

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

Elizabeth Useem

Philadelphia Education Fund

7 Benjamin Franklin Parkway
Suite 700
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215-665-1400 x 3323
<buseem@philaedfund.org>

Paper presented at the
American Educational Research Association
Annual Meeting
Seattle
April 2001

This paper is available on the website of the Philadelphia Education Fund at
www.philaedfund.org

Abstract

This study examines the problem of teacher recruitment, preparation, and retention in the context of schoolwide reform in seven of Philadelphia's 43 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 improvement. Data from interviews of all teachers (60) new to the schools in 1999-2000 confirm the long-held perception in the city that teachers assigned to middle schools are disappointed in their placement and ill-prepared for their placement. They were grateful for the training and mentoring they got from the Talent Development program, experiences that significantly increased their commitment to staying in the school. However, concerns about the District's residency requirement, salary, discipline, supplies, and other factors were prompting large numbers of them to seek employment elsewhere.

Middle grades educators can now choose from among several promising "whole school change" models that simultaneously push the academic rigor and personal nurture called for in *Turning Points 2000* (Jackson and Davis, 2000), *This We Believe* (National Middle Schools Association, 1982, 1995), and the manifesto of the National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform. These designs include the Turning Points Design Model coordinated by the Center for Collaborative Education in Boston; the Talent Development model created at Johns Hopkins University; Different Ways of Knowing coordinated by The Galef Institute in Los Angeles; the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's Middle Start initiative; the Success for All Middle School Project at Johns Hopkins University; and Making Middle Grades Matter, an initiative of the Southern Regional Education Board (Bradley and Manzo, *Education Week*, 2000).

Successful implementation of such schoolwide improvement models, especially those with a strong academic component, assume that schools have a reasonably qualified and stable staff of classroom teachers. Recent documentation of the strong positive connection between teachers'

knowledge and skill and students' learning levels underscores the importance of such staffing (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Haycock, 1998; Haycock, 2000; Wenglinsky, 2000). Many models invest heavily in teacher training and the use of new classroom materials, an investment that is expected to yield benefits for students over a period of years as the teachers become familiar with new and presumably more effective approaches to instruction. Yet efforts to improve urban middle and high schools in the U.S. have been severely hampered by the inadequate preparation levels of many teachers, the common practice of assigning teachers to courses for which they have no specialized knowledge, and the rapid turnover of schools' instructional staff from year to year (Balfanz & MacIver, 2000; Cooney, 1998; Haycock & Ames, 2000; Ingersoll, 1999; McEwin & Dickinson, 1995; Ruby, 1999, 2001; Strauss, 1999; Useem *et al.*, 1997).

At the middle school level (grades 6-8) the problem of teacher qualifications is especially serious since many states, including Pennsylvania, permit elementary-level certified teachers to instruct core subjects in the seventh and eighth grades (Cooney, 1998; Olson, 2000; Useem, Barends, & Lindermayer, 1999; Watson, 2001). The need to understand and address the issue of middle school staffing has become more urgent as standards-based curricula are introduced and more stringent promotion and graduation requirements for eighth graders and twelfth graders take hold.

This study examines the problem of teacher recruitment, teacher preparation, and teacher retention in the context of schoolwide reform in seven of Philadelphia's 42 public middle schools. The seven schools are at varying stages of 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 well-regarded comprehensive school designs aimed at raising performance of low income and minority middle schoolers. This model

combines high academic standards and personalization by introducing a standards-based common core curriculum for all students; small teacher teams; an emphasis on engaging teaching strategies; high quality curriculum materials; intensive professional development in subject areas keyed to the curriculum; including in-class coaching from master teachers; and extra-help opportunities for students below grade level. Students have demonstrated significant achievement gains in the schools that have fully implemented the model (Balfanz & MacIver, 2000). The Philadelphia Education Fund, a non-profit education reform organization, serves as Hopkins' regional partner in the Philadelphia area for this national initiative.

