

Introduction

This report summarizes select results for items pertaining to Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), teacher collaboration, instructional practice, and teacher planning from the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (Tell) AISD Working Conditions and the 2011-2012 Employee Coordinated (ECS) surveys. Both surveys are conducted annually by the Department of Research and Evaluation (DRE); TELL AISD is administered to all teachers and the ECS is administered to a representative samples of teachers to achieve a 95% level of confidence. In the tables and figures that follow, item results are presented as the percentage of respondents selecting each of the response choices provided, unless otherwise noted.

Time

In 2011-2012, the majority of participants did not agree that class sizes allow teachers to meet the needs of all students, and agreement declined from 2010-2011. Additionally, less than two-thirds of participants agreed that they had time for collaboration or that non-instructional time for teachers was sufficient. Middle school teachers reported the largest declines across all time related indicators. Results from the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 TELL survey “time” related items are presented in Table 1.

“[Planning time] need varies for added requirements from campus or district. Dedicated teachers use their personal time to complete work, taking it home if necessary and coming to campus on weekends if needed.”

— Elementary school teacher

Table 1. Percentage of Respondents Who Agree/Strongly Agree with Each Statement About the Use of Time at Their School

	Elementary			Middle			High		
	2011	2012	Δ	2011	2012	Δ	2011	2012	Δ
Class sizes are reasonable such that teachers have the time available to meet the needs of all students.	57%	45%	-13	50%	31%	-19	49%	42%	-7
Teachers have time available to collaborate with colleagues.	56%	54%	-2	66%	54%	-13	69%	70%	2
The non instructional time provided for teachers in my school is sufficient.	42%	41%	-1	54%	45%	-9	53%	58%	4
School leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns over “the use of time in my school”	77%	76%	-1	69%	59%	-10	68%	71%	2

Source. TELL AISD Working Conditions Survey, 2012-2011 and 2011-2012

Note. Highlighted cells indicate declines of 5 percentage points or greater.

Professional Learning Communities

The questions in Table 2 were included on the 2011-2012 ECS to assess who participates in PLCs and when. The results suggest a majority of teachers participated in one or two PLCs. Secondary teachers were most likely to use their common planning periods for PLC meetings, while the majority of elementary teachers indicated meeting with their PLCs after school. Teachers from all three school levels indicated their PLCs primarily consisted of entire grade-level or department team members, with slightly higher levels of participation by administrators, instructional coaches, and specialists at the high school level.

“Our PLC meets and we divide the necessary tasks up. We spend a great deal of time discussing instruction, reviewing data, working on assessments. A daily planning period works great.”

— High school teacher

Table 2. Results for Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

		Elementary (n= 328)	Middle (n= 125)	High (n= 159)
How many Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) do you participate in?	None	12%	8%	3%
	One	39%	36%	36%
	Two	31%	27%	38%
	Three or more	17%	29%	23%
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When do you meet with your PLC (s)? Check all that apply.	Before school	3%	9%	31%
	Late start days	1%	1%	66%
	During common planning periods	41%	71%	69%
	Other times (not planning periods) during the school day	16%	19%	34%
	After school	77%	50%	30%
	Other	14%	12%	13%
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Who is part of your PLC(s)? Check all that apply.	My entire grade level/department team	75%	78%	86%
	Teachers who are not part of my grade level/department team	46%	33%	27%
	Instructional coach/specialist(s)	23%	31%	34%
	Counselor(s)	8%	17%	11%
	Administrator(s)	29%	29%	35%
	Other(s)	20%	18%	13%

Source. Employee Coordinated Survey, 2011-2012

Collaboration and Instructional Practice

Table 3 reports results for items included on the TELL survey that pertain to PLC participation while specifically addressing teacher collaboration with regards to instructional practice and planning. Most teachers at all school levels reported favorable conditions for PLCs in their schools, and ratings remained stable or improved from those in 2011. The results suggest that teachers most frequently engage in collaborative activities to discuss and plan for individual student needs, while participating less in activities that promote knowledge transfer of campus-wide teaching practices. ECS results further suggest 24% to 31% of teachers at each level are not satisfied with their opportunities for teacher to teacher collaboration, which may help explain the limited awareness of other teachers' practices (Figure 1).

"... my primary and secondary planning periods do give me most of the time I need. I still come to work early and leave late most days to continue planning or grading, but having the planning periods during the day is invaluable time for meeting with my colleagues and addressing student needs."

