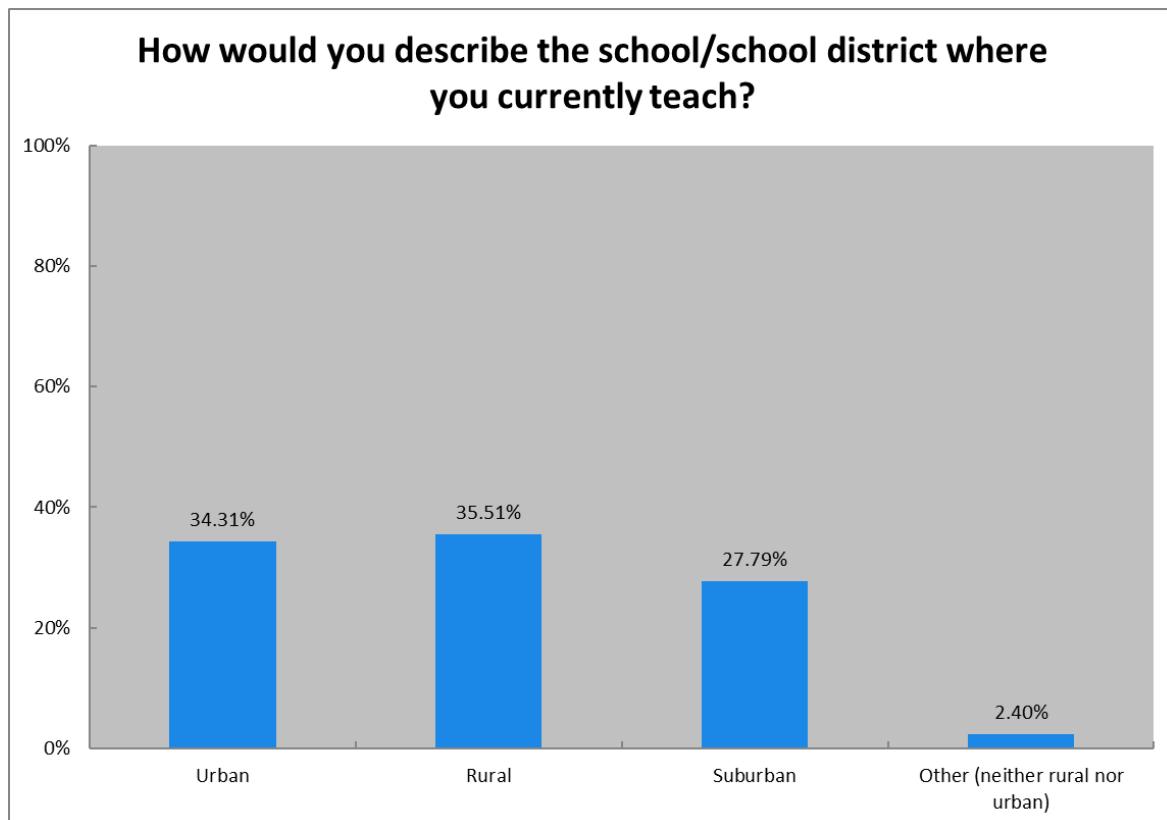


Figure 18

Figure 18 above shows that 34.13% (200) indicated that they teach at a school located in an urban area, while 35.15% (207) indicated teaching at a school in a rural area. Additionally, 27.79% (162) of respondents said that their school was in a suburban area, while 2.4% (14) of respondents indicated that their school was in some other kind of area that was neither rural nor urban.

## TEXT ANALYSIS

This section of the report explores the responses from the open-ended questions on the TINTP evaluation survey. We conducted text analysis to quantify unique features of the text data that constitute responses to the open-ended questions using R, with some support from the text analysis tool present in the QuestionPro survey management software. Further, we employed an inductive reasoning approach to derive themes from the data upon reading and rereading the responses carefully. Now, we present the findings from the text analysis, followed by a discussion of the themes derived qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions.

Question 4 on the survey was an open-ended question which required grant recipients to elaborate on how the grant influenced their decision to continue teaching in Nebraska. We only posed this question to respondents who indicated on the previous question that the grant was the primary reason they remained in the teaching profession, and those who said that the grant significantly, or moderately influenced their decision to continue teaching in Nebraska.

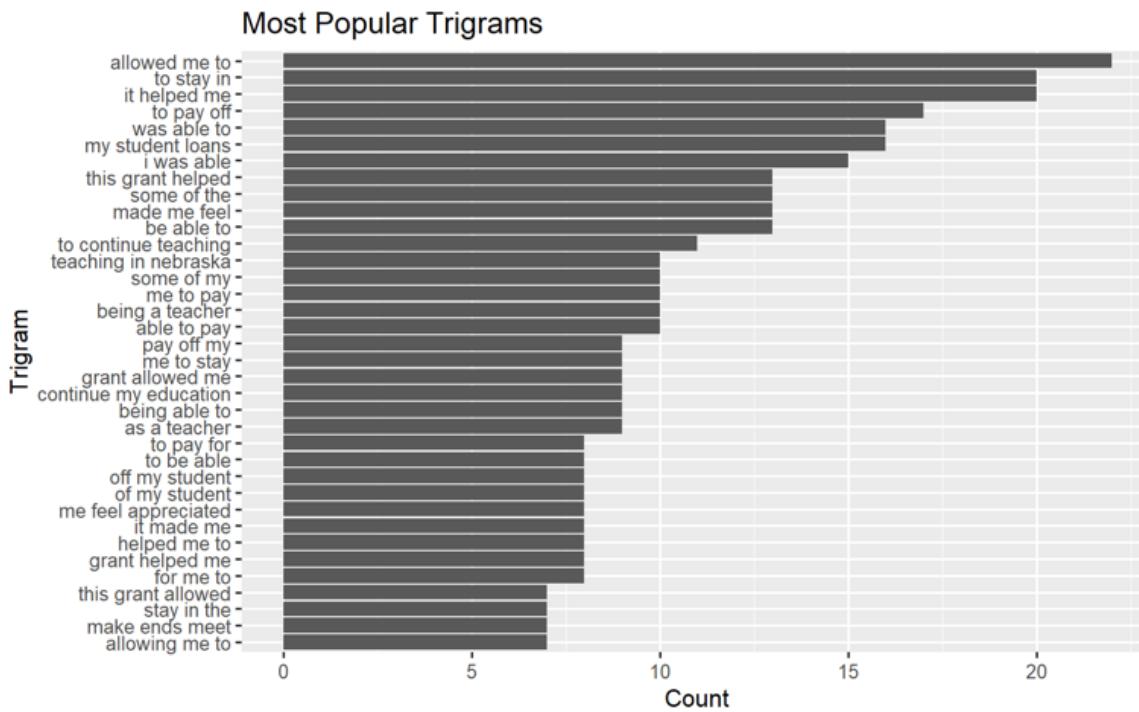


Figure 19

Figure 19 above depicts all trigrams occurring more than 5 times in the text responses to question 4 arranged in descending order. Trigrams are consecutive sequences of three words in a series of texts (Silge and Robinson, 2017), and the most common recurring words (unigrams) or sequences of words such as trigrams usually hint at the main themes within the entire text. There were 36 trigrams occurring more than 5 times in the responses to question 4 as depicted in figure 19, and 13 of these trigrams cue us about the impact the grant had

