# **Acting on SC Teacher Working Conditions Survey Data: A** Toolkit for Districts

**JANUARY 2024** 

POWERED BY





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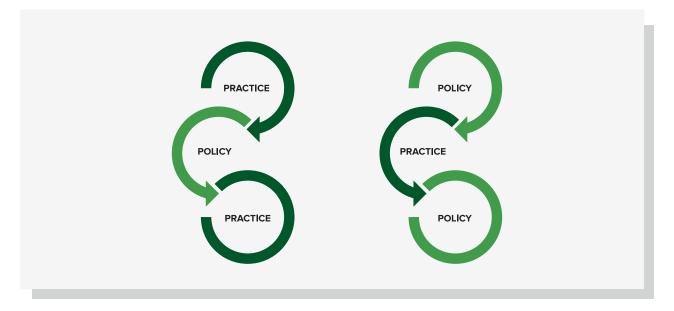
"Fostering positive teacher working conditions is not only important for strengthening the well-being of teachers, but it is essential for promoting an equitable, high-quality education for all students."

-2023 South Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey report

# **Exploring 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.

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 is designed to help educators and other decision-makers find meaning in their survey data and integrate it into work already being done to improve schools, support all educators, and boost teacher retention.



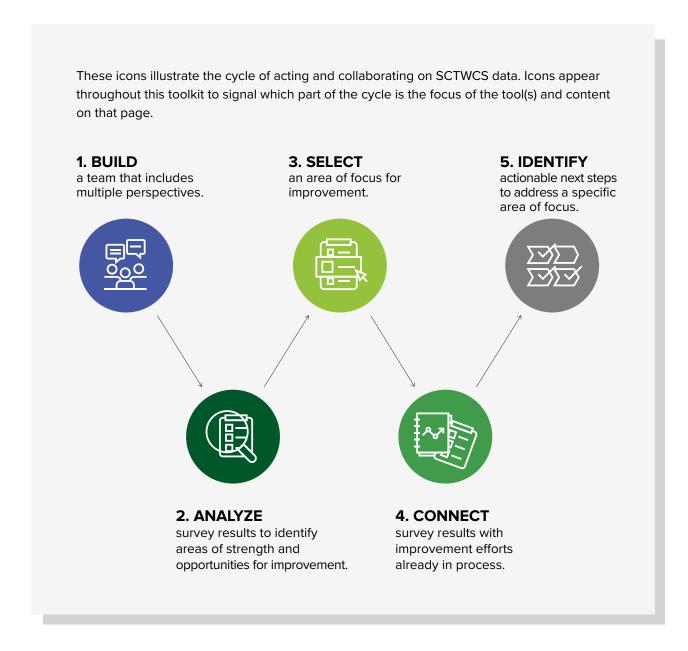
#### Figure 1. Interplay Between Practice and Policy

This toolkit is structured in a way that can move your team quickly from analysis to action. 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.

It is important to note that the SCTWCS is not designed as an evaluative tool for schools or for individuals who teach and lead within them. We therefore work with several partners to support schools and districts in using these data for improvement purposes that lead to the greatest fidelity and impact.

As your team uses this toolkit, you will work through the following cycle:



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

# **District Teams**

This toolkit is structured to focus attention on how practices, policies, and/or decisions made at the district level can contribute to improving working conditions in schools. It is intended for use by district teams to create plans for themselves, rather than plans for school-level personnel. A separate toolkit is available for school teams to analyze and address working conditions at the school level.

This section of the toolkit is intended for use mostly by educators who are charged with addressing districtlevel continuous improvement. Usually, those individuals will work at the district level themselves, though you are encouraged to include one or more school-based administrators and one or more teachers on the team as well. The first step is to define who is, or should be, part of this work.



## + BUILDING A TEAM

Assemble a team of educators that represents diverse perspectives and areas of expertise to engage in the work of analyzing and addressing district impact on teacher working conditions. Using Worksheet 1 that follows, you will see recommendations for some of the perspectives and expertise 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 engage in continuous improvement efforts that can impact working conditions across the district, not only situations that impact individuals or small groups.