— High school teacher

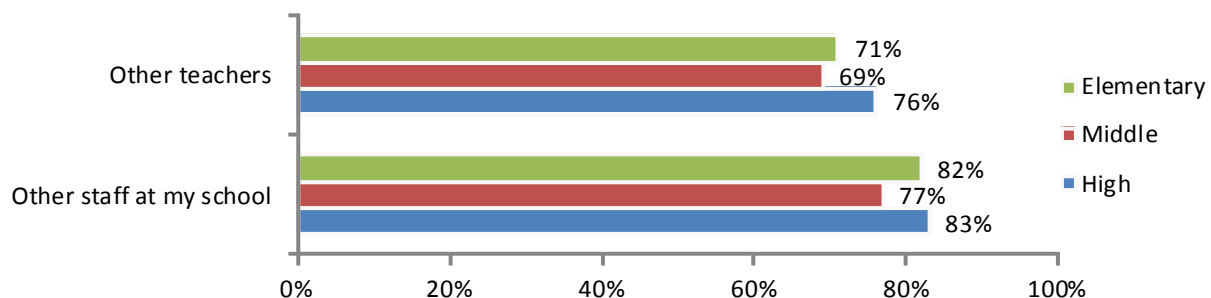
Table 3. Percentage of Teachers Who Agree/Strongly Agree with Each Statement About Instructional Practice and Planning

	ES			MS			HS		
	2011	2012	Δ	2011	2012	Δ	2011	2012	Δ
I have detailed knowledge of the content covered and instructional methods used by other teachers at this school.	69%	75%	6	70%	72%	2	68%	72%	4
I participate with a group of my campus colleagues to analyze student performance data.	86%	89%	3	81%	85%	4	82%	86%	4
I participate with a group of my campus colleagues to discuss ways to meet objectives for specific students.	87%	91%	4	88%	86%	-2	80%	86%	6
I participate with a group of my campus colleagues to plan lessons and units together.	89%	88%	-1	79%	82%	3	81%	85%	4
I participate with a group of my campus colleagues to develop common student assessments.	85%	83%	-2	76%	79%	3	83%	84%	1

Source. TELL AISD Working Conditions Survey, 2012-2011 and 2011-2012

Note. Professional Learning Communities items were administered to teachers only.

Figure 1. Percentage of Teachers Who Are Satisfied or Very Satisfied with Their Opportunity for Collaboration with Other Teachers and Other Staff at Their School



Source. Employee Coordinated Survey, 2011-2012

Nearly half of all teachers reported collaborating with other educators at least twice a month to examine data in relation to the learning needs of students (Table 4). Teachers additionally reported favorable ratings for items related to school level instructional practices and supports (Table 5). The results suggest wide-spread PLC participation and collaborative instructional planning. Eighty percent of all respondents agreed that instructional supports (i.e., instructional coaching, professional learning communities, etc.) have lead to improvements in instructional practice.

“Once a week, our grade level team is required to meet with our administrator during our planning time to discuss results of assessments given weekly.”
 — Elementary school teacher

Table 4. Percentage of Teachers Who Use Data in the Following Ways

	Once a week/ Twice a month			Once a month / Once every two months			Once a year/ Once every semester		
	EL	MS	HS	EL	MS	HS	EL	MS	HS
Comparing test scores for your class across academic years (e.g., how 5th grade class as a whole performed in 3rd and 4th grade).	10%	14%	11%	22%	21%	24%	68%	65%	66%
Examining current year benchmark scores to create classroom instructional groups.	22%	26%	13%	41%	37%	35%	36%	37%	52%
Examining data to identify students in need of intervention.	54%	51%	43%	31%	31%	34%	15%	18%	23%
Collaborating with other educators about data and how it relates to the learning needs of students.	51%	47%	43%	28%	31%	31%	21%	23%	26%

Source. Employee Coordinated Survey, 2011-2012

Note. The original categories were collapsed for ease of interpretation.

Table 5. Percentage of Respondents Who Agree/Strongly Agree with Each Statement About Instructional Practices and Support in Their School

	ES			MS			HS		
	2011	2012	Δ	2011	2012	Δ	2011	2012	Δ
State and local assessment data are available in time to impact instructional practices	90%	90%	-	88%	82%	-6	83%	81%	-2
Teachers in this school use assessment data to inform their instruction.	98%	98%	-	97%	96%	-1	93%	94%	1
Teachers work in professional learning communities to develop and align instructional practices.	92%	93%	1	93%	93%	-	94%	94%	-
Provided supports (i.e. instructional coaching, professional learning communities, etc.) translate to improvements in instructional practices by teachers	87%	88%	1	84%	84%	-	83%	88%	5

Source. TELL AISD Working Conditions Survey, 2012-2011 and 2011-2012

An additional series of items included on the Employee Coordinated Survey asked teachers to indicate the frequency with which they collaborate with other department/team members for various instructional purposes. The majority of respondents reported “often” to “frequent” collaboration across all activities (Table 6). Department/team discussions of professional development needs, support for new teachers, and grouping of students across classes were activities engaged in least frequently, while collaborative lesson planning, improving teaching practice, and sharing of instructional strategies were reported most frequently.

