Key Issue:
Identifying Professional Contexts to Support Highly Effective Teachers

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Scenario

Dr. Jones was just appointed interim superintendent of a rural school district after the long tenured and well-respected district head left to work in higher education. She has worked for the district for a number of years in the central office, and a search is under way for a permanent superintendent.

Her district struggles with recruiting and retaining qualified educators:

- More than one fifth of the district's teachers left the district, a significantly higher proportion than the state average (at almost 13 percent). Two of the district's 14 schools suffered losses of more than one third of their faculty from the previous school year.
- Only 64 percent of middle school and 56 percent of high school teachers are fully licensed, which is significantly lower than the state average of 84 and 85 percent respectively.
- The district has few qualified applicants and has to rely heavily on alternative route and out-of-state teachers, who leave the district after a short time.

These teaching quality challenges must be addressed with few resources, abject poverty, and a history of poor performance on the state's performance measures.

The county has seen a decline in population and suffers from the highest poverty rate in the state (23.9 percent) with an average median household income of more than $15,000 below the state average. More than one third of children in the district live in poverty (double the state average of 16.1 percent), yet the district has the 11th highest property tax rate in the state (.0865 per $100). About one fourth of students live in a household headed by a parent with less education than a high school diploma, and more than one fifth live in single-parent households. Three fourths are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch.

The 5,000-student district struggles academically, particularly at the high school level. The two high schools have the lowest proportion of students proficient in the state (both below 40 percent), and only 58 percent of ninth graders who enter these high schools graduate four years later.

Dr. Jones had read research on the importance of school culture and context on student learning, attended a few conferences where the issue was raised, and even brought in an outside expert on the topic for a half-day inservice for her principals. She remembered from her own teaching how important other colleagues had been to her motivation and success.

Her first step was to better understand whether her schools had the types of professional contexts and conditions that would serve to welcome new teachers and keep the ones already there.

Her district was part of a statewide survey just a few months earlier, and the following was documented:

- Less than half (48 percent) of teachers agreed that school leadership consistently enforces rules of student conduct.
- About half (54 percent) of educators agreed that they have sufficient access to appropriate instructional materials and resources (the state average was 73 percent).
- Only about two out of five (39 percent) agreed that teachers are centrally involved in decision making about education issues.

Despite these findings, one of the elementary schools was recently recognized for its positive working conditions and provides a significant amount of planning and collaborative time for its teachers. Other elementary schools and one of the three middle schools appeared to offer good examples of positive, collaborative professional contexts.

Dr. Jones had several questions:

- What could she do to help each school understand why its current environment might not be conducive for attracting, retaining, and motivating teachers, while showing respect for the school principal and faculty?
- What tools could she provide to empower her leaders and teachers to solve their own problems when the schools that needed improvement the most were the ones without the trusting, collaborative environments that foster success? And what could the district do?
- How could she support plans to improve these professional contexts when resources were scarce?

Note: This scenario is based on a real school district, and all data presented are actual data.

Benefits of Improving Professional Context

Policymakers, practitioners, and researchers have long understood that teacher quality is the most important variable for the success of students. Programs and policies, however, have focused almost exclusively on improving teaching quality through investments in human capital (e.g., ensuring that teachers are well prepared, have sufficient credentials and degrees, and have an adequate numbers of years of experience in the profession). Although it is important to address these aspects of teaching quality, they are but partial solutions to improving teaching.

Workplace performance is a function of three interdependent factors: motivations; abilities; and working conditions, or the situation in which one works (O'Day, 1996). It is this last area that is often left unaddressed. Policymakers also have paid little attention to the influences of working conditions (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2007). Ultimately, investments in social capital help improve student learning by encouraging teachers to work together more effectively. Schools put far more energy into formal training and evaluation of teachers than coaching, support, and networking, but it is this professional context and the supportive environments of schools that shape teacher efficacy and satisfaction. In a recent study of 88 urban public schools, it was found that students had noticeably higher reading and mathematics test scores in schools where teachers frequently talked to each other about their jobs and where principals did the best job of staying in touch with the community. These communication networks had a greater impact on test scores than the experience or credentials of the staff (Leana & Pil, 2006).

Assessing, analyzing, and improving the professional context in which teachers work has many benefits:

- **Improved Student Learning.** Teachers cannot be as successful with students as they otherwise would be without the leadership, support, and collaborative environments that positive school contexts provide. Several statewide studies have demonstrated that the presence of positive work environments is significantly connected with increased student achievement (Hirsch, 2006; Hirsch & Emerick, 2007a, 2007b). In particular, strong trusting internal and external relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) and supportive leadership are essential to improving student achievement.
- **Improved Teacher Efficacy and Motivation.** Teachers' perceptions of their schools are their reality, and their behavior and efficacy are a direct result of those views. "What teachers actually do in their schools and classrooms depends on how teachers perceive and respond to their working conditions" (Leithwood, 2006, p. 8). Leithwood's recent literature review of teacher working conditions studies found the following:
  - Sixteen empirical studies published between 1976 and 2001 and five literature reviews that show teacher efficacy is significantly shaped by teaching conditions and has large effects on both teacher performance and student outcomes.
  - Seventeen original empirical studies published between 1974 and 2003 that analyze the effect of teacher burnout and extreme stress on absenteeism, decline in classroom performance, and poor interpersonal relations with colleagues and students.

- Fifteen original empirical studies and one review of research that link teacher engagement in the school or profession to job satisfaction, organization satisfaction, and teacher retention.

Leithwood (2006) makes the following conclusion:

> There is good evidence to show that teachers' working conditions matter because they have a direct effect on teachers' thoughts and feelings—their sense of individual professional efficacy, of collective professional efficacy, of job satisfaction; their organizational commitment, levels of stress and burnout, morale, engagement in the school or profession and their pedagogical content knowledge. These internal states are an important factor in what teachers do and have a direct effect in what happens in the classroom, how well students achieve, and their experience of school. (p. 88)

- **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 (Ingersoll, 2003; Marvel, Lyter, Peltola, Strizek, & Morton, 2006; Luekens, Lyter, & Fox, 2004). 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, 2006; Hirsch & Emerick, 2007a, 2007b). 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 leadership who create trusting environments where educators are engaged in decision making has an impact on teachers' decisions about where to work (Hirsch, 2006; Hirsch & Emerick, 2007a, 2007b).
- **New Recruitment Strategies to Entice Educators to Hard-to-Staff Schools.** Teachers not only stay in schools because of positive professional contexts but seek out such contexts when choosing where to work. 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 a place of employment. Furthermore, when asked about incentives that would attract them to schools, nonfinancial incentives, such as guaranteed planning time, additional support, and reduced class sizes, are more powerful recruitment incentives than salary supplements and bonuses (Hirsch, 2006). Improving teaching conditions could also bolster the teacher supply pool; many educators who left due to poor conditions might reconsider if the conditions were enhanced. A recent survey of 2,000 educators from California found that 28 percent of teachers who left before retirement indicated that they would resume their positions if improvements were made to teaching and learning conditions. Monetary incentives were found to be less persuasive (Futernick, 2007).
- **Equitable Distribution of Resources.** Many educators assume that the professional contexts in schools that serve high-minority and high-poverty student populations are worse than those in more affluent schools. Given that the professional context within schools is influenced by nonfinancial elements, such as positive social interactions and

leadership, however, this may not be the case. Statewide surveys indicate that the relationship between student populations, resources invested, and professional context is complex. So, assessing and utilizing school-level data on professional context can assist districts and states in deciding on the best areas in which to invest resources to improve schools and provide guidance on why certain policies and practices may not have worked out as intended.

