



## 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 working conditions across Massachusetts, the Massachusetts Board and Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), in partnership with a coalition of education groups, worked with the New Teacher Center (NTC) to administer the second iteration of the Massachusetts Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning Survey (TELL Massachusetts Survey). The TELL Massachusetts Survey assesses whether educators across the state report having the resources and supports necessary to facilitate effective teaching. Findings from this initiative will inform school improvement planning.

### About the Survey

The TELL Massachusetts Survey is a statistically valid and reliable instrument that assesses eight research-based teaching and learning conditions.<sup>1</sup> The eight constructs, which are empirically linked to student achievement and teacher retention, are: Time, Facilities and Resources, Community Support and Involvement, Managing Student Conduct, Teacher Leadership, School Leadership, Professional Development, and Instructional Practices and Support.<sup>2</sup> See Table 1 for descriptions of each area.

Additionally, the TELL survey includes questions for novice teachers (those in their first three years in the profession) to assess induction support and for principals to assess district-level supports. Response options for core 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.

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**TO DO THEIR BEST WORK *with students, teachers need supportive school environments that maximize their opportunity to be effective.***

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1. 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.

2. See endnotes for research.

TABLE 1. 2014 TELL MASSACHUSETTS SURVEY 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**—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

This summary provides a brief overview of major trends emerging from preliminary analyses at the state aggregate level.

## State Context

ESE, as part of the state's Race to the Top plan, worked with the NTC to conduct the TELL Massachusetts Survey in 2012 and again in 2014. The 2012 data has proved valuable at the school, district and state level. The data has been used to support creation of school improvement strategies that help ensure that all educators work in school contexts that give them the best opportunity to be successful.

Several reports and findings using previous TELL survey results support the importance of assessing, analyzing and improving teaching contexts:

- Analyses of 2012 TELL Massachusetts Survey results found that teaching conditions — particularly Instructional Practices and Supports, Managing Student Conduct, and Community Support and Involvement — have strong and statistically significant relationships to both the Composite Performance Index and Student Growth Percentile in Mathematics.

- In evaluating the use of TELL Massachusetts Survey data, the UMass Donahue Institute found that all interviewed districts used survey results in some ways. The Institute documented how districts used results for professional development planning and to set school goals in relationship to their evaluation system. Nearly all districts participating in the study described the survey results as at least somewhat helpful to their district improvement efforts.

This brief explores the 2014 TELL Massachusetts Survey data, not only to understand current teaching conditions across the Commonwealth, but also to identify changes in conditions since the NTC administered the first survey in 2012.

## Response Rate

The NTC administered the anonymous, full-population survey to all school-based, licensed educators in spring 2014. Over 35,000 educators (48 percent) in the state responded (Table 2). This represents a 4 percentage point decrease from the 52 percent responding in 2012. Response rates vary by school type. As Table 2 demonstrates, 50 percent of elementary school educators participated in the survey, 49

percent of middle school educators responded and 43 percent of high school educators responded. Additionally, 73 percent of educators assigned to schools such as alternative education settings (designated as “Special” in Table 2).

**TABLE 2. 2014 SURVEY RESPONSE RATE BY SCHOOL TYPE**

School Type	Headcount	Responded	Percent Responded
Elementary	36,126	18,002	49.8
Middle	16,438	8,114	49.4
High	27,429	11,013	43.4
Special	55	40	72.7
Total	80,200	38,217	47.6

**Note:** 148 educators also participated in the survey who are assigned to other schools. These schools reported 152 educators for their headcount. The Total row is inclusive of these counts.

Approximately 54 percent of surveyed schools (971 of 1,790) 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.tellmass.org](http://www.tellmass.org) after April 28, 2014.

## Preliminary Findings

NTC reviewed the rates of agreement by item and survey area. The highest overall survey areas and items are reported and then compared to the prior year rate of agreement. The

emphasis is on the constructs and items with the highest and lowest rates of agreement. Preliminary findings identify items across constructs with relatively high or low levels of agreement. Items and rates of agreement are reported within select survey areas below.

**From 2012 to 2014, Massachusetts educators report the greatest increase in rate of agreement across items related to Community Support and Involvement.** In the most recent survey, educators rate this area of the survey highest overall, with increases in each of the nine items. Educators indicate that their schools and teachers have a healthy, open line of communication with the parents of their students, as well as with the community as a whole (Table 3).

