

# Understanding and Improving Working Conditions: An Activity Guide for School District Leaders



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Developed by the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE),  
the Kentucky Education Association (KEA), and the New Teacher Center

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## About This Guide

This Activity Guide references results from the 2017 TELL Kentucky Survey, available online at [www.tellkentucky.org](http://www.tellkentucky.org). The intent is *to begin discussion* among school district leaders on whether certain working conditions are present in their district and to ensure data is used in school improvement planning.

The guide will assist district leaders in implementing an efficient and sequential process for reflecting on the overall status of teaching conditions, assessing differences across schools, and considering potential strategies and solutions to enhance conditions throughout the district. Conversations also need to occur within every school in the district to inform the work of School Improvement Teams and school improvement planning. To facilitate the process at the school level, additional guides are available at [www.tellkentucky.org](http://www.tellkentucky.org).

While the processes outlined in this guide will be useful for district-level staff working independently of each other, much more can be gained through a collaborative effort across district leadership. The expertise that multiple school leaders can bring to this process will yield a more robust level of reflection as well as improve the possibility of change initiatives to align across different departments of the district organization in the future. Should a collaborative process be implemented, it is our recommendation that a facilitator be chosen to help oversee and maintain the process and promote equitable discussion.

Research has shown teaching conditions to be integral to attracting and retaining effective teachers as well as improving student achievement. Once the discussions have begun at the district level, it then will be necessary to dig deeper into the available data from the TELL Kentucky Survey as annual goals are established for school improvement.

## Who Should Use This Guide

This guide has been designed for use by district-level leaders, as well as those educational personnel whose work involves interaction with multiple schools across a district throughout a school year. Staff who may benefit from this process may include, but are not limited to, boards of education; superintendents; associate and assistant superintendents; curriculum and instruction staff; human resources directors; research and accountability staff; mentoring and coaching directors; and other director- and coordinator-level staff.

### The Eight Working Conditions Constructs

**Time** – Available time to plan, collaborate and provide instruction; and eliminating barriers to maximize instructional time during the school day.

**Facilities and Resources** – Teacher access to technology, instructional supplies, office materials and other school resources.

**Community Support and Involvement** – Community and parent/guardian communication and influence in the school.

**Managing Student Conduct** – Policies and practices to address student conduct issues and ensure a safe school environment.

**Teacher Leadership** – Teacher involvement in decisions that impact classroom and school practices.

**School Leadership** – The ability of school leadership to create trusting, supportive environments and address teacher concerns.

**Professional Learning** – Availability and quality of learning opportunities for educators to enhance their teaching.


**Instructional Practices and Support** – Data and support available to teachers to improve instruction and student learning.

## Activity I: District-level trend data using specific questions

Engage in this activity to conduct an analysis of specific questions of interest within the constructs.

The table on the next page contains space to write in a question from each of the eight different constructs of the TELL Kentucky Survey. Because this is the fourth iteration of the TELL survey, districts have data available to them from 2011 and can analyze previously identified areas of focus.

In this exercise, you will compare your district's survey results on eight questions to prior years' data to explore what has changed within the district and also identify persistently low areas. Then you will determine if there are similar districts to yours that are excelling in areas that could be studied.

1. Leave the "LEA of interest" columns blank for now. You'll come back to these later.
2. Access results from the website, click the button labeled "Results" on the main page.
3. Locate your district's name in the list and click on the comparison results icon to the right of the name. Open the comparison reports for your district for the years 2017, 2015 and 2013. Review the data from 2017, 2015, 2013 and 2011. Printing the three comparison reports in Excel or pdf format may provide an easier analysis of trend data. 
4. Choose one question on which to focus from each construct and record it in the "Survey Question" column.
5. Beginning with the 2011 data, record the percent of educators who responded either "agree" or "strongly agree" to the questions you listed in the table and record your findings in the 2011 column. Repeat the process with years 2013, 2015 and 2017. (Minor variations exist between surveys. For example, changes to terminology, clarifications to definitions and an addition of new questions have occurred.)
6. Determine trends in data occurring over the course of the four iterations of the survey for the questions listed in the table. Decide upon symbols or colors to indicate trends of increasing and decreasing approval ratings. Mark questions that show these trends.
7. Decide upon a symbol or color to indicate persistently low approvals on the indicator questions. Mark questions that are persistently low.