Staffing in Philadelphia's Middle Schools

Philadelphia's public middle schools have long had difficulty attracting teachers. Pennsylvania does not have a required middle level teaching certificate although an optional certificate became available in 2001. Instead, teachers are generally certified for the elementary level (grades K-6) or are licensed for one or more subject areas at the secondary level (grades 7-12). The state allows elementary-certified teachers to teach the seventh and eighth grades as long as their "teacher certification preparation program and repertoire of subject knowledge and instructional skills are commensurate with the learning outcomes that a given course is intended to achieve" (Pennsylvania Department of Education, CSPG #86, 1990). In reality, however, the state does not enforce this vaguely worded regulation. In Philadelphia, teachers are frequently assigned to classes of seventh and eighth graders in subject areas for which they are manifestly underqualified. Applicants to the District who are elementary-certified for grades K-6 or who have secondary certification(s) usually prefer placements in elementary schools (this includes the District's 46 K-8 schools) and high schools respectively, accepting middle school positions only as a last resort.

Suburban districts that can choose from a surfeit of applicants can select secondary-certified teachers or elementary-trained people who have advanced degrees in a subject area or special expertise in teaching middle grades students. Only three of the 19 teacher preparation programs in colleges and universities in the Philadelphia area offer any sort of middle grades preparation program (Useem, Barends, & Linder Mayer, 1999).

The proportion of teachers new to the District in the city's 42 middle schools during the 1999-2000 school year averaged 13.5 percent, ranging from a low of zero vacancies in four schools (that were either small or had fewer low income students) to a high of 40 percent in one school. When the four schools that have some element of student selection are removed from the analysis, the average is 14.4 percent new staff members. In eleven of the 43 schools, more than 20 percent of the teaching staff was new to the District and the school. Philadelphia's middle schools still had 78 teaching vacancies in May of the school year, an understated figure since some principals had given up listing the position. By contrast, high schools across the District had only 18 vacancies at that point.

Overall, teachers in the 38 non-selective neighborhood middle schools in the District average 11.7 years of service in their school building, considerably lower than the 17.7 year average of the teachers in the 22 non-selective neighborhood high schools. The correlation between the percentage of new teachers in a school and the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch is 0.49 ($p=0.001$). Teacher transfer rates are significantly higher in schools with predominantly low income students (Offenberg, Xu, & Chester, 2000).

Data and Methods

While analyses of large-scale surveys and reviews of state certification requirements have painted a general picture of teachers' thin preparation for teaching academic subjects in the middle grades, the literature on the issue lacks fine-grained qualitative studies that take into

account the complexities of middle level teachers' credentials and course assignments. It is easier to study the question of "out of field" teaching among high school teachers whose certification is in a specific discipline(s) than it is to study the issue for middle grades teachers whose states allow them to teach in all core subject areas with just an elementary license. With this in mind, this study looked at their academic preparation of new teachers in middle schools implementing a high-standards comprehensive school change effort.

In February and March of the 1999-2000 school year, I interviewed all of the 60 teachers new to the School District of Philadelphia who began teaching in these seven middle schools during that academic year. The teachers were questioned about their preparation for instructing in the middle grades, their experience being recruited and hired in the District, their course assignments, their appraisal of the Talent Development training and curricular program, and their plans for remaining in the school or the District. The 15 to 30 minute structured interviews took place during the school day. All of the teachers in the target population agreed to participate.

The 60 teachers described below (Table 1) were assigned to teach in one of the seven schools choosing to implement the Talent Development model. These schools are fairly typical of Philadelphia middle schools, entities that vary in size from 238 to 1500 students. Poverty rates of the student bodies in the seven schools range from a low of 71 percent to a high of 90 percent, similar to the 82 percent average across the system's middle schools. The number of classroom teachers per school ranged from 19 teachers in an unusually small middle school to a high of 64 in one of the District's largest middle schools. There is no reason to believe that these 60 teachers are any different from new teachers assigned to other middle schools in the District, particularly since they did not claim to choose the school because of the Talent Development program. Thus the findings discussed here can most likely be generalized to all new middle school teachers hired for the 1999-2000 school year in Philadelphia.

