



## New Teacher Staffing and Comprehensive Middle School Reform: Philadelphia's Experience

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study examines the problem of teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention in the context of schoolwide reform in seven of Philadelphia's 42 middle schools. The seven schools are implementing the Talent Development Middle School model of Johns Hopkins University's Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR), one of the most promising national designs for urban middle school reform. Philadelphia's Central East Middle School piloted the model in the mid-1990s, and it has since been adopted by Strawberry Mansion, Clemente, Cooke, Beeber, Shoemaker, and Roosevelt middle schools. The Philadelphia Education Fund, a non-profit education reform organization, is the regional partner in the initiative.

In February and March of 2000, I interviewed all of the 60 teachers (excluding those in art, music and physical education) who were new to the District in those seven schools for the 1999-2000 school year.

#### **Key findings:**

- 65 percent of the new teachers held an elementary certificate (grades K-6); 8 percent had a secondary credential (grades 7-12); and 27 percent were Apprentice teachers with an emergency credential, two thirds of whom were studying for an elementary certificate.
- Only 14 percent of the new teachers had done their student teaching in the seventh or eighth grade; 74 percent student taught in grades K-5.
- A mere 6 of the 60 teachers (10 percent) said they preferred to teach in the middle grades more than any other school level.
- Only 10-17 percent (depending on the field) were well qualified to teach in the subject areas to which they had been assigned, meaning they had a college major or minor or at least four academic courses in that area. More than a third appeared to be poorly prepared (as high as 42 percent in Reading/English Language Arts) for teaching in their subject area.
- 80 percent of the new teachers received in-classroom assistance from Talent Development curriculum coaches and/or attended a workshop series or courses in one or more curriculum areas run by the Talent Development program. Their appraisals of this support were highly favorable.

- New teachers who had received curriculum coaching and/or who had attended Talent Development workshops and courses were far more likely to say they would like to stay in their current school, at least for the short term.
- 63 percent of the new teachers said they wanted to return to the School District of Philadelphia the following year but only 40 percent said they definitely wanted to return to their current school. Two thirds said they would leave the District within the next five years if they got an acceptable offer elsewhere and another 22 percent said they might do so. Only 12 percent said they were committed to staying.
- New teachers' reasons for considering leaving the District included (in order): the residency requirement (cited by 50%); difficulties with classroom discipline and/or school climate; the low salary structure; the lack of materials and supplies; lack of administrative support; and other financial issues (wage tax, car insurance costs, etc.).

In sum, data from these interviews confirm the long-held belief in Philadelphia that teachers assigned to middle schools are disappointed in their placement and under-qualified for their jobs. They appreciate the support they get from the Talent Development program and their participation in that training increased their commitment to staying at the school. However, the District's requirement that they move into the city within three years of employment along with concerns about salary, discipline, supplies, and other factors prompt large numbers of them to consider employment elsewhere.

## **Recommendations**

In order for middle schools to have qualified and stable staffs, change must occur at four levels:

- **Pennsylvania** must implement and enforce more stringent certification requirements for middle grades teachers, fund the District at a more reasonable level, and enact financial or other incentives to encourage teachers to instruct in high-need schools.
- **The School District of Philadelphia** should eliminate the residency requirement, allow greater control by schools in the hiring of teachers, and provide incentives of various kinds to attract and retain qualified teachers in high-poverty middle schools.
- **Principals** and other school leaders need to implement meaningful induction programs for new teachers, require new teachers to participate in school-day on-site training programs if they are available, and limit a teacher's number of subject areas and grade levels in order to develop their subject-matter expertise in one or two content fields.
- **Colleges and universities** in the Philadelphia area need to undertake aggressive efforts to recruit a higher proportion of students into teaching at the seventh and eighth grade levels, and to develop high quality teacher preparation programs specifically designed for that level.