## WORKSHEET 1: TEAM MEMBERS

Perspective/ Expertise Needed	Name	Role/Title	Expertise
Knowledge of continuous improvement efforts taking place across			
the district			
School-based formal			
leaders/administrators			
Practicing educators: classroom teachers, instructional coaches, etc.			
Formal authority within the district that can ensure action plan			
implementation			
Other key personnel in the district			



Before you begin analysis, let's examine the context for the SCTWCS and how it differs from other surveys that measure climate, culture, or conditions in schools. To state the obvious, schools and school staffs are complex systems. This survey was not intended to get a sense of *every* factor that exists within buildings but to focus specifically on the ones research has linked with stronger teacher efficacy and retention. As a result, many factors you may be accustomed to seeing from other surveys (such as facilities) are not considered here.

Recognizing that teaching is inherently challenging and multifaceted work, SC TEACHER has adopted a unique structure for the survey instrument, focused on how and to what extent *demands* of teachers' experiences are balanced by *resources* on which professionals can draw to avoid burnout. The survey assesses a total of 11 areas: seven resources (factors that support teachers' professional practice, growth, and resilience when under pressure) and four demands (factors that add stress or pressure on teachers' practice and well-being).

The extent to which these resources and demands are balanced effectively produces two outcomes: job satisfaction and intention to stay in the classroom. Additionally, three areas of mentoring support for new teachers are also included (support for teaching, support outside of teaching, and proximity), as these factors are shown to link to effective induction and early career retention.

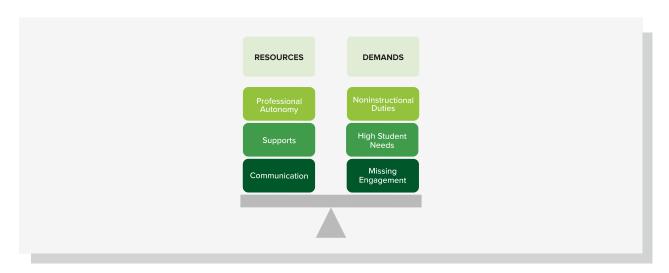


Figure 2. Balance of Conditions Leads to Teacher Satisfaction and Retention



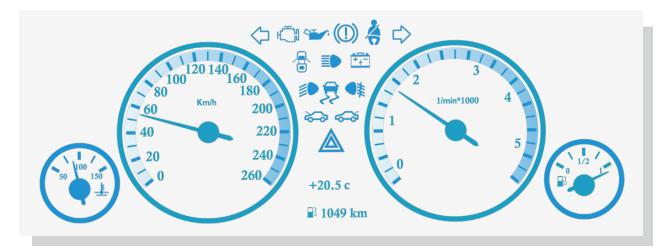
As you review data, you will see results reported in two ways: first by the broad areas of the resources and demands experienced by teachers, and then by the individual items giving a more detailed view of exactly what is within those areas. In both cases, data are presented on a 5-point scale (5 indicates very strong agreement that a resource is available or a demand is well addressed, 1 indicates very strong disagreement with such perspectives).



Also consider that higher numbers for an area or item suggest it is a strength for your district or school, and lower numbers signal opportunities for improvement. You will see language like *areas of strength and improvement* echoed throughout your data reports and this toolkit.

## Clarifying what the Results Are Not

SC TEACHER purposely refers to the presentation of your results as a "dashboard" and not a "report card." Surveys are designed to measure individuals' perceptions on one day, so they offer a snapshot in time—not a comprehensive and summative assessment. Like a dashboard in your vehicle, these results are intended to guide you in moving your school or district efficiently in your chosen direction. They will let you know, over time, how quickly you are progressing and how much fuel you have to keep going based on your areas of strength.



#### Figure 3. Data Dashboard

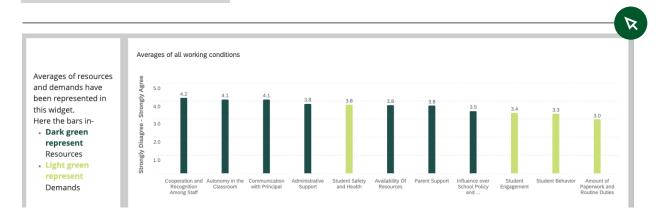
*Note:* Results are presented as a dashboard to convey that the data is intended to inform and guide the work of your team, not as a summative judgment.



