Preliminary Findings

To do their best work with students, teachers need supportive school environments that maximize their opportunity to be effective. In a continuing effort to assess school teaching and learning conditions, under the leadership of Governor Beshear and Commissioner Holliday, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and a coalition of education stakeholders[1] worked with the New Teacher Center (NTC) in the third administration of the Kentucky Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning (TELL Kentucky) Survey.

About the Survey

The TELL Kentucky Survey is a statistically valid and reliable instrument that assesses eight research-based teaching and learning conditions standards.[2] The following eight teaching and learning condition constructs are empirically linked to student achievement and teacher retention: Time, Facilities and Resources, Community Support and Involvement, Managing Student Conduct, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, Professional Development, and Instructional Practices and Support.[3] See Table 1 for descriptions of each construct. Additionally, the TELL Kentucky Survey includes questions specific to the function of school councils.

Response options for the survey's core, positively oriented questions use a Likert scale and range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This brief summarizes results using a rate of agreement that combines the strongly agree and agree categories.

TABLE 1. 2015 TELL KENTUCKY SURVEY CONSTRUCT AREAS

Time—Available time to plan, collaborate, provide instruction, and eliminate barriers to maximize instructional time during the school day

Facilities and Resources—Availability of instructional, technology, office, communication, and school resources to teachers

Community Support and Involvement—Community and parent/guardian communication and influence in the school

Managing Student Conduct—Policies and practices to address student conduct issues and ensure a safe school environment

Teacher Leadership—Teacher involvement in decisions that impact classroom and school practices

School Leadership—The ability of school leadership to create trusting, supportive environments and address teacher concerns

Professional Development—Availability and quality of learning opportunities for educators to enhance their teaching

Instructional Practices and Support—Data and support available to teachers to improve instruction and student learning

1. The coalition of education stakeholders includes Governor Beshear, Commissioner Holliday, the Kentucky Department of Education, Kentucky Association of School Superintendents, Kentucky School Boards Association, Kentucky Association of School Administrators, Kentucky Education Association, Education Professional Standards Board, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce, Kentucky Association of School Councils, Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, Kentucky PTA, Jefferson County Education Association, and the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence.

2. Swanlund, A. (2011). *Identifying working conditions that enhance teacher effectiveness: The psychometric evaluation of the Teacher Working Conditions Survey*. Chicago. IL: American Institutes for Research.

3. See endnotes for research.

State Context

Since the release of the 2011 and the 2013 TELL Kentucky Survey results, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and each of the TELL Kentucky partners engaged in extensive outreach with stakeholders across the Commonwealth. The goals of outreach efforts were to emphasize the importance of the TELL data and to provide guidance in how to use the TELL data for improvement planning. Because educator professional development in the state is largely executed by various stakeholder organizations rather than through the KDE, TELL partners such as the Kentucky Association of School Administrators, Kentucky School Boards Association, Kentucky Association of School Councils, and Kentucky Education Association developed their own guides for using the TELL data and incorporated this information into professional development offerings across the state, ensuring wide dissemination.

Since 2011, KDE and the coalition partners have been actively working to improve school conditions across the Commonwealth using TELL Kentucky Survey data. Examples of policies resulting from collaborative efforts across the state include:

- The new Kentucky Professional Growth and Effectiveness System incorporates the use of the TELL data as a required component of the evaluation tool being developed to assess administrator effectiveness.
- The Consolidated District Improvement Plan (CDIP) and the Consolidated School Improvement Plan (CSIP) require the use of the TELL data.
- The Kentucky Learning Forward initiative used 2011 TELL data when examining policy recommendations impacting the use of teachers' time and continued opportunities for teachers to collaborate.
- The Kentucky Department of Education asked every KDE office to incorporate the use of TELL data into their discussions with respective stakeholder groups. All field staff, including technology partners, used the TELL data as a basis for conversation about the improvement of teaching and learning conditions.

In some instances, actions taken by KDE in response to TELL Kentucky Survey data from previous administrations have yielded important improvements over time. For example:

- In 2013, in response to a drop in the rate of agreement on technology questions in the 2011 survey results, KDE requested and received an increase of $5.8 million in its technology budget from the Kentucky General Assembly to improve access to reliable technology and address the speed of Internet connections. Subsequently, in 2015, TELL Kentucky Survey results indicate improvement in teaching and learning conditions related to technology.
  - In 2015, 96 percent of educators agree that teachers have access to reliable communication technology, including phones, faxes, and email, compared to 94 percent in 2013.
  - Eighty percent (80 percent) of educators agree that "the reliability and speed of Internet connections" in their schools "are sufficient to support instructional practices," compared to about three-quarters (76 percent) of respondents in 2013.
- In 2013, after seeing slight improvement from 2011 in beginning teachers' perceptions of teaching conditions, KDE began a focused effort to address new teacher support, working closely with the Kentucky Teacher Induction Program (KTIP). In 2015, 83 percent of beginning teachers now agree that, overall, the additional support they received as a new teacher during this current school year has been important in their decision to continue teaching at their schools. This is an increase of 3 percentage points from 2013 (80 percent). Additionally, more beginning teachers are in agreement that each of the supports measured by the survey had "quite a bit" or "a great deal" of influence on their practice. More specific information on beginning teacher supports will be addressed in a future report.

