



# TELL Maryland

*Listening to Educators  
to Create  
Successful Schools*

Executive Summary  
and Recommendations



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## **Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning Maryland Survey Coalition**

The Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning Maryland Survey (TELL Maryland) is conducted by Governor Martin O'Malley in conjunction with a coalition of representatives from education, government and business organizations, all of whom believe that it is critical to listen to educators' views when shaping school improvement strategies.

- Governor Martin O'Malley
- American Federation of Teachers – Maryland
- Maryland Association of Boards of Education
- Maryland Association of Elementary School Principals
- Maryland Association of Secondary School Principals
- Maryland State Department of Education
- Maryland State Education Association
- Maryland State Board of Education
- Public School Superintendents Association of Maryland

## *Executive Summary*

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, are necessary for enabling teachers to be successful. To assess whether these conditions are present across Maryland, Governor O'Malley initiated the first-ever statewide total population survey of certificated educators. In partnership with a coalition of state education organizations, the **TELL Maryland-Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning Survey** was created and conducted in March 2009.

More than 43,400 educators (62 percent) responded to the survey. State and district results have been available since May 2009 to all educators and the 1,023 schools in which at least half the faculty responded had password protected access to individual school data. An assessment of these schools shows that they are representative of schools across the state. Key findings documented in the final report include:

- ***Educators are generally positive about teaching in Maryland.*** Three-quarters of survey respondents agree that their school is a good place to work and learn, and four-fifths of teachers indicate they want to remain teaching in their current position. Nine out of 10 educators believe the faculty is committed to helping every student learn. Educators were positive about community engagement, facilities and resources and many aspects of professional development.
- ***Teacher engagement in decision making was consistently a significant influence on school level student performance.*** While controlling for the demographics of students and teachers and using the Maryland School Assessment and High School Assessment, teacher engagement in decision making exerted roughly the same influence on performance on secondary mathematics as the percentage of teachers working within their licensure area. About six out of 10 Maryland educators agree that teachers are integrally involved in decision making and that effective processes exist for making group decisions. However, many educators do not feel empowered in certain areas. For example, educators report that teachers play a small role, or no role at all, in selecting his or her school's new teachers (79 percent), or in deciding how the school budget will be spent (71 percent). Levels of community engagement and perceptions of Student Conduct/Safety were also significant in explaining performance at the elementary school level.
- ***School leadership was the most important condition affecting teachers' willingness to remain teaching at their school.*** Teachers who indicated that they plan to remain teaching in their school were twice as likely to agree they work in trusting and supportive environments. Leadership, decision making, professional development and student conduct were significant in explaining teachers' future employment plans at the elementary level. At the middle school level, student conduct and community engagement were the most significant factors contributing to employment plans. While no single teaching condition was significant

at the high school level, teaching condition variables in total explained 20 percent of differences in expected teacher retention rates across Maryland high schools.

- ***Teachers' and principals' perceptions of school conditions vary significantly.*** Eight out of 10 principals agree that teachers have an appropriate level of influence on school decisions compared with four out of 10 teachers. Principals are almost twice as likely as teachers to agree that the school leadership makes sustained efforts to address teacher concerns about leadership issues or that teachers are comfortable raising issues with leadership.
- ***Principals are positive about most aspects of the support they receive from districts.*** Most principals in the state are positive about the resources they have available, their engagement in district-level decision making and their professional development. Principals who report more positive leadership conditions are better able to provide teaching and leading conditions for their faculty in key areas. One area where concerns were noted by Maryland principals was in the area of time. Only half of principals agree that they have sufficient time to provide instructional leadership to their faculty.
- ***There are differences in perceptions in teaching and learning conditions across the state based on a variety of factors.*** Schools serving high poverty populations were less likely to note positive conditions, particularly in the area of community engagement. Larger schools had less positive responses in the areas of time, decision making and leadership at all school levels. The newest and most veteran teachers are the most likely to note positive teaching conditions.
- ***New teachers are not systematically supported.*** Almost one-third of new teachers report not being assigned a mentor. Of those who do receive a mentor, more than one-quarter never developed lesson plans, were observed by, or analyzed student work with their mentor. New teachers reporting sufficient support were significantly more likely to indicate their intent to remain in teaching.

## Recommendations

From these findings and other analyses, Maryland policymakers, stakeholders and educators offer the following recommendations to enhance continued efforts to improve teaching conditions:

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

- Ensure policies and practices are in place that make clear how decisions will be made and that help to clearly communicate the results and rationale back to faculty.
- Consider areas in which 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 in making decisions that influence their classroom, school and profession.

### ***Recommendation 2. Ensure that Every New Teacher is Inducted into the Profession***

In December, the State Board adopted new regulations to replace the Teacher Mentoring Program Authority with the Comprehensive Teacher Induction Program. Given documented inconsistencies in the duration and perceived quality of support, the state should ensure that these regulations are followed and that districts have plans meet these new standards so that all new teachers are supported.

### ***Recommendation 3. Help School Leadership Establish Positive Teaching and Learning Conditions in Every School***

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

***Recommendation 4. 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 environment.
- Ensure that teaching conditions survey data be used as part of the school improvement planning process.
- Provide incentives and/or resources for schools that create data-driven plans to improve teaching conditions.

***Recommendation 5. Use TELL Maryland and Other Mechanisms to Collect Educators' Views on Teaching and Learning Conditions to Inform Local and State Human Capital Decisions***

- Regularly assess and monitor progress on critical conditions identified as having a significant impact on expected teacher retention and student learning.
- Establish an oversight committee of policymakers and practitioners to coordinate the survey and the design and implementation of strategies to improve teaching conditions.

The TELL Maryland data is a compilation of the voices of those who know schools best—the dedicated educators working in them each and every day. Now that more than 43,000, or 62 percent, of the state's school-based licensed educators have responded to questions about what they want and need to be successful and remain teaching, 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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