In March and April 2012, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE)—in partnership with the New Teacher Center, a national non-profit organization dedicated to strengthening teacher practice, and an advisory group comprised of representatives from education advocacy groups active in the Commonwealth—implemented the statewide *Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning in Massachusetts Survey* (or TELL Mass Survey) for school-based educators. Schools were encouraged, and Race to the Top (RTTT) districts were required, to use their 2012 TELL Mass results to develop and implement plans to improve educator working conditions.

In collaboration with ESE's Office of Educator Policy, Preparation, and Leadership and Office for Planning, Research, and Delivery Systems, the UMass Donahue Institute engaged a sample of school leaders in RTTT districts in fall 2013 to understand whether and how schools used TELL Mass results, as well as learn how ESE could further support and encourage schools to use the results. This engagement, key aspects of which are described below, reflects on one data collection phase of a multi-phase evaluation study that previously involved district-level leaders to better understand district-level use of TELL Mass results. A subsequent phase of the study will incorporate an analysis of data from the 2014 TELL Mass survey, which added a question about whether and how the data were used.

- In October and November 2013, UMDI administered a brief online questionnaire to a sample of 232 school leaders in 33 RTTT districts[1] to begin to understand the nature and extent of school-level use of TELL Mass results and to identify a sample of school leaders willing to contribute to the study's interview phase. A total of 90 principals completed a questionnaire, or approximately 40% of those in the sample, 23 of whom indicated that they would be willing to be contacted for an interview.

- From October to December 2013, UMDI followed up with those leaders to schedule a series of more in-depth telephone conversations about their schools' approach to, experience with, and feedback about TELL Mass. Interviews were conducted with 13 of these principals, among whom a variety of different experiences with TELL Mass were reported. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured protocol developed collaboratively by UMDI and ESE. In addition, three phone interviews conducted with school leaders in spring 2013 following interviews with administrators in their districts were also analyzed and considered in the development of findings.

This interim briefing summarizes overarching findings from the school-level phase of the study. Findings are organized into four main sections, each related to one of the project's four primary research questions. The first presents findings regarding schools' use of TELL Mass results, including the specific ways in which the data helped to inform schools' ongoing improvement efforts. The second highlights changes in schools that were attributed, at least in part, to their review of the data. The third presents a brief discussion of some of the factors and conditions that appeared to contribute to schools' use of the results. Finally, the fourth offers feedback from school leaders for ESE as it relates to the survey itself and how to better support schools in using its results. The briefing ends with a conclusion summarizing overarching findings and offering some reflections. All findings will be considered and incorporated, as appropriate, into the June 2014 TELL Mass final evaluation report, which will integrate school-level findings with those from the study's district-level and TELL Mass data analysis phases.

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[1] Sampled districts included 34 RTTT districts in which: the district met TELL Mass reporting thresholds, and thus were eligible to receive their data; three or more schools in the district met reporting thresholds and were eligible to receive their data; and districts had outlined as part of their RTTT plans a target date of 2011 or 2012 for the identification of a plan to address a concern in TELL Mass data, such that there was a reasonable expectation that districts may have begun these efforts prior to the start of the study. One district opted out of the school-level phase of the study; that district was removed from the sample and school leaders in that district were not contacted to participate in the study.

I. School-Level Use of TELL Mass Results

Evaluation data suggest that schools in RTTT districts reviewed and used 2012 TELL Mass results, but that the ways in which the data were used varied considerably. On the initial questionnaire, nearly three-quarters of responding principals from the sampled RTTT districts indicated that their schools reviewed 2012 TELL Mass results in some way, and in follow-up interviews, school leaders described a number of different ways in which their school-level results were used and/or discussed. Within buildings:

- TELL Mass data were often discussed with school faculty as part of faculty meetings or existing teacher team meetings, as well as by school administrative and/or leadership teams. In some schools, results were also discussed with other groups, including school improvement councils, parent-teacher organizations, and/or building representatives to local teachers unions. One school specifically convened a team of teachers and leaders for the purposes of looking at the TELL Mass results as part of a district initiative.

- There were also several instances in which leaders indicated that they reviewed their schools' TELL Mass results largely on their own.

