



TeLL Maine Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey: An Interim Report

Submitted to the Maine Education Association and the Maine Department of Education

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Introduction

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 to improve instruction, are necessary for enabling teachers to be successful. Policymakers have paid little attention to the working conditions in schools (Hanushek & Rivken, 2007) that are so critical to teacher retention, teacher and student success. A growing body of research clearly demonstrates that assessing, understanding, and improving such conditions can have many benefits:

- **Improved Student Learning:** Teachers' success with students is facilitated by a positive school context, such as support from leadership and being in a collaborative working environment. Several statewide studies have demonstrated that the presence of positive work environments is significantly connected to increased student achievement (Hirsch & Emerick 2007, 2006). In particular, having strong, trusting relationships—both internally and externally (Bryk & Schneider, 2002)—and supportive school leadership are both essential to improving student achievement. A study of 88 urban public schools demonstrates the importance of communication networks for improving student achievement: in schools where teachers talked to each other the most about their jobs and where the principals did the best job of staying in touch with the community, students had noticeably higher reading and math test scores. These communication networks had a greater impact on test scores than the experience or credentials of the staff (Leana & Pil, 2006).
- **Improved Teacher Efficacy and Motivation:** Teachers' perceptions of their school are their reality; therefore, teachers' behavior and efficacy are a direct result of those views. In a recent literature review on teaching conditions, Leithwood (2006) found that teacher efficacy is significantly shaped by teaching conditions and that burnout and teacher engagement are critical to classroom performance and job satisfaction. He notes, "What teachers actually do in their schools and classrooms depends on how teachers perceive and respond to their working conditions."
- **Improved Teacher Retention:** Teachers who leave schools cite an opportunity for a better teaching assignment, dissatisfaction with support from administrators and dissatisfaction with workplace conditions as the main reasons why they seek other opportunities (NCES, 2004, Ingersoll, 2005, Marvel et al., 2006). Teachers indicate that a positive, collaborative school climate and support from colleagues and administrators are the most important factors influencing whether they stay in a school (Hirsch & Emerick 2007, 2006a,b). Research has linked teachers' negative perceptions of working conditions with their exit from schools. Factors such as facilities, safety, and quality of leadership have a greater effect on teacher mobility than salary (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007). In particular, it appears that supportive school leaders who create trusting environments where educators are engaged in decision making impacts the latter group's decisions about where to work (Hirsch & Emerick 2007, 2006a,b).

- **New Recruitment Strategies to Entice Educators to Work in All Schools:** Teachers who are willing to teach in hard-to-staff schools indicate that strong supportive school leadership, an engaged community and parents, safety, and working conditions are all important factors when selecting where to work. Further, when Alabama educators were asked about incentives that would attract them to schools, non-financial incentives, such as guaranteed planning time and reduced class sizes, were found to be more powerful recruitment incentives than salary supplements and bonuses (Hirsch, 2006). Improving teaching conditions could also bolster the teacher supply pool because many educators who left due to poor conditions may come back if such conditions were enhanced. A survey of 2,000 educators from California found that 28 percent of teachers who left the profession before retirement indicated that they would come back if improvements were made to teaching and learning conditions. Monetary incentives were found to be less effective in luring them back (Futernick, 2007).

To help ensure that all students can learn, teachers need to work in schools designed for their success. Positive teaching conditions, where educators are supported and empowered, are essential to creating schools where teachers want to work and students can learn.

About the Survey

To assess whether these conditions are present, the Maine Education Association and the Maine Department of Education conducted the state's first statewide teaching conditions survey in 2008. The survey, which was administered through the New Teacher Center at the University of California at Santa Cruz in December 2007 and January 2008, was sent to all school-based, licensed educators throughout the state of Maine. The TeLL Maine Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey provides data to schools, districts, and the state about whether educators have the supportive school environments necessary for them to continue working and be successful with students. By hearing directly from educators who intimately understand teaching conditions, policymakers will have the opportunity to make data-driven decisions to develop policies that make Maine schools great places to work and learn.

