National Training Aircraft Symposium (NTAS)       2022 - Bridging the Gap

# FAA Designated Pilot Examiner System Insights

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https://commons.erau.edu/ntas/2022/presentation/21

# FAA Designated Pilot Examiner System Insights

- Wendy Beckman, Michael Gref, Tim Rosser

- Middle Tennessee State University

# Pilot Certification Ecosystem
## Certificates Issued in 2021

**FAA Civil Airman Statistics - Table 16**
**AIRMEN CERTIFICATES ISSUED BY CATEGORY AND CONDUCTOR**
**Calendar Year 2021**

| Category of Certificates | Total Certificates Issued | Original Issuances | | | | Additional Ratings | | | | Original Issues by CFI |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Total | Examiner | Inspector | No Test | Total | Examiner | Inspector | No Test | |
| **Pilot--Total** | **140,473** | **43,416** | **36,962** | **416** | **6,038** | **46,698** | **40,210** | **497** | **5,991** | **50,359** |
| Student | 50,874 | 515 | 301 | 214 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 50,359 |
| Recreational | 5 | 5 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | N/Ap |
| Sport Pilot | 247 | 228 | 227 | 0 | 1 | 19 | 19 | 0 | 0 | N/Ap |
| Airplane | | | | | | | | | | |
| Private | 37,284 | 22,551 | 20,465 | 28 | 2,058 | 14,733 | 12,759 | 18 | 1,956 | N/Ap |
| Commercial | 26,165 | 12,771 | 9,669 | 15 | 3,087 | 13,394 | 10,592 | 39 | 2,763 | N/Ap |
| ATP | 22,984 | 5,020 | 4,838 | 142 | 40 | 17,964 | 16,374 | 435 | 1,155 | N/Ap |
| Rotorcraft | 2,764 | 2,176 | 1,308 | 17 | 851 | 588 | 466 | 5 | 117 | N/Ap |
| Glider | 150 | 150 | 149 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | N/Ap |
| **Flight Instructor Certificates** | **16,164** | **7,759** | **6,167** | **32** | **1,560** | **8,405** | **7,870** | **17** | **518** | N/Ap |

https://www.faa.gov/data_research/aviation_data_statistics/civil_airmen_statistics

# Summary of Certificate Issued Data

- Approximately 105,000 pilot/flight instructor certificates issued last year (not including student pilot certificates)

- Approximately 94,000 were for Airplane SEL/MEL Private, Commercial, Instrument, CFI, CFII, MEI

- Examiners did approximately 91,000 of those certifications (87%)

- FAA Inspectors did approximately 700 of those certifications (.67%)

- "No test" for approximately 14,000 of those certifications (13%)

# Pilot Training/Certification System Overview

- 2,200 flight schools listed on AOPA's Flight School Finder website

- 877 Part 141 flight schools listed on FAA's website

- 58 Part 141 schools with examining authority of some sort

- 850 DPE's with authorization for at least one of: Airplane SEL, MEL for Private, Instrument, Commercial, CFI, CFII, MEI

- Another 350 DPE's with other authorizations (glider, rotorcraft, SES, MES, various type ratings)

- Rough calculation: 91,000 certificates/850 DPE's = 107 certificates per DPE per year

AOPA Flight School List



www.aopa.org/training-and-safety/learn-to-fly/flight-schools

# Why a study of the DPE system?

▶ Issues experienced by MTSU flight school

▶ Anecdotal evidence at UAA/AABI conferences

▶ Congressional interest in topic

  ▶ 2018 Congressional mandate for FAA to review DPE policies

  ▶ 2019 - Aviation Rule-making Committee (ARAC) tasked, DPE Reforms Working Group (DPERWG) formed, FAA removed geographical restrictions and changed check ride limit to 3 per day

  ▶ June 2021 – DPERWG submitted recommendations to FAA

▶ No research of stakeholder opinion done prior to recommendations being formulated by Working Group

▶ Survey - means of allowing input by both DPE's and flight schools to the FAA regarding the Working Group recommendations

**Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Committee Task Notice**
June 20, 2019

**ACTION:** Notice of a new task assignment for the Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Committee (ARAC) and solicitation of members.

**SUMMARY:** The FAA assigned ARAC a new task to review all regulations and policies related to designated pilot examiners appointed under section 183.23 of title 14, Code of Federal Regulations. The FAA seeks advice and recommendations on regulatory and policy changes necessary to ensure an adequate number of designated pilot examiners are deployed and available to perform their duties to meet the growing need of the public. This notice informs the public of the new ARAC activity and solicits membership for the new Designated Pilot Examiner Reforms Working Group.

**BACKGROUND:** ARAC is governed by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C., Appendix 2). The FAA established ARAC to provide information, advice, and recommendations on aviation related issues that could result in rulemaking to the FAA Administrator, through the Associate Administrator of Aviation Safety.

On October 5, 2018, Congress enacted the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 (P.L 115-254). Section 319 (Designated Pilot Examiner Reforms) of P.L. 115-254 requires the following:

  *(a) IN GENERAL.—The Administrator shall assign to the Aviation Rulemaking Advisory Committee (in this section referred to as the ''Committee'') the task of reviewing all regulations and policies related to designated pilot examiners appointed under section 183.23 of title 14, Code of Federal Regulations. The Committee shall focus on the processes and requirements by which the FAA selects, trains, and deploys individuals as designated pilot examiners, and provide recommendations with respect to the regulatory and policy changes necessary to ensure an adequate number of designated pilot examiners are deployed and available to perform their duties. The Committee also shall make recommendations with respect to the regulatory and policy changes if necessary to allow a designated pilot examiner perform a daily limit of 3 new check rides with no limit for partial check rides and to serve as a designated pilot examiner without regard to any individual managing office.*

# Study Research Questions

▶ 1) What is the perception of the current state of the DPE system by all stakeholders?

▶ 2) What is the perception of stakeholders of the major recommendations made by the DPERWG?

# Methodology

▶ Two surveys – one for DPE's and one for flight school management personnel

▶ Surveys were provided to five individuals to check face validity

▶ DPE's - e-mails downloaded from FAA Designee Locator website (https://designee.faa.gov/#/designeeLocator)

  ▶ 851 DPE's sent a direct email with link to survey

▶ Flight schools – e-mails from AOPA Flight School Directory website and UAA member list

  ▶ 2000 flight schools sent a direct email with link to survey

▶ Industry groups – UAA/AABI/FSANA/AOPA/NAFI/SAFE – advertised as well

# Survey Question Areas

▶ **Demographic information**

  ▶ DPE's – years of service, PT/FT, check rides per month, oversight FSDO

  ▶ Flight schools – courses offered, number of instructors, number of aircraft, FSDO region

▶ **Current state of system**

  ▶ Wait times for check ride scheduling

  ▶ Perceptions of staffing level of DPE's

  ▶ Travel to check rides

▶ **Feedback on selected DPERWG recommendations**

# Response Rates

- **DPE's**
  - 306 valid DPE responses (36% response rate)
  - DPE's from 68 of 77 FSDO's nationwide responded
  - Over 30 DPE's felt so strongly about the topic they called or emailed with additional thoughts

