



Understanding the Results of the TELL Colorado Educators' Survey: Initial Findings

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To help ensure all students can learn teachers need to work in schools designed for their success. Positive teaching conditions, where educators are supported and empowered, are essential to creating schools where teachers want to work and students can learn.

To assess whether these conditions are present across Colorado, the Colorado Department of Education in partnership with a coalition including the Colorado Association of School Boards, Colorado Association of School Executives, Colorado Education Association, Colorado League of Charter Schools, and Governor Bill Ritter worked with the New Teacher Center to conduct a survey in April/May 2009 of all school-based licensed educators in the state. By hearing directly from educators who intimately understand teaching conditions, the state will have the opportunity to make data-driven decisions to establish policies and practices that make all schools great places to work and learn.

Educators across the state have shared their perceptions of the teaching and learning conditions in their schools. ***Over 23,000 educators (36 percent) from across the state participated in the TELL Colorado survey.*** Data is now available for 624 schools and 50 school districts in which a sufficient number of educators responded, providing critical information for making school and district level decisions to improve Colorado schools.

An interim report will be completed this summer, providing more in-depth analysis of the survey results and analyses of the representativeness of respondents. A final report, analyzing the findings of the survey relative to student learning and teacher retention, will be submitted in the fall. In the meantime, some general trends are already clear in the state survey results. All percentages presented are for those educators who responded to the TELL Colorado survey who agreed or strongly agreed with the questions unless otherwise noted.

Overall, Colorado educators are satisfied with the teaching conditions in their school. About three-quarters (73 percent) agree that their school is a good place to work and learn. Four out of five teachers want to continue teaching in their current school building (82 percent). While about half of teachers want to keep teaching at their school over the long term (56 percent), 16 percent want to remain teaching within the state and 17 percent hope to pursue an administrative or non-administrative position within education. Only three percent of survey respondents want to leave education immediately and one out of 10 (nine percent) hope to leave education over the course of their career.

Teaching conditions appear to be important factors influencing employment plans according to survey respondents. Adequate support from school administration (58 percent strongly agree), effectiveness with students (57 percent strongly agree), collegial atmosphere amongst the staff (52 percent strongly agree), time to do their job during the work day (48 percent), and teaching assignment (47 percent strongly agree) were the strongest influences on teacher decision making about future professional plans; more so than salary (25 percent strongly agree), cost of living (22 percent strongly agree), proximity of the school to home (18 percent strongly agree), student behavior (21 percent strongly agree), or the quality of life within the community (26 percent strongly agree).

But while Colorado educators are generally positive about their school context, several areas were identified as issues that merit further analyses and discussion at the school, district and state level. The following trends were evident upon initial analyses of responses from the statewide survey.

Time: Educators may need more time to plan and work with colleagues

Less than half of educators agree that they have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students (45 percent) and enough non-instructional time to plan and collaborate (39 percent).

- One-third (34 percent) of Colorado teachers report receiving, on average, at least an hour per day of non-instructional time in an average week while one-quarter (27 percent) receive three hours or less.
- Much of this planning time appears to be in isolation. One-quarter of Colorado teachers (23 percent) report receiving no time for structured collaborative planning—nine out of ten receive three hours or less—while less than half (44 percent) agree that teachers have sufficient time available to collaborate with colleagues.

Addressing time concerns may be important as 48 percent of Colorado teachers believe that issues of time (amount, quality and use) are the most important teaching condition in promoting student learning, significantly more than empowerment (15 percent), facilities and resources (13 percent) and school leadership (11 percent).

Administrators too feel a time crunch, which may have an impact on their ability to serve as instructional leaders. Only about one-third (37 percent) of the almost 550 principals responding to the survey agree that they have sufficient time to focus on instructional leadership issues. In a given week, principals are much more likely to focus on administrative duties than instructional tasks. More than half of principals (56 percent) report spending ten hours or more per week on administrative tasks (versus one percent spending equivalent time on instructional planning with teachers and 4 percent observing and coaching teachers). Meeting with parents and the community and student discipline issues are frequent activities for principals. Central office procedures may contribute to principal time as one-third of principals (37 percent) agree that districts have streamlined procedures to minimize principal's time on non-instructional tasks.