“There isn't enough time due to all the changes and forms that we have to complete. I would like to have more time for data assimilation that correlates with my lesson plans.”
 — Middle school teacher

Table 6. Percentage of Teachers Who Use the Following Instructional Practice Strategies

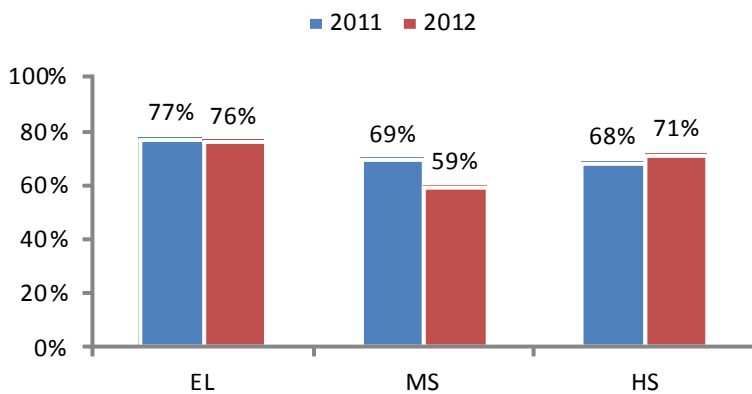
	Frequently			Often			Sometimes			Rarely		
	EL	MS	HS	EL	MS	HS	EL	MS	HS	EL	MS	HS
How often do you seek out collaboration with other teachers to improve a lesson plan that did not go well?	38%	33%	35%	39%	48%	35%	19%	14%	25%	4%	5%	4%
How often do you work with other teachers to improve your teaching even when it is going well?	39%	33%	27%	40%	47%	42%	17%	14%	24%	5%	6%	7%
How often does your department/team discuss your department/team's professional development needs and goals?	29%	24%	26%	32%	27%	36%	24%	26%	26%	15%	23%	12%
How often does your department/team discuss assessment data for individual students?	33%	21%	25%	38%	32%	37%	22%	32%	23%	7%	16%	15%
How often does your department/team set learning goals for groups of students?	33%	26%	20%	38%	34%	43%	21%	15%	23%	8%	26%	14%
How often does your department/team group students across classes based on learning needs?	28%	23%	18%	35%	32%	36%	19%	20%	22%	18%	25%	24%
How often does your department/team provide support for new teachers?	32%	27%	24%	42%	34%	41%	18%	21%	27%	8%	18%	9%
How often does your department/team provide support for struggling teachers?	27%	24%	21%	39%	33%	38%	24%	21%	27%	10%	22%	15%
How often does your department/team share instructional strategies?	35%	30%	30%	41%	34%	42%	19%	19%	20%	5%	17%	8%

Source. Employee Coordinated Survey, 2011-2012

Planning Time

Additional TELL AISD and ECS item responses suggest that the high level of PLC participation and collaborative planning may be placing pressure on teachers' non-instructional time when considered in addition to other day to responsibilities and meetings teachers must attend. TELL AISD survey items assessing teachers' perceptions of their school leadership's sustained efforts to address teacher concerns revealed the lowest levels of agreement among teachers when it involved the issue of time.

Figure 2. Percentage of Respondents who Agree/Strongly Agree that, "School leadership makes a sustained effort to address the use of time in my school."



"It [planning time] doesn't matter if the time is usurped. The time we have would be plenty if we were allowed to use it."

— High school teacher

"225 [minutes] would be adequate if it were respected by administrators and could be dedicated to planning."