- **Flight Schools**
  - 773 valid flight school responses (39% response rate)
  - Responses from schools in all 77 FSDO's nationwide
  - Average fleet size of the responding flight schools was 10.2 aircraft (minimum of 1 aircraft and maximum of 100 aircraft)
  - The average number of flight instructors employed by the responding flight schools was 11.4 (minimum of 1 and a maximum of 250 instructors)
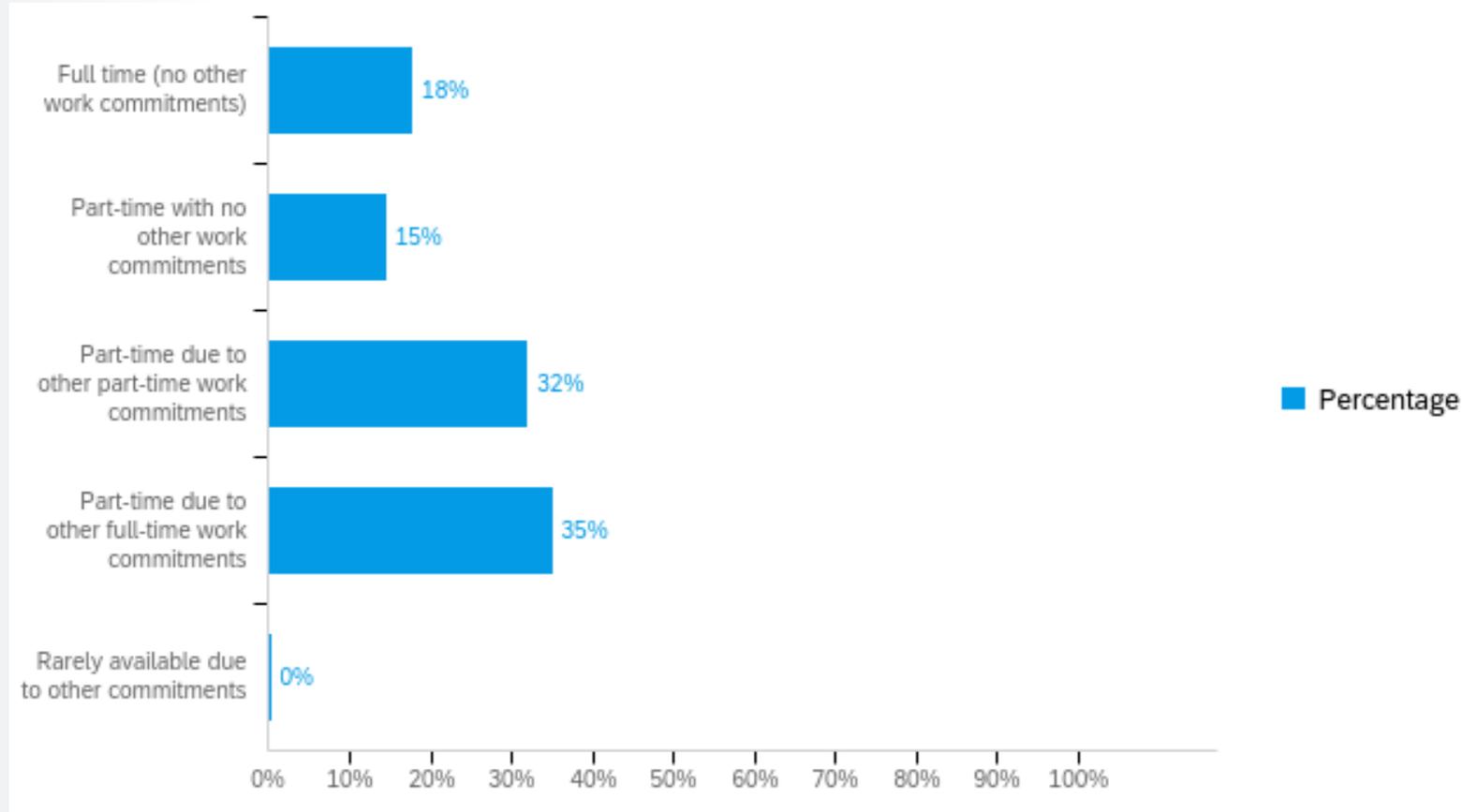
# DPE Demographics

**1. How long have you served as a Designated Pilot Examiner (DPE)?**
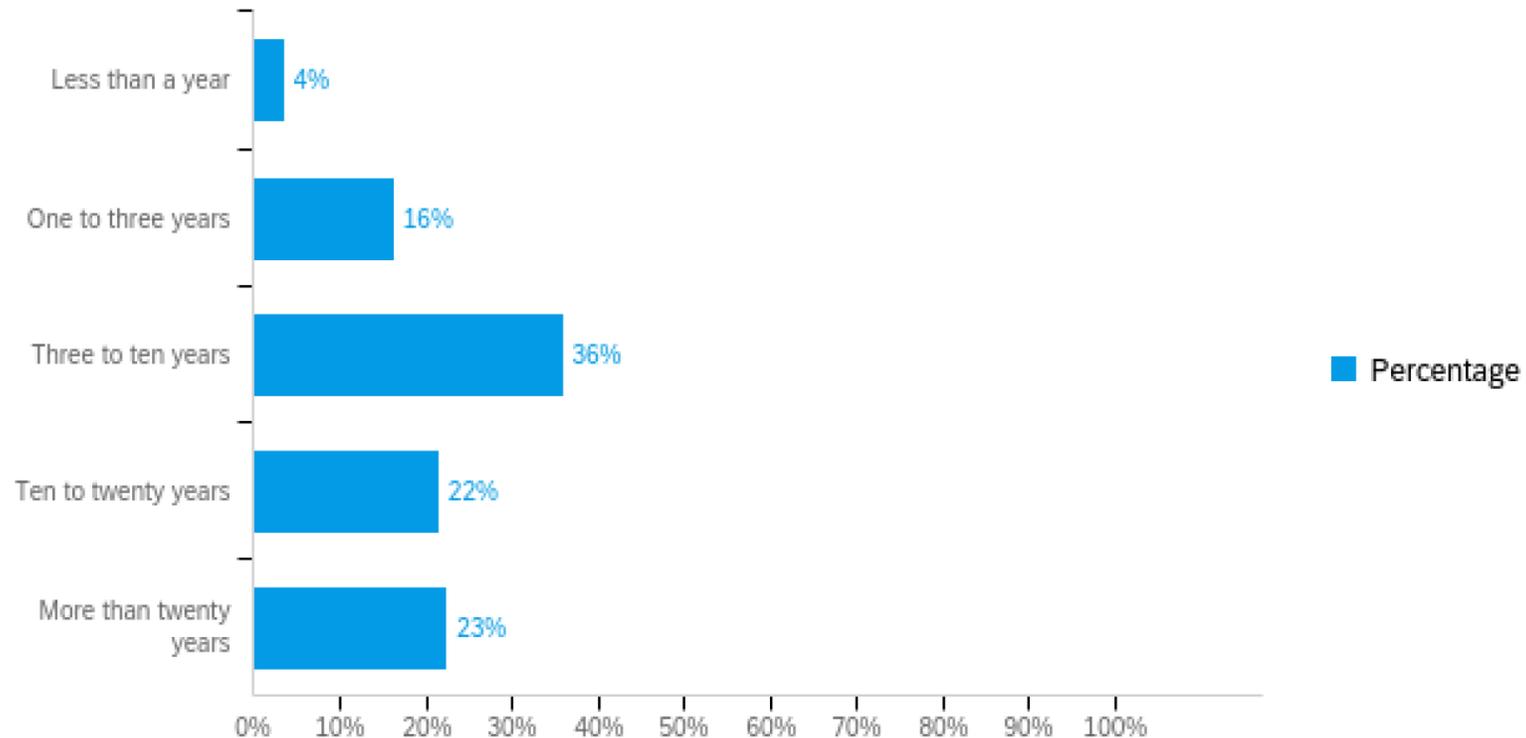


**81% of responding DPE's have been examiners for three or more years and 45% have been examiners for more than 10 years**

# Is your DPE Service:



While 18% of DPE's report full-time DPE service, the majority (67%) report part-time DPE service due to other part-time or full-time work commitments. Only 15% were part-time DPE's with no other work commitments

