



Arizona Department of Education  
Tom Horne, Superintendent of  
Public Instruction



ARIZONA SCHOOL  
ADMINISTRATORS

# Interim Report on the Arizona Teacher Working Conditions Survey

Submitted to Governor Janet Napolitano and the  
Arizona Education Association

By

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[www.teachingquality.org](http://www.teachingquality.org)

## **Introduction**

For virtually any business or organization, employees' working conditions drive their satisfaction and productivity. Schools are no different. Research demonstrates the importance of addressing school conditions to improve 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 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Teachers also 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 (Loeb & Darling-Hammond, 2005). In recent working conditions surveys of teachers in North Carolina, Kansas, and Nevada, the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ) has found strong connections between several teaching and learning factors — including the time that teachers have to plan, the extent to which they feel empowered, and the quality of their school leaders — and student achievement and teacher retention (Hirsch & Emerick, 2006, 2006, 2007).

The importance of working conditions is familiar to many educators and policymakers in Arizona. In 2006, the state, with CTQ, conducted a pilot survey of teaching and learning conditions in 18 districts with more than 5,200 respondents. Analyses of those results found connections between the presence of working conditions, AIMS results, and teachers' future employment plans. Given these connections, CTQ recommended expanding the initiative statewide so all Arizona schools and districts would have the opportunity to hear from their educators about whether or not critical conditions of work were present in their school (Hirsch & Emerick, 2007).

In the spring of 2007, under the leadership of Governor Janet Napolitano and the Arizona Education Association, the Center for Teaching Quality conducted a web-based population study of all Arizona school-based licensed educators — asking them to respond to a range of questions about time, professional development, leadership, empowerment, and facilities and resources. As the Governor notes in her message on the Arizona Teacher Working Conditions homepage ([www.aztwc.org](http://www.aztwc.org)), “To prepare students for a world of competition and innovation, Arizona needs to ensure that there is a qualified teacher in every classroom. Ensuring working conditions that support teachers' efforts will be critical to their success.”

By hearing directly from school-based educators who intimately experience and understand working condition issues, policymakers will have the opportunity to make data-driven decisions for developing policies that make Arizona schools better places to work and learn. For example, while 80 percent of the state's educators intend to stay in teaching and in their current school (referred to as “stayers” throughout this report),

policymakers can look at the perceptions of teachers who plan to leave their schools (“movers”) and the profession altogether (“leavers”) to gain insights on how to recruit and retain teachers for its public schools.

Educators across the state have spoken out on working conditions in their schools. Due to the tireless efforts of the Office of Governor Napolitano the Arizona Education Association, the Arizona School Administrators, and the Arizona Department of Education almost 32,000 educators (53 percent) from across the state participated in the Arizona Working Conditions Survey. Data—only released if at least 50 percent of the school faculty or district’s school-based licensed educators responded—is now available for almost 700 schools, providing critical information for making local and state level decisions. School and district results were released by the Governor in May. A final report, analyzing the findings of the survey relative to student learning and teacher retention, will also be submitted in the fall. In the meantime, some general trends are clear.

## **Finding 1: Arizona Teachers Believe Their Schools are Good Places to Work and Learn**

***Almost three-quarters (72 percent) of Arizona educators agree that their school is a good place to work and learn.*** Over one-quarter (29 percent) of educators “strongly” agree with that statement. Teachers were positive about teaching and learning conditions in several areas. Consider the following:

- ***Arizona educators are generally positive about their facilities and resources.*** A majority of Arizona educators note they have sufficient instructional materials (61 percent), instructional technology (59 percent), communications technology such as email and phones (83 percent), and office equipment (65 percent). Additionally 64 percent agree that they have adequate professional space, and a very large proportion (78 percent) agree that their school environment is safe. Only slightly more than one out of ten teachers in Arizona (12 percent) disagree that their school is safe.
- ***Educators are positive about the commitment of the faculty in their school.*** Seventy percent of educators believe the faculty is committed to helping every student learn. Two-thirds (62 percent) believe that steps are made in their school to solve problems.
- ***The least experienced teachers are more likely to agree that their schools’ teaching and learning conditions are positive.*** On most questions, teachers in their first year are slightly more positive than their colleagues about time, empowerment, leadership, and professional development issues. As they become more experienced, they are less likely to believe critical conditions of work are present in their school. ***Elementary educators are more likely to note the presence of important teaching and learning conditions in their school than middle and high school teachers.***

Elementary school educators are significantly more satisfied with the quality of professional development and faculty standards and commitment (Table 1). While almost three-quarters (71 percent) believe that professional development has changed their practice, only half (52 percent) of high school teachers report that their professional development was effective. Additionally, elementary educators are more likely to report working in an environment with strong school leadership.

