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Examining Teachers' Perceptions of School Working Conditions: Analysis of GVSU School Operations Survey

Kiel McQueen, PhD

February 2021

Using teacher survey data across K-12 schools authorized by Grand Valley State University (GVSU), this research brief examines teachers' perceptions of school working conditions.

Key findings include:

- Most teachers are satisfied working in their school and like the way it is run.
- Most schools in the GVSU network have favorable working conditions.
- Establishing a trusting professional culture positively influences teachers' sense of satisfaction.
- Teachers' perceptions of individual and collaborative planning time and opportunities offered to parents/guardians detract from schools' resources and parent/guardian engagement scores.

Recommendations include:

- Highlight best practices for supporting teachers' individual and collaborative planning time and providing opportunities for parent/guardian engagement.
- Use survey results to differentiate support to unique needs of individual schools.

Introduction

In January 2021, the Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Charter School Office (CSO) partnered with Basis Policy Research (Basis) to develop and administer a School Operations survey. The survey solicits teachers' perceptions on school culture and climate, school leadership, faculty commitment and responsibility, school resources and time use, and parent/guardian engagement. This research brief examines results from select GVSU schools meeting reporting requirements.

Research Questions

This brief examines the following research questions:

1. To what extent are teachers satisfied with working in their current school?
2. To what extent do schools have favorable working conditions?
3. What factors contribute to teachers' perceptions of satisfaction and working conditions?

Results

Drawing on data from the Winter 2021 administration of the GVSU CSO School Operations Survey, Basis researchers conducted a series of descriptive and inferential analyses. Results are organized by research question below with a full description of methods provided in Appendix A.

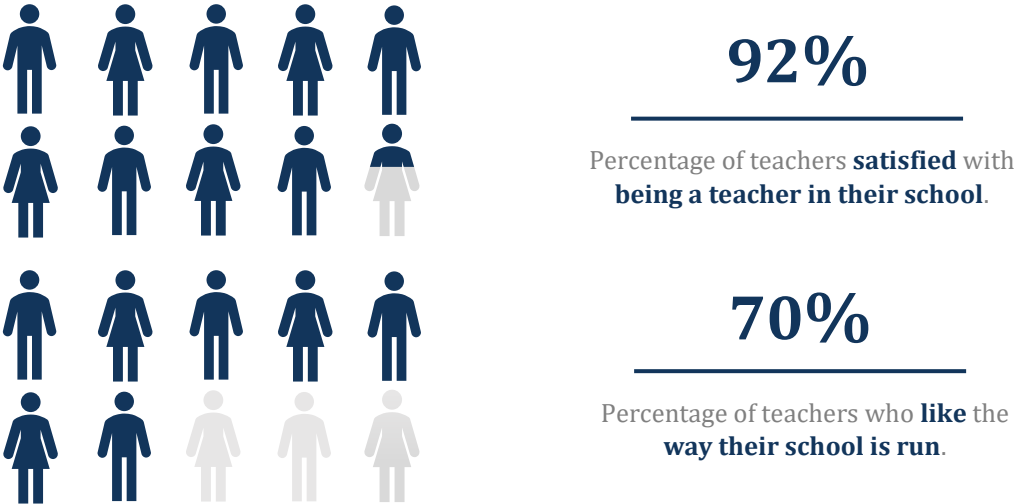
At the conclusion of the survey window, 659 participants (41 percent) completed the survey. Basis researchers restricted the analysis to the 502 teachers working in 45 schools with at least a 50 percent response rate or greater than 10 responses. This sample restriction reduces the degree to which school-level results are driven by a small percentage or subset of teachers. Most analyses included in this brief explore descriptive trends in the percentage of participants responding to different response options.

1 | To what extent are teachers satisfied with working in their current school?

Most teachers are satisfied working in their current school.

Figure 1 displays the percentage of teachers who “agreed” or “strongly agreed” to questions gauging workplace satisfaction. Results suggest overall satisfaction is overwhelmingly high in GVSU network schools, with 92 percent of teachers reporting they are generally satisfied working in their school. Moreover, the survey asked whether teachers like the way their school is run. Figure 1 indicates approximately 70 percent of all teachers agreed with this statement. The discrepancy in results between questions indicates that approximately 20 percent of teachers are satisfied working in their school even if they have less favorable opinions of school leadership.

