

Engaging Teachers in Decision-Making: A Toolkit

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POWERED BY



TEACHER WORKING CONDITIONS

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“Fostering positive teacher working conditions is not only important for strengthening the well-being of teachers, but it is essential for promoting an equitable, high-quality education for all students.”

–2023 South Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey report

Explore the Survey and Toolkit

The overarching goal of the SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey (SCTWCS) is to assess conditions that affect teachers’ effectiveness, efficacy, and retention, providing a platform for teachers to share their perceptions. It also offers data that can help schools and districts support and retain staff. **This toolkit specifically focuses on the condition of Shared Governance. Some school districts may see this alternatively labeled in their data as Influence Over School Policy and Decision-Making.**

Schools and school systems are often rich with data but can be short on opportunities to turn those data into actionable information that guides practices and policies. This toolkit and its companions are designed to help educators and other decision-makers find meaning in their survey data, integrating findings into work already being done to improve schools, support all educators, and boost teacher retention.

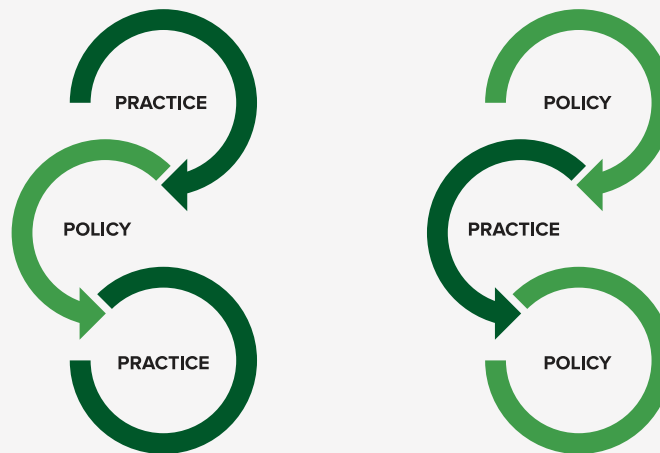


Figure 1. *Interplay Between Practice and Policy*

This toolkit is structured in a way that can move your team quickly from analysis to action on issues related to shared governance. In it, you will focus primarily on “microactions” that, when consistently applied, are likely to have a macro effect. Your team is encouraged to align these efforts with ongoing continuous improvement efforts. Our purpose with this toolkit is **not** to add another thing to your plate but rather to integrate these efforts with strategies that are already in motion.

You are strongly encouraged to engage with this toolkit with a team of educators who bring diverse perspectives and insights about working conditions. Engaging a team from the start of this work will build collective ownership which is more likely to result in collective impact.

As your team uses this toolkit, you will work through a cycle similar to the processes recommended in other school and district toolkits that are a part of this series:

These icons illustrate the cycle of acting and collaborating on SCTWCS data. Icons appear throughout this toolkit to signal which part of the cycle is the focus of the tool(s) and content on that page.

1. BUILD

a team that includes multiple perspectives.



3. SELECT

an area of focus for improvement.



5. IDENTIFY

actionable next steps to address a specific area of focus.



2. ANALYZE

data to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.



4. CONNECT

results with improvement efforts already in process.



To access the report for the SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey, visit sc-teacher.org/twc-survey.

To access companion toolkits, visit toolkit.sc-teacher.org.

Engaging Teachers in Decision-Making

Working through this toolkit will focus your team’s attention on how practices, policies, and decisions can contribute to engaging teachers in shared governance (sometimes referred to as influence over school policy and/or decision-making). SCTWCS data have highlighted this working condition as a key opportunity for improvement. Research has indicated a need for efforts to retain more experienced teachers by giving them “shared decision-making roles” (Sorensen and Ladd, 2020). To aid in those efforts, this toolkit is intended for use by school or district teams to create plans that can strengthen teachers’ participation in shared governance. It is *not* intended to position teachers as conveyors of someone else’s decisions. The focus is on creating structures and processes that encourage teacher influence within situations and practices that impact them the most, including their ability to support student learning.

This section of the toolkit is intended for use by educators in both formal and informal leadership roles, who are responsible for creating teams that engage in continuous improvement efforts at either the school or district level. The first step in the process is to define who is, or should be, part of the work analyzing SCTWCS data and translating the analysis into action. While administrators may initiate or lead efforts to improve teacher working conditions, your team is encouraged to include at least two classroom teachers, ideally more.

