

Working Conditions in DSSF Districts

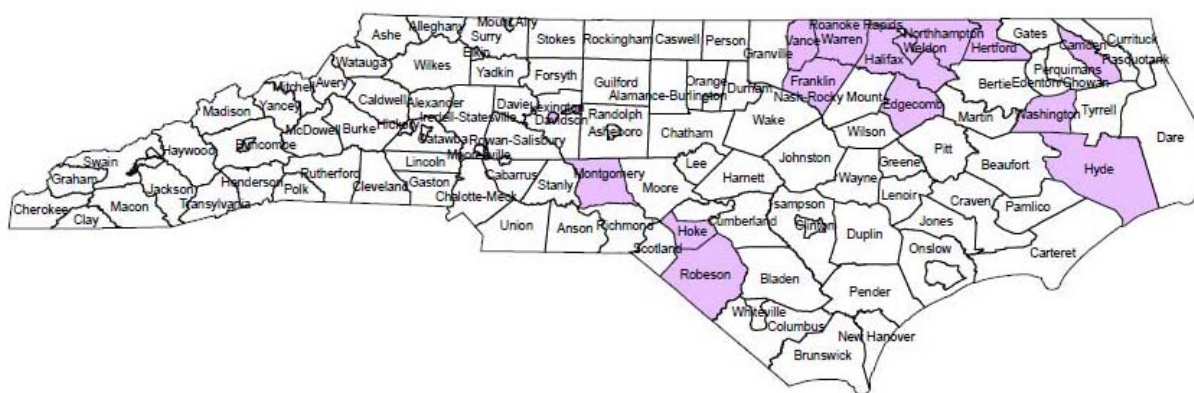
Since 2002, the Office of the Governor, the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission and the North Carolina State Board of Education have made a sustained commitment to listen to educators and reform schools to create the working conditions necessary for student and teacher success.

In 2010, over 105,000 educators responded to the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey (89 percent), the highest proportion since the advent of the survey in 2002. Every school district and traditional public school 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. Data from these respondents were made available in May 2010 at www.ncteachingconditions.org.

While all districts in North Carolina now receive additional support to work with high poverty students through the Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Fund (DSSF), the original program piloted in 2004 identified 16 districts “on the basis of four factors that indicated that their students were at significant risk academically. These factors included having 25 percent or more of their students failing to achieve proficiency on the ABC assessments, high teacher turnover, approximately a third of their teachers having less than five years of experience, and large percentages of students living in poverty.”¹ (Figure 1)²

FIGURE 1. THE 16 NORTH CAROLINA DSSF DISTRICTS



This research brief analyzes these high poverty, original DSSF districts to assess whether and how working conditions differ in order to better illuminate potential challenges to student learning, teacher recruitment and retention.

DSSF District Working Conditions Are Improving

Since 2008, the 16 DSSF districts have made great gains in all five areas assessed by both the NC 2008 and 2010 Teacher Working Conditions Surveys: Time, Facilities and Resources, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, and Professional Development. The greatest improvements occurred in the areas of staff development and school leadership.

As was the case across the entire state, the percentage of teachers agreeing that positive working conditions exist in their schools is greater in 2010 than in 2008 (Table 1).

- Three-quarters of educators (76 percent) in DSSF districts in 2010 agree that sufficient resources are available for teacher professional development in their school, whereas half (53 percent) agreed in 2008.

These resources appear to be helping as nine out of 10 (88 percent) DSSF educators indicate that professional development enhances teachers' abilities to improve student learning compared to two-thirds (67 percent) in 2008.

- Educators are much more positive about leaderships' efforts to address teacher concerns, particularly in the areas of teacher and school leadership. In 2010, eight out of 10 educators (82 percent) indicate sustained efforts are made to improve teacher leadership compared to six out of 10 (62 percent) in 2008. Previous analyses of working conditions results in North Carolina have demonstrated that school leadership is an essential component to teacher retention.
- Educators are more positive about their abilities to solve problems. About three-quarters (78 percent) report that their school takes steps to solve problems and that there are effective decision making processes in place (72 percent) in 2010, significantly more than in 2008.