Facilities and Resources: Educators are positive about the resources available to them

Most Colorado educators report that teachers have access to sufficient resources. Two-thirds of educators (67 percent) believe that teachers have sufficient access to appropriate instructional materials and resources and at least three-quarters report sufficient access to communications technology (84 percent), office equipment (76 percent) and school library resources (83 percent). Educators were also positive about their school facility, agreeing that their school is clean and well maintained (78 percent), that there is adequate professional space (73 percent), and that the school environment is safe (85 percent). Principals too were positive when responding to question about district resources available to their school, with two-thirds agreeing that their school has a sufficient number of licensed staff (69 percent) and that their school receives instructional resources commensurate with student needs (65 percent).

However, there are still issues to consider.

- More than half (55 percent) of educators believe the physical environment of classrooms—lighting, temperature, air circulation, etc.—supports teaching and learning.
- Although six out of ten educators (62 percent) indicate that teacher access to instructional technology is sufficient (including computers, internet access, etc.), less than half (48 percent) agree that teachers have sufficient training and support to fully utilize the available instructional technology.

Community Engagement: Parents/guardians are involved and supportive

While three-quarters of educators (73 percent) agree that their school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement and almost nine out of ten (85 percent) report that teachers provide parents/guardians with useful information about student learning, six out of ten (57 percent) agree that parents/guardians are influential decision makers and that they support teachers (60 percent).

Empowerment: Teachers do not feel engaged in important decisions about their school

About two-thirds of responding Colorado educators report that there are opportunities for teachers to participate in school leadership roles (68 percent), that teachers trust each other (62 percent) and that teachers are recognized as educational experts (65 percent). But this does not necessarily appear to translate into feelings of empowerment, as many Colorado educators report that teachers do not feel engaged in education decision making. About half of educators agree that teachers are integrally involved in decision making about educational issues (55 percent). This could be explained by:

- Concern about ways decisions are made as half of educators agree that there is an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems (51 percent).
- Disengagement from decisions outside of their classroom. Educators indicate that teachers play a large or the primary role on decision making on issues that impact their

practice such as devising teaching techniques (59 percent), setting grading and student assessment practices (40 percent) and selecting instructional materials and resources (46 percent). But teachers are not influencing other decisions that affect their school and their professional growth. A significant proportion of educators report that teachers have a small role or no role at all in determining the content of in-service professional development programs (56 percent), school improvement planning (44 percent), establishing student discipline procedures (43 percent), and selecting new teachers (42 percent).

About four out of ten educators (42 percent) agree that teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making in their school.

School leadership: Leadership is supportive in many arenas, but may need to do more to address concerns about teaching and learning conditions

When asked which of the seven overarching conditions assessed in the survey most affects your willingness to remain teaching at your school, more than one-quarter (28 percent) of teachers indicated that school leadership was the most critical and nine out of ten (89 percent) indicated that support from school administration influenced their future employment plans.

About half of educators (55 percent) agree that school leadership—defined as an individual, group of individuals or team within the school—is effective. About two-thirds of educators agree that teacher performance evaluations are fair (65 percent) and six in ten report that school leadership works to minimize disruptions and communicates clear expectations to students (60 percent respectively). Other trends within the school leadership section include:

- Six in ten educators agree that the faculty and staff have a shared vision (58 percent) and that the school leadership communicates with the faculty adequately (57 percent).
- About half of educators agree that teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them (52 percent) and that there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the school (57 percent).
- About half of educators report that school leadership is making a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about leadership (47 percent), empowering teachers (51 percent), the use of time (53 percent), and new teacher support (54 percent). Educators are more positive about leadership efforts to address concerns about student learning (73 percent) and facilities and resources (59 percent).