By helping schools use data to assess, understand, and improve their teaching and learning conditions, states and districts can 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.

Tips and Concerns

The context in which educators work is critical to their success and satisfaction; however, identifying and addressing the conditions that teachers want and need is difficult. Assessing context is not like analyzing other more neutral and quantifiable data points, such as student test scores and class size. The only way to get at issues of culture and collaboration is to ask educators themselves; however, getting honest, authentic input and dialogue can be challenging, especially in schools where the basic building blocks of a positive context—trust, time, and leadership—are not in place. Using information in a positive way toward school improvement is critical, and the following are important ideas to consider when assessing and discussing professional context:

- **This is not about any one individual, and it will take a community effort to improve.** The principal holds a unique and important place within the school community and can have a significant impact on the professional context in which teachers work; however, many aspects of context are beyond the principal's control. Broader social trends and federal, state, and district policies all impact how educators view and operate within their schools and classrooms. Context is about schools, not about individuals. No one person should be viewed as responsible for creating or reforming school culture.
- **Context is an area for school improvement, not accountability.** Because professional context is about schools, no one individual should be held solely accountable for the status of the school culture. Rather, data should be used to guide school improvement planning and then assessed to determine the level of progress toward implementing collectively developed reforms.
- **Perceptual data are real data.** Data on culture and context is based on surveys, focus groups, interviews, and discussion; however, that does not mean it is not "valid" or not as important as other data sources. In a number of studies, educators' perceptions on the culture and context of their schools have been linked to student learning, future employment plans, efficacy, and motivation. Gathering information about professional context and using it to improve schools is critical and needs to be a part of reform efforts at the school, district, and state levels.
- **Solutions can be complex and long term.** Context and culture is cumulative and engrained. It took many years and faculty members to create it, and it will take a similar amount of time to reform. Some solutions may be inexpensive and simple to address (e.g., having a more consistent means of communicating among the faculty), whereas 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 address both short-term and long-term issues in order to successfully improve the professional context.
- **Focus on positives as well as areas for improvement.** Educators take tremendous pride in their work and want to be employed in a school that allows them to do their best. All schools have positives to draw upon as they assess and improve their context. Ensuring that positives are acknowledged and celebrated, while issues are identified and addressed, is an important part of moving forward.

- **Create a common understanding of what defines professional context.** Anything and everything might be considered a part of professional context. Research shows that broader social trends, media coverage, respect for the profession, and local and state policies can all influence teachers' perceptions of their conditions and ultimately their motivation and efficacy as educators. Being clear about what working conditions can be assessed, understood, and improved can help schools and districts move from broad conversations and criticisms to specific data and action. Such working conditions include structural conditions (e.g., planning time, instructional resources, and class sizes) and social conditions (e.g., leadership, trust, collaboration, and support). A list of research-based conditions that define professional context should include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following (Moore-Johnson, 2006):
  - "Appropriate and fair teaching assignments" (p. 3)
  - "Collaborative work with colleagues" (p. 6)
  - "Extra support for new teachers" (p. 8)
  - "Supports for working with students" (p. 9)
  - "Curricular support in an era of high standards" (p. 10)
  - "Sufficient resources and materials" (p. 11)
  - "Assessments for accountability" (p. 12)
  - "Ongoing professional development" (p. 12)
  - "Expanded influence and career growth" (p. 13)
  - "Safe, well-equipped facilities" (p. 15)

Series of Strategies

Creating Positive Professional Contexts to Support Highly Effective Teachers

There is no right professional context that works for all educators. Veteran educators often have different expectations and desires about their teaching environment than new teachers. New teachers seek environments that are collaborative and flexible and provide opportunities for influence and advancement, whereas veteran educators tend to be more focused on privacy and autonomy. Creating an integrated culture that draws on these different novice and veteran dispositions and expectations is critical (Peske, Liu, Johnson, Kauffman, & Kardos, 2001). The level of success for schools, however, is dependent on a variety of factors, including the experiences, knowledge, skills, and disposition of the existing faculty; the degree of site-based autonomy possible in a given district; state and federal laws, rules, and regulations; and the amount of resources available.

In a series of summits on recruiting and retaining accomplished teachers to high-needs schools, held in six states and sponsored by the National Education Association and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, more than 2,000 educators offered the following as necessary components of a professional context that would be attractive to them and allow them to thrive (Berry, n.d.):

- Strong supportive school leaders who empower educators and encourage appropriate instructional risk-taking and engage the faculty in creating and implementing a vision for the school.
- Flexible curricula in which educators can be creative in designing and delivering instruction.
- Collaborative environments where educators can work together and learn from each other.
- Growth opportunities for educators to take on new responsibilities while still teaching (e.g., mentoring, designing and delivering professional development, leading professional learning teams).

Summaries for all state summit recommendations are available online (http://www.nea.org/nationalboard/summits.html). For a summary of the summits, see Berry (n.d.).

The strategies and resources listed on the following pages are offered to help states, districts, and schools assess and take action to improve the professional cultures in which educators work.

Strategy 1: Create Clear Standards and Expectations for Positive Professional Contexts

Schools, districts, and states need an understanding of positive professional contexts. As educators often work in the same school or school system for much of their career, their understanding of positive professional contexts may be limited by their own work experiences. States, through standards and/or guidelines, can make clear to educators the types of environments expected. Districts also should be clear about school design, expecting that all schools will be great places to teach and learn. Finally, schools—through continuous dialogue, assessment of data, and other methods—should be clear about the type of environment desired and be purposeful in continuously assessing and improving school culture and context.

Resource 1: ***Standards for Working Conditions in North Carolina Schools*** **(state)**

North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission. (n.d.). *Standards for working conditions in North Carolina schools.* Raleigh: North Carolina Teaching Standards Commission. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.ncptsc.org/STANDARDS%20FOR%20WORKING%20CONDITIONS%20IN%20NORTH%20CAROLINA%20SCHOOLS.doc

Twenty-nine standards in five distinct areas—time, empowerment, professional development, leadership, and facilities and resources—serve as guidance for schools to understand positive working conditions. These areas were the basis for Governor Easley's Teacher Working Conditions Survey and inform newly revised teacher and administrator standards.

Resource 2: ***Ohio School Climate Guidelines*** **(state)**

Ohio Department of Education. (2004). *Ohio school climate guidelines.* Columbus, OH: Author. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/DocumentManagement/DocumentDownload.aspx?DocumentID=8563

Ohio enacted school climate guidelines with the belief that students in schools with safe, supportive learning environments where they become connected to school are less likely to engage in disruptive and destructive behavior. Nine guidelines are presented in areas such as engaging in school-community partnerships, conducting regular and thorough assessments toward continuous improvement, providing high-quality professional development for school leaders and staff, and engaging parents. Specific benchmarks and potential reform strategies are offered.

Resource 3: Partnership for 21st Century Skills (state or district)

Website: http://www.21stcenturyskills.org

Framework:
http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=254&Itemid=120

Resources:
http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=273&Itemid=139

21st Century Learning Environments:
http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/route21/images/stories/epapers/r21_le_epaper.pdf

Route 21: http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/route21/

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills is a group of 34 businesses and organizations working collaboratively to ensure that all students have the knowledge and skills to succeed as effective citizens, workers, and leaders in the 21st century. Six states—Maine, Massachusetts, North Carolina, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wisconsin—have initiatives aligned with the partnership's goals. The partnership offers a framework that shows a unified, collective vision for 21st century learning. A crucial element is support systems, including learning environments.