# On average, approximately how many check rides do you conduct each month as a DPE?



Frequency Table - Reported Average Number of Check Rides Per Month
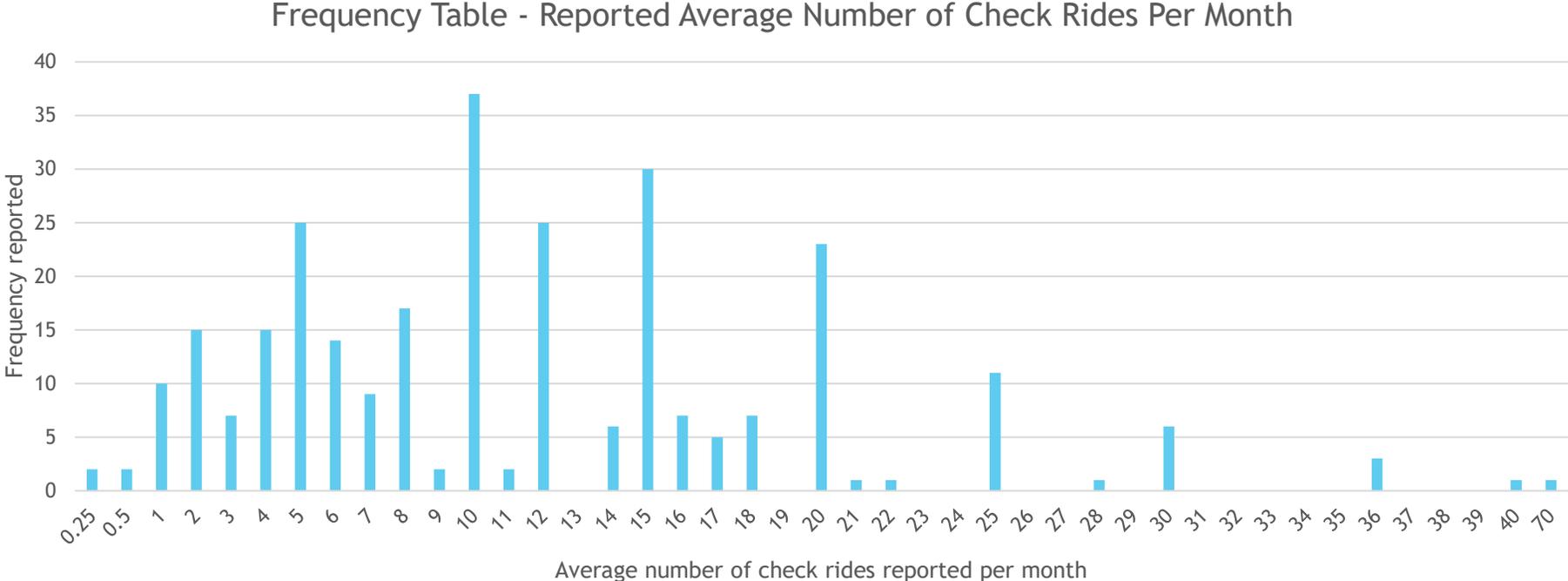
DPE's indicated an average (mean) of 11.6 check rides per month (standard deviation of 8.27). The median was 10 check rides per month, with the minimum reported being .25 and the maximum reported being 70. Of the responding DPE's, 54% reported doing 10 or less check rides per month, while 46% reported doing 11 or more check rides per month.

**Is the current number of check rides you conduct each month:**
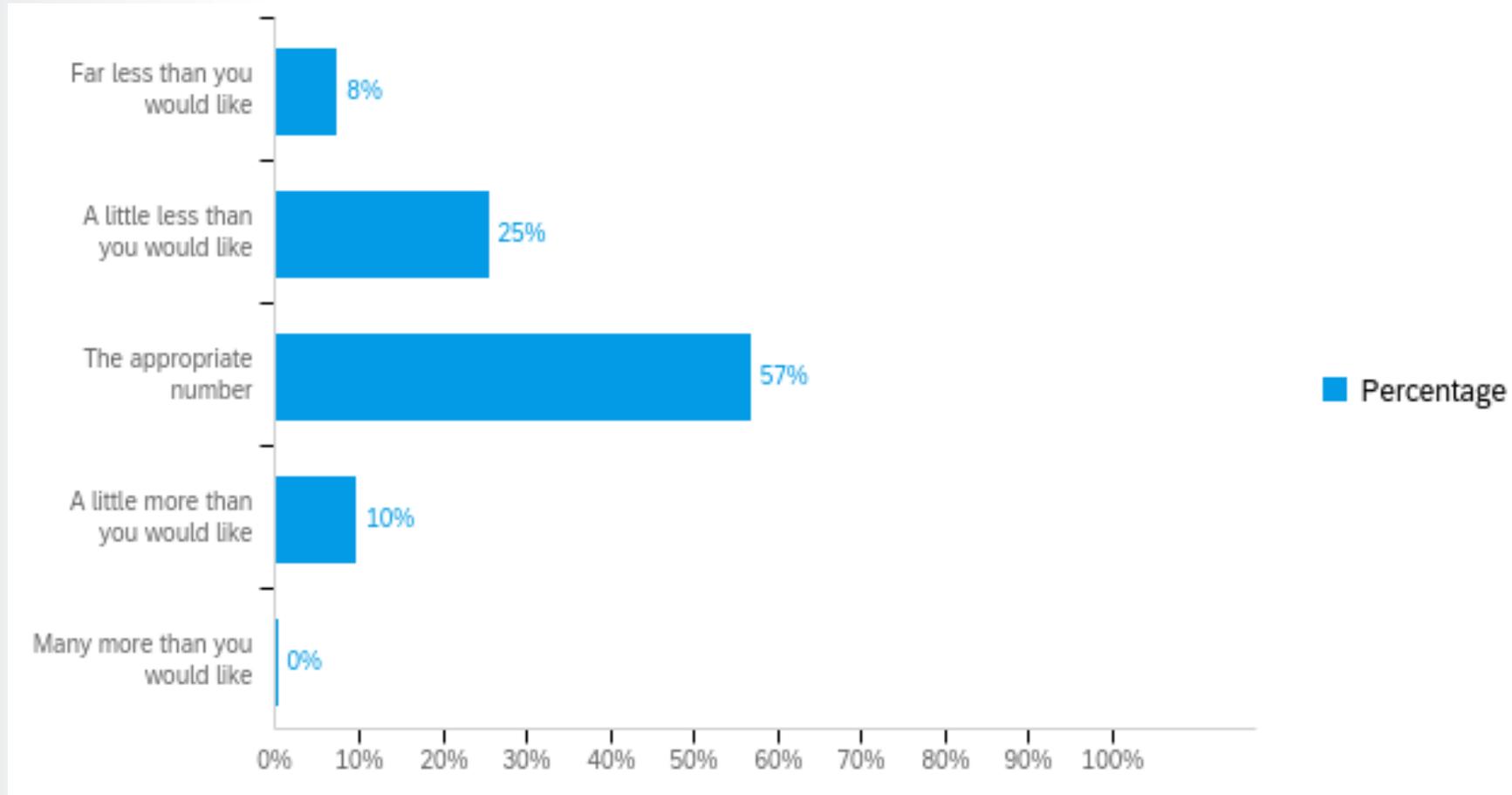


92% of responding DPE's are conducting approximately the number of check rides they wish to each month (responses including a little less than they'd like, the appropriate number, and a little more than they'd like)

# Flight School Demographics

**What title best describes your position at your flight school?**

|  | Percent | Count |
|---|---|---|
| Director of Operations | 15.52% | 120 |
| Chief Instructor | 27.04% | 209 |
| Assistant Chief Instructor | 6.60% | 51 |
| Line Instructor | 32.21% | 249 |
| Training Support Personnel | 1.68% | 13 |
| *Other (please specify) | 16.95% | 131 |
| Total | 100% | 773 |

* Note – "other" was most frequently indicated to be owner/founder/President/CEO

# What training courses are offered by your flight school?

| Course | Part 61 | # of schools | Part 141 | # of schools | Part 141 Examining Authority? | # of schools |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Private ASEL | 75% | 620 | 21% | 176 | 3% | 26 |
| Private AMEL | 81% | 348 | 17% | 71 | 2% | 10 |
| Instrument Airplane | 74% | 577 | 22% | 173 | 3% | 25 |
| Commercial ASEL | 76% | 578 | 22% | 168 | 2% | 15 |
| Commercial AMEL | 74% | 348 | 23% | 107 | 3% | 13 |
| Certified Flight Instructor ASEL | 83% | 564 | 15% | 105 | 1% | 10 |
| Instrument Instructor Airplane | 85% | 547 | 14% | 91 | 1% | 9 |
| Certified Flight Instructor AMEL | 81% | 342 | 17% | 73 | 1% | 6 |
| Airline Transport Pilot ASEL | 94% | 188 | 6% | 11 | 1% | 1 |
| Airline Transport Pilot AMEL | 90% | 155 | 9% | 16 | 1% | 1 |