The TeLL Maine Teaching and Learning Condition Survey included approximately ten¹ ? questions with multiple subparts, broken into six major sections: time, facilities and resources, empowerment, leadership, professional development, and mentoring. There were also questions covering the demographics of respondents, such as position held, years of experience, and educational background. Surveys were administered to teachers, principals, vice principals, and other education professionals (e.g., school counselors, psychologists, social workers, library media specialists, etc.). Most of the questions were asked of all respondents, though some were asked only of specific groups. Only teachers in their first three years and those indicating that they served as mentors were asked about new teacher support and mentoring. Further, a set of questions about district support in creating positive teaching conditions was asked specifically of principals.

The survey instrument was developed by the New Teacher Center with input and guidance from a subcommittee of stakeholders and researchers including the Maine Education Association and the Maine Department of Education. A set of core, validated questions from previous teaching

conditions surveys was utilized, while others were developed specifically for the state, including questions on workload and stressors adapted from the Maine Education Policy Research Institute's survey conducted for The Commissioner's Task Force on Teacher Workload (Maine Education Policy Research Institute, November 2004). The statistical analyses conducted using the TeLL Maine survey data included: a factor analysis of the findings that resulted in a reorganization of the survey areas into three major categories of responses: leadership, support for practice, and workload and stress. In addition, cross tabulations of findings by future employment plans, school level, years of experience; as well as frequencies of all questions were conducted for this interim report.

Survey access information and login codes were sent to all school-based educators in the State of Maine. ***More than 5,100 Maine educators (27 percent of all Maine educators) from across the state participated in the TeLL Maine Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey.*** This includes responses from 4,739 teachers, 43 principals, 14 assistant principals, and 341 other education professionals. Data is now available for 159 schools and 35 districts, thus providing critical information for making local and state level decisions to improve Maine schools. Data is only released at the school level if at least 40 percent of the school faculty responded to the survey. Data for the state is publicly available at www.tellmaine.org. Schools and districts with a sufficient response rate received a password to access their data for their own school improvement planning. This survey data is unique in that it represents the perceptions of those who understand Maine teaching and learning conditions best—the educators who experience them every day.

Organization of this Report

While a final report is not expected until student achievement, teacher turnover and other state-provided data are available for further analyses, several initial trends can be identified from the TeLL Maine survey data. Major trends are highlighted across different groups of respondents.

First, a quick snapshot of educators' overall impressions of teaching and learning conditions in Maine schools is presented. Second, the relationship between teaching conditions and teacher employment plans is explored. Third, differences in the perceptions of educators with varying years of experience are explored. Fourth, trends in the perceptions of educators in different school levels and ~~with~~ are discussed. Charts throughout the report highlight survey items where the greatest differences in perception about teaching and learning conditions emerged. Finally, key findings are presented for each major area of the survey: leadership, support for practice, and workload and stress.

Key Findings

Maine educators, generally, believe that their schools are good places to work and learn. *Nearly three-quarters of Maine educators² (70 percent) responding to this survey agree that their school is a good place to work and learn.* One-third of (33 percent) “strongly agree” with this statement and less than one in ten (8 percent) strongly disagree. There are other positive findings throughout the survey as well. Consider the following:

- ***Maine educators are positive about their facilities and resources.*** Two-thirds of Maine educators note that they have sufficient instructional materials (62 percent), instructional technology (67 percent), and communications technology (71 percent). Educators also report working in schools that are safe (75 percent).
- ***Educators are positive about the commitment of the faculty in their school.*** Eighty-eight percent of educators believe that the faculty is committed to helping every student learn. However, only half (55 percent) of Maine educators believe that steps are taken in their schools to solve problems.

However, the state’s teaching corps consistently noted many areas for improvement. The next section explores the implications of the survey findings for teacher retention, given the importance of teaching conditions on the future employment plans of survey respondents.