Figure 1: Percentage of teachers who “agree” or “strongly agree” to questions about personal satisfaction



Source: GVSU CSO School Operations Survey; author’s analysis.

2 | What percentage of schools have favorable working conditions?

To answer this research question, we aggregated teachers’ responses at the school-level and applied the following scoring key to code measures discussed in this section:

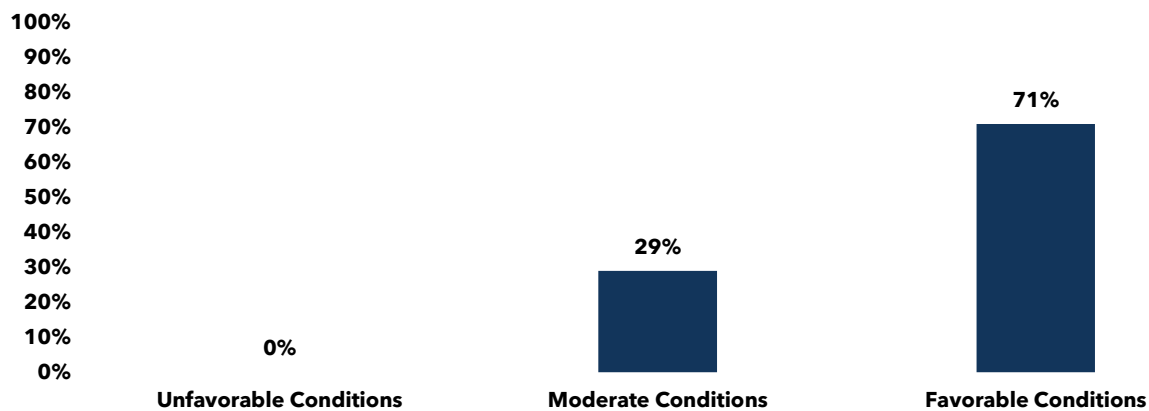
- Favorable Conditions – School Operation score exceeding 3.00;
- Moderate Conditions – School Operation score between 2.50–2.99;
- Unfavorable Conditions – School Operation score below 2.49.

Basis researchers aggregated participants’ responses across 27 survey questions to construct a school-level “Working Conditions” score. We also constructed five sub-measures – School Climate, School Leadership, Collective Responsibility, School Resources, and Parent/Guardian Engagement – to better understand what is driving schools’ working condition scores. A description of each measure is included in Appendix A.

Most schools in the GVSU network have favorable working conditions.

Figure 2 displays the percentage of schools with favorable, moderate, or unfavorable working conditions. Results indicate most schools (71 percent) have favorable working conditions. Moreover, we sought to understand if there is a relationship between working conditions and the percentage of economically-disadvantaged (ED) or minority students served. Results from a two-sample *t*-Test suggest there is no meaningful difference in schools’ working condition scores for schools serving a larger percentage of ED and minority students.

Figure 2: Percentage of schools with favorable, moderate, or unfavorable working conditions