in providing increased capacity and opportunity in terms of enabling the recipients in some ways as teachers. Examples of these trigrams include phrases such as “allowed me to”, “was able to”, “able to pay” etc.

Sentiment analysis is used to quantify the emotional intent of words to infer whether a section of text is positive or negative or perhaps characterized by some other more nuanced emotion like anticipation and surprise. One approach to analyzing sentiment analysis is to assume that the text is a combination of its individual words, and the sentiment content of the whole text is the sum of the sentiment of the individual words.

Experience	n	Negative	Positive	Net Sentiment
1	7	5	9	4
2	10	2	6	4
3	56	14	71	57
4	66	31	89	58
5	171	73	177	104

Table 1. Emotion Scores of Bing Lexicon-Based Sentiment Analysis

Table 1 above presents the results of a sentiment analysis conducted on text responses to question 4 based on the Bing lexicon (Silge & Robinson, 2017), which categorizes words in a binary fashion into positive and negative categories. The number of positive and negative emotions expressed by respondents are broken down by the teachers' years of experience. Most of the respondents to this question were fourth (n = 66), and fifth (171) year teachers. The results seem to show that there is an increase in the number of positive and negative sentiments as teachers' years of experience increased, however, this is a function of the fact that the sample is dominated by teachers with more years of experience as the grant was open to only teachers within the first 5 years of teaching in the state of Nebraska. The key takeaway from table 1 is that teachers across all levels of experience have net positive sentiment scores indicating that their experience of receiving the grant was in general more positive than negative.

Experience	Anticipation	Fear	Joy	Negative	Positive	Trust	Anger	Sadness	Surprise	Disgust
1	6	1	4	2	11	9	0	0	0	0
2	11	2	7	7	21	14	1	5	1	0
3	74	2	70	17	129	94	7	6	8	0
4	128	7	109	44	220	148	21	22	28	3
5	215	22	186	85	405	273	29	46	52	9

Table 2. Emotion scores of NRC Lexicon-Based Sentiment Analysis

Table 2 above presents emotion scores from another sentiment analysis conducted on responses to question 4 based on the NRC lexicon which categorizes words in a binary fashion into categories of positive, negative, anticipation, fear, joy, trust, anger, sadness, surprise, and disgust.

To interpret table 2, we need to compare the number of times each emotion is elicited in the words of teachers with the same years of experience. For instance, the emotions most elicited in the words of teachers with 5 years of experience were positivity (405), followed by trust (273), then anticipation (215) and joy (186), while the emotions most elicited in the words of teachers with 4 years of experience were positivity (220), Trust (148), anticipation (128), and joy (109). Close examination of table 2 reveals a consistent pattern of words from teachers' responses to question 4 eliciting more positive emotions than negative ones, according to the NRC lexicon-based sentiment analysis.

Question 7 was an open-ended question which asked teachers who had received the Teach in Nebraska Today grant to describe how the grant had impacted them as a teacher.

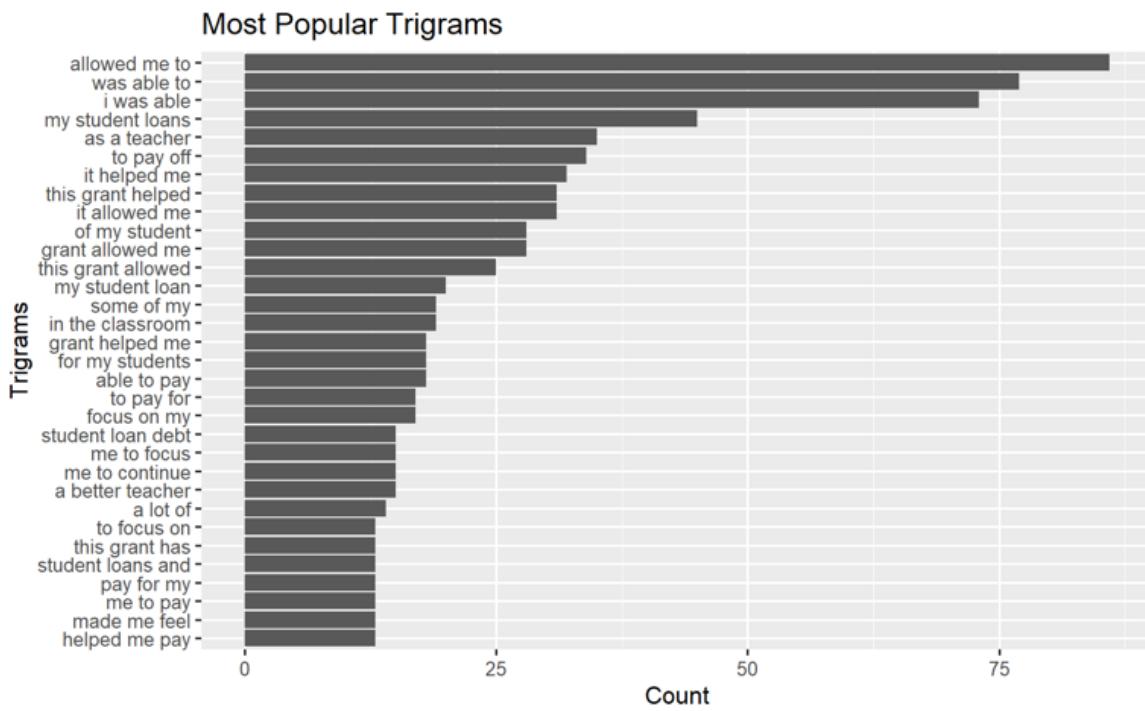


Figure 20

Figure 20 above depicts the most common trigrams in the text responses to question 7 in descending order. 14 of the 32 most common trigrams signal potential areas where teachers experienced increased capacity and were enabled by receiving the grant, and examples of these trigrams include phrases like, "my student loans", "in the classroom", "focus on my", and "a better teacher". Further, 8 of the 32 most common trigrams hint at the grant impacting teachers by increasing their capacity, opportunity, and enabling them in some ways just as we found in their responses to question 4.