## + ANALYZING YOUR RESULTS

Now that you understand more about the data overall, it is time to turn to your own results. This activity is one you can facilitate with your team during a standing meeting or strategy session in an hour or less.

- 1. In advance, ask each person to review the information in the early pages of this toolkit. Each person will then come with clear context for the survey and the conversation.
- 2. Locate the area in your dashboard that shows the averages of all working conditions (see image below).



#### AREAS OF STRENGTH - CONDITIONS AND SURVEY ITEMS

- 3. The conditions and survey items with the largest averages are the primary strengths and the ones with the smaller averages are opportunities for improvement. Conditions are the larger categories into which individual survey items are grouped.
- 4. Locate the two conditions that are primary strengths and enter them in Worksheet 2 that follows (i.e., student engagement and autonomy in the classroom).
- 5. Record the average value (1–5) for each of the conditions you listed.
- 6. Locate the section in your dashboard that shows your district's areas of strength and areas for improvement. The items listed here are **individual survey items**.



Areas of Strength	)	Areas for Improvement	
Areas of Strength - 10 highest rated items in your school/district		Areas for Improvement - 10 lowest rated items in your school/district	•••
Working Conditions	↓ Average	Working Conditions	↑ Average
You can rely on your colleagues if you need help.	4.34	You have adequate time to complete most of your job-related work (e.g., grading) at school.	2.79
Your principal has positive interactions with you.	4.23	You have adequate time to take care of your classroom (e.g., cleaning the	2.9
In your electroom, you are able to be creative in your teaching	A 91	classroom, sanitizing materials).	2.90

- 7. From the Areas of Strength, list the four survey items that show the greatest strength.
- 8. Record the average value (1–5) for each of the survey items you listed.

#### 9. Team reflection protocol: Think—Pair—Share

- a. Think: Each person on the team captures individual notes about the questions:
  - *i.* To what degree do your results align with what you anticipated would be your greatest areas of strength at both the condition and survey item level?
  - ii. What surprises did you encounter in the data?
- b. Pair: Team members pair up and share their responses with each other.
- c. Share: Pairs share takeaways from the conversations.
- d. Capture key takeaways in the worksheet.

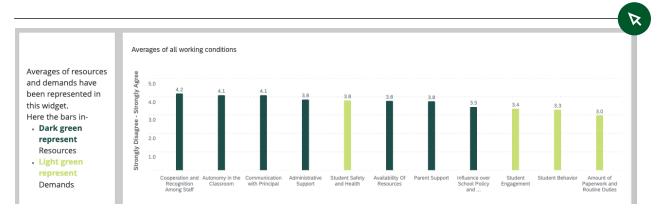
#### 10. Group discussion:

- a. What are your team's initial thoughts about district-level actions that may contribute to the areas of strength in conditions?
- b. What are your team's initial thoughts about district-level actions that may contribute to the areas of strength in survey items?

### WORKSHEET 2: AREAS OF STRENGTH

Conditions Signaling Areas of Strength	Average	Survey Items Signaling Areas of Strength	Average
To what degree do your re What surprises did you en	esults align with what you a counter in the data?	nticipated?	
Key takeaways:			
What are your team's init and survey items noted a		-level actions that may co	ntribute to the conditions
Contributors to areas of s			
Contributors to areas of s	trenath in survey items:		
	trengtr in survey items.		

#### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT – CONDITIONS AND SURVEY ITEMS**



- 1. Locate the two conditions that signal opportunities for improvement and enter them in Worksheet 3 that follows.
- 2. Record the average value (1–5) for each of the conditions you listed.
- 3. Locate the section in your dashboard that shows your district's areas of strength and areas for improvement. The items listed here are **individual survey items**.

