



**West Virginia's Vision for Improving Teaching and Learning:
The West Virginia VITAL Survey Interim Report**

Submitted to:

The West Virginia State Board of Education, the West Virginia State Department of Education
and the West Virginia VITAL Stakeholders

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Introduction

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. Policymakers have paid little attention to the working conditions in schools (Hanushek & Rivken, 2007) that are so critical to teacher retention, teacher and student success. A growing body of research clearly demonstrates that assessing, understanding, and improving such conditions can have many benefits:

- **Improved Student Learning:** Teachers' success with students is facilitated by a positive school context, such as support from leadership and being in a collaborative working environment. Several statewide studies have demonstrated that the presence of positive work environments is significantly connected to increased student achievement (Hirsch & Emerick 2007, 2006). In particular, having strong, trusting relationships—both internally and externally (Bryk & Schneider, 2002)—and supportive school leadership are both essential to improving student achievement. A study of 88 urban public schools demonstrates the importance of communication networks for improving student achievement: in schools where teachers talked to each other the most about their jobs and where the principals did the best job of staying in touch with the community, students had noticeably higher reading and math test scores. These communication networks had a greater impact on test scores than the experience or credentials of the staff (Leana & Pil, 2006).
- **Improved Teacher Efficacy and Motivation:** Teachers' perceptions of their school are their reality; therefore, teachers' behavior and efficacy are a direct result of those views. In a recent literature review on teaching conditions, Leithwood (2006) found that teacher efficacy is significantly shaped by teaching conditions and that burnout and teacher engagement are critical to classroom performance and job satisfaction. He notes, "What teachers actually do in their schools and classrooms depends on how teachers perceive and respond to their working conditions."
- **Improved 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 (NCES, 2004, Ingersoll, 2005, Marvel et al., 2006). Teachers 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 (Hirsch & Emerick 2007, 2006a,b). Research has linked teachers' negative perceptions of working conditions with their exit from schools. Factors such as facilities, safety, and quality of leadership have a greater effect on teacher mobility than salary (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007). In particular, it appears that supportive school leaders who create trusting environments where educators are engaged in decision making impacts the latter group's decisions about where to work (Hirsch & Emerick 2007, 2006a,b).

- **New Recruitment Strategies to Entice Educators to Work in Hard-to-Staff Schools:** Teachers who are willing to teach in hard-to-staff schools indicate that strong supportive school leadership, an engaged community and parents, safety, and working conditions are all important factors when selecting where to work. Further, when Alabama educators were asked about incentives that would attract them to schools, non-financial incentives, such as guaranteed planning time and reduced class sizes, were found to be more powerful recruitment incentives than salary supplements and bonuses (Hirsch, 2006). Improving teaching conditions could also bolster the teacher supply pool because many educators who left due to poor conditions may come back if such conditions were enhanced. A survey of 2,000 educators from California found that 28 percent of teachers who left the profession before retirement indicated that they would come back if improvements were made to teaching and learning conditions. Monetary incentives were found to be less effective in luring them back (Futernick, 2007).

To help ensure that all students can learn, teachers need to work in schools designed for their success. Positive teaching conditions, where educators are supported and empowered, are essential to creating schools where teachers want to work and students can thrive.

About the Survey

To assess whether these conditions are present, the West Virginia State Board of Education, under the leadership of the West Virginia Department of Education, the West Virginia Education Association and other stakeholder groups, conducted its first statewide survey of teaching and learning conditions in 2008. The survey, which was administered through the New Teacher Center at the University of California at Santa Cruz in February and March 2008, was sent to all school-based, licensed educators throughout the state of West Virginia. The West Virginia Vision for Improving Teaching and Learning (VITAL) Survey provides data to schools, districts, and the state 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, policymakers will have the opportunity to make data-driven decisions to develop policies that make West Virginia schools great places to work and learn.

The West Virginia VITAL Survey included approximately ten¹ questions with multiple subparts, broken into six major sections: time, facilities and resources, empowerment, leadership, professional development, and mentoring. There were also questions covering the demographics of respondents, such as position held, years of experience, ethnicity, gender, and educational background. Surveys were administered to teachers, principals, vice principals, and other education professionals (e.g., school counselors, psychologists, social workers, library media specialists, etc.). Most of the questions were asked of all respondents, though some were asked only of specific groups. Only teachers in their first three years and those indicating that they served as mentors were asked about induction. Further, a set of questions about district support in creating positive teaching conditions was asked specifically of principals.