A 21st century learning environment depends on a number of aligned and interdependent elements to support 21st century teaching and learning:

- Facilities and design
- Technology infrastructure
- Scheduling
- School culture
- Leadership
- Professional learning communities

The site contains Route 21 with online resources and tools to promote 21st century skills and support systems and a white paper specifically on creating supportive learning environments.

Resource 4: Professional Cultures of Schools (school)

Peske, H., Liu, E., Johnson, S. M., Kauffman, D., & Kardos, S. M. (2001, December). The next generation of teachers: Changing conceptions of a career in teaching. *Phi Delta Kappan, 83*(4), 304–311.

Peske, H., Liu, E., Johnson, S. M., Kauffman, D., & Kardos, S. M. (2001, April). Counting on colleagues: New teachers encounter the professional cultures of their schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 37*(2), 250–290.

Summaries of both articles are available at http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ngt/papers.htm.

Schools are characterized as having three types of professional cultures or subcultures: veteran-oriented cultures, novice-oriented cultures, and integrated cultures. Schools with veteran-oriented cultures—employing a high proportion of senior teachers who work independently with well-established practice—often have few meaningful ways to orient, induct, and provide support to new teachers. Novice-oriented cultures provide intense professional interaction but do not have the benefit of expertise. Integrated cultures do not have separate camps of educators and have dynamic, supportive environments where everyone benefits from professional collaboration. Principals play an important role in developing and maintaining integrated professional cultures through their presence and responsiveness to creating positive teaching and learning environments.

Strategy 2: Assess the Quality of the Professional Environment in Schools

Understanding the professional context of schools can be difficult. There are few systematic and "hard" measures of critical components of professional environment such as levels of trust, teacher engagement, and support. When educators are asked about these issues during staff meetings, interviews, or evaluations, they can be reluctant to share their thoughts and perceptions. These resources, including survey instruments and improvement processes, can help to better assess and improve the working environments of schools.

Resource 5: Teaching and Learning Conditions Survey (state, district, and school)

Website: http://www.newteachercenter.org/pdfs/Teaching-Learning_Conditions_Survey.pdf

The New Teacher Center at the University of California at Santa Cruz (NTC) works with states to conduct statewide full population surveys of teaching, learning, and leadership. Based on North Carolina's initial statewide teacher working conditions survey, NTC works with states to do the following:

- Customize a survey drawing upon core questions in the areas of time, leadership, empowerment, facilities and resources, professional development, and induction for all school-based licensed educators.
- Produce school district and state reports.
- Analyze the connection between results, student achievement, and teacher retention.
- Assist states in utilizing the data to improve policy and practice at the school, district, and state levels.

Links to state survey websites and summaries of results can be found at the NTC website. Results from research conducted on initiatives prior to the 2007–08 school year are available at http://www.teachingquality.org.

Resource 6: Keys to Excellence for Your School (KEYS) (school)

The KEYS Online Survey: http://www.keysonline.org/
School Quality: NEA's KEYS Initiative: http://www.nea.org/schoolquality/index.html

The National Education Association developed the Keys to Excellence for Your Schools (KEYS) initiative to help schools develop improvement plans and meet the challenges of the No Child Left Behind Act. KEYS includes a survey tool that helps schools measure the extent to which quality indicators in six areas are present:

- Shared understanding and commitment to high goals.
- Open communication and collaborative problem solving.
- Continuous assessment for teaching and learning.

- Personal and professional learning.
- Resources to support teaching and learning.
- Curriculum and instruction.

Resource 7: Consortium on Chicago School Research (district and school)

Website: http://ccsr.uchicago.edu/

Since 1991, the Consortium on Chicago School Research has regularly surveyed all Chicago public school principals, teachers, and students to learn their views on and experiences in the districts' schools. Surveys assess learning climate, student-teacher relationships, leadership, and quality of the school's instructional program. They also ask about the school's professional environment and the nature of the school's relationships with parents and the community. School-specific confidential reports are prepared for schools, and data have been used to provide a comprehensive picture of the condition of Chicago schools. Survey instruments and other resources are available.

Resource 8: Central Office Review for Results and Equity (district)

Website: http://www.annenberginstitute.org/WeDo/CORRE.php

The Central Office Review for Results and Equity (CORRE), carried out in partnership between a school district and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, help districts consider data in an effort to transform into "smart districts." The content of CORRE is customized for each district, but key areas that tend to emerge involve professional context issues, such as culture and communications and relationships within the district and with external partners. CORRE reviews have been completed in several school districts including East Providence (Rhode Island), Portland Public Schools (Oregon), Sacramento Unified School District (California), Mobile County Public School system (Alabama), and the Hamilton County Department of Education (Chattanooga, Tennessee). Final CORRE reports, news articles, and other documents related to the reviews are available online.

Resource 9: Tools for School-Improvement Planning (school)

Website: http://www.annenberginstitute.org/tools/index.php

The Tools for School-Improvement Planning website contains observation protocols; focus group samples; questions, surveys, and questionnaires; and other techniques to help examine specific school improvement concerns. The tools include sections on both school culture and school organization.

Resource 10: *Asking the Right Questions: A School Change Toolkit* (school)

Website: http://www.mcrel.org/toolkit/

The Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) has developed *Asking the Right Questions: A School Change Toolkit.* The site offers information about systems theory in order to provide those undertaking a school improvement effort with a "balcony view" to get the big picture of what's happening in a school system. In addition, tools and resources are provided.

Resource 11: Baldrige National Quality Program: *Education Criteria for Performance Excellence* (district and school)

Baldrige National Quality Program. (2008). *Education criteria for performance excellence.* Gaithersburg, MD: Author. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.quality.nist.gov/PDF_files/2008_Education_Criteria.pdf

The Baldrige National Quality Program has criteria for performance excellence in the area of education and presents exemplary districts with awards. The publication includes principles of excellent education organizations and assessment tools in the following areas, all of which contribute to creating positive school cultures and contexts:

- Leadership
- Strategic planning
- Student/stakeholder and market focus
- Measurement, analysis, and knowledge management
- Workforce focus
- Process management
- Results

Resource 12: Organizational Climate Index

Hoy, W., Smith, P., & Sweetland, S. (2002). The development of the organizational climate index for high schools: Its measure and relationship to faculty trust. *The High School Journal, 86*(2), 38–49.

This article highlights the Organizational Climate Index, a 27-item descriptive questionnaire that assesses organizational openness and health by examining the following: environmental press (the relationship between the school and community), collegial leadership (the openness of the leader and behavior of the principal), teacher professionalism (the openness of teacher-teacher interactions), and academic press (the relationship between the school and students). Faculty trust in colleagues was related to all dimensions of school climate assessed.

For more information about this strategy, see Key Issue: Building the Capacity of School Leaders to Support Teachers at http://www.tqsource.org/strategies/atrisk/leadership.pdf.

Strategy 3: Develop the Data Infrastructures Necessary to Warehouse and Analyze Data on School Context and Integrate It Into School Improvement Planning

States and districts need robust data systems in order to make information on the presence of professional contexts available and usable. Few states or school systems gather, archive, and make accessible critical information for schools that can be used to understand and assess the professional contexts of schools. If schools are to make data-driven decisions about effective organization so that educators can do their best work, information must be available and readily accessible.

