

How Different Educators Perceive Teaching Conditions

Comparisons Across Participant Groups

With the leadership of Governor Jack Markell, Secretary Mark Murphy, and the Delaware Department of Education, a coalition of education stakeholders, working with the New Teacher Center (NTC), administered the Delaware Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL Delaware Survey) in spring 2013. The TELL Survey is a full population survey designed to report educators' perceptions about the presence of teaching and learning conditions. The TELL Survey groups the conditions into eight distinct areas or constructs including: Time, Facilities and Resources, Professional Development, School Leadership, Teacher Leadership, Instructional Practices and Support, Managing Student Conduct, and Community Engagement.

This brief is one in a series of reports providing results from the 2013 TELL Delaware Survey. Briefs describing preliminary findings and summarizing instrument design and psychometric properties can be found on the TELL Delaware website under the Resources tab (www.telldelaware.org/resources). These two documents also offer the research base supporting the connection between teaching and learning conditions and important outcomes, such as student performance and teacher retention. Please refer to them for more detail.

The purpose of this brief is to highlight differences in perceptions between and within groups of participants and subsets of schools. This report provides a summary of rates of

agreement across constructs and items by different participant groups and demographic characteristics. Item-level data demonstrate the largest rates of agreement differences between participant groups. Construct-level data indicate differences within and across constructs by participant group. Results are provided to illustrate these differences and provide context for school and district improvement efforts.

Response Rate

NTC administered the anonymous survey to all school-based licensed educators in early 2013. The data for these analyses include 6,153 respondents out of a reported 10,392 school-based licensed educators in Delaware, yielding a response rate of 59 percent, which by social science standards for online surveys is considered acceptable.¹ Respondents include several categories of educators: 85 percent are teachers, two percent are principals, and ten percent are other licensed educators, such as librarians and school psychologists. Additionally, 757 respondents are beginning teachers (with three years of experience or less) (12 percent). Table 1 provides response rates by participant type.

1. The statistical accuracy of the survey depends on how many of the full population respond and how closely those responding reflect the population. If this were a sample survey, in order for the survey results to be generalizable to all Delaware educators, a sample size calculation for 95% certainty (confidence level) of +/- 1% accuracy (confidence interval) of the results requires 4,991 participants. Because this is a full population survey, analyses comparing participants to the population are appropriate to determine bias. These comparisons will be conducted during outcome analyses. Given the relatively high response rate overall and the sample size requirements, consumers can be confident in the results reported, Van Bennekom, F. C. (2002). *Customer surveying: A guidebook for service managers*. Boston, MA: Customer Service Press.

Respondents*	Response Rate (N) Spring 2013
Teachers	85.2% (5,242)
Principals	1.5% (95)
Other Education Professionals	9.9% (611)
Total	59.2% (6,153)
Number of all Educators	10,392

***Note.** The respondent category "teachers" includes instructional coaches, department heads, literacy specialists, etc. The respondent category "Other Education Professional" includes school counselors, school psychologists, social workers, etc.

Response rates between traditional and charter schools are similar. As Table 2 demonstrates, 60 percent of traditional public school educators participated, 64 percent of charter

school educators participated, however, 39 percent of vocational school educators participated.²

School Type	Headcount	Responded	Percent Responded
Traditional	9,126	5,488	60.1
Charter	680	438	64.4
Vocational	586	227	38.7
Total	10,392	6,153	59.2

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2. The response rate for educators selecting assignment to a vocational-type school is low and therefore, comparisons to this school type are inappropriate.

Findings

The Preliminary Findings brief provided data aggregated at the state level. This brief provides comparisons in order to show variation in the perceived presence of teaching conditions based on one's position, years of experience, school level, and school type. The descriptive information included here demonstrates that reporting the data by different demographic and organizational characteristics presents alternative ways to view and think about the results. Implications are provided after each comparison.

Comparisons by Position

Finding: Principals view teaching conditions more positively than teachers.

Principals report higher rates of agreement across almost all survey items. Items in Table 3 highlight the differences in perceptions between principals and teachers. These items reflect the largest percentage point difference between the two groups. On all but two survey items, the 95 principals reported higher rates of agreement than the more than 5,200 participating teachers. The greatest gaps in perception between teachers and principals reside in the areas of Time and Professional Development.

- More than nine out of ten principals (93 percent) agree that teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students compared to less than half of teachers (48 percent). The largest difference in the rate of agreement is found on this item (45 percentage point difference).
- The principal rate of agreement is more than twice that of teachers related to, efforts made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do (77 percent compared to 37 percent).
- Nine out of 10 participating principals (90 percent) report agreement that follow up is provided from professional development in their school compared to more than half of teachers (54 percent).
- Almost all principals (98 percent) indicate that professional development provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices compared to 62 percent of teachers who agree.