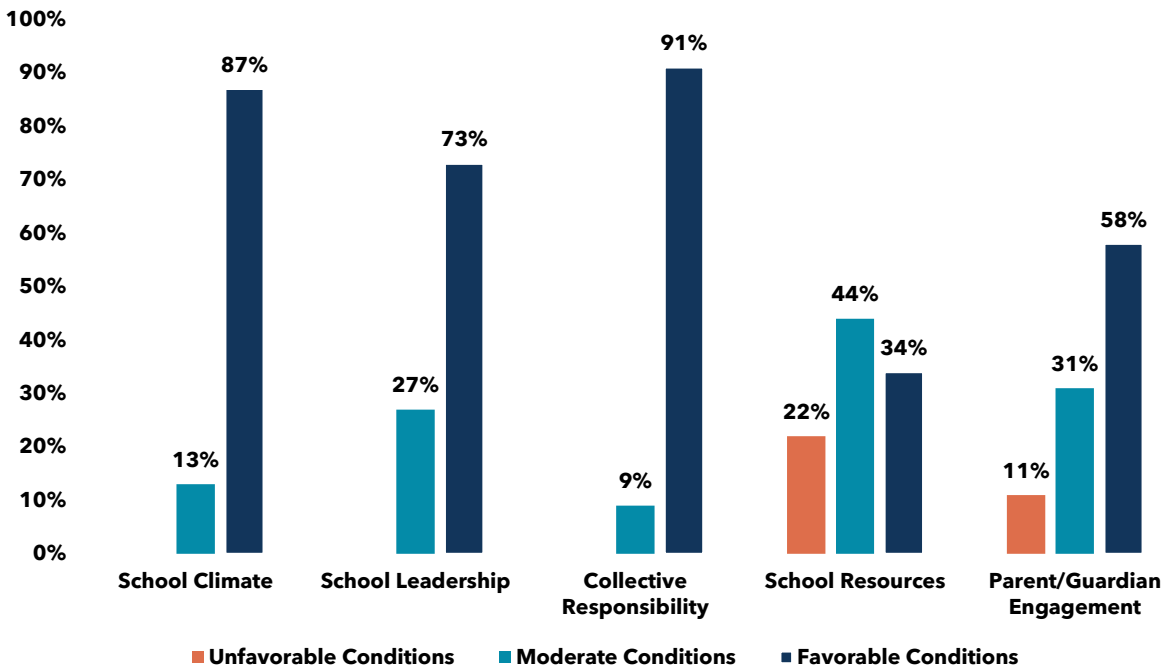


Source: GVSU CSO School Operations Survey; author’s analysis.

Most schools have favorable school climate, school leadership, and collective responsibility conditions.

Figure 3 displays the percentage of schools with favorable, moderate, or unfavorable conditions by sub-measures. Results indicate most schools have favorable Collective Responsibility (91 percent), School Climate (87 percent), and School Leadership (73 percent) conditions. This suggests most teachers (a) feel responsible for student learning and establishing healthy learning environments, (b) believe there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in their school, and (c) perceive their administration as strong instructional leaders. In contrast, Figure 3 indicates fewer schools have favorable School Resources (34 percent) or Parent/Guardian Engagement (58 percent) conditions.

Figure 3: Percentage of schools with favorable, moderate, or unfavorable conditions by measure



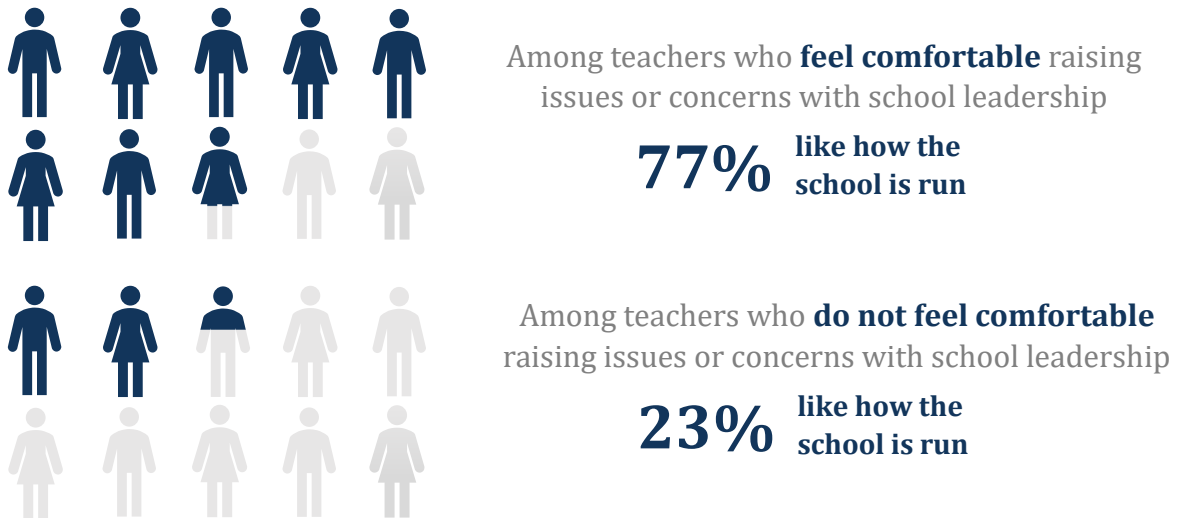
Source: GVSU CSO School Operations Survey; author's analysis.

3 | What factors contribute to teachers' perceptions of satisfaction and working conditions?

Establishing a trusting and open professional culture positively influences teachers' sense of satisfaction.

GVSU teachers are more likely to be satisfied working in their school and approving of the way the school is run when administrators establish a collaborative, trustful, and open staff culture. For instance, 88 percent of teachers feel comfortable raising issues or addressing concerns with school leadership. Of those teachers, 77 percent approve of the way things are run at their school compared to 23 percent of teachers who do not feel comfortable raising concerns with administrators (See Figure 4).