# Current State of DPE System as Reported by Participants

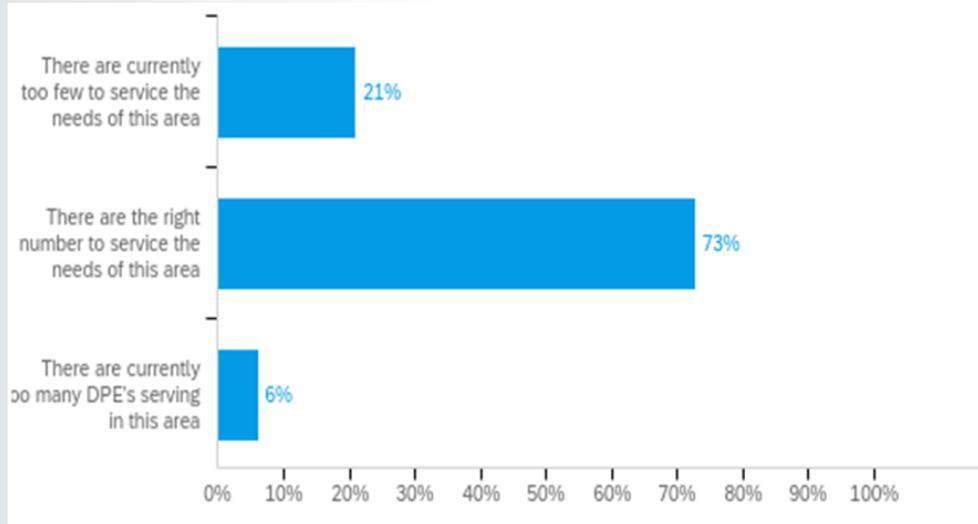# What is your overall perception of the availability of DPE's to conduct check rides for your flight school's students?
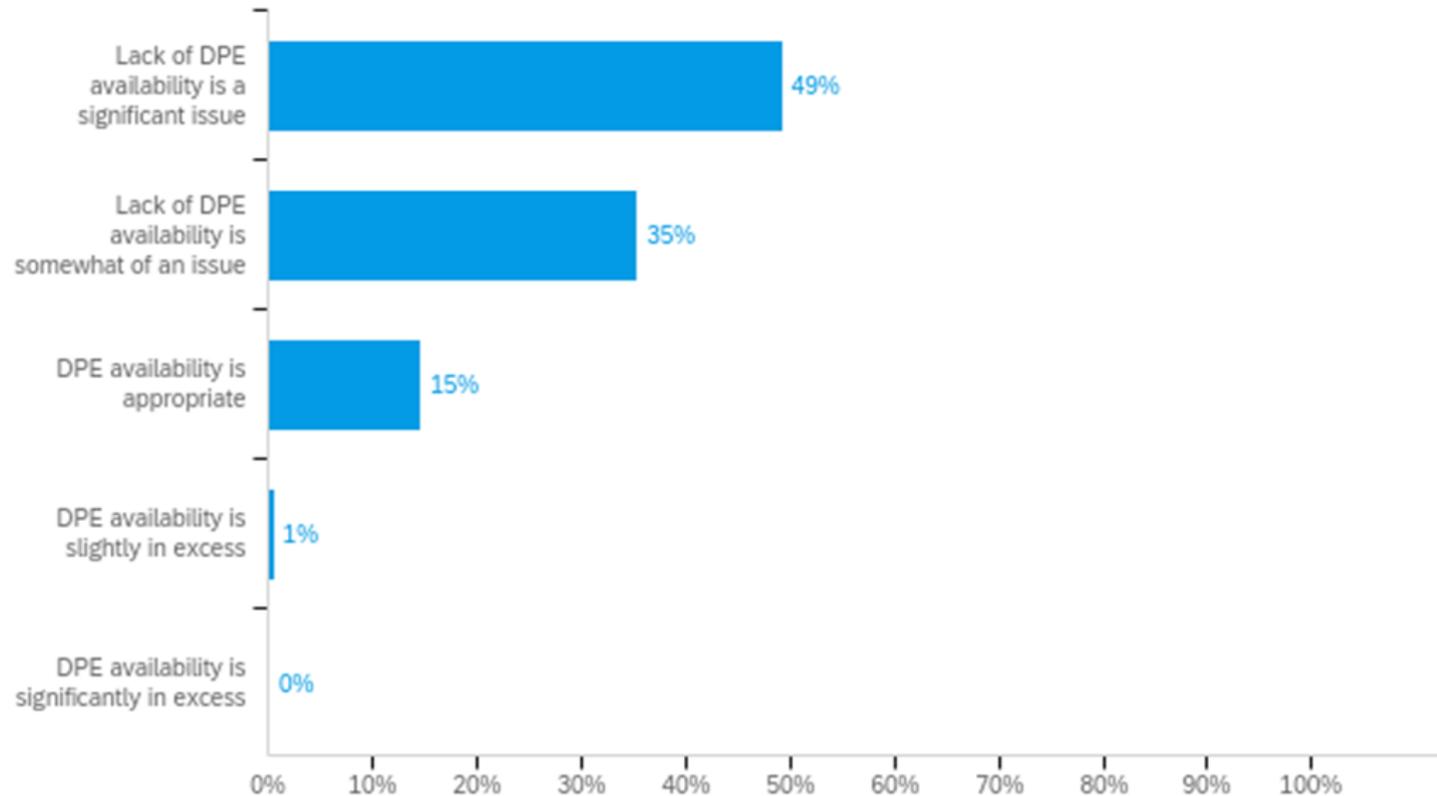


84% of responding flight schools indicated that DPE availability is either somewhat (35%) or a significant (49%) issue for their students; 15% indicated DPE availability is appropriate; only 1% indicated any excess DPE availability