Finding 1: Teaching Conditions Have an Impact on Teacher Employment Plans

The survey data demonstrates what individuals who work in schools already know: teaching conditions are a potentially powerful lever to help address teacher attrition. ***Overall, almost nine out of ten teachers (86 percent) responding to this survey indicated that they want to “stay” teaching at their school.*** Six percent of respondents were “movers,” wanting to continue teaching but in a different school or district, while eight percent were “leavers,” indicating that they plan to leave education all together.³

Factors Influencing Retention Decisions. The survey includes two major questions addressing future employment plans. The first question asks teachers to rate how strongly they agree or disagree that certain factors influence their decisions about future professional plans. Here, ***teachers most frequently cited their sense of effectiveness in teaching (84 percent), followed by support from teaching assignment (83 percent) and collegiality among staff (83 percent) as factors influencing their future employment*** (Table 1). Teaching conditions such as collegiality, leadership, and empowerment were important factors for teachers in making their decisions about whether to continue working in their school.

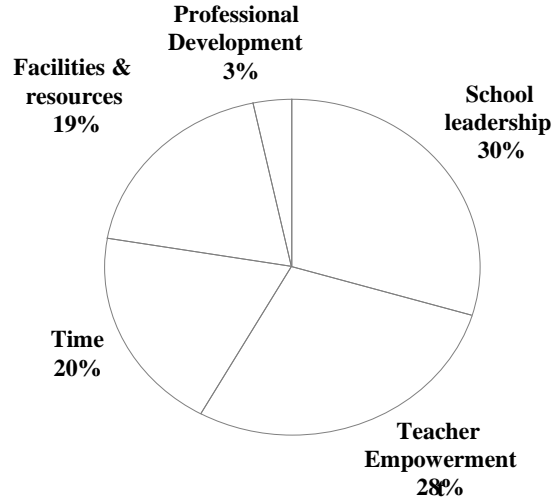
Table 1
Factors Influencing Teachers’ Future Employment Plans in Maine

Factors Influencing Teachers’ Decisions about Their Future Intentions for their Professional Career	Percent Agreeing, Overall	Percent “Strongly Agreeing”
Teaching assignment (subject, students)	82.9%	49.7%
Collegial atmosphere among the staff	82.9%	49.6%
Effectiveness with the students I teach	84.0%	49.4%
Adequate support from school leadership	82.0%	47.0%
Empowerment to make decisions that affect my school and/or classroom	78.5%	41.7%
Salary	70.4%	31.3%
Personal reasons	69.4%	40.1%
Student behavior	61.8%	22.6%
My districts consolidation plan	33.2%	13.9%

Table 1 is organized in descending order of those who “strongly agree” with statements about factors influencing respondents’ decisions about their future plans. Salary, community factors, and personal reasons while important, were *less* likely to shape teachers’ decisions about their future professional plans than other teaching conditions. District consolidation plans appear to be influencing the plans of survey respondents less so than all other areas assessed. Teachers knew few specifics about district consolidation at this time this survey was administered [December 2007 – January 2008].

School leadership is important to retention. In a second question about employment plans, teachers were asked to select between the five conditions assessed on the survey which *most* affects their willingness to keep teaching at the same school: time during the work day, school facilities and resources, school leadership, teacher empowerment, and professional development. ***One-third (30 percent) of all teachers selected school leadership as the most important teaching condition to their willingness to continue working at their school, while 28 percent selected teacher empowerment*** (see Figure 1 on next page).

Figure 1
Teaching Conditions Maine Teachers Perceive as Being MOST Important to Continue Teaching in their School



Positive Perceptions of Teaching Conditions Are Linked to Staying. Evidence throughout the survey indicates that teachers with positive perceptions of their teaching conditions are much more likely to want to stay at their current school than teachers who are more negative, particularly in the areas of leadership and teacher empowerment (Table 2). Leavers are more positive than movers, most likely because those who are leaving teaching do so not just due to dissatisfaction, but often for other non-teaching related causes (retirement, personal reasons, etc.).