Results of the Bing lexicon-based sentiment analysis conducted on responses from question 7 are illustrated in table 3 below.

Experience	n	Negative	Positive	Net Sentiment
1	11	7	15	8
2	13	7	17	10
3	74	50	115	65
4	83	64	133	69
5	281	209	334	125

Table 3. Emotion Scores of Bing Lexicon-Based Sentiment Analysis

Approximately 60% of respondents to this question were teachers in their 5th year of teaching in the state of Nebraska, hence they account for a high proportion of the words with negative or positive sentiments. The net sentiment scores for teachers across all the years of experiences are positive, however, negative sentiments appear to make up a higher proportion of total sentiments elicited from the responses of 5th year teachers.

Experience	Anticipation	Fear	Joy	Negative	Positive	Trust	Anger	Sadness	Surprise	Disgust
1	8	3	9	7	25	16	0	6	1	0
2	21	2	16	8	29	24	2	3	3	0
3	140	9	131	54	249	167	12	20	20	1
4	153	10	139	64	268	199	14	34	20	2
5	413	45	366	211	751	505	50	116	94	15

Table 4. Emotion scores of NRC Lexicon-Based Sentiment Analysis

Emotion scores from the NRC lexicon-based sentiment analysis conducted on responses to question 7 are shown in table 4. Close inspection of the table reveals a consistent pattern of words from teachers' responses to question 7 eliciting more positive emotions than negative ones. Positiveness, trust, anticipation, and joy were consistently the top emotions elicited by words from teachers' responses to question 7.

In question 8, teachers who received the Teach in Nebraska Today grant were asked to state other types of support that would help them remain in the teaching profession in Nebraska.

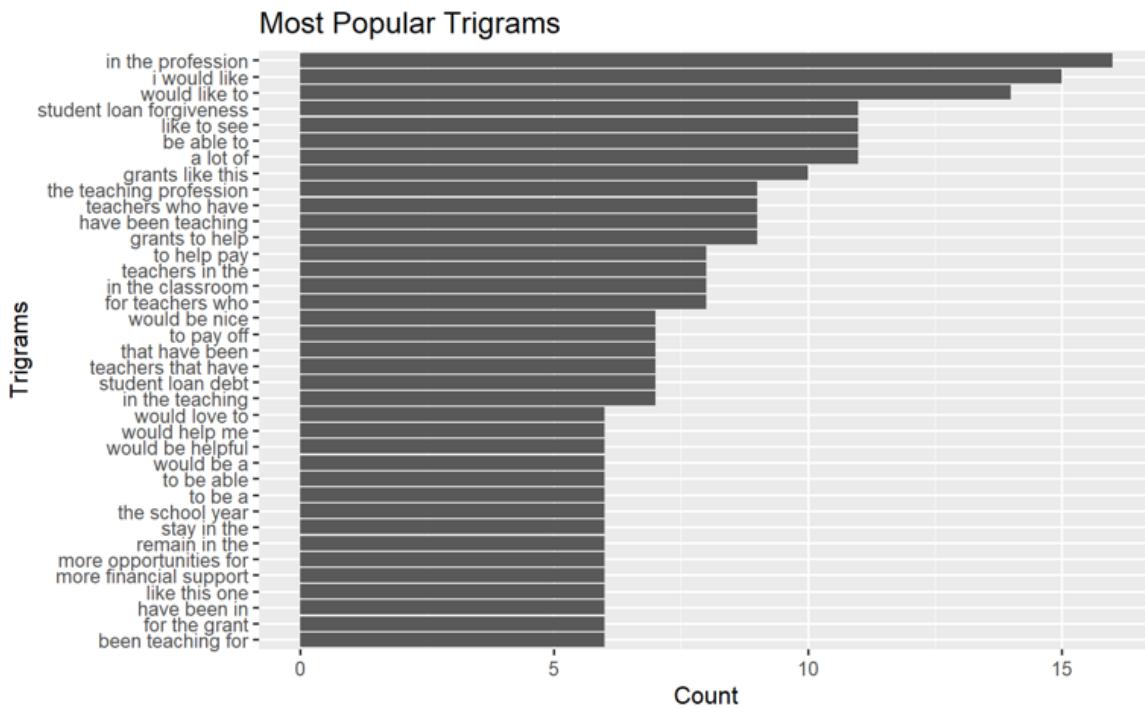


Figure 21

The most common trigrams in the text responses to question 8 are depicted in figure 21 above. 8 of the 37 most common trigrams suggest that the teachers who received the grants would like to see more financial support to help pay off their student loan debt, while another 8 of the 37 most common trigrams in the responses seek to highlight a specific group of teachers. Examples of trigrams that seek to highlight certain teachers include phrases like “teachers who have”, “for teachers who”, “been teaching for”, and “have been teaching”.

Experience	n	Negative	Positive	Net Sentiment
1	9	2	11	9
2	12	4	12	8
3	58	13	49	36
4	76	19	71	52
5	263	126	301	175

Table 5. Emotion Scores of Bing Lexicon-Based Sentiment Analysis

The result of the Bing lexicon-based sentiment analysis for question 8 are presented in table 5 above. The emotions elicited by words of teachers across all years of experiences have net positive sentiment scores just like we observed for the two previous two questions.

Experience	Anticipation	Fear	Joy	Negative	Positive	Trust	Anger	Sadness	Surprise	Disgust
1	10	0	10	1	24	13	3	1	2	0
2	19	0	14	1	23	17	2	1	4	0
3	48	5	45	15	106	77	10	10	12	4
4	76	9	77	28	152	114	9	18	15	2
5	317	37	270	146	647	447	57	84	71	19

Table 6. Emotion scores of NRC Lexicon-Based Sentiment Analysis

Emotion scores from the NRC lexicon-based sentiment analysis conducted on responses to question 8 are shown in table. In concordance with the results obtained from the previous open-ended questions, positive, trust, anticipation, and joy were consistently the top emotions elicited by words from teachers' responses to question 8.