Areas of Strength		Areas for Improvement	
Areas of Strength - 10 highest rated items in your school/district		Areas for Improvement - 10 lowest rated items in your school/district	
Working Conditions	↓ Average	Working Conditions	↑ Average
You can rely on your colleagues if you need help.	4.34	You have adequate time to complete most of your job-related work (e.g., grading) at school.	2.79
Your principal has positive interactions with you.	4.23	Marchania adamata dina katala ana afanna dananan fa a adaminada	

- 4. From the Areas for Improvement, list the four survey items that show the greatest opportunity for improvement.
- 5. Record the average value (1–5) for each of the survey items you listed.
- 6. Team reflection protocol: Think—Pair—Share
  - a. Think: Each person on the team captures individual notes about the questions:
    - *i.* To what degree do your results align with what you anticipated would be your greatest opportunities for improvement at both the condition and survey item level?
    - ii. What surprises did you encounter in the data?
  - b. Pair: Team members pair up and share their responses with each other.
  - c. Share: Pairs share takeaways from the conversations.
  - d. Capture key takeaways in the worksheet.
- 7. Group discussion:
  - a. What are your team's initial thoughts about district-level actions that may contribute to the opportunities for improvement in conditions?
  - b. What are your team's initial thoughts about district-level actions that may contribute to opportunities for improvement in survey items?

#### WORKSHEET 3: OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Conditions Signaling Opportunities for Improvement	Average	Survey Items Signaling Opportunities for Improvement	Average
To what degree do your re What surprises did you en	esults align with what you a counter in the data?	nticipated?	
Key takeaways:			
What are your team's init and survey items noted a		-level actions that may co	ntribute to the conditions
Contributors to opportuni	ties for improvement in co	nditions:	
Contributors to opportuni	ties for improvement in sur	vey items:	

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### **Use Resources to Effectively Meet Demands**

As mentioned earlier, the working conditions in the survey were broken down into two subcategories: demands and resources. Job demands refer to the "physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects that require sustained physical and/or psychological effort. In the teaching context, demands encountered by teachers may be low levels of student engagement, student misbehavior, or lack of collegial relationships" (Starrett et al., 2023). Job resources, in contrast, are those things that help teachers meet those demands in various ways.

When there is a balance between demands and resources, teachers can effectively fulfill their responsibilities. However, a lack of resources compared to the level of daily demands teachers encounter leads to stress, burnout, and attrition. (Harmsen et al., 2018). In other words, the extent of demands that teachers experience is not inherently "bad" or "good" for teacher efficacy and retention. It is the extent to which teachers experience access to supportive resources that are sufficient to meet those demands that makes a difference.

This is why SC TEACHER and its partners recommend an asset-based approach in your work with these data: thinking about how you leverage areas of strength in service of identified educator needs is what has the potential to positively change teachers' experiences. In doing so, your school and district can improve your results and retention accordingly over time. In the next set of tools, we will take a closer look at the items within your district's areas of strength and improvement. Your team may find this information useful as you determine how to leverage demonstrated strength to support areas of improvement. This activity—like the preceding one—is designed to be embedded in an existing meeting with a team responsible for school or district improvement. Because you will work with specific items rather than broader groups or areas of school conditions, this activity gives you a more precise way to examine patterns in your data and consider related action steps.

#### FOCUSING ON AREAS OF STRENGTH

- 1. On the Overview page in your dashboard, note that resources are indicated by the black bars. Demands are indicated by the light green bars. Review the conditions that sort to the top as areas of strength. How many are resources and how many are demands? What might this imply about the balance in your district or school?
- 2. Record the condition listed first on the table. This is your top area of strength.
- 3. Go to the page that has your district's top area of strength. This is listed in either the "Resources" or "Demands" section of your report.
- 4. In Worksheet 4, list the survey items from your top area of strength.
- 5. With your team, discuss the following and capture notes in Worksheet 4:
  - a. What district practices may have contributed to strength for each of the items?
  - b. What district *policies* may have contributed to strength for each of the items?
- 6. For each column (Contributing Practices and Contributing Policies), highlight words or phrases that show connections among items using different colors for different connections.
- 7. Team discussion protocol:
  - a. Create role-alike groups and discuss the following questions, capturing notes on chart paper:
    - *i.* What patterns do we see in the items from our condition with the greatest strength?
    - ii. What patterns do we see in the highlighting of practices and/or policies?