The survey instrument was developed by the New Teacher Center with input and guidance from 16 stakeholder organizations, the West Virginia Department of Education and the State Board of

Education. A set of core, validated questions from previous teaching conditions surveys was utilized, while others were developed specifically for the state. The statistical analyses conducted included: a factor analysis of the findings that resulted in a reorganization of the survey areas into four major categories of responses: leadership, decision making, resources, professional development. In addition, cross tabulations of findings by future employment plans, position held, years of experience, as well as frequencies of all questions were conducted for this interim report.

Surveys were sent to all school-based educators in the State of West Virginia. ***Almost 10,000 West Virginia educators (43 percent) from across the state participated in the West Virginia VITAL Survey.*** This includes responses from 8,816 teachers, 384 principals, 132 assistant principals, and 550 other education professionals. Data is now available for 390 schools and 36 districts, thus providing critical information for making local and state level decisions to improve West Virginia schools. Data is only released at the school level if at least 40 percent of the school faculty responded to the survey. Overall state results are publicly available at www.westvirginiavital.org. Districts and schools with a sufficient response rate received a password to access their data for their own school improvement planning. This survey data is unique in that it represents the perceptions of those who understand West Virginia teaching and learning conditions best—the educators who experience them every day.

Organization of this Report

While a final report is not expected until student achievement, teacher turnover and other state-provided data are available for further analyses, several initial trends can be identified from the West Virginia survey data. Major trends are highlighted across different groups of respondents.

First, a quick snapshot of educators' overall impressions of teaching and learning conditions in West Virginia schools is presented. Second, the relationship between teaching conditions and teacher employment plans is explored. Third, differences in perceptions between teachers and principals are assessed. Fourth, trends in the perceptions of educators with varying years of experience are discussed. Finally, key findings are presented in the following areas: leadership, decision making, resources, professional development. Charts throughout the report highlight survey items where the greatest differences in perception about teaching and learning conditions emerged.

Key Findings

Previous research demonstrating the impact of teaching conditions on retention and student learning bodes well for West Virginia as, overall, educators across the state believe that their schools are good places to work and learn. Most teachers are generally satisfied with their current workplace. ***Three-quarters of West Virginia educators² (78 percent) responding to this survey agree that their school is a good place to work and learn.*** Nearly half of responding educators (49 percent) “strongly agree” with this statement and less than one in ten (8 percent) “strongly disagree.” Consider the following:

- ***Educators are positive about the commitment of the faculty in their school.*** Eighty-eight percent of educators believe that the faculty is committed to helping every student learn. Around three-quarters (71 percent) of West Virginia educators believe that steps are taken in the school to solve problems.
- ***West Virginia educators are positive about their facilities and resources.*** Three-quarters of West Virginia educators note that they have sufficient instructional materials (77 percent), instructional technology (70 percent), and communications technology (73 percent). Eight in ten (80 percent) educators also report working in schools that are safe.

That perceptions of teaching and learning conditions are positive on the whole is significant for understanding the relationship between such conditions and teachers’ future employment plans.

Finding 1: Teaching and Learning Conditions Have an Impact on Teachers’ Employment Plans

The survey data demonstrates what individuals who work in schools already know: teaching conditions are a potentially powerful lever to help address teacher attrition. ***Overall, eight in ten West Virginian teachers (82 percent) responding to this survey indicated that they want to “stay” teaching at their current school.*** Five percent of respondents were “movers,” wanting to continue teaching but in a different school or district, while thirteen percent were “leavers,” indicating that they plan to either leave classroom teaching or education all together.³

Factors Influencing Retention Decisions

The survey includes two major questions addressing future employment plans. The first question asks teachers to rate how strongly they agree or disagree that certain factors influence their decisions about future professional plans. Here, ***teachers most frequently cited their sense of effectiveness in teaching (86 percent), followed by teaching assignment (83 percent) and support from leadership (83 percent), and comfort with the students I teach (82 percent) as factors influencing their future employment*** (Table 1).

However, when looking at the percentage of educators “strongly agreeing” with factors influencing future employment plans, adequate support from school leadership is ranked as the

top item with 52 percent, followed closely by effectiveness, teaching assignment and comfort with students taught.

