

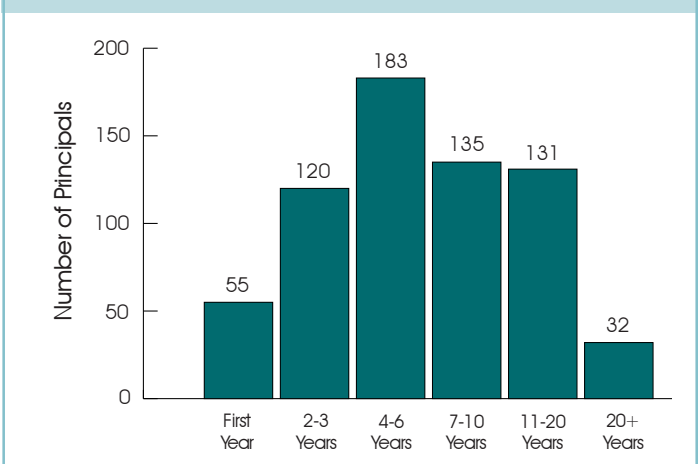
# Supporting Principals to Create Positive Teaching and Learning Conditions

In February 2011, nearly 30,000 educators (47 percent) from across Colorado completed the second iteration of the Colorado Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Survey (TELL Colorado Survey), an 11 percent increase in participation since the first survey was conducted in 2009 (23,000 educators or 36 percent). Fifty percent or more of faculty in almost 850 schools across the state provided their perceptions of the teaching and learning conditions in which they work, including whether they have the kind of supportive school environments necessary for them to help students learn. Included in the respondents are the voices of 667 Colorado principals who responded not only to questions about the teaching conditions in their school, but also to the supports they receive from their district. Findings from these respondents are addressed in this brief. Data, additional briefs, research findings, and tools for utilizing the 2011 Survey data can be accessed at [www.tellcolorado.org](http://www.tellcolorado.org).

## About the Principals

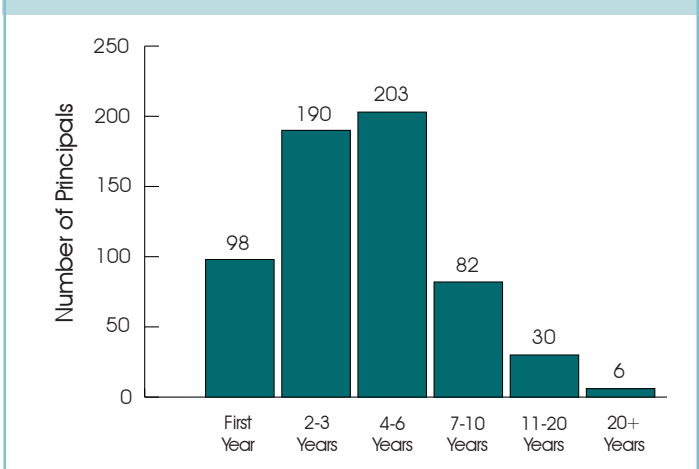
The principals who responded to the TELL Colorado Survey range from novices to at least 20 years of experience in school leadership and their school setting. Eight percent of respondents (55) are in their first year as a principal with more than one quarter of responding principals (183 or 28 percent) in their 4th-6th year of experience (Figure 1). The most veteran principals—those with 20 or more years of experience—are 5 percent of respondents.

FIGURE 1. PRINCIPALS BY YEARS OF EXPERIENCE



Most principals (393 or 64 percent) have been at their current school between two and six years (Figure 2). Sixteen percent of principals (98) are in their first year at their current school; fewer than six percent of principals have been at their schools 11 or more years.

FIGURE 2. PRINCIPALS BY YEARS IN THEIR CURRENT SCHOOL



## Principals Are Positive About Many Aspects of the Supports They Receive.

Assessing principals' leadership conditions is important given the critical role principals play in establishing school policies, setting the tone within the school, providing leadership and implementing school improvement plans. For principals to be able to best support teachers and students, they must be supported themselves in efforts to lead and learn.

Principals in Colorado 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. Overall, nine out of ten principals agree that their school is a good place to work and learn. Eighty-five percent of principals who responded indicate that their immediate plans are to continue as principal at their current school with two percent indicating that their plans are to serve as a principal in a different school within the same district.