Table 1
Middle Schools Participating in the Talent Development School Change Initiative

School	Grade Span	Student Enrollment	Teachers	%Low Income	% New Hires 1999-2000	Average Yrs. in the Building	# Teachers Interviewed
1	5-8	1125	60	86	9.5	9.7	5
2	5-8	977	54	86	16.1	8.9	13
3	5-8	1472	64	90	22.1	8.3	15
4	6-8	850	38	86	21.3	9.0	12
5	6-8	1189	58	71	3.0	15.1	3
6	6-8	989	47	81	21.0	9.0	9
7	7-8	238	19	90	na	na	3

The New Teachers in Philadelphia’s Middle Schools: Background Characteristics

Three fourths of the new teachers were female, consistent with the districtwide pattern of 74 percent female. (Table 2) A little more than a third (35 percent) were African American, 60 percent were Caucasian, and 5 percent were Hispanic, also similar to the breakdown of the District’s teachers. (The districtwide breakdown is 34 percent African American; 62 percent Caucasian; and 2.6 percent Hispanic.) Sixty percent were currently residing within Philadelphia’s city limits, and 35 percent had graduated from a Philadelphia public high school. Two fifths were pursuing graduate work; 22 percent had completed a Master’s degree, and 38 percent had completed only a BA or BS degree and had not yet embarked on graduate study. A quarter of these new teachers started teaching right after college graduation. The others had some prior occupational experience after receiving their Bachelor’s degree: 25 percent had taught in private or parochial schools or in another public school system; 17 percent had work experience in another occupation; 27 percent had been substitute teachers; and 5 percent had taught in pre-schools.

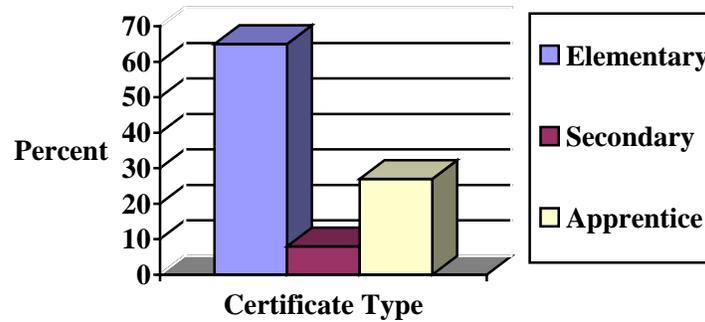
Table 2
Background Characteristics and Training of New Teachers
(n=60 teachers)

Background Characteristic	Percent of New Teachers
Female	75%
Race/Ethnicity	
African American	35
Caucasian	60
Hispanic	5
Graduate of Philadelphia public high school	35
Resident of Philadelphia	60
Educational Level	
Bachelor's degree	38
Master's degree	22
Some graduate level education	40
Prior Employment after college graduation	
none—went directly into teaching	25
teacher in private or parochial schools or other districts	25
substitute teacher in Philadelphia or another district	27
pre-school teacher	5
other occupation	17

Almost two thirds of the new recruits (65 percent) were certified as elementary teachers. A much smaller number, 8 percent, were secondary certified in one or more subject areas. A significant group, 27 percent, had emergency certifications as Apprentice teachers, two thirds of whom were currently enrolled in an elementary education certification program. (Chart 1) These 60 teachers had received or were working toward their teaching certificates at 25 different institutions of higher education, a fact that reflected the District's attempts to recruit at a wide range of colleges. (The largest percentage, 18 percent, were trained at Temple University.) The majority (77 percent) began teaching in the month of September of the 1999-2000 school year with the rest being hired throughout the school year.

Chart 1

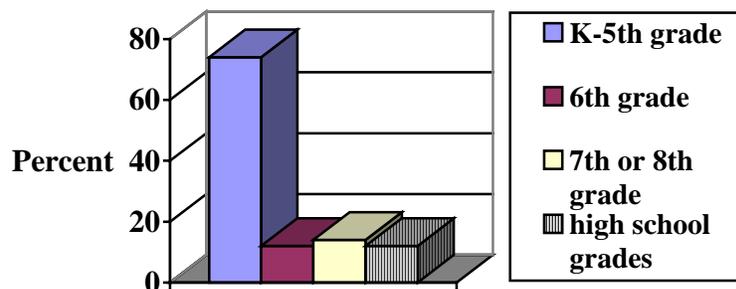
Certificates of New Middle School Teachers



Only a small percentage of the new teachers had prepared for and wanted to teach at the middle school level. Of those who had completed student teaching (Apprentice teachers had no student teaching experience), nearly three-fourths (74 percent) did their student teaching in grades K-5. Another 12 percent had student taught in the sixth grade, half of whom had divided their student teaching time between sixth and a lower grade. Only 14 percent had student taught in the seventh or eighth grade. Twelve percent were student teachers in a high school. (Chart 2) A mere six of the 60 teachers (10 percent) said they preferred teaching the middle grades to any other school level.