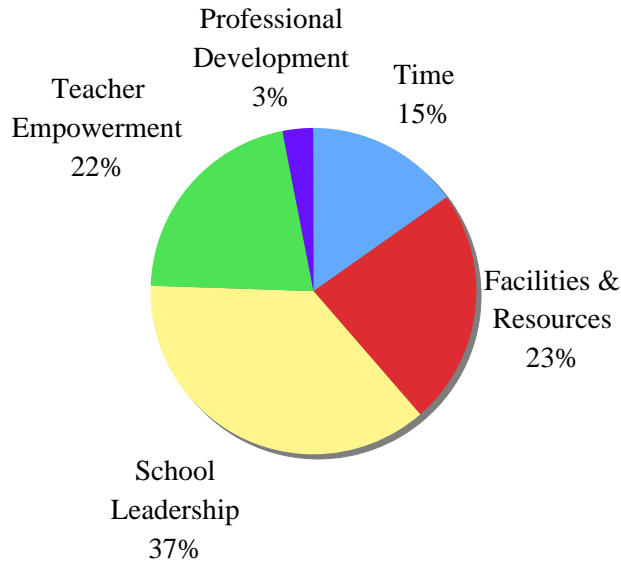
Table 1
Factors Influencing Teachers’ Future Employment Plans in West Virginia

Factors Influencing Teachers’ Decisions about Their Future Intentions for their Professional Career	Percent Agreeing, Overall	Percent “Strongly Agreeing”
Effectiveness with the students I teach	85.5%	50.6%
Teaching assignment (subject, students)	83.4%	49.9%
Adequate support from school leadership	82.5%	52.0%
Comfort with the students I teach	82.2%	48.3%
Collegial atmosphere amongst the staff	79.0%	42.8%
Empowerment to make decisions that affect my school and/or classroom	76.9%	37.7%
Personal reasons (health, family, etc.)	69.7%	40.1%
Salary	63.8%	35.2%

Table 1 is organized in descending order of those who agreed with statements about factors influencing respondents’ decisions about their future plans. Salary, community factors, and personal reasons, while important, were *less* likely to shape teachers’ decisions about their future professional plans than many of the teaching conditions documented in the West Virginia VITAL Survey.

In a second question about employment plans, teachers were asked to select between the five conditions assessed on the survey which *most* affects their willingness to keep teaching at the same school: time during the work day, school facilities and resources, school leadership, teacher empowerment, and professional development. ***Over one-third (37 percent) of all teachers ranked school leadership as the MOST important teaching condition to their willingness to continue working at their school, significantly higher than the 23 percent selecting school facilities and resources, and 22 percent indicating teacher empowerment.*** (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Teaching Condition West Virginia Teachers Perceive as Being MOST Important to Continue Teaching in their School



Positive Perceptions of Teaching Conditions Are Linked to Staying

Evidence throughout the survey indicates that teachers with positive perceptions of their teaching 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 (Table 2). Leavers are more positive than movers, likely because those who are leaving teaching do so not just due to dissatisfaction, but often for other non-teaching related causes (retirement, personal reasons, etc.).

Table 2
Differences in the Perceptions of Stayers, Movers and Leavers on Teaching Conditions Questions

WV VITAL Survey Questions	Percent of Educators Agreeing		
	Stayers	Movers	Leavers
In this school we take steps to solve problems.	72.7%	31.5%	63.9%
The school leadership consistently supports teachers when needed.	70.9%	29.9%	61.4%
The leadership effectively communicates policies.	72.1%	31.7%	61.0%
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the school.	69.4%	29.5%	59.7%

The school leadership support teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom.	73.4%	36.2%	66.8%
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems.	64.5%	27.7%	54.3%
The faculty and staff have a shared vision.	74.1%	38.0%	64.5%
Teachers receive feedback that can help them improve teaching.	72.5%	36.7%	61.8%

Table 2, which is organized in the order of the greatest difference between perceptions of stayers and movers across a variety of questions about teaching and learning conditions, shows that many of greatest differences in perceptions of teaching conditions are related to school leadership. Moreover, *twice as many stayers agreed with positive statements about school leadership and teacher empowerment than do movers*. For example, while less than one-third (30 percent) of movers agrees that “the school leadership consistently supports teachers when needed,” over two-thirds (71 percent) of stayers agree with the same statement. West Virginia teachers who want to remain teaching in their school are far more likely to note the presence of supportive, trusting environments where the faculty work to address problems that may arise.

