

## Effectively Using Your TELLColorado Survey Results

Teaching conditions are critical to educator success and satisfaction. The TELLColorado Survey provides data to schools, districts, and the state about whether educators have the supportive school environment necessary to remain working and be successful with students. This unique dataset represents the perceptions of those who understand these conditions best — the educators who experience them every day. Assessing teaching conditions along with other more neutral and quantifiable data points (e.g., student test scores, class size) provides a more complete body of evidence of teaching and learning in Colorado’s schools. Getting honest, authentic input and engaging in dialogue — especially in schools where the basic building blocks of positive conditions (e.g., trust, time, leadership) are not in place — can be challenging. Using survey results in a positive way toward school improvement is critical. Consider the following eight concepts when analyzing and using the results of the TELLColorado Survey.

### **1. Teaching conditions should be examined for school improvement purposes, not accountability.**

The survey is focused on capturing educator perceptions of current teaching and learning conditions. Because these conditions are about schools, no one individual should be held solely accountable for the status of the school culture. Rather, data gathered should be used to help guide school improvement planning as one of multiple data artifacts.

### **2. Teaching conditions are not about any one individual and it will take a community effort to improve.**

The principal holds a unique and important place within the school community and can have a significant impact on the professional culture in which educators work. However, many aspects of educator working conditions are beyond the principal’s control. Broader social trends and federal and local policies influence how educators operate within their school and classroom. Working conditions are about schools, not about individuals. So no one person should be viewed as responsible for creating or reforming school culture alone. No questions on the survey focus exclusively on the principal. Any questions regarding school leadership were aimed at the team that holds decision-making power within the school – not a single individual.

### **3. Perceptual data are real data.**

The survey collects perceptual data from educators about the presence of important teaching conditions. These results are “valid” and as significant as other data sources. Students’ learning conditions are a reflection of educators’ working conditions. Perceptions of the culture and context of the 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. However, other data (e.g., instructional expenditures, proportion of teachers working out of field, teacher/pupil ratio) should be used to triangulate these findings and provide a better understanding of the data.

### **4. Conversations need to be structured and safe.**

Data-driven dialogue about the findings of the survey deserves structure, facilitation, ground rules and the ability to separate issues from individuals. Discussing the root causes of identified problems and determining viable solutions are not always easy. These conversations can become difficult if they are not approached in a systematic and predictable fashion where all staff can participate in a meaningful and safe way.

### **5. Identify and celebrate positive trends in addition to considering areas for improvement.**

Educators have tremendous pride in their work and want to be in a school that supports them in doing their best. All schools have successes to draw upon as they assess and improve their teaching and learning conditions. Ensure

that time is spent identifying and celebrating positive aspects of the school – rather than jumping straight into negative trends.

#### **6. Create a common understanding of what defines and shapes teaching conditions.**

Many factors influence educators' perceptions of teaching conditions. Research shows that broader social trends, media coverage, respect for the profession, and local and state policies can play a part in teachers' perceptions of their conditions. In turn, this influences their motivation and efficacy as educators. The survey gathers input on a variety of important research-based teaching conditions. In addition, other areas may be worthy of further investigation, such as teaching assignments, curricular support, assessments and accountability, and parent and community support. The survey results are a starting point, not an ending point for understanding what is important to ensuring that educators have access to the conditions to do their best work.

#### **7. Focus on what you can solve.**

Many issues that shape teaching conditions within a school or district are outside of your control (e.g., federal and state assessment policies, funding). School improvement planning should focus on areas that can be addressed by the school community. District barriers to school-based solutions should be identified and constructive conversations across schools should occur locally. Other influences (e.g., federal and state policy, broader social and community context) are areas for the school to think about in partnership with others. A plan with proposed solutions that cannot be reached through the efforts of the school community is not likely to be successful.

#### **8. Solutions can be complex and long term.**

Teaching and learning conditions are cumulative and engrained. It took many years to create them. So, it may take a similar amount of time to change them. Some solutions may be inexpensive and simple to address, like having a more consistent means of communicating amongst the faculty; while others are resource intensive (e.g., class size reduction, integration of technology) or long range (e.g., building trust, creating authentic Professional Learning Communities). A school improvement plan must pay attention both to short and long term issues to successfully improve the school environment.