Resource 13: Data Quality Campaign (state)

Website: http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org

Bergner, T., Steiny, J., & Armstrong, J. (2007). *Benefits of and lessons learned from linking teacher and student data.* Austin, TX: Data Quality Campaign. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/publications-benefits_of_and_lessons_learned_from_linking_teacher_and_student_data-120607.pdf

"The Data Quality Campaign is a national, collaborative effort to encourage and support state policymakers to improve the collection, availability, and use of high-quality data and implement state longitudinal data systems to improve student achievement." One of the ten essential elements of a P–12 longitudinal data system is collecting teaching quality information by individual educator and linking it to student learning data. Any system that incorporates information on professional context must be built on a foundation that comprises these elements to conduct research to better understand the impact and importance of professional context on teacher retention and student learning. A white paper with lessons learned and practical advice in setting up state teaching quality data systems is available online.

Resource 14: Teaching Quality Data Systems Roadmap: Building Teaching Data to Promote Sound TQ Policies and Programs (state)

Website: http://www.teachingdata.org

The teaching quality data systems roadmap provides information for state policymakers about indicators and design principles of a comprehensive teaching quality data system. Specific indicators in the areas of teacher working conditions are highlighted in the teachers and schools section of the site.

Resource 15: School Improvement Through Data-Driven Decision Making (district and school)

Website: http://www.ncrel.org/datause/

This site, by Learning Point Associates, offers a data primer, data resources, and data tools. The data tools section specifically lists resources that can be utilized in assessing school and district climate, including *Quality School Portfolio, Making Good Choices: A Guide for Schools and Districts*, and *Educating for Democracy: School and Classroom Practices*.

Resource 16: The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement Resources (school)

The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. (2007, September 27). *Matching school improvement strategies with identified needs: The story of two schools* [Webcast]. Naperville, IL: Learning Point Associates. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.centerforcsri.org/webcasts/webcast4/webcast4.html

The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. (2007, June). *Improving teacher retention with supportive workplace conditions* [Newsletter]. Naperville, IL: Learning Point Associates. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.centerforcsri.org/files/TheCenter_NL_June07.pdf

Two elementary schools from Maryland are highlighted in this webcast from the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, which addresses how the learning needs of a school community are identified and incorporated into school improvement plans. The cited newsletter also specifically focuses on improving the working conditions of educators.

Strategy 4: Design Schools as Learning Organizations

Schools need to be designed so that educators can work collaboratively toward student learning goals. Creating authentic learning communities where educators make important decisions about instruction, support each other, and have school leaders that clear the way for them to do their best work is essential.

Resource 17: Fifth Discipline Resources (district and schools)

Senge, P., Cambron-McCabe, N., Lucas, T., Smith, B., Dutton, J., & Kleiner, A. (2000). *Schools that learn: A fifth discipline fieldbook for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education.* New York: Doubleday/Currency.

Senge, P., Kliener, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., & Smith, B. (1994). *The fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organization.* New York: Doubleday/Currency.

Senge, P., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., Roth, G., & Smith, B. (1999). *The dance of change: The challenges of sustaining momentum in learning organizations.* New York: Doubleday/Currency.

These guides based on the work of Peter Senge present practical exercises, stories, and resource reviews aimed at assisting in the development of systems approaches that engage schools in organizational design, reflection, and learning. It is based on the premise that for schools to change, educators need to change the ways they think and interact.

Substrategy 4.1: Ensure Schools Have Effective Decision-Making Structures and the Power to Make Important Decisions

Resource 18: Nevada Empowerment Schools (state and district)

Committee on Human Resources and Education. Senate Bill No. 238. (2007). Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.leg.state.nv.us/74th/Bills/SB/SB238_EN.pdf

Clark County School District. (2007). *Clark County School District empowerment schools.* Reno, NV: Nevada Association of School Boards. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.nvasb.org/07_conf_documents/lee.pdf

In 2007, Nevada passed legislation that provides for 29 empowerment schools across the state and allocates an additional $400 per pupil in spending. Principals, in collaboration with the faculty, control up to 90 percent of their school budgets, allowing educators to determine how to best meet the unique needs of their student populations. Clark County (Las Vegas) has eight of these schools, four of which opened in 2006–07. Under the legislation, schools will receive more autonomy in the areas of budgeting, staffing, employee incentives, time/calendar, and instruction and will be held accountable for meeting performance targets. Schools will create a school

design team that puts together an empowerment plan approved by the board of trustees of the district. Plans will include a budget, governance structure, academic plan, intended student/teacher ratios, and a parental involvement plan. Each school will submit a quarterly report on progress.

Resource 19: The Central Role in Shared Decision Making: How District Staff Can Help Schools Create and Operate Site Counsels (state and district)

Kentta, B. (1997, March). The central role in shared decision making: How district staff can help schools create and operate site counsels. *The School Administrator.* Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.aasa.org/publications/saarticledetail.cfm?ItemNumber=4814

This article, written by a curriculum and staff development coordinator from Eugene, Oregon, provides tips on putting together effective site-based counsels so that decisions on budget, staffing, and program can be transferred from central office to schools.

Substrategy 4.2: Encourage Collaboration Through Professional Learning Communities

Professional learning communities organize teaching around collaborative teams in which teachers work together to examine data, plan instruction, and improve practice together based on individual student learning needs.

Resource 20: *Professional Development Sourcebook* Produced by *Teacher Magazine* (school)

Website: http://www.teachermagazine.org/tm/toc/2007/10/25/index.html

This first issue of *Professional Development Sourcebook* produced by *Teacher Magazine* is focused on teamwork and professional learning teams. Several articles provide insight into teacher-led professional development, working in collaborative teams.

Resource 21: *A Facilitator's Guide to Professional Learning Team* Produced by SERVE (school)

Jolly, A. (2005). *A facilitator's guide to professional learning teams: Creating on-the-job opportunities for teachers to continually learn and grow.* Greensboro, NC: SERVE.

SERVE Website: http://www.serve.org/

This guide provides a set of tools for implementing professional learning teams with an entire faculty or part of a faculty. The book is organized in ten short chapters or steps. Each step features a variety of tools to use while establishing, maintaining, and evaluating a specific part of the learning team process. Team tools and resources are available on the SERVE website.

Resource 22: All Things PLC (district and school)

Website: http://www.allthingsplc.info/

The All Things PLC website provides research, articles, data, and tools to educators who seek information about professional learning communities at work. This information is provided so schools and districts have relevant, practical knowledge and tools as they create and sustain their professional learning communities. Blogs, a professional learning community locator, tools, resources, and links to numerous seminal and newly published articles are available online.

For more information about this substrategy, see Key Issue: Improving the Working Environment of Teachers at http://www.tqsource.org/strategies/atrisk/Environment.pdf.

Substrategy 4.3: Ensure That Teachers Have Sufficient Time to Collaborate and Plan

Quality teaching is dependent upon time. To successfully meet the needs of diverse students, teachers need time to collaborate with colleagues, discuss and observe best practices, and participate in professional development that prepares them for changing curriculum and the challenges of teaching in the 21st century. Unfortunately, survey data from educators in states across the country consistently indicate that time available to teachers is the working condition of single greatest concern to educators, and a majority of teachers are not satisfied with the time they have to complete key aspects of their job (Hirsch, 2006; Hirsch & Emerick, 2007a, 2007b).