Question 11 was the last open-ended item on the Teach in Nebraska Today evaluation survey. It asked teachers who received the grant to describe any other grant or support they had received, and only respondents who indicated yes to question 10 which asked respondents if they had received any other grants or financial incentives to support their work as a teacher were shown question 11.

What we can deduce from examining figure 22 below is that there is a grant intended for recruitment and retention which some of the teachers who received the Teach in Nebraska Today grant had also been awarded.

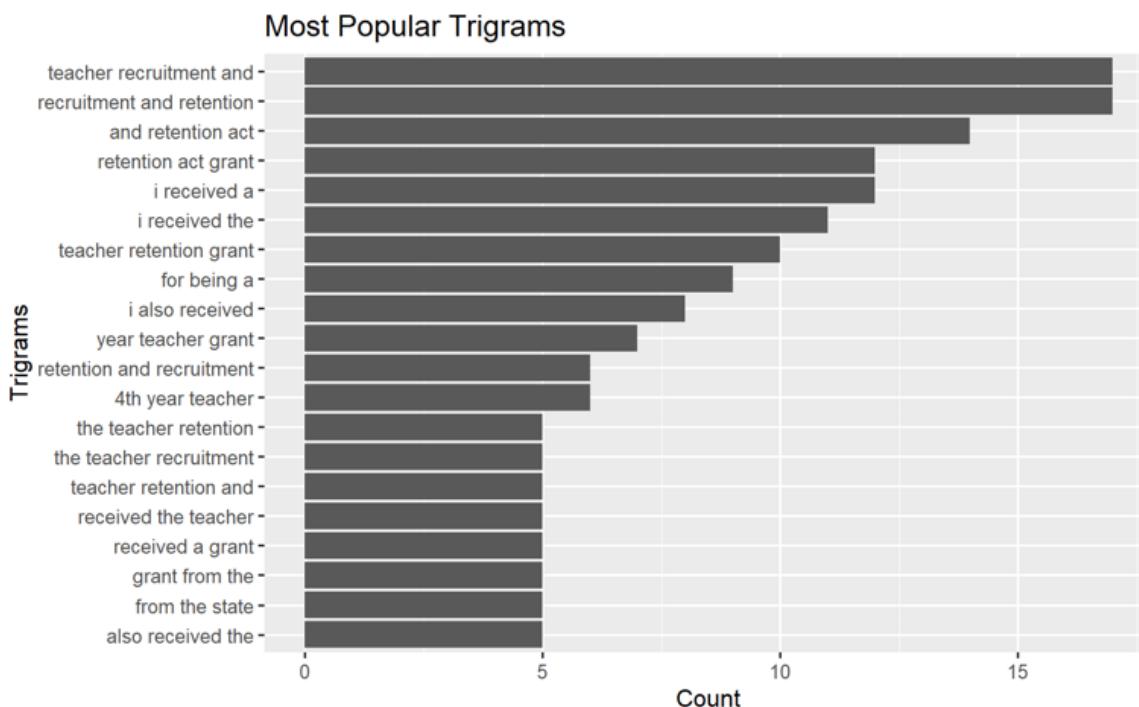


Figure 22

The result of the Bing lexicon-based sentiment analysis conducted on text responses to question 11 reveals a net positive sentiment for teachers across all years of experience, except for year 1 where the number of positive and negative are zero, resulting in a net sentiment of zero.

This sentiment analysis is less informative than those obtained from the responses to the earlier open-ended questions. This is perhaps because there were fewer respondents to this question, or due to the terse and straightforward responses they gave to this question. A close examination of the text responses confirmed our suspicion as it revealed several single word responses which were abbreviations of the names of different grants (e.g., TRRA), and names of grants fully written out (e.g., Teacher Recruitment & Retention Act).

Experience	n	Negative	Positive	Net Sentiment
1	1	0	0	0
2	2	0	1	1
3	35	1	3	2
4	29	0	7	7
5	92	1	12	11

Table 7. Emotion Scores of Bing Lexicon-Based Sentiment Analysis

The result of the NRC lexicon-based sentiment analysis of responses to question 11 mimics those found for responses to the earlier open-ended questions with positive, trust, joy, and anticipation consistently being more substantially elicited by words of respondents than the other emotions.

Experience	Anticipation	Fear	Joy	Negative	Positive	Trust	Anger	Sadness	Surprise	Disgust
1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
3	19	0	21	1	64	36	0	1	0	0
4	25	1	26	1	61	43	1	0	2	1
5	68	1	79	4	173	126	3	2	16	3

Table 8. Emotion scores of NRC Lexicon-Based Sentiment Analysis

## QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

The next stage of analysis entailed thoroughly reading through and reviewing responses to the open-ended questions while keeping a memo of ideas and patterns that were emerging from the responses. The survey questions served as a guide for writing memos so that the analysis gave attention to recurring comments that were relevant to the survey questions, and to recurring comments not necessarily relevant to the specific evaluation question. This was done to potentially capture dimensions of the topic that are of importance to teachers in the state of Nebraska that are yet unknown to researchers and policymakers.

Next, the qualitative analysis proceeded to the interpretation and sensemaking stage after extensively reading, reviewing and memoing. This entailed applying codes to represent ideas and patterns and examining relationships among codes to explore themes in the data. Specific statements that were exemplars of ideas and patterns discovered in the responses while reading, reviewing and memoing were recorded and associated with codes and emerging themes. The themes derived from the qualitative analysis of responses to the open-ended survey questions are discussed in the rest of this section.

Three main themes relating to teachers' perceptions of their job and the Teach in Nebraska Today grant were identified which were increased capacity, financial struggle, and hinderances (see Table 1X). The themes are related to themselves and to the survey questions that elicited them. Each of the themes are comprised of sub-themes which serve as their foundation, and the basis for discussing the themes.

Themes	Sub-themes
Increased capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paying student loans/being debt free.</li><li>• Professional development.</li><li>• Focus on teaching.</li><li>• Feeling appreciated.</li></ul>
Financial struggles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A key aspect of being a teacher.</li><li>• A reason to leave the state/profession.</li><li>• Solution(s).</li></ul>
Hinderances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To the grant.</li><li>• On the job.</li><li>• Work/life balance.</li></ul>

Table 9. Themes & Sub-themes

### **Increased Capacity**

#### **For paying off student loans**

A resounding message from responses to questions 4 and 7 on the survey was the enabling impact that receiving the grant had on the respondents as teachers in the state of Nebraska. They wrote about different aspects of the teaching profession in which receiving the Teach in Nebraska Today grant resulted in an increased capacity and/or ability for accomplishing their goals. One aspect of being a teacher in which participants wrote about the grant's enabling effect was in being debt free.