The data shows that disparities between stayers and movers are visible not just in whether teaching conditions are present, but also in their perceptions of whether or not school leadership makes efforts to improve such conditions. *Teachers who want to stay in their school are far more likely than those who want to move to believe that school leadership is working to improve teaching and learning conditions*. While six in ten responding teachers who want to stay teaching at their same school believe that leadership is addressing empowering teachers (61 percent), only two in ten movers believe the same statement to be true (23 percent). It is also notable that on all of these questions, only one-half to less than three-quarters of stayers (who are more positive than movers or leavers) agree with statements about leadership’s efforts to improve teaching and learning conditions in West Virginia schools (Table 3, on next page).

Table 3
Differences in Perceptions of Stayers, Movers and Leavers about School Leadership Efforts to Address Teachers’ Concerns about Teaching and Learning Conditions

School Leadership Makes a Sustained Effort to Address Teacher Concerns About:	Percent of Educators Agreeing		
	Stayers	Movers	Leavers
Empowering teachers	61.0%	22.6%	53.6%
The use of time in my school	66.8%	30.1%	57.6%
Leadership issues	57.9%	21.9%	47.2%
Facilities and resources	70.3%	36.8%	62.3%
New teacher support	61.9%	27.3%	48.5%
Professional development	68.8%	36.0%	60.3%

Note: Responses are organized in the order of the greatest difference between perceptions of stayers and movers in response to this question on the survey.

School leadership, it appears, is important to teachers in determining whether they will remain working in their current position. Unfortunately, school leadership—principals, assistant principals and other school administrators—do not share similar perceptions as to whether teaching conditions are in place and efforts toward improvement occur.

Finding 2: Teachers View Teaching, Learning and Leadership Conditions Differently from Administrators

While some differences in perceptions of working conditions can be expected between “bosses” and “employees” in any industry, the disparity between principals and teachers is notable in West Virginia. *On all questions, the 384 principals responding to the survey were far more likely than the 8,816 teachers to note the presence of positive teaching conditions, such as leadership making efforts to improve conditions in their schools* (Tables 4 and 5).

While the gaps between principals and teachers are substantial on every question, both sets of educators were generally positive about the presence of teaching conditions in many areas:

- *Commitment and vision* – about 9 out of 10 teachers (88 percent) and principals (94 percent) agree that the faculty is commitment to helping every student learn. While virtually every principal responded that the faculty and staff have a shared vision (97 percent), 7 out of 10 teachers agreed to the same statement.
- *Access to resources* – both teachers and principals were positive about many aspects of their facilities and resources. Teachers and principals reported that the school environment is safe (78 percent and 96 percent, respectively). Additionally, both teachers and principals were positive about supplies and equipment in their schools. Teachers and principals believe they have sufficient access to office equipment and supplies (77 percent and 93 percent, respectively), appropriate instructional materials and resources (76 percent of teachers and 90 percent of principals), and reliable communication technology (72 percent and 85 percent, respectively).

Both teachers and principals similarly noted problems in the amount of time available to teachers in schools. Only half of responding teachers (52 percent) and 4 out of 10 principals (39 percent) reported that teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues and that the non-instructional time provided for teachers is sufficient (50 and 41 percent, respectively).

As shown in Table 4, the greatest gaps in perception between teachers and principals appear to be most common in the areas of school leadership and empowerment – two of the most common areas that teachers said were most important to them in making decisions regarding their future employment plans (Figure 1).

Principals were twice as likely as teachers to agree that teachers are centrally involved in decision making about educational issues in their school, and were far more likely to believe that they were creating supportive, trusting environments. Virtually every principal in West

Virginia responding to the survey believes that school leadership consistently supports teachers and that steps are taken to solve problems compared to only about two-thirds of teachers.

Table 4
Teacher and Principal Perceptions of Teaching, Learning, and Leadership Conditions

WV VITAL Survey Questions	Percent Agreeing	
	Teachers	Principals
Teachers are centrally involved in decision making about educational issues.	43.1%	84.3%
The school leadership shields teachers from disruptions, allowing teachers to focus on educating students.	61.5%	94.8%
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems.	60.7%	92.9%
The school leadership consistently supports teachers when needed.	66.7%	98.2%
Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.	61.3%	91.9%
In this school we take steps to solve problems.	68.7%	98.7%

Table 4 is organized in order of the greatest difference between teachers and principals' perceptions. These findings do not imply that principals do not want to address teaching and learning conditions in their schools, but rather that they do not perceive that they are issues to the same extent as teachers. Therefore, it should be no surprise that more has not been done to prioritize these issues. School level data, ideally, can help facilitate the kinds of dialogue where school faculty can build a greater consensus about the presence of teaching and learning conditions.