Resource 23: *Teacher Workload and Stressors: Perceived Changes in Teachers' Responsibilities, Time Allocation, and Levels of Stress in Maine Public Schools* (state)

Maine Education Policy Research Institute. (2004). *Teacher workload and stressors: Perceived changes in teachers' responsibilities, time allocation, and levels of stress in Maine Public Schools.* Orono: Author. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.maine.gov/education/edletrs/2006/ilet/06ilet115workload.pdf

Results from a survey of over 3,000 educators for The Maine Commissioner's Task Force on Teacher Workload found that teacher workload had increased over the previous three years due to requirements of state standards and assessment and the No Child Left Behind Act. Teachers worked over 50 hours per week and devoted a majority of their time to planning and assessment but noted significant time devoted to committee work and parent outreach.

Resource 24: *Journal of Staff Development, 28*(2)–Spring 2007 (district and school)

Journal of Staff Development, 28(2). (2007, Spring). Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.nsdc.org/publications/issueDetails.cfm?issueID=196

The theme of the Spring 2007 issue of *The Journal of Staff Development*, published by the National Staff Development Council, is time. Articles focus on providing time for teachers to

collaborate and offer examples from South Carolina, New York, and Ohio. The issue includes a tool that helps schools find time for professional learning.

Resource 25: Rethinking the Allocation of Teaching Resources: Some Lessons From High Performing Schools (district and school)

Darling-Hammond, L., & Hawley-Miles, K. (1997). Rethinking the allocation of teaching resources: Some lessons from high performing schools. In *Developments in school finance*. Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics. Retrieved February 27, 2008, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs98/dev97/98212e.asp

The study examines five high-performing schools that have redesigned the way they allocate teaching resources. The article gives concrete ways to reorganize teacher time and identifies six principles of resource allocation among the five schools. Suggestions include combining lunch periods with common planning time. For example, Lyons School gave teachers a common lunch period followed by one hour and 15 minutes of common planning time.

Resource 26: *Creating Non-Instructional Time for Elementary Schools: Strategies from Schools in North Carolina* (district and school)

Reeves, C., Emerick, S., & Hirsch, E. (2006). *Creating non-instructional time for elementary schools: Strategies from schools in North Carolina.* Hillsborough, NC: Center for Teaching Quality. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.teachingquality.org/pdfs/twc2006timebrief_full.pdf

This brief examines successful strategies in finding more time for teacher planning and collaboration in North Carolina schools. Schools, identified based on results from Governor Easley's Teacher Working Conditions Survey, overcame traditional barriers to provide more time for educators. Strategies used across the schools include the following:

- Involving teachers in developing the school schedule
- Assessing needs and available resources
- Developing mechanisms to ensure available time is used well

Specific district-level recommendations are offered, and short vignettes from schools are available.

For more information about this substrategy, see Key Issue: Improving the Working Environment of Teachers at http://www.tqsource.org/strategies/atrisk/Environment.pdf.

Substrategy 4.4: Provide Induction Support to New Educators

See Key Issue: Induction/Mentoring/Support of New Teachers at http://www.tqsource.org/strategies/atrisk/Induction.pdf

Strategy 5: Build Safe, Supportive Trusting Environments for Students and Teachers

Several statewide studies have demonstrated that the presence of positive work environments is significantly connected with increased student achievement (Hirsch, 2006; Hirsch & Emerick, 2007a, 2007b). In particular, strong trusting internal and external relationships (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) and supportive leadership are essential to improving student achievement.

Resource 27: *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement* (district and school)

Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. L. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Social relationships (relational trust) can serve as a prime resource for school improvement. Bryk and Schneider, based on data from Chicago, examined how social exchanges that make up daily life in a school community generate, or fail to generate, a successful educational environment. The personal dynamics among teachers, students, and their parents have an impact on student attendance and ultimately learning. Schools with high relational trust had educators who were more likely to experiment with new practices and work together with parents to advance improvements.

Resource 28: *Creating an Atmosphere of Trust: Lessons From Exemplary Schools* (district and school)

Reeves, C., Emerick, S., & Hirsch, E. (2007). *Creating an atmosphere of trust: Lessons from exemplary schools.* Hillsborough, NC: Center for Teaching Quality. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.ncptsc.org/trust%20brief.pdf

This brief, published in cooperation with the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission, draws upon focus groups of educators from schools in North Carolina identified as having trusting, supportive environments by educators through Governor Easley's Teacher Working Conditions Survey. The brief includes examples from elementary and secondary schools and offers strategies for building trust, including the following:

- Having a shared vision for the school among the faculty.
- Establishing clear decision-making and problem-solving structures.
- Supporting and valuing teachers.

Substrategy 5.1: Recognize Teachers for Their Accomplishments

Positive teaching contexts are shaped by social interactions that are supportive and nurturing. Educators often note that being recognized and thanked is as important to them as fiscal rewards and other external motivators.

Resource 29: Principals: Leaders of Leaders (school)

Childs-Bowen, D., Moller, G., & Scrivner, J. (2000, May). Principals: Leaders of leaders. *National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Bulletin, 84*(616), 27–34.

Recognition of teacher innovation and expertise is important for the development of teacher leadership. Principals need to encourage teachers and provide praise. Effective leaders use rituals, ceremonies, and stories. Opportunities for teacher recognition and student success help create positive, supportive cultures.

Resource 30: An Administrator's Challenge: Encouraging Teachers to Be Leaders (school)

Birky, V. D., Shelton, M., & Headley, S. (2006, June). An administrator's challenge: Encouraging teachers to be leaders. *National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) Bulletin, 90*(2), 87–101.

This article highlights research that examines the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of teachers and finds that teacher leaders are motivated by appreciation and encouragement more than they are by any other factor. When teacher leaders function within a collaborative leadership model, teachers find more meaning and motivation to continue their leadership roles.

Substrategy 5.2: Ensure That Teachers Feel Safe and Secure in Their School Environment

According to a recent analysis of 2003 PISA data, school disciplinary climate is one of the four strongest predictors of student learning. Schoolwide management of student behavior can have significant effects on the time required of individual teachers; detract from instruction; and impact teacher satisfaction, stress, absenteeism, and attrition (Leithwood, 2006).

Resource 31: Class Disrupted: Disorder and Its Effects on Learning and Culture (state and district)

Website: http://cgood.org/schools-events-76.html

On October 31, Common Good convened a forum to draw attention to examine disorder and its effects on learning and school culture. Attendees spanned many disciplines and sectors with educators, mental health professionals, policymakers, business leaders, academics, and reformers present. They discussed the complexity of school disorder, in light of contributing factors and solutions, and how imperative it is that energy be directed toward building healthy and positive school cultures in order to improve student achievement. A webcast of the event is available online as are PowerPoint presentations from panelists. One panel specifically examines the impact of student discipline and safety issues on school culture and teachers. The Common Good website provides information on student discipline policies and practices from across the country.

Resource 32: American Federation of Teachers: Discipline and School Safety (district and school)

Website: http://www.aft.org/topics/discipline/index.htm

This resource page from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) includes many tools to help educators and schools improve school safety. AFT offers the following suggestions for ensuring the safety and order of schools:

- "Enact districtwide discipline codes."
- "Teach students how to follow the discipline code and ensure that the code is rigorously and fairly enforced."
- "Implement effective classroom management practices."
- "Implement programs to modify student misbehavior."
- "Establish alternative placements that should include 'wrap-around' supports for chronically disruptive and violent students."
- "Develop school safety plans."
- "Support the work of families, religious institutions, and communities in developing sound character in children."

Information and resources are provided for each suggestion.

Strategy 6: Ensure That School Leaders Have the Knowledge, Skills, Dispositions, and Support They Need to Create Positive Teaching and Learning Environments

Principals are essential to creating positive teaching and learning environments. Effective leaders help develop and communicate a clear vision and direction, allocate resources, and design school processes to enable collaboration and learning among the staff in a trusting environment of respect.

