

# Fairfax County Public Schools Working Conditions Survey

*Insights for  
Continuous Improvement*



## *Executive Summary*

To assess the quality of working conditions in Fairfax County Public Schools conducted its first survey of teacher working conditions. The survey, administered in February and March 2008, was available to all school-based, licensed educators throughout FCPS and 8,641 educators (58 percent) from across the county responded

The FCPS Working Conditions Survey provides data to individual schools and the district at large about whether educators have the supportive school environments necessary for them to continue working and be successful with students. By hearing directly from educators who intimately understand teaching conditions, the district will have the opportunity to make data-driven decisions to develop policies that make FCPS great places to work and learn.

## **Findings**

- 1. Working Conditions are Generally Positive, but Educators Express a Need for More Time and Engagement in Decision Making.** Three-quarters of FCPS educators responding to this survey agree that their school is a good place to work and learn. But only half of educators agree that teachers are centrally involved in education decision making and that there is an effective process for making group decisions. And while teachers believe time is essential to improving student learning only 44 percent believe the time they receive to plan and collaborate is sufficient.
- 2. Working Conditions Influence School Success.** Working conditions are essential elements of schools with strong student performance. All five working conditions factors were statistically significant in explaining achievement across subjects and school levels. Community Involvement was statistically significant for all levels and all subjects assessed, often exerting as much or nearly as much influence on achievement as student characteristics such as poverty and English proficiency. It appears that schools with higher engagement of parent/guardians and perceptions of community support are able to achieve at higher levels, either due to those influences or because they share other characteristics.
- 3. Working Conditions Influence Future Employment Plans.** Teachers with positive perceptions of their working conditions are much more likely to want to stay at their current school than teachers who are more negative, particularly in the areas of leadership and empowerment. Teachers want to work in trusting environments with supportive school leadership and effective processes for making decisions.
- 4. Not all educators view teaching conditions similarly.** Educators' years of experience, school level taught and role within the school all influence whether they report positive teaching, learning and leading conditions.

- Teachers and principals perceive conditions differently, particularly in the areas of teacher empowerment and school leadership. Principals were nearly twice as likely as teachers to agree that the school leadership consistently enforces rules for student conduct, that teachers are meaningfully involved in decision making about educational issues, and that school leadership shields teachers from disruptions, allowing teachers to focus on educating students
- Elementary school educators are generally more positive about important teaching and learning conditions in their schools than middle and secondary school educators, particularly in the areas of facilities and resources, professional development, school leadership, and empowerment. However, elementary teachers are more likely to say that they do not have sufficient time.
- On most questions, teachers in their first year are somewhat more positive than their colleagues about time, empowerment, leadership, and professional development issues. Teachers with 4-10 years of experience tend to be the most negative about their teaching conditions.

**5. Educators in Schools Serving Higher Poverty Populations are Less Likely to Report Positive Working Conditions.** In FCPS, educators in higher poverty schools are significantly less likely to agree that they have necessary teaching and learning conditions in the areas of Leadership, Community Involvement, and Facilities and Resources. Only about one-third of educators in high poverty schools agree that parents are influential decision-makers in their school, compared to nearly nine in ten in low poverty schools.

**6. Administrators are positive about district support, leading them to create more positive working conditions in their school.** School-based administrators are positive about the support they receive that enables them to create positive working conditions in their school, with three-quarters indicating they have a sufficient number of licensed staff and that professional development is available and is effective. Time, however, is a concern, as only one-third of administrators agree they have sufficient time to focus on instructional leadership. Educators report more positive conditions in their school about leadership when administrators report the district has a clearly defined mission and that administrator professional development is a priority.

## Recommendations

From these findings and other analyses, the following recommendations are offered to FCPS to enhance continued efforts to improve working conditions.

### ***Recommendation 1: Ensure the Data from the FCPS Working Conditions Survey Is Used by Educators and Develop Assistance for Working Conditions Reform***

- Create standards or guidelines for teacher working conditions so all schools understand the key elements of building a positive school climate.
- Create assistance teams or other support to help schools, especially where working conditions are less positive.
- Require that working conditions data be used as part of the school improvement planning process and ensure that plans address needs identified by faculty in the Working Conditions Survey.

### ***Recommendation 2: Continue Efforts to Provide Opportunities for all Teachers to be Leaders and Engage in School Decision Making***

### ***Recommendation 3: Provide Support for School Leadership Establish Positive Working 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 as well as creating positive working conditions.
- Provide professional development for principals and other school leaders that support efforts to create positive teaching and learning conditions.

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

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