Often, although not always, school-level TELL Mass results were also discussed with district administrators. These conversations generally took place either as part of district administrative team meetings or one on one between building leaders and their superintendent and/or assistant superintendents.

In three instances, leaders described their schools' review and use of TELL Mass results as occurring as part of a relatively discrete school-wide project. In these schools, TELL Mass results were reviewed for the purposes of going through the full process of identifying needs, developing goals and action steps, and assessing progress—an approach that is generally consistent with the process described in the *School Guide for Using TELL Data.* In both instances, part of the impetus behind approaching TELL Mass in this way appeared to be leaders' desire to build new venues or forums for reviewing and making use of data. For example, one of the leaders described how, as a new principal in a building that had historically been more leadership-driven than collaborative, modeling a process of establishing a team goal and building the capacity to make more collective decisions were important priorities.

> *We used it not only to analyze the results but also to model that whole drill-down process ... it was time consuming, but for me, I chose to take the time to do that because I was getting a lot out of that all at once.*

The other principals noted that their districts had asked them to use the data in this way. In one of those schools, prior to TELL Mass, schools in the district did not have teams specifically focused on data use. Following release of the TELL Mass results, the district asked schools to establish school-based teams to look at the results over the summer and make recommendations for improvement, and resources were made available to support teacher participation in these teams.

While some schools approached TELL Mass as a fairly discrete project, the results of the survey were more commonly used as in input to schools' existing cycles of inquiry or decision-making processes. That is, leaders typically described TELL Mass data as offering concrete data about areas of need or highlighting issues that they were then able to further analyze and address through existing decision-making or improvement processes. Often, review of the data involved engagement with staff to better understand the specific nature of the concerns evident in the results, but the actual selection of areas to address, development and implementation of strategies, and assessment of progress—the latter stages of the change process or cycle of inquiry—typically occurred within the context of a school's broader decision-making processes. "It just clarified our needs," one school leader explained, while another described how the data were more salient to needs assessment, but less so to implementation.

> *I think by the time we got into the actual work, we weren't really connecting it anymore to the [TELL Mass] data—we were just doing the thing that we were going to do.*

In some cases, the influence of TELL Mass results on school decision-making was described as occurring in relatively informal ways, such as when a leader or a leadership team reviewed the results and used the

information in the context of their ongoing planning or decision-making. In other cases, TELL Mass results were described as informing more formal school improvement or planning processes, such as when the results were used to help develop one or more goals for the school's improvement plan or for the leader's evaluation.

Regardless of approach—use of the data as part of a discrete project or incorporating them into existing decision-making—TELL Mass results were often described as leading to valuable conversations in buildings. "It generated a great conversation," one interviewee explained, and in most instances, these conversations engaged teachers, either as part of staff or teacher team meetings, and in some cases, through existing teacher leadership teams. In most cases, discussions centered on the school's survey results (either in whole or in part) explicitly. For example, one leader described sharing TELL Mass reports with her staff at a faculty meeting and asking them to review, in small groups, the survey indicators where the proportion of staff agreeing with a statement either fell below a certain threshold or was substantially lower for the school than for the district as a whole and offer suggestions for improvement.

However, in other instances, the conversations did not involve discussion of the TELL Mass results per se, but were reportedly initiated as a result of the data. An example of this approach is a school in which, following a review of the TELL Mass results, the administration engaged staff in an exercise to learn more about how staff felt about building conditions more generally and how they could be improved.

II. Changes Occurring as a Result of School's Use of TELL Mass Data

Nearly all interviewed leaders indicated that their schools' use of TELL Mass data contributed to some positive changes within their buildings. In fact, in all but two instances, interviewed leaders felt that use of their school's TELL Mass results had led to changes that benefited their overall school environment and culture. It should be noted that because the data were often used as one facet of a larger cycle of inquiry or decision-making process, several leaders, while positively inclined towards the data and its influence, found it difficult to attribute specific or concrete changes to TELL Mass. However, in these (and other cases), specific areas of focus were referenced, and it was noted that TELL Mass data were "instrumental in establishing [a] need," which in turn led to changes by way of further examination by school leaders and leadership teams.