TABLE 3. ITEM RATES OF AGREEMENT BY PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

Survey Items	Percent Agree (Agree/Strongly Agree)		Difference
	Principals	Teachers	
Teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students.	93.3	48.7	44.6
Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do.	76.6	37.3	39.3
School administrators consistently enforce rules for student conduct.	98.9	60.2	38.7
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions to solve problems.	97.8	59.5	38.4
In this school, follow up is provided from professional development.	89.9	54.2	35.7
Professional development provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices.	97.8	62.2	35.6
The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.	79.6	44.5	35.1
Professional development deepens teachers' content knowledge.	92.2	57.6	34.6

A higher percentage of teachers agree that an appropriate amount of time is provided for professional development compared to principals (67 percent compared to 61 percent) and that the curriculum taught in this school is aligned with the Common Core Standards (84 percent compared to 76 percent).

Implication: Teacher and principal differences in perceived conditions is not uncommon.ⁱ However, the impact of these differences is important. For a staff to prioritize areas of need, there must first be a shared understanding of the most pressing concerns. Administrators play a critical role in defining areas of focus as school leaders. Therefore acknowledging the consistent differences between teachers and principals is an important first step. The TELL Delaware data presents an opportunity to facilitate staff discussions.

Comparisons by Future Employment Plans

Finding: Teachers who intend to stay at their current school report more positive teaching conditions than those who intend to move to a different school.

The TELL Delaware Survey includes a question that asks teachers to describe their immediate professional plans. “Stayers” includes those teachers who intend to remain teaching in their current schools. “Movers” includes those who want to remain teaching, but not in their current

schools. A comparison of stayers versus movers suggests that these two groups of educators view their teaching and learning conditions differently. Stayers report higher rates of agreement on every question of the survey than their mover colleagues (Table 4).

- Many of the questions with the greatest percentage point differences between stayers and movers reside in the area of School Leadership. The rate of agreement among stayers is more than twice the rate of agreement reported by movers on items concerning: there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in their school; teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them; and school leadership consistently supports teachers.
- Large differences are also present between stayers and movers on items related to Managing Student Conduct. Eight out of 10 stayers (80 percent) agree that their school administrators support teachers’ efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom compared to about four out of 10 movers (41 percent). About two-thirds of stayers (67 percent) agree that school administrators consistently enforce rules for student conduct compared to less than three out of 10 movers (28 percent).

TABLE 4. ITEM RATES OF AGREEMENT BY STAYERS AND MOVERS

Survey Items	Percent Agree (Agree/Strongly Agree)		Difference
	Stayers	Movers	
Overall, my school is a good place to work and learn.	86.4	39.4	47.0
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school.	71.6	28.1	43.6
Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.	68.6	27.3	41.3
The school leadership consistently supports teachers.	73.9	34.5	39.4
School administrators support teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom.	79.8	40.6	39.2
School administrators consistently enforce rules for student conduct.	66.6	27.5	39.1
The school improvement team provides effective leadership at this school.	75.8	36.9	38.9
The faculty and leadership have a shared vision.	76.7	38.9	37.8

Implications: Teachers identify positive teaching conditions as important factors in deciding to continue teaching at a school.ⁱⁱ Specifically, the TELL Delaware data indicate teachers intending to remain in current assignments report strong school leadership and strong support around managing student conduct compared to teachers who intend to leave their current schools. Considering which conditions contribute to teachers' plans to stay or leave a school provides staff with areas of focus for school improvement planning.

Comparisons by Years of Experience

Finding: Most teachers indicate receiving additional support in their early years, however mentor support is inconsistent. Most responding teachers report they are formally assigned a mentor (88 percent), have access to seminars specifically for new teachers (86 percent), and have access to general professional learning communities (80 percent). A majority of teachers report release time to observe other teachers (74 percent), formal time to meet with mentors during school (70 percent), and a reduced workload (59 percent) as novice. See Table 5.