TABLE 1. COMPARISON OF PERCENT AGREEMENT ACROSS SAME OR SIMILARLY WORDED ITEMS: DSSF DISTRICTS 2008-2010

NC TWC	Percent Agreement		
	<i>DSSF Districts 2008</i>	<i>DSSF Districts 2010</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Sufficient resources are available for professional development in my school.	53.44	76.14	22.70
Teachers are relied upon to make decisions about educational issues.	57.28	79.72	22.44
Professional development enhances teachers' abilities to improve student learning.	66.80	88.06	21.26
The school improvement team provides effective leadership at this school.	57.74	78.73	20.99
The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about teacher leadership.	62.18	82.35	20.17
The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about leadership issues.	59.46	76.68	17.21
An appropriate amount of time is provided for professional development.	62.58	79.22	16.64
In this school we take steps to solve problems.	61.37	77.50	16.13
The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about facilities and resources.	68.03	83.70	15.66
The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about new teacher support.	63.83	79.48	15.66
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions to solve problems.	58.03	72.63	14.59
Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.	68.95	81.98	13.03
The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about professional development.	69.30	81.45	12.16
The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about the use of time in my school.	65.79	77.50	11.71
The faculty work in a school environment that is safe.	78.31	89.03	10.72
The school leadership consistently supports teachers.	65.24	74.22	8.98
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school.	59.40	67.26	7.86

These cross-district results, however, obscure wide variation in working conditions across DSSF schools. Several schools within the DSSF districts declined significantly in critical working conditions areas (Figure 2).

- **Trust and Support:** About one out of five schools in DSSF districts (32) have significantly fewer educators reporting that there is an atmosphere of trust and

mutual respect in their school, while at the same time almost half (44 percent) of schools improved dramatically on this question. Previous analyses have demonstrated that the presence of an atmosphere of trust is critical to the future employment plans of teachers and the ability of staff to work collaboratively toward improved student outcomes. Additionally, at least 10 percent fewer educators in 27 schools agree