Table 2
Differences in the Perceptions of Stayers, Movers and Leavers on Teaching Conditions Questions

Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey	Percent of Educators Agreeing		
	Stayers	Movers	Leavers
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the school.	59.1%	12.0%	34.7%
In this school we take steps to solve problems.	59.7%	15.9%	39.1%
Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.	62.5%	21.4%	40.6%
School leadership consistently supports teachers when needed.	56.2%	15.2%	35.8%
Overall, the school leadership in my school	50.7%	10.2%	31.4%

is effective.			
Teacher performance evaluations are handled in an appropriate manner.	58.0%	22.8%	43.2%

Table 2, which is organized in the order of the greatest difference between perceptions of stayers and movers across a variety of questions about teaching and learning conditions, shows that many of greatest differences in perceptions of teaching conditions are related to school leadership. Moreover, *three to five times as many stayers agree with positive statements about school leadership than do movers*. For example, while around one-tenth (12 percent) of movers agreed that “there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the school,” six in ten (59 percent) of stayers agree with the same statement.

The data shows that disparities between stayers and movers are visible not just in whether teaching conditions are present, but in whether or not school leadership makes efforts to improve such conditions. *Teachers who want to stay in their school are far more likely than those who want to move to believe that school leadership is working to improve teaching and learning conditions*. While about two-fifths of responding teachers who want to stay believe that leadership is addressing empowering teachers (43 percent), less than one-tenth of movers believe the same statement to be true (8 percent). It is also notable that on all of these questions, only half or fewer stayers (who are more positive than movers or leavers) agree with statements about leadership’s efforts to improve teaching and learning conditions in Maine schools (Table 3).

Table 3
Differences in Perceptions of Stayers, Movers and Leavers about School Leadership Efforts to Address Teachers’ Concerns about Teaching and Learning Conditions

School Leadership Makes a Sustained Effort to Address Teacher Concerns About:	Percent of Educators Agreeing		
	Stayers	Movers	Leavers
Empowering teachers	42.9%	8.0%	24.1%
Facilities and resources	52.1%	19.4%	40.4%
New teacher support	51.3%	23.8%	38.7%
Professional development	50.6%	23.6%	32.7%
The use of time in the school	41.3%	14.9%	23.4%
Leadership issues	34.8%	9.1%	18.8%

Note: Responses are organized in the order of the greatest difference between perceptions of stayers and movers in response to this question on the survey.

Teachers who want to stay in their current school are more likely to report having necessary teaching conditions in place. Differences in perceptions of teaching conditions also arose across other groupings of respondents, such as by their years of experience and school level, as noted in findings 2 and 3.

Finding 2: New Teachers Tend to View Teaching and Learning Conditions Most Positively

A teacher's years of experience appears to make a difference in teachers' perceptions of whether or not critical teaching conditions are in place within a school.

The least experienced teachers are the most likely to agree that positive teaching and learning conditions are present in their school. On most questions across all areas of the survey, teachers in their first three years are slightly more positive than their more experienced colleagues. Teachers with seven to ten years experience were the least likely to believe that critical conditions of work are present in their schools (Table 4). The most veteran teachers – those with 20 or more years of experience – were typically more positive than teachers with 4-20 years experience, but usually less so than novice teachers. The greatest differences in perceptions were seen between novice teachers (those with 1-3 years experience) and teachers with 7-10 years experience in the areas of professional development, leadership, and empowerment. For example, novice teachers are more likely to agree that: professional development provides teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to teach, and that teachers are provided the opportunity to learn from one another.

Table 4
Percentage of Teachers Agreeing Teaching and Learning Conditions Are Present by Years of Experience

Teaching and Learning Conditions Questions	Percent Agreeing by Experience				
	1-3 Yrs	4 - 6 Yrs	7 - 10 Yrs	11 - 20 Yrs	20+ Yrs
Professional development provides teachers with the knowledge and skills most needed to teach effectively.	58.6%	40.1%	40.2%	42.8%	43.6%
Teachers are provided opportunities to learn from one another.	62.7%	47.1%	46.4%	48.3%	51.6%
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the school.	65.9%	56.3%	51.0%	53.5%	53.8%
Sufficient resources are available to allow teachers to take advantage of professional development activities.	65.5%	52.2%	50.8%	51.1%	51.1%
Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.	73.4%	67.8%	58.7%	57.6%	54.3%
Teacher performance evaluations are handled in an appropriate manner.	68.4%	57.7%	54.0%	53.7%	52.8%

Note: Table 4 is organized in order of the greatest difference between first year teachers and those with 7-10 years experience.