# What is your perception of the number of DPE's within your FSDO's geographic area of responsibility?

## DPE Responses



There are currently too few to service the needs of this area — 21%

There are the right number to service the needs of this area — 73%

There are currently too many DPE's serving in this area — 6%

## Flight School Responses



■ Percentage

There are currently too few to service the needs of the area — 83%

There is the right number to service the needs of the area — 16%

There are currently too many DPE's in this area — 1%

The majority (73%) of responding DPE's indicated the "right number" of DPE's in their FSDO's geographic area of responsibility, with 21% indicating there were too few DPE's in their area and 6% indicating there were too many DPE's in their area
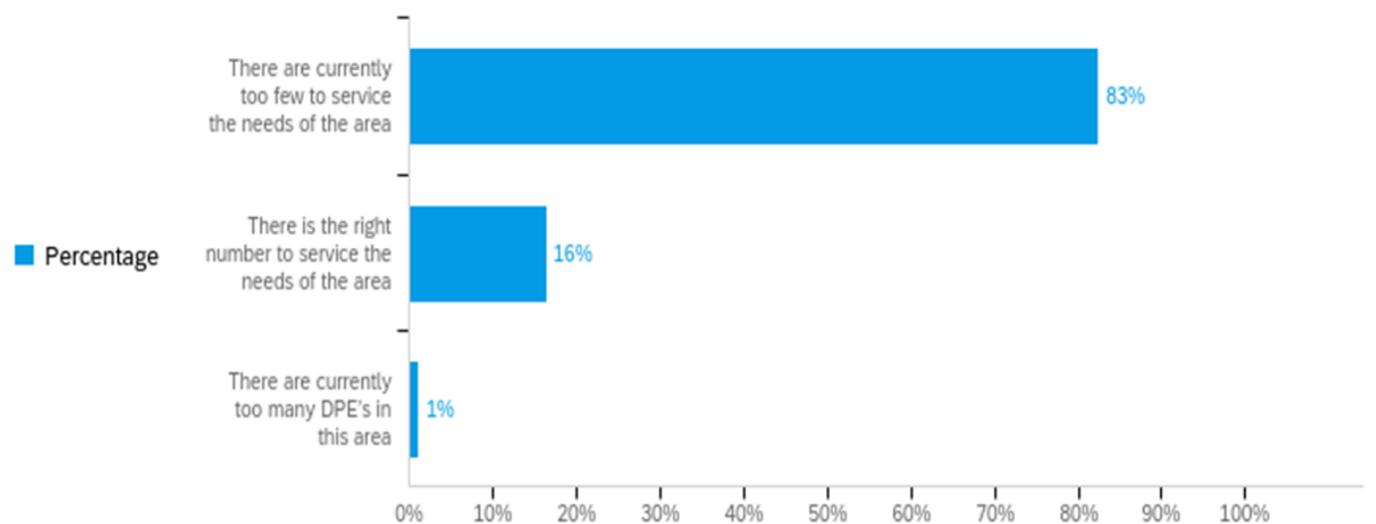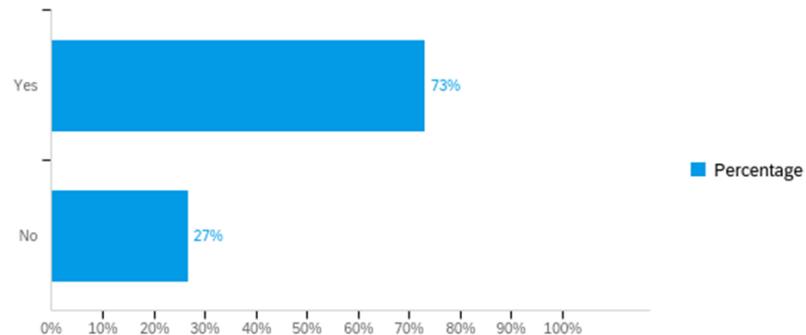
A large majority (83%) of responding flight schools indicated they believed there are currently too few DPE's in their geographic region to service the needs of the area
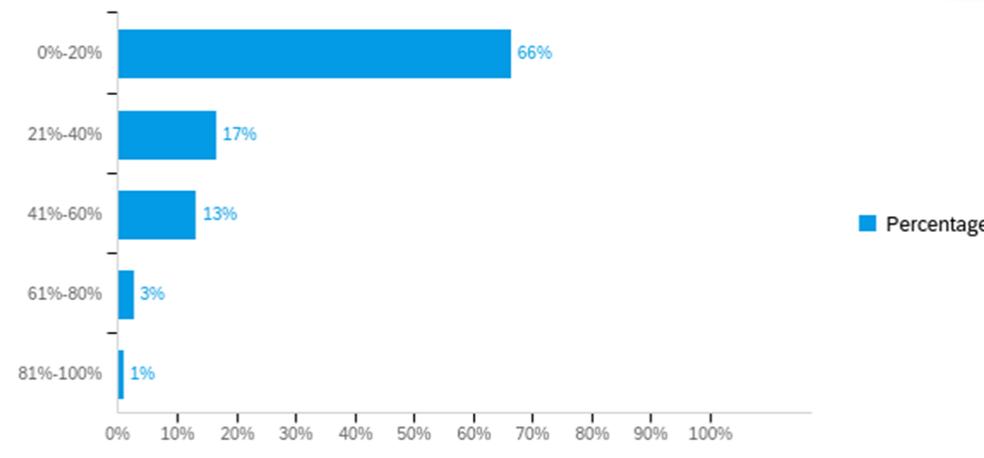
# Travel – DPE Perspective

Do you travel to other FSDO's geographic areas of responsibility to conduct check rides?



73% of DPE's indicate they travel to geographic areas beyond their oversight FSDO

What percentage of the check ride applicants that you service come to you from outside your managing FSDO's geographic area of responsibility?



83% of DPE's indicated that less than 40% of their check ride applicants come to them from outside their managing FSDO's geographic area of responsibility.

# Travel – Flight School Perspective

What percentage of check ride applicants from your flight school travel to a DPE outside your FSDO's geographic region for their check ride?

Does your flight school bring in DPE's from other geographic regions to conduct check rides?
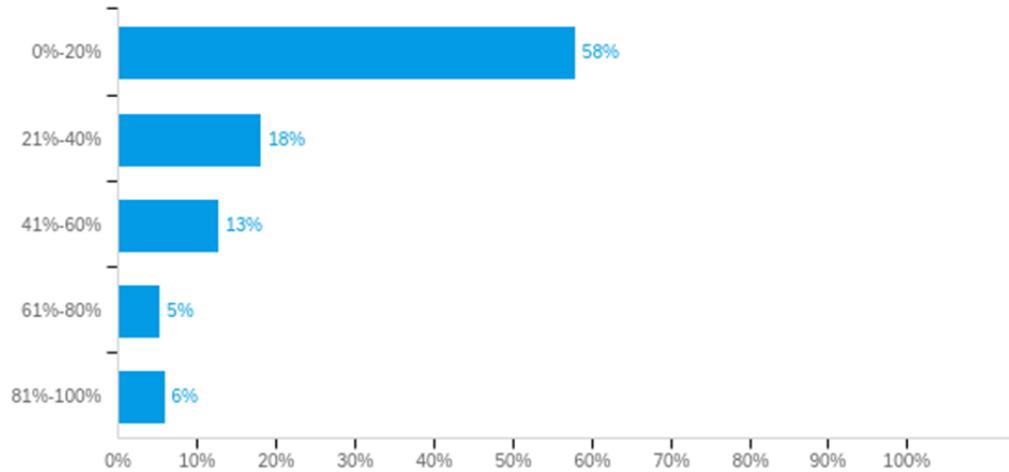




**76% of flight schools reported less than 40% of their students travel to a DPE outside their geographic region for a check ride**
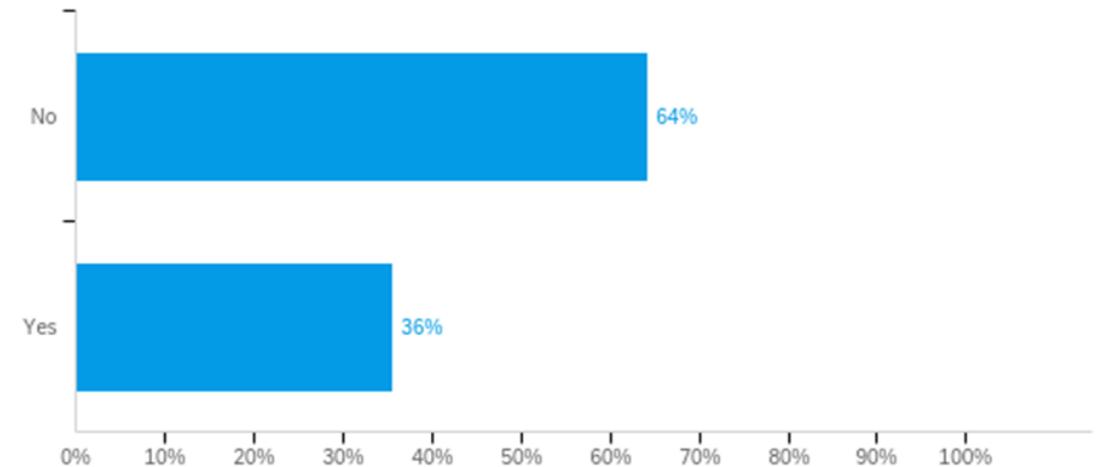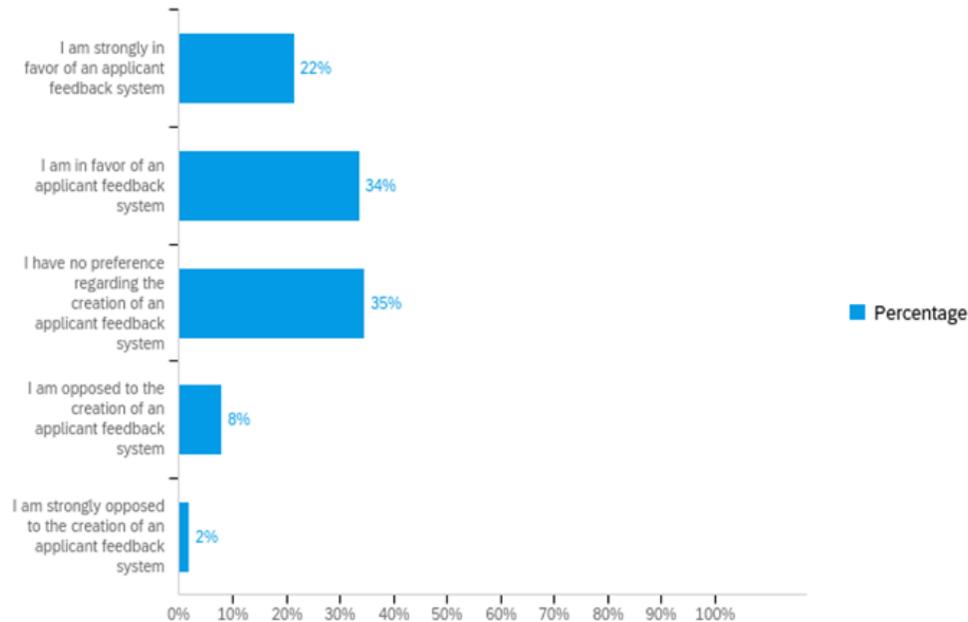
**36% of flight schools reported bringing in DPE's from other geographic regions to conduct check rides for their applicants**