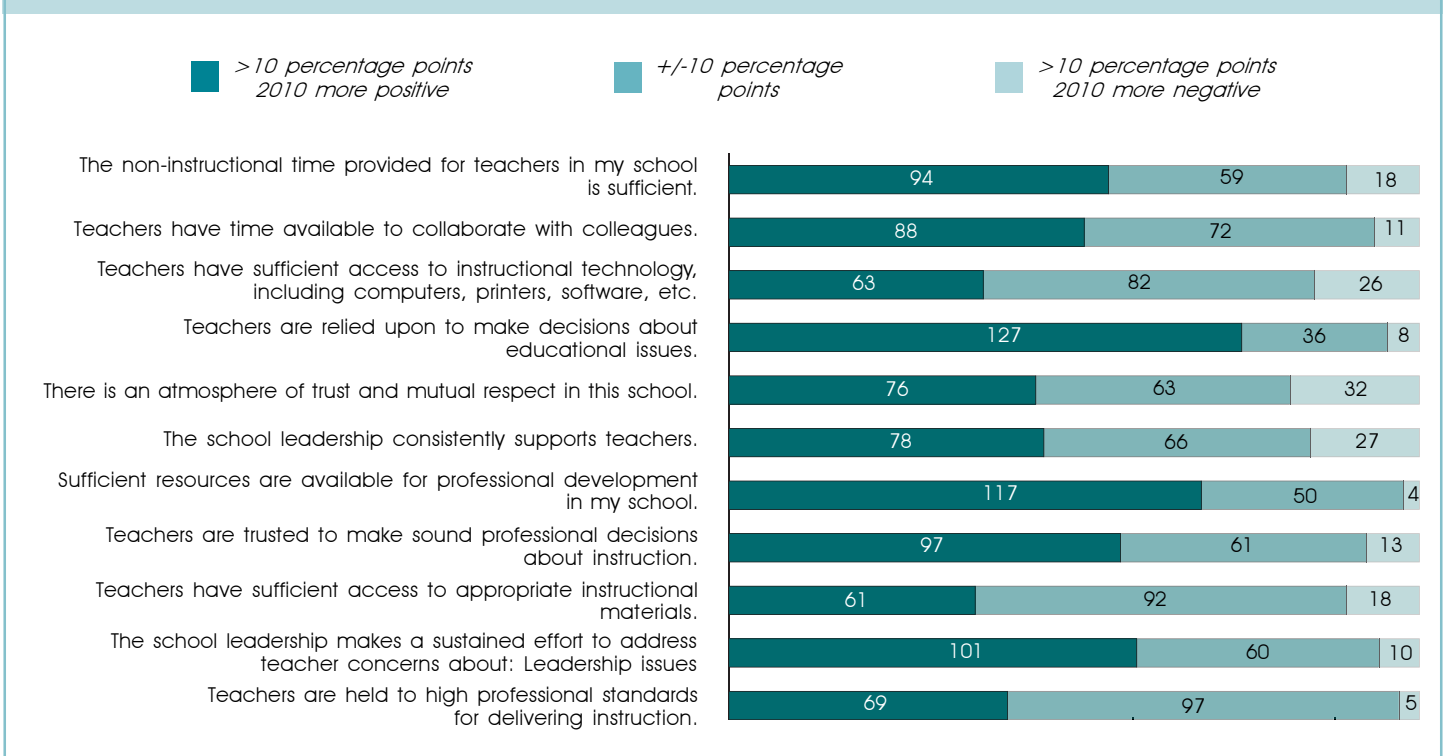
that leadership consistently supports teachers and 10 percent fewer educators in 13 schools agree that they are trusted to make sound decisions about instruction.

- Sufficient Resources:** While in 63 schools more educators report that sufficient resources are available for instructional technology, 10 percent fewer educators are in agreement to this item in 26 schools. At least ten percent fewer educators in 18 DSSF schools report that there are sufficient instructional resources in 2010 than in 2008.

- Time to Plan and Collaborate:** Time available for planning and collaboration declined by more than ten percent in 18 DSSF schools and educators in 11 schools are less likely to report that teachers had time available to collaborate with colleagues.

While DSSF districts overall are making improvements in working conditions, there are individual schools where this is not the case. Careful study of school-level findings are critical to determine where specific schools may be in need of additional support and resources and where facilitated dialogue on assessing and improving these conditions may be helpful.

FIGURE 2. CHANGE IN RATE OF AGREEMENT AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL ON SELECT QUESTIONS BETWEEN 2008 AND 2010



Educators in DSSF Districts Are More Positive About Professional Development Than Their Colleagues Across the State

As was found in previous years, educators in DSSF districts are more likely to note positive working conditions in the area of professional supports (Table 2), due in part to the additional resources from DSSF and other federal funds that disproportionately flow to schools serving high poverty students.

- Smaller, but significant differences around several aspects of professional development were found, including the evaluation and differentiation of learning opportunities, as well as the impact of professional development in deepening content knowledge.

- DSSF educators are more positive about areas that can impact instruction, including class sizes (69 versus 62 percent) and the timeliness of assessment data (82 versus 76 percent), and sufficiency of instructional time (73 versus 69 percent).

DSSF Districts Report Concerns About Community Engagement and Student Conduct

While there have been improvements in working conditions in DSSF districts according to educators, there are several areas where educators in these districts report deficiencies relative to the rest of the state, particularly in the areas of Community Engagement and Managing Student Conduct (Table 3).