Principals indicated that teacher leadership (24 percent), instructional practices and support (22 percent), and school leadership (21 percent) are the conditions that most affect their willingness to remain as an administrator at their school. Thus it is positive that they report great support from central office in areas related to decision-making, school support, and leadership development, as noted below:

- Principals are encouraged about many conditions related to decision making in their school and district. Nearly nine out of 10 principals agree that principals are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction in their district and that central office supports appropriate school improvement decisions when challenged by parents and the community (86 percent and 87 percent, respectively).
- More than nine out of 10 principals (93 percent) report that their school is provided sufficient data to make informed decisions, with eight out of 10 (81 percent) agreeing that the district involves them in decisions that directly impact the operations of their school.
- Nearly nine out of 10 principals (87 percent) agree that their district has a clearly defined mission and vision for all schools and that their district defines expectations for schools (88 percent).
- Many principals report that their district engages in activities that promote trusting relationships and provide positive environments to grow professionally. Nearly nine out of 10 administrators (88 percent) agree that their central office provides principals support when they need it whereas eight out of 10 administrators (83 percent) agree that their district encourages cooperation among schools and provides constructive feedback to principals toward improving performance (80 percent).

## Principals Need More Time to Effectively Support Teachers and Students

Although more than three-quarters of principals (77 percent) agree that they have time available to collaborate with colleagues (compared to two-thirds of principals on the 2009 TELL Colorado Survey), the greatest concern expressed by principals across the state is the time they have to do their job. Increasing demands and expectations of principals to effectively manage schools in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are placing additional strains on the amount of time principals have available to meet their many obligations.

Fewer than half of the administrators that responded to the Survey (47 percent) report that their central office has streamlined procedures to minimize principals' time on non-instructional tasks and 46 percent of principals agree that they are provided time for networking and collaboration outside of the district. Even fewer (45 percent) agree that they have sufficient time to focus on instructional leadership issues (e.g., data analysis, professional development, etc.).

Part of the challenge is the amount of time principals spend on administrative issues versus instructional leadership. In an average week, principals spend more time on administrative issues than planning and coaching (Table 1).

TABLE 1. TIME PRINCIPALS DEVOTE TO ADMINISTRATIVE AND LEADERSHIP DUTIES IN AN AVERAGE WEEK

| Activities   | Amount of Time Devoted Weekly |                                     |   |  |   |                           |
|--|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|---|---------------------------|
|  | <i>None</i>                   | <i>Less than or equal to 1 hour</i> | <i>More than 1 hour but less than or equal to 3 hours</i> | <i>More than 3 hours but less than or equal to 5 hours</i> | <i>More than 5 hours but less than or equal to 10 hours</i> | <i>More than 10 hours</i> |
| Instructional planning with teachers                             | 3.2                           | 24.3                                | 44.1  | 20.4   | 7.6   | .5                        |
| Observing and coaching teachers                                  | .3                            | 8.5                                 | 36.8  | 32.0   | 18.6  | 3.8                       |
| Covering classes for certified or non-certified absences on-site | 31.9                          | 49.2                                | 15.0  | 3.2  | .8  |                           |
| Meetings with or sponsored by central office                     | 2.3                           | 20.3                                | 41.8  | 25.5   | 8.3   | 1.8                       |
| Personnel issues   | 2.3                           | 22.4                                | 36.0  | 23.6   | 12.3  | 3.4                       |
| Administrative duties  | .3                            | 1.7                                 | 6.7   | 17.7   | 28.7  | 45.0                      |
| Meetings with parents and the community                          | .3                            | 5.6                                 | 33.0  | 34.8   | 21.8  | 4.5                       |
| Student discipline issues  | .9                            | 15.2                                | 30.2  | 29.9   | 18.7  | 5.0                       |
| Working directly with students (i.e. teaching, tutoring, etc.)   | 6.2                           | 32.7                                | 31.9  | 15.4   | 9.5   | 4.4                       |

- More than 91 percent of respondents spend more than three hours a week on administrative duties, with almost half (45 percent) spending more than 10 hours weekly.
- Four out of 10 principals (39 percent) spend three or more hours a week engaged in meetings with parents and the community, and almost half of principals (46 percent) spend more than three hours each week addressing student discipline issues.
- Many principals report limited time engaging in activities as an instructional leader. Seven out of 10 administrators (72 percent) participate less than three hours each week in instructional planning with teachers and almost half (46 percent) spend less than three hours each week observing and coaching teachers.