# Perceptions of Selected DPERWG Recommendations

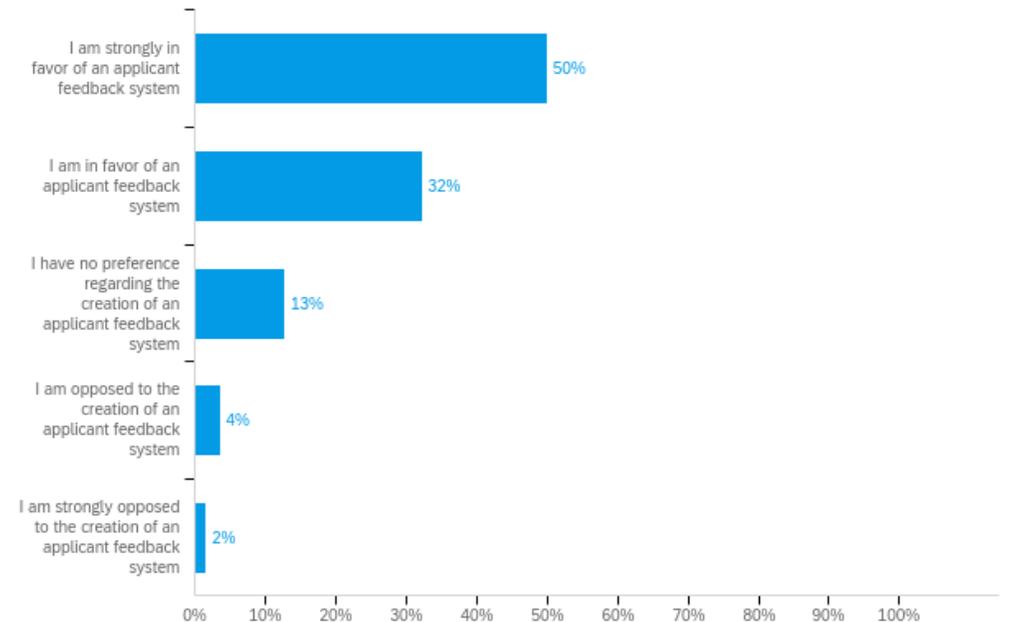MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENT OF AEROSPACE

# What is your perception of the development of a confidential survey feedback system to be administered by the FAA, by which applicants are encouraged to complete a survey regarding their check ride experience?

## DPE Responses

| Response | Percentage |
|---|---|
| I am strongly in favor of an applicant feedback system | 22% |
| I am in favor of an applicant feedback system | 34% |
| I have no preference regarding the creation of an applicant feedback system | 35% |
| I am opposed to the creation of an applicant feedback system | 8% |
| I am strongly opposed to the creation of an applicant feedback system | 2% |

## Flight School Responses

| Response | Percentage |
|---|---|
| I am strongly in favor of an applicant feedback system | 50% |
| I am in favor of an applicant feedback system | 32% |
| I have no preference regarding the creation of an applicant feedback system | 13% |
| I am opposed to the creation of an applicant feedback system | 4% |
| I am strongly opposed to the creation of an applicant feedback system | 2% |

56% of responding DPE's indicate being in favor (34%) or strongly in favor (22%) of an applicant feedback system, while 35% indicated "no preference"

82% of flight schools indicated being in favor (32%) or strongly in favor (50%) of an applicant feedback system

# What is your perception of the potential benefit of moving to a centralized national oversight model of the DPE system versus continuing with the existing local FSDO oversight of DPE's?