Principals are not only 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 5).

Table 5
Teacher and Principal Perceptions of School Leadership Efforts to Address Teaching and Learning Conditions

School Leadership Makes a Sustained Effort to Address Teacher Concerns About:	Percent Agreeing	
	Teachers	Principals
Leadership issues	53.8%	93.8%
Empowering teachers	57.1%	93.5%
New teacher support	57.8%	92.1%
The use of time in my school	62.8%	96.6%
Facilities and resources	66.7%	96.9%
Professional development	65.3%	91.6%

Table 5 is organized in order of the greatest difference between teachers and principals' perceptions. These wide disparities between the perceptions of principals and teachers have been documented in other studies of working conditions (Hirsch & Emerick 2007, 2006b,c). The data here indicate a need to consider leadership and empowerment in school improvement planning. These findings also call for school-based, data-driven conversations of working conditions, as well as 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.

Consider the convergence of findings related to school leadership:

- First, as previously noted, educators indicate that school leadership and teacher empowerment are critical influences on their future employment plans (Table 1 and Figure 1).
- Second, teachers believe that school leadership efforts to address working conditions are least likely to occur in the areas of leadership (54 percent), and empowerment (57 percent) (Table 5).
- Third, the greatest gaps between teacher and principal perceptions about school leadership efforts to address teacher concerns are also in the areas of leadership and teacher empowerment (42 percent difference in both cases) (Table 5). Principals are more likely than teachers to believe that sustained efforts are being made by the leadership to address such concerns.

These findings will be further analyzed in the final report, but have immediate implications for improving teacher retention in West Virginia. Addressing issues related to school leadership effectiveness, particularly in the areas of creating trusting, supportive environments where teachers are empowered in classroom and school decisions is important to keeping teacher. The first step must be in utilizing the West Virginia VITAL data, and other information, to ensure that principals

Finding 3: Teachers' Perceptions of Teaching and Learning Conditions Vary by Years of Experience

School leadership clearly shapes teaching conditions in West Virginia schools. Other factors too—including years of experience—appear to make a difference in respondents' perceptions of whether or not critical teaching conditions are in place within a school.

In general, the least experienced teachers (those in their first year of teaching), followed by the most experienced teachers (those with 20+ years of experience) are the most likely to agree that positive teaching and learning conditions are present in their school.

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 4-6 years of experience, tend to be the least likely to agree with positive statements about their working conditions. The areas where there are the greatest differences based on experience tend to be around issues of trust and support, some of the same conditions that appear to be linked to teacher retention (Table 6). For example two-thirds of teachers in the middle and end of their career reported that there is “an atmosphere of trust” in their school, compared to three-quarters of teachers in their first year. Additional trends include:

- Many of the variations in responses when examined by years of experience appear to be due to first year teachers having differing perceptions than all other teachers. First year teachers, in particular, seem to be much more likely than more veterans to agree that there are learning opportunities, an atmosphere of trust, etc.
- In a few areas, the most veteran teachers (20+ years experience), are the most negative about their teaching conditions, particularly around issues specific to instruction. For example, these veteran teachers were the least likely to report: that teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction; having a sufficient amount of non-instructional time or sufficient time to collaborate with colleagues; and that professional development is effective in developing teachers’ skills.

Table 6
Perception of Teachers about Conditions by Years of Experience

WV VITAL Survey Questions, by Years of Experience	Percent Agreeing					
	First Year	2 - 3 Years	4 - 6 Years	7 - 10 Years	11 - 20 Years	20+ Years
Teachers are provided opportunities to learn from one another.	68.7%	58.8%	55.1%	52.7%	52.7%	53.1%
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the school.	77.4%	67.9%	64.2%	65.9%	66.9%	67.1%
Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.	78.4%	70.5%	65.5%	62.5%	63.3%	59.7%
The school leadership communicates clear expectations to students and parents.	76.9%	69.0%	64.4%	68.5%	68.4%	69.7%
In this school we take steps to solve problems.	78.4%	70.6%	66.3%	69.0%	70.2%	71.5%
The school leadership consistently supports teachers when needed.	75.5%	66.4%	63.8%	65.9%	69.1%	69.7%

Professional development provides teachers with the knowledge and skills most needed to teach effectively.	68.2%	61.5%	56.7%	56.5%	58.1%	55.5%
The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.	54.0%	48.0%	42.6%	38.6%	40.9%	39.0%
The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions and solving problems.	70.0%	60.4%	59.0%	59.6%	61.4%	64.2%
Teachers have time available to collaborate with their colleagues.	55.6%	45.3%	44.8%	42.1%	43.0%	41.8%
Teachers and staff work in a school environment that is clean and well maintained.	76.1%	72.7%	65.5%	69.2%	64.9%	63.9%

Note: Responses are organized in the order of the greatest difference between perceptions of first year teachers and teachers with 4-6 years experience in response to this question on the survey.