1. BUILD



+ BUILD A SCHOOL OR DISTRICT TEAM

Assemble a team to engage in the work of analyzing data and identifying strategies for engaging teachers in decision-making. Educators involved should represent diverse perspectives and areas of expertise. Using Worksheet 1 that follows, you will see recommendations for some viewpoints that ideally would be included on the team.

It is important for each team member to understand that the purpose of the work is to strengthen continuous improvement efforts by engaging teachers in decision-making across the school or district. It is not intended for situations that only involve individuals or small groups.

As you build your team, consider where and how the work of engaging teachers in decision-making may integrate with other structures within your school or district. Considering these questions will help you undertake this process in a way that maximizes expertise:

- Does a team already exist with the recommended roles and perspectives as part of its composition?
- Is there a team that, with a few adjustments, would have the recommended composition?
- Where in your school/district is work already focused on something related to engaging teachers in decision-making?
- Is there a team or meeting time where it makes sense to integrate addressing this issue?

You are encouraged to be strategic about weaving the work of this team into the existing work structures of your school or district. This way, you will ensure that efforts to engage teachers in decision-making are strategically aligned with ongoing initiatives and not an isolated approach.



WORKSHEET 1: TEAM MEMBERS

Perspectives/ Expertise Needed	Name	Role	Perspectives/Expertise
Knowledge of continuous improvement efforts taking place across the school/district			
Classroom practitioners			
Educators with perspectives beyond the classroom			
A position of formal authority to ensure action plans will be implemented			

For additional information about the survey and presentation of results
visit <https://bit.ly/SCTExaminingData>.



2. ANALYZE

+ ANALYZE DATA

SCTWCS data concerning shared governance (i.e., teacher engagement in decision-making) provides valuable insights into the dynamics within your school or district. Exploration of this data will assist your team in gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges teachers encounter engaging in and/or influencing decision-making in their building or district. A logical starting point is to examine the results from the SCTWCS, focusing on the Shared Governance (or Influence Over School

Policy) section. The insights formed by your analysis should be integrated into your existing improvement efforts to ensure strategies are in line with current efforts and to avoid undue burden on teachers. The goal of this work is to increase teacher influence in shared governance and decision-making without introducing additional significant demands on their time.

SCTWCS Data

Within SCTWCS data, the Shared Governance condition measures the degree to which teachers perceive their input is heard and included in decisions made about policies at their schools. It is important to note that while teachers want to have the opportunity to provide input that influences school policy, that does not necessarily mean they want to *make* the decisions.

Across the state of South Carolina, teachers' ability to influence decision-making and school policy is strongly linked to job satisfaction and their intent to stay in the profession (Starrett, et al., 2023). See the table below. As a result, schools and districts who choose to focus on this working condition are more likely to affect both teacher satisfaction and retention.

RESOURCES AND DEMANDS INFLUENCE OUTCOMES

	Making a difference in students lives	Enjoying their current job	Intending to remain in profession	Choosing teaching again
Administrative support	●		●	●
Principal communication		●		
Policy influence	●	●	●	●
Available time		●	●	●

Dots indicate significant correlation between certain working conditions and outcomes of teachers' experiences, according to analysis of SCTWCS data.



CONDITION: SHARED GOVERNANCE

Let’s take a closer look at the survey items included within this condition. Use Worksheet 2 to capture the average score from your district/school dashboard for each item. Once the first two columns are complete, engage in a discussion with your team about which items represent an area of strength and which represent an opportunity for growth. Also, discuss the criteria on which you based your responses. Come to a consensus with the team about the greatest area of strength and greatest opportunity for growth. This information will be used later in this toolkit when your team selects an area of focus.

WORKSHEET 2: ANALYZING ITEMS WITHIN SHARED GOVERNANCE

Administrators at your school include your input on...	Average score for each item	Which survey item is your district/school’s area of greatest strength? On what did you base your response?	Which survey item is your district/school’s greatest opportunity for growth? On what did you base your response?
Selecting instructional materials.			
School improvement planning.			
Selecting student grading and assessment practices.			
Establishing student discipline procedures for the school.			
Changing school policies.			

