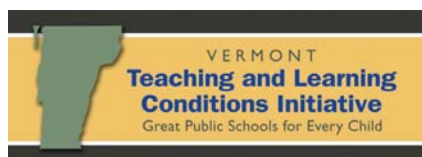




# The Vermont Teaching and Learning Conditions Initiative

*Ensuring All Educators  
and Education Support Personnel  
Work in Great Public Schools*

Executive Summary  
and Recommendations



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## **Teaching and Learning Conditions Initiative Vermont Survey Coalition**

To help ensure all students can learn educators need to work in schools designed for their success. Positive teaching conditions, where educators and Education Support Professionals (ESPs) are supported and engaged, are essential to staff retention and, ultimately, student success. To assess whether these conditions are present, the New Teacher Center, under the leadership of the Vermont-NEA, conducted surveys of all school-based licensed educators and ESPs in April 2009.

By surveying faculties about their school conditions, data from those who know these conditions best—the dedicated professionals working across Vermont—has been compiled, analyzed and utilized at the school, district and state levels in an effort to make teaching and learning conditions better for educators and students.

## *Executive Summary*

Policymakers, practitioners, and researchers have long realized that teaching quality is the most important variable in student success. Supportive school environments, where educators are valued, trusted, and have the time and ability to collaborate, are necessary for enabling teachers to be successful. To assess whether these conditions are present across Vermont, the Vermont – National Education Association (NEA) initiated the first-ever statewide total population survey of certificated educators and education support professionals. In partnership with a coalition of state education organizations, the Vermont Teaching and Learning Conditions Licensed Educator Survey (Vermont TLC-LE) and the Vermont Teaching and Learning Conditions Education Support Professional Survey (Vermont TLC-ESP) were created and conducted in April of 2009.

More than 4,200 licensed educators (46 percent) and almost 2,000 education support professionals (estimated 30 percent) responded to the surveys. State and district results have been available since June of 2009 to all educators from the 166 schools in which at least 40 percent of the licensed faculty responded and the 85 schools for which at least 40 percent of the Education Support Professionals responded. Individual school data for those schools with sufficient response can be accessed at [www.vtteachingandlearning.net](http://www.vtteachingandlearning.net). An assessment of these schools shows that they are representative of schools across the state. Key findings documented in this report include:

- ***Educators are generally positive about teaching in Vermont.*** About three-quarters of survey respondents agree that their school is a good place to work and learn, and nine out of 10 teachers indicate they want to remain teaching in their current position. Seven out of 10 teachers are hoping to do so as long as they are able. Only three percent of survey respondents plan to leave education entirely (and that includes the 36 percent of survey respondents who have been teaching 20+ years). In addition, educators are positive about the level of community engagement in their schools, the facilities and resources provided to them, and some aspects of professional development.
- ***Community Engagement and Empowerment influence student performance.*** The Community Engagement and Empowerment factors exert significant influence on aggregate school-level achievement. Among teaching conditions, community and parent/guardian support and communication were the most consistent influence in student performance. At the high school level, supportive school leaders and effective decision-making processes were essential elements of student success. However, only half of teachers report that they are integrally involved in decision making and four out of 10 report an effective process for making collaborative decisions.
- ***Teacher turnover is lower in schools where educators note sufficient facilities and resources.*** Teacher turnover is lower where teachers have access to the facilities and resources they need to be effective. Such resources include instructional materials, communication technology, office equipment, and instructional technology, along with the training to support utilization of instructional technologies in the classroom. Additionally, teachers are

four times more likely to report wanting to remain teaching in their school where there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect and three times more likely where they perceive school leadership makes efforts to address concerns about empowering teachers.

- ***There are differences in perceptions of teaching and learning conditions across the state based on a variety of factors.*** Schools serving high poverty populations are less likely to note positive conditions, particularly in the area of Community Engagement and Facilities and Resources. The newest teachers are the most likely to note positive aspects of their teaching environment. Elementary educators report more positive teaching and learning conditions.
- ***ESPs are not being engaged in decisions that impact their work or their students.*** Only one-quarter of ESPs report they are involved in decision making about issues that directly impact their school. Only four out of 10 agree they are involved in decision making about issues that impact their jobs. Four in 10 do not agree that ESPs are trusted to make sound professional decisions about their work. This may be important as ESPs are significantly more likely to report wanting to stay in environments where they feel respected.
- ***There are differences in perceptions of teaching and learning conditions between licensed educators and ESPs in the same school.*** Generally, licensed educators are more likely to report community engagement and support, professional development and involvement in decisions that impact their job.

## ***Recommendations***

From these findings and other analyses, the following recommendations are offered to Vermont policymakers, stakeholders and educators to enhance continued efforts to improve teaching and learning conditions.

### **Recommendation 1: Create Systemic Opportunities for Teachers and Staff to Participate in Decisions that Impact Classrooms and Schools.**

- Ensure policies and practices are in place that make clear how decisions will be made and that clearly communicate the results and rationale of such decisions to faculty.
- Consider areas where teachers can be appropriately engaged in decision making and ensure they have the knowledge and skills necessary to make the right choices.
- Consider leadership opportunities for teachers to allow for their participation in decisions that influence their classroom, school and profession.
- Engage ESPs in decisions that impact their jobs.

### **Recommendation 2: Help School Leadership Establish Positive Teaching and Learning Conditions in Every School**

- Create clear expectations and/or standards for what school leaders need to know and be able to do in recruiting and retaining teachers as well as creating positive teaching and learning conditions.
- Partner with institutions of higher education to ensure that new principal candidates graduate from programs with the knowledge and skills they need to create positive teaching and supportive school climates.
- Provide professional development for principals and other school leaders that support efforts to create positive teaching and learning conditions.

### **Recommendation 3: Support Schools in Understanding and Improving Teaching Conditions.**

- Create standards or guidelines for teaching conditions so all school faculty members understand the key elements of building a positive school climate.
- Ensure that teaching conditions data be used as part of the school improvement planning process.

**Recommendation 4: Support Schools in Engaging the Broader Community in Efforts to Understand and Improve Working Conditions.**

- Ensure that teaching conditions analysis and reform is a community effort.
- Document successful community engagement practices through a thorough examination of working conditions data.

**Recommendation 5: Ensure that Every Faculty Member is Inducted into the Profession.**

- The state should create rigorous induction program standards, criteria for selecting and supporting mentors, and program review to ascertain all new teachers are supported.

**Recommendation 6: Use the Vermont TLC and Other Mechanisms to Collect Educators' Views on Teaching and Learning Conditions to Inform Local and State Human Capital Decisions**

- Engage a broader group of stakeholders and policymakers in conducting and utilizing the Vermont TLC Survey.
- Regularly assess and monitor progress on critical conditions identified as having a significant impact on expected teacher retention and student learning.

The Vermont TLC data is a compilation of the voices of those who know schools best—the dedicated educators and ESPs working with students every day. More than 6,000 of Vermont's school-based licensed educators and ESPs responded with what they want and need to be successful and remain working. Now it is time to listen.

## About the New Teacher Center

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The New Teacher Center is a national organization dedicated to improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders. NTC strengthens school communities through proven mentoring and professional development programs, online learning environments, policy advocacy, and research. Since 1998, the NTC has served over 49,000 teachers, 5,000 mentors, and touched millions of students across America.



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