**Table 1**  
**Percentage of Educators Agreeing Teaching and Learning Conditions**  
**Are Present by School Level**

<b>Teacher Working Conditions Survey Question</b>	<b>Elem</b>	<b>Middle</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Difference Between Elem &amp; High Agreement</b>
All of the faculty are committed to helping every student learn	80%	64%	57%	23%
The school leadership consistently enforces rules for student conduct	63%	48%	43%	20%
Professional development has provided you with strategies that you have incorporated into your instructional delivery methods	71%	62%	52%	19%
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems	53%	44%	34%	19%
Professional development provides teachers with the knowledge and skills most needed to teach effectively	64%	53%	45%	19%
Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction	87%	77%	69%	18%

***While educators in Arizona are positive about their teaching environment, they are less likely to note the presence of important working conditions than their peers in several other states where CTQ has conducted similar working conditions surveys.*** Arizona educators are less likely to report positive teaching and learning environments than their colleagues in North Carolina, Kansas and Mississippi (Table 2). In virtually every area surveyed, fewer educators in Arizona were likely to note the presence of working conditions. The two areas where the greatest gaps were found were in school leadership and empowerment, both essential to teacher turnover. For example, while more than half (53 percent) of educators report being centrally involved in decision-making in North Carolina, only one-third (36 percent) of Arizona educators feel similarly. Arizona teachers are less likely to report working in a supportive environment with sufficient instructional resources and technology.

**Table 2**  
**Percentage of Educators Agreeing Teaching and Learning Conditions Are Present in Statewide Surveys**

<b>Teacher Working Conditions Survey Questions</b>	<b>AZ (2007)</b>	<b>MS (2007)</b>	<b>KS (2006)</b>	<b>NC (2006)</b>
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the school	57%	60%	62%	64%
Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction	59%	64%	61%	72%
The school leadership communicates clear expectations to students and parents	61%	69%	63%	72%
The faculty are committed to helping every student learn	70%	84%	87%	85%
Overall, the school leadership in my school is effective	58%	61%	59%	64%
Teachers have sufficient access to instructional technology	59%	72%	64%	74%
Teachers are centrally involved in educational decision-making	36%	40%	44%	53%

**Source:** All results from statewide teaching and learning conditions survey initiatives in 2006 and 2007. North Carolina and Kansas Working Conditions Surveys 2006, Mississippi and Arizona Working Conditions Surveys 2007. See [www.teachingquality.org](http://www.teachingquality.org) for more information.

## **Finding 2: School Leadership is Critical to Retaining Teachers**

A recent report looking at turnover in 5 school districts found that it costs as much as \$18,000 to replace a teacher who leaves a classroom (Barnes et al., 2007). In addition to the monetary costs of attrition, new data from the New Teacher Center reveal that well designed novice teacher induction programs can dramatically increase student achievement (Fletcher, Strong, & Villar, 2003). With so much at stake in keeping experienced educators in the classroom, policymakers would be well served to consider the factors that lead to strong retention rates.

As noted, most Arizona teachers are satisfied with their current workplace. ***These positive feelings are evident as approximately 80 percent of Arizona teachers say their goal is to stay at their current school.*** Eleven percent note

that they want to move to a new school but stay in teaching, and nine percent indicate that they plan to leave the teaching profession entirely.

Not surprisingly, survey results indicate that **teachers with positive perceptions about their working conditions are much more likely to want to remain teaching in their current school** (Table 3). Leavers are more positive than movers, most likely because those who are leaving teaching do so not just due to dissatisfaction, but other non-teaching related causes. For instance, recent data from the Schools and Staffing Survey indicate that of the teachers who leave 15 percent do so because of dissatisfaction with teaching as a career and another 25 percent leave in pursuit of a non-teaching career (Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2006).

According to the Arizona survey data, stayers and movers expressed the greatest disagreement over measures of leadership and empowerment.

- **Teachers who intend to remain in their current teaching position, compared to those who intend to move schools, are three times more likely to agree that the school leadership is effective and that an atmosphere of trust is present.** Stayers are also significantly more positive about how school leadership supports and respects teachers and clearly communicates expectations.
- **Movers and leavers see their school's ability to effectively and collaboratively address problems as critical for their career plans.** Less than one-third of movers believe their current school takes steps to solve problems and less than one-fifth agree that there is an effective process for making group decisions (compared to more than two-thirds and half of stayers respectively).

