



Principal Working Conditions

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, a record 105,688 educators responded to the NC Teacher Working Conditions (TWC) Survey (89 percent). Every school district and traditional public school in the state of North Carolina reached the minimum response rate (40 percent) necessary to receive 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.

Having these data for all schools is essential since North Carolina's Professional Educator Evaluation instruments now rely on the Teacher Working Conditions Survey as an essential data artifact for educators to reflect whether they are meeting state standards. The North Carolina State Board of Education also recommends the Teacher Working

Conditions Survey results be integrated into the annual School Improvement Plans.

Survey respondents included 2,100 principals who were asked questions both about the working conditions in their school and the supports they received as school leaders from their district. Assessing principal working conditions is important given the critical role principals play in establishing school policies, setting the tone within the school, providing leadership and implementing the school improvement plans. Analyses from the 2008 Teacher Working Conditions Survey demonstrated that principals who report more supportive conditions are better able to provide positive teaching conditions for their faculty.

About the Responding Principals

Responding principals are well distributed in their experiences as a school leader, with 11 percent in their first year as a principal. About half (46 percent) have been the principal in their current school for three years or less with 15 percent in their first year at the building. Fifteen percent have been the leader of their school for ten years or more.

Principals Report That They Are Supported

Principals in North Carolina are very positive about several aspects of the support they receive from their school district, enabling them to create positive working conditions in their school. Consider the following:

- Eighty-four percent of principals agree that their school has a sufficient number of licensed staff to meet the educational needs of their students. Seven in 10 (72 percent) agree that they have a sufficient number of support staff, with almost nine in 10 (87 percent) agreeing that they receive instructional resources commensurate to meet the needs of students.
- Eight out of 10 principals (84 percent) agree that they are actively involved in district decisions about educational issues. Almost nine in 10 principals note that they receive resources that are commensurate with other schools (89 percent) and virtually all principals (97 percent) report that their school is provided sufficient data and information to make informed decisions.
- More than eight out of 10 principals agree that their district encourages cooperation among schools (84 percent) and almost all principals report that there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within their district (97 percent) and that central office provides principals support when they need it (94 percent).
- Almost eight out of 10 principals (79 percent) agree that professional development for principals is a

priority in his or her district, and that sufficient resources are available to participate in professional development opportunities (73 percent).

Overall, principals appear satisfied as nine out of 10 (91 percent) agree that their school is a good place to work and learn. Additionally, 88 percent of principals who responded indicate that their immediate plans are to continue as principal at their current school, and an additional two percent indicate that their plans are to serve as a principal in a different school within the same district. When asked, principals indicated that teacher leadership (24 percent), instructional practices and support (23 percent), and school leadership (21 percent) are the aspects of their working conditions that most affect their willingness to remain as an administrator at their school.

Principals Need More Time to Provide Instructional Leadership

The greatest concern expressed by principals is about the time they have to do their job. New obligations in principal standards, a recent formative, coaching-based evaluation procedure for teacher development, and the demanding expectations of leading a school in the 21st century place additional strains on the amount of time principals have available.

Almost one-third of principals disagree that central office has streamlined procedures to minimize principals' time on non-instructional tasks and that principals have sufficient time to focus on instructional leadership issues (e.g., data analysis, professional development, etc.).

Principals spend more time on administrative tasks than on instructional leadership to bolster teaching and learning in their school (Table 1).

- Principals appear to be spending most of their time in an administrative capacity, with more than 90 percent of respondents spending more than 3 hours a week on administrative duties and 49 percent spending more than 10 hours weekly.
- A majority of principals spend less than three hours a week covering classes (61 percent), attending central office meetings (77 percent), and working directly with students (67 percent).
- More time is spent working with parents and the community, with more than one-third of principals spending, on average, an hour per day on these meetings. One-quarter spend a commensurate amount of time on student discipline issues.
- About two-thirds of principals report spending more than three hours a week observing and coaching teachers (67 percent); four out of 10 spend similar amounts of time on instructional planning with teachers.