TABLE 2. WORKING CONDITIONS WHERE DSSF EDUCATORS ARE MORE POSITIVE

NC 2010 TWC	Percent Agreement		
	<i>Non-DSSF Districts</i>	<i>DSSF Districts</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.	61.72	68.77	7.05*
State assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	76.04	81.71	5.67*
Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	68.81	72.76	3.96*
Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do.	54.40	57.81	3.41*
Professional development is differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers.	64.95	68.04	3.08*
Professional development is evaluated and results are communicated to teachers.	66.14	68.44	2.30*
Professional development deepens teachers' content knowledge.	78.46	80.73	2.26*
The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.	63.48	64.85	1.36*
Teachers have autonomy to make decisions about instructional delivery (i.e. pacing, materials and pedagogy).	77.22	78.50	1.28*
Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students.	69.95	71.07	1.11

* Statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level (two-tailed)

- DSSF educators are less likely to report feeling supported by and engaging parents/guardians and the community. Six out of 10 (60 percent) DSSF educators agree that parents support teachers, compared to three-quarters (74 percent) in non-DSSF districts. They are less likely to report that the community supports teachers and the school, that parents know what is going on in the school and that they are influential decision makers in the school.
- DSSF educators are significantly less likely to note that students understand expectations and follow rules of student conduct.
- Some differences in the availability of resources are noted, particularly in the area of communication technology (80 percent in DSSF districts versus 85 percent in other North Carolina districts).

TABLE 3. WORKING CONDITIONS WHERE DSSF DISTRICTS ARE MORE NEGATIVE

NC 2010 TWC	Percent Agreement		
	<i>State</i>	<i>DSSF</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Students at this school follow rules of conduct.	71.52	58.68	- 12.84*
Parents/guardians support teachers, contributing to their success with students.	74.37	62.51	- 11.86*
Parents/guardians are influential decision makers in this school.	72.26	60.80	- 11.46*
The community we serve is supportive of this school.	85.24	75.10	- 10.14*
Community members support teachers, contributing to their success with students.	83.62	74.67	- 8.95*
Parents/guardians know what is going on in this school.	86.23	78.47	- 7.76*
This school maintains clear, two-way communication with the community.	89.33	82.68	- 6.65*
Students at this school understand expectations for their conduct.	85.64	80.47	- 5.17*
Teachers have access to reliable communication technology, including phones, faxes and email.	89.21	84.25	- 4.97*
This school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement.	90.04	85.23	- 4.82*

* Statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level (two-tailed)

Principals and Teachers in DSSF Districts Still Have Professional Development Needs That Have Not Yet Been Met

While DSSF educators are more positive than their colleagues about professional development, there appear to be some challenges in providing sufficient support in key areas, particularly around differentiating instruction to diverse learners. Over half of the teachers in DSSF districts indicate a great need for professional development in the areas of integrating technology into instruction (61 percent), differentiating instruction (57 percent), working with students with disabilities (55 percent), and closing the achievement gap (54 percent) (Table 4).

- In 2010, a greater proportion of DSSF teachers indicated a need for additional support in working

with special education students and closing the achievement gap than in 2008. DSSF teachers were twice as likely in 2010 to report needing assistance in working with gifted and talented students (47 percent versus 24 percent), and significantly more likely to need additional professional development to work with English Language Learners (47 percent versus 27 percent).

- In all areas on the survey, DSSF teachers report a greater need for professional development in 2010 than in 2008, perhaps due to the changing demographics of students in these districts, a greater awareness of different instructional practices that are successful with students, or higher than average teacher turnover.