**Table 3**  
**Differences in the Perceptions of Stayers and Movers**  
**on Teacher Working Conditions Questions**

Teacher Working Conditions Survey Questions	Percent of Teachers Agreeing			Difference Between Stayers and Movers
	Stayers	Movers	Leavers	
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the school	63%	22%	41%	41%
Overall, the school leadership in my school is effective	63%	23%	43%	40%
Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them	59%	21%	38%	38%

In this school we take steps to solve problems	68%	30%	47%	38%
The school leadership communicates clear expectations to students and parents	66%	30%	47%	36%
School leaders effectively communicate policies	63%	27%	45%	36%
Teachers are recognized for accomplishments	62%	27%	42%	35%
Teachers are recognized as educational professionals	63%	30%	37%	33%
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems	50%	18%	30%	32%

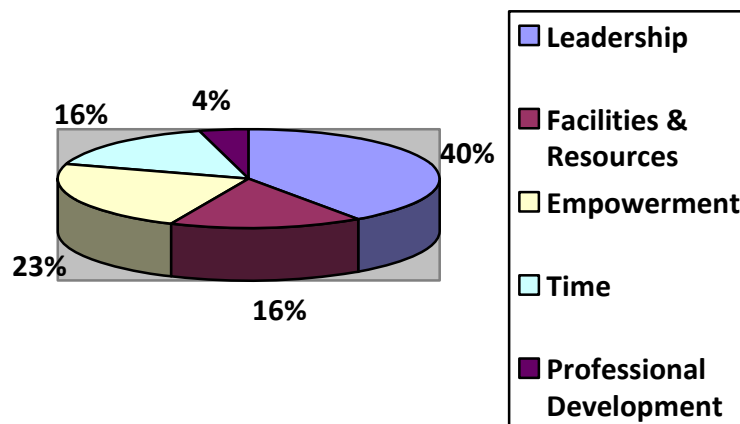
The disparities between stayers and movers are not just reflective of whether working conditions are present, but also whether school leadership makes efforts to improve them. ***Teachers who want to stay in their school are far more likely to believe leadership is working to improve teaching and learning conditions than those who want to move schools*** (Table 4). While about half of stayers believe that leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about empowerment (51 percent) and leadership issues (45 percent), less than one-sixth of movers agree with the same statements (16 percent). Over half of those who want to stay in their teaching job believe leadership supports concerns about improving working conditions versus only about one-quarter of movers.

**Table 4**  
**Difference in Perception between Stayers and Movers about School Leadership Efforts to Address Working Conditions**

School leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about:	Percent of Teachers Agreeing			Difference Between Stayers and Movers
	Stayers	Movers	Leavers	
Empowering teachers	51%	16%	28%	35%
New teacher support	57%	25%	37%	32%
The use of time in the school	49%	18%	29%	31%
Facilities and resources	57%	26%	39%	31%
Professional development	59%	29%	40%	30%
Leadership issues	45%	16%	27%	29%

**When asked to select which of the surveyed teaching and learning conditions most influenced retention decisions, leadership was by far the most common response (40 percent) (Figure 1). More than one-fifth of teachers indicated empowerment (23 percent) as important, and facilities and resources (16 percent) and time (16 percent) followed closely as significant factors. However, only four percent of Arizona educators identified professional development as the most critical working condition influencing retention decisions.**

**Figure 1  
Aspect of Working Conditions Arizona Teachers Believe is Most Important to Continue Teaching in Their School**



Leadership continued to play a central role in teachers’ thinking about which factors, including both working conditions and other elements, were most likely to influence future employment plans (Table 5). Sixty percent of teachers report that support from school leadership is an extremely important influence. About half indicate that students, both in terms of their learning (54 percent) and class assignments (46 percent), are critical. **Salary, while important, was as likely to be a significant influence as the teaching assignment, atmosphere within the school, and ability to make decisions that affect the school and classroom.**

**Table 5  
Factors Influencing Future Employment Plans in Arizona**

Factors Influencing Teachers’ Decisions about Their Future Intentions for Their Professional Career	Percent Agreeing It is Extremely Important
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Adequate support from school leadership	60%
Effectiveness with the students I teach	54%
Salary	49%
Collegial atmosphere amongst the staff	47%
Teaching assignment (subject, students)	46%
Empowerment to make decisions that affect my school and/or classroom	43%

**Finding 3: Teachers and Administrators View Working Conditions Differently.**

While some differences in the perceptions of working conditions could be expected between “bosses” and “employees” in any industry, the disparity between principals and teachers is extremely large in Arizona. ***On all questions, the 411 principals responding to the survey were significantly more likely than the approximately 30,000 teachers to note that positive working conditions were in place, and that leadership was making efforts to improve them*** (Table 6).