TABLE 1. THE AMOUNT OF TIME PRINCIPALS DEVOTE TO VARIOUS ACTIVITIES IN AN AVERAGE WEEK

| Activities | Amount of time devoted weekly | | | | | |
|--|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--|--|---|---------------------------|
| | <i>None</i> | <i>Less than 1 hours</i> | <i>More than 1 but less than or equal to 3 hours</i> | <i>More than 3 but less than or equal to 5 hours</i> | <i>More than 5 but less than or equal to 10 hours</i> | <i>More than 10 hours</i> |
| Instructional planning with teachers | 1.1 | 15.8 | 43.2 | 25.9 | 12.2 | 1.8 |
| Observing and coaching teachers | 0.1 | 4.0 | 29.2 | 34.9 | 24.1 | 7.7 |
| Covering classes for certified or non-certified absences on-site | 37.0 | 46.2 | 11.7 | 3.5 | 1.3 | 0.2 |
| Meetings with or sponsored by central office | 2.4 | 28.1 | 46.5 | 18.0 | 4.4 | 0.6 |
| Personnel issues | 2.7 | 18.8 | 33.6 | 25.6 | 13.9 | 5.4 |
| Administrative duties | 0.0 | 0.7 | 5.7 | 17.4 | 26.9 | 49.3 |
| Meetings with parents and the community | 0.1 | 5.1 | 27.7 | 33.8 | 25.4 | 8.3 |
| Student discipline issues | 0.5 | 13.5 | 32.5 | 27.4 | 17.2 | 8.9 |
| Working directly with students (i.e. teaching, tutoring, etc.) | 5.3 | 30.9 | 32.1 | 17.4 | 9.4 | 5.0 |

Principals Need More Support Working with Teachers

Principals were asked to identify areas in which additional support would help them to lead their schools more effectively (Table 2). Principals report needing additional help evaluating and coaching teachers and working with student learning data.

- In 2010, support in teacher remediation/coaching is the most identified area of professional development need (45 percent), followed by student assessment (44 percent). In 2008 these ranked third and fourth, respectively, in terms of need. Implementation of a new statewide teacher evaluation system which began in the 2008-2009 school year utilizes a formative, coaching-based approach. The implementation of this new system may be contributing greatly to the increased need of support in this area.

- Four out of 10 principals indicate that they need support in data-driven decision-making (42 percent) and teacher evaluation (40 percent). In 2008 data-driven decision-making was ranked first among professional development needs, whereas 11 percent of responding principals indicated a need for professional development around teacher evaluation. Additional support needs in the area of teacher evaluation are also most likely in response to the new teacher evaluation instrument.
- One-third of principals indicate a need for additional support in the areas of instructional leadership (36 percent), budgeting (34 percent), working with parents and the community (32 percent), and school improvement planning (31 percent).

TABLE 2. AREAS PRINCIPALS IDENTIFIED NEEDING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

| Professional Development Area | Principals Indicating Need for Support | | |
|---|---|---|-------------------|
| | <i>Percent Indicating a need for Support 2010</i> | <i>Percent Indicating a need for Support 2008</i> | <i>Difference</i> |
| Teacher remediation/coaching | 45.7 | 32.0 | 13.7 |
| Student assessment | 44.0 | 30.0 | 14.0 |
| Data-driven decision making | 42.1 | 48.0 | - 5.9 |
| Teacher evaluation | 40.0 | 11.0 | 29.0 |
| Instructional leadership | 35.8 | 32.0 | 3.8 |
| Budgeting | 34.1 | 28.0 | 6.1 |
| Working with parents and the community | 32.2 | 20.0 | 12.2 |
| School improvement planning | 31.4 | 24.0 | 7.4 |
| School scheduling | 29.7 | 27.0 | 2.7 |
| Creating positive learning environments | 27.8 | 23.0 | 4.8 |
| Staffing (hiring, etc.) | 15.7 | 14.0 | 1.7 |

Mentoring and induction support for principals also appears to be an issue for new principals. About half (48 percent) of the 678 new principals with three years of experience or less who responded to the survey were formally assigned a mentor, but many of those who received induction support were not ever observed in their school by their mentor (41 percent) nor did they observe their mentor's school (54 percent). Additionally, three out of 10 supported new principals (29 percent) report not engaging in any school improvement planning with their mentor.

Principals View Working Conditions More Positively Than in 2008

Compared to 2008, principals across the state are even more favorable about many aspects of their school's working conditions. On all but one of the similarly worded items, principals are more positive (as with teachers, class sizes are reasonable was the only exception). In some cases, 10 percent more principals were positive about school conditions.

Principals View Many Working Conditions Differently Than Teachers

Whereas some differences in perceptions of teaching conditions should be expected between "bosses" and "employees" in any industry, the disparity between principals and teachers across North Carolina schools is large. On every survey item the 2,100 principals responded significantly more positively about teacher working conditions than the approximately 92,000 participating teachers. The greatest gaps in perception

between teachers and principals are in the areas of time and student conduct (Table 3).