In one of the buildings where TELL Mass data were not described as making a contribution, the results were seen as largely reflective of an erosion of the school's culture due to recent changes in the building, an issue leaders felt they were already aware of and working to address. "I'm not saying that the information is useless," that leader noted. "It certainly made it clear to me that there was a problem, but I think I knew that there was a problem to begin with." In the other instance, the school's instructional leadership team reviewed the results and facilitated a discussion with staff about a specific area (professional development), but ultimately found they were limited in their ability to make changes. This was due to decreases in the amount of time for development and a need to focus that limited time on training related to educator evaluation and other priorities more directly related to the school's improvement plan and instructional improvement.

As might be expected, the specific changes differed from school to school based on the survey's results, but also, in some cases, the extent to which leaders and/or staff felt they could effectively address concerns in those areas. As described by interviewees, changes attributed to TELL Mass ranged from "little things that made the day go smoother" to changes to school schedules and structures. Some of the more common changes referenced in interviews included:

- Changes to schedules to provide additional time for teacher collaboration and planning;

- Efforts to improve professional development, for example, by focusing more explicitly on job-embedded development, aligning job-embedded development with district-wide offerings, or encouraging the district to offer more of its workshops in the school building; and

- Development of new structures for teacher leadership and collaborative decision-making.

In one school, a school-based initiative related to teachers' use of technology was established using TELL Mass results, an initiative which was seen as helping teachers make more effective use of technology in the classroom. Time and resources, it was noted, often hindered schools in making more significant changes as a result of their review of the data, but most leaders felt as though they were able to make some positive changes as a result, if not immediately then in the course of their ongoing planning and decision-making. For example, in one school where TELL Mass results revealed teachers' desire for common planning time, the following summer, the leader altered existing schedules and used a newly-assigned staff position to change the way a student support curriculum was delivered, which in turn, allowed additional time for teachers to meet as teams.

In interpreting TELL Mass results, one consideration in determining whether to focus on a particular indicator often involved the extent to which it was believed the survey results for that indicator reflected conditions that could be easily changed by the school or its leaders. For example, professional development often emerged as a concern for staff, but not all schools pursued changes in this area, as results were seen as largely reflective of district-wide policy and professional development offerings over which leaders felt they had limited control. Similar issues were also raised with regard to indicators about teachers' access to technology, class sizes, and access to instructional materials, among others. This is not to say that changes were not made in these areas, as several schools did seek ways to make improvements, but instead highlights an important consideration influencing decisions about how to use TELL Mass results.

While many leaders acknowledged that some changes occurring as a result of TELL Mass may have taken place eventually, having the data helped bring focus and accelerate the pace of change. For example, it was noted by some that because the data highlighted particular areas that could be improved, it brought a level of focus to those areas and made changes in those areas timely. "What it did was help us by shortening the amount of time to help us decide what needed to be done next," explained one leader. Another shared the following about new opportunities for teacher leadership, specifically in relation to curriculum and training staff in the district's new educator evaluation system, which were created as a result of the survey:

> *I don't think it would have been something I would have given attention to right away. I think it would have been something that a year down the road, two years down the road, it would have been more of a focus because that's really, no matter what, where you want to head…. But because it was just so glaring, it just helped to move it closer to the priority list faster.*

In other cases, interviewees noted that having concrete data confirming what would otherwise be largely an uncorroborated "gut-feeling" led them to feel more confident in making changes.

> *A real positive to me was that it really allowed people without restraint to let it be known what their opinions were …. It was nice [information] to have, so it wasn't just, 'Okay I think people are worried about this,' or 'I think people might have a concern about that.' It was able to show us exactly where people were and we had that data to really fall back on and move on from. So it gave us a lot of concrete data to move off from.*

In addition, most interviewees felt as though the process itself was beneficial and contributed to improvements in school culture and morale. As discussed previously, most interviewees felt that the data had spurred valuable conversations within their buildings, and these conversations were often seen as having positive benefits for overall culture. As one leader described, these discussions "were really helpful in establishing that we were all in this together," adding that "there were many positives that came out of that initial teacher meeting." Another described the conversations as "the most important result" of the survey:

> *I think one of the things it has the potential to do, if principals really use it right, is really bring some of the morale up in buildings …. I think my teachers are really appreciative that things that they have mentioned have come through in some positive ways in their work.*

In this respect, interviewees often felt as though being able to incorporate teachers' input into decisions—either by using the survey results directly or as a result of conversations that occurred—helped to build morale

and create a greater sense of ownership throughout the building. For example, the leader who engaged teachers in the school's training for the educator evaluation system recounted how implementation of that system was proceeding much more smoothly and with much greater buy-in from staff than it was elsewhere in the district. In another instance, where TELL Mass results were used to inform development of a school improvement plan, the leader noted:

> *I think we got goals that people believed in, and I think we got goals that people thought were important, and therefore people were more willing to work for them.*

Furthermore, some leaders also indicated that because, in many cases, the survey helped illuminate areas of strength as well as needs, it also provided an opportunity to collectively celebrate success, which they felt was beneficial for morale.

III. Factors and Conditions Influencing School's use of TELL Mass Data

Interview findings suggest that both the extent to which TELL Mass results were used and the specific approaches employed were influenced largely by leadership and schools' existing cultures. When asked about factors that supported their schools' use of data, interviewees often described their positive disposition towards the data and their belief that it reflects something meaningful about conditions in their building. Where leaders were more skeptical about the data, the results tended to be used in more limited ways and did not contribute to changes or further action. Further, the leaders' ability to "not take the results personally" was also viewed as key. That is, although the survey is intended to assess building conditions, not an individual leader's performance, many interviewees felt that separating the two was difficult. One school leader explains:

> *The fact is the improvement process and listening to other people, especially when there [are] areas of need, is not easy. As a leader, you don't want to hear that things may not be going quite right …. It's difficult when you ask people how you're doing, and ultimately how the school is doing is a reflection on how the principal is doing and the administration, so [it's] a little bit difficult if you think of it that way.*

Similarly, having positive school cultures and productive relationships within buildings was also seen as critical to effectively using the data. "I think you have to have a certain level of trust because looking at any data is difficult," commented one leader, whereas another noted, "If it was a different type of culture and I had resistance, it might have been harder to confront certain things." Another interviewee, reflecting on why use of the data was more successful at that school compared to others in the district, explained it as follows:

> *I think that this school, we're kind of close …. We respect each other. I think going into the meeting [to discuss the school's TELL Mass results], [staff] were pretty confident that everything they said wasn't going to make me mad …. If your staff thinks you're mad, then they are not going to be open to good, productive conversations about how to make things better.*

The specific ways in which the data were used and the venues in which they were discussed also appeared to be influenced substantially by existing relationships and governance practices within buildings. For example, in one school where teachers were engaged primarily through the leadership team, the rationale for this approach was the leaders' desire to build the capacity of that team in relation to building-level decision making. In instances where the data were reviewed with all staff, either as a whole group or as part of team meetings, having that time in the existing schedule was viewed as critical.

Not surprisingly, time was also a mentioned as a significant factor influencing the use of TELL Mass results. In particular, having time in the schedule to discuss the data and gather teacher input was often viewed as an important factor supporting schools in their ability to effectively use the results. Nearly all schools had some existing venue for these conversations, but it was also noted that time spent on activities related to TELL Mass—and to pursuing changes to address concerns identified through the data—required foregoing other activities, so schools needed to prioritize among various needs and demands.

I think it's hard, because it's another thing. That's I think the challenge. There are just so many things happening .... [The TELL Mass data] is important and it's great to have it, but I think everyone's in a different place, and there are only so many hours in a day. You have to make decisions about how much time you can put towards different things given all the different things we're dealing with, because you want to do things well.

A number of factors influenced the relative priority of, and time allocated to, the use of TELL Mass data. However, schools where leaders and staff were under greater pressures, such as those in need of turnaround or where resource limitations were more severe, may have been more limited in their ability to intensively use or make changes based on TELL Mass results. In these situations, use of TELL Mass results, particularly as part of discrete projects focused around the data, may be seen as distracting from other, more urgent priorities. One leader explains:

It comes down to time. Maybe this would be a priority in other schools ... but in the scheme of things ... I would rather have teachers engaged in things that are best practices in the classroom.

