

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Brief: Working Conditions Influence Teacher Retention

Eric Hirsch, *New Teacher Center* with
Keri Church, *LEARN NC*

Since 2001, 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 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 2008 at www.ncteachingconditions.org.

With four iterations of the survey completed, analyses have been consistent and clear. The conditions teachers face in schools and classrooms are critical to teacher retention. Analyses from 2004 and 2006 demonstrate that effective leadership that provides sufficient planning

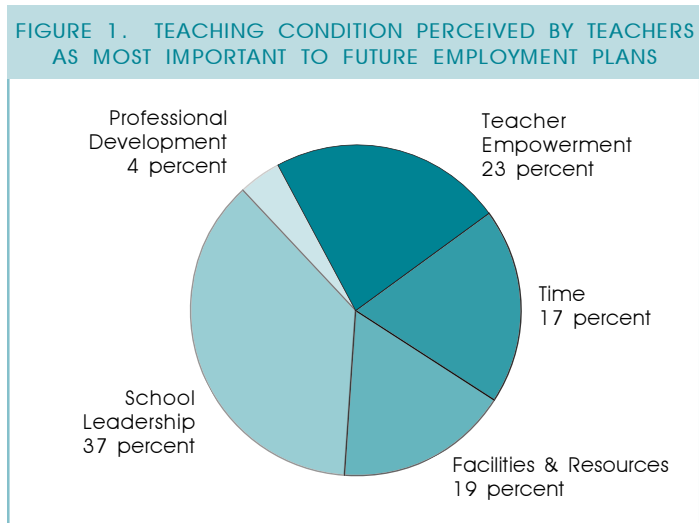
time and empowers teachers in trusting environments are essential to retaining teachers (Hirsch and Emerick, 2007; Hirsch 2005).

With the 2008 survey data, the New Teacher Center analyzed the relationship between working conditions and two measures of teacher retention: actual school level turnover and the future employment plans as self reported on the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Supporting statistical documentation on the data utilized, survey questions included in the working conditions areas examined (Leadership, Decision Making, Professional Development, Time and Facilities and Resources) and statistical models developed are available in the research section of www.ncteachingconditions.org.

Findings

On the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, more than one-third (37 percent) of teachers indicate that School Leadership is the most important working condition influencing their decision about where to work (Figure 1). About twice as many teachers selected Leadership as Facilities and Resources and Time.

Approximately one-quarter (23 percent) of teachers report that empowerment is most important in deciding whether to remain working in their current school.



Evidence throughout the survey indicates that North Carolina teachers with positive perceptions about their working conditions, particularly in the areas of school leadership and teacher empowerment, are much more likely to want to stay at their current school (Table 1).

- *Issues related to teacher engagement in a clear and effective decision making process led by the School Improvement Team (SIT) influence teachers' decisions about where to work.* Three-quarters of those who want to continue working in their current school agree that members of the SIT are elected compared to four out of ten teachers (43 percent) who want to stay in the profession but work elsewhere. There are large and significant differences between teachers who want to stay and move on issues such as taking steps to solve problems, having an effective SIT, having an effective

decision making process, and teachers being centrally involved in decision making.

- *Leadership that supports teachers is an important influence on where they work.* More than three-quarters (78 percent) of teachers who want to stay working in their school agree that school leadership consistently supports teachers compared to less than half (47 percent) of movers. Leadership's communication about expectations, enforcement of student conduct rules, and ability to shield teachers from unnecessary disruptions impact whether teachers want to remain in their school.

In looking at actual attrition, the greatest differences between the highest- and lowest-turnover schools at all levels are the overall perceptions 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.

To better understand the connections between working conditions and both actual attrition and future employment plans, statistical models were created for elementary, middle and high schools. This modeling moves beyond correlations by controlling for various factors to better determine whether there is a direct relationship between particular working conditions and teacher retention in light of the multitude of factors that influence where educators work.

- *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

of fully licensed teachers and school size were significant influences as well.

- *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 proportion 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

Conclusion

Statistical models demonstrate that the presence of supportive school leadership, teacher engagement in decision making and the sufficiency of resources are significant factors in explaining teacher retention at all school levels. Positive working conditions, where educators are supported and empowered, are essential to creating schools where teachers and administrators want to work and students thrive.

TABLE 1. DIFFERENCES IN THE PERCEPTIONS OF STAYERS, MOVERS AND LEAVERS ON TEACHER WORKING CONDITIONS QUESTIONS

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey Questions	Percentage of Educators Agreeing		
	<i>Stayers</i>	<i>Movers</i>	<i>Leavers</i>
Members of the school improvement team are elected	75.7%	42.9%	55.0%
The school leadership consistently supports teachers	78.1%	47.0%	58.8%
In this school we take steps to solve problems	74.6%	46.4%	56.5%
The school leadership communicates clear expectations to students and parents	71.0%	43.6%	53.7%
The faculty and staff have a shared vision	78.0%	50.8%	59.5%
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems	68.3%	41.4%	51.2%
The School Improvement Team provides effective leadership	68.5%	41.6%	51.3%
The school leadership consistently enforces rules for student conduct	76.2%	49.7%	59.6%
The school leadership shields teachers from disruptions, allowing teachers to focus on educating students	66.6%	40.8%	49.4%
Teachers are centrally involved in decision making about educational issues	66.3%	41.1%	50.2%

Note: Items are ordered based on the greatest disparity between stayers and movers.

References

Hirsch, E. and Emerick S. with K. Church and E. Fuller (2007). *Teacher Working Conditions are Student Learning Conditions: A Report on the 2006 North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey*. Hillsborough, N.C.: Center for Teaching Quality.

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About The New Teacher Center

The New Teacher Center (NTC) was established in 1998 as a national resource focused on teacher and administrator induction. NTC implements and promotes induction best practices through a variety of innovative professional development opportunities and materials that assist educators and policy makers in supporting the next generation of education professionals. Using an integrated, collaborative approach, NTC strives to support essential research, well-informed policy, and thoughtful practice that encourage teacher development from pre-service throughout the career of a teacher.

New Teacher Center

Improving Teaching and Learning in America's Schools



725 Front Street, Suite 400, Santa Cruz, CA 95060
831-459-4323 | Fax: 831-459-3822 | info@newteachercenter.org
www.newteachercenter.org



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