

North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions: The Intersection of Policy and Practice

by

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All across the nation public schools are under various federal and state mandates for reform, addressing essential areas such as teacher quality and teacher retention strategies, high school completion, improving low performing schools, and closing the achievement gap. In almost every state, the design and founding principles behind policies to improve public education originate with good intentions, but not always good data to inform these efforts. In almost every instance, a key data element - the voice of educators in the field - has been left out as it is difficult to capture and understand. Outstanding policy ideas basically have failed in implementation within the school setting as each is different with varying conditions and capacity to improve. Knowing the perspectives of teachers with regards to school leadership and the support and environment within their school can help policymakers and practitioners understand what it will take to improve.

In North Carolina, policy and practice are at an historical intersection drawing upon the voices of educators as an

“The Survey provides teachers with an opportunity to make sure our voices are heard about issues that determine the quality of our jobs and our students’ success.”

- Melissa Bartlett, Former NC Teacher of the Year; Member, NC State Board of Education

integral component of policy design through a statewide, voluntary, survey of teacher working conditions administered biennially.

Since a pilot initiated in 2001 by the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission and the first statewide survey

under the leadership of Governor Easley in 2002, the state has surveyed all school-based licensed educators about their teaching conditions—time, leadership, empowerment, professional development, facilities and resources, and induction—essential elements to student success and teacher retention. As the Governor aptly noted, “teacher working conditions are student learning conditions.” The most recent iteration of the survey was in the spring of 2008 and over 104,000 educators responded, providing every public school with their own data to use as a tool to improve student learning conditions.

Analyses conducted by the New Teacher Center demonstrate significant connections between positive teacher working conditions and student achievement and teacher retention. For more information on these findings, visit www.ncteachingconditions.org

STATE POLICY REFORMS

North Carolina has incrementally advanced policy work in subsequent years. The data from each iteration of the survey not only continues to inform local communities on ways to improve each school, it assists district and state policymakers in decisions affecting the recruitment and retention of quality teachers, teacher induction practices, and quality training of principals. The TWC data and accompanying research findings continue to shape statewide policy, leading to newly established 21st century standards and evaluations and support for school leaders and classroom teachers.

The following page lists a summary of the key strategies taken to enact various statewide policies as a result of the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey initiative since 2002.

NC Teacher Working Conditions Initiative- Policies Implemented

2003

Governor announced the first state-generated NC Report Card (www.ncschoolreportcards.com) for every school in the state so that anyone can see details about every school. Included in the Teacher Quality report is the number of teachers that responded to the previous TWC Survey as well as school level teacher turnover rates.

2004

Disadvantaged Student Supplemental Fund (DSSF) created: original \$22M allocation to sixteen school districts in most need; districts applied for use of the money from a menu of “proven strategies” which included use of TWC data in school improvement planning.

2005

Established TWC survey as permanent part of the state’s continuation budget (Senate Bill 622):

- Established the TWC Survey every two years as part of state budget
- Included funding for associated research and findings at both statewide and school level for DSSF districts and the lowest performing schools
- Established the NC TWC Advisory Board to oversee implementation and dissemination of survey and the findings to school level as well as policy development
- Provided funding (\$100K annually) to NC Network for School Improvement Plans incorporating TWC data
- Provided funding for TWC Conference every two years

Evaluation of school principals: Required State Board of Education to revise evaluation instrument for principals to include accountability for teacher retention, teacher support, and school climate.

Revision of Masters in School Administration (MSA) Standards: Required State Board of Education to revise MSA program standards to focus on providing positive school climate, teacher support, and teacher retention.

Professional Development for new principals: Required all new principals to complete the Principals Executive Program - focusing on TWC; provided \$125K to the program.

2006

Planning time for teachers (HB 1151): All School Improvement Teams now required to document a plan to provide planning time for every teacher (goal of 5 hours per week) and a duty-free lunch.

Provided continuation \$2M of custom professional development to DSSF schools/districts based on TWC survey and student achievement results.

Customized TWC data analysis and assessment of School Improvement Plans for the state’s lowest performing high schools; Provided analyses for all high schools where less than 70 percent of students met proficiency levels on the state’s student assessment.

North Carolina State Board of Education established their new twenty-first century goals for students, teachers and administrators using the national Partnership for 21st Century Skills roadmap.

2007

Principal evaluation instrument pilot conducted: Newly developed by the North Carolina State Board of Education this evaluation tool aligned with seven standards that draw upon principals’ abilities to create positive working conditions.

Teacher Evaluation: The design of a new instrument to be used statewide by the State Board of Education was started; NC Professional Teaching Standards spearheaded the effort to align all instruments and incorporate TWC work.

Education Week adopted the Teacher Working Conditions Survey as an indicator of quality for state education report cards. Fifteen states implemented similar teaching conditions surveys.

2008

Principal evaluation instrument implemented statewide; Every principal required to show use of data (including TWC Survey) for planning goals annually, account for teacher turnover in a written statement and must show that the School Improvement Team is elected (as per legislative statute) and is the decision-making body for the school.

Teacher evaluation instrument was implemented in 13 school districts with plans for statewide adoption by 2011. First standard for teachers focused on leadership in their classroom, school and profession and draws on TWC research and data.

2009

With a budget shortfall in excess of \$4 billion dollars in NC, funding for the survey was reduced (non-recurring cut) from \$505K in previous biennium to \$215K; One of few research or support programs not to be eliminated in the state budget. This reduction still allows for the administration of the biennial survey but reduces the associated research.

Teacher evaluation instrument in phase II implementation (approximately two thirds of the state).