Response Rate

The NTC administered the anonymous, full-population survey to all school-based licensed educators in March 2015. Nearly 45,000 educators (89 percent) in the state responded (Table 2). This is an increase of 2 percentage points from the 87 percent responding in 2013. Response rates vary slightly by school type. As Table 2 demonstrates, 92 percent of elementary school educators participated in the survey, 90 percent of middle school educators responded, and 86 percent of high school educators responded. Additionally, 84 percent of educators assigned to schools such as alternative education settings (designated as "Special" in Table 2) responded.

TABLE 2. 2015 SURVEY RESPONSE RATE BY SCHOOL TYPE

School Type	Headcount	Responded	Percent Responded
Elementary	25,040	22,995	91.8
Middle	9,115	8,159	89.5
High	13,449	11,510	85.6
Special	2,699	2,269	84.1
Total	**50,303**	**44,933**	**89.3**

Approximately 95 percent of surveyed schools (1,339 of 1,409) met or exceeded the 50 percent response rate threshold required to receive an individual school-level data report. All results may be viewed online at www.tellkentucky.org.

Preliminary Findings

The rates of agreement by item and survey area were reviewed, and results were compared between 2015 and 2013. Preliminary findings identify items within and across constructs with relatively high or low levels of agreement or indicated change. Items and rates of agreement are reported below within select survey areas.

Overall, Kentucky educators are more positive about their teaching and learning conditions. In an overall composite measure of teaching conditions, the state average agreement rate in 2015 increased 2.6 percentage points from the previous year to 83.8 percent. At the construct composite level, more educators agree in 2015 that they have the conditions necessary to produce their best work in every area assessed by the TELL survey than they did in 2013 (see Table 3).

- For all but one construct (Time), more than four out of five educators (80 percent) agree the conditions that research demonstrates are critical for teacher success are in place.
- Despite the largest percentage point increase from 2013 (5 percentage points), Time remains the least positively viewed construct area measured by the TELL survey at 73 percent agreement.
- Instructional Practices and Support continues as the most positively viewed construct in Kentucky at 88 percent agreement.

TABLE 3. CONSTRUCT AVERAGE AGREEMENT

Construct Composites	*Agreement*		
	2015	2013	Difference
Time	72.9	67.7	5.2
Professional Development	81.9	78.5	3.5
Teacher Leadership	84.1	81.7	2.4
Instructional Practices & Support	88.1	85.9	2.3
Community Support & Involvement	85.2	82.9	2.2
School Leadership	87.1	85.0	2.1
Managing Student Conduct	84.4	82.4	2.0
Facilities and Resources	86.5	85.2	1.3

Note: The displayed calculated difference may vary by .1 due to rounding.

Results suggest that the teaching and learning conditions identified by previous survey data as needing attention are improving the most. Items with the least positively viewed conditions in 2013 exhibit the greatest percentage point growth in 2015 (see Table 4). As referenced earlier in the state context section of the report, this finding is further evidence that state leadership and stakeholders maintain an active and strong supporting role in listening to educator feedback as captured by the TELL Kentucky Survey and including teacher voices in decision-making related to school improvement.

- The six conditions least positively viewed in 2013 each improved more than 4 percentage points in 2015.
- In 2013, fifty-six percent (56 percent) of respondents agreed that efforts were made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers were required to do. This was the least positively viewed condition in 2013. In 2015, the agreement rate for this item increased more than five percentage points to 61 percent.
- More than two-thirds of educators in 2015 (68 percent) indicate that professional development is evaluated and results are communicated to teachers compared to about six out of 10 (61 percent) of educators two years ago.

An increased focus on teaching and learning conditions may be contributing to these large gains in targeted areas. More than four out of five educators (85 percent) now agree that they utilize the results from the TELL Kentucky Survey as a tool for school improvement, compared to three-quarters in 2013. This represents the largest single item increase between the two survey administrations.