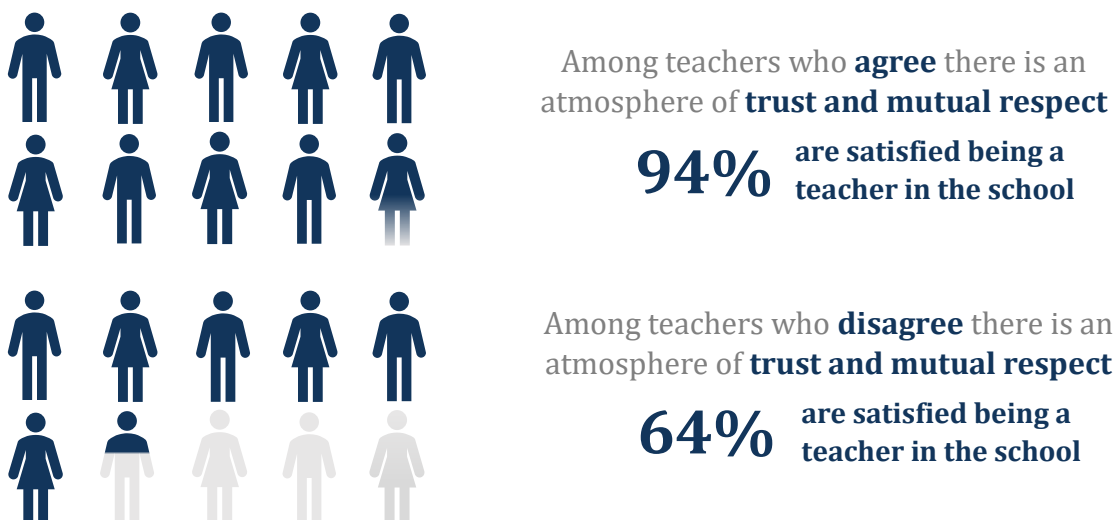
Figure 4: Percentage of teachers satisfied with being a teacher and like the way their school is run as a function of feeling comfortable raising issues with school leadership



Source: GVSU CSO School Operations Survey; author's analysis.

Moreover, 89 percent of teachers agree there is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within their school. Most of these teachers (94 percent) are satisfied with being a teacher in their current school (See Figure 5). In contrast, 64 percent of teachers who do not agree an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect exists report being satisfied to work in their school. Three quarters of teachers reporting an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect exists approve of the way things are in their school. This represents a 50 percent difference when compared to teachers who do not report an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect exists.

Figure 5: Percentage of teachers satisfied with being a teacher and like the way their school is run as a function of feeling comfortable raising issues with school leadership.

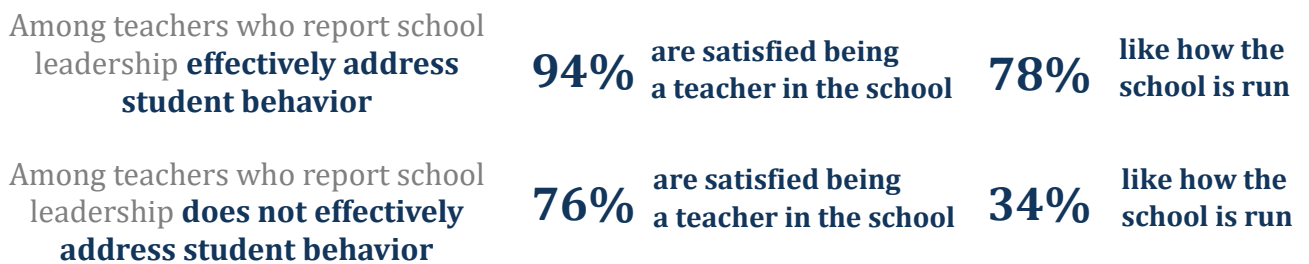


Source: GVSU CSO School Operations Survey; author's analysis.