Finding 3: Teachers’ Perceptions of Teaching and Learning Conditions Vary by School Level

Another area where differences in perceptions were seen was by the school level in which the teachers worked: elementary, middle or high school.

- ***Elementary school teachers are more likely to note the presence of many important teaching and learning conditions in their school than middle and high school educators.*** Elementary school teachers are more likely to note the presence of positive teaching conditions in the areas of school leadership, empowerment, professional development, and facilities and resources. For example, elementary teachers are more likely than their middle or high school counterparts to agree that professional development provides teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to teach effectively, that faculty and staff have a shared vision, and that teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction (Table 5).
- ***Elementary teachers are less likely than middle and high school teachers to report that they have sufficient time in their school day to meet the needs of all of their students.*** For example, fewer elementary educators note that the teachers in their schools have sufficient non-instructional time. (Table 5).

Table 5
Percentage of Teachers Agreeing Teaching and Learning Conditions Are Present by School Level

Teaching and Learning Conditions Questions	Percent Agreeing by Level		
	Elementary	Middle	High
Professional development provides teachers with the knowledge and skills most needed to teach effectively.	51.8%	41.1%	31.4%
The faculty and staff have a shared vision.	69.0%	50.9%	48.9%
Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.	81.5%	69.1%	63.3%
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems.	43.6%	32.4%	28.5%
Teachers are provided opportunities to learn from one another.	55.1%	53.5%	42.1%
The school leadership communicates clear expectations to students and parents.	60.1%	49.0%	47.8%
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the school.	60.8%	47.1%	48.6%
In this school we take steps to solve problems.	61.1%	51.0%	49.0%
Teacher performance evaluations are handled in an appropriate manner.	61.8%	50.1%	50.2%
School leadership consistently supports teachers	57.7%	47.0%	46.8%

when needed.			
The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.	21.6%	41.9%	32.2%

The following sections will further explore Maine educators’ aggregated perceptions about leadership, support for practice, and workload and stress.

Leadership

While teachers who plan to stay teaching in their same schools tend to have more positive perceptions about their school leadership, Maine educators on the whole are not particularly positive about their leadership. ***Overall, fewer than half of Maine educators (47 percent) believe that their school leadership is effective.*** Moreover, almost one-fifth (19 percent) “strongly disagrees” with the statement that their school leadership is effective.

As mentioned in Finding 1 (see Figure 1), when asked which teaching condition MOST affects willingness to remain teaching at the same school, one-third (29 percent) of Maine educators indicated that school leadership was the most critical, more than any other area. Further, half (47 percent) of teachers said that having supportive school leadership was “extremely important” to them in considering future career plans, a higher percentage than those reporting that their salary (31 percent), and student behavior (23 percent) are extremely important (see Table 1).

- **School leadership is supportive in many arenas, but needs to do more to create trusting environments and address concerns about teaching conditions.**

Maine educators responding to the survey are positive about several aspects of school leadership. Three-quarters (72 percent) believe that they are held to high professional standards and that the faculty is committed to helping every student learn (88 percent). Other areas, however, appear to be of concern to Maine educators:

- Only about half believe that there is an atmosphere of trust in their school (54 percent) and feel consistently supported (52 percent).
- Less than half of educators report that school leadership is making a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about leadership (32 percent), teacher empowerment (39 percent) and time (38 percent).
- **Teachers do not feel engaged in important decisions about their school.**

Teacher empowerment is viewed as critical to teacher success with students as well as to their future employment decisions. Almost one-third of responding educators believe empowerment is the most important teaching condition in promoting student learning (30 percent) and the most significant condition influencing whether teachers keep working at their current school (28

percent). Maine educators, however, do not feel empowered and engaged in education decision-making.