## DPE Responses



## Flight School Responses
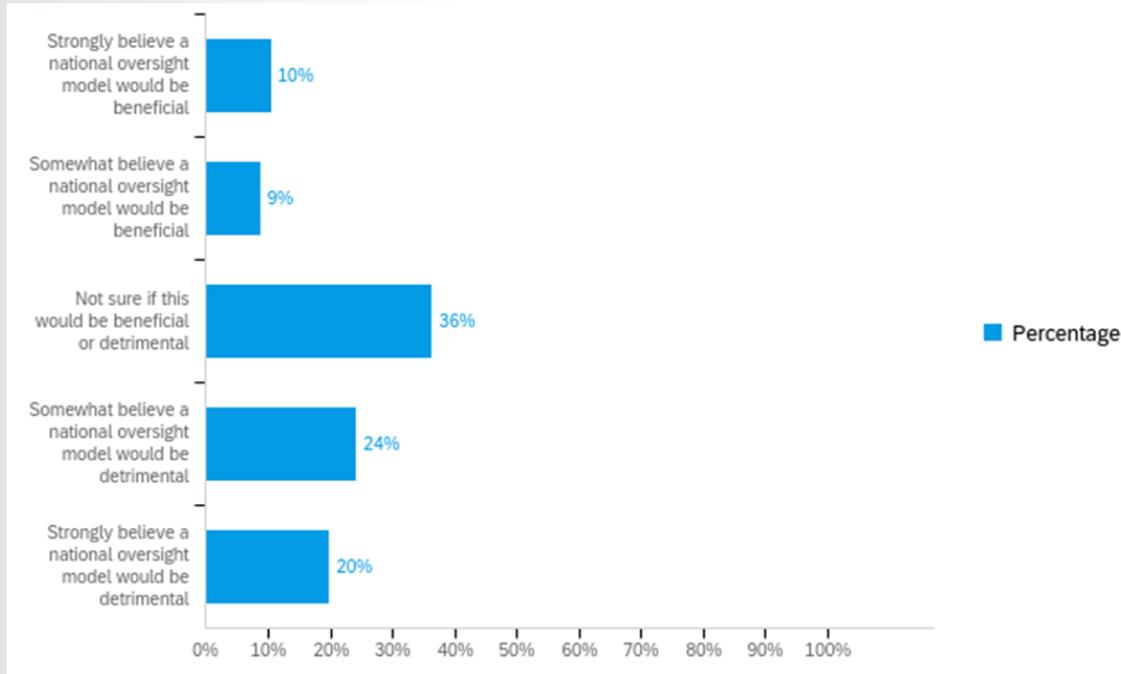


While 44%) of DPE's believed (24%) or strongly believed (20%) a national oversight model for DPE's would be detrimental, the most selected response (36%) was "not sure if this would be beneficial or detrimental"
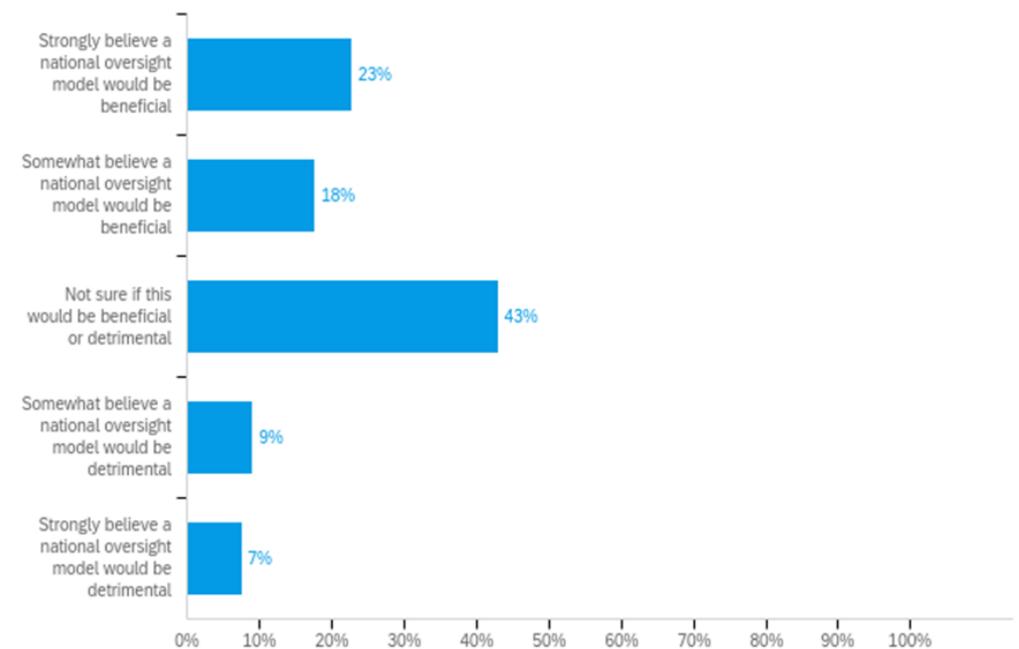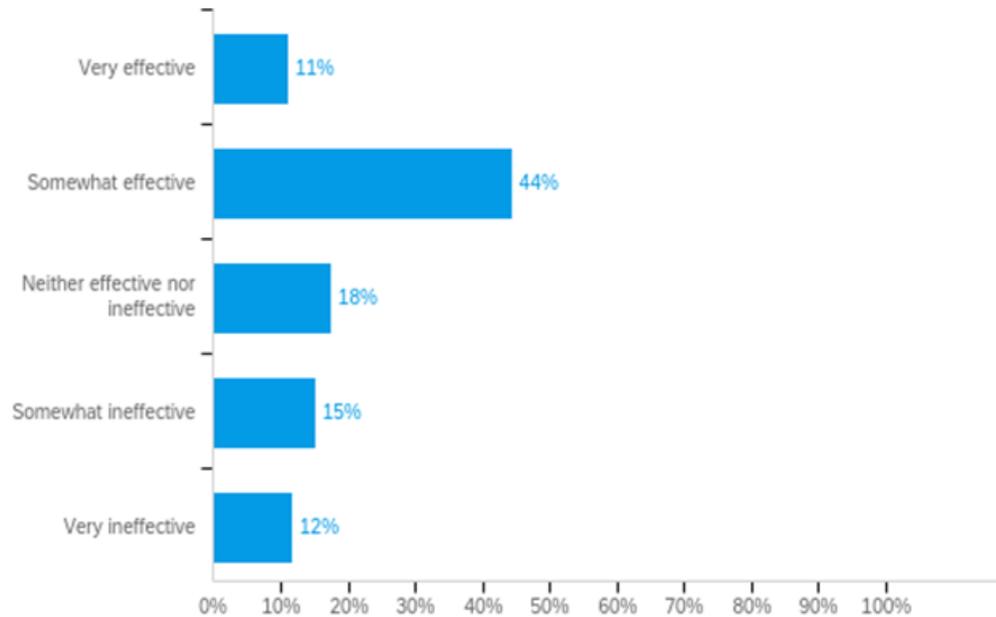
While 41% of flight schools somewhat believed (18%) or strongly believed (23%) a national oversight model for DPE's would be beneficial, the most selected response (43%) was "not sure if this would be beneficial or detrimental"
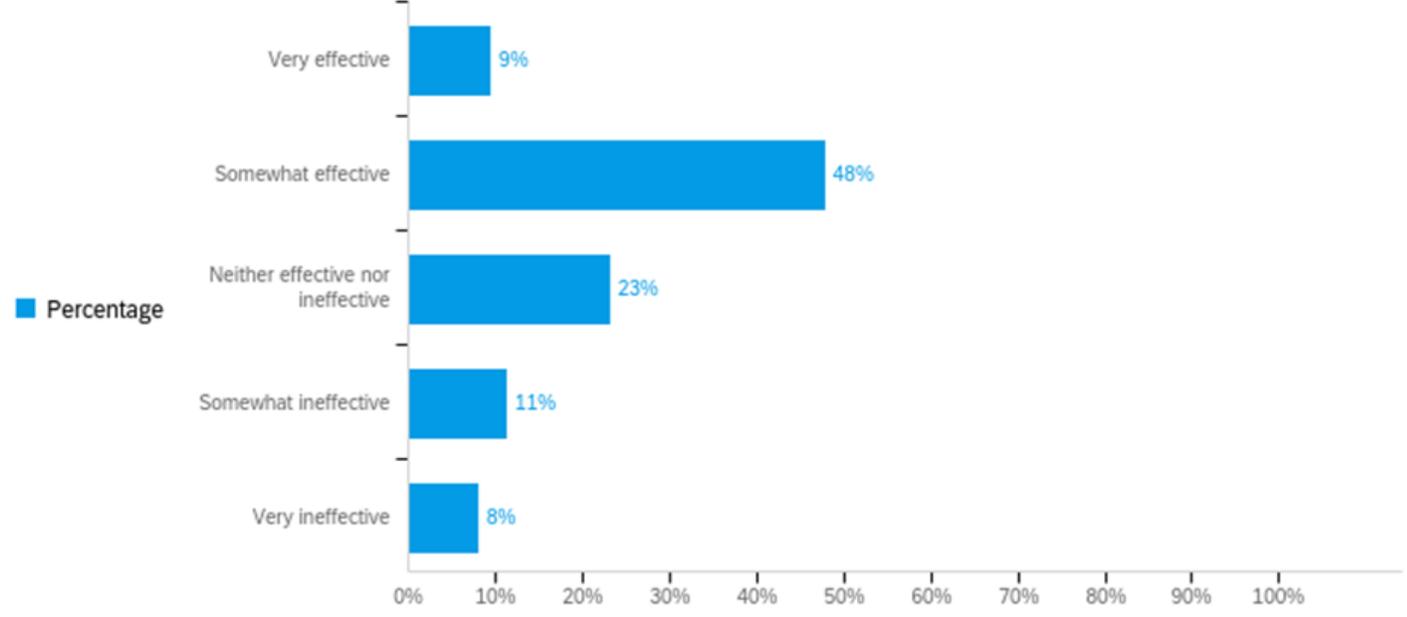
# What is your perception of the effectiveness of the current DPE locator function provided on the FAA website?

## DPE Responses



## Flight School Responses



55% of responding DPE's believed the DPE locator website is very or somewhat effective, while 27% believed it was ineffective or very ineffective

57% of flight schools believed the DPE locator website is very or somewhat effective, while 19% believed it was ineffective or very ineffective

# In your perception, would it be beneficial to treat oral and flight tests as two distinct events, so that weather or mechanical issues that would prevent the conduct of a flight test would not preclude conducting an oral test as scheduled?