How administrators handle student discipline influence teachers’ sense of satisfaction and perceptions of how the school is run

Beyond establishing an open and trusting staff culture, how administrators handle student misbehavior positively influences teachers’ sense of satisfaction and perceptions of how their school is run. For instance, 88 percent of teachers agree school leadership effectively handles student discipline and behavioral problems. Of these teachers, 94 percent are satisfied with being a teacher in their school while 78 percent like how the school is run (See Figure 6). In contrast, a considerably smaller percentage of teachers are satisfied being a teacher in their school or like how their school is run when they do not believe their leadership effectively handles student discipline or behavioral problems.

Figure 6: Percentage of teachers who like how school is run based on how leadership handles student behavior.



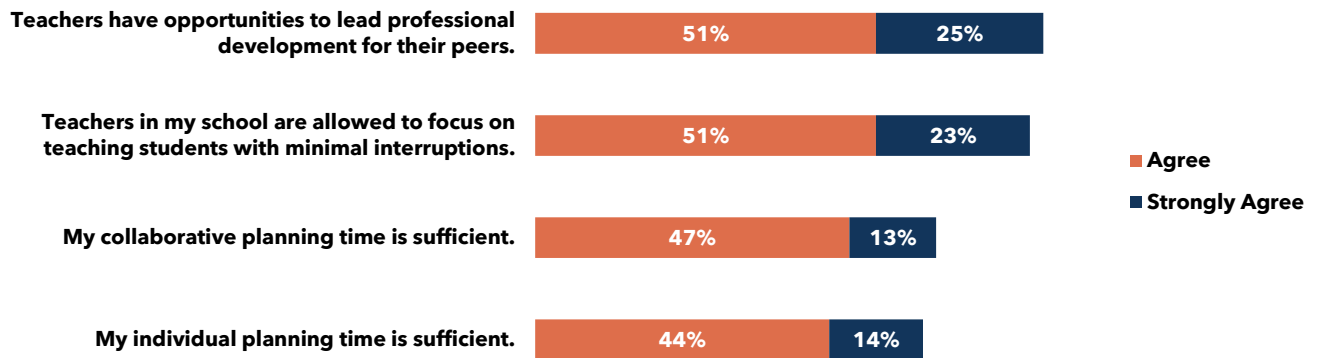
Source: GVSU CSO School Operations Survey; author’s analysis.

Moreover, results suggest there is a positive association between administrators’ handling of student misbehavior and the amount of time teachers spend focused on teaching and learning. Approximately 79 percent of teachers who agree administrators effectively handle student misbehavior and discipline report being allowed to focus on teaching students with minimal interruptions. In contrast, only 43 percent of teachers who do not agree administrators effectively address student misbehavior report being able to focus on instruction without disruptions.

Teachers’ individual and collaborative planning time and opportunities offered to parents/guardians detract from schools’ resources and parent/guardian engagement scores.

While survey results are overwhelmingly positive, Figures 7 and 8 identify two areas in which most schools could improve. First, the percentage of teachers “agreeing” or “strongly agreeing” to having sufficient individual (58 percent) or collaborative (60 percent) planning time is considerably lower than most questions included in the survey. Moreover, teachers’ responses to these two questions contributed to an increase in the percentage of schools with “unfavorable” or “moderate” conditions for resources and time use.

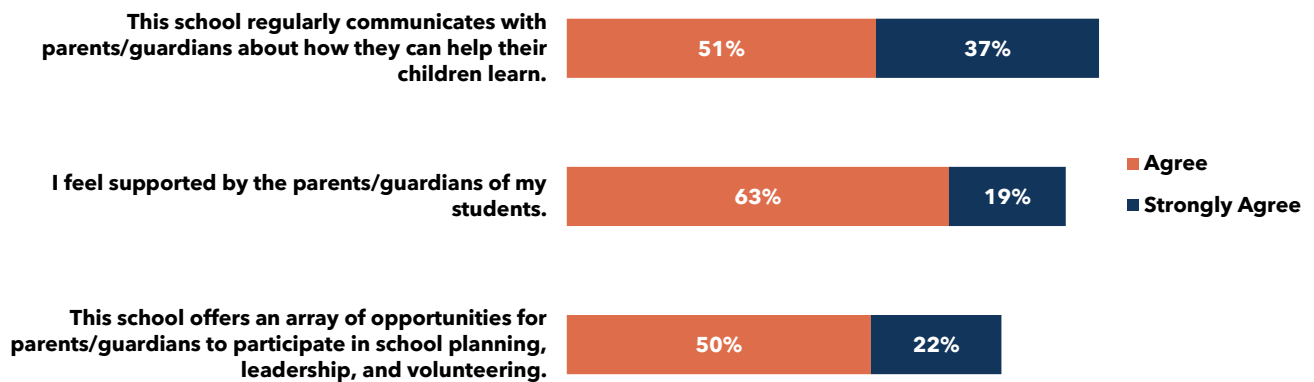
Figure 7: Percentage of teachers “agreeing” or “strongly agreeing” to questions addressing school resources and time use.