- *iii.* How might item(s) in the areas of strength be leveraged to address opportunities for improvement?
- *iv.* To what degree might the practices and policies associated with the item(s) be leveraged to address opportunities for improvement?
- b. Each role-alike group shares the notes they captured with the whole group. As role-alike groups share, the rest of the team is listening for commonalities across roles.
- c. Hold a whole group debrief: Across role-alike groups, what are some commonalities in ideas for leveraging areas of strength?
- d. Use Worksheet 4 to enter notes on the compiled conclusions and insights.

#### WORKSHEET 4: PATTERNS IN PRACTICES AND POLICIES FOR AREAS OF STRENGTH

Your district's top area of strength	:	
Items Within Your Top Areas of Strength	Contributing Practices	Contributing Policies
What patterns do you see in your	top strengths?	
What patterns do you see in the p	practices and/or policies related to	those items?
How might the patterns you see in	the strengths be leveraged to addre	ss opportunities for improvement?



#### 8. Analyze all notes captured in the previous sections.

- a. Analysis questions (enter your team's responses in Worksheet 5):
  - *i.* What is your team's theory about the district actions that contribute to the items that signal your top strength?
  - *ii.* How and to what extent does the evidence in the coding exercise (Worksheet 4) confirm or refute your team's theory?
  - *iii.* What **practices** or **policies** most likely contributed to your greatest strengths? What of those practices and policies are applied across your district?
  - *iv.* Where and with whom does expertise lie in those areas of strength?
  - v. What support or action might be needed to broaden the sphere of influence of those strengths?

#### WORKSHEET 5: THEORY ABOUT AREAS OF STRENGTH

Theory:		
What evidence confirms or refutes your team's theory?		
Practices and Policies	Expertise	Support or Actions



#### EXPLORING AN OPPORTUNITY FOR IMPROVEMENT

- 1. From the Overview page in your dashboard, locate the condition listed last. This is likely your most opportune area for improvement. Is it a resource or a demand? Resources are indicated by the black bars. Demands are indicated by the light green bars.
- 2. Record the most opportune area for improvement in Worksheet 6.
- 3. Go to the page that has your district's most opportune area for improvement. This is listed in either the "Resources" or "Demands" section of your report.
- 4. In Worksheet 6, list the survey items from your district's most opportune area for improvement.
- 5. With your team, discuss the following and capture notes in Worksheet 6:
  - a. What district practices may have contributed to the improvement needs related to each of the items?
  - b. What district *policies* may have contributed to improvement needs related to each of the items?
  - c. What other contributing factors may be at play for each item signaling the greatest improvement opportunity?
- 6. For each column (Contributing Practices and Contributing Policies), highlight words or phrases that show connections among items. Use different colors for different connections.
- 7. Team discussion protocol:
  - a. Create role-alike groups and discuss the following questions, capturing notes on chart paper:
    - *i.* What patterns do we see in the items from our most opportune area for improvement?
    - *ii.* What patterns do we see in the highlighting of practices, policies, and/or other contributing factors?
    - iii. How might item(s) in the Areas of Strength be leveraged to address needs for improvement?
    - *iv.* To what degree might the practices and policies associated with the item(s) be leveraged to address needs for improvement?
  - b. Each role-alike group shares the notes they captured with the whole group. As role-alike groups share, the rest of the team is listening for commonalities across roles.
  - c. Whole group debrief: Across our role-alike groups, what commonalities do we hear for ideas on leveraging areas of strength to address needs for improvement?
  - d. Enter insights in Worksheet 6.



#### WORKSHEET 6: PATTERNS IN PRACTICES AND POLICIES FOR OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Your district's most opportune area for improvement:			
Items Within Your Most Opportune Area for Improvement	Contributing Practices	Contributing Policies	Other Contributing Factors
What patterns do you see	e in the items from your m	ost opportune area for imp	provement?
What patterns do you see in the practices, policies, and/or other contributing factors related to the items in your improvement area?			
How might the patterns you see in areas of strength be leveraged to address this opportunity for improvement?			