## Activity I: District-level trend data using specific questions

<b>Survey Questions</b> Record one question from each of the eight different constructs of the TELL Kentucky Survey	<b>Approval Percentages</b>					
	2011	2013	2015	2017	LEA	LEA
<b>TIME</b> Q:						
<b>FACILITIES AND RESOURCES</b> Q:						
<b>COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT</b> Q:						
<b>MANAGING STUDENT CONDUCT</b> Q:						
<b>TEACHER LEADERSHIP</b> Q:						
<b>SCHOOL LEADERSHIP</b> Q:						
<b>PROFESSIONAL LEARNING</b> Q:						
<b>INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AND SUPPORT</b> Q:						

## Activity I: Reflective Prompts

### **Compare your district results over time.**

In which constructs has your district improved? What policies or support systems exist in your district that may be contributing to improvements in those constructs?

In which construct(s) is your district struggling? What might be some explanations that would account for your district being persistently low? Do other data or informational sources provide similar or contrasting results?

### **Study successes of similar districts.**

Discuss and choose one or two districts that appear to be experiencing success in constructs that are persistently low in your district. As you reflect on districts to study more deeply, keep in mind the size of the district, the communities they serve and the student population. Record the district name(s) in the LEA column(s).

### **Compare trend data**

Examine the 2017 data for the identified district(s) and record in the chart above. A review of previous year's data may be necessary.

What policies, practices and supports are likely affecting the results in the identified areas of interest?

What findings are worthy of more study?

Are there opportunities for collaboration among districts and/or schools?

## Activity II: Reflections on schools in your district

Activities II and III are designed to build upon one another. Reflecting on the schools in your district, choose three schools based on the following criteria:

1. Choose one school that you anticipate will have the most positive working conditions (WC) relative to other schools in the district (High WC).
2. Choose one school that you anticipate will have similar working conditions relative to other schools in the district (Average WC).
3. Choose one school that you predict will have less positive working conditions relative to other schools in the district (Low WC).

Place the names of those schools on the following page in the boxes provided at the top of the page.

In the next section of the worksheet, choose one construct based upon where you think large differences in the factors/events/elements are in place between the three schools being examined. Think first about the differences between the “high” working conditions school and the “low” working conditions school before reflecting on the school in middle.

1. Place the number of the construct you select in the construct box of the first table.
2. In the space provided, try to explain as best you can what some of the differences are between the three schools you have selected.
3. Repeat the process in the next two tables choosing a different construct for each.

**The following example may help to guide your work:**

School with High WC	School with Average WC	School with Low WC
<i>Smith Elementary</i>	<i>Central High</i>	<i>Hampton Elementary</i>

**Constructs**

1. Time	5. Teacher Leadership
2. Facilities and Resources	6. School Leadership
3. Community Support and Involvement	7. Professional Learning
4. Managing Student Conduct	8. Instructional Practices and Support

Construct	School	Differences
<i>8. Instructional Practices and Support</i>	High	<i>Strong leader who involves teachers in decision making, school schedules planned to encourage collaboration among staff, veteran teachers, healthy school culture, teachers actively collaborate to address students’ needs, stable workforce, equity in classrooms</i>
	Average	<i>Mostly sound instructional practices, support needed mostly in language arts, some collaboration in math and science, limited differentiation, poor support of English learners</i>
	Low	<i>High teacher turnover rate with a lot of inexperienced teachers on staff, limited teacher leadership and little collaboration, teachers don’t know what to do, a lot of district support needed and received, high numbers of ELL students and limited support for their needs; school schedule not prioritized to assist teachers</i>

## Activity II: Reflections on schools in your district (continued)

School with High WC

School with Average WC

School with Low WC

### Constructs

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Time                              | 5. Teacher Leadership                  |
| 2. Facilities and Resources          | 6. School Leadership                   |
| 3. Community Support and Involvement | 7. Professional Learning               |
| 4. Managing Student Conduct          | 8. Instructional Practices and Support |

Construct	School	Differences
	High	
	Average	
	Low	

Construct	School	Differences
	High	
	Average	
	Low	

Construct	School	Differences
	High	
	Average	
	Low	

### Activity III: Thinking Locally – A Deeper Examination of Your District Data

To participate in this activity, please access the results of the 2017 TELL Kentucky Survey online at [www.tellkentucky.org](http://www.tellkentucky.org).

In this exercise, you will examine the same construct questions from Activity I. Instead of reflecting on trend data, this exercise examines 2017 individual school results within your district you identified in Activity II. The tables on the next pages are organized in the same manner as the first activity.

