

## Making Effective and Appropriate Use of Your TELLColorado Survey Data

The TELLColorado survey provides valuable data on the working conditions in Colorado's schools related to Teaching, Empowerment, Leading, and Learning through a biennial survey of school-based, licensed educators working in every public school in the state. The purpose of the TELLColorado survey is to provide information to guide school and district improvement planning efforts and to inform broader policy discussions for supporting teacher recruitment and retention, effective school leadership, and instructional improvement. These data are **not** intended to be used for evaluating or holding accountable individuals, schools or districts. All users of TELLColorado survey data are encouraged to consider the following as they access, analyze and disseminate their data.

**Do** *ensure the privacy of all participants.* The survey data are most useful when the vast majority of educators feel comfortable sharing their perspectives of the teaching conditions in their schools.

**Don't** *do anything to compromise the confidentiality of participants or the integrity of the survey's results.* Each district and school should have a plan for ensuring data security and for appropriately releasing results, analyses and findings to the public.

**Do** *ensure access to the results by all educators in schools with sufficient survey response rates.* Every educator should have access to her or his school's survey data to facilitate the school improvement planning process.

**Don't** *restrict access to results to only a school's leadership or improvement planning team.* The data are most useful when the results are broadly shared and discussed among all educators and other key community stakeholders.

**Do** *view this as an opportunity to inform professional, data-driven conversations about strategies for moving forward.* These conversations should be safe, structured and focused on the school rather than individuals.

**Don't** *use this as a tool for criticizing or evaluating individual principals or other school leaders or staff.* The teaching conditions present in any given school are the result of multiple factors and contexts. To address these requires the participation and engagement of all members of the school community. Focusing on issues rather than individuals makes this difficult work much easier and more productive.

**Do** *use this as an impetus for broader conversations* regarding the climate, conditions and culture of schools and how they affect student learning and teacher retention. The findings from the survey provide a good entry point into complex discussions when used with multiple sources of school data.

**Don't** *view the survey as a "magic bullet"* for curing all that ails a school. The context of every school's unique culture and programs should be considered along with working conditions data. Consequently, outsiders considering school data should be sensitive and aware of the multitude of school factors influencing results on the survey.



**Do** *consider the perceptual data collected by the survey as real data* to be used to guide your school improvement planning. Educators' perceptions of the culture and context of their school have been linked in a number of studies to student learning, future employment plans, efficacy and motivation. Analyzing and using this information to improve schools is critical and needs to be a part of reform efforts at the school and district levels.

**Don't** *dismiss the results as opinion or not as "valid" or important as other data sources.* Educators' perceptions are their reality and these data provide important insights into the learning environment of their schools. However, other data should be used to triangulate these findings and provide a better understanding of these perceptions (e.g., instructional expenditures, proportion of teachers working out of field, teacher/pupil ratio)

**Do** *view the results as a snapshot in time of faculty perceptions* regarding their school and as a baseline tool for measuring improvement on a host of critical working conditions.

**Don't** *assume the results are a permanent and static descriptor* of any school's working conditions, regardless of how positive or negative results may appear. The impact of working conditions are cumulative and residual over time—they are bigger than any individual, and schools often feel the effects of positive and negative influences that may evolve over time.

**Do** *regard the results as an accurate representation of the working conditions that teachers actually experience in their schools.* In every state where working conditions initiatives have been conducted to date, teachers' perceptions of working conditions have been directly related to the reality of the conditions in their schools. For example, teachers spending more time outside the school day on teaching activities may express the most concern about time available to complete their jobs.

**Don't** *view this as merely an opportunity for educators to vent a litany of complaints.* There are negative and positive elements of the data in every Colorado school, and the degree to which teachers express dissatisfaction is undeniably linked to the real conditions within their respective schools. This is not a satisfaction survey. These are educators' perceptions of the presence of important, research-based factors in their school that affect student learning and teacher retention.

**Do** *use your findings to drive educators, stakeholders and the community toward more complex conceptions of teaching, empowering, leading, and learning conditions.* Favorable school conditions involve more than keeping the lights on in a building and paying educators sufficiently. The TELLColorado initiative considers a comprehensive, research-based set of factors influencing the quality of teaching, empowering, leading, and learning, including professional development, time, empowerment and leadership.

**Don't** *regard this as an attempt to merely document the physical structure and related resources* in a school building. While physical facilities and resources are included in the research base, other complex factors influencing the professional teaching practices of educators are also measured.

**Do** *use the process to ensure that all educators—teachers and principals alike—have a similar understanding about whether teaching, empowering, leading, and learning conditions are present* in the school and whether efforts are being made to address them. While some level of difference in perceptions should be expected, it is essential to recognize where the divergent views, particularly of teachers and administrators, could limit the potential for meaningful improvement.

**Don't** *consider this process as an accountability tool for principal performance.* The "leadership" category of the TELLColorado survey is intentionally broad to incorporate multiple sources of school leadership, including teacher leadership. District and school leaders should consider where administrator perceptions differ considerably from teachers. School leadership should encourage analysis of the data without fear of reprisal.



Teaching, empowering, leading, and learning conditions are about schools, not individuals, and it will take the entire school community to improve them.

**Do** *use the findings to inform school and district level decisions* about scheduling, professional development offerings, opportunities to support and cultivate teacher leadership, collaboration, and investments in facilities and resources. By making TELLColorado data part of the school improvement planning process, findings from each working condition domain can be seamlessly integrated into the current and emerging school improvement programs at every school in Colorado.

**Don't** *use this information to unilaterally and/or arbitrarily judge a school's effectiveness* in any TELLColorado survey area. Every finding should be considered a tool for driving improvement and not for fueling accountability grades or measures.

**Do** *view the results within the context of progress* from year-to-year and relative to other groups of schools across a district and the state. The findings are reported with bars representing the school, district and state averages for TELLColorado questions and domains.

**Don't** *use the information within the vacuum of a single school*, with fear of comparisons to other schools. The results will prove more meaningful if used to support collaborative efforts to identify and implement best practices within and among Colorado schools.

**Do** *use the findings to help districts move from understanding teaching, empowering, leading, and learning conditions to taking action toward instructional improvement.* Teams of community members, teachers, principals, administrators, and policymakers should consider using the data as one point of reference in planning for and implementing change in their school.

**Don't** *use the results as a one-shot conversation or a report that sits on the shelf.* The data are only as useful as their potential application for improving real schools.

**Do** *use TELLColorado to help drive local-level policy decisions.* Reviewing data results with local teacher associations, school leadership, local school boards, legislators, and other decision-makers can ensure that policies and resources are more responsive to the most pressing needs of students, educators, schools, and districts.

**Don't** *over- or under-represent the data in local policy decision-making.* Local policymakers should neither ignore the power of working conditions data, nor make policy without the context of other data points and school context.

**Do** *use the findings to help state policymakers make more informed decisions* about statewide policies that directly address educators' greatest concerns.

**Don't** *continue to collect survey data without the buy-in and support of all state policymakers and officials* who add credibility to the survey and ensure that results spur meaningful policy outcomes in Colorado.