Districts also appeared to play a role in whether or not TELL Mass data were used in schools in both direct and indirect ways. Although there were some cases where schools used the results independent of district involvement, in most cases, interviewees indicated that district discussions or directives contributed to the use of the results in their schools. For example, some described initial discussions with district administrators—either in the form of individual meetings or as part of district-level leadership team meetings—as spurring their use of the data in their schools. Districts appeared to play a much more significant role in influencing *whether* the data were used than in *how* they were used, as generally, districts did not proscribe the use of a particular approach. In a few cases, interviewees recalled being asked to review their results with staff, or in one case, establish a team of teachers to look at the data, but for the most part, the specific ways in which the data were used were left up to individual buildings and their leaders.

In addition to contributing to the use of TELL Mass results after the data were made available, districts also promoted TELL Mass use by encouraging schools to achieve the response rates required to receive their reports, a precondition for use. Interviewed school leaders typically described building-level efforts to achieve high response rates similar to those outlined in the June 2013 district-level briefing—including ongoing reminders to staff, providing time to complete the survey, and communicating about the importance of the results and intention to use them. These efforts were described as occurring in conjunction with, and often because of, district-level efforts. "We did talk about the TELL Mass survey at administrative meetings, so I knew it was important to them," described one interviewee. "They were very much pushing, 'Let's get to the [threshold] so we can get our results." Several school leaders also described receiving periodic reminders from district administrators about their building's response rates prior to the close of the survey, which they felt was important to conveying district commitment.

It should be noted that when considering the district influence on TELL Mass use, to some extent, the way in which districts approach the results also appeared to contribute to leaders' perceptions of the survey, which in turn influenced use. For example, in some districts, interviewees described conversations at the district-level as primarily focused on use of the data in the context of leader evaluation or performance improvement. Where data were perceived as being evaluative in nature, this seemed to coincide with a greater degree of concern about the data—for example, a worry that it could be negatively influenced by teachers "sounding off" as a result of an unfavorable evaluation, or because difficult change initiatives were underway—and less buy-in to use of the results. However, some interviewees acknowledged that there may be some cases—for example where TELL Mass results were suggestive of widespread and systemic issues related to climate and culture— where district involvement may be necessary to promote change.

Finally, having results that were largely positive was also often viewed as contributing to schools' ability to effectively use the data. In interviews, a number of leaders expressed their belief that overall, even as their schools' TELL Mass results revealed areas that could be improved, the data was not overly negative, and that

this contributed to their schools' use of the results. This is not a surprising finding, as results on a survey about building conditions would likely be related to use in a number of ways. For example, results that were largely positive would also likely be suggestive of whether a school had a positive and open building culture that might allow them to use the data in collaborative and effective ways. Interviewees also described how having results that did not involve too many areas that stood out as negative or concerning allowed their schools to focus on drilling down to a relatively small set of issues, hence facilitating the process of analyzing the data and translating the results into action. As one leader noted:

> *Too many areas where there's concern—when you can't really drill down and really identify, 'Okay here are the two areas that we really need to discuss and tease apart and find out what's the source of this'—too many areas like that would have been almost overwhelming. We wouldn't have been able to do it.*

Similarly, results that were not overly negative were less likely to be perceived as challenging, hence they would be likely to be met with less resistance on the part of administrators and staff. One interviewee explains:

> *I have to be honest, if the data wasn't that great, maybe we wouldn't have spent that much time on it. But, it was a source of pride for all of us, and I think that we spent the time on it because of that.*

To some extent, this finding underscores the need to emphasize both schools' strengths and weaknesses when looking at TELL Mass results, but it also suggests that buildings in greatest need for improvement—those with significant culture and climate concerns—are likely those least able to make effective use of or benefit from TELL Mass results absent external support and/or impetus for change.