1. To the right of the cell that reads “Insert School Names Here,” place the name of the school in your district that you anticipated in Activity II that would exhibit very high working conditions relative to other schools in your district in the column labeled “High.” Place the name of the school in your district that you predicted would exhibit average working conditions relative to other schools in your district in the column labeled “Average.” Finally, place the name of the school in your district that you anticipated would exhibit low working conditions relative to other schools in your district in the column labeled “Low.”
2. Using a similar process you applied in Activity I, look up each individual school’s 2017 summary results on the survey website and place the percent agreement rates in the corresponding boxes of the table.
3. In the final column, labeled “Difference Between High and Low,” subtract the percent agreement from the high school by the percent agreement score of the low school for each of the questions in the table and place the results into the corresponding boxes.





### Activity III: School Level Comparison

<b>Survey Questions</b> Record the same questions from Activity I below.	<b>2017 Percent Agreement*</b>			
	<b>High</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>Difference Between High and Low</b>
<b>Insert School Names Here</b> →				
<b>TIME</b>				
<b>FACILITIES AND RESOURCES</b>				
<b>COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND INVOLVEMENT</b>				
<b>MANAGING STUDENT CONDUCT</b>				
<b>TEACHER LEADERSHIP</b>				
<b>SCHOOL LEADERSHIP</b>				
<b>PROFESSIONAL LEARNING</b>				
<b>INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES AND SUPPORT</b>				

### Activity III: Reflection Prompts

Are there constructs where there are meaningful differences between the three schools? Are the responses reflective of your perceptions of the teaching conditions within each of the schools?

Are there constructs where there is very little difference between the three schools? Are these smaller differences specific to the construct or is one school more/less positive than you anticipated? Why?

Are there any constructs where a school you thought had less positive conditions outperformed a school you perceived had more positive conditions (or a school you anticipated had the best teaching conditions had fewer educators responding positively)? Why? What might be going on within the school for which you did not account? Why might the faculty be more or less inclined to indicate that there are positive conditions on the survey?

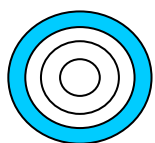
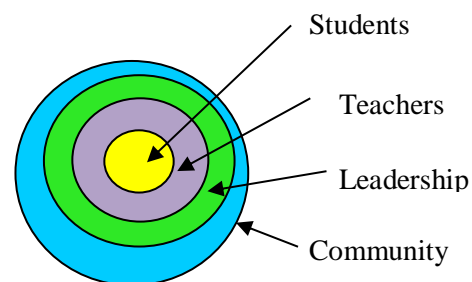
How do the results of Activity III compare to your anticipation of these schools' results in Activity II?

- Are there large differences between your perceptions and the data? If so, where and how does this inform your work?
- Are there some similarities between your predictions and the findings, and how does that inform your work? (If there was little difference between the high and low schools across the entire exercise, consider choosing different schools and repeating the exercise.)

Any additional thoughts:

## Activity IV: Determining Reasons for School Level Differences Which Can Be Addressed at the District Level

So far you have compared your district's working conditions results with other similar districts to give you contextual data on a holistic level. You have also reflected on differences between schools with high working conditions and low working conditions relative to schools across your district to consider a more granular level. In this exercise, you will consider four different components of your district and how they may be affecting your working conditions in the schools you examined for Activity III.



**COMMUNITY:** Compare the communities in each of the schools you identified in Activity III.

What roles do parents/guardians and other members of the community play within the participating schools?  
What activities do they support (instructional vs. non-instructional, etc.) and what decisions do they influence?

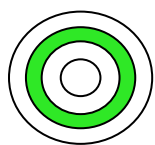
Does the School Improvement Team function well in each school?

What member from the community is represented on the School Improvement Team?

How active and engaged is the PTA? Does PTA participation reflect the demographics of the school population? What are some challenges to engaging parents/guardians?

Are there any businesses or foundations engaged with these schools?

## Activity IV: Determining Reasons for School Level Differences Which Can Be Addressed at the District Level (continued)



**LEADERSHIP:** Compare the leadership in each of the schools you identified in Activity III.

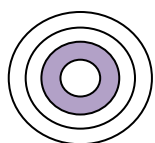
How experienced is the leadership at each school?

What type of training has each leader received in the past two years?

What leadership style does each school administrator exhibit?

What evidence is there that leadership encourages teachers to work collaboratively when given time to do so?

How well do school administrators function in a collaborative setting?



**TEACHERS:** Compare the teaching population in each of the schools you identified in Activity III.

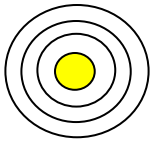
What are the teachers' average years of experience?

How many National Board Certified Teachers are there?