Similar gaps in perception exist between teachers and other school-based licensed educators, but these differences are significantly smaller than the difference between teachers and principals. The gaps in perception between teachers and principals appear to be greatest in the areas of leadership and empowerment, the two working conditions educators said were most important to them in deciding their future employment plans (Figure 1).

***Principals were far more likely to believe that teachers are a part of an effective process for making collaborative decisions.*** The question with the greatest gap in perception between teachers and principals involved teacher participation in decision-making. While only about one-third (35 percent) of teachers believe they are centrally involved in decision-making on educational issues, 84 percent of principals believe this is true in their school. Further, principals were almost twice as likely as teachers to agree that there is an effective school-wide process for making decisions and solving problems. Gaps were also evident in several leadership areas including creating trusting environments and consistently enforcing student conduct rules.

**Table 6  
Teachers’ and Principals’ Perceptions of Teacher Working Conditions**

Teacher Working Conditions Survey Questions	Percent Agreeing		Difference Between Teachers and Principals
	Teachers	Principals	
Teachers are centrally involved in decision-making about educational issues	35%	84%	49%
The school leadership consistently enforces rules for student conduct	52%	94%	42%
The faculty as an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems	45%	85%	40%
Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them	52%	91%	39%
Teachers are recognized as educational professionals	57%	94%	37%
Professional development provides teachers with the knowledge and skills most needed to teach effectively	55%	92%	37%
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the school	56%	92%	36%

Given how critical these issues are to teacher retention, schools and districts should take note of these findings. It is not necessarily that principals do not want to address these issues, but that they do not perceive they are issues to the same extent as teachers.

***Principals are not only far more likely to believe that positive working conditions are present, but also that school leadership—a concept that includes, but is not limited entirely to the principal—makes sustained efforts to address any teacher concerns that exist*** (Table 7). A “perfect storm” of factors coming together is evident in the data.

- First, as noted previously, educators indicate that leadership and empowerment factors are the most critical influences on future employment plans.
- Second, teachers believe that school leadership efforts to address working conditions are least likely to occur in the areas of leadership (40 percent), time (44 percent) and empowerment (45 percent).

- Third, the greatest gap between teacher and principal perception revolves around efforts to improve conditions in the leadership and empowerment areas. Principals are more than twice as likely as teachers to believe that sustained efforts are being made to address concerns in both areas.

Using the data to ensure all faculty have similar perceptions about the conditions of work—both positive and negative conditions—is essential in order to move forward with school improvement planning. The data here indicate a need to prioritize leadership and empowerment in that planning.

**Table 7**  
**Teachers’ and Principals’ Perceptions of School Leadership Efforts to Address Working Conditions**

School leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about:	Percent Agreeing		Difference Between Teachers and Principals
	Teachers	Principals	
Leadership issues	40%	91%	51%
Empowering teachers	45%	93%	48%
The use of time in my school	44%	90%	46%
Classroom management of today’s students	51%	94%	43%
Facilities and resources	52%	92%	40%
Professional development	54%	93%	39%

These wide disparities between the perceptions of principals and teachers documented in Arizona have also been found in other studies in North Carolina, Mississippi, Kansas, Nevada and Ohio. It is an important finding—a finding that calls for school-based, data-driven working conditions conversations and professional development for both principals and teacher leaders. Until all educators can agree on the relative presence of working conditions, sustained reforms to improve school climate will not be prioritized.

**Finding 4: Arizona Educators Appear More Involved in Classroom-level Decisions, but Not in School-level Ones.**

Research has demonstrated the importance of teacher empowerment on teacher retention (Ingersoll, 2003). Teachers want to play a role in classroom and school decisions to ensure they can be effective with their students. It appears educators in Arizona are not playing a significant role in many decisions that ultimately impact their school.