IV. School Leader Feedback for ESE about TELL Mass

Interviewed school leaders generally shared positive feedback about the survey itself and the process of administering it, and offered only minor suggestions for how these might be improved. "The survey's excellent," commented one leader, whereas another reflected positively on the depth of information covered and the opportunity to "drill down" within specific topic areas. The framing of indicators as positive statements—as opposed to having the survey comprised largely of negative statements—was also referenced as helpful and generally supportive of use of the data. Where feedback was offered, there were a few emergent themes:

- The feedback tended to focus on the survey's length and recommended condensing some of the content where possible. However, it was also acknowledged that this might have the effect of limiting the level of depth available to leaders, especially given that specific items or areas seen as less useful tended to differ greatly in light of the many different ways the data were used, and differences in the extent to which school leaders felt they had autonomy to make changes in particular areas.

- Another suggestion mentioned in interviews involved the inclusion of open-response items to gather comments—something that was also referenced in district interviews and included in the June 2013 briefing, although logistical challenges in doing this as part of the survey were also acknowledged.

The process for administering the survey was typically described simple and straightforward. "I didn't think it was hard at all," said one interviewee. Having access to response rates during the administration window was seen as contributing to schools' and districts' efforts to meet the response rate thresholds required for reporting, as these data could be used as part of messaging to staff. Some interviewees, however, did allude to issues in identifying "who was assigned where" for the purposes of building counts, particularly as it related to itinerant staff. This concern appeared to be most salient for schools and districts targeting 100% response rates. One leader suggested that, in this context, it would have been helpful to have received a list of staff who should take the survey for each building, a recommendation that is consistent with feedback received during the district-level phase of the study and outlined in the briefing produced during that phase.

Overall, interviewees also shared positive impressions of the TELL Mass data reports, which were the primary resource accessed in the process of using the results. "The way they distribute the data is beautiful," commented one interviewee, whereas another noted, "the reports that you get are clear and concise and very user-friendly." Being able to access the data with different levels of detail—detailed and summary reports—was seen as particularly helpful, with some leaders finding themselves gravitating towards one report or the other, depending on how the data were used. Of the summary reports in particular, one leader noted:

> *I found it very useful and very easy to take and then share with my staff. The thing I really used most was the survey summary report, which grouped the questions by areas and gave you your percentage compared to elementary schools in town, and then our district, and then the state, so it gave us a real, I thought, easy view, in less than four pages, of all of our results.*

As alluded to above, being able to view the school's results side-by-side with statewide results, district results, and the results from others schools in the district at the same level—elementary, middle, or high school—was also seen as helpful. Interviewees sometimes saw this as helping to encourage a focus on the bigger picture and overall trends, rather than on small minorities of disagreement, by providing context. Of being able to compare the results to different peers, one elementary school principal noted:

> *It was nice to see the elementary piece, because sometimes we just get lumped in with schools in general, so it was really nice to be able to compare apples to apples, but [to] also be able to drill down and look at the district as a whole.*

Only one school made reference to the use of other tools or resources made available through the TELL Mass website, in this case, the *School Guide for Using TELL Data* and related PowerPoint slides and activities. Should ESE want these resources and processes to be more widely used, this may imply a need to more actively promote them through new venues. However, interviews suggest that an expectation that TELL Mass results be reviewed using a fairly discrete and comprehensive process may be met with a level of resistance. For example, although the leader of the school that did use these resources found them helpful, it was also noted that the process itself was time-consuming and, in light of competing demands on time, "not every school will have the time to go through such a comprehensive process." As such, it was suggested that providing additional examples of alternative ways of using the results might be one way to help ensure that the data "does get used and looked at meaningfully," even if the process is not as comprehensive as might have been initially envisioned.

Because data reports were the primary resource used, suggestions for how ESE could better support schools in their use of TELL Mass results centered on recommendations for new reports or ways of viewing the data. Often this involved a desire for more summary-type results and simplified views of the data, again underscoring a general desire to use the data, but limited time to do so. For example, leaders suggested a report or reports showing "an overall rating factor under the major headings," color-coded reports that highlight areas or indicators for which the school's results are significantly above or below district and/or state averages, and, for 2014, data reports that incorporate results from the 2012 survey so that changes and trends would be immediately evident.