Are there opportunities for teachers to lead in their building and contribute to decisions that affect the school's working conditions?

How many teachers are teaching classes and students for which they are not best suited? See answers to question Q9.1.g. on the 2017 TELL Kentucky Survey.

Do the teachers in the school work well together to meet the needs of their students?



**STUDENTS** -Think about how the students attending each of the schools identified in Activity III are similar and different.

How does the socio-economic status of students served vary across the three schools?

Are students coming to school ready to learn?

What support (professional learning, coaching, etc.), personnel (social workers, guidance counselors, etc.) and/or services are in place to help all learners receive a high-quality education?

**FOR FURTHER THOUGHT** – If there is time, you may want to further define schools in your district so you can highlight the schools of similar demographics (percent free and reduced-price meals, urban vs. rural, etc.) and identify schools of like demographics that can be highlighted and share their best practices. For example, select two schools of similar grade level and demographics in your district that have the least favorable working conditions on the TELL Kentucky Survey and compare to a school that has most favorable working conditions.

## Activity V: District-Level Support for Site Administrators

One of the many benefits of the TELL Kentucky Survey is that the data can inform district leaders on ways the supports they put in place for site administrators are perceived. As your district begins discussions around the TELL Kentucky data, it will be important to reflect on the following questions about district-level supports for school-level leadership.

In your reflection of the following prompts, consider what systems and supports are currently in place in your district to meet these needs and place that information in the corresponding box. In the other box provided, write down the adjustments needed to systems and structures to support district needs. Responses to questions on the survey may help you assess perceptions of policies. Districts can request a report of answers from principals to questions about district supports if a sufficient number of principals participated by submitting a request on [www.tellkentucky.org](http://www.tellkentucky.org).

What is currently in place  
in your district?

What is the ideal for  
your district?

Professional learning for principals to enhance their instructional leadership skills and create positive teaching conditions

Induction for principals new to school leadership and/or new to the district

Process for identifying issues and practices across schools to improve teaching conditions.

Process for engaging parents/guardians and the community in school activities and improvement planning

Policies and practices specific to engaging teachers in decision making within schools

## Activity V: District Level Support for Site Administrators (continued)

What is currently in place  
in your district?

What is the ideal for  
your district?

Assessment of the functioning  
of School Improvement Teams  
and/or Professional Learning  
Communities (PLCs) across  
schools

Guidance and assistance to  
SITs in understanding  
and addressing  
working conditions issues

Identifying and highlighting  
schools with best practices  
to create positive working  
conditions

### Reflection Prompts

Are the support systems currently in place the same as the ideal?

If not, why might they be different? Does it vary by school, and if so, how and why?

What resources will it take to make the “ideal” a reality?

## **Activity VI: NEXT STEPS - Continuous Improvement for School Success**

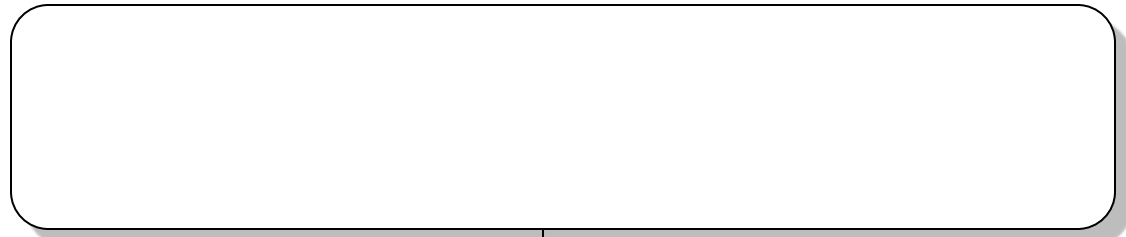
This guide is intended to begin discussion among school district leaders on just a few of the many ways the data from the 2017 TELL Kentucky Survey can be helpful in decisions about school improvement. During the next two years it will be important for your district to continue focusing on ways this data can be helpful in other areas, such as staffing for hard-to-staff schools, teacher and principal retention, professional learning, facilities and resources, and student conduct.

This exercise seeks to take one of the systems identified in Activity V and develop a basic plan of action to improve it. Below, an organizational chart has been built to help guide your reflections and decision-making process.



## Activity VI: NEXT STEPS – Continuous Improvement for School Success

Place one of the “What Would Be Ideal”  
Items from Activity V in this box.



Identify steps that need  
to happen to achieve  
the “Ideal” in your  
district.

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Who/what departments  
need to be engaged to  
address this step?

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Who is responsible for  
overseeing this step?

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What is an appropriate  
timeline?

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