Note: The left column of this worksheet includes items specific to a newer iteration of SCTWCS administered in 2024. If your SCTWCS data is from 2023, use the specific items related to Influence Over School Policy instead.



Team Reflection Protocol: Snowball Discussion

1. In pairs, discuss and capture notes about the following questions:
 - a. What are likely some contributing factors to your area of greatest strength?
 - b. What structures are in place that may account for that area of strength?
2. Next, each pair joins another pair, creating a group of four to share their answers.
3. Finally, groups of four join back together with the whole group to capture key discussion takeaways using **Worksheet 3**.
4. Begin the snowball discussion again using the second set of questions.
5. Pairs discuss and capture notes around the following:
 - a. How might your team leverage the area of greatest strength to address an opportunity for growth?
 - b. What structures or supports from your area of strength might carry over to the opportunity for growth?
6. Each pair joins another pair, creating a group of four to further the discussion.
7. Finally, all team members join together to capture key takeaways using **Worksheet 3**.

WORKSHEET 3: LEVERAGING YOUR STRENGTH

Area of Strength	
What are likely some contributing factors to your area of greatest strength?	
What structures are in place that may account for that area of strength?	
Opportunity for Growth	
How might your team leverage the area of greatest strength to address an opportunity for growth?	
What structures or supports from your area of strength might carry over to the opportunity for growth?	



Professional Publications Jigsaw

In your school or district, teacher engagement in decision-making is likely an area of both opportunity and challenge. By analyzing district/school data, it becomes clear that teacher engagement in decision-making holds substantial potential for school improvement. The protocol outlined in this section offers an opportunity for school or district teams to examine strategies to increase teacher influence over policy decisions, as well as the resulting impact on teacher satisfaction and retention. Through comprehensive analysis, teams can work toward streamlining their practices while identifying areas in need of refinement or elimination.

Team Analysis Protocol: Professional Publications

Step 1: Set up exercise

- Excerpts from four professional articles on teacher engagement and influence over school policy are provided for you. You can find the compiled article excerpts at toolkit.sc-teacher.org/references.
- Print four copies of each excerpt.
- Place copies of the articles on four different tables in the room. Each table should have four copies of the *same* article.

Step 2: Assign team members to tables/articles

- Divide the group evenly among the four tables.

Step 3: Read and discuss publication excerpts

- Each participant will spend ten minutes reading their excerpt and annotating their printed copy as they read.
- After ten minutes, groups will use the following discussion questions to guide a table conversation about their findings and wonderings within the text.
 - What from this excerpt resonates for you?
 - What from this excerpt gives you pause?
 - Where are some of the concepts and ideas from the excerpt already at play in your school or district?
 - What connections are there between this excerpt and the area of strength and the opportunity for growth your team identified in Worksheet 3?

Step 4: Team conversation

- Once reading group conversations are complete, the whole group reconvenes.
- Each group provides a quick overview of the article excerpt they read and shares key takeaways from the reading table conversations.
- Refer to your responses in Worksheet 3 and add your area of strength and opportunity for growth to Worksheet 4.
- As a team, discuss the following questions and capture your team's thinking in Worksheet 4.
 - What concepts related to your area of strength and opportunity for growth emerged in the excerpts?
 - What ideas from the excerpts hold the most promise to strengthen teacher influence within policy and decision-making in your school/district?
 - What are your team's biggest takeaways from the professional publication excerpts?



WORKSHEET 4: PROMISING IDEAS

	Concepts Related to This Area	Ideas for Ways to Strengthen This Area
Area of Strength:		
Opportunity for Growth:		
What are your team's biggest takeaways from the professional publication excerpts?		



Supporting Teacher Engagement in Shared Governance

“Schools often do not emphasize, and sometimes even neglect, elements of instructional leadership that are more strongly related to student achievement, while emphasizing elements that are less related to student achievement. In particular, schools are strikingly less likely to implement elements that enhance teacher authority and leadership, even though some of these have the strongest ties to student achievement. And conversely, schools are more likely to implement elements that enhance accountability and teacher evaluation, which have the weakest ties to student achievement.” (Ingersoll et al., 2018)

Teacher preparation, whether traditional or alternative in nature, primarily focuses on supporting individuals to lead classrooms and student instruction. Preparation pathways tend to focus on developing an individual’s capacity to support young learners. Identifying individual strengths and working styles is left as a lesser priority. As a result, teachers rarely have the opportunity to learn about and leverage those styles and strengths when working with other adults. To effectively engage in shared governance, teachers may need to build their leadership capacity in this way.