A significant percentage of Arizona educators report that teachers play a large role in decisions about classroom issues such as devising teaching techniques (55 percent), setting grading and student assessment practices (49 percent), and selecting instructional materials and resources (35 percent) (Table 8). However, teachers are far less likely to report that they or their colleagues play a large role in school-level decisions such as budgeting (4 percent), hiring (11 percent), determining the content of professional development (13 percent), school improvement planning (21 percent), and setting student discipline policies (22 percent).

More than one-quarter (27 percent) of teachers report playing no role in selecting the professional development opportunities available to them, and three in five teachers (60 percent) say they play no more than a small role. Additionally teachers are not engaged in school improvement planning (more than half play no more than a small role) or school budgeting (49 percent have no role and an additional 32 percent play only a small role).

**Table 8  
Teachers' Role in School Decision-Making**

Please indicate how large a role teachers have at your school in each of the following areas:	Role Indicated Arizona Teachers Play in Decision-Making in Their School				
	No role at all	Small role	Moderate role	Large role	Primary role
Devising teaching techniques	4%	14%	27%	38%	17%
Setting grading and student assessment practices	7%	17%	28%	35%	14%
Selecting instructional materials and resources	6%	24%	35%	27%	8%
Establishing and implementing policies for student discipline	19%	31%	28%	19%	3%
School improvement planning	19%	32%	29%	18%	2%
Site council planning/decision-making	20%	33%	31%	15%	2%
Determining the content of in-service professional development	27%	34%	27%	12%	1%
The hiring of new teachers	37%	32%	21%	10%	1%
Deciding how the school budget will be spent	49%	32%	14%	4%	0%

Not surprisingly, this lack of participation has led educators to feel separated from decision-making. Only one-third (36 percent) of educators agree that they are centrally involved in decision-making about educational issues. Part of the problem could be the process for making school-wide decisions. Less than half (46 percent) of educators agree that there is an effective process for making decisions and solving problems in their school. Not surprisingly, only about half (52 percent) of educators agree that site councils provide an opportunity to participate in decision-making and half (53 percent) report that teachers play no more than a small role in site council activities.

A slightly larger majority of Arizona educators agree that they are respected as professionals (58 percent) and trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction (59 percent), but empowerment challenges clearly remain.

### **Finding 5: Teachers Need More Time to Collaborate**

Teachers in Arizona expressed some concerns about the amount of time they have available to teach, plan, and collaborate with colleagues. ***Less than one-third (31 percent) of teachers agree that the non-instructional time they receive is sufficient*** (Table 9). Only 15 percent of Arizona educators receive at least an hour a day, without student contact, to plan and collaborate, and almost half (45 percent) receive three hours or less per week. The problem is particularly acute at the elementary level where more than half (54 percent) receive less than three hours of weekly non-instructional time compared to about one-third for middle school (37 percent) and high school (34 percent) teachers.

**Table 9  
Teachers' Accounting of Non-Instructional Time by School Level**

<b>Amount of Non-Instructional Time Available During an Average Week</b>	<b>Elementary</b>	<b>Middle School</b>	<b>High School</b>	<b>State</b>
None	5%	4%	5%	5%
Less Than Three Hours	49%	33%	29%	40%
More than Three and Less Than Five Hours	35%	46%	43%	40%
More than Five Hours and Less Than Ten Hours	10%	16%	21%	14%
Ten Hours or More	1%	1%	2%	1%

As a result of this lack of planning time, most teachers are working outside of the regular school day on school related activities. More than one-third (39 percent) report working, on average, more than 10 hours outside of the work week and 70 percent report working at least an additional hour a day on school related activities. Other factors are also influencing time for teachers. Less than one-third (30 percent) of

educators believe efforts are made to minimize administrative paperwork and that class sizes are reasonable (32 percent). Additionally, less than half (44 percent) agree that they can focus on educating students with minimal interruptions.

## **Conclusions**

Initial survey data suggest that Arizona has a solid foundation of committed educators, and comprehensive, sustained efforts to improve teaching and learning conditions will ensure that the state's educators are able to help every child in Arizona learn. For our final report, we will continue to investigate some of the following significant issues:

- 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.
- We will also further explore how the time limitations of Arizona's teachers impact both their own job satisfaction and student learning. For instance, when issues affecting retention are considered, time ties for a distant third in teachers' career decisions, but it shoots up to a close second behind empowerment when teachers are asked which working condition most greatly impacts student learning.
- Using mentoring and induction data, we will study teachers' perceptions of the support they receive for teaching in Arizona schools.

We look forward to continuing our support of Arizona's most critical educational resource—its dedicated teaching corp.

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