- Nearly nine out of 10 (88 percent) educators report that their school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement, compared to 86 percent in 2012.
- More educators in 2014 agree that the community they serve is supportive of their school (79 percent in 2014 compared to 74 percent in 2012). This represents a gain of more than 5 percentage points.
- Nearly all respondents (95 percent) in 2014 agree that teachers provide parents/guardians with useful information about student learning, compared to 93 percent in 2012.

**TABLE 3. SELECT ITEMS RELATED TO COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT**

Survey Item	Percent Agree		2014-2012
	2014	2012	
Teachers provide parents/guardians with useful information about student learning.	94.9	93.5	1.4
This school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement.	88.2	86.2	2.0
This school maintains clear, two-way communication with the community.	88.0	84.7	3.4
The community we serve is supportive of this school.	79.3	74.0	5.2
Parents/guardians know what is going on in this school.	79.0	74.8	4.1

**Gains in agreement are present across all items related to Managing Student Conduct.** This area is also highly rated as compared to other constructs in 2014, and shows greater increases relative to other areas. Some of the greatest gains in this construct are in regard to school rules, both in teachers' consistent enforcement of them and students' compliance with them (Table 4).

- In 2014, more educators agree that teachers consistently enforce rules for student conduct (79 percent) than they did in 2012 (76 percent).

- Over 90 percent of educators (92 percent in 2014) acknowledge that the faculty work in a school environment that is safe.
- More than eight out of 10 educators (85 percent) in 2014 report that students understand expectations for their conduct, compared to 81 percent in the previous survey.

TABLE 4. SELECT ITEMS RELATED TO MANAGING STUDENT CONDUCT			
Survey Item	Percent Agree		2014-2012
	2014	2012	
Students at this school follow rules of conduct.	75.3	69.3	6.0
School administrators consistently enforce rules for student conduct.	66.8	62.6	4.2
Teachers consistently enforce rules for student conduct.	79.4	75.5	3.9
Students at this school understand expectations for their conduct.	84.6	81.3	3.3
School administrators support teachers' efforts to maintain discipline in the classroom.	78.9	75.7	3.2

**GAINS IN AGREEMENT** are present across all items related to Managing Student Conduct. This area is also highly rated as compared to other constructs in 2014, and shows greater increases relative to other areas.

These results from the 2014 TELL Massachusetts survey regarding the areas of Community Support and Involvement and Managing Student Conduct are particularly encouraging given their implications for student achievement and teacher retention. Results from the 2012 TELL Massachusetts Survey analysis suggest that there are strong and significant relationships between student achievement and the areas of Community Support and Involvement and Managing Student Conduct—often proving as important to student achievement as student attendance.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the 2012 analysis suggests that these two constructs (and Teacher Leadership) strongly influence teachers’ future employment plans. In schools where educators perceive more community support and better management of student conduct more educators select to remain at the same school.

Based on these findings, it is encouraging not only that these two areas are the most positively perceived by educators, but also that they are the two areas that have shown the most growth since the 2012 survey.

**Massachusetts educators are using data to inform school improvement planning and student learning.** Results from several survey questions across constructs indicate that data-driven decision making occurs in Massachusetts schools and districts.

- Almost nine out of 10 educators (89 percent) indicate that their school leadership facilitates using data to improve student learning.
- Nearly the same percentage (89 percent) report that teachers use assessment data to inform their instruction.
- More than six in 10 respondents (64 percent) acknowledge that their school used results from the 2012 TELL Massachusetts survey as a tool for school improvement.

TABLE 5. SELECT ITEMS RELATED TO MANAGING STUDENT CONDUCT

Survey Item	Percent Agree		2014-2012
	2014	2012	
The school leadership facilitates using data to improve student learning.	89.2	87.2	2.0
Teachers use assessment data to inform their instruction.	88.7	86.0	2.7
At this school, we utilize the results from the 2012 TELL Massachusetts Survey as a tool for school improvement.	63.7	N/A	N/A

## **MASSACHUSETTS EDUCATORS are using data to inform school improvement planning and student learning.**

3. This report can be found at: [www.tellmass.org/uploads/File/MA12\\_brief\\_ach\\_ret.pdf](http://www.tellmass.org/uploads/File/MA12_brief_ach_ret.pdf)

**The rates of agreement for items related to Time are the lowest compared to other survey areas and have decreased slightly since 2012.** Although a greater proportion of respondents indicate that teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues as compared to 2012 (4 percent increase), all other aspects of the Time construct showed losses or gains of less than 1 percent in comparison to 2012 (Table 6).