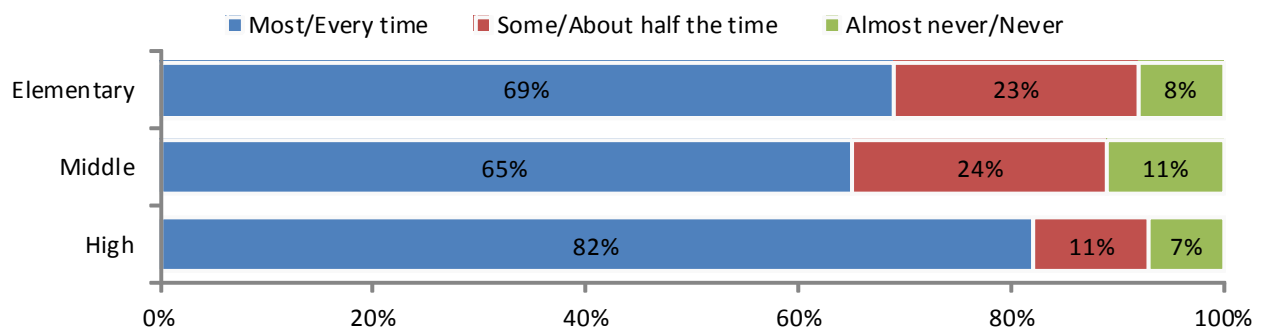
— Elementary school teacher

Source. TELL AISD Working Conditions Survey, 2012-2011 and 2011-2012

Primary Planning Period Use

Five items were included on the ECS to gather feedback from teachers regarding their use of in-school planning periods. The majority of respondents indicated using their primary planning period for their own work most of the time or every time (Figure 3). Although secondary teachers receive two daily planning periods in contrast to one at the elementary level, 4% fewer middle school teachers than elementary teachers reported using their first planning period for their own work every time or most of the time. Additionally 17% fewer middle school teachers reported using their primary planning period for their own work every time or most of the time than high school teachers.

Figure 3. Percentage of Teachers Who Use Their Primary Planning Period for Their Own Work.



Source. Employee Coordinated Survey, 2011-2012

Note. The original categories were collapsed for ease of interpretation.

Second Planning Period Use

The majority of teachers at the secondary level indicated using their second planning period for grading assignments or reviewing students' work, and for individual lesson planning weekly or every other week (Table 7). High school teachers reported more frequent use of their second planning period for required professional development activities, while middle school teachers indicated higher frequencies of PLC meetings, parent and/or student conferences, and grade-level or department meetings during their second planning period. The higher usage of second planning periods for various activities suggests that middle school teachers may have greater demands on their planning time than do high school teachers and helps explain the less frequent use of planning time for their own work (Figure 3).

"[Two] planning periods is only enough for PLC meetings, parent/student conferences, and making copies. most of planning, grading, etc. must be done after hours and/or weekends."

— Middle school teacher

Table 7. Percentage of Teachers Who Engage in the Following Activities During Their Second Planning Period

	Weekly/ Every other week		Monthly/ 2 or 3 times per semester		1 to 3 times per year		Never	
	MS	HS	MS	HS	MS	HS	MS	HS
Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings	73%	65%	10%	16%	3%	5%	14%	14%
Grade-level and department team meetings	68%	57%	18%	20%	5%	8%	10%	16%
Required professional development activities	15%	34%	52%	37%	17%	16%	16%	13%
Parent conferences	39%	21%	50%	55%	5%	15%	7%	9%
Student conferences	50%	42%	37%	31%	4%	13%	9%	15%
Individual lesson planning	82%	79%	11%	13%	1%	3%	5%	5%
Grading assignments and reviewing student work	81%	79%	10%	11%	1%	1%	8%	8%
Other	78%	75%	6%	11%	3%	1%	13%	12%

Source. Employee Coordinated Survey, 2011-2012

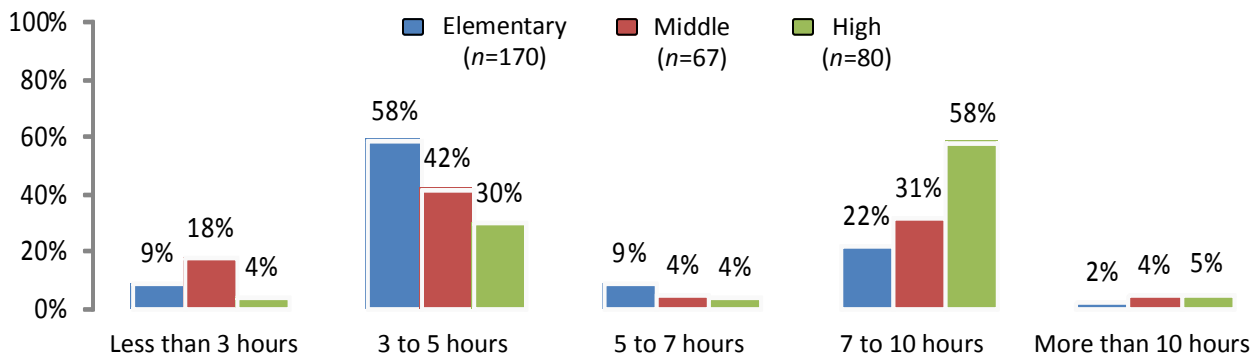
Note. The original categories were collapsed for ease of interpretation.