### Principals Indicate a Need for Additional Professional Development to Better Support Teaching and Learning

As part of the TELL Survey principals were asked a variety of questions related to their professional development. When asked whether principal professional development was a priority in their district, almost seven out of 10 principals (69 percent) agree, up from 60 percent in 2009. Nearly two-thirds of principals (65 percent) agree that there are sufficient resources available for them to participate in professional development opportunities. Principals indicate a need for more professional development in a variety of areas. When asked to identify specific areas in which additional support would help them to lead their schools more effectively, principals indicate the following (Table 2):

TABLE 2. AREAS IN WHICH PRINCIPALS IDENTIFY NEEDING ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

| Professional Development Area           | Principals Indicating Need for Support |      |            |
|---|--|------|------------|
|   | 2011                                   | 2009 | Difference |
| Teacher remediation/coaching            | 58.5                                   | 50.8 | 7.7        |
| Instructional leadership                | 44.8                                   | 46.2 | -1.4       |
| Student assessment                      | 44.7                                   | 36.7 | 8.0        |
| Teacher evaluation                      | 39.8                                   | 24.4 | 15.4       |
| Data-driven decision making             | 38.5                                   | 49.8 | -11.3      |
| School improvement planning             | 37.2                                   | 37.5 | -0.3       |
| Budgeting                               | 29.3                                   | 21.0 | 8.4        |
| Working with parents and the community  | 29.1                                   | 30.4 | -1.4       |
| Creating positive learning environments | 24.8                                   | 22.8 | 2.0        |
| School scheduling                       | 21.2                                   | 18.3 | 2.9        |
| Staffing (hiring, etc.)                 | 14.9                                   | 6.7  | 8.3        |

- Principals’ greatest need for additional support is in the area of teacher remediation/coaching, an increase of eight percent from 2009 (59 percent versus 51 percent).
- Instructional leadership and student assessment (both at 45 percent) are the next most frequently identified areas in which principals identify a need for more professional development. Principals identify these categories and teacher remediation/coaching as areas where they spend very limited amounts of time relative to other activities (Table 1). One explanation may be that while current time spent in these areas is limited, principals recognize the importance of addressing these areas to better support teacher and student development. Additionally, changes at the district level to incorporate more coaching and instructional supports into the teacher evaluation process may be a catalyst for renewed interest in these areas.
- The need for support in the area of teacher evaluation increased by 15 percentage points from 2009, and represents the area with the greatest growth in perceived need among principals. Nearly four out of 10 principals express a need for additional support in this area in 2011.
- Fewer than four out of 10 administrators (39 percent) report a need for additional support in data-driven decision making in 2011, down 11 percent from 2009.

### New Principal Support Is Inconsistent Across the State with Few Principals in Their First Three Years Receiving Mentoring

Of the 667 principals responding to the Survey, 175 (26 percent) are in their first three years as a principal. Given the importance of the principal to so many aspects of a school’s culture and climate, inducting new principals is critical. Unfortunately, the supports in place for new principals are inconsistent across the state with fewer than sixty percent of new principals (58 percent or 102) assigned a mentor. Even many of those who are assigned a mentor do not engage in support activities with their mentor (Table 3).

- Nearly half of new principals (47 percent) receiving mentoring never once observed their mentor’s school.
- Almost four out of 10 new principals assigned a mentor (38 percent) report never being observed by their mentor.
- Three out of 10 new principals (29 percent) never met with their assigned mentor to develop school improvement plans with them.