Chart 2

Student Teaching Grade Levels of New Middle School Teachers



The Recruitment and Hiring Experience

When applying for a teaching position in Philadelphia, applicants who are certified must take a written examination (in addition to the national Praxis tests), undergo an oral examination before a panel of two or three interviewers (usually principals), and then go through a centrally-administered school assignment/selection process. As is the case in most large urban districts, the hiring process has long been perceived as unnecessarily drawn out, cumbersome, and frustrating. The District, however, has made some progress in streamlining and speeding up the process, and, like most other large districts, it has instituted several incentives aimed at boosting recruitment. In 1999, the residency requirement that stipulates teachers must move into the city after one year of teaching was loosened to three years, and a hiring bonus of \$4500 was put into place. Teachers receive \$1500 after six months on the job and another \$3000 after three years of employment with the District. A new “enhanced compensation system,” details of which are still being hammered out, will enable teachers who demonstrate certain levels of skill and knowledge to receive higher pay. In March 2001 the District also passed a two-pronged bonus system that will 1) pay teachers in 19 hard-to-staff schools an additional \$2000; and 2) pay teachers in certain scarce subject specialties such as math, science, special education, and foreign languages an additional \$1500.

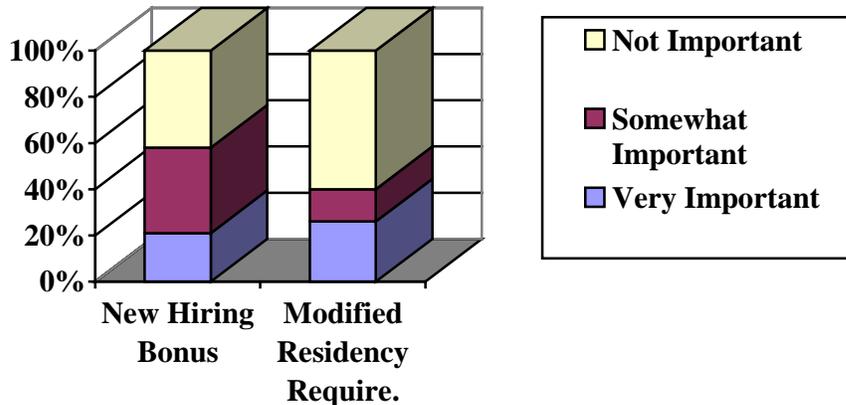
The interviews yielded some initial findings about the impact of the loosening of the residency requirement and the hiring bonus, both of which were put into place during the summer these candidates were being hired. (Chart 3) A quarter of the new teachers (26 percent) said the change in the residency requirement was very important in influencing them to teach in Philadelphia’s public schools. Another 14 percent said it was somewhat important and 60 percent said it was not important. Many in the latter group, however, claimed that this requirement would become important to them in the future and would be a primary reason for

their choosing to seek employment outside of the city. A number said that living in the city was problematic now or would be in the future because their current or prospective spouses had jobs in distant suburbs where employment has boomed in recent years.

With regard to the bonus, 21 percent of the new teachers said it was very important, 37 percent reported it was somewhat important, and 42 percent claimed it was not important. These teachers had applied to the system before the bonus was announced, so for most it came as a pleasant surprise (“it helped pay for my wedding;” “it helped me buy a computer”) but was not a key factor in their decision to teach in Philadelphia. The bonus did appear to be a significant incentive for people who had been thinking about applying for a long time such as teachers in lower-paid positions in parochial schools.

Chart 3

Importance of New Hiring Incentives



Approximately two thirds of the 60 teachers interviewed gave a rating of “good” or “excellent” to the offices of Recruitment (65 percent) and Examinations (69 percent), reflecting the efforts that have been made to re-engineer those aspects of the hiring process. Most of the new teachers gave favorable reviews to their initial recruitment experience, including the taking of the system’s written and oral tests, but tended to be much more critical of the way in which

their application was processed and the way their personnel benefits were handled. Many talked about experiences with lost paperwork, lack of clear and consistent directions and information, difficulty getting through on the telephone, and bureaucratic bungling.