It was also noted that having access to an expanded variety of reports or different ways of manipulating the data, as is available for MCAS data through Edwin Analytics and the data warehouse, would have given schools more options for using the results that may have complemented their existing use of the data. For example, in one school where the summary and detailed reports were used with staff, the leader would also have liked to have had access to some of the summary-type reports described above with different audiences:

> *I could see myself sharing [TELL Mass results] with my school site council too, but I wouldn't want to share the entire piece—I wouldn't want to share all those individual responses. I would want to share a much more condensed version that really just highlights key points …. We could do that ourselves, but it just takes time and if it's something that could be built in, it would be very beneficial in terms of how it's used.*

Similarly, another leader felt that being able to access the data in Excel—something that ESE has announced will be an option for 2014 results—would have made using the data easier in that building.

In some interviews, concerns were raised about the potential unintended consequences of the survey, particularly if they are used for evaluative purposes. As alluded to in an earlier section of this briefing, TELL Mass results were sometimes viewed as being used for evaluative purposes, and in other cases it was expected that the data would be used for those purposes in the future. Viewing the survey through this lens, a number of leaders felt that it was unfair or problematic due to its anonymous nature—the precise feature of the survey described in other contexts as the source of its validity and, thus, value for school-level use. That is, some principals felt that because respondents are not accountable for what they say on the survey, it can be used as a forum to vent about issues unrelated to the particular indicators, for example, dissatisfaction over a recent performance evaluation. "I think surveys like this when people don't have to be accountable, it leads to things that are not great," commented one leader, whereas another explained:

> *It just felt to me like principals, administrators who have not caused any waves for the staff or who haven't made any difficult decisions fared very well and looked great on the survey, and administrators who had made some very recent difficult decisions did not fare so well.*

In this context, concerns were also raised about staff using the survey to express dissatisfaction with district- or state-level initiatives, conditions, and policies, things over which a school leader has limited control, if any. To some extent, concerns of this nature reflect on the broader debate about the planned inclusion of staff feedback in administrator evaluations, as ESE has recommended that TELL Mass not be used for evaluative purposes. However, because of the perception of TELL Mass in some places is that it is or will be used in this way, these concerns may have implications for overall survey buy-in, use, and/or implementation. One leader explains:

> *My concern is always that we're looking for a single measure, and I think what I always say to teachers is you need multiple measures … and that's how TELL Mass, I think, has to be seen. It's one of multiple measures that we need to be looking at, but on its own, you're not going to be able to get down to that point about good or bad principal, effective or ineffective leader … because what's going to end up happening is either principals are not going to hand out the survey to people, or they're only going to hand it out to teachers that like them best.*

It should be noted, however, that as mentioned previously, at least one school leader and several district leaders interviewed during the district phase of the study said that TELL Mass results could be useful as one source of information for administrator performance assessment and improvement.

Most interviewees anticipated their schools would participate in the TELL Mass survey again, but their reasons for doing so differed. For some, the rationale for participating was the value derived from the use of the previous results and a desire to see if the changes made had an impact. "I thought it gave us a lot of good information," noted one leader, adding, "It's worth doing, and I'd like to see it happen again." Another explained:

> *We would [participate] and some of it is to get that post-data to see if there have been improvements in any areas. And, like anything else, we focus on one area that we see is an area for improvement, and we slip on something else. My guess is we'll be doing better in some areas, but other areas will be put on a back burner. I think it's important to keep bringing things up and saying, you've got to keep all those balls in the air at the same time.*

For others, their reason for likely participating in the survey was an expectation that it would be required by their districts. Whereas several felt that, absent a mandate from their districts, their schools might still participate in the survey, one interviewed leader felt that that given more urgent priorities that needed to be addressed, if it were a choice, the preference would be to invest the time elsewhere:

With all the other things on our plate, if it were a choice between two hours over the course of a year taking the survey, having staff dissect it, and respond to it, and maybe another two hours of the ILT being part of that process ... as opposed to five, six hours of looking at math data, MCAS data, [formative assessment] data, instructional planning, or professional development for teachers, if it were a choice between that, no I wouldn't ask teachers to do it, because we have so many other things that we need to focus on and already shave time off .... It would be a nice thing to do, but in terms of all the other things that can impact instruction and student achievement, this is not one of those more essential things to do.

Again, differences in perspectives likely reflect, among other factors, differences in levels of priority placed on the survey's results in light of competing demands and immediate needs discussed earlier. It was also noted that time pressures had grown more intense, which may make implementation of the survey and finding time to use the results more difficult.