A significant number of respondents mentioned experiencing financial insecurity in their response to questions 4 and 7. Many of these respondents pointed to the overwhelming amount of student debt they owed as evidence of their financial struggles, while also stating that the grant enabled them to continue paying off their student loan debt.

Quotes from a respondent presented below represent an example of significant statements that led to the development of this sub-theme:

"This grant helped reaffirm my commitment to staying in the teaching profession here in Nebraska. By easing some of the financial pressure from student loans, it made me feel more supported and valued as an educator."

Another respondent added:

"I had a lot of loan debt that I needed to pay off. I was so happy that I received the money. It was nice to not have to worry about my loans anymore, and I can look forward to teaching full-time without having to figure out what to do about my loans."

These quotes and many more that are not included here signify what it meant for the respondents to receive the TINTP grant as teachers in the state of Nebraska. The interconnection between sub-themes will become apparent as I continue reporting and discussing other sub-themes.

### **Professional development**

In addition to helping them pay off their student loan debt, respondents to questions 4 & 7 on the evaluation survey indicated that receiving the Teach in Nebraska Today grant enabled them to further their education. The responses suggest that teachers are expected to further their education by obtaining their master's degrees and/or other professional certifications and many respondents considered this expectation to be contributing to their financial insecurity. While some said that it allowed them to pursue their master's degree, others talked about using the funds to complete professional certifications that were required to remain in the teaching profession.

This opinion was shared by a respondent in their response below:

"Reduced financial stress of paying off student loans. To make more money in teaching, you have to continue schooling to get a masters or higher. I was able to finish paying off my bachelors which took 12 years, but now that I have a masters I only make about \$150 more a month but the student loan debt is close to \$28,000 to still pay off."

Another respondent expressed a similar opinion in the statement quoted below:

"This grant allows me to progress in my career by getting my master's degree without having to pay directly out of pocket on a new teacher salary. It makes the profession and going back to school for continued education possible!"

### **Focus on teaching.**

Besides indicating that the grant enabled them to pay their student loans, many respondents also revealed that receiving the grant enabled them to be more focused on teaching by reducing their financial stress. Some of the teachers indicated that the grant helped reduce doubts they had about remaining in the teaching profession and reaffirmed their love for teaching. The ultimate outcome of reducing the doubts teachers had about remaining in the profession was increased dedication and focus on becoming better teachers as is illustrated in the statement quoted below:

"This grant has helped me be a better teacher because it has helped ease some of the financial stress I have as a result of my student loans. It has allowed me not to need a second job to pay for my loans, which allows me to remain focused on being a teacher."

This impact of helping teachers become more focused on their teaching duties was echoed in another response to question 4 as illustrated below:

"As a teacher, it has allowed me to enjoy teaching again. For a period of time, I was regretful of joining the teaching profession simply because it does not provide well financially. While I love developing students and seeing them grow, there is the ever-present need to live. This grant allowed me to allocate more money toward my schooling and paying-off debt at a more rapid pace. Because of this, I could focus more on teaching and less on stressing about my debt."

Further, several teachers demonstrated their dedication to teaching by using some of the funds from the grant to pay for classroom supplies, as one teacher stated:

"While the whole \$5000 went directly towards paying off student loans, it allowed me to put some of the money I earn through teaching back into my classroom. It gave me the opportunity to invest in supplies and additional materials for my students."

It was apparent from reading numerous accounts of teachers describing how the grant helped them that most were highly motivated to become better teachers and that the stress associated with student loan debt and financial insecurity were deterrents to their performance as teachers.

### **Feeling Appreciated.**

A significant number of respondents revealed that receiving the Teach in Nebraska Today grant helped them feel appreciated for the work they did as teachers. This is illustrated in the statements quoted below:

"More importantly, the grant served as a recognition of the value of my work. Feeling seen and supported as an educator was incredibly motivating. It reminded me that others believe in the importance of what we do in the classroom and are willing to invest in it."

Another teacher added to this subtly with the statement quoted below:

"I felt appreciation and felt that I was being rewarded for making a difference."

Yet, some other respondents indicated not being able to feel appreciated or valued despite evidence indicating otherwise. This sentiment is illustrated in the statement quoted below:

"It helps me to know that organizations believe in teachers. Even though I know it intrinsically, it is often hard to feel."

## **Financial Struggles**

### **The norm**

A substantial portion of teachers' responses to the open-ended questions on the survey attributed being a teacher to being financially insecure, feeling underpaid for the work they did and experiencing stress because of their financial insecurity. These responses were often written in the context of describing the positive impact the grant had in helping to alleviate their financial stress. Further, some respondents attributed their financial insecurity to being a new teacher while expressing hopes of earning a salary that would allow them to be financially stable after climbing up the career ladder. For these respondents, climbing up the ladder entailed further schooling to earn a master's degree or professional certificate which

will cause them more financial stress in the short term.

The statement below was written by a respondent describing their experience of financial struggles and the TINTP grants' associated impact in helping to relieve their stress:

"I struggle financially, so having the bonus grant helped relieved stress of not having enough and having to come daily to a place where my personal needs aren't met but having to even use my personal time and space prior to coming to a place that challenges me from having the monies I need to function on a daily basis."

Another respondent who attributed their financial insecurity to being a first-year teacher shared:

"It provided me with the means to pay off my student loans, allowing me to better afford daily expenses as a first-year teacher. The salary for a first-year teacher without a master's (yet) is difficult to live on and pay off loans. This grant allowed me to become debt-free."

Yet, another teacher shared the following statement as they expressed gratitude for receiving the TINTP grant:

"I'm currently unable to afford to live independently on my salary while paying loans and other expenses. This grant allows me to pay down my total loan amount faster bringing them closer to paid off and being able to eliminate a bill and afford housing."

These statements, and several others, helped paint a picture of financial insecurity being the norm for teachers, especially those in their earlier years in the profession.

### **Reason to stay/leave.**

In addition to discussing their experiences with financial insecurity, several teachers also wrote about considering leaving the profession because of the financial strain they faced as a result of being underpaid. Further, they discussed the impact receiving the TINTP grant had on influencing their decision to stay or leave.

The statement below illustrates how receiving the TINTP grant helped some teachers make the decision to stay in the profession and in the state of Nebraska:

"I was thinking of switching occupations for a higher-paying job and benefits. I am new to teaching and worked very hard to complete college, but I am fighting debt and appreciate the financial boost. Teaching has been a great joy, and I feel very gifted in this occupation. I have found my passion in teaching, but the pay is not great for the work involved. This grant was an incentive. I really desire to keep teaching."