TABLE 4. NEEDS FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT, 2008-2010

Professional Development Area	Percent Agreement		
	<i>Percent Indicating a Need for Support, 2010</i>	<i>Percent Indicating a Need for Support, 2008</i>	<i>Difference</i>
Integrating technology into instruction	60.7	Not asked	---
Differentiating instruction	57.2	Not asked	---
Special education (students with disabilities)	55.1	40.0	15.1
Closing the achievement gap	54.1	41.9	12.2
Special education (gifted and talented)	47.2	23.6	23.6
English Language Learners	47.1	27.2	19.9
Reading strategies	43.4	32.5	10.9
Methods of teaching	35.0	23.1	11.9
Student assessment	33.9	20.1	13.8
Your content area	33.5	21.1	12.4
Classroom management techniques	31.7	30.1	1.6

Despite these needs, few DSSF teachers received significant professional development (at least 10 or more clock hours over the past two years) for working with several high needs populations. While about half of DSSF teachers received significant professional development in their content area (57 percent), integrating technology into instruction (49 percent) and differentiating instruction (48 percent), only one out of 10 had equivalent support in working with gifted and talented students and 2 out of 10 in working with English Language Learners and Special Education students (18 percent each).

Like teachers, the professional development needs of DSSF principals have changed since 2008 (Table 5).

Principals are three times more likely to report needing additional support on teacher evaluation in 2010 than in 2008, likely due to the implementation of the new teacher evaluation process across DSSF districts and the state over the past two years. Additionally, more principals in DSSF districts are reporting a need for support in school scheduling, student assessment, school improvement planning and creating positive learning environments. Likely due to professional development received over the past biennium, principals are half as likely to report needing additional support in data-driven decision making as well as working with parents and the community.

TABLE 5. AREAS PRINCIPALS IDENTIFY NEEDING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

Professional Development Area	Percent Agreement		
	<i>Percent Indicating a Need for Support, 2010</i>	<i>Percent Indicating a Need for Support, 2008</i>	<i>Difference</i>
School scheduling	44.0	29.2	14.8
Student assessment	42.5	34.0	8.5
Creating positive learning environments	40.6	31.3	9.3
School improvement planning	38.3	28.5	9.8
Teacher remediation/coaching	34.3	36.1	- 1.8
Instructional leadership	32.7	31.3	1.4
Staffing (hiring, etc.)	30.9	25.0	5.9
Teacher evaluation	30.0	9.7	20.3
Budgeting	28.5	30.6	- 2.1
Data-driven decision making	26.6	52.1	- 25.5
Working with parents and the community	15.0	28.5	- 13.5

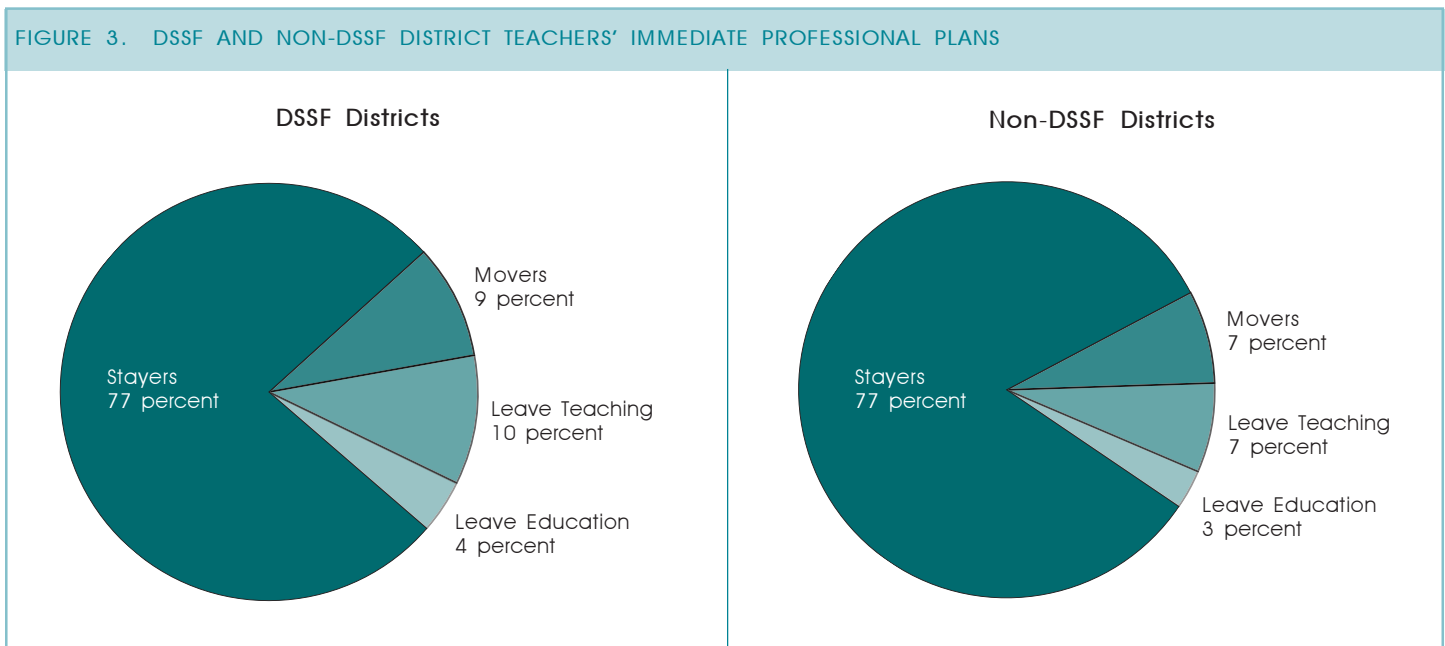
Teachers in DSSF Schools Are Less Likely to Stay