Further investigations about years of teaching experience as well as other disparities that impact perceptions of teaching conditions will be documented in the final report.

The following sections will further explore educators’ aggregated perceptions about leadership, decisions making, resources, and professional development.

Leadership

- **School leadership is supportive in many arenas, but may need to do more to address concerns about teaching and learning conditions.**

When asked which teaching condition *most* affects their willingness to remain teaching at their school, one-third (37 percent) of West Virginia educators indicated that school leadership was the most critical, more than any other area (Figure 1). Fortunately, educators are positive about several aspects of school leadership. Almost two-thirds (62 percent) believe that the school leadership in their building is effective and that the faculty senate provides effective leadership (68 percent). Some of the areas of leadership support highlighted by survey responses include:

- Educators believe that they work in supportive environments where there is an atmosphere of trust (67 percent), that teachers can raise issues and concerns that are important to them (67 percent) and consistently get support when needed (68 percent).
- West Virginia educators believe that expectations are clear and well communicated. Almost nine in ten educators (88 percent) believe the faculty is committed to helping every student learn and two-thirds agree that school leadership communicates clear

expectations to students and parents (69 percent). Seven in ten (70 percent) West Virginia educators believe that leadership effectively communicates policies.

There are some concerns, however, about the ability of school leadership to address teacher concerns about teaching conditions. Over half of educators⁴ believe that sustained efforts are made to improve leadership (56 percent) and teacher empowerment (59 percent), the areas of greatest concern to educators in making future employment plans.

Decision Making

- **Teachers do not appear to be engaged in many decisions about their school.**

Teacher empowerment is viewed as critical to teacher success with students as well as to teachers' future employment decisions. One-third (33 percent) of educators believe teacher empowerment is the most important teaching condition in *promoting student learning*, more than any other area surveyed.

West Virginia educators, however, do not feel engaged in education decision making in several important areas.

- Less than half (46 percent) of the educators believe that teachers are centrally involved in decision making about educational issues. While almost three-quarters of educators believe that steps are taken to solve problems in their school (71 percent), fewer (62 percent) agree that there is an effective process for making collaborative decisions.
- Educators report less teacher influence over decisions that affect their school. Half or more of educators indicate that teachers play a *small role* or *no role at all* in selecting in-service professional development programs (50 percent), providing input on the school budget (63 percent), or the selection of new teachers (87 percent). While only one-third of educators note that teachers play a *large* or *primary role* in school improvement planning (32 percent), more than half of responding educators (55 percent) indicate teachers are influential in Faculty Senate planning and decision making.

Educators, however, do report that teachers play a *large* or the *primary role* in issues that impact their professional practice within their classroom. A majority of educators agree that teachers play a “large role” or “the primary role” in several important areas related to professional practice, including selecting instructional materials (47 percent), devising teaching techniques (59 percent) and assessment practices (48 percent).

Resources

- **Educators believe they need more time to plan and work with colleagues.**

Only four out of ten educators (41 percent) believe that the non-instructional time—time without student contact that could be used for planning, meetings, etc—teachers receive is sufficient and

that teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues (43 percent). Several issues identified within the survey help illuminate these time concerns:

- About one-third (30 percent) of West Virginia teachers report receiving, on average, an hour per day of non-instructional time while 33 percent receive three hours or less a week.
- Time available for collaboration is also scarce. More than one-third (38 percent) of responding teachers report no collaborative time at all in an average week and 9 in ten teachers (87 percent) receive three hours or less a week to collaborate.
- About half of teachers (54 percent) agree they are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students
- **Educators are generally positive about the resources they have to support instruction.**

About three-quarters of West Virginia educators believe that teachers have sufficient access to appropriate instructional materials (77 percent), instructional technology (70 percent), office equipment and supplies (77 percent) and communication technology (73 percent). Eight in ten (80 percent) West Virginia educators believe that their school environment is safe.