Elementary teachers do not have a second planning period and were therefore excluded from Table 7.

Teachers also indicated the amount of scheduled planning time they felt was sufficient each week (Figure 4). High school teachers reported their time needs were greater than those of both elementary and middle school teachers. The majority of teachers indicated that 10 or fewer hours per week were sufficient.¹ Means and standard deviations of responses for different teacher categories can be found in Table 8. High school teachers, particularly special education teachers, reported a need for the greatest amount of scheduled planning time.

"I have 450 minutes of non-teaching time per week. Of that, 315 minutes have a scheduled meeting. That leaves 135 minutes a week for my own time to grade, make copies... and no, 2.25 hours a week for that is not sufficient."
 — Middle school teacher

Figure 4. Amount of Weekly Hours of Planning Time Reported as Sufficient, by Level



Source. Employee Coordinated Survey, 2011-2012

Table 8. Average Weekly Hours of Planning Time Reported as Sufficient, by Teacher Type

	Elementary			Middle			High		
	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD
All teachers	177	5.5	2.3	66	5.6	3.4	82	7.0	3.7
Special education	18	5.8	2.0	9	6.4	2.5	10	8.6	2.7
Bilingual/English as a second language	107	5.2	2.1	—	—	—	—	—	—
Other general education teachers	52	6.0	2.0	54	5.5	3.6	69	6.9	3.8
Novice*	20	5.0	2.9	12	4.7	2.6	9	6.1	2.9
Non-novice	157	5.6	2.3	54	5.8	3.6	73	7.1	3.8

Source. Employee Coordinated Survey, 2011-2012

* Indicates teachers with less than 3 years of teaching experience.

— Middle and high school bilingual/ESL results were masked due to small cell sizes.

¹ Responses indicating 90 minutes or less without specifically stating “daily” or “weekly (n=66) and responses not provided a value of time (n=48) were excluded from the analyses in Figure 4 and Table 8. In cases where respondents indicated a range of time (n=15), the average of the range provided was used to determine a single value.

How many minutes of scheduled planning time per week are sufficient ? (Additional Comments)

About 30% of teachers (n=128) provided non-numeric or additional responses to the question “How many minutes of scheduled planning time per week are sufficient?” These comments highlighted a variety of impressions and concerns, and some suggested that differences in perceived planning needs may be explained by school level work conditions, teaching area, teaching experience, or a combination thereof. Although the mean responses for each group reported in Table 8 do not reveal any large differences in responses given by teachers of different types, further inquiry into the differences observed between school levels and within teacher groups may be warranted to help identify and target support for teachers susceptible to work overloads.

Summaries of the most frequently cited themes are presented in Table 9. Seventeen percent of teachers (n=22) indicated that they did have sufficient time, while 57% (n=73) claimed current planning time to be insufficient. Thirty-eight percent of teachers specifically mentioned interruptions and other uses of planning time as reasons for insufficient time. The most frequently reported disruptions to planning included meetings, paperwork, district and campus administrative requirements, and other school duties and responsibilities. Overall, 27% of teachers who wrote comments indicated regularly working extended hours before or after school, at home, and on weekends, due to insufficient planning time during the school day. Ten percent of teachers responded that planning time adequacy depended on the time of the school year, changes in campus or district requirements, or scope of the work expected to be completed during planning periods. Several teachers indicated an unclear understanding of the work expected to be completed during their planning time. Improved communication at the campus and district level may help teachers more clearly understand the intended purpose and variety of work expected to be completed during official planning times, while providing a more precise benchmark from which to assess planning time sufficiency.

Table 9. Summary of Other Written Responses to Sufficient Planning Time Question

	Elementary (n=68)		Middle (n=27)		High (n=33)		Total (n=128)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Current planning time is sufficient	5	7%	8	30%	9	27%	22	17%
Current planning time is insufficient	40	59%	14	52%	19	58%	73	57%
Regularly work after school/work at home	19	28%	5	19%	10	30%	34	27%
Other use of planning time	14	21%	8	30%	6	18%	28	22%
Interruptions	11	16%	6	22%	4	12%	21	16%
Meetings	5	7%	4	15%	1	3%	10	8%
Paperwork	4	6%	4	15%	1	3%	9	7%
District/Campus requirements	6	9%	1	4%	1	3%	8	6%

Source. Employee Coordinated Survey, 2011-2012

Note. The categories are not mutually exclusive.

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