Their greatest dissatisfaction, however, was with the school selection process. Only 28 percent of the new teachers rated the services of that office as “good” or “excellent.” Since these teachers had not wanted a middle school assignment, their unhappiness with the process is not surprising. The centralized “school picking” procedure has long been a source of irritation, even trauma, for new recruits. The collective bargaining agreement between the District and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) allows school-based hiring only in those schools where two-thirds of the faculty have voted to allow it, an option chosen by just 12 schools in December 2000, the first opportunity this option was made available to them. The typical practice in Philadelphia is for prospective teachers to pick a school from among the remaining vacancies on a given day, usually during the summer months. Information is not provided about the schools in advance. Candidates choose in the order of their ranking on one of several lists, a ranking based, in part, on their local examination score.

Principals or their designees can come to the school selection sessions and make a pitch for their individual schools, an option utilized by a relatively small number of administrators. The new teachers have to select on the spot from one of the schools still listed or risk losing a placement in any position. By the time these teachers were called to pick a school, they found themselves with few options since nearly all of the coveted elementary openings were already taken.

The interviews revealed that new teachers typically did not choose schools according to the school’s philosophy, the school’s reform program (such as Talent Development), the culture of the school among the staff and parents, the quality of the principal’s leadership, the achievement

levels of the students, or a school's "performance index score" that includes student test scores and absenteeism levels among students and teachers. Unless they had done serious research ahead of time on very short notice—difficult since the list of schools with vacancies is available only a day or two ahead of a school selection date—they had little opportunity to learn this sort of information about the schools. Lacking this information, their desire for a reasonable commute led them to choose a school as close as possible to their home.

While less important than geographic location, the pitch made for a particular school by a principal or another administrator or teacher from the school also influenced prospective teachers' choice of a school. In addition, some of the new teachers were privy to information about the school as a result of personal experience (student teaching, subbing, formerly attending that school, familiarity with the neighborhood) or of hearing about it from friends or family members. Another influential factor was their perception about the safety of the neighborhood. In some cases, the teachers' union staffers advised the recruits about which among several schools to select. Others said they chose "blind," knowing almost nothing about the school.

Assignment to Courses and Grade Levels

The Talent Development trainers stress the notion that teachers should have only two preparations, either in two content areas in the same grade with the same students, or teaching one subject in two adjacent grade levels in a "looping" arrangement that enables teachers to stay with the same group of students over two years. The data show that some progress has been made in that direction. (Table 3) Nearly two thirds of the new teachers (64 percent) were assigned to just one grade although 14 percent had schedules that spanned three or four grade levels. Seventy percent were placed in one or two subject areas. Nearly a quarter of the new teachers (23 percent) were teaching three different subjects, and 8 percent (5 people) found themselves trying to cover four different content preparations. Not surprisingly, new teachers

with multiple preparations and grade levels were unhappy with their assignment. The least satisfied were those assigned to teach a non-core course to as many as 24 separate classes in order give other teachers their preparation times.

Table 3
Number of Subjects and Grades
Assigned to New Middle School Teachers

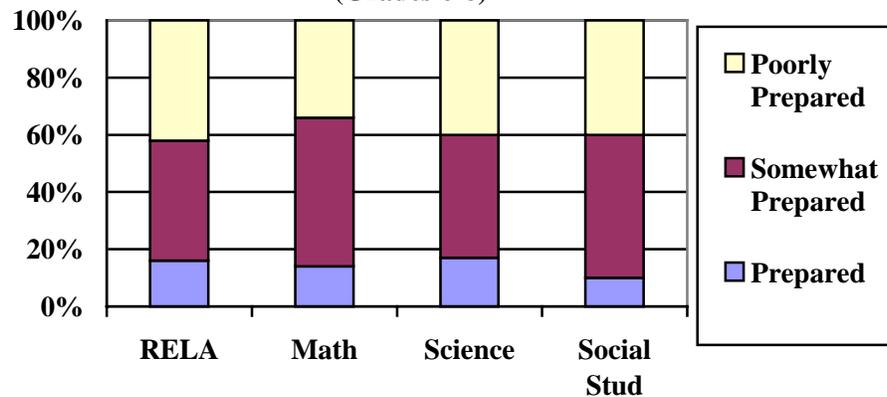
Number	Subject Areas	Grade Levels
One	22 %	64%
Two	47	22
Three- Four	31	14

New teachers’ course schedules varied significantly from school to school. In four of the schools, more than 78 percent of the teachers taught only one grade. One principal assigned three fourths of the new teachers (77 percent) to one content area with an eye to developing content knowledge and pedagogical strategies in a field. Another school had succeeded in assigning 10 out of its 12 new teachers to two subject areas at just one grade level.