Engaging in an inventory of individual working styles and strengths is one step toward a deeper understanding of these attributes. Additionally, by providing a better sense of each individual’s key contributions, inventory results can inform assembling a team with maximal impact. These inventories of working style/strengths thus result in both personal leadership awareness and information for team development, setting groups and individuals up for success.

WORKING STYLE INVENTORY: COMPASS POINTS

The Compass Points protocol shared here provides a relatively simple framework for understanding individual working styles and the importance of the interplay of the different “directions” of team members. There are a number of other work style assessments that could also be used for these purposes. If your team has already engaged with a different assessment, the results can be used for the same purpose as the one described below. The important point here is that working style information can be used to build self-awareness for educators (teachers and other team members) who may not have had the opportunity to explore this type of information. This information can be extremely useful to use as a frame for team interactions and to ensure that the team can leverage expertise in a variety of working styles.

Team Activity Protocol: Compass Points

Note: The process described in the following steps is adapted from one developed by the Center for Collaborative Education, which can be accessed at <https://bit.ly/CompPt>.

1. **Set-up: Place a piece of chart paper on each of the four walls of the space and label them North, South, East, and West.**
2. **Have each team member complete the following assessment: Quick Test to Identify Your Compass Point: Parts 1 and 2.**

Center for Collaborative Education

Quick Test to Identify Your Compass Point: Part 1

Are you more North or South?
For each set of words, circle the word that describes you more often than the other one (even though you may have both characteristics at times)

a. Confident	a. Goal-centered	a. Bold
b. Helpful	b. People-centered	b. Supportive
a. Self-reliant	a. Initiator	a. Productive
b. Understanding	b. Listener	b. Faithful
a. Fast-paced	a. Determined	a. Self-starter
b. Easy-going	b. Unselfish	b. Volunteer
a. Independent	a. Straightforward	a. Opinionated
b. Team player	b. Patient	b. Sensitive
a. Decisive	a. Results-focused	a. Challenger
b. Diplomatic	b. Relationship-focused	b. Mediator
a. Assertive	a. Hardworking	a. Doer
b. Non-confrontational	b. Friendly	b. Communicator
a. Competitive	a. In-charge	a. Deadline-driven
b. Cooperative	b. Generous	b. Values-driven
a. Leader	a. Task-oriented	a. Achiever
b. Loyal	b. Peace-oriented	b. Caregiver

Total # of A's circled: _____ (if this number is higher, you're more North)
Total # of B's circled: _____ (if this number is higher, you're more South)

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Center for Collaborative Education

Quick Test to Identify Your Compass Point: Part 2

Are you more East or West?
For each set of words, circle the word that describes you more often than the other one (even though you may have both characteristics at times)

a. Organized	c. Factual	c. Careless
d. Creative	d. Fun-loving	d. Open-minded
a. Structured	c. Analytical	c. Finisher
d. Flexible	d. Cheerful	d. Mediator
a. Quality-centered	c. Consistent	c. Rule-follower
d. Idea-centered	d. Versatile	d. Option-provider
a. Logical	c. Serious	c. Systematic
d. Visionary	d. Humorous	d. Carefree
a. Reserved	c. Efficient	c. Precise
d. Innovative	d. Dreamer	d. Inventive
a. Planner	c. Reliable	c. Persuasive
d. Spontaneous	d. Delegator	d. Adversities
a. Perfectionist	c. Detail-oriented	c. Accurate
d. Free-spirited	d. Improvising	d. Adaptable
a. Traditional	c. Persistent	c. Protocol-focused
d. Risk-taker	d. Imaginative	d. Methods-focused

Total # of C's circled: _____ (if this number is higher, you're more East)
Total # of D's circled: _____ (if this number is higher, you're more West)

Now that you have a number for each of the four types (North, South, East, West)...

This type has the highest number _____ (this is your Dominant Type)
This type has the second highest number _____ (this is your Subdominant Type)

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To download these files, visit <https://bit.ly/CompPt>.