- Only one-third (37 percent) of educators believe that teachers are centrally involved in decision making about educational issues. While a majority of educators believe that steps are taken to solve problems in their school (55 percent), only one-third agree (36 percent) that there is an effective process for making collaborative decisions.
- **Educators report that teachers play a large or the primary role in issues that impact their professional practice within their classroom**, such as selecting instructional materials (57 percent), devising teaching techniques (69 percent) and setting grading and assessment practices (48 percent) (Table 6).
- **Educators report less teacher influence over decisions that affect their school.** Almost two-thirds (63 percent) play a “small role” or “no role at all” in determining the content of in-service professional development programs, deciding how the school budget is spent (68 percent), school improvement planning (59 percent), and establishing and implementing student discipline policies (50 percent) (Table 6).

**Table 6
Teacher Role in School Decision Making**

Please indicate how large a role teachers have at your school in each of the following areas:	Responses from ME Educators Surveyed				
	No role at all	Small role	Moderate role	Large role	Primary role
Devising teaching techniques	1.4%	8.5%	21.1%	39.0%	30.0%
Selecting instructional materials and resources	2.1%	15.6%	25.6%	34.6%	22.2%
Setting grading and student assessment practices	5.6%	18.1%	28.4%	33.8%	14.1%
Interviewing and selecting new teachers	14.5%	32.5%	29.6%	21.9%	1.5%
Establishing and implementing policies and student discipline	15.7%	34.1%	29.7%	18.3%	2.2%
School improvement planning	20.1%	38.7%	28.2%	11.9%	1.1%
Determining the content of in-service professional development programs	26.2%	36.9%	24.4%	11.0%	1.6%
Deciding how the school budget will be spent	28.6%	39.1%	23.1%	8.6%	0.6%

Table 6 is organized in descending order by those areas where teachers indicated that they had either a “large role” or the “primary role” in shaping these areas their schools.

Support for Practice

- **Professional development does not appear to be meeting the most pressing needs of Maine educators.**

About half of educators report that there are sufficient resources for teachers to take advantage of professional development (52 percent), that professional development is a priority as a strategy to improve student achievement (45 percent), and that it ultimately provides teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to teach effectively (43 percent).

Teachers were asked about both their professional development needs and the areas in which they actually receive support. When asked to identify areas of professional development *needed* to teach effectively, Maine teachers were most likely to cite training for working with students with disabilities (45 percent) and support around closing the achievement gap (45 percent) (Table 7).

Table 7
Professional Development NEEDED by Teachers to Effectively Teach Their Students

Professional Development NEEDED to teach effectively	Percent Agreeing
Special Education (students with disabilities)	45.4%
Closing the achievement gap	44.6%
Literacy strategies	38.5%
Student assessment	34.9%
Special Education (academically gifted students)	29.5%
Your content area	27.5%
Methods of teaching	26.7%
Numeracy strategies	25.9%
Classroom management techniques	24.1%
Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	7.7%

Teachers were also asked to cite areas where they *received* 10 hours or more of professional development in the past two years (Table 8). Only in reading/literacy strategies (60 percent) did half of educators receive such training (Table 8). While 45 percent of teachers cited a need for professional development around teaching students with disabilities and closing the achievement gap, only 19 and 11 percent, respectively, noted that they had received at least 10 hours of training over the last two years in these areas.⁴

Table 8
Professional Development RECEIVED by Teachers over the Last Two Years

Professional Development RECEIVED (at least 10 hours over last 2 years)	Percent Agreeing
Literacy strategies	60.1%

Your content area	41.0%
Student assessment	38.3%
Methods of teaching	30.9%
Special Education (students with disabilities)	19.1%
Numeracy strategies	18.6%
Classroom management techniques	12.3%
Closing the achievement gap	11.3%
Special Education (academically gifted students)	4.4%
LEP	2.6%

Such gaps in learning needs and professional development received may be related to teachers' role in planning and delivering professional learning opportunities. *Two-thirds (63 percent) of teachers responding to the survey perceived themselves as playing a "small role" or "no role at all" in determining the content of in-service professional development programs* (see Table 6).