TABLE 5. PERCENT OF BEGINNING TEACHERS INDICATING SCHOOL SUPPORTS

Survey Items	Percent	
	Yes	No
Formally assigned a mentor	88.2	11.8
Seminars specifically designed for new teachers	86.4	13.6
Access to professional learning communities where I could discuss concerns with other teacher(s)	80.1	19.9
Regular communication with principals, other administrator, or department chair	83.8	16.2
Release time to observe other teachers	73.5	26.5
Formal time to meet with mentor during school hours	70.4	29.6
Reduced workload	59.1	40.9

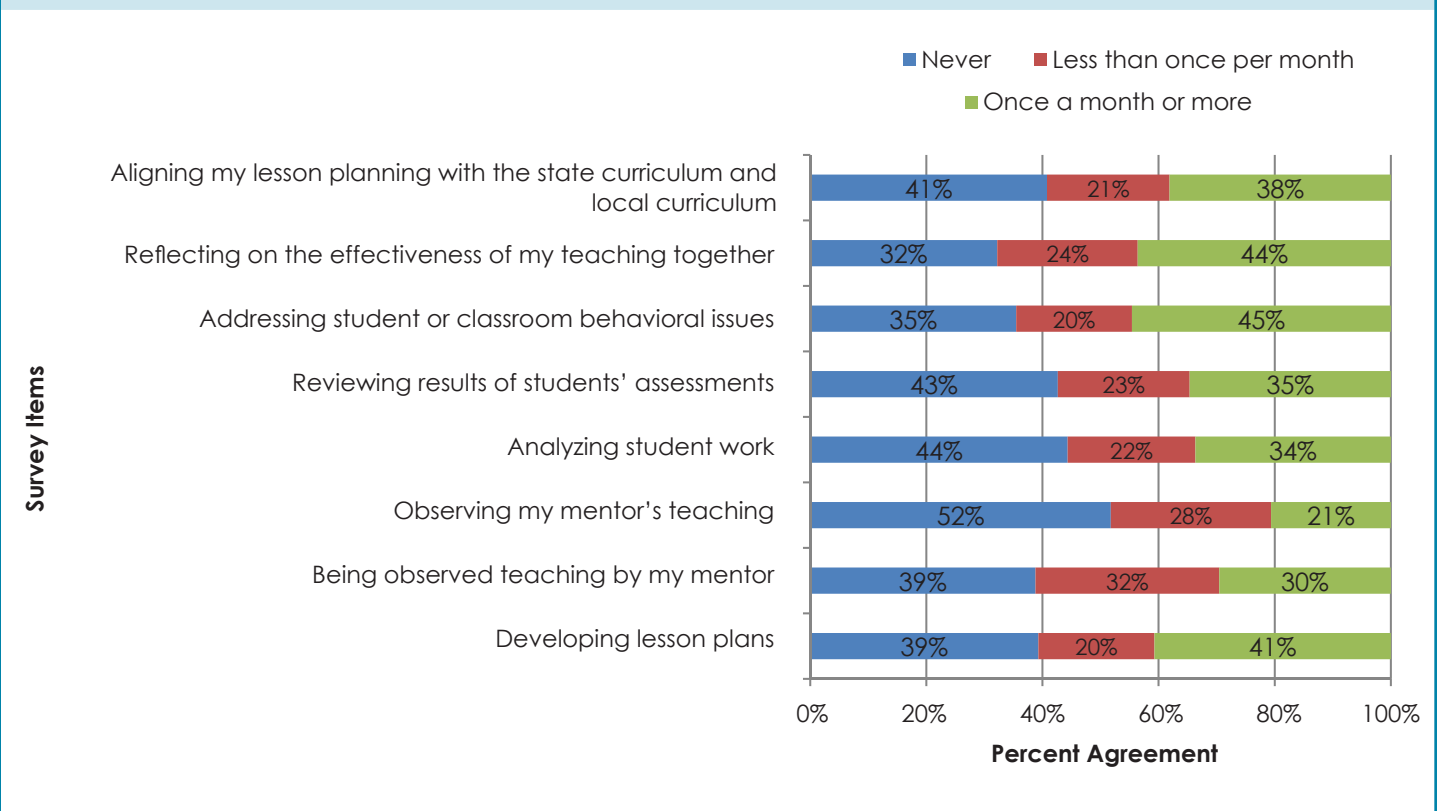
MOST RESPONDING TEACHERS INDICATE receiving additional support as novices, however, mentor support is inconsistent.

Less than half of responding teachers indicate receiving mentor support once a month or more in any area identified on the survey, including aligning lesson plans with curriculum (38 percent), reflecting on teaching together (44 percent), addressing student conduct (45 percent), analyzing student assessments (35 percent) or student work (34 percent), observing mentors' classes (21 percent), mentors observing beginning teachers (30 percent), and developing lesson plans (41 percent).

Additionally, some teachers report receiving no mentor support. See Figure 1.

- Over 40 percent never analyze student assessment (43 percent) or student work (44 percent) together.
- Almost 40 percent have never been observed teaching by their mentor (39 percent) and the same percentage has never worked with their mentor developing lesson plans.
- Almost one-third report never reflecting on effectiveness of teaching (32 percent) or addressing student conduct (35 percent).