Source: GVSU CSO School Operations Survey; author’s analysis.

Second, teachers are less likely to agree their school offers diverse opportunities for parents/guardians to participate in school planning, leadership, and volunteering or report feeling supported by the parents/guardians of their students in these areas. Similarly, results from this question contribute to a decrease in the number of schools with “favorable” conditions for parent/guardian engagement. Finally, when we examined whether there were significant differences in resources or parent/guardian engagement scores for schools serving larger percentages of ED or minority students, we found no meaningful difference exists. This suggests results are not driven by the student population served.

Figure 8: Percentage of teachers “agreeing” or “strongly agreeing” to questions addressing parent/guardian engagement.



Source: GVSU CSO School Operations Survey; author’s analysis.

Discussion and Implications

This brief summarizes teachers' perspectives on working conditions, including school culture and climate, school leadership, faculty commitment and responsibility, school resources and time use, and parent/guardian engagement. Most teachers in the GVSU network are satisfied working in their current school (92 percent) and like the way their school is run (70 percent). These results contribute to most GVSU schools having favorable working conditions (71 percent). Moreover, favorable results are largely driven by teachers' responses to school climate, school leadership, and collective responsibility questions. In contrast, fewer schools have favorable school resource or time use and parent/guardian engagement conditions. These results are largely influenced by teachers' responses to questions about whether individual or collaborative planning time is sufficient and whether schools offer diverse opportunities for parents/guardians to engage with the school. Considering these findings, we suggest the GVSU CSO and its stakeholders consider the following two recommendations when planning future network supports.

1 | Highlight best practices for supporting teachers' individual and collaborative planning time and providing opportunities for parent/guardian engagement.

Results from the GVSU CSO School Operations Survey could be used to highlight schools excelling in select measures. The GVSU CSO could then conduct a series of case studies to understand what schools are doing to thrive in school climate, school leadership, school resources and time use, and parent/guardian engagement. For instance, schools with favorable resources and time use, and parent/guardian engagement conditions could participate in a case study highlighting actions they undertook or structures they developed that are positively received among staff. Insights from these case studies would highlight best practices that could be disseminated to the broader GVSU network with a toolkit of support to help implement these best practices.

2 | Differentiate support to unique needs of individual schools.

The CSO could explore measures included in the survey by schools included in the analytic and non-analytic sample. Results will provide the GVSU CSO with insights into strengths and areas for improvement for each school. Moreover, the GVSU CSO can further review how schools score on individual questions identifying areas of strength and areas needing improvement. Insights from this analysis support the GVSU CSO in tailoring supports to the unique needs of the respective schools.

Appendices

Appendix A: Methods

Data Sources. This research brief draws on data from the Winter 2021 administration of the Grand Valley State University (GVSU) Charter School Office (CSO) School Operations Survey. The survey includes validated items from the annual Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) Educator Survey. Researchers from Basis Policy Research (Basis) selected items addressing school culture and climate, perceptions of school leadership, school resources and time use, and parent/guardian engagement. Basis researchers shared the survey items with GVSU CSO leadership for review and approval. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey instrument. Basis researchers administered the survey through Qualtrics.

Sample. Basis researchers distributed survey invitations to 1,608 full-time teachers working in 75 K-12 schools authorized by the GVSU CSO. At the conclusion of the survey window, 659 participants (41 percent) completed the entire survey. We further restricted our analytic sample to the 502 teachers working in 45 schools with at least a 50 percent response rate or greater than 10 teacher responses. This sample restriction reduces the degree to which school-level results are driven by a small percentage or subset of teachers. While the response rate may be on the lower end, it is important to note that 41 percent exceeds the average response rate for large-scale teacher surveys by approximately 2 percentage point (Cook et al., 2000).

Measures. In this section, we describe the focal measures used in this research brief. We used five survey measures – school climate, school leadership, collective responsibility, school resources, and parent/guardian engagement – previously identified from research using the TDOE Educator Survey. Each measure is discussed below.