TABLE 4. LEAST POSITIVELY VIEWED CONDITIONS IN 2013 AND CHANGE IN 2015

Survey Questions with Lowest Rate of Agreement in 2015	*Rate of Agreement*		
	2015	2013	Difference
Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do.	61.5	56.4	5.1
Professional development is evaluated and results are communicated to teachers.	68.2	61.2	6.9
Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.	69.8	64.0	5.8
State assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	70.9	64.4	6.5
Professional development is differentiated to meet the needs of individual teachers.	70.6	65.2	5.4
Teachers have an appropriate level of influence on decision making in this school.	70.9	66.6	4.2
At this school, we utilize the results from the TELL Kentucky Survey as a tool for school improvement.	84.7	75.4	9.3*

***** Largest item increase from 2013 to 2015

Note: The displayed calculated difference may vary by .1 due to rounding.

Instructional practices and support conditions continue to be viewed as largely positive. Instructional Practices and Support was the most positively viewed construct in both 2013 (86 percent) and 2015 (88 percent). Rates of agreement for every item in the construct increased from 2013 to 2015 (see Table 5).

- Nearly all educators (99 percent) agree that the curriculum taught in their school is aligned with Kentucky Core Academic Standards.
- Seventy-one percent of respondents agree in 2015 that state assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices, an increase of 7 percentage points from 2014 (64 percent).

TABLE 5. SELECT ITEMS RELATED TO INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AND SUPPORT

Select Items Related to Instructional Practices and Support	*Rate of Agreement*		
	2015	2013	Difference
State assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	70.9	64.4	6.5
Teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students.	76.9	74.1	2.8
Local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	91.0	88.5	2.6
Teachers have autonomy to make decisions about instructional delivery (i.e., pacing, materials, and pedagogy).	86.0	83.5	2.5
Provided supports (i.e., instructional coaching, professional learning communities, etc.) translate to improvements in instructional practices by teachers.	88.2	86.2	2.0
The curriculum taught in this school is aligned with Kentucky Core Academic Standards.	98.5	97.7	.8

Note: The displayed calculated difference may vary by .1 due to rounding.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AND SUPPORT ***was the most positively viewed construct in both 2013 and 2015.***

Conditions related to time, while more positively viewed than in 2013, remain challenging. The Time construct exhibited the most growth of any construct since 2013 (up 5.2 percentage points to 73 percent agreement) yet remains the least positively viewed construct in the survey.

- All questions in the time construct increased in agreement since 2013 (see Table 6).
- Seven out of 10 educators (70 percent) report that class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students compared to 64 percent in 2013.
- Despite a five-percentage-point increase in agreement from 2013 that efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do, 38 percent of educators still do not agree that this condition is in place.

TABLE 6. SELECT ITEMS RELATED TO TIME

Select Items Related to Time	*Rate of Agreement*		
	2015	2013	Difference
Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	75.0	68.6	6.4
Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.	69.8	64.0	5.8
Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do.	61.5	56.4	5.1
Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions	75.8	70.7	5.1
Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues.	77.7	72.7	5.0
The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.	72.3	67.4	4.9
Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students.	78.3	74.2	4.1

CONDITIONS RELATED TO TIME, ***while more positively viewed than in 2013, remain challenging.***

Summary

The voices of nearly 90 percent of Kentucky educators have been heard. Preliminary analyses suggest that educators are more positive about their teaching and learning conditions than two years ago. Of all the areas assessed by the survey, positive conditions related to instructional practices and support continue to garner the highest agreement rates from educators. Additionally, there is evidence that conditions identified in 2013 as some of the least positively viewed showed some of the greatest growth between 2013 and 2015. Conditions related to time, in particular, exhibit improvement. Overall, the findings suggest that state leadership and stakeholders maintain an active and strong supporting role in listening to educator feedback as captured by the TELL Kentucky Survey and including teacher voices in decision-making related to school improvement.

Next Steps

To inform Kentucky educators, stakeholders, and policymakers about the results of this survey, a number of resources and reports are being developed, including:

- A series of tools for schools and districts to use in facilitating dialogue on their teaching and learning conditions and how to use the survey results as an artifact to inform school improvement planning.

- Additional forthcoming analyses and reports will examine teaching conditions across the state as well as their connection to key student outcomes and teacher retention.

All resources and reporting will be available electronically at www.tellkentucky.org.

PRELIMINARY ANALYSES SUGGEST ***that Kentucky educators are more positive about their teaching and learning conditions than they were two years ago. Of all the areas assessed by the survey, positive conditions related to instructional practices and support continue to garner the highest agreement rates from educators.***

Endnotes

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About the New Teacher Center

New Teacher Center focuses on improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of new teachers. NTC partners with states, school districts, and policymakers to design and implement systems that create sustainable, high-quality mentoring and professional development; build leadership capacity; work to enhance teaching conditions; improve retention; and transform schools in vibrant learning communities where all students succeed.

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