Another respondent added the following statement on why they decided to stay in teaching:

"It just gave me a little extra boost when money was tight. I have a degree in something else I could always find work in, so I do not have to stay a teacher if I do not want to, and money was getting tight for me when I was awarded the grant, so it helped me stay the course instead of looking for jobs in another industry."

And this statement:

"I stayed in the teacher profession for another year because of the money provided by the grant."

While a substantial proportion of teachers' responses to open-ended questions on the

survey indicated that they experienced financial insecurity that led them to consider leaving the profession, most also expressed their passion for the teaching while acknowledging the impact the grant had in helping them decide to remain in the profession.

## **Hinderances**

The teachers contacted to take part in this evaluation survey were those that had been identified as recipients of the Teach in Nebraska Today grant in at least one of the first two years of the grant's existence. Although responses to the open-ended questions almost revealed complete consensus to support the grant's positive impact of reducing teachers' financial stress and enabling them to pursue opportunities for professional development, a non-negligible number of respondents expressed discontentment for some of the conditions of the grant's administration as well as conditions within their profession which they found to be dissatisfactory.

### **Hinderances to the grant**

While almost all respondents expressed their gratitude towards the state for receiving the Teach in Nebraska Today grant, a substantive number of responses expressed dissatisfaction about certain terms of its administration including prerequisites for qualification and its tax implications for recipients.

Responses to the open-ended survey questions on the survey indicated that teachers were dissatisfied with the eligibility criteria that prevents teachers with more than five years of experience from receiving the grant. This requirement meant that teachers whose fifth year of service at Nebraska schools coincides with the inaugural year of the grant's administration would only be eligible to receive the \$5,000 grant once, while those in their first year would be eligible to receive up to \$25,000 if they meet other qualification requirements throughout their five years of eligibility.

One teacher expressed their dissatisfaction with the following statement:

"It was great for a year but then you changed who could qualify and I no longer did. It was disappointing because in the beginning I would qualify each year and it would be used to pay off all my student loans. Then you decided based on years of teaching that some people wouldn't qualify. I still need assistance. I still want to feel valuable. You still need to retain teachers that have been in the field for awhile. Not just new teachers."

Responses to open-ended questions on the survey also indicated dissatisfaction about the grant's income-based eligibility requirement. Changes implemented in the second year of the grant's administration required teachers to have an annual income less than \$55,000 for the prior year to be eligible for the grant. Some teachers indicated that receiving the grant in the first year of its administration put their annual yearly income for the previous year just slightly above the \$55,000 limit to make them ineligible to receive the grant in the second year according to the newly implemented eligibility requirement. The statement below illustrates one teacher's expression of their disappointment about changes to the income-based eligibility requirement:

"After receiving the first year's payment, the eligibility requirements were changed. Because I had to receive the \$5,000 as income rather than having it go directly to my loans, I became ineligible after the first year. I was disappointed because I thought this was going to help me substantially with my student loans. However, because of the change to a \$55,000 income max and because I coach two varsity sports and received the TINTP as income, I earned just over 57,000 that year and became ineligible. The

initial TINTP program stated it would be a 5000 awarded for up to 5 years or 25,000 of student debt which got me very excited when I received it but it ended up doing me little good because of the changes in eligibility after the first year."

The comment below illustrates another teacher's discussion of the unintended consequences of the increase in their annual income due to receiving the grant in the previous year:

"This put my income barely over to eliminate child tax credits and refund. It hurt me more financially because it was taxed."

Related to this statement, a good number of teachers expressed dissatisfaction over not being forewarned that they would be incurring additional tax responsibilities due to receiving the grant. This sense of dissatisfaction from a teacher is expressed in the statement quoted below:

"It helped me a lot when I first received it. I filed the tax information that I was suppose to. I ended up paying taxes on it. I was not aware of the amount of tax that the federal goverment would take out. I felt the pinch later. I don't want to see ungrateful. I am. I wished I would have known what amount to save for taxes."

As indicated earlier, responses to the open-ended survey questions almost showed unanimous support for the grant's positive impact of enabling teachers to feel more financially stable and for their professional development. The concerns highlighted here suggest that the grant could be more impactive with changes to its eligibility criteria and better communication about its tax implications.

### **On the job**

In addition to expressing their dissatisfaction about the terms of the Teach in Nebraska Today grant, several teachers who participated in this survey took the opportunity to discuss other work-related issues posing significant challenges to fulfilling the responsibilities of their roles as teachers and their overall well-being.

One such issue is the lack of funds dedicated to acquiring classroom supplies. Several teachers indicated that they spent a portion of the grant they received purchasing supplies required for their classrooms and several others also alluded to the fact that they often had to buy classroom supplies with funds from their salaries thereby contributing to their financial strain.

Moreover, respondents also indicated students' behavioral problems, interactions with difficult parents, lack of sufficient supporting staff, and excessive paperwork as other hinderances to fulfilling their teaching responsibilities.

### **Work-life balance**

Besides discussing issues that hindered them from performing their teaching duties adequately, teachers' responses to this survey's questions also revealed how experiencing financial instability impacted their overall wellbeing. Their responses revealed significant struggles they faced to afford basic necessities and in trying to achieve some of life's important milestones. Some teachers wrote about significant struggles in securing adequate/desired accommodation as the statement below illustrates:

"I'm currently unable to afford to live independently on my salary while paying loans and other expenses. This grant allows me to pay down my total loan amount faster bringing them closer to paid off and being able to eliminate a bill and afford housing."

Another teacher wrote about their struggle for adequate accommodation by saying that “I will be able to continue to live in my apartment and still continue to love my job.”

Some teachers also wrote about the grant, and their financial situation playing significant roles in their family planning decisions as seen below:

“I was able to start my family while being a teacher.”

This statement was written in the context of a teacher describing how the grant’s impact on them as teachers. Another teacher added:

“I felt I could stay and not for another job with my pregnancy. I could afford to stay.”

And yet another teacher shared the following statement:

“This grant gave me a little financial freedom to start my family and keep teaching.”

These statements and many others support the notion that teachers’ experience of financial instability negatively impacted their standard of living and having undue influence on their ability to make major life decisions.

