



Understanding the Results of the Alabama Teaching and Learning Conditions 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, is essential to creating schools where teachers want to work and students can learn.

To assess whether these conditions are present, the Alabama State Department of Education, at the recommendation of the Governor's Commission on Teaching Quality and in partnership with numerous educator and stakeholder groups, worked with the New Teacher Center at the University of California at Santa Cruz, to conduct a survey in January and February 2008 of all state licensed educators. By hearing directly from school-based educators who intimately understand teaching condition, policymakers will have the opportunity to make data-driven decisions for developing policies that make Alabama schools great places to work and learn.

Educators across the state have shared their perceptions of the teaching conditions in their schools. ***Almost 30,000 Alabama educators (47 percent) from across the state participated in the Alabama Take20 Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey.*** Data—only released if at least 40 percent of the school faculty or district's school-based licensed educators responded—is now available for almost 1,000 schools and 88 districts, providing critical information for making local and state level decisions to improve Alabama schools.

An interim report will be completed later this spring, providing more in-depth analysis of the survey results, including questions for principals about the support they receive to create positive teaching environments. 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.

Overall, Alabama educators are generally satisfied with their teaching conditions. Nine out of ten educators (87 percent) agree that their school is a good place to work and learn, and more than half (58 percent) strongly agree. It is not surprising, given these perceptions, that 89 percent of survey respondents indicated that they want to remain teaching at their school. These

decisions were guided by the support received from school leadership, effectiveness with students, teaching assignments and the collegiality of the school. Salary, community, parental support and other influences, while important, were less likely to shape educators decision about their future professional plans.

Support

1. School leadership appears to be creating trusting and supportive environments for teachers across the state.

When asked which teaching condition most affects your willingness to remain teaching at your school, 42 percent of Alabama educators indicated that school leadership was the most critical, more than any other area. Fortunately, educators are positive about school leaders. Nine out of ten educators (88 percent) believe that school leadership encourages the faculty to meet high performance standards, that leadership facilitates the use of data to improve student learning (85 percent) and that the school is committed to helping every student learn (86 percent). Additionally:

- Educators feel they work in trusting and supportive environments. More than two-thirds (68 percent) agree that there is an atmosphere of trust in their school and three-quarters (75 percent) agree that school leadership develops supportive community relationships.
- Educators believe that school leadership makes sustained efforts to address concerns about teaching conditions. While less than two-thirds believe efforts are made to address leadership issues (60 percent) and empower educators (62 percent), educators are positive about efforts to improve facilities and resources (69 percent) and professional development (73 percent).

2. Teachers feel engaged and participate in important decisions about their classroom, but are less involved in school choices.

Teacher empowerment is viewed as critical to teacher success with students and their future employment decisions. More than one-third of educators believe that teacher responsibility is the most important teaching condition in promoting student learning (37 percent) and was the critical condition for teachers deciding to remain at their school (32 percent). Alabama educators generally feel empowered and engaged in education decision making.

- Almost two-thirds (63 percent) of educators believe that teachers are centrally involved in decision making about educational issues and three-quarters (73 percent) agree that teachers are engaged in decisions about continuous school improvement and that steps are taken in the school to solve problems (74 percent).
- Teachers report having a large or the primary role in issues that impact their practice such as selecting instructional materials (61 percent), developing teaching strategies (60 percent) and assessment practices (47 percent). But teachers are not influencing other decisions that affect their classroom and school. Half of

educators indicate that teachers play a small role or no role at all in making decisions about teaching assignments (49 percent) and establishing discipline policies (47 percent), and two-thirds play a small or no role in creating school schedules (65 percent) and hiring new faculty and staff (79 percent).

3. Professional development is well received though more may be needed, particularly in differentiating instruction for diverse learners.

Educators (82 percent) believe professional development is a priority strategy for increasing student achievement at their school and that sufficient resources are available to allow teachers to pursue professional development activities (72 percent).

Although two-thirds (67 percents) of Alabama educators report having sufficient training and support to fully utilize available instructional technology, teachers were most likely to indicate a need for professional development in technology (44 percent). Educators also believe they need support to more effectively teach special education students (39 percent) and close the achievement gap (34 percent), yet few educators received at least ten hours of support over the past two years in these areas (20 percent and 18 percent respectively). Only in reading/literacy strategies (50 percent) did half of educators indicate that they received 10 hours of more of professional development in the past two years.

Gaps in learning needs and professional development received may be related to teachers' role in planning and delivering professional learning opportunities. One-quarter of teachers responding to the survey themselves (28 percent) play a small role or no role at all in planning or delivering the professional learning they have engaged in over the last two years. Despite this unmet need, educators are positive that professional development is providing them with the knowledge and skills they need to teach effectively (76 percent).

4. New teachers receiving mentoring found it helpful.

More than 1,200 beginning educators answered specific questions about the support they receive. Nine in ten (85 percent) new teachers—those in their first year of teaching—report having received a mentor.

- Of those receiving support, more than three-quarters believed effective support was provided in modeling professionalism (86 percent), understanding policies and procedures (85 percent), creating discipline strategies (81 percent), devising instructional strategies (84 percent), utilizing curriculum (77 percent), and differentiating instruction based individual student needs and characteristics (72 percent).
- More than half (59 percent) of first year teachers who received a mentor worked together at least one hour per week, and almost one third (31 percent) collaborated more than two hours per week.
- Four-fifths (87 percent) were able to develop a respectful and trusting relationship with their mentor.

- About two-thirds (63 percent) of new Alabama teachers agree that their mentoring experience was important in their decision to remain in teaching at their school.

Resources

5. Teachers need more time to plan and work with colleagues.

Less than half (42 percent) of educators believe the non-instructional time (time without student contact that could be used for planning, meetings, etc.) teachers receive is sufficient, and only 36 percent agree that they have time to collaborate with colleagues. Several issues identified within the survey help illuminate these time concerns.

- Less than one-fifth (15 percent) of Alabama educators report receiving, on average, an hour per day of non-instructional time and half (48 percent) receive three hours or less.
- Non-instructional time may not be used to improve student learning due to paperwork and other duties. Only 30 percent believe efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork required of teachers.

6. Teachers are positive about the resources available.

Alabama educators believe that teachers have sufficient access to appropriate instructional materials (79 percent), instructional technology (74 percent), office equipment and supplies (76 percent) and communication technology (85 percent). Almost nine in ten (84 percent) Alabama educators believe that their school environment is safe.

Workload

7. Getting students to expected levels of performance takes significant time.

Alabama educators note substantial time is required to address the needs of diverse learners and getting teachers to expected levels of performance. Almost three-quarters (70 percent) of educators strongly agree that getting students to meet performance expectations contribute to their overall workload. Student assessment requirements (57 percent strongly agree) and compliance with No Child Left Behind (56 percent strongly agree) were also noted as significant workload contributors.

The Alabama Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey 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 this will create positive school environments where all educators are supported, want to work and can thrive.