I hope that is one thing that DESE understands is that in this era of accountability, the mandates are enormous, not only for teachers, all educators I think, with new Common Core and support for ELL, and bullying legislation, and the list goes on and on and on, and there's only so much that people can do at once .... We're at a tipping point, and I don't mean just me and my school, but education in general.

Finally, several interviewees expressed their hope that ESE will use TELL Mass as a source of information to inform its own decision-making. Just as interviewees highlighted the influence of district conditions on TELL Mass results, they also felt as though some aspects of the survey speak to the broader statewide context. In this vein, several interviewees expressed their hope that ESE use the survey to better understand statewide trends and make changes as appropriate.

My hope is that it really has as much of an influence from a policy standpoint and from the ESE and the Commissioner's standpoint, all the way down to my individual school and my individual building.

Looking to the future, several interviewees noted that if the survey becomes part of the ongoing landscape, they would like to see it incorporate indicators specifically focused on understanding where schools are with regard to implementation of high-priority initiatives and where there may be opportunities to better support teachers' understanding of these initiatives at a state-wide level.

There's a lot going on .... If they were to look at some of those initiatives it would really be interesting to see if teachers understand ... because if we have people who are not understanding, that really would be important.

V. Conclusion

As described in the briefing, a number of schools in RTTT districts reviewed and used their 2012 TELL Mass results, although the ways in which the data were used varied. Most often when the data were used, they were used in ways that informed and supplemented schools' existing decision-making processes or cycles of inquiry, rather than as a discrete project with formal goals and action plans focused specifically on TELL Mass. That is, in all but a few cases, the data were used as a source of information about school climate and conditions, highlighting specific areas or needs that could then be further discussed and analyzed, often in the context of other data and school improvement priorities. In some cases, the data were used to inform formal plans for improvement—such a school improvement or a leaders' performance improvement plan—but in others the influence was more in the context of school-level decision-making. This is not to say that the data were not used in ways that promoted collaboration, as due to their nature as perceptual data from staff, the results were often described as spurring valuable conversations between and among leaders and staff, and/or providing a venue for the inclusion of staff input into schools' needs assessments and planning.

In nearly all instances where the data were used, interviewed leaders felt that that use had led to changes that benefited overall school environment and culture. Some leaders, while positively inclined towards the data and its influence, found it difficult to attribute specific or concrete changes to TELL Mass, something that reflects

the fact that the data were often used as one facet of a larger cycle of inquiry or decision-making process. As might be expected, the specific changes differed from school to school based on the survey's results, ranging from "little things that made the day go smoother" to the development of new structures for teacher leadership and collaborative decision-making. Changes to schedules to provide additional time for teacher collaboration and planning as well as efforts to improve professional development were also common. A number of factors or conditions appeared to influence schools in their use of TELL Mass results, among which leadership and existing cultures appeared to be the most significant. Decisions about how much time to spend on using the data were generally made within the context of time and the relative priority of using TELL Mass in light of other competing demands, and in this context, districts played a significant role in helping to shape priorities. Having results that were largely positive was also often viewed as contributing to schools' ability to effectively use the data.

School leaders generally shared positive feedback about the survey itself, the process of administering it, and the data reports received, offering only minor feedback in relation to how these might be improved. Because data reports were the primary resource used, suggestions for how ESE could better support schools in their use of TELL Mass results centered on recommendations for new reports or ways of viewing the data, for example, by providing more summary-type results or different ways to manipulate the data. Most interviewees anticipated that their schools would participate in the survey again, offering different reasons for doing so. Some said they would like to see the survey readministered because they had previously found the results useful and felt that ongoing administration of the survey would allow them to assess whether changes made contributed to improvements in culture and climate. Others, however, reflected on their urgent need to prioritize in light of numerous competing demands and suggested that they would not place as high a priority on the survey absent a mandate to do so. If the survey does become part of the education landscape moving forward, several interviewees expressed their hope that ESE will use TELL Mass as a source of information about the needs of the field more generally, and use that as an input in developing support initiatives so that the influence of the survey extends from individual buildings to the broader state policy context.