3. After completing the assessment, each person should move to the poster that aligns with their dominant compass direction. Acknowledge that everyone has the ability to access all four compass directions. Encourage participants to select their most dominant compass direction for the purpose of this experience.
4. While at the poster, respond to the following questions and record them on the chart paper:
 - a. What are the strengths of this style? (List four adjectives or phrases.)
 - b. What are the limitations of this style? (List four phrases.)
 - c. What is this style's complementary opposite? Which compass point best complements this style's limitations?
 - d. What do other styles need to know about working with this style?
 - e. In what ways might this work style benefit from collaborating with the other three?
5. Once each group has responded to the prompts using the chart paper, have them report back to the whole group.
6. After all groups have reported out, host a group discussion that can include the following questions:
 - a. What might this assessment suggest about the ideal composition of a team?
 - b. What do we notice about the distribution of our team?
 - c. What implications does this distribution have for our work together?
 - d. How might we use this information as we engage in our work together?
7. Capture information about your team members in Worksheet 5, along with the strengths of each style, information about working with each style, and implications for your work together.

Optional extension:

1. After step 5 in this protocol, have participants go to the poster of their subdominant style.
2. In compass point groups, each person should share what their most dominant style was in the first round.
3. Discuss the implications the combinations of dominant and subdominant styles have for your work as a team.



WORKSHEET 5: STYLES OF TEAM MEMBERS AS COMPASS POINTS

	North	South	East	West
Our team members				
Strengths of this style				
Working with this style				
In what ways will our team use this information in our work together?				
In what ways might this information be helpful as our team starts to strengthen teachers' engagement in shared governance? How might we use this information to inform decisions about which teachers to engage and how?				

Micro-Credential Connection

The working style assessment and application processes described above are aligned with micro-credentials in certain stacks (Building Leadership Capacity, Collective Leadership, and Cultivating Leadership) from the mCrED catalog. Micro-credentials are assessments of specific competencies that frequently result in learning by the pursuer. Micro-credentials can be a useful tool as your team seeks to either confirm or build competency related to teachers' ability to engage in shared governance. Connect with CarolinaCrED at carolinacred.org for more information on how to access and earn these micro-credentials.

3. SELECT



+ SELECT AN AREA OF FOCUS

Now that your team has analyzed SCTWCS data and some additional resources in the previous section of this toolkit, it is time to identify a focus area for your team's working condition improvement efforts. Complete Worksheet 6 by revisiting discussions and information gathered earlier in this toolkit.

WORKSHEET 6: SELECTING A FOCUS AREA

From Worksheet 2: Item of greatest strength and item of greatest opportunity for growth

From Worksheet 4: Promising ideas that align with our school/district priorities

From the working styles inventory: Concepts related to working styles that may be relevant to engaging teachers in shared governance

As you work to identify an area on which to focus improvement efforts, we encourage your team to start small, perhaps at the survey item level. Small wins help build momentum and allow for sustained effort over time. Keep in mind the more focused your improvement efforts are, the more quickly you are likely to see results.



We also invite you to consider a range of factors beyond a numerical score to guide your selection of a focus area. Discuss the following questions with your team:

- What shift is likely to make the biggest difference in teacher working conditions? For instance, might amplifying teachers' ability to select instructional materials have the largest impact?
- If improved, what shift might make a difference most quickly? For example, might convening a team of teachers to establish student discipline procedures for the school quickly provide change?
- Which shift may connect with existing efforts and values if focused on? For instance, if your district/school is already involved in improvement planning related to a condition other than shared governance, might it make sense to further integrate teachers into that process?
- What actions to improve something related to survey items are likely to most clearly signal intent to support? For example, might explicit and transparent actions that address multiple survey prompts be a way to clearly signal support?

Based on the discussion of the previous questions, complete Worksheet 7 to identify an area on which to focus your team's improvement efforts.

WORKSHEET 7: AREA OF FOCUS

The worksheet is a flowchart with three steps, each in a green box with a white text area to its right. The steps are connected by arrows pointing from left to right.

- Step 1:** "Our team will leverage these strengths:"
- Step 2:** "To improve or change this situation:"
- Step 3:** "Which will improve responses on this/these survey item(s):"



4. CONNECT

+ CONNECT RESULTS WITH IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

Align With Ongoing Improvement Efforts

The information your team has gathered and analyzed from SCTWCS and other processes in this toolkit can likely provide insights into school or district improvement efforts already in progress. Your team is strongly encouraged to integrate efforts related to these data with ongoing improvement efforts in your school or district, rather than adding another initiative to address.

