

Highlights from 2008 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey

by

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Since 2001, Governor Easley, the North Carolina Professional Teaching Commission and the State Board of Education has made a sustained commitment to listening to educators and reforming schools to create the working conditions necessary for student and teacher success.

In 2008, 104,249 educators responded to the Teacher Working Conditions Survey (87 percent), the highest proportion since the advent of the survey in 2002. Every traditional public school and school district in the state of North Carolina reached the minimum response rate (40 percent) necessary to have valid data, providing information needed to gauge the successes and areas of concerns in their own school community. The data was made available in May at www.ncteachingconditions.org. Having this data for all schools is essential as:

- The new School Executive and Teacher Evaluation instruments rely on the Teacher Working Conditions Survey as an essential data artifact for educators to reflect on whether they are meeting state standards.
- The Teacher Working Conditions survey results are being integrated into a newly crafted School Improvement Planning process as required by the State Board of Education.

With four iterations of the survey completed, analyses have been consistent and clear. The conditions teachers face in schools and classrooms are essential elements of student achievement and teacher retention.

Teacher Working Conditions are Student Learning Conditions

- Statistical models demonstrate that the presence of supportive school leadership and sufficient facilities and resources (instructional resources and technology, office equipment, etc.) are significant factors in explaining student achievement at all school levels. The models explained as much as 80 percent of the variance in school level achievement—as measured by the overall performance composite—with working conditions factors accounting for as much as 24 percent of the difference. Almost nine in ten educators at the highest performing schools agreed their school is a good place to work and learn compared to two-thirds in the lowest performing.
- The amount of time available to plan and collaborate and the ability of teachers to focus on students without interruption and additional duties were significant in explaining student achievement at the elementary and high school levels.

- Eight in ten teachers at the highest performing elementary schools report that there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in their school compared to six in ten in the lowest performing schools. Teachers in high performing schools at all levels were significantly more likely to report working in safe, trusting environments with supportive, effective school leadership and strong School Improvement Teams.
- Teaching conditions also impact school wide growth in student learning. In analyzing whether schools exceeded growth expectations, several working conditions areas were found to be important.
 - For every one point increase in the school leadership factor average, elementary schools were 85 percent more likely to exceed growth expectations. Schools were 82 percent more likely to exceed growth expectations for every one point increase in school factor averages in the area of time (collaboration, planning, sufficient class size, etc.).
 - For every one point increase in the facilities and resources factor average, middle schools were 98 percent more likely to exceed growth expectations. Middle schools with higher teacher turnover, higher class sizes and higher poverty students were less likely to exceed growth expectations in middle schools.
 - School leadership and facilities and resources were statistically significant in explaining whether schools met growth expectations at the high school level. For every one point increase in the facilities and resources factor average, high schools were 97 percent more likely to exceed growth expectations. High schools were 92 percent more likely to exceed growth expectations for every one point increase in the school leadership factor average.

Teacher Working Conditions are Essential for Keeping Teachers

- As found in previous surveys and corroborated by other research, the presence of working conditions is strongly connected to the future employment plans of North Carolina teachers and actual attrition. Teachers in the lowest turnover schools are significantly more likely to note the presence of an atmosphere of trust and effective school leadership and effective School Improvement Teams.
- Statistical models demonstrate that different working conditions are significant at different school levels in explaining teacher attrition.
 - At the elementary school level, school leadership was statistically significant in explaining school level turnover. Higher percentages of fully licensed teachers and the proportion of educators with advanced degrees were also significant.
 - At the middle school level, the role of teachers in making decisions—from teaching and classroom to school-wide practices—were significant in explaining

teacher turnover. Teachers in lower turnover schools were significantly more likely to play a large role in making various decisions. Smaller middle schools, those with higher proportions of licensed teachers and those serving less diverse students were more likely to have lower turnover.

- For high schools, those with higher factor averages in the area of facilities and resources were significantly more likely to have lower teacher attrition. The proportion of fully licensed teachers and school size were significant influences as well.
- Teachers who indicate that they want to remain teaching in their current school are almost three times more likely to report that the School Improvement Team is effective and almost twice as likely to report that teachers play at least a large role in school improvement planning. In looking at actual attrition, the greatest differences between the highest and lowest turnover schools at all levels is the overall perception of the school being a good place to work and learn, the effectiveness of the School Improvement Team, the presence of an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect, and the ability of leadership to shield teachers from disruption.

Additional Findings

- For the fourth consecutive iteration of the survey, educators were more positive about their working conditions. On virtually all questions and in all of the major survey areas, North Carolina educators were more likely to agree that they work in trusting, supportive environments.
- Principals and teachers have differing perceptions on whether working conditions are present and whether school leadership is making a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about their school environment. For example, about 6 out of 10 teachers agree that teachers are centrally involved in educational decision making compared to 97 percent of principals. The greatest disparity between principals and teachers are in the areas of educator and school leadership: the working conditions North Carolina educators perceive are most important to student learning and teacher retention.
- In 2008, principals were asked questions for the first time about the support they receive from districts. About 8 out of 10 principals indicate that they have sufficient staffing, are actively engaged in decisions at the district level that impact their school, and that professional development is both available and effective. Like teachers, principals report needing more time. Only half of principals report time to sufficiently focus on instructional issues, and 6 out of 10 report spending less than three hours in an average week working with teachers on instructional planning.
 - Principals who receive support from their district are more likely to provide positive working conditions for teachers. For example, principals trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction in the district are significantly

more likely to provide trusting environments for teachers, to provide training to teachers to fully utilize instructional technology and to provide effective professional development to teachers.

- Although 9 out of 10 new teachers (those with three years experience or less) report being assigned a mentor, one-third of new teachers report never planning during the school day or planning instruction with their mentor. New teachers who plan to stay in their school, however, report receiving more frequent mentoring support than those who want to move to a new school or leave the profession. Three-quarters of new teachers mentored report that it made at least some contribution to their success as a beginning teacher and about half agree that their mentoring experience was important in their decision to continue teaching at their school.
- Elementary educators are more positive about their working conditions than those at the secondary level in all areas except time. Almost half of elementary educators disagree that the non-instructional time—time to plan and collaborate—they receive is sufficient compared to three out of ten teachers at the secondary level. Forty-eight percent of elementary teachers report receiving three hours or less of non-instructional time in an average week, compared to 37 percent of middle school teachers and 35 percent of high school teachers.