FIGURE 1. FREQUENCY OF MENTOR SUPPORT



Implication: While research indicates that a lack of beginning teacher support is not uncommon, the consequences are severe, including loss of teachers and invested resources.ⁱⁱⁱ Despite inconsistent mentor support, the majority of Delaware teachers report receiving school supports as novices. District and school staff can use the TELL data to examine mentoring supports offered and enhance this area identified as critical to retaining beginning teachers.

Finding: New teachers perceive more positive teaching conditions compared to veteran teachers.

Factors like the number of years of experience in teaching influence respondents' perceptions of whether or not positive conditions are present. Across constructs, beginning teachers report higher rates of agreement compared to veteran teachers. On average, as years of experience increases, rates of agreement across all survey constructs decreases. See Figure 2.

Figure 2 indicates rates of agreement across a composite of all survey questions are highest for beginning year teachers. They drop by seven percentage points on average for teachers with two to three years of experience and continue to decline for other groups, with the teachers who have 11 or more years of experience reporting the lowest rates of agreement.

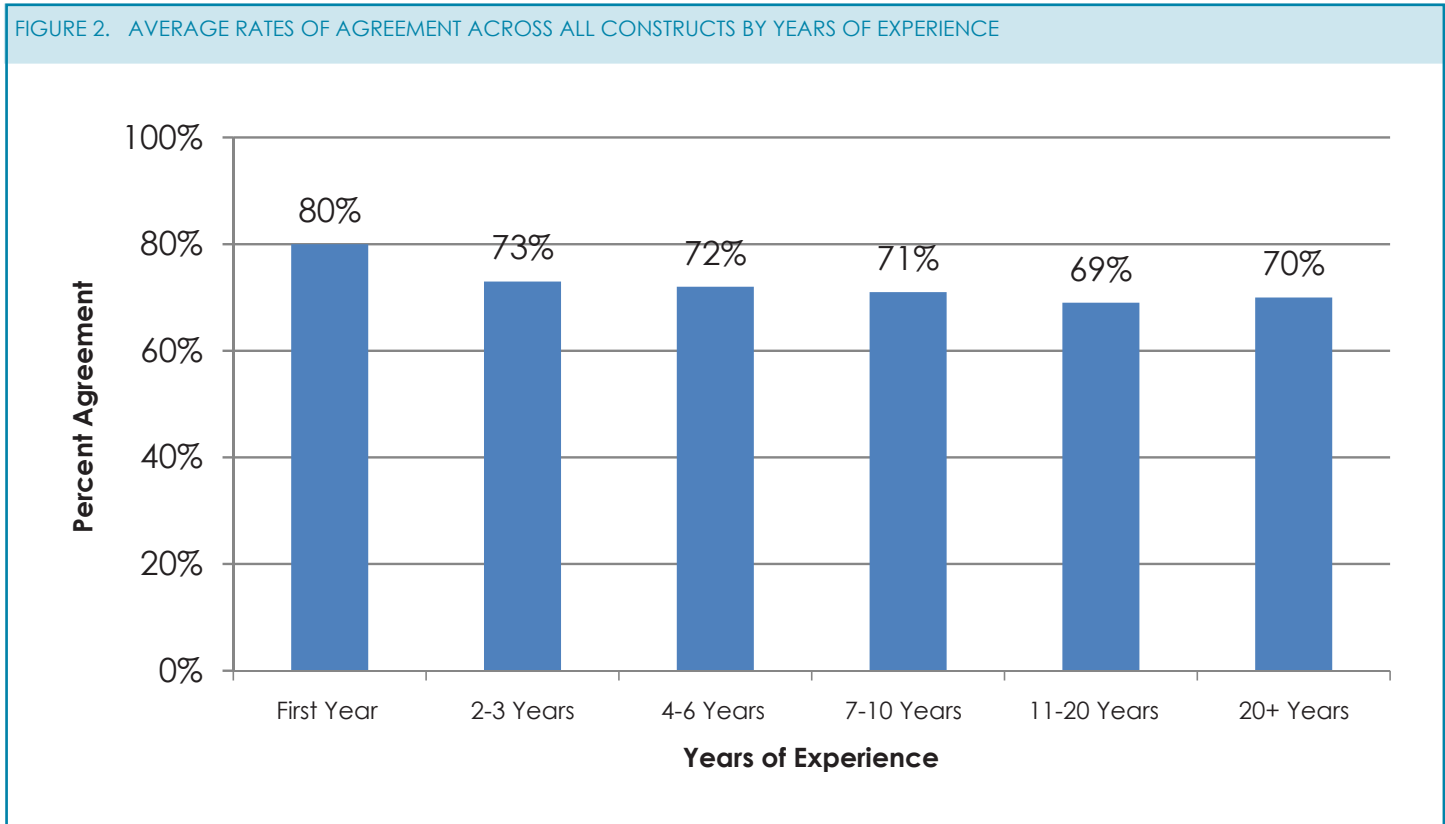
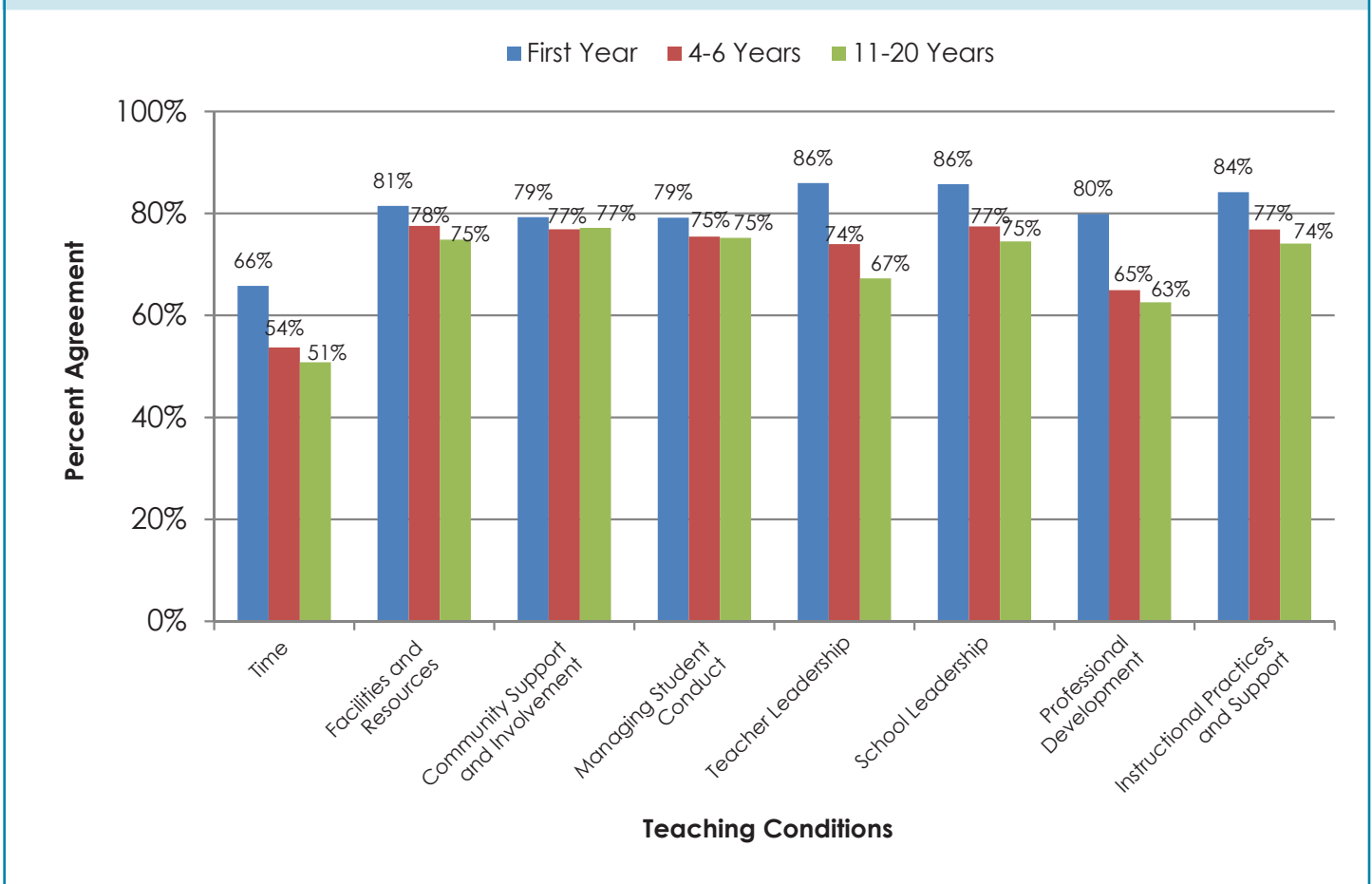


Figure 3 shows average rates of agreement by construct for first year teachers, teachers with four to six years of experience, and teachers with 11 to 20 years of experience to demonstrate differences by years in the profession. All survey constructs show a similar pattern where the perceived presence of positive working conditions declines as the amount of experience increases.

- Rates of agreement for Teacher Leadership and Professional Development differ by almost 20 percentage points between the first year teacher respondents and the 11 to 20 year respondents. Veteran teachers report less agreement.

