



TELL Colorado

*Creating Supportive School
Environments to Enhance
Teacher Effectiveness*

Executive Summary
and Recommendations



TELL Colorado
Teaching, Empowering,
Leading & Learning Initiative

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TELL Colorado Survey Coalition

House Bill 08-1384 authorized the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to conduct a biennial survey of teaching and learning conditions. The bill states that “these conditions must be systematically studied and addressed for Colorado to develop a critical mass of teachers who are well prepared to teach and who will remain in the hardest-to-staff schools long enough to make a significant difference for students and their families.”

The TELL Colorado initiative (Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning) was created with this mission in mind. The goal was to survey every school-based licensed educator so that valuable information about their perceptions of teaching and learning conditions could be compiled, analyzed and utilized at the school, local, and state levels.

To ensure the survey was designed and disseminated successfully so data could be utilized the CDE formed a partnership of educators, policymakers and stakeholders to sponsor the initiative, which included:

- Governor Bill Ritter
- Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones
- Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB)
- Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE)
- Colorado Education Association (CEA)
- Colorado League of Charter Schools (CLCS)
- Colorado Department of Education (CDE)

In addition, other organizations supported the effort, including:

- The Alliance for Quality Teaching
- Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, Inc.
- Center for Education Policy Analysis
- Colorado Children’s Campaign
- Professional Association of Colorado Educators

The TELL Colorado sponsors and supporters committed to this initiative because they want to ensure that all the schools in the state are great places in which to teach and learn.

Executive Summary

Policymakers, practitioners, and researchers have long realized that teaching quality is the most important variable for the success of students. Supportive school environments, where educators are valued, trusted, and have the time and ability to collaborate, are critical to teachers' success. To assess whether these conditions are present in schools across this state, the Colorado Department of Education, responding to HB 08-1384, convened a coalition to initiate the first-ever statewide total population survey of certificated educators. In partnership with a coalition of state education organizations, the TELL (Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning) Colorado Survey was created and conducted in May 2009.

More than 23,000 educators (36 percent) responded to the survey. State results have been available since June 2009. Educators in the more than 600 schools where half the faculty responded had password-protected access to individual school data. Upon the release of this report, that data is now publicly available. An assessment of these schools shows that they are representative of schools across the state. Key findings documented in the final report include:

- 1. *Educators are generally positive about teaching in Colorado.*** Three-quarters of survey respondents agree that their school is a good place to work and learn, and four-fifths of teachers indicate they want to remain teaching in their current position. Nine out of 10 educators believe the faculty is committed to helping every student learn. Educators were positive about community engagement, facilities and resources and many aspects of professional development.
- 2. *Community Engagement and Student Learning Conditions influence student performance and growth.*** Community Engagement and Student Learning factors exert significant influence on absolute performance and growth on state assessments. Teaching conditions factors explain as much as 11 percent of the variation in performance across schools in Colorado.
- 3. *Leadership is the most important condition affecting teachers' willingness to remain teaching at their school.*** Teachers who indicate that they plan to remain teaching in their school are twice as likely to agree they work in trusting and supportive environments. Leadership, Resources and Decision Making factors are significant in explaining teachers' future employment plans and actual teacher turnover.
- 4. *Teachers' and principals' perceptions of school conditions vary significantly.*** Eight out of 10 principals agree that teachers have an appropriate level of influence on school decisions compared with four out of 10 teachers. Principals are three times more likely than teachers to report that teachers play a large role in school improvement planning and twice as likely to agree that professional development is differentiated to meet the needs of individual teachers. Principals are significantly more likely to agree that there is an atmosphere of trust and that teachers feel comfortable raising issues.

- 5. *Principals are positive about most aspects of the support they receive from districts.*** Most principals in the state are positive about the resources they have available, their engagement in district-level decision making and their professional development. Principals who report more positive leadership conditions are better able to provide teaching and leading conditions for their faculty in key areas. One area where concerns were noted by Colorado principals was in the area of time. Only about one-third of principals agree that they have sufficient time to provide instructional leadership to their faculty.
- 6. *There are differences in perceptions of teaching and learning conditions across the state based on a variety of factors.*** Schools serving high poverty populations are less likely to note positive conditions, particularly in the area of community engagement and student learning conditions. The newest and most veteran teachers are the most likely to note positive aspects of their teaching environment.
- 7. *New teachers are not systematically supported.*** Almost one-fifth of new teachers report not being assigned a mentor. Of those who are mentored, more than one-quarter never developed lesson plans, were observed by or analyzed student work with their mentor. New teachers reporting sufficient support are significantly more likely to indicate their intent to remain teaching in their current school.

Recommendations

From these findings and other analyses, Colorado policymakers, stakeholders and educators offer the following recommendations to enhance continued efforts to improve teaching conditions:

Recommendation 1: Create Systemic Opportunities for Teachers to Grow Professionally and Participate in Decisions that Impact Their Schools and Classrooms.

- Ensure policies and practices are in place that clarify how decisions will be made and that clearly communicate the results and rationale of such decisions to faculty.
- Consider areas where teachers can be appropriately engaged in decision making and ensure they have the knowledge and skills necessary to make the right choices.
- Ensure sufficient time is available for teachers to develop and contribute to school success.

Recommendation 2: Ensure that Every New Teacher is Inducted into the Profession and Receives More Frequent Support to Improve Instruction.

- Given the inconsistency found in the provision of new teacher support, the State Board of Education should reassess adopted rules and the approval process for district and BOCES programs.
- Programs should provide data that demonstrate that all new teachers are provided a mentor that provides regular support to help enhance instructional practices and teacher effectiveness.

Recommendation 3: Help School Leadership Establish Positive Teaching and Learning Conditions in Every School.

- Create clear expectations and/or standards for what school leaders need to know and be able to do in recruiting and retaining teachers as well as creating positive teaching and learning conditions.
- Partner with institutions of higher education to ensure new principal candidates graduate from programs with the knowledge and skills they need to create positive teaching and learning conditions and build trusting, supportive school climates.

- Provide professional development for principals and other school leaders that support efforts to create positive teaching and learning conditions.

Recommendation 4: Support Schools in Understanding and Improving Teaching Conditions.

- Create standards or guidelines for teaching conditions so that all school faculty members understand the key elements of building a positive school climate.
- Ensure that teaching conditions data be used as part of the school improvement planning process.
- Provide incentives and/or resources for schools that create data-driven plans to improve teaching conditions.

Recommendation 5: Support Schools in Engaging the Broader Community in Efforts to Understand and Improve Working Conditions.

- Ensure that teaching conditions analysis and reform is a community effort.
- Identify and document successful community engagement practices through a thorough examination of working conditions data.

Recommendation 6: Use TELL Colorado and Other Mechanisms to Collect Educators' Views on Teaching and Learning Conditions to Inform Local and State Human Capital Decisions.

- Regularly assess and monitor progress on critical conditions identified as having a significant impact on expected teacher retention and student learning.
- Establish an oversight committee of policymakers and practitioners to coordinate the survey and the design and implementation of strategies to improve teaching conditions.
- Consider additional data that can help better understand the school context in which educators work in areas identified on the survey such as Community Engagement, data availability and utilization.

The TELL Colorado data is a compilation of opinions from those who know schools best—the dedicated educators working with students every day. More than 36 percent of the state’s school-based licensed educators responding have outlined what they want and need to be successful and remain teaching. Now it is time to listen.

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.



Launching the Next Generation

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