

For More Information:

- www.teacherworkingconditions.org is a toolkit designed by the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality with recommendations and resources for reforming teacher working conditions.
- www.learnnc.org/gov/twc.nsf is hosted by LearnNC and has all state, district and school working conditions reports. Legislators can pull up survey results for all schools in their district.
- www.cicoline.com/AboutCIC/Publications/Archives/threshold_spring04.htm The spring 2004 issue of *Threshold* magazine profiled teacher retention. “*Creating a Culture of Excellence*” is written by a North Carolina teacher expressing his thoughts, and the thoughts of more than 300 other accomplished teachers, about which working conditions should be addressed to improve teacher turnover.

Prepared for the Hunt Institute by the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality.

For virtually any business or organization, the conditions in which employees work influence their satisfaction and productivity. Many business leaders understand the importance of employee satisfaction, while many schools still struggle to address basic but critical working conditions issues: teacher isolation, lack of basic classroom materials, excessive non-instructional duties, lack of input into school design and organization and limited opportunities for career advancement and professional growth. Such conditions are closely related to teacher turnover and difficulties in recruiting and retaining teachers. While salary and bonuses are important factors, research has demonstrated that financial incentives alone are not sufficient to keep teachers in schools where poor working conditions exist.

North Carolina became the first state in the nation to study teacher working conditions by surveying those whose opinion matters most on these issues - teachers themselves. In 2002 and again in 2004, teachers were asked questions about five critical areas that research has shown an impact on whether teachers stay in the classroom and how well students learn:

- time
- facilities and resources
- empowerment
- leadership
- professional development

Through surveying every teacher in the state, data have been gathered to provide customized reports about working conditions in individual schools. These data are essential to help policymakers design flexible and effective policies that can be adapted to the unique needs of individual school communities.

Survey results reflect responses from approximately 34,000 educators in 90 percent of schools and virtually every district. The preliminary analysis has yielded the following:

1. Working conditions are significant and strong predictors of teacher retention and student achievement on the state's ABCs assessments.
2. Leadership is critical to improving working conditions, but principals and teachers perceive these conditions very differently. Many school leaders fail to address issues that teachers say are most important to them.

3. Teachers are generally satisfied with most aspects of their working conditions and, since 2002, their views about their workplaces are improving across North Carolina. Both time and empowerment, however, remain unresolved issues for a majority of teachers in the state. Teachers identify class size, time to work with colleagues, and involvement in important decisions related to hiring, budget and professional development opportunities as important to their overall job satisfaction.
4. Teachers, regardless of their background and experience, view working conditions similarly. Neither the amount of time they have taught, how they were prepared, nor any background characteristics such as race or gender had a measurable impact on how teachers perceived working conditions and which aspects of their teaching environment they indicated were most important.

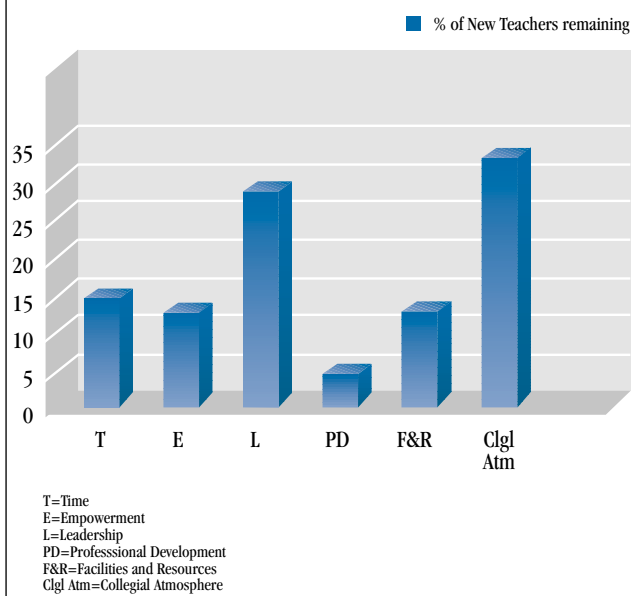
POLICIES AND PROGRAMS IN NORTH CAROLINA

Teachers in North Carolina believe that creating a work environment in which they can work in collaboration with their colleagues and leaders who promote and support instruction are the key ingredients in lowering turnover (see graph).