- Teachers, regardless of experience levels, report similar rates of agreement for Facilities and Resources, Community Support and Involvement, and Managing Student Conduct.
- Educators, regardless of experience level, reported the lowest rates of agreement for the Time construct; however, the same pattern of the rate of agreement decreasing as experience increases is present.

FIGURE 3. AVERAGE RATE OF AGREEMENT BY CONSTRUCT BY EXPERIENCE LEVELS



Implication: Positive teaching conditions are related to higher teacher retention. Regardless of which schools teachers are assigned to, they are more likely to remain if they work in a positive school environment.^{iv} Additionally, regardless of years of experience, teachers in positive school environments report more satisfaction.^v That the TELL Delaware data show a pattern where teachers' perceptions of positive conditions decreases as years of experience increases indicates an area for staff to investigate, particularly in areas related to time for planning and collaboration, teacher leadership opportunities, and professional development opportunities.

Comparison by School Level

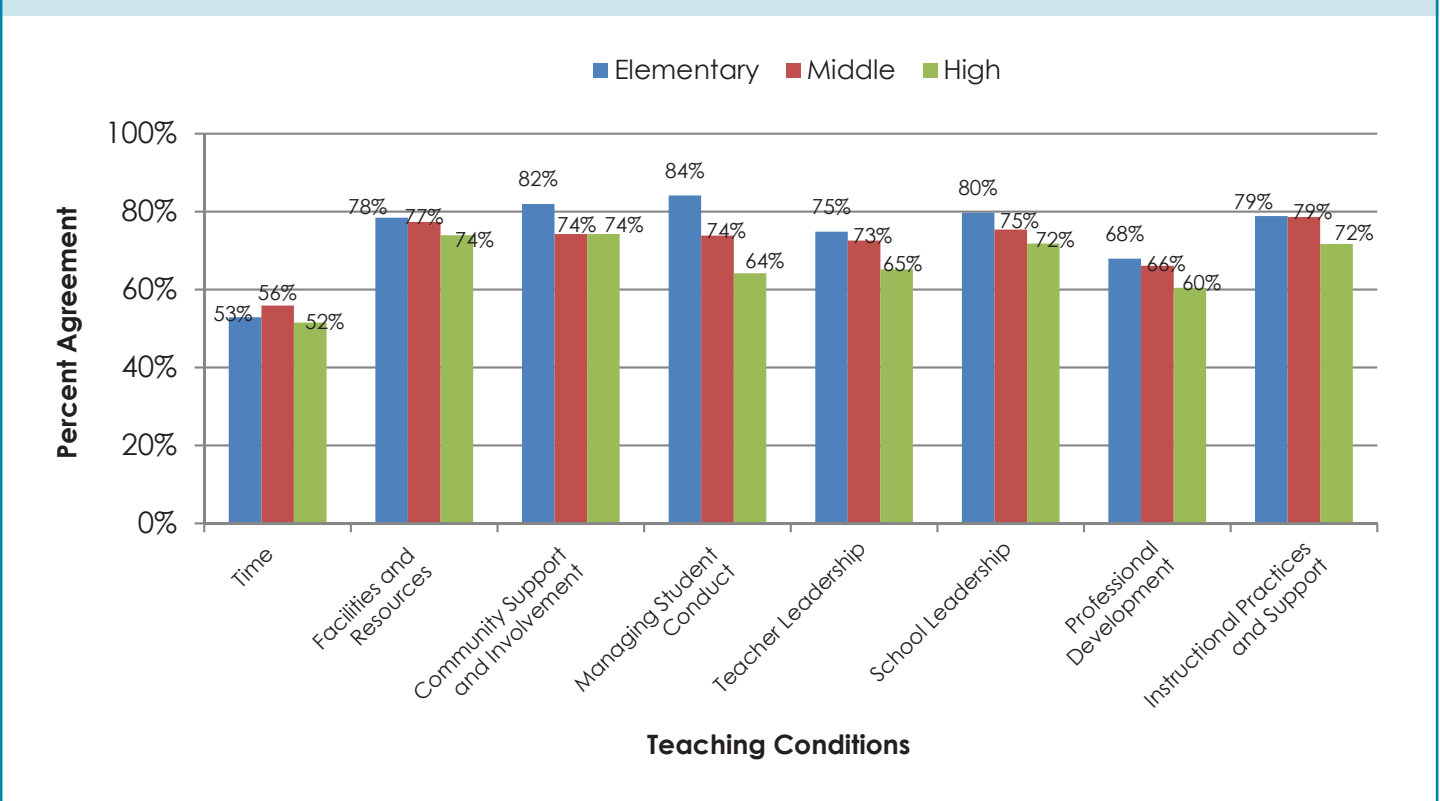
Finding: Elementary educators report more positive teaching conditions in all areas except time.