Substrategy 6.1: Assess School Leaders' Ability to Create Learning-Centered Environments

Resource 33: *Leading, Learning, and Leadership Support* (state and district)

Knapp, M. S., Copland, M. A., Plecki, M. L., Portin, B. S., et al. (2006, October). *Leading, learning, and leadership support.* Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://depts.washington.edu/ctpmail/PDFs/Synthesis-Oct16.pdf

This report from the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy at the University of Washington provides an overview of learning-focused leadership and articulates the state and local contexts that affect leadership and leadership support. Specific recommendations are offered to state and local policymakers to support positive leadership practices.

Resource 34: *Schools Need Good Leaders Now: State Progress in Creating a Learning-Centered School Leadership System* (state)

Fry, B., Bottoms, G., O'Neill, K., & Walker, S. (2007). *Schools need good leaders now: State progress in creating a learning-centered school leadership system*. Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.wallacefoundation.org/NR/rdonlyres/1F825380-FAF1-4151-B3C3-74CA6810D6AD/0/SchoolsNeedGoodLeadersNow.pdf

A report by the Southern Regional Education Board rates the progress of 14 states in adopting policies to support learning-centered leadership in schools where principals can provide teachers with leadership and support and create environments in which students and adults can improve their skills. The report concludes that state efforts are insufficient and makes specific recommendations to accelerate reform, including the following:

- "Say what you mean about school leadership."
- "Choose the right people for the job."
- "Get university leadership programs on track."
- "Make sure aspiring principals learn on the job."
- "Use your licensing power to drive reform."

- "Cast a wider leadership net."
- "Make low-performing schools a top priority."
- "Learn from the pacesetters."

Resource 35: *Assessing Learning-Centered Leadership: Connections to Research, Professional Standards, and Current Practices* (district and school)

Goldring, E., Porter, A. C., Murphy, J., Elliot, S. N., & Cravens, X. (2007). *Assessing learning-centered leadership: Connections to research, professional standards, and current practices.* Nashville, TN: Learning Sciences Institute, Vanderbilt University. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.wallacefoundation.org/NR/rdonlyres/2D4629AE-6592-4FDD-9206-D23A2B19EAC5/0/AssessingLearningCenteredLeadership.pdf

Vanderbilt University, with the support of the Wallace Foundation, has created an assessment system for measuring learning-centered leadership. The system includes a conceptual foundation, framework, and evidence-based behavioral scales that measure the impact of leadership behaviors on academic and social learning in the school and community. The assessment can be used for individuals or leadership teams. Field testing is under way in, and the tool will be available soon.

Resource 36: Balanced Leadership Profile™ (district and school)

Website: http://www.mcrel.org/topics/products/213/

McREL has identified 21 research-based leadership responsibilities that have an impact on student achievement, including creating a culture with shared beliefs, supporting staff professional development, providing effective decision making structures, and engaging the faculty in the design and implementation of policies and practices. The Balanced Leadership Profile™ is an online feedback tool to gather input from a variety of stakeholders on progress in the 21 areas. The website offers resources to help improve performance in each of the areas.

Substrategy 6.2: Ensure That Principals Are Prepared to Create Positive Work Environments for Teachers

Resource 37: *Preparing School Leaders for a Changing World: Lessons From Exemplary Leadership Development Programs* (state)

Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., Orr, M. T., & Cohen, C. (2007). *Preparing school leaders for a changing world: Lessons from exemplary leadership development programs.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.wallacefoundation.org/NR/rdonlyres/664A3CA6-62D3-45AC-B2EA-2A76DB7721C1/0/preparingschoolleaders_finalreport.pdf

This comprehensive report provides several in-depth case studies of successful principal preparation programs. Specific implications and recommendations are provided for preparation programs and policymakers. Detailed information is provided about how specific programs address principals' abilities to create positive teaching and learning environments.

For more information about this substrategy, see Key Issue: Improving the Preparation of School and District Leaders at
http://www.tqsource.org/strategies/leadership/ImprovingLeaderPrep.pdf**.**

Substrategy 6.3: Provide Support for Principals in Creating Positive Professional Contexts

Resource 38: Blended Coaching (school and district)

Bloom, G., Catagna, C., Moir, E., & Warren, B. (2005). *Blended coaching: Skills and strategies to support principal development.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Effective school leaders need coaching and support in order to better understand and improve their abilities to promote collegiality, support adult learning, and nurture teachers. This book by staff at The New Teacher Center at the University of California–Santa Cruz applies different models of coaching to nurturing school leaders. Skills, strategies, and tools are provided to help coaches work with principals.

Resource 39: e-Lead: Leadership for Student Success (state and district)

Website: http://www.e-lead.org/

Professional Development Programs: http://www.e-lead.org/programs/index.asp

e-Lead is a partnership of the Laboratory for Student Success and the Institute for Educational Leadership. The e-Lead website provides a database of professional development programs for principals that are standards-based, including creating positive professional contexts and teacher support. Full program descriptions and summary information is provided for each program.

Resource 40: *Making the Case for Principal Mentoring* (district)

National Association of Elementary School Principals and Collaborative Communications Group. (2003). *Making the case for principal mentoring*. Providence, RI: The Education Alliance at Brown University. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/pln/prncpalmntrg.pdf

This publication profiles the evolutionary role of the principal as an instructional leader who creates positive teaching and learning environments and details several programs that provide support for new principals.

Strategy 7: Ensure That the Physical Plant and Technology Provide Positive Teaching and Learning Environments

The physical and technological infrastructure of a school can catalyze teaching and learning environments. Teachers need real and virtual space to work and plan collaboratively. A survey of New Jersey principals, however, notes that their training in facilities management was less adequate than in other areas, that stakeholders were not engaged, and that their schools did not provide sufficient space for teacher and staff planning activities (Schneider, 2004).

Resource 41: ***The Importance of Physical Space in Creating Supportive Learning Environments: New Directions for Teaching and Learning*** **(district and school)**

Chism, N., & Bickford, D. (2003). *The importance of physical space in creating supportive learning environments: New directions for teaching and learning.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

This edited volume examines the interrelationship between physical space and learning, drawing upon research, and providing case studies. Chapters examine the roles of technology, architectural design, and even furniture choice in collaboration between adults and students. Details of positive learning spaces are provided, and implications for the future are discussed.

Resource 42: National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities (district and school)

Website: http://www.edfacilities.org/

The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities provides specific resources on more than 140 school facilities topics and includes descriptions of books, articles, reports, and links to websites. There is an extensive section on teaching spaces, including standards and principles in classroom and school design for effective teaching and learning.

Resource 43: ***For Generations to Come: A Leadership Guide to Renewing Public School Buildings*** **(district)**

21st Century School Fund. (2004). *For generations to come: A leadership guide to renewing public school buildings*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.21csf.org/csf-home/Documents/Organizing_Manual.pdf

This manual by the 21st Century Fund provides a guide to community member involvement in the process of modernizing and/or building new schools. An explanation of how the condition and design of the school affects teaching and learning is provided. Evidence shows how community involvement results in better design. The process for school redesign and construction is broken into five steps—assessment, envisioning, planning, development, and implementation—with detailed descriptions and stories provided for each step.

