



TLCI: Teaching and Learning Conditions Initiative

New York State United Teachers Innovation Initiative 2012 Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey Pilot Brief

Prepared by the New Teacher Center

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. A growing body of research clearly demonstrates that assessing, understanding, and improving such conditions can have many benefits including improved student learning; teacher efficacy and motivation; and teacher retention.

In the spring of 2012 the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) partnered with select districts across Rhode Island and New York, called Innovation districts, to apply for a United States Department of Education (USDoE) Investing in Innovation (i3) grant. A portion of this grant was used to administer the Teaching and Learning Conditions (TLC) Survey to a handful of participating districts to identify the presence of teaching and learning conditions in each of the participating districts schools. With more than 1,400 licensed educators responding to the survey across 59 schools in New York, the TLC Survey met with success by achieving greater than 40 percent response rate including five out of six participating districts meeting the reporting threshold (greater than 40 percent and 20 respondents). Similarly, of the 59 New York schools participating in the survey, 36 schools had more than half of their faculty respond. Given such positive turnout for the survey, the New Teacher Center (NTC) in partnership with the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) prepared individual research briefs for each district to identify the presence of positive teaching and learning conditions, and examine areas where there may be opportunities to improve. This brief examines findings aggregated across all New York Innovation districts, and offers comparisons to that of similarly positioned districts across states around the country.

Comparison Group Development

To assist in the contextual understanding of the data collected from the TLC survey, NYSUT leaders requested that NTC conduct a comparison of all New York participants in the TLC Innovation survey (in aggregate and across all six districts) with other similarly sized districts across the country. A challenge with this request is that comparison school districts of that aggregated size (59 schools) are often associated with a level of urbanicity that differs from the smaller districts that comprise it. To address this challenge and make the most meaningful comparisons, NTC created four synthetic comparison groups employing the following process by:

1. Identifying four comparison districts from NTC's master database for each of the six districts included in the New York portion of the Innovation grant that are similar in size and urbanicity.
2. Aggregating the one comparison district for each of the six New York participating districts into an aggregate composite and repeating this process to develop four aggregate comparison groups.

One important caveat to this process is that one district did not have a participation rate high enough to allow for an individual district level report (26.5 percent participation, well below the threshold of 40 percent required at the district level), the 212 educators participating across their district do represent a sizable portion of the aggregate New York participation. Because of this, it was determined that district comparisons for this district should be included in the aggregate comparisons despite this lower response rate at the district level.

Results of this comparison suggest that while some isolated questions across the survey are competitive with the comparison groups and positively viewed by a preponderance of New York Innovation educators, overall they lag behind these aggregate comparison groups in every area assessed. This brief highlights some of the more prominent findings of these analyses.

Community Support and Involvement

Educators in the New York Innovation districts are positive about the supports they are providing to parents/guardians and the community (Table 1).

- Nine out of 10 New York Innovation educators (90 percent) report that teachers provide parents/guardians with useful information about student learning.
- Roughly seven out of 10 (71 percent) agree that their school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement.

New York Innovation educators are less positive, however, about the supports they are receiving from parents/guardians and the community.

- Fewer than half of New York Innovation educators (44 percent) agree that parents/guardians support teachers, contributing to their success with students or that community members support teachers, contributing to their success with students (45 percent).
- About half of New York Innovation educators (51 percent) agree that the community they serve is supportive of their school.

**Table 1:
Community Support and Involvement: NY Innovation Average Relative to Comparison Groups**

Survey Questions	Percent Agreement				
	New York Innovation	Comp #1	Comp #2	Comp #3	Comp #4
Teachers provide parents/guardians with useful information about student learning.	89.8	94.1	96.7	96.0	90.5
This school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement.	70.6	90.6	92.3	87.7	79.5
This school maintains clear, two-way communication with parents/guardians and the community.	64.7	89.4	92.6	92.3	78.9
Parents/guardians know what is going on in this school.	60.1	79.5	87.8	87.2	69.6
The community we serve is supportive of this school.	51.0	77.6	87.4	90.3	71.1
Parents/guardians are influential decision makers in this school.	51.0	78.3	77.4	69.2	61.3
Community members support teachers, contributing to their success with students.	45.1	71.5	85.0	84.7	61.3
Parents/guardians support teachers, contributing to their success with students.	44.3	70.9	73.2	74.4	61.1

Instructional Practices and Support

While New York Innovation educators do acknowledge the presence of positive conditions in the area of Instructional Practices and Support, other factors may be obstructing their impact (Table 2).