Rates of agreement by construct vary by what level educators teach (elementary, middle, or high schools). See Figure 4.

With the exception of the Time construct, educators in elementary schools are more likely to report higher agreement than middle or high school teachers, particularly in the areas of Managing Student Conduct, Teacher Leadership, and Professional Development.

- The largest difference in rates of agreement between school levels is reported for the area of Managing Student Conduct, where high school educators report less agreement than middle school educators (10 percentage point difference) and elementary school educators (20 percentage point difference).
- The lowest rates of agreement regardless of school level are reported in the area of Time.
- The least variation in rate of agreement across school levels is reported for the construct of Facilities and Resources.

FIGURE 4. RATE OF AGREEMENT BY CONSTRUCT BY SCHOOL LEVEL



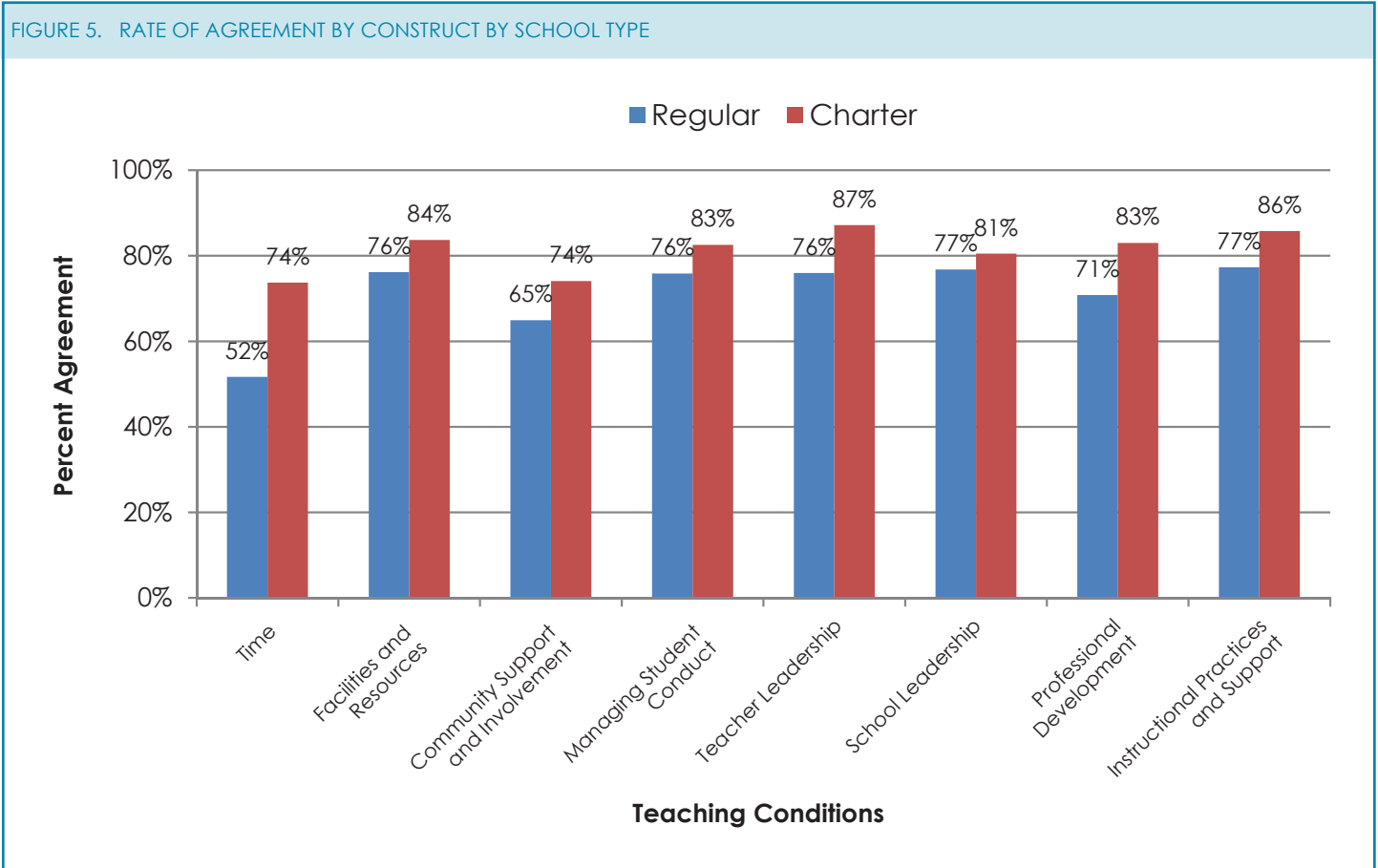
Implication: While finding that elementary school teachers perceive more positive conditions compared to secondary teachers is not surprising, typically due to smaller size and higher levels of community involvement,^{vi} it should not be overlooked that research documents that strong teaching conditions in other areas, such as school leadership, can reduce differences in perceived conditions across school levels.^{vii} The pattern TELL Delaware data exhibit by school level provide an opportunity for secondary staff to examine gaps in perception of teaching conditions, specifically in the area of managing student conduct.

