

# Governor Easley's Teacher Working Conditions Initiative Resources and Response for Teacher Working Conditions Data



While the significance of North Carolina's laudable efforts to develop a body of 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.

The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey provides schools and districts with unique data to help understand and make decisions related to improving teacher working conditions. Unfortunately, many schools simply lack the time, capacity and commitment to fully understand and act on the data. Recognizing these inherent challenges for reforming schools and improving teacher working conditions, under the leadership of Governor Mike Easley, the partners in the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Initiative have developed a range of tools, resources and support opportunities to assist schools in identifying and addressing challenges highlighted by their data.

The Teacher Working Conditions Toolkit ([www.teacherworkingconditions.org](http://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 with "seeing it work" resources, while the "action tools" include checklists and concrete ideas to provide a roadmap for activity on working condition reforms and the "knowledge resources" provide background research to give users some theoretical perspective in identifying school reform strategies. By providing tools to more easily analyze complex data, along with concrete reform strategies for various role groups (community members, teachers, principals, district officials and policymakers) to take action on working conditions issues, the Toolkit increases the likelihood of sustainable, systemic approaches to working condition reforms.

The Southeast Center for Teaching (SECTQ) developed the Toolkit with support from the BellSouth Foundation and the North Carolina Business Committee for Education. In the process of developing the Toolkit, SECTQ solicited input from volunteer stakeholders and teachers from the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission. The Toolkit will continue to improve over time, as schools identify and share what works for improving working conditions.

*"This resource-laden website...is a major find for anyone interested in strategies to address persistent problems in schools that block teacher effectiveness and student achievement."*

*— Public Education Network Newsblast regarding the Toolkit, October 29, 2004*

Another noteworthy opportunity for districts was created when the General Assembly provided \$2 million for the North Carolina Teacher Academy to provide professional development to help improve teacher working conditions in some of North Carolina's poorest school systems. The NC Teacher Academy has hosted six regional training meetings to help the 16 Disadvantaged Students Supplemental Fund (DSSF) pilot districts use their teacher working conditions data to create school and district improvement plans that incorporate working

*"Armed with this data, North Carolina will better meet the needs of teachers, and in turn, our students, because teacher working conditions are student learning conditions."*

*—Governor Mike Easley*

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condition reforms. SECTQ and the NC Teacher Academy have presented survey data analysis tools and the Toolkit directly to more than 350 principals, teachers and school improvement team members in these districts that face significant challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers. Initiative partners have also trained more than 56 other district representatives across the state to help their schools understand and respond to the working conditions data.

## TEACHER WORKING CONDITIONS RESPONSE BEYOND NORTH CAROLINA

The power of this initiative to improve teacher working conditions and consequently student achievement has not been lost on other states. There is strong and emerging interest in replicating North Carolina efforts to diagnose and respond to teacher working conditions.

An analysis of a statewide working conditions survey in *South Carolina* is underway. With funding from the South Carolina Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement (CERRA) and the South Carolina Department of Education's Division of Teaching Quality (DTQ), SECTQ has customized the North Carolina survey instrument, surveyed South Carolina educators and analyzed the results. Individual schools, districts, and a state report will all be published along with an analysis of connections to student achievement.

The *Georgia* Board of Regents is also piloting a customized variation of the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue mentioned the initiative in his State of the State Address and, like other policymakers and stakeholders in Georgia, is participating in the design of the initiative and considering whether to conduct the survey statewide next year. The nine participating districts will also use the Toolkit and hold community meetings sponsored by BellSouth (similar to the work being done by NCBCE in North Carolina).

The *Virginia* Department of Education has contracted with SECTQ to conduct a version of the Teacher Working Conditions Survey in Franklin City and Caroline County school districts. Both districts are currently piloting Governor Mark Warner's Teacher Incentives for Hard-to-Staff Schools Initiative, where new qualified teachers receive a \$15,000 signing bonus for teaching in a hard-to-staff school and all faculty members at hard-to-staff schools are eligible for a \$3,000 performance award.

Along with these states, there are a host of other states, districts and organizations across the country currently considering how teacher working conditions fit into their respective school improvement agendas and many are continuing to look toward North Carolina as the national leader on the forefront of this emerging issue.

*"Not only will we get a closer look at the working conditions of teachers and administrators in our own state, but we will also have the opportunity to compare our situation with neighboring states who have conducted similar research."*

*— Ann Byrd, Director, South Carolina Center for Educator Recruitment, Retention and Advancement*

Prepared by the Southeast Center for Teaching Quality for Governor Mike Easley