Substrategy 7.1: Utilize Technology That Moves Beyond the Four Walls of the Classroom Into 21st Century Learning Environments

Resource 44: *Learning Spaces* (state and district)

Oblinger, D. G. (Ed.). (2006). *Learning spaces.* Boulder, CO: Educause. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.educause.edu/LearningSpaces/10569

This book on learning spaces, edited by Diana Oblinger and available in its entirety electronically, examines the research on the impact of space on teaching and learning and design principles for integrating technology. The book also offers assessment tools as well as several case studies (albeit from higher education). Space, whether physical or virtual, can have a significant impact on learning. *Learning Spaces* focuses on how learner expectations influence such spaces, the principles and activities that facilitate learning, and the role of technology from the perspective of those who create learning environments: faculty, learning technologists, librarians, and administrators. Information technology has brought unique capabilities to learning spaces, whether stimulating greater interaction through the use of collaborative tools, videoconferencing with international experts, or opening virtual worlds for exploration. This e-book represents an ongoing exploration as we bring together space, technology, and pedagogy to ensure learner success.

Resource 45: CEO Forum: School Technology and Readiness (STaR) Chart: A New Look at Digital Learning (district and school)

Website: http://www.ceoforum.org/downloads/star3.pdf

This matrix from the CEO Forum helps schools find their digital learning profile, providing a matrix from early technology to target several technology areas that relate to professional context including teacher professional development and utilization in instruction.

Resource 46: The Path to Teacher Leadership in Educational Technology (school)

Sherry, L., & Gibson, D. (2002). The path to teacher leadership in educational technology. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* [Online serial], *2*(2), 178–203. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.citejournal.org/vol2/iss2/general/article2.cfm

This article outlines a four-stage professional growth model to develop teacher leaders who use technology to enhance teaching and learning. In addition to describing the model, the authors address where schools typically encounter problems implementing such a model and describe processes necessary for the systemic change encouraged by the model. The ability of teachers to institutionalize changes in practice in their schools and their impact on the learning environment is assessed.

Strategy 8: Create Community Partnerships in Which Teachers Are Engaged and Valued

The business community, higher education community, and parents are integral to the success of schools and can be strong, stable partners in creating positive school communities. Assessing data and developing strong teams of educators, parents, and community members can assist each audience in understanding how *they* can help schools improve (e.g., business to promote local schools, universities to make more strategic placement of teacher candidates in supportive clinical settings).

Resource 47: *Helping* Every *Student Succeed: Schools and Communities Working Together*

Helping every *student succeed: Schools and communities working together.* (2002). Pomfret, CT: Study Circles Resource Center, The Topsfield Foundation Inc. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.everyday-democracy.org (Free registration required).

This tool explains how study circles engage community members in school improvement efforts and provides the discussion materials necessary for a series of four study groups. Group discussions begin with consideration of what each participant considers a "good education" and progress to deciding upon specific actions for change.

Resource 48: *Developing Effective Partnerships to Support Local Education: School Communities That Work: A National Task Force on the Future of Urban Districts*

Fisher, S. C., & Balch-Gonzalez, M. (Eds.). (2002). *Developing effective partnerships to support local education: School communities that work: A national task force on the future of urban districts.* Providence, RI: The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.schoolcommunities.org/Archive/images/Partnerships.pdf

This report describes design and operating principles used in effective education and community partnerships. The authors emphasize that partnerships should focus on equity in addition to results and aim to effect youth engagement and development.

For more information about this strategy, see Key Issue: Improving the Working Environment of Teachers at http://www.tqsource.org/strategies/atrisk/Environment.pdf.

Strategy 9: Provide Opportunities for Teacher Leadership and Career Advancement by Differentiating Roles for Teachers

Highly effective teachers often seek leadership opportunities in order to spread their expertise to other colleagues in their building, district, state, or across the profession. Yet schools often treat teachers as interchangeable parts—doing the same job regardless of their expertise, knowledge, skills, or dispositions.

Resource 49: ***Leadership for Student Learning: Redefining the Teacher as Leader*** **(state and district)**

Institute for Educational Leadership. (2001). *Leadership for student learning: Redefining the teacher as leader.* Washington, DC: IEL. Retrieved February 28, 2008, from http://www.iel.org/programs/21st/reports/teachlearn.pdf

This report from a task force on teacher leadership conducted by the Institute for Educational Leadership seeks to explore how to engage teachers as leaders. "The infinite potential the nation's teachers possess for sharing their hard-earned knowledge and wisdom with players in educational decision making circles—or even for becoming part of those circles—remains largely unexploited."

For more information about this strategy, see Key Issue: Teaching as a Career With Advancement and Leadership Opportunities at http://www.tqsource.org/strategies/atrisk/Career.pdf and Key Issue: Enhancing Teacher Leadership at http://www.tqsource.org/strategies/leadership/EnhancingTeacherLeadership%20.pdf.

Substrategy 9.1: Compensate Teachers Differently to Create Incentives for Educators to Take on New Roles and Responsibilities

Creating new roles for teachers may not be enough to get the most talented educators to assume the new and/or additional duties and responsibilities. Financial incentives can encourage teachers and help systems prioritize creating and implementing differentiated staffing models.

Resource 50: Center for Educator Compensation Reform (state and district)

Website: http://www.cecr.ed.gov/

The Center for Educator Compensation Reform (CECR) is a partnership of five organizations funded by the U.S. Department of Education to raise awareness of alternative and effective strategies for educator compensation reform. The site has information, tools, and resources to support federal Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantees and other educators, stakeholders, and policymakers considering compensation reform. Several of the profiled TIF grantees utilize models that promote differentiated staffing opportunities in which teachers are recognized and rewarded for serving as lead teacher, mentor, and other positions.

Resource 51: National Center on Performance Incentives (state and district)

Website: http://www.performanceincentives.org/

Housed at the Peabody Center for Education Policy at Vanderbilt University, the National Center on Performance Incentives conducts research on performance incentives to provide a better understanding of the design, implementation, effects, and implications of performance incentives in education. The Center will address the following question: Do the financial structure and organizational context of performance-based incentive plans influence professional relations between teachers, the culture of schools, or the interactions between teachers and their students?

Resource 52: National Institute for Excellence in Teaching: Teacher Advancement Program (state, district, or school)

Website: http://www.talentedteachers.org/tap.taf?page=main

The Teacher Advancement Program from the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching is a comprehensive school reform aimed at restructuring and revitalizing the teaching profession. It has four components:

- Multiple career paths
- Ongoing applied professional growth
- Instructionally focused accountability
- Performance-based compensation

In the Teaching Advancement Program model, effective teachers are identified and offered new roles as master or mentor teachers within their building, which come with additional compensation.

For more information about this substrategy, see Key Issue: Performance-Based Pay at http://www.tqsource.org/strategies/atrisk/Performance.pdf.

Real-Life Examples

Given the differences in role and responsibility among states, districts, and schools for addressing the professional context of educators, three real-life examples are provided; however, all occur within the same state—North Carolina—as each would not be possible without the policies and practices of the other governing entities. A state profile of North Carolina is provided as well as one of an exemplary school district (Iredell-Statesville) and an award-winning school (Salem Middle School in Wake County).

North Carolina: State Policies to Assess and Improve Professional Context

North Carolina has invested substantially over the past decade in assessing and improving the professional contexts in which all educators work. In 2001, the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission passed state standards for teacher working conditions, and the next year, under the leadership of Governor Mike Easley, a statewide survey of every school-based educator was offered to assess whether those standards were in place. Based on findings from the survey, the state has taken action to better understand and improve school context.