Professional Development

- **Professional development is viewed positively, but does not appear to be meeting the most pressing needs of West Virginia educators.**

About half of educators (58 percent) report that there are sufficient resources for teachers to take advantage of professional development and that ultimately it provides teachers with the knowledge and skills they need to be effective (57 percent).

Teachers were asked about both their professional development needs and the areas in which they actually receive support. When asked to identify areas of professional development *needed* to teach effectively, West Virginia teachers were most likely to indicate a need for professional development to close the achievement gap (42 percent) and more effectively teach special education students (37 percent) (Table 7).

Table 7
Professional Development NEEDED by Teachers to Effectively Teach Their Students

Professional Development NEEDED to teach effectively	Percent Agreeing
Closing the achievement gap	41.9%
Special Education	36.7%
Reading strategies	32.2%
Classroom management techniques	29.0%
Your content area	22.8%

Methods of teaching	22.6%
Student assessment	22.3%
Gifted and talented	14.4%
English language learners	7.3%

Teachers were also asked to cite areas where they *received* 10 hours or more of professional development in the past two years (Table 8). Only in methods of teaching did more than half of West Virginia teachers indicate that they received 10 hours or more of professional development in the past two years. And in the areas where teachers most frequently cited a need for professional development support (closing the achievement gap and effectively teaching special education students), few teachers received at least ten hours of support over the past two years (26 percent and 23 percent respectively) (Table 8).

Table 8
Professional Development RECEIVED by Teachers over the Last Two Years

Professional Development RECEIVED (at least 10 hours over last 2 years)	Percent Agreeing
Methods of teaching	50.6%
Reading strategies	47.3%
Your content area	45.0%
Student assessment	43.4%
Closing the achievement gap	26.3%
Classroom management techniques	25.1%
Special Education	22.8%
English language learners	3.5%
Gifted and talented	2.0%

About two-thirds of West Virginia teachers (68 percent) report that they have incorporated strategies from professional development into their instructional delivery and that it has proven useful in improving student achievement (63 percent). Only half of educators (55 percent), however, indicate that professional development offerings are data-driven.

- **New teachers receiving additional support found it helpful.**

Approximately 1,100 new teachers—those with three years of teaching experience or less—were asked whether they were assigned a mentor and answered specific questions about the induction support they receive. Seven out of ten new teachers (70 percent) report that they have been formally assigned a mentor in the past three years (more than 300 new teachers responding reported receiving no mentoring).

- Of those receiving a mentor, about three-quarters believed it improved their effectiveness in following school and district procedures (71 percent) and required documentation (68 percent), development classroom management and discipline strategies (72 percent) and

instructional strategies (72 percent). Eight out of ten (84 percent) agree that their mentor provided effective social support and encouragement.

- But this support does not appear to be systematically in place across the state. Of those 70 percent of new teachers assigned a mentor, one-quarter to one-half report *never* engaging in the following activities with their mentors: planning instruction with their mentor (39 percent), planning with their mentor during the school day (33 percent), being observed by their mentor (24 percent) or observing their mentor's teaching (49 percent).

Given these inconsistencies, less than half (41 percent) of new teachers assigned a mentor agreed that it was an important factor in their decision to continue teaching at their current school.

Conclusion and Next Steps

While more analyses remain, the initial examination of the survey data suggests that West Virginia has a solid foundation of committed educators. Comprehensive, sustained efforts to improve teaching and learning conditions will ensure that the state's educators are able to help every child in West Virginia learn.

The West Virginia VITAL Survey data can help the state, districts, and schools assess, understand and improve their teaching and learning conditions in order to foster improved perceptions, motivations and performance in schools. Ultimately, this will create positive school environments where all educators are supported, want to work and can thrive.

A final report, analyzing the findings of the survey relative to student learning and teacher retention, will be submitted in the fall 2008 after student achievement, teacher turnover and other state-provided data can be analyzed. For the final report, more in-depth analyses will occur in the following areas:

- 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 to teachers' future employment plans.
- Using student achievement data, we will further analyze how educators' perceptions of working conditions align with student learning.
- We will continue to explore how the time constraints on West Virginia's teachers impact both their own job satisfaction and student learning. For instance, when issues affecting retention are considered, time ranks fourth in teachers' career decisions, but climbs to second behind empowerment when teachers are asked which working condition most greatly impacts student learning.

While some additional data will be provided in the final report, readers are encouraged to use these interim findings to begin the important conversations that will lead to improvement in the teaching and learning conditions in their schools. Having a qualified teacher for every student is

not enough to close the achievement gap. Teachers must have the resources and support they need to serve all students well. We look forward to continuing our support of West Virginia's most critical educational resource—its dedicated teaching corps.