#### 8. Analyze the items and the notes from Worksheet 6.

- a. Analysis questions (enter your team's responses in Worksheet 7):
  - *i.* What is your team's theory about why these items are most in need of improvement?
  - *ii.* How and to what extent does the evidence in the previous coding exercise (Worksheet 6) confirm or refute your team's theory?
  - *iii.* What **practices** or **policies** from your areas of strength could be applied to your most opportune area for improvement?
  - iv. Where and with whom does expertise lie in those areas of strength?
  - v. What would need to happen to be able to apply areas of strength to your most opportune area for improvement?

#### WORKSHEET 7: THEORY ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Theory:		
What evidence confirms or refutes your team's theory?		
Practices or Policies	Expertise	Application of Strength



### **Consider Additional Information**

Results from the statewide survey indicated that the three areas of teacher working conditions with the largest correlations to teachers' decisions to remain in the classroom were **administrative support**, **influence over school policy issues**, and most of all the **amount of time available to complete their work duties** (Starrett et al., 2023).

In addition, "[t]eachers' influence on school policy, available resources, and classroom autonomy all appear to play a significant role in how teachers rated the difference they make in students' lives" (Starrett et al., 2023). The combination of influence on remaining in the profession and perceived impact on students' lives makes selecting a focus on the associated conditions worth consideration.

With the above information in mind, your team may want to pay particular attention to your district's results related to Administrative Support and/or Influence Over Policymaking. As you move on to the next section, you are invited to consider the degree to which your team will emphasize these two conditions given their impact on teachers' decisions to remain in the profession.



## + SELECTING A FOCUS AREA

Now that your team has taken a close look at your district's top areas of strength and most opportune area for improvement, it is time to identify focus areas for your team's working condition improvement efforts. Your team may choose to focus at either the condition or survey item level. Keep in mind the more focused your improvement efforts are, the more quickly you are likely to see results. Complete Worksheet 8 by identifying your district's areas of strength, the most opportune area for improvement on which you will focus, and information about the practices and policies that can be leveraged for continuous improvement.

## WORKSHEET 8: FOCUS AREA

	Area of Strength	Opportunity for Improvement
Condition		
Survey Items		
Practices that can be leveraged for continuous improvement		
Policies that can be leveraged for continuous improvement		



## + CONNECTING WITH CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

The data your team has gathered and analyzed from the SCTWCS are likely to provide insights about district improvement efforts already in progress. Your team is strongly encouraged to integrate efforts related to these data with ongoing improvement efforts, rather than adding another initiative to address.

Use the prompts below to host a discussion with your team about the ways in which information garnered from the SCTWCS can be integrated into district continuous improvement efforts.

## WORKSHEET 9: CONNECT WITH CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS

Discussion Prompt	Notes
Where might data related to working conditions already be reflected in our district continuous improvement processes? Which goal and/or strategy includes the related information?	
Which goals and strategies within our continuous improvement efforts are informed or impacted by teacher working conditions?	
How might information from the working conditions strengths and improvement items inform current district continuous improvement work?	
How might our team integrate the SCTWCS information into what is already being done through our district continuous improvement efforts?	
How might this information guide practice and policy related to support and evaluation of school- or district-level leaders?	
What district-level practices might be contributing to challenges? How might those practices shift in order to improve working conditions?	
What district-level policies might be contributing to challenges? To what degree can those policies be shifted to improve working conditions?	



## + MOVING TOWARD ACTION

Now that you've considered the areas of strength, opportunities for improvement, and district improvement efforts already under way, your team will develop plans for initiating actions to improve a working condition within your district. This plan is intended for use by **your team**, NOT to be handed over to schools to implement. Consider the role *you and your team* play in creating and supporting working conditions for teachers. School teams can use the school-level toolkit to extend and deepen the work within their own buildings in alignment with the district's efforts.