With your team, use the table below to discuss ways the information gathered from SCTWCS data can be integrated into your school/district continuous improvement efforts.

WORKSHEET 8: CONNECT WITH CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

Discussion Prompt	Notes
How might our team integrate SCTWCS information around shared governance into actions already being taken through our school/district continuous improvement efforts?	
Where can data on engaging teachers in shared governance and decision-making already be found within school/district continuous improvement processes? Which specific goal or strategy contains this information?	
Which goals, plans, and actions within our continuous improvement efforts strategically engage teachers to provide input and contribute to decision-making?	
How might our team gather teacher input and/or engage teachers in ongoing improvement efforts?	
Where are there opportunities to add teachers to the team that identifies and articulates improvement goals and strategies?	
What other teams are doing aligned work within our school/district? How might we strategically integrate our efforts?	

5. IDENTIFY



+ IDENTIFY ACTIONABLE NEXT STEPS

Now that your team has identified a single, data-informed area of focus, identify three actionable next steps to take that will begin the process of improvement within your school/district. For each step, identify a person who will be responsible for ensuring movement forward. Additionally, identify the next date and time for your team to convene (or check in asynchronously) to discuss progress.

Worksheet 9 can serve as an action console that signals your progress in applying SCTWCS data to your ongoing work. Reviewing status, learning, and impact at each leadership team or improvement team meeting may be one way to apply efforts in the context of your regular work cadence. New action items that emerge from each meeting can be filled in on the next meeting's

console for review at that time. Between meetings, the most recent version of the console can serve as a reporting tool, allowing any member of your team to share current progress and next steps with district leadership, school-based teams, community members, or others you wish to engage in the effort.

As your team identifies actionable next steps and moves toward creating a comprehensive action plan, we invite you to investigate the Resources section of this toolkit. There you will find a number of professional publications that have research, information, and strategies for increasing teacher participation in shared governance and decision-making.

WORKSHEET 9: NEXT STEPS

Area of Focus			
Action Steps	Person Facilitating Efforts	Status (Started, In Progress, Launched)	Notes on Impact and Learning

Next meeting date and time:

Develop a Comprehensive Action Plan

For those teams interested in developing a more comprehensive action plan, SC TEACHER will work in partnership with CarolinaCrED and Mira Education to supply more in-depth support over time, including access to micro-credentials and support for capacity-building, strategy design, and implementation. These facilitation partners also provide coaching for district and school improvement teams using these data.

Resources

CarolinaCrED Resources

mCrED/Micro-Credentials

mCrED (<https://carolinacred.org/>) hosts a robust micro-credentials library created for SC leaders and learners by SC leaders and learners. Introductory webinars, access to a growing micro-credential library, and wrap-around services provide the support you need to build capacity within your schools and district.

CarolinaCrED CORE

CarolinaCrED CORE connects learners and leaders to the personalized support they need to accelerate career opportunities. CarolinaCrED CORE provides personalized, professional learning solutions to meet the unique needs of educators in the form of flat-rate contract courses, customized degree programs, and packages that lead to add-on certifications and endorsements in South Carolina.

Professional Publications

A Policy Agenda to Address the Teacher Shortage in U.S. Public Schools

This report about the larger issue of the teacher shortage has a specific proposal to amplify teacher engagement in decision-making as a strategy for retaining teachers.
<https://files.epi.org/pdf/186493.pdf>

Three Ways Administrators Can Include Teachers in Decision-Making

This article describes three concrete actions school administrators can take to engage teachers in school-level decision-making.
<https://www.edutopia.org/article/3-ways-administrators-can-include-teachers-decision-making/>

Leadership Matters: Teachers' Roles in School Decision Making and School Performance

The report authors analyzed data from the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) Survey, including a focus on a set of questions regarding the role of teachers in eight key areas of decision-making and teacher leadership in schools.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1173452.pdf>

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SC TEACHER and its partners will continue to release related research and tools. For the most recent resources, please visit sc-teacher.org.



ABOUT SC TEACHER

SC TEACHER provides comprehensive research, visualized data profiles, and compelling stories to communicate impact of educator pipeline policies and promote transformative practices that inform policymakers, educators, and communities who care about education scaling economic opportunity.

SC-TEACHER.ORG