

# Governor Easley's Teacher Working Conditions Initiative

## Executive Summary



In 2002, North Carolina became the first state in the nation to ask educators what they need to succeed and since then Governor Mike Easley has administered the Teacher Working Conditions Survey three times to educators across the state. From this feedback, it is clear that improving teacher working conditions—planning time, professional development, leadership, empowerment, and facilities and resources—will improve student learning conditions and help retain teachers.

In 2006, a record 75,600 school-based licensed educators (more than 66 percent) responded to this important survey. More than 85 percent of the state's schools (1,985) reached the minimum response rate (40 percent) necessary to provide valid data. Data from this most recent survey will continue to provide educators, stakeholders and policy makers a powerful tool to help make every school in North Carolina a better place to teach and to learn.

### MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE 2006 TEACHER WORKING CONDITIONS SURVEY

#### 1. Teacher Working Conditions Are Student Learning Conditions

- Elementary schools in which 60 percent or more of the faculty agree that class sizes are reasonable are more likely to meet or exceed academic growth expectations.
- Middle schools in which 80 percent or more of the faculty agree that there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect more likely to meet or exceed academic growth expectations.
- High schools in which teachers rated school leadership more positively were more likely to meet or exceed academic growth expectations.

#### 2. School Leadership and Planning Time Affects Teacher Retention

- In middle schools, for every increase in the number of teachers who agree they have sufficient planning time *without* student contact, there is a decline in teacher turnover rates.
- In high schools, for every increase in the number of teachers who agree their school leadership is effective, there is decrease in teacher turnover rates.

#### 3. Teacher Working Conditions in North Carolina Have Improved and Are Better Than in Other States

- Improvements in teacher working conditions in North Carolina between 2004 and 2006 are evident, especially when compared to working conditions in other states. Teachers in North Carolina noted more positive working conditions than educators in Kansas, Arizona, Ohio and Clark County, Nevada (Las Vegas), all locales that replicated the North Carolina Working Conditions Initiative.

#### 4. Working Conditions Results Were More Likely to Improve in Schools Where Teachers Indicated that They Had Used Prior Survey Results

- Teachers at elementary and middle schools in which prior survey results were not used were much less likely to agree that positive leadership and empowerment conditions were present in their schools.

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*Teachers in North Carolina noted more positive working conditions than educators in Kansas, Arizona, Ohio and Clark County, Nevada (Las Vegas), all locales that replicated the North Carolina Working Conditions Initiative.*

*Teachers in schools serving a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students consistently reported more negative working conditions on critical issues such as school safety and trust.*

*Target funding for professional development for principals and teacher leaders to work together to improve working conditions.*

## **6. Schools Vary in the Quality of Teacher Working Conditions, Despite Available Resources**

- Teachers in schools serving a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students consistently reported more negative working conditions on critical issues such as school safety and trust. However, teachers in high poverty schools were also more likely to report presence of sufficient class sizes and resources for professional development that increased teachers' knowledge and skills.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **1. Bolster School Improvement Teams (SITs) and Find More Ways to Engage Teachers in Decision Making**

- Conduct a statewide audit of the SIT process.
- Provide more structured guidance and increase technical assistance for SITs.
- Consider areas in which teachers can be better engaged in decision making and provide them with additional knowledge and skills to better participate in the decision making process.

#### **2. Continue Investments in School Leadership and Supportive School Communities**

- Target funding for professional development for principals and teacher leaders to work together to improve working conditions.

#### **3. Provide Support for Schools to Reform Teacher Working Conditions**

- Create professional development training and tools for schools to support working conditions data analysis and the creation of data-driven strategies for improving working conditions.
- Create working conditions assistance teams—comprised of teachers, principals and other educators from schools with positive climates—to assist other schools who request help in reforming working conditions.
- Make sure resources are available to support schools in implementing data-driven working conditions reform, with priority going to high-needs schools.
- Develop a web site to feature schools with positive working conditions.

#### **4. Investigate Principal Working Conditions and Potential Challenges to Creating Positive School Environments**

- Conduct a working conditions survey for principals.
- Conduct focus groups with school and district leaders to discuss local and state policies that influence teacher working conditions.

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