## **Identify a Priority of Practice**

Using the information gathered from the data analysis thus far, your team has selected an area on which to focus improvement efforts. As your team identifies a priority of practice for the focus area, be sure to take into consideration the continuous improvement efforts already in progress in your district. While there may be more than one condition that your team would like to address, we strongly encourage you to start with a small, very focused area that aligns with the criteria listed below. This may include focusing on specific areas or items within a condition rather than all aspects of a condition.

Make sure that the area of focus meets these criteria:

- lives within your locus of control;
- focuses on practice for which the adults in the district are responsible;
- addresses an underlying challenge that, if improved, has the potential to improve a number of circumstances; and
- is actionable through inquiry.

Use Worksheet 10 to check alignment with the criteria above.

## WORKSHEET 10: IDENTIFYING A PRIORITY OF PRACTICE

Priority of Practice:

Criteria to check against:	Explanation of how the area of focus meets criteria:
How is this area of focus within your locus of control?	
What and whose practice is being addressed?	
What makes this an underlying challenge?	
In what ways can this be actionable through inquiry?	

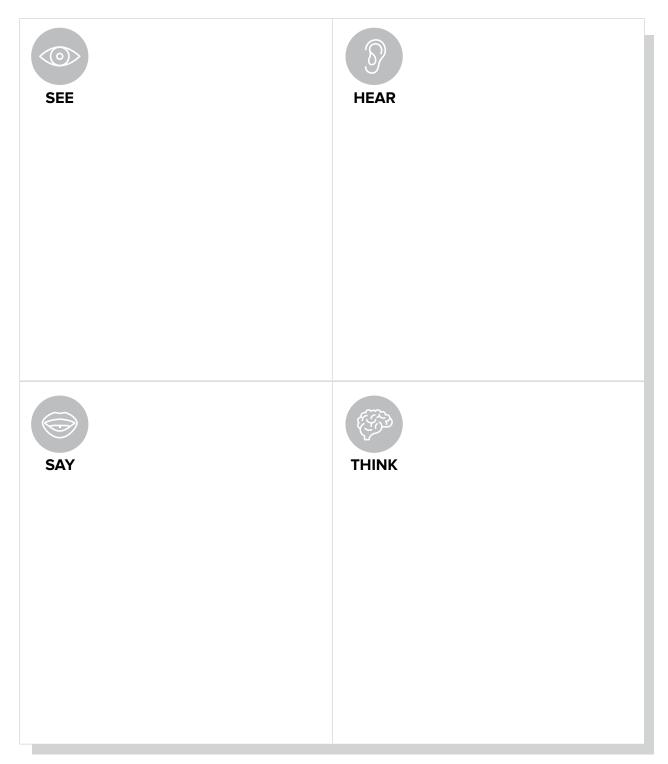


## Set the Vision for Success

Use Worksheet 11 to gain clarity about the end state of the action steps.

#### WORKSHEET 11: SETTING THE VISION FOR SUCCESS

When our team's priority focus on teacher working conditions is resolved, here is what we all would:





## **Identify Actionable Next Steps**

Now that your team has identified a data-informed area of focus, identify **three actionable next steps** to take that will begin the process of improvement within your district. Identify a person who will be responsible for ensuring that the identified action steps are taken. Finally, identify the next date and time for your team to convene (or check in asynchronously) to discuss progress.

Worksheet 12 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 may wish to engage in the effort.

Priority of Practice:			
Action Steps	Person Facilitating Efforts	Status (Not Started, In Progress, Launched)	Notes on Impact and Learning
Next Meeting:			
Hereing.			

#### WORKSHEET 12: NEXT STEPS

#### **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.

# References

- Harmsen, R., Helms-Lorenz, M., Maulana, R., & Van Veen, K. (2018). The relationship between beginning teachers' stress causes, stress responses, teaching behaviour and attrition. *Teachers and Teaching*, 24(6), 626-643.
- Starrett, A., Barth, S., Gao, R., DiStefano, C., Liu, J., & Go, J., & Lewis, A (2023). 2023 South Carolina teacher working conditions survey. SC TEACHER. https://sc-teacher.org/documents/teacher-working-conditions/

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