



*Where Teachers are
Central
to Improving Schools*

Teacher Working Conditions Initiative Frequently Asked Questions

Why Focus on Teacher Working Conditions?

The Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) is currently working with states and school districts across the country to assess teacher working conditions. These reform efforts are allowing individual districts and schools to understand and improve the conditions under which teachers work and ultimately decrease teacher turnover and increase student achievement.

For any organization, the conditions in which employees work drive their satisfaction and productivity. Yet, while businesses often focus on employee satisfaction, many schools struggle to address working conditions – isolating teachers from peers, denying them basic materials, inundating them with non-instructional duties, providing them with limited input regarding the design and organization of the school and offering limited opportunity for professional growth and advancement. Research indicates that such conditions are closely related to difficulties recruiting and retaining teachers.

Working Condition survey results provide individual districts and schools with reliable data regarding their own teachers' perspective on their working conditions and the impact of these conditions on student achievement. The data allows individual schools and communities to consider appropriate policies and programs to address the unique concerns of their teaching force.

Current research on teacher working conditions reflects a comprehensive environment for improving professional teaching practices and student learning. The research base considers traditional facilities and resources issues and more complex issues proven to be closely related to the ability of professionals to improve student learning. These measures include the impact of time, empowerment, professional development and leadership.

Ensuring a qualified teacher for every student will not be enough to close the achievement gap. Teachers must have the resources and supports they need to serve all students well, and without comprehensive and sustained efforts to improve teacher working conditions, other school reform efforts will be shortchanged.

How are Teacher Working Conditions Being Measured?

Under the leadership of Governor Mike Easley, North Carolina became the first state to implement a statewide study of teacher working conditions by surveying teachers and administrators across the state in 2002. Based largely on working conditions standards created by the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission, the survey was made available to every teacher in the state to disclose their perceptions on five critical working condition areas. The survey was administered again in 2004, but moved online and expanded to include questions that not only captured teachers perceptions of working conditions, but actual conditions of work (for example, the number of hours spent outside of the school day on instruction, types of professional development taken, etc.).

Factor analysis and stakeholder surveys have been conducted during statewide and pilot initiatives in various states to validate the survey instrument. The most recent survey has also been shortened by ensuring that only those questions with the highest explanatory value and factor weighting were included in the most recent versions of the instrument (52 questions). A group of statisticians and university professors have also verified the accuracy of the survey design and the alignment of questions with intended outcomes. The most recent versions of pilot and statewide surveys have all been administered anonymously and online. All certified educators receive codes identifying their schools which allow them to log in and complete the 20-25 minute survey.

What are the Results of Working Condition Studies to Date?

In 2004, CTQ analyzed more than 34,000 surveys from teachers and principals in 90 percent of North Carolina's schools. A similar initiative was conducted in South Carolina with funding from the Department of Education's Division of Teaching Quality and the Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement (more than 15,000 surveys were analyzed).

In both studies*, teachers' responses on the Working Conditions Survey were powerful predictors of whether or not schools made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and performed well on the states' respective school accountability model.

*Note, only states with available statewide data (NC and SC) allowed analysis with student achievement data, because pilot sites in GA, OH and VA do not provide a sampling representative of the states' total student population included for all student achievement measures.

In North Carolina, **Leadership** was the single greatest predictor of AYP status at the middle school level. For every one point increase (on a one-to-five scale of satisfaction) on the survey's leadership domain average, middle schools were 6.7 times more likely to have made AYP. North Carolina schools (all grade levels) were four times more likely to make AYP for every one point domain average increase on the survey in **professional development**; and for every one point increase on the survey in the **facilities and resources** domain average, schools (all grade levels) were 2.8 times more likely to make AYP.

In South Carolina, survey results for **empowerment** were a significant predictor of AYP status. For every one point increase on the survey, schools are 4.75 times more likely to achieve AYP. For every one point increase on the survey in all schools on the **professional development** domain average, South Carolina schools were 2.5 times more likely to achieve AYP.

The connections between teacher retention and working conditions were statistically significant in many instances as well. However, the connections were at lower levels than those of student achievement and lower than other critical factors influencing teachers' decision to remain in a school including the percentage of teachers on emergency credentials, student poverty levels, school size and school designation levels for student achievement. However, in North Carolina higher satisfaction levels with the **empowerment** questions on the survey had a significant impact on teacher retention at the high school level. A significant connection between retention and **professional development** was also documented. **Professional development** was also found to exert a significant effect on teacher retention at the elementary level. Leadership was a significant predictor of teacher retention in South Carolina.

What is Being Done with the Survey Results?

While the significance of any effort to develop knowledge around teacher working conditions should not be underestimated, developing resources, tools and plans to respond to the data with meaningful school reforms is the most essential element of the working conditions initiative. Many schools simply lack the time, capacity and commitment to fully understand and act on this data. In response to this challenge, CTQ has worked with a variety of partners to develop a range of tools, resources and support opportunities which help schools comprehend and react to the challenges highlighted by their data.

The Teacher Working Conditions Toolkit (www.teacherworkingconditions.org) was developed to help communities and schools better understand and respond to the data from the 2004 Teacher Working Conditions Survey. The Toolkit helps users identify effective strategies for achieving school reform and includes examples of schools that have addressed teacher working conditions successfully, checklists and concrete ideas to provide a roadmap for activity on working condition reforms, and background research to give users some theoretical perspective in identifying school reform strategies. The tool is organized for the needs of various role groups including community members, teachers, principals, district officials and policymakers.

Many individual school districts in North Carolina and also pilot districts in both Virginia and Ohio have created professional development opportunities to study and understand working condition survey results in various training sessions. Principals and teachers in some districts have worked to create school and district improvement plans that incorporate working condition reforms. And the opportunities to learn from the experiences and context of other districts familiar with working condition reforms are increasing exponentially. Districts can receive matched pair comparisons of districts in or out of state with similar size and student demographics. And perhaps most importantly, district and school level success stories related to individual working condition reforms are being documented on the teacher working conditions toolkit.