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Appendix A: Guide to Using the Data

It is important to consider the following when analyzing and using the West Virginia Vision for Improving Teaching & Learning (VITAL) Survey results for your school improvement efforts.

- 1. Teaching Conditions are an area for school improvement, not accountability.** Because teaching conditions are about schools, no one individual should be held solely accountable for the status of the school culture. Rather, these data should be used to guide school improvement planning with schools and then assessed on their progress toward implementing collectively developed reforms.
- 2. Teaching conditions are not about any one individual and it will take a community effort to improve these conditions.** No one person should be viewed as responsible for creating or reforming school culture. Conditions are about schools, not about individuals. The principal can have a significant impact on the professional culture in which teachers work, but many aspects of teaching conditions are beyond the principal's control. Broader social trends, federal, state and district policies all impact how educators view and operate within their school and classroom.
- 3. Perceptual data are real data.** The survey results are based on educators' perceptions of the presence of important teaching conditions. Educators' perceptions of the culture and context of their schools have been linked in a number of studies to student learning, future employment plans, efficacy and motivation. Furthermore, given that educators base their decisions to stay in or leave teaching upon their perceptions, this data should help inform school improvement and reform efforts at the school, district and state levels. However, other data (e.g., instructional expenditures, teacher/pupil ratio, etc.) should be used to triangulate these findings and provide a better understanding of these perceptions.
- 4. Conversations need to be structured and safe.** Having data-driven dialogue about the findings of the survey, the root causes of educator perceptions, and potential reforms will require structure, facilitation, setting ground rules and the ability to separate the issues from individuals. Dialogue should occur so that all can participate in a safe and meaningful way.
- 5. Identify and celebrate positives as well as considering areas for improvement.** Educators have tremendous pride in the work they do and all want to work in a school that allows them to do their best work. All schools have strengths that should be acknowledged and celebrated during school improvement efforts at the same time as issues are identified and addressed.
- 6. Create a common understanding of what defines and shapes conditions.** Anything and everything might be considered a part of and influence on teaching conditions. The survey provides input from educators on a host of important research-based teaching conditions, which should serve as a starting point for understanding what is important to teachers for them to do their best work. Research shows that broader social trends, media coverage, respect for the profession, local and state policies, etc. can all influence teachers' perceptions of their conditions and ultimately their motivation and efficacy as educators. Other areas may be worthy of further investigation, such as teaching assignments, curricular support, assessments and accountability, parent and community support, etc.
- 7. Focus on what you can solve.** Many issues that shape teaching conditions within a school or district are subject to federal and state assessment policies, funding, etc. To be successful, school improvement planning should focus on areas that can be addressed by the school community. District barriers to school-based solutions, as well as challenges related to state or federal policy or broader societal concerns should be identified and used to facilitate cross-school conversations.
- 8. Solutions can be complex and long term.** Teaching conditions are cumulative and engrained over time. It took many years and faculty members to create them and it may take a similar amount of time to reform them. Some solutions may be inexpensive and simple to address, like improving the consistency of communication amongst faculty, while others are resource intensive (e.g., class size reduction, integration of technology) or long range (e.g., building trust, creating authentic professional learning communities). A school improvement plan must pay attention both to short and long term issues to successfully improve the professional context.

¹ The number of questions answered by any one respondent depended on their years of experience and their role in the school (teacher, principal, etc.). Educators may have answered up to 200 specific items about their school.

² “Educators” is used in this report only to refer to the aggregated responses all school-based licensed educators who responded to the survey. There were four groups of professionals completing this survey: teachers, principals, vice or assistant principals, and other school-based licensed education professionals.

³ 8,768 educators responded to a question about their future intentions for their professional career. “Stayers” were those who planned to continue working in their current school either as long as possible or until a better opportunity came along; “movers” planned to leave the school or district as soon as possible but to continue teaching; and, “leavers” planned to leave classroom teaching or education all together. According to recent research by Quartz, et al. (2008) some of the respondents (7 percent) here dubbed “leavers” could alternatively be thought of as “role changers” because while they are leaving classroom teaching, they indicated that they plan to stay in education in a different role.

⁴ Note that this figure is an aggregate of all respondents, including teachers, vice principals, principals, and other educators. Teachers’ perceptions of leadership’s efforts to improve teaching and learning conditions, when pulled out separately, were lower than this aggregate (see Table 5).