## DPE Responses



## Flight School Responses
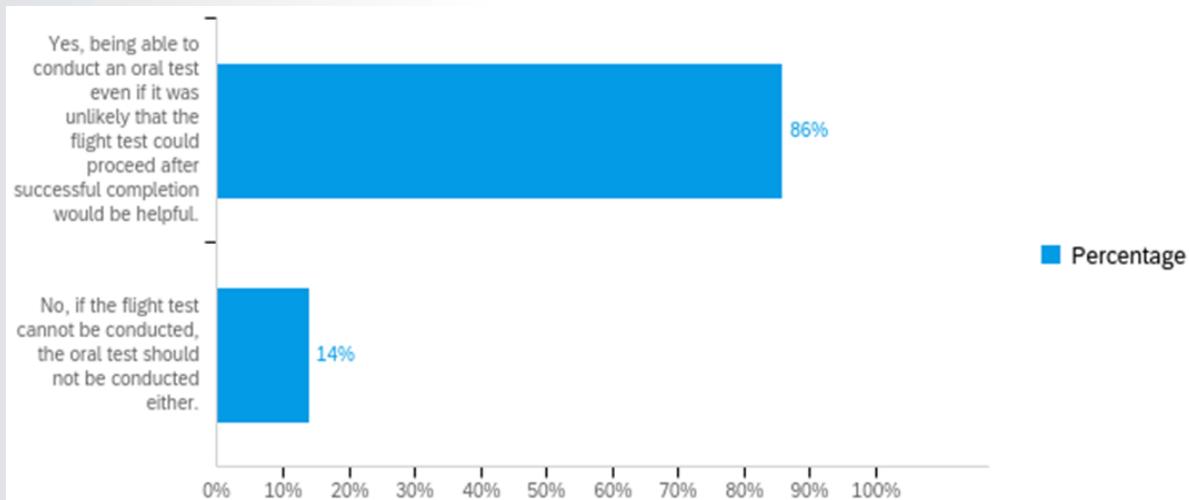


A large majority (86%) of DPE's believed it would be beneficial to be able to conduct an oral test even if it was unlikely a flight test could proceed after successful completion of that oral test
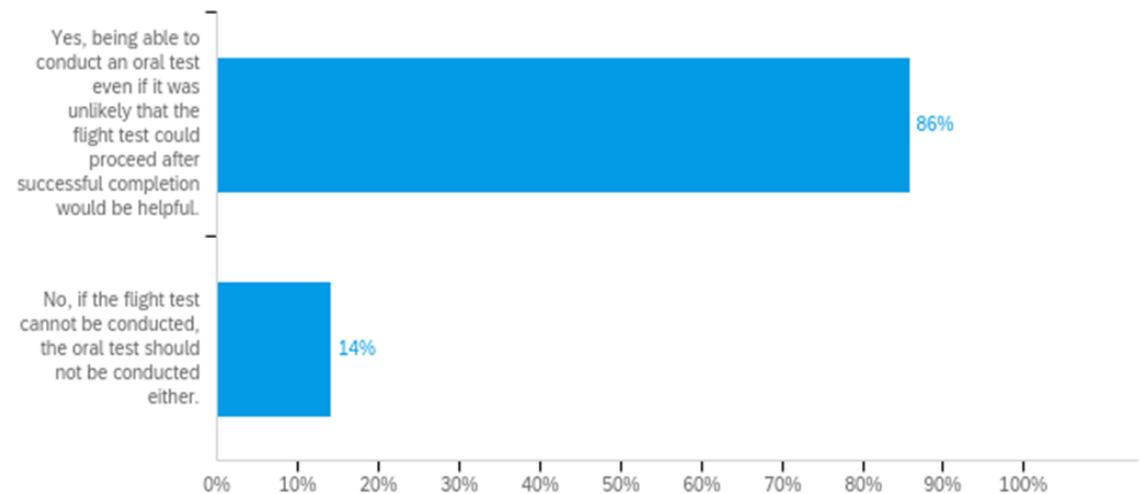
The large majority (86%) of flight schools believed it would be beneficial to be able to conduct an oral test even if it was unlikely a flight test could proceed after successful completion of that oral test

# Conclusions

# Conclusions – Current State of System

▶ Significant difference of opinions on DPE availability between DPE's and flight schools

▶ Lots of travel going on (both DPE's and applicants) - higher costs for applicants

▶ No one is happy with current state of affairs:

  ▶ Flight schools expressed that significant time is spent trying to locate DPE's with availability within a two-week time frame, with numerous calls made to try to determine the optimal DPE solution

  ▶ DPE's expressed that the scheduling of check rides by applicants who anticipate finishing a course at a particular point in time but that are subsequently unable to meet that deadline result in cancellations on short notice which they are then in large part unable to fill. They too report a large administrative burden in terms of scheduling, cancelling, and rescheduling of applicants.

# DPE Locator Website Improvements Needed

**There were 84 specific DPE suggestions made to improve the locator function, and these included the following most frequent themes:**

▶ Make more user friendly - especially with regards to authorization types and more search parameters (24 comments)

▶ Geographically allow a search within a radius of a given zip code versus by city; provide a map (19 comments)

▶ Keep it current and updated (16 comments)

▶ Advertise it and make it more easily accessible (13 comments)

**There were 188 specific flight school suggestions made to improve the locator function, and these included the following most frequent themes:**

▶ Keep the site updated (many DPE's listed are inactive and some newer DPE's are not reflected) (48 comments)

▶ Provide maps/zip code search/search by radius (30 comments)

▶ Add DPE availability and scheduling functions (28 comments)

▶ Advertise it (many flight schools indicated not knowing it existed) (22 comments)

▶ Identify which DPE's are authorized for which check rides in plain language (13 comments)

# DPERWG Recommendations With Consensus

▶ 1) Implementing an applicant feedback system. Since 91% of DPE's indicated being in favor, strongly in favor, or having no preference regarding such a system, and 95% of flight schools indicated the same, it appears such a system should be implemented.

▶ 2) Allowing oral tests to be conducted even if weather or mechanical issues will likely prevent conduct of the flight test. Both 86% of DPE's and flight schools indicated their support.

▶ 3) Allowing DPE's to conduct check rides under the provisions of BasicMed as appropriate by aircraft and operating requirements. Both DPE's (79%) and flight schools (81%) indicated support or strong support.

▶ 4) Not allowing a flight to be conducted if an oral test was failed on the scheduled test day, with 81% of DPE's and 59% of flight schools not supporting this concept.

# What Does It Mean…?

▶ **While fairly opinionated on other items, the one DPERWG recommendation on which both DPE's and flight schools indicated a lack of ability to form a perception was:**

▶ "The potential benefit of moving to a centralized national oversight model for the DPE system"

   ▶ 36% or DPE's and 43% of flight schools indicated they were not sure if this would be beneficial or detrimental

# After the Study...FAA Response to DPERWG Recommendations

▶ Study was done in February 2022; FAA response came out in June 2022 – responses to 12 total recommendations

▶ **Specific to our survey...**

*1. The FAA agrees with the recommendation that the **designee locator should be improved** and concedes that the current locator is not user friendly and has limited functions*

*2. The FAA agrees that **a survey system**, possibly integrated with DMS, would be beneficial to it as a supplement to interviewing recently tested airmen. Implementation of such a system will require both internal and external coordination and funding approval for additional resources*

*3. The FAA agrees in principle that examiners should only be required to obtain the level of **medical eligibility necessary** to act as Pilot-In-Command (PIC) for the operation being conducted during a practical test*

*4. While the FAA disagrees with the recommendation as written, it acknowledges the benefit it aims to achieve in terms of improving scheduling efficiency. The belief is that this can be accomplished within the existing regulatory framework and by only slightly modifying current FAA policy. The FAA considers a practical test to be a unified event conventionally comprised of a ground and flight portion. It **does not appear that the integrity of the test is compromised if those two portions are accomplished over multiple days**.*

# National Oversight Concept...

**Recommendations for Consideration Under a National Oversight Structure**

| DPE Deployment and Oversight | |
|---|---|
| **RECOMMENDATION #9** | **FAA RESPONSE** |
| Develop and implement a national level oversight structure that focuses on the selection, training, deployment, and oversight of DPEs | The FAA supports the concept of establishing a National Oversight Structure aimed at increasing standardization, consistency, communication, and resource placement among individual designees. However, the FAA must first determine the feasibility of changing its organizational structure and calculate the budgetary impacts of such a change before it can commit to implementing this recommendation. |

# Thank You