Given the disparities in working conditions in DSSF districts in the areas of Community Engagement and Managing Student Conduct, it is not surprising that fewer DSSF teachers report wanting to remain teaching in their current school.

An examination of the self-reported future employment plans of teachers shows that a greater proportion of DSSF teachers are likely to leave their current school (Figure 3). Seventy-seven percent of DSSF teachers report that their immediate plans are to remain teaching in their current

school (“stayers”), compared to 83 percent of other teachers across the state. They are also more likely to want to “leave” teaching to move into another position within education or move to a new school and remain teaching.

While teachers in DSSF districts are more inclined to leave their current teaching assignment than teachers in non-DSSF districts, it appears both groups’ immediate career plans are motivated by very similar conditions. Both groups indicate School Leadership (27 percent) as the condition which affects their decision to stay, followed by Instructional Practices and Support (18 percent), and Teacher Leadership (11 percent).



Summary

Overall, teachers and principals in DSSF districts are more positive about working conditions in 2010 than they were in 2008, similar to the state as a whole.

Working conditions such as class size, the use of time, and teacher and school leadership have improved dramatically in DSSF districts. Additionally, teachers in DSSF districts are more positive about some aspects of professional development than teachers across the state.

Challenges remain in DSSF districts, particularly in the areas of Community Engagement and Managing Student Conduct. DSSF educators are significantly less likely to note that parents/guardians and the community are supportive and engaged in school decision making and that students understand and follow student conduct rules. Additional professional development opportunities noted by DSSF teachers as necessary to support meeting students with diverse learning needs can help drive improvements in both areas and bolster teacher retention and student learning.

Notes

1. First Report of the Evaluation of the Disadvantaged Student Supplement Fund, April 2007, NC SBE
2. DSSF districts include Edgecombe, Elizabeth City/Pasquotank, Franklin, Halifax, Hertford, Hoke, Hyde, Lexington City, Montgomery, Northampton, Robeson, Thomasville City, Vance, Warren, Washington, and Weldon City.

About the New Teacher Center

The New Teacher Center is a national organization dedicated to improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders. NTC strengthens school communities through proven mentoring and professional development programs, online learning environments, policy advocacy, and research. Since 1998, the NTC has served over 49,000 teachers, 5,000 mentors, and touched millions of students across America.



725 Front Street, Suite 400, Santa Cruz, CA 95060
831-600-2200 | Fax: 831-427-9017 | info@newteachercenter.org
www.newteachercenter.org