While almost two-thirds of Maine teachers (61 percent) report that they have incorporated strategies from professional development into their instructional delivery and that it has proven useful in improving student achievement (57 percent), only one-quarter (28 percent) received follow up from professional development that helped improve their teaching.

In addition to asking all teachers questions about professional development support, first year teachers were asked about the quality and duration of mentoring in their schools.

- **New teachers receiving additional support found it helpful**

Almost 300 beginning educators answered specific questions about the support they receive. Nine in ten (87 percent) new teachers—those with three years of teaching experience or less—report receiving some additional support as a beginning educator. Mentoring was the most frequent way support was provided (92 percent), but many also received general support and encouragement (74 percent), seminars and professional development specifically for new teachers (45 percent) and common planning time with experienced colleagues (37 percent).

- Of those receiving support, more than two-thirds believed it improved their effectiveness in following school and district procedures (75 percent) and completing required documentation (72 percent), as well as in developing classroom management and discipline strategies (70 percent) and instructional strategies (73 percent).
- Nine out of ten responding new teachers (90 percent) attribute at least some of their success as a beginning teacher to the additional support they received.
- More than half (59 percent) of new Maine teachers agree that the additional support they received was important in their decision to remain in teaching.

Workload and Stress

- **Teachers need more time to plan and work with colleagues.**

Less than one-third (30 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 37 percent agree that they have time to collaborate with colleagues. Several issues identified within the survey help illuminate these time concerns:

- Only about one in ten (13 percent) Maine educators report receiving, on average, an hour per day of non-instructional time and 48 percent receive three hours or less per week.
 - Teachers may be utilizing non-instructional time for paperwork and other duties rather than to improve student learning. Only 28 percent of responding Maine educators believe efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork required of teachers.
- **Getting students to expected levels of performance takes significant time and contributes significantly to teachers' stress.**

Maine educators note substantial time is needed to address the needs of diverse learners and to get students to expected levels of performance. More than half (57 percent) of educators “strongly agree” that getting all students to expected levels of performance contributes to their overall workload, and nearly half (49 percent) strongly agree that meeting diverse student learning needs also significantly contributes to workload. 47 and 37 percent, respectively, of teachers “strongly agree” that the same concerns add significantly to their stress as a teacher. Student assessment requirements were also noted by educators as being significant contributors to workload (43 percent strongly agree) and by teachers, specifically, as adding to their stress as a teacher (39 percent strongly agree).

Conclusion and Next Steps

While more analyses remain, the initial examination of the survey data suggests that Maine has a solid foundation of committed educators. Comprehensive, sustained efforts to improve teaching and learning conditions will ensure that the state’s educators are able to help every child in Maine learn.

The TeLL Maine 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.

A final report, analyzing the findings of the survey relative to student learning and teacher retention, will be submitted in the fall 2008 after student achievement, teacher turnover and other state-provided data can be analyzed. For the final report, more in-depth analyses will occur in the following areas:

- In domain-specific analyses, we will delve into teachers' perceptions of leadership abilities and empowerment opportunities within their schools, with an understanding that these two areas are critical in teachers' future employment plans.
- Using student achievement data, we will further analyze how educators' perceptions of working conditions align with student learning.
- We will continue to explore how the time constraints on Maine's teachers impact both their own job satisfaction and student learning. For instance, when issues affecting retention are considered, time ranks third in teachers' career decisions, but climbs to first when teachers are asked which working condition most greatly impacts student learning.

While some additional data will be provided in the final report, readers are encouraged to use these interim findings to begin the important conversations that will lead to improvement in the teaching and learning conditions in their schools. Having a qualified teacher for every student is not enough to close the achievement gap. Teachers must have the resources and support they need to serve all students well. We look forward to continuing our support of Maine's most critical educational resource—its dedicated teaching corps.

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Appendix A: Guide to Using the Data

It is important to consider the following when analyzing and using the TeLL Maine Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey results for your school improvement efforts.