TABLE 3. FREQUENCY OF NEW PRINCIPAL MENTORING SUPPORT

|  | <i>Never</i> | <i>Less than once per month</i> | <i>Once per month</i> | <i>Several times per month</i> | <i>Once per week</i> | <i>Almost daily</i> |
|--|--------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Observing my mentor’s school                       | 46.5         | 29.3                            | 13.1                  | 4.0                            | 4.0                  | 3.0                 |
| Being observed in my school by my mentor           | 38.0         | 32.0                            | 15.0                  | 5.0                            | 7.0                  | 3.0                 |
| School improvement planning with my mentor         | 29.0         | 26.0                            | 24.0                  | 13.0                           | 5.0                  | 3.0                 |
| Coaching conversations with my mentor              | 2.0          | 15.0                            | 43.0                  | 25.0                           | 9.0                  | 6.0                 |
| Having discussions with my mentor about leadership | 2.0          | 13.0                            | 44.0                  | 25.0                           | 11.0                 | 5.0                 |

Some principals report inconsistent value in the mentoring support provided. For example, fewer than eight out of 10 (79 percent) new principals agree that their mentor was effective in providing support related to teacher evaluation and instructional leadership. Three-quarters of new principals report effective support by their mentor in addressing staffing issues (76 percent) or helping them with school improvement planning (74 percent). Additionally, seven out of 10 new principals (70 percent) agree that the mentoring support they received addressing teacher remediation was effective.

Despite these challenges seven out of 10 mentored beginning principals (71 percent) agree that their mentoring experience was important in their effectiveness as a school leader. Additionally, two-thirds (65 percent) report that their mentoring experience was important in their decision to remain as the principal in their school.

### Principals and Teachers View Teaching Conditions Differently, with Principals Much More Positive in General

While some differences in perceptions of teaching conditions should be expected between “bosses” and “employees” in any industry, the disparity between principals’ and teachers’ views of teaching conditions is notable in Colorado. The 667 principals responding to the Survey are significantly more likely (14 percent higher on average) than the 26,092 teachers to note the presence of positive teaching conditions.

Differences in perceptions between principals and teachers are particularly evident in the area of school leadership (Table 4).

- More than nine out of 10 principals (95 percent) report that teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them compared to about six out of 10 teachers (61 percent).
- Almost all principals (99 percent) believe that the school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about leadership issues compared to 66 percent of teachers.
- Almost all principals (99 percent) believe that they consistently enforce rules for student conduct compared to two-thirds (66 percent) of teachers.
- The area of greatest disparity between principals (88 percent) and teachers (50 percent) is in response to the question, 'Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine administrative paperwork teachers are required to do.'

TABLE 4. TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING, LEARNING AND LEADING CONDITIONS

| TELL Colorado Survey Questions   | Percent Agreeing  |                 |                   |
|--|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
|  | <i>Principals</i> | <i>Teachers</i> | <i>Difference</i> |
| Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine administrative paperwork teachers are required to do.       | 88.1              | 49.7            | 38.4              |
| Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.                              | 94.7              | 60.5            | 34.1              |
| The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about leadership issues.            | 98.9              | 65.5            | 33.4              |
| Administration consistently enforces rules for student conduct.  | 98.8              | 65.5            | 33.3              |
| The school leadership consistently enforces rules for student conduct.   | 98.3              | 65.7            | 32.6              |
| The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about empowering teachers.          | 98.5              | 66.3            | 32.2              |
| The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about the use of time in my school. | 98.0              | 66.2            | 31.8              |
| Follow-up is provided from professional development at this school.  | 84.7              | 53.1            | 31.6              |
| The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems.                          | 92.9              | 62.1            | 30.8              |

Not only are principals more likely to believe that positive teaching conditions are present, they are also more likely to indicate that school leadership makes sustained efforts to address teacher concerns that exist (Table 5).

TABLE 5. TEACHER AND PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP EFFORTS TO ADDRESS TEACHING, LEARNING AND LEADING CONDITIONS

| The school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about: | Percent Agreeing  |                 |                   |
|---|-------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
|   | <i>Principals</i> | <i>Teachers</i> | <i>Difference</i> |
| Leadership issues   | 98.9              | 65.5            | 33.4              |
| Empowering teachers   | 98.5              | 66.3            | 32.2              |
| The use of time in my school  | 98.0              | 66.2            | 31.8              |
| Professional development  | 97.7              | 68.1            | 29.7              |
| Managing student conduct  | 98.9              | 71.6            | 27.3              |
| New teacher support   | 94.6              | 70.4            | 24.3              |
| Facilities and resources  | 98.0              | 77.8            | 20.3              |
| Community engagement  | 95.3              | 75.4            | 19.9              |
| Student learning  | 99.5              | 86.8            | 12.7              |

Teachers and principals also have different perceptions about the role of teachers in decision making in classrooms and schools.