Professional Development: There are gaps in the professional development needed and offerings received.

About six out of ten educators (59 percent) report that there are sufficient resources for teachers to take advantage of professional development activities, but half (53 percent) agree that an appropriate amount of time for professional development is provided. Resource challenges may have an impact on the amount of professional development received. Only in their content area

(44 percent) did more than four in ten teachers report having at least ten clock hours of professional development over the past two years. Four out of ten (43 percent) teachers report receiving follow-up from their professional learning opportunities.

These opportunities do not appear to be targeted in the areas Colorado teachers indicate they need the most support to improve their effectiveness. Half of Colorado teachers (53 percent) report needing additional professional development in using technology in classroom instruction but only 31 percent received at least ten clock hours over the past two years. A similar gap exists for differentiating instruction (48 percent report a need versus 38 percent received), closing the achievement gap (44 percent report a need versus 23 percent received), and working with special education students (36 percent report a need versus 14 percent received).

Professional development is mostly likely to be designed and delivered by school administrators. More than half (56 percent) of educators indicate that teachers play a small or no role in selecting professional development and one-quarter (29 percent) indicate teachers play a large role in professional development delivery. Six out of ten teachers (63 percent) indicate that administrators in their school and one-third report central office staff (32 percent) plays a large role in planning or delivering their professional learning opportunities. This more top down approach could explain why one-third (33 percent) of teachers agree that professional development is differentiated to meet the individual needs of teachers.

Three-quarters (73 percent) of teachers indicate that the professional development they received provided them with strategies that they have incorporated into their instructional delivery and two-thirds (64 percent) agreed it was useful in efforts to improve student achievement.

Student Learning: Educator report using assessment data to differentiate instruction and drive practice

While nine out of ten educators agree that the faculty is committed to helping every student learn (88 percent), only four out of ten educators report that students come to school ready to learn on a regular basis.

Three-quarters (75 percent) report that teachers use formative assessments to adjust instruction and two-thirds report that the curriculum taught meets the needs of students (66 percent). Educators are somewhat less positive about the role of state and local assessments. Although six out of ten agree that these assessments are used to improve student learning, less than half agree that the assessments are useful in efforts to improve student learning and provided in time to impact decision making (48 percent respectively).

Mentoring: There are inconsistencies in the quality and quantity of support offered

About 3,350 beginning teachers answered specific questions about any additional support they receive. About three-quarters of novice teachers (80 percent)—those with three years of teaching experience or less—report being formally assigned a mentor while most also attended an orientation (81 percent) and seminars designed for new teachers (62 percent). Half received common planning time with other teachers (52 percent) and regular communication with school

leadership (56 percent), and three out of ten (31 percent) indicated they received formal time during school hours to meet with their mentor.

Of those 80 percent of new teachers assigned a mentor, many report never working with their mentor in critical areas such as analyzing student work (31 percent) and developing lesson plans (28 percent). About one-quarter of novice teachers (24 percent) report that their mentor never observed their teaching. Less than half (43 percent) of the 172 new principals who responded to the survey were formally assigned a mentor, and many of those principals who received induction support never were observed in their school by their mentor (50 percent), nor did any school improvement planning with their mentor (32 percent).

Despite these inconsistencies, six out of ten novice teachers who were mentored report that their mentoring provided “quite a bit” of emotional support and almost half indicated the support improved their instructional strategies (44 percent). Half of supported new teachers (52 percent) agreed that the additional support they received was an important factor in their decision to remain teaching at their current school and 64 percent reported it improved their instructional practice.

TELL Colorado data can help the state, districts, and schools assess, understand and improve their teaching and learning conditions in order to foster improved perceptions, motivations and performance in schools. Ultimately these data drive conversations that can help to create positive school environments where all educators are supported, want to work and can thrive.