- 1. Teaching Conditions are an area for school improvement, not accountability.** Because teaching conditions are about schools, no one individual should be held solely accountable for the status of the school culture. Rather, these data should be used to guide school improvement planning with schools and then assessed on their progress toward implementing collectively developed reforms.
- 2. Teaching conditions are not about any one individual and it will take a community effort to improve these conditions.** No one person should be viewed as responsible for creating or reforming school culture. Conditions are about schools, not about individuals. The principal can have a significant impact on the professional culture in which teachers work, but many aspects of teaching conditions are beyond the principal's control. Broader social trends, federal, state and district policies all impact how educators view and operate within their school and classroom.
- 3. Perceptual data are real data.** The survey results are based on educators' perceptions of the presence of important teaching conditions. Educators' perceptions of the culture and context of their schools have been linked in a number of studies to student learning, future employment plans, efficacy and motivation. Furthermore, given that educators base their decisions to stay in or leave teaching upon their perceptions, this data should help inform school improvement and reform efforts at the school, district and state levels. However, other data (e.g., instructional expenditures, teacher/pupil ratio, etc.) should be used to triangulate these findings and provide a better understanding of these perceptions.
- 4. Conversations need to be structured and safe.** Having data-driven dialogue about the findings of the survey, the root causes of educator perceptions, and potential reforms will require structure, facilitation, setting ground rules and the ability to separate the issues from individuals. Dialogue should occur so that all can participate in a safe and meaningful way.
- 5. Identify and celebrate positives as well as considering areas for improvement.** Educators have tremendous pride in the work they do and all want to work in a school that allows them to do their best work. All schools have strengths that should be acknowledged and celebrated during school improvement efforts at the same time as issues are identified and addressed.
- 6. Create a common understanding of what defines and shapes conditions.** Anything and everything might be considered a part of and influence on teaching conditions. The survey provides input from educators on a host of important research-based teaching conditions, which should serve as a starting point for understanding what is important to teachers for them to do their best work. Research shows that broader social trends, media coverage, respect for the profession, local and state policies, etc. can all influence teachers' perceptions of their conditions and ultimately their motivation and efficacy as educators. Other areas may be worthy of further investigation, such as teaching assignments, curricular support, assessments and accountability, parent and community support, etc.
- 7. Focus on what you can solve.** Many issues that shape teaching conditions within a school or district are subject to federal and state assessment policies, funding, etc. To be successful, school improvement planning should focus on areas that can be addressed by the school community. District barriers to school-based solutions, as well as challenges related to state or federal policy or broader societal concerns should be identified and used to facilitate cross-school conversations.
- 8. Solutions can be complex and long term.** Teaching conditions are cumulative and engrained over time. It took many years and faculty members to create them and it may take a similar amount of time to reform them. Some solutions may be inexpensive and simple to address, like improving the consistency of communication amongst faculty, while others are resource intensive (e.g., class size reduction, integration of technology) or long range (e.g., building trust, creating authentic professional learning communities). A school improvement plan must pay attention both to short and long term issues to successfully improve the professional context.

Endnotes

¹ The number of questions answered by any one respondent depended on their years of experience and their role in the school (teacher, principal, etc.). Educators may have answered up to 200 specific items about their school.

² “Educators” is used in this report only to refer to the aggregated responses all school-based licensed educators who responded to the survey. There were four groups of professionals completing this survey: teachers, principals, vice or assistant principals, and other school-based licensed education professionals.

³ 24,398 educators responded to a question about their future intentions for their professional career. “Stayers” were those who planned to continue working in their current school either as long as possible or until a better opportunity came along; “movers” planned to leave the school or district as soon as possible but to continue working in education; and, “leavers” planned to leave education all together.

⁴ One must be careful when making comparisons between the stated professional development needs of teachers and the areas where they noted receiving professional development. This is true for a number of reasons. One is that teachers might not always be aware that a certain kind of professional development was meant to cover the topics we asked about, like closing the achievement gap. Second, it is possible that the needs of respondents are actually underestimated: if teachers *received* professional development in a particular area, they might have decided not to indicate it as a *need*, even if they felt it was important. Alternatively, teachers may be confirming that they have a need for a particular kind of professional development that they are actually receiving.