- More than three-quarters of New York Innovation educators (77 percent) agree that teachers use assessment data to inform their instruction. However, six out of 10 (60 percent) report that they have access to local assessment data in time to impact instructional practices and access to state assessment data is even less positively reported (33 percent). Lack of timely data may inhibit educators from maximizing their potential to create the most effective lesson plans and teaching strategies.
- Eight out of 10 New York Innovation educators (81 percent) agree that teachers are encouraged to try new things to improve instruction. Fewer than half (49 percent), however, report that teachers work in professional learning communities to develop and align instructional practices. Limited access to the community of experience and expertise that resides within the school may prevent educators from utilizing that talent to leverage new ideas and improvements to practice. Additionally, less than three out of 10 (29 percent) agree that teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students. This suggests that many teachers within the Innovation community are not placed where they can be most effective.

**Table 2:
Instructional Practices and Support: NY Innovation Average Relative to Comparison Groups**

Survey Questions	Percent Agreement				
	New York Innovation	Comp #1	Comp #2	Comp #3	Comp #4
Teachers are encouraged to try new things to improve instruction.	80.8	91.3	95.2	94.4	84.4
Teachers use assessment data to inform their instruction.	77.4	87.3	93.4	92.5	#N/A
Teachers have autonomy to make decisions about instructional delivery (i.e. pacing, materials and pedagogy).	61.4	78.4	87.1	81.5	74.7
Local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	59.7	81.3	87.7	83.4	#N/A
Provided supports (i.e. instructional coaching, professional learning communities, etc.) translate to improvements in instructional practices by teachers.	53.1	74.2	86.0	80.6	67.7
Teachers work in professional learning communities to develop and align instructional practices.	49.2	73.4	88.1	76.3	68.1
State assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices.	33.1	62.6	75.1	52.9	#N/A
Teachers are assigned classes that maximize their likelihood of success with students.	29.0	61.9	72.5	73.4	62.5

School Leadership

While New York Innovation educators are largely positive that teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction (85 percent), other conditions related to school leadership may be preventing educators from achieving this expectation (Table 3).

Less than half of New York Innovation educators (47 percent) agree that there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in their schools. More than half report that teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them (55 percent), that the faculty and leadership have a shared vision (55 percent), and that the school leadership consistently supports teachers. These less positively viewed conditions hinder productive collaboration and sharing of information. Over time, they can also contribute to higher teacher attrition.

**Table 3:
School Leadership: NY Innovation Average Relative to Comparison Groups**

Survey Questions	Percent Agreement				
	New York Innovation	Comp #1	Comp #2	Comp #3	Comp #4
Teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.	84.8	93.6	94.8	94.5	85.1
The faculty and leadership have a shared vision.	54.9	77.2	83.2	86.5	69.2
Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.	54.6	76.7	70.0	75.4	63.9
The procedures for teacher evaluation are consistent.	54.2	84.5	91.0	90.6	84.5
The school leadership consistently supports teachers.	53.0	75.2	79.8	83.3	76.1
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school.	46.8	77.0	75.1	78.9	70.1

Time

Many educators across the New York Innovation districts report insufficient time to meet their daily obligations at school (Table 4). Issues related to time are often cited across the country as a challenge for educators, and this appears to be particularly evident for New York Innovation educators. On many survey questions in the area of Time, fewer than half of the NYSUT aggregate agrees that the presence of sufficient time and systems to protect their time are in place in their schools. Additionally, these findings are well below the comparison groups.

**Table 4:
Time: NY Innovation Average Relative to Comparison Groups**

Survey Questions	Percent Agreement				
	New York Innovation	Comp #1	Comp #2	Comp #3	Comp #4
Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues.	32.0	56.7	72.2	67.1	50.3
Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions	37.1	68.3	72.1	74.4	67.5
Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.	37.7	61.7	62.9	68.5	56.0
Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do.	37.9	59.8	58.9	67.3	51.3
Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	38.9	59.5	69.3	66.3	52.5
The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.	43.0	52.9	64.7	72.4	47.6
Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating	50.6	69.7	72.2	75.6	64.9

students.					
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Conclusion

The voices of more than 1,400 educators from across the New York Innovation districts have been heard. Evidence from the first administration of the TLC survey at the aggregate district level suggests that while some conditions are approaching the rates of agreement observed in the comparison groups, the presence of positive teaching and learning conditions may not be in place for many of the cohort's educators in a number of important areas. This lack of positive teaching and learning conditions may inhibit educators from producing their best work and could be a contributing factor to teacher retention over time.

For purposes of reporting, the findings in this brief are aggregated to the composite district level. While efficient for writing brief overviews of findings, this method of reporting masks sometimes wide differences present across the six districts and even wider variation at the individual school level. Some districts and schools within the composite group are reporting much more positive conditions than this district aggregate portrays. With careful study at the individual district and school levels, Innovation leaders could help to enable and foster the sharing of best practices in their most positive schools, provide targeted additional supports in their more challenged schools, and consider changes in district policy where multiple schools across the district are reporting similar concerns.

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