- The greatest differences in perceptions are on items in the time construct, particularly around the amount of paperwork and duties required of teachers, the non-instructional time provided to teachers, and interruptions during the school day. For example, only half of teachers (52 percent) agree that efforts are made to minimize paperwork compared to virtually all principals (96 percent).
- Teachers and principals differ in their perceptions of student conduct and efforts to enforce rules of conduct. Almost all principals agree that school administrators consistently enforce rules for student conduct compared to seven out of 10 teachers (69 percent), a difference of 30 percentage points. Similar disparities are found in perceptions of students following rules of conduct.
- Principals are much more likely to report that teachers feel comfortable raising issues and that there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect.
- Principals and teachers perceive instructional issues differently as well. Two-thirds of teachers (66 percent) report that teachers are assigned classes that maximize their chance of success compared to almost all principals (97 percent). Principals are significantly more likely to agree that professional development is differentiated to meet individual teachers' needs.

TABLE 3. TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER WORKING CONDITIONS

| NC 2010 TWC Survey Items | Percent Agreeing | | |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Principals</i> | <i>Teachers</i> | <i>Difference</i> |
| Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do. | 95.5 | 52.0 | 43.5 |
| Teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students. | 97.1 | 66.1 | 31.0 |
| School administrators consistently enforce rules for student conduct. | 99.4 | 69.1 | 30.3 |
| Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them. | 98.4 | 69.0 | 29.4 |
| The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient. | 90.0 | 61.2 | 28.8 |
| Students at this school follow rules of conduct. | 98.0 | 69.4 | 28.6 |
| Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students. | 96.8 | 68.6 | 28.2 |
| Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions. | 97.1 | 68.9 | 28.2 |
| Professional development is differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers. | 89.0 | 63.2 | 25.8 |
| There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school. | 96.9 | 71.3 | 25.6 |

Although teachers and principals vary greatly in their perception of the use of time in school and managing student conduct, the gap is significantly smaller in areas related to school leaderships’ efforts to address concerns about teacher leadership, instructional practices and support, and community support and involvement (Table 4).

Eight out of 10 teachers (84 percent) agree that their school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher leadership concerns in their school (although 99 percent of principals agree) and concerns about instructional practices and support (87 percent of teachers agree versus 99 percent of principals). Additionally, principals and teachers are more in agreement that leadership makes a sustained effort to address concerns about facilities and resources and community support and

involvement with differences between principals and teachers at or below 12 percentage points.

Wide disparities between the perceptions of principals and teachers have been documented in analyses of North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey data since its inception in 2002. These findings are typical in other states as well. It should not be inferred from these findings that principals do not want to address conditions in these areas. Rather, they do not perceive that these are issues of concern to the same extent as teachers. This perceptual gap is important for school leaders to consider when prioritizing issues for school improvement.

TABLE 4. TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP EFFORTS TO ADDRESS WORKING CONDITIONS

| The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about: | Percent Agreeing | | |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| | <i>Principals</i> | <i>Teachers</i> | <i>Difference in Perception</i> |
| The use of time in my school | 99.1 | 77.3 | 21.8 |
| Managing student conduct | 99.1 | 77.8 | 21.3 |
| Leadership issues | 99.1 | 78.6 | 20.5 |
| New teacher support | 98.5 | 81.9 | 16.6 |
| Professional development | 98.8 | 82.4 | 16.4 |
| Teacher leadership | 99.1 | 84.0 | 15.1 |
| Facilities and resources | 99.1 | 85.6 | 13.5 |
| Instructional practices and support | 99.3 | 87.3 | 12.0 |
| Community support and involvement | 98.8 | 86.9 | 11.9 |

Conclusion

Like teachers, principals need supportive working conditions to provide the leadership necessary to create school environments where teachers want to stay and students learn. Overall these findings suggest that principals believe they are supported and that they are supporting positive working conditions in their school. Time allocation emerges as a challenge in that while much of principals’ use of time occurs in the area of administrative duties, parent meetings, and discipline, more time is needed in the areas of teacher coaching and

instructional support. This is reinforced by the new principal standards and teacher evaluation process as well as the finding that teacher leadership plays an important role in retaining principals at their school. Shifts in the role of the principal to address these emerging issues are likely shaping their desire for more professional development in those same areas. While overall principals are more positive about their working conditions, wide gaps continue to be found between their views and teachers. Awareness of these disparities is critical for designing effective school improvement plans and engaging in productive dialog to improve teacher working conditions.

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.



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