

# Interim Report on the Maryland Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning Initiative

## 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 to improve instruction, are necessary for enabling teachers to be successful. A growing body of research clearly demonstrates that assessing, understanding, and improving such conditions can have many benefits including improved student learning, improved teacher efficacy and motivation, improved teacher retention, and new recruitment strategies to entice educators to work in hard-to-staff schools.

To assess whether these conditions are present across Maryland, Governor O'Malley initiated the first-ever state wide 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. Data has been available to all schools via password since May at the TELL Maryland website. For the approximately 1,000 schools in which at least half of the school faculty responded, the report includes the individual school results in addition to the district and state data.

### TELL Maryland Highlights the Positive

Educators reported that there are many positive conditions present in Maryland schools. Nine out of ten educators believe the faculty is committed to helping every student learn, and three out of four (73 percent) of educators agreed their school is a good place to work and learn. Additional key findings highlighted in the report include:

- **Leadership Matters**

Almost two-thirds (64 percent) of educators report that school leadership creates supportive environment where there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. Teachers indicated that school leadership was the most important condition affecting their willingness to remain teaching at their school. Teachers who want to remain teaching in their school were twice as likely to agree they work in trusting and supportive environments.

- **Future Professional Plans**

The employment intentions of Maryland educators are cause for optimism. While the economy may have had some impact on these responses, it is encouraging that 80 percent intend to stay at their current school in the short term, and 50 percent in the long term. Beyond that, 10 percent of teachers in the short term and 29 percent in the long term indicate an intention to pursue another position in school or district leadership. Teachers indicated that both their effectiveness with students and school administration support are the primary factors that influenced their decision to remain in their school. When asked to select one factor, nearly 3 of 10 chose school leadership, followed by student learning (23 percent) and time to collaborate (14 percent) as factors in their professional planning.

- **A Safe, Collegial, Collaborative Environment and Time Promotes Learning**

Four of ten educators identify the need for more time to plan and work with colleagues as an important condition in promoting student learning; significantly more than any other area surveyed. More than 8 in 10 report teaching in a safe school.

### A Challenge in Varying Degrees

One-fourth of teachers report receiving less than three hours a week of non-instructional time. About half of teachers (52 percent) indicate they receive less than three hours per week of time for individual planning and that collaborative time is rarer. Nine out of ten receive three or fewer hours per week for structured collaborative planning, while one-fourth report less than three (3) hours per week of non-instructional time. On the other hand, 54 percent indicate they have time to collaborate with colleagues.

- **Professional Development and Changing Needs**

Approximately 70 percent of the respondents were positive about the presence of Maryland Professional Development Standards in their learning opportunities, including content knowledge and skills, and the ability to apply research, and support for working with colleagues to refine teaching practices. Close to 50 percent indicated a need for additional professional development in the following areas: tailoring instructional strategies to meet the learning needs of diverse groups of students; collaborating with others to improve instruction; and in formulating strategies for engaging families and other stakeholders in the school community. More than 50 percent believe educators have either no role or a small role in determining the content of professional development programs.

- **Early Support a Challenge that Reaps Long-term Benefits**

While research clearly demonstrates that new teacher support is critical to improving performance and in retaining teachers in the profession, Maryland schools and systems have been challenged to provide the important early support to the 5,500 new educator respondents.

- More than one-third of new teachers report they were not assigned a mentor in the past three years. Of those that were assigned a mentor, less than half believed the mentor influenced their practice in the areas of instructional strategy and classroom management.
- Not surprisingly, those wanting to stay in their current school received significantly more support than those wanting to move to another school.

- **Empowerment and Decision Making Roles**

Approximately 70 percent of educators report that leadership opportunities exist for teachers and that teachers trust each other and are recognized as educational experts. Close to 60 percent report that teachers are integrally involved in decision making and that there is an effective process for making group decision and solving problems. 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 teachers new to the school (79 percent) or in deciding how the school budget will be spent (71 percent).

- **Student Learning, Assessments, Instruction and Performance**

Virtually all educators use formative assessments to make appropriate instructional adjustments and to develop appropriate daily learning objectives. Two-thirds agree that assessment results are available in time to impact decision making and improve student learning. However, only 57 percent believe the assessments are useful in efforts to improve student learning.

## **TELL Maryland Defines a Perception Gap**

Teachers' perceptions and principal's perception of conditions in a school may be very different. For example, across the State:

- About 60 percent of educators agree that teachers are integrally engaged in decision making, but while eight of ten principals agree that teachers have an appropriate level of decision making, only four of ten teachers agreed.
- On the following school leadership questions, principals are almost twice as likely as teacher to agree that:
  - School leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about leadership issues.
  - Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns with school leadership.

With the individual school data available in more than 1,000 schools, principals will have specific data on the extent to which these issues matter to their teachers and be able to use the data in school improvement discussions.

## **TELL Maryland Supports and Guides School Improvement Action**

The Partnership Agreement clearly states that the purpose of the Survey data is school improvement. As research demonstrates, assessing, understanding, and improving such conditions can have many benefits including: improved student learning, improved teacher efficacy and motivation, improved teacher retention, and new recruitment strategies to entice educators to work in hard-to-staff schools. The Coalition Partners are interested in the efforts school leadership teams and staff take to use the data to inform their school improvement efforts. The school and system data will continue to be embargoed until the final statewide report is released early in 2010. During these eight months, schools have the opportunity to embed their TELL data in the ongoing school improvement activities. Likewise, systems and the State will have the same opportunity to explore the broader issues uncovered in their results, considering action appropriate to their responsibilities. The final statewide report will analyze the relationship(s) between teaching conditions and student achievement and teacher retention, providing further insight and encouragement to continue the important discussions throughout the system as part of our efforts close achievement gaps and prepare all students to compete in the international economy and society.

**TELL Maryland can be found at [www.tellmaryland.org](http://www.tellmaryland.org).**