## **Solutions**

Question 7 on the survey gave teachers responding to the survey an opportunity to identify other kinds of support that would help them remain in the teaching profession in Nebraska. Most responses focused on measures intended to alleviate the financial burdens that they faced. For instance, some suggestions focused on forgiving teachers’ student loans:

“Free or reduced tuition at Nebraska schools to obtain a Master’s degree or additional teaching endorsements.”

There were also calls relaxing the eligibility criteria for the Teach in Nebraska Today grant to include teachers with more than 5 years of experience and those earning slightly more than the annual income-based criteria:

“I would love to see some more kinds of retention grants to reward teachers that have been in education for 5+ years. The education field in Nebraska should be competitive and paying teachers is one way to ensure high quality, educated teachers stay in the field!”

There were also calls for making the grant tax-free, or providing other tax-free grants as well as offering permanent raises to their salaries instead of one-off grants like the TINTP:

“Tax free grants. It was super helpful to get this grant money but it made my taxes go up greatly. A higher paycheck will help me remain in a teaching profession in Nebraska. Looking at starting a family soon but with living paycheck to paycheck without a safety net in case of emergencies is a barrier.”

Teachers identified other kinds of support they needed to help them remain in the teaching profession in Nebraska in their responses to question 7. For instance, some teachers called for increased access and support for dealing with students’ mental health and behavioral issues as the statement below illustrates:

“More mental health professionals and community resource experts in schools, and behavior support in elementary schools. Personally, more financial support like student loan forgiveness would help me remain a Nebraska teacher.”

Survey respondents identified additional forms of support to retain teachers in Nebraska,

some of which fall outside the scope of this section and may warrant further investigation in a separate study.

## DISCUSSION

This qualitative analysis provides a detailed account of the experiences of educators who received the Teach in Nebraska Today (TINTP) program grant. Thematic analysis of survey responses revealed several key insights into how the grant influenced teachers' decisions to remain in their roles and within the state, enhanced their opportunities for professional growth, and alleviated financial stress. Additionally, respondents offered constructive suggestions for improving the program's design and implementation.

Participants consistently emphasized the TINTP grant's role in enhancing their capacity to pursue professional goals, meet immediate financial obligations, and feel recognized for their contributions. Many teachers indicated that the grant enabled them to begin their graduate studies and/or complete professional certification exams necessary for career advancement. Notably, many teachers also shared that they had contemplated leaving the teaching profession due to low wages, but receiving the grant played a pivotal role in their decision to remain both in the field and within the state of Nebraska.

During the most recent administration of the Teach in Nebraska Today (TINTP) program, recipients were granted full discretion over how to allocate their funds. Many teachers reported using the grant to pay down student loan debt, enroll in graduate-level coursework, and, in some cases, purchase instructional materials for their classrooms. These patterns of use suggest that the grant not only addressed immediate financial needs but also supported long-term professional development. Such outcomes have important implications for teacher retention in Nebraska, especially given prior research which indicate suggest that educators with graduate degrees are significantly less likely to leave the profession than those with only associate or bachelor's degrees (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

One of the most prominent concerns raised by participants centered on the eligibility criteria for the grant. Teachers with more than five years of experience were excluded from continued participation, resulting in inequitable access to this specific grant. Respondents noted that this restriction disproportionately affected mid-career educators whose fifth year of service coincided with the program's launch making them eligible for only one year of support, while newer teachers could potentially receive up to \$25,000 over five years. This perceived inequity not only diminished the grant's utility for more experienced teachers but also raised questions about the program's alignment with broader retention goals.

Additionally, changes to income-based eligibility requirements introduced in the second year of the program created unintended consequences. Several teachers reported that receiving the grant in the first year pushed their annual income just above the \$55,000 threshold, rendering them ineligible for subsequent awards. This issue was compounded by the grant's classification as taxable income, which not only affected eligibility but also reduced access to other financial benefits such as child tax credits and refunds. Many respondents expressed disappointment over the lack of clear communication regarding these tax implications, noting that the financial burden undermined the intended relief the grant was meant to provide.

Beyond the grant's administrative limitations, teachers used the open-ended survey responses to voice broader concerns about their working conditions. A recurring theme

was the lack of sufficient funding for classroom supplies, which led many educators to use personal income or portions of the grant to purchase essential materials. This practice exacerbates financial strain and reflects systemic underinvestment in classroom resources. Respondents also cited behavioral challenges among students, difficult interactions with parents, insufficient support staff, and excessive administrative paperwork as significant barriers to fulfilling their professional responsibilities. These stressors contribute to a work environment that many teachers described as emotionally and physically taxing, further complicating efforts to retain qualified educators in the state.

Finally, teachers revealed how financial instability affected their broader quality of life. Several respondents described difficulties securing adequate housing, with some noting that they could not afford to live independently without the grant's support. Others shared how the grant enabled them to pursue major life milestones, such as starting a family or continuing employment during pregnancy. These narratives underscore the extent to which financial insecurity influences not only professional decisions but also personal trajectories. Taken together, these findings suggest that while the TINTP grant has made meaningful contributions to teacher well-being and retention, its impact is constrained by eligibility limitations, tax-related consequences, and broader systemic challenges within the profession. Addressing these issues—through more inclusive eligibility criteria, transparent communication about financial implications, and increased investment in classroom resources—could enhance the program's effectiveness and sustainability.

## **LIMITATIONS**

While the Teach in Nebraska Today Evaluation Survey provides valuable insights into the experiences of grant recipients, several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings.

**Response Bias:** The survey achieved a response rate of 37.3%, which, although reasonable for an email-based survey, may not fully capture the perspectives of all eligible participants. Those who chose to respond may have had more favorable experiences with the grant, potentially skewing the results toward positive outcomes.

**Analysis Plan Development:** In evaluation research, it is considered best practice to establish a data analysis plan prior to the commencement of data collection. This approach ensures that the study design aligns with the intended analytical methods and supports the validity of the findings. In this study, however, the data analysis plan was developed post hoc—after data collection had concluded. The analytical framework emerged through an exploratory review of the dataset, which guided decisions on how to extract meaningful insights. While this adaptive approach allowed for flexibility in responding to the nature of the data, it may have introduced limitations in the consistency and rigor of the analysis.

**Qualitative Data Constraints:** The study's qualitative analysis relied solely on text responses from open-ended survey questions. While this method provides valuable firsthand insights, it presents several limitations. The depth and richness of qualitative data are inherently constrained by the brevity and variability of participant responses. Unlike interviews or focus groups, open-ended survey items do not allow for follow-up questions or clarification, which can limit the ability to fully understand context or nuance. Additionally, the quality and interpretability of responses may vary widely depending on individual writing styles, levels of engagement, and comfort with expressing complex thoughts in written form. These factors may affect the consistency and comprehensiveness of the thematic analysis.