- ***Working conditions are now a permanent part of the North Carolina education reform process.*** The state made a commitment to fund the Working Conditions Survey every two years and created the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Advisory Board appointed by the state board. The Advisory Board is overseeing the fourth iteration of the survey and is now asking a battery of questions specifically for principals to better understand the support they receive in creating positive teaching contexts.

- ***The state has increased the level of rigor expected of school principals in creating positive working conditions and provided needed support.*** The state has rewritten principal standards to incorporate teacher recruitment, retention, and administration. All master's of school administration programs offered by North Carolina colleges and universities will be evaluated based on these standards. In addition, a new evaluation instrument, which is being piloted in 2007 and will go statewide in 2008, will, among other things, assess whether principals use working conditions survey data in school improvement planning and make efforts toward improvement. All new principals also are required to participate in professional development opportunities funded by the state and offered through the Principals' Executive Program on creating positive working conditions.

- ***Legislation has been enacted to address planning time.*** The state requires that school improvement teams—led by a teacher elected by his or her peers according to state statute—develop a plan that guarantees that all teachers have a duty-free lunch and planning period daily. In addition, the state is considering reforms that bolster the school improvement team and find other ways to empower teachers in school-based decision making.

- ***Investments have been made to support the use of data and the sharing of best practices.*** The NC Network received funding to create a blueprint for school improvement teams to integrate working conditions results into school improvement planning and conduct the state's Real DEAL (Dedicated Educators, Administrators and Learners) conference to share best practices in schools with positive working conditions and high student achievement. The North Carolina Teacher Academy receives $2 million annually to provide professional development in high-poverty school districts to improve teaching quality with a focus on working conditions reform. Additional analyses have been conducted on both low-performing and exemplary high schools. Turnaround plans are being analyzed in low-performing high schools to ensure that working conditions data is incorporated and reform strategies address teacher concerns.

For more information, visit http://www.ncteachingconditions.org

Iredell-Statesville Schools: A North Carolina District Committee to an Inclusive Improvement Process

The Iredell-Statesville School System (ISS) serves more than 20,000 students and ranks among the 20 largest districts in North Carolina. ISS has a mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas, is 40 miles from Charlotte, and is consistently among the top performing districts in the state. ISS is committed to school improvement and has been successful in assessing and providing resources for its schools in improving professional context.

- ***The district draws upon a wealth of professional context data in school improvement planning.*** The district has been a leader in utilizing data from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey and has developed a professional learning community matrix for gathering data, which includes information gained through Baldrige participation, classroom walkthroughs, common formative assessments, and other means. Action research is encouraged for teachers to gather their own data that can help improve teaching and learning. All of these data points are widely available and understood and provide an extensive and accurate picture of the professional context in each of the 34 ISS schools.

- ***There are frequent and inclusive processes for school improvement planning.*** In ISS, the district meets as a leadership team (all central office, principals, assistant principals, and school improvement team leaders) at mid-year to check progress on district goals and at the end of the year to evaluate districts and schools in meeting their goals. For every district goal, schools and departments have responsibility for a portion of the data. If a school or department owns data that show a gap, then those gap areas become candidates for improvement goals for the school or department. If a school owns data that have helped the district meet goals, then the school has cause for celebration.

  There are quarterly reviews of school improvement plans during coaching sessions with principals. The school improvement team, led by the principal, looks at the results from the first quarter action steps and evaluates progress using the identified evaluation measures from the deployment plan. Those elements that are working are continued, and

those elements that are not working are analyzed to identify ways to improve. By coaching and reviewing the plans on a quarterly basis, ISS provides feedback to principals, school improvement teams, classroom teachers, and eventually students on how well they are progressing toward meeting goals. The strategic planning process has become a continuous improvement journey with constant monitoring and feedback rather than an isolated session that happens once a year and produces a notebook with a ream of paper that is not consulted again until the next planning session.

- ***ISS provides resources for schools to improve their professional context.*** ISS allows schools to apply for funding for school improvement pilot plans that are research-based, data-driven, and aligned with the state's 21st century competencies and goals. These plans must be sustainable and designed to help the district and its schools align resources and share knowledge throughout the system (See http://iss.schoolwires.com/1531101211173848230/site/default.asp).

ISS has "convened a group of teachers of the year from schools across the district to analyze state data trends and create district-level working condition goals. The results and data from the survey were part of an advocacy strategy to convince the county commissioners to place a bond referendum on the ballot. Influenced in part by survey data demonstrating that the district's teachers were less likely than their peers across the state to say they had adequate professional space, voters passed a $90 million bond, the first successful bond campaign requiring a tax increase in more than 50 years" (Center for Teaching Quality, 2007, p. 3).

For more information, visit http://iss.schoolwires.com/iss/site/default.asp

Salem Middle School, Wake County, North Carolina: A Truly Collaborative School Community

Salem Middle School was established as a model of professional learning communities (PLCs). The school operates on a 90-minute block schedule that yields a common planning time for each PLC. This time is used for planning, designing common assessments, and analyzing data, and it is protected by administration to limit outside distractions and noninstructional duties. The common planning time encourages regular communication between experienced and novice teachers.

PLCs have created warehouses of best practice and established procedures to streamline planning and data analysis, and administration has provided training on how to effectively use time in PLC meetings. The administration empowers teachers with the ability to arrange instruction as they see fit, and coverage is provided, allowing teachers additional PLC time for in-depth data analysis and planning. Without other obligations, teachers are able to maintain focus on classroom instruction and student needs. PLCs drive staff development. Team meetings stimulate conversation that leads to professional growth for teachers in areas such as pedagogy and classroom management. These interactions help teachers evolve beyond one's individual capacity and thus lead to higher quality instruction. They also help staff members work more efficiently. According to Grade 6 teacher Bill Ferriter (2005), "Collaboration done right helps to lighten the load for everyone. In the past few years, I've actually seen the time that I invest in

planning daily lessons go down as I've taken advantage of learning experiences and materials shared by my colleagues. We've even gotten creative about regrouping students across classrooms during the school day to provide the kinds of remediation experiences that I used to deliver in after school tutoring sessions."

Each PLC team establishes a professional development focus that is tailored to the school's mission. The collaborative group identifies an area of need specific to its group of students. PLC teams working toward a chosen goal assume ownership and therefore have a greater commitment to meeting their goals. Subsequently, teams find the research and support to address and learn about their particular focus.

The administration provides the freedom and flexibility for PLC teams to establish their own needs thus, empowering staff members to serve the needs of individual students. Strong principal leadership is at the heart of Salem's success. In his blog about the first principal at Salem Middle School, Ferriter (2005) wrote the following:

> So what makes our principal so remarkable? For starters, he empowers teachers to make critical decisions about teaching and learning. There is no decision that teachers aren't centrally involved in. In today's accountability culture where a school administrator's reputation—and sometimes career—is dependent on producing results, there is a great temptation to make all decisions from the principal's office. Control becomes important because the professional risks of releasing control are too great.
>
> Empowering teachers, however, produces results in our school that centralized decision making could never produce. Most significantly, our teachers feel a sense of professionalism and engagement that many teachers don't feel. There is an atmosphere of collective curiosity at Salem. We see ourselves as problem-solvers because that is what our principal expects us to be, and we are incredibly motivated to identify the instructional approaches that work best for our students. Our principal has unleashed an often-untapped resource in schools—the intellectual energies of our teaching staff.

Collaboration with peers and continuous training leads to refined practice and understanding of data collection and analysis toward identifying best practice.

Visit http://ncteachingconditions.org/RealDeal/home.php for a profile of Salem Middle School as one of Governor Easley's Real DEAL Award winners.

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Additional Resources

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