Providing the time necessary to do this is a challenge. A majority of teachers in North Carolina report having less than three hours per week during school hours dedicated to instructional planning. More than one-quarter of the respondents report spending more than 10 hours per week outside the regular school day planning and grading. Only half of the state's teachers report having adequate time for collaboration with colleagues.

Few state policies and programs exist in North Carolina to help foster collaborative school environments in a comprehensive and systematic way. Within the five areas of working conditions surveyed, the state has been most active in supporting districts to build adequate facilities and in providing professional development opportunities for teachers to improve their practice. But many school leaders say that the money for professional development declines each year.

Working Conditions NC Teachers Say Are Most Important in Deciding Whether to Stay in Their School



Source: North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, 2004.

North Carolina is one of 41 states that provides some state assistance for facilities (\$75 million in FY 2003), including grants and debt service for capital outlays. The state has consistently supported professional development which was demonstrated as significant when analyzed against actual turnover patterns within the state.

Three conclusions about professional development in the state can be drawn from the working conditions surveys:

- Teachers are generally satisfied with the professional development they receive. About two-thirds of teachers stated that their professional development helped them with their teaching and improved student achievement.
- Teachers do not have much say in choosing their professional development opportunities. Only about half of teachers indicate that they have a role in determining the content of professional development offered, raising questions about whether opportunities can help teachers in the areas where they believe they need the most support.

- Most teachers have not had significant professional development in critical areas such as interpreting and using assessment data to inform their instructional practices, modifying the curriculum or designing lessons to support students with special needs or who are English language learners.

POLICIES AND PRACTICES ACROSS THE NATION

Although only South Carolina has amassed the type of specific working conditions data available in North Carolina, several other states have passed legislation that helps to address many of the areas cited by teachers as important. However, no state has done so in a comprehensive way.

- Like North Carolina, about three-fifths of the states have passed legislation requiring reductions in class size, particularly in grades K-3. **California** and now **Florida** are making significant investments to ensure smaller classes. While teachers have been positive about these reforms, they appear to have further exacerbated teacher shortages and have created new challenges related to working conditions and teacher attrition.
- Since the late 1990s, **Arkansas** has required that districts provide teachers with at least 200 minutes of time per week dedicated to instructional planning.
- Through the award winning **Alabama** Reading Initiative, the state provides professional development on reading support through reading specialists, resulting in outstanding student achievement growth. The model requires partnerships with higher education and participation in school teams that include the principal, as well as a reading specialist. The team addresses critical issues related to professional development, time, leadership and building a collegial atmosphere.

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

- **How can a state ensure that working conditions data are used to influence school based reforms to help retain teachers?** Schools and districts need support and assistance in interpreting their customized data. Schools could benefit from specially designated “venture capital” to design and implement data-driven plans for improvement. Best practices should be documented and shared throughout the state. Simple evaluation protocols can be disseminated to help schools measure their progress.
- **How can a state provide sufficient flexibility and support while ensuring that resources are used in the most appropriate ways?** Many of the aspects of working conditions are driven by local district policies related to school design and supporting teachers. The state can help boards to make good decisions by providing them with accurate information and recommendations.
- **How can working conditions reform be integrated into other strategies aimed at teacher satisfaction and retention?** It is critical that there be a comprehensive approach to attracting and retaining excellent teachers and school leaders. A review of all related initiatives could help to surface where the gaps are, where there might be duplication of effort or where conflicting policies are impeding progress. A review of how funding may constrain integrated efforts at the district or school level could also be useful.

“While I’d love to be paid more, no amount of money could make me teach if these conditions [effective school leaders, professional flexibility and a culture of collaboration] are not present in the schools where I work.”

— *Member Teacher Leaders Network*