**Lack of Control Group:** The study exclusively surveyed grant recipients, limiting the ability to compare outcomes with teachers who did not receive financial support. Without a control group, it is difficult to isolate the effects of the grant from other variables influencing teacher retention.

**Self-Reported Data:** The study relies heavily on self-reported survey responses and qualitative feedback, which are subject to recall bias and social desirability bias. While thematic analysis adds depth, it is inherently interpretive and may not fully represent the diversity of experiences among all recipients.

## CONCLUSION

The Teach in Nebraska Today (TINTP) Evaluation Survey offers meaningful insights into the experiences of educators who received financial support through the grant program. The findings suggest that the grant had a positive impact on teacher retention, well-being, and professional commitment, particularly among early-career educators and those facing financial hardship. Respondents expressed appreciation for the support and highlighted its role in alleviating stress and reinforcing their decision to remain in the profession.

Overall, this evaluation study underscores the value of targeted financial support for educators and provides actionable insights for policymakers and program administrators seeking to strengthen teacher retention efforts in Nebraska. Future evaluations would benefit from a more structured analytical framework, expanded data sources, and mechanisms for capturing longitudinal outcomes to better assess the sustained impact of such initiatives.

## REFERENCES

Borman, G. D., & Dowling, N. M. (2008). Teacher attrition and retention: A meta-analytic and narrative review of the research. *Review of educational research*, 78(3), 367-409.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### Teach in Nebraska Today Survey

The purpose of this survey is to evaluate the impact of the 'Teach in Nebraska Today' grant program, which provides \$5,000 grants to full-time classroom teachers across Nebraska. Your feedback will help us understand how the grant supports teachers and how the program can be improved.

**How did you primarily use the \$5,000 grant? (Select all that apply)**

1. Paying off student loans
2. Purchasing classroom supplies or materials
3. Covering personal expenses (e.g., rent, groceries, utilities)
4. Paying for professional development or additional certifications
5. Other, please specify:

**How helpful was the grant in supporting your ability to remain in the teaching profession?**

1. Not at all helpful
2. Slightly helpful
3. Moderately helpful
4. Very helpful
5. Extremely helpful

**To what extent did receiving the grant influence your decision to continue teaching in Nebraska?**

1. Not at all
2. Slightly
3. Moderately
4. Significantly
5. It was the primary reason I stayed

**How did this grant influence your decision?**

**How did the grant affect your financial well-being? (Select all that apply)**

1. Reduced financial stress
2. Helped me avoid taking on additional debt
3. Allowed me to invest in professional growth
4. Had minimal impact on my financial situation
5. Other

**If you had the choice, would you prefer grant money to be:**

1. Unrestricted (as it currently is)
2. Specifically designated for paying off student loans
3. Specifically designated for classroom-related expenses
4. Other

**Please describe how this grant impacted you as a teacher:**

**What other types of support would help you remain in the teaching profession in Nebraska?**

**What year did you receive the Teach in Nebraska Today grant?**

1. 2023
2. 2024
3. Both years

**Have you received any other grants or financial incentives to support your work as a teacher?**

1. Yes
2. No
3. Not sure

**Please briefly describe the grant or support received.**

**How long have you been in the teaching profession?**

1. 1 year or less
2. More than 1 year but less than 2 years
3. More than 2 years but less than 3 years
4. More than 3 years but less than 4 years
5. More than 4 years

**How long do you plan to continue teaching in Nebraska?**

- 1. Less than 1 year
- 2. 1-3 years
- 3. 4-6 years
- 4. 7-10 years
- 5. 10+ years
- 6. I'm not sure

**Are you the primary income earner of your household?**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 3. Shared equally

**How did you learn about the Teach in Nebraska Today grant? (Select all that apply)**

- 1. Email from school/district
- 2. NDE/ESU communication
- 3. Social Media
- 4. Word of mouth
- 5. Not sure
- 6. Other

**How easy or difficult was the application process?**

- 1. Very easy
- 2. Somewhat easy
- 3. Neither easy nor difficult
- 4. Somewhat difficult
- 5. Very difficult

**Would you recommend this grant program to other teachers?**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No
- 3. Not sure

**What is your gender?**

- 1. Male
- 2. Female
- 3. Prefer not to say

**What is your race and/or ethnicity? (Select all that apply)**

- 1. American Indian or Alaska Native
- 2. Asian
- 3. Black or African American
- 4. Hispanic or Latino
- 5. Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 6. White

**What grade level(s) do you currently teach? (Select all that apply)**

1. Pre-Kindergarten
2. Kindergarten
3. Grade 1
4. Grade 2
5. Grade 3
6. Grade 4
7. Grade 5
8. Grade 6
9. Grade 7
10. Grade 8
11. Grade 9
12. Grade 10
13. Grade 11
14. Grade 12
15. Grade 12+ (i.e., Graduation recovery, etc.)
16. Other, please specify:

**What subject(s) do you teach? (Select all that apply)**

1. English language arts
2. Science
3. Math
4. Social studies
5. Fine art
6. Music
7. Physical education
8. Special education
9. English as a second language
10. Religion
11. World languages
12. Career and technical education
13. Other

**How would you describe the school/school district where you currently teach?**

1. Urban
2. Rural
3. Suburban
4. Other (neither rural nor urban)

## APPENDIX B

### Communication Script

Dear [First Name Last Name],

We hope you are doing well. As a recipient of the Teach in Nebraska Today Program (TINTP) grant, your perspective is invaluable to us. We are reaching out to understand the impact of the 'Teach in Nebraska Today' grant program, which provides \$5,000 grants to full-time classroom teachers across Nebraska. Your feedback will help us assess how the grant supports teachers and identify areas for improvement.

Your input is crucial. Please take a moment to complete this brief 5-minute survey by clicking the link below:

[Survey URL]

Your responses will remain confidential and will only be analyzed in aggregate form for research purposes. No personally identifiable information will be reported.

Your participation is truly appreciated. Should you have any questions or need assistance, please feel free to contact Ariane Joens, Program Specialist, at [ariane.joens@nebraska.gov](mailto:ariane.joens@nebraska.gov) or (402) 432-1395.

Thank you for your continued dedication to teaching in Nebraska and for sharing your valuable insights.

Warm regards,

Ariane Joens  
Program Specialist  
Coordinated School & District Support  
Nebraska Department of Education