School Operations. The school operations score represents the mean score across all survey items. Questions used in this measure are included in Q1-5 in Appendix B.

School Climate. Survey items address teachers feeling satisfied being a teacher in this school, having a sense of trust and mutual respect in this school, teachers recommending this school to parents/guardians, and students treat adults with respect at this school. Questions used in this measure are included in Q1, A-G in Appendix B.

School Leadership. This measure includes survey items addressing leadership communicating a vision for this school, teachers feeling satisfied with the way things are run at this school, and leadership being knowledgeable about curricula being used. Questions used in this measure are included in Q1 G, Q2 A-H in Appendix B.

Collective Responsibility. Survey items address teachers feeling responsible when students fail, teachers feeling responsible to help each other do their best, and teachers taking responsibility for improving their school. Questions used in this measure are included in Q3, A-D in Appendix B.

School Resources. This measure includes survey items addressing teachers having time to focus on teaching with minimal disruptions, having sufficient planning time, and having opportunities to lead professional development for their peers. Questions used in this measure are included in Q4, A-D in Appendix B.

Parent/Guardian Engagement. Survey items address the school regularly communicating with parents/guardians, teachers feeling supported by parents/guardians, and the school offering opportunities for parents/guardians to participate in planning, leadership, and volunteering. Questions used in this measure are included in Q5, A-C in Appendix B.

Moreover, Basis researchers aggregated schools' scores across respective measures and applied the following scoring key to classify schools' conditions:

- Favorable Conditions – School Operation score exceeding 3.00;
- Moderate Conditions – School Operation score between 2.50–2.99;
- Unfavorable Conditions – School Operation score below 2.49.

Analytic Strategy. Basis researchers conducted a series of descriptive analyses to answer the research questions. We mostly explored descriptive statistics to report on the distribution of scores across schools and measures.

Appendix B: Survey Instrument

1. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your school.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A. There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within this school.	1	2	3	4
B. I am generally satisfied with being a teacher in this school.	1	2	3	4
C. I would recommend this school to parents/guardians seeking a place for their child.	1	2	3	4
D. Our school staff is a learning community in which ideas and suggestions for improvement are encouraged.	1	2	3	4
E. Students treat adults with respect at this school.	1	2	3	4
F. Students in my school are safe from bullying.	1	2	3	4
G. I feel prepared to respond to any type of emergency situation that may occur at my school.	1	2	3	4
H. Teachers are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles.	1	2	3	4

2. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding school leadership in your school.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A. The principal at my school communicates a clear vision for this school.	1	2	3	4
B. I feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to me with school leaders.	1	2	3	4
C. I like the way things are run at this school.	1	2	3	4
D. My principal regularly models effective instruction.	1	2	3	4
E. My principal regularly gives feedback on my instruction.	1	2	3	4
F. My principal knows my instructional strengths and areas of growth.	1	2	3	4
G. My principal is knowledgeable about the curricula being used.	1	2	3	4
H. School leadership effectively handles student discipline and behavioral problems.	1	2	3	4

3. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the teachers at your school.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A. Teachers at my school feel responsible when students fail.	1	2	3	4
B. Teachers at my school feel responsible to help each other do their best.	1	2	3	4
C. Teachers at my school help maintain discipline in the entire school, not just their classroom.	1	2	3	4
D. Teachers at my school take responsibility for improving their school.	1	2	3	4

4. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding teacher workload at your school.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A. Teachers in my school are allowed to focus on teaching students with minimal interruptions.	1	2	3	4
B. My individual planning time is sufficient.	1	2	3	4
C. My collaborative planning time is sufficient.	1	2	3	4
D. Teachers have opportunities to lead professional development for their peers.	1	2	3	4

5. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding teacher/parent/guardian relations at your school.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
A. This school regularly communicates with parents/guardians about how they can help their children learn.	1	2	3	4
B. I feel supported by the parents/guardians of my students.	1	2	3	4
C. This school offers an array of opportunities for parents/guardians to participate in school planning, leadership, and volunteering.	1	2	3	4

About This Report

This research was conducted by Basis Policy Research. Basis conducts applied public policy research, primarily in the field of education; provides technical assistance to state departments of education, districts, and schools; and supports policymakers by providing the data they need to make sound decisions. For more information visit our website at www.basispolicyresearch.com.