- Less than five out of 10 educators (48 percent) agree that efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do. This represents the greatest drop in rate of agreement (8 percentage points) across the survey from 2012.

- More than five in 10 respondents (56 percent) indicate that teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues; however, this is an increase (4 percentage points) from 2012.
- About the same proportion (59 percent) report that teachers have sufficient time to meet the needs of all students.

TABLE 6. SELECT ITEMS RELATED TO TIME

Survey Item	Percent Agree		2014-2012
	2014	2012	
Efforts are made to minimize the amount of routine paperwork teachers are required to do.	47.5	55.3	-7.8
Teachers have sufficient instructional time to meet the needs of all students.	58.5	60.1	-1.6
Teachers are allowed to focus on educating students with minimal interruptions.	62.7	63.9	-1.3
Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues.	56.0	52.2	3.9
Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.	60.1	59.3	0.8
Teachers are protected from duties that interfere with their essential role of educating students.	69.4	69.2	0.2
The non-instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.	56.2	55.7	0.4

**THE RATES OF AGREEMENT for items related to Time are the lowest compared to other survey areas and have decreased slightly since 2012.**

**Educators continue to report low rates of agreement in the area of Professional Development, although gains were made in multiple aspects in comparison to the 2012 TELL Massachusetts Survey.** The two survey items receiving the lowest rates of agreement in 2014 are in the area of Professional Development. Although more than eight in 10 educators report that professional development opportunities are aligned with school improvement plans (81 percent) and that teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own practice (84 percent), educators responded less favorably to other aspects of this construct (Table 7).

- Approximately four in 10 educators (42 percent) indicate that professional development is differentiated to meet the needs of individual teachers.
- About the same proportion (40 percent) agrees that professional development is evaluated and results are communicated to teachers.
- In 2014, fewer respondents report that professional development deepens teachers' content knowledge (54 percent) than in 2012 (56 percent).

TABLE 6. SELECT ITEMS RELATED TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Survey Item	Percent Agree		2014-2012
	2014	2012	
Professional development deepens teachers' content knowledge.	53.8	56.0	-2.2
Teachers are encouraged to reflect on their own practice.	83.7	78.3	5.4
Professional development opportunities are aligned with the school's improvement plan.	81.4	77.9	3.5
Sufficient resources are available for professional development in my school.	58.0	54.9	3.1
In this school, follow up is provided from professional development.	51.0	48.3	2.7
Professional development is evaluated and results are communicated to teachers.	40.3	38.3	2.0
Professional development is differentiated to meet the needs of individual teachers.	41.8	40.0	1.9

**THE TWO SURVEY ITEMS receiving the lowest rates of agreement in 2014 are in the area of Professional Development.**

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## Summary

All survey areas with the exception of Time show an increase in the rates of agreement from the 2012 to 2014 survey administrations. The areas of Community Support and Involvement and Managing Student Conduct indicate the highest overall rates of agreement and also demonstrate the largest gains between surveys. Construct rate of agreement increases range from 1 to 3 percentage points between survey administrations. Item-level rate of agreement changes between survey administrations range from an 8 percentage point decrease to a 6 percentage point increase. According to survey responses related to data usage, respondents agree that teachers and school leadership are using student assessments as well as 2012 TELL Massachusetts Survey data to improve schools and student learning.

Educators report the lowest rates of agreement on items related to Time and Professional Development. Each area shows increases in several aspects between the 2012 and 2014 survey administrations. However, there were decreases in several items as well, indicating specific areas that may need to be addressed.

## Next Steps

To provide support and inform Massachusetts educators, stakeholders and policymakers around the results of this survey, a number of resources and reports are being developed, including:

- A series of tools for schools and districts to help facilitate dialogue on teaching and learning conditions and how to use the TELL survey as an artifact to inform school improvement planning
- Additional analyses and reports, which will be available by June 30, 2014

All resources and reporting will be made available electronically at [www.tellmass.org](http://www.tellmass.org) after April 28, 2014.

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***ALL SURVEY AREAS with the exception of Time show an increase in the rates of agreement from the 2012 to 2014 survey administrations.***

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## 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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