- Almost 30 percent more principals (88 percent) than teachers (60 percent) agree that teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making in their schools.
- Although almost all principals (99 percent) agree that teachers are relied upon to make decisions about educational issues, only 72 percent of teachers agree.
- Similarly, almost all principals agree that teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction compared to only three-quarters of teachers (99 percent versus 74 percent, respectively).

Principals are not more positive than teachers across every TELL Colorado Survey question. This is particularly evident in their responses to questions about access and use of assessment data. Whereas almost half of teachers (48 percent) agree that data are available for instructional planning, fewer than three out of 10 (29 percent) of principals agree. In 2009, more than half of responding principals (53 percent) agreed that state assessment data were available in time to impact decision making.

In addition, principals are much more negative in 2011 than they were in 2009 with respect to teacher professional development.

- Almost seven out of 10 principals (69 percent) in 2009 agreed that there is an appropriate amount of time provided for professional development, while about six out of 10 (61 percent) principals are in agreement in the latest 2011 Survey.
- More than three-quarters of school principals (77 percent) agreed that professional development was differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers in 2009. This rate declined to 72 percent in 2011.

- More than eight out of 10 principals (83 percent) reported that teachers had sufficient access to a broad range of professional personnel in 2009. In 2011, fewer than eight out of 10 (78 percent) agree.

While large gaps exist in most cases between principals and teachers on their perception of teaching conditions, both sets of educators are generally positive about the presence of teaching conditions in the following areas:

- Both principals and teachers report that the faculty is committed to helping every student learn (96 percent of principals and 94 percent of teachers).
- Both principals and teachers agree that teachers are providing parents and guardians with useful information about student learning (93 percent of principals and 94 percent of teachers).
- Principals (100 percent) and teachers (93 percent) report that teachers work in a school environment that is safe.
- Both principals (56 percent) and teachers (55 percent) cite insufficient training and support to fully utilize the available instructional technology. Additionally, only 61 percent of principals and 62 percent of teachers believe that an appropriate amount of time is provided for professional development.

It should not be inferred from these findings that principals do not want to address conditions in their schools, but rather they do not perceive that they are issues to the same extent as teachers. There are no correct or incorrect answers to whether these conditions exist. However, differences in perception have ramifications for school operations and improvement planning. Ideally district- and school- specific results from the TELL Colorado Survey can be used to facilitate faculty dialogue, sharing of perspectives, and collectively identifying areas of focus for reform.

## Conclusion

Like teachers, principals need supportive conditions to provide the leadership necessary to create school environments where teachers want to teach and students can learn. Overall these findings suggest that principals in Colorado believe that they are supported and that there are positive teaching conditions in their school. The analyses presented in this brief reveal a number of important findings:

- School principals generally agree that they are included in decision making processes, are engaged in activities and dialogue that promote the development of trusting relationships between them and the district, and that their school is a good place to work and learn.
- Of all the areas addressed by the Survey, issues related to time are the most concerning to principals. More than half of principals report that they do not have sufficient time to network, collaborate, or focus on leadership issues.

- Principals most often cite coaching, instructional leadership, and student assessment as the areas in which they need additional support. While there is interest in this area, principals spend very little time each week engaged in these processes.
- In many areas of the Survey, principals are more positive than teachers that necessary teaching and learning conditions are in place across the state. Differences in perceptions between principals and teachers are greatest in the areas of school leadership and communication. Awareness of these differences is critical for designing effective school improvement plans and engaging in productive dialogue to improve teacher working conditions.

Having an effective school principal is a critical component to the success of a school, its culture, and the retention of its staff. Policymakers and district leaders across the state now have information about the perceptions of principals which can be used to develop supports and systems to help principals support teachers and accelerate student learning. When schools are led by effective and supported leaders, teachers have the best chance to successfully work with students, enabling them to achieve at the highest levels.

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## 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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