Comparison by School Type

Finding: Charter school educators report higher rates of agreement across survey items.

Average rates of agreement vary by construct by school type. As Figure 5 demonstrates, across all constructs, charter school educators indicate higher rates of agreements than traditional school educators. Time shows the largest difference in rates of agreement between traditional public school educators and charter school educators (22 percentage point difference). The least difference between rates of agreement is reported for the Facilities and Resources construct (four percentage point difference). Traditional public school and charter school educators report the least agreement with items related to Time and Professional Development.

FIGURE 5. RATE OF AGREEMENT BY CONSTRUCT BY SCHOOL TYPE



Implication: The initial finding that charter school teachers report more positive working conditions differs from other findings that charter schools vary little from traditional schools or are perceived to have less positive teaching conditions compared to traditional schools.^{viii} The TELL Delaware data may be an artifact of the variation across charter schools, meaning the majority of traditional public schools view teaching conditions in the same way; however, charter schools include schools at the extremes, both those with very high ratings of teaching conditions and those with very low ratings. This variation may skew the reporting for overall charter school rates of agreement across constructs. Therefore, it is important for stakeholders interested in charter schools to pay close attention to how individual schools compare to the average charter school shown here.

Summary

As this brief demonstrates, there are differences between educators across the state and how they perceive their teaching and learning conditions based on position, intent to remain at a school, years of experience, school level, and school type. Principals report higher rates of agreement across almost all survey items compared to teachers. Teachers intending to stay at their current school report higher rates of agreement on every question of the survey than their colleagues planning to leave the school. Across constructs, beginning teachers report higher rates of agreement compared to veteran teachers. With the exception of the Time construct, educators in elementary schools report higher agreement than middle or high school teachers. Across all constructs, charter school educators indicate higher rates of agreements compared to regular school educators.

The differences highlighted in this brief have important implications for school improvement planning and should be examined closely by stakeholders. The TELL Delaware data provide an entry point for conversations at the district and school level. Understanding the perspectives represented by different stakeholders allows educators to collaboratively identify areas of priority.

- School improvement planning should be a collaborative and inclusive process to capture the different perspectives of as many people as possible across a school. Including all stakeholders in the development of a plan is an important step to encouraging buy-in about new processes.
- Wide differences between educators in a school about teaching and learning conditions can sometimes be challenging to talk about. Efforts to set collaborative norms, agree on common definitions, focus topics, and approach the process transparently and objectively are important to promote robust discussions about teaching and learning conditions.

Results of the TELL Delaware Survey are an important tool in identifying areas for school improvement planning. The supporting tools, graphic organizers, drilldown processes, and facilitators guides located at www.telldelaware.org can be a valuable guide to engaging school staff in efficient and meaningful dialog about their teaching and learning conditions.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING should be a collaborative and inclusive process to capture the different perspectives of as many people as possible across a school.

Endnotes

- i. Kelley, R., Thornton, B., & Daugherty, R. (2005). Relationships between measures of leadership and school climate. *Education*, 126 (1).
 - ii. Guarino, C., Santibañez, L., & Daley, G. (2006). Teacher recruitment and retention: A review of the recent empirical literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 76 (2).
Horng, E. (2009). Teacher tradeoffs: Disentangling teachers' preferences for working conditions and student demographics. *American Educational Research Journal*, 46 (3).
 - iii. Kardos, S. & Johnson, S. (2007). On their own and presumed expert: New teachers' experience with their colleagues. *Teachers College Record*, 109 (9).
 - iv. See ii.
 - v. Alt, M. & Henke, R. (2007). To teach or not to teach? Teaching experience and preparation among 1992–93 bachelor's degree recipients 10 years after college. U.S. Department of Education. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics.
 - vi. See v.
 - vii. Ladd, H. (2009). Teachers' perceptions of their working conditions: How predictive of policy relevant outcomes? CALDER Working Paper 33. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education.
 - viii. Stuit, D., & Smith, T. M. (2009). Teacher turnover in charter schools. *National Center on School Choice, Vanderbilt University*.
- Ni, Y. (2012). Teacher working conditions in charter schools and traditional public schools: A comparative study. *Teachers College Record*, 114 (3).

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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