Only a modest percentage of teachers appeared to be well prepared to teach in the content areas and grade levels to which they were assigned. (Chart 4) Depending on whether the field was math, science, social studies, or reading/English language arts (RELA), I classified only 10 percent (in social studies) to 17 percent (in science and RELA) as well trained to teach in a particular field, a designation based on self-reports of their higher education coursework and experience, i.e. a major or minor in the field or at least four academic courses in that area. I categorized approximately two-fifths to a half of the new teachers (42 percent and 52 percent respectively) as “somewhat prepared,” meaning that they had an elementary certificate with two or three academic courses in the content area plus a teaching methods course in that discipline.

More than a third, however, were categorized as “poorly prepared”-- from a low of 34 percent in math to a high of 42 percent in RELA. This designation was applied to those who had from zero to two courses in that content area and no teaching methods course in the field, or a methods course but only zero or one course in the content area, or three courses in the subject but no pedagogy coursework. In most of these cases, the teachers themselves volunteered that they were not qualified to teach in that subject area at the grade level to which they were currently assigned.

Chart 4
Level of Academic Preparation for Courses Taught
(Grades 6-8)



New Teachers’ Assessments of the Talent Development Training and Curriculum

Despite being new to the school, the teachers interviewed for this study had high rates of participation in the Talent Development professional training opportunities. (Table 4) Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) said they had received in-classroom coaching in one or more curriculum areas from a Talent Development “curriculum coach.” These coaches are either teachers on special assignment from the School District or are staff from Johns Hopkins. In some cases, expert teachers within the schools support the initiative by coaching new teachers as well. They conduct demonstration lessons, provide materials and handy tips, and give feedback.

Similarly, 68 percent had attended after-school and/or Saturday workshops in one or more curriculum areas (available for pay or for graduate course credit) or had enrolled in the Skillful Talent Development Teacher graduate course (in pedagogy and classroom management) at St. Joseph’s University. The workshops, geared to the specific curriculum being used by the teachers, preview upcoming units, lessons, and experiments, attending both to teachers’ content knowledge and pedagogical strategies. Only 3 of the 60 teachers attended one of the August institutes in a content area, reflecting the fact that most of them were hired late in the summer or after school started. Altogether, an impressive 80 percent of the new teachers participated either in the coaching or in the workshops or the course in one or more subject areas.

Overall, the new teachers gave favorable appraisals of the training. Between 82 and 92 percent of the teachers rated the in-class coaching as “good” or “excellent” with the highest marks given to the coaching in mathematics. Ratings of the workshops were also high with the “good” or “excellent” designation of 76 percent to 91 percent, depending on the subject area.

Table 4

Percentage of New Middle School Teachers Participating in Talent Development Training Opportunities*

	Reading/English Language Arts	Mathematics	Science	Total (1 or more subjects)
In-class coaching	28%	23%	35%	63%
Workshops/courses	40	22	32	68

*In-class coaching and school-year workshops were not offered in Social Studies during the 1999-2000 academic year. They are available for 2000-2001.

Ratings of the usefulness and effectiveness of the Talent Development curriculum and materials were largely favorable but more mixed than ratings of the training. Only 56 percent claimed that the science curriculum was “good” or “excellent,” not surprising since the development by Johns Hopkins of a full-blown curriculum was not yet complete. All five people

teaching the social studies curriculum in the upper grades (adopted in only three of the schools thus far) gave it a good or excellent rating. Three fourths gave similar marks to the RELA program, and 63 percent did so in mathematics. Sixty-three percent of those responding to an open-ended question about Talent Development's value in supporting their growth as a new teacher (49 of the 60 teachers) claimed that it was "very valuable."

Their Plans for the Future: Teacher Retention

The 60 new teachers were asked a series of questions about their future employment plans. (Table 5) Only 40 percent said they would like to continue teaching in their current school next year or for the next three years, 22 percent said "maybe," and 38 percent said they would not like to stay at that school. When queried whether or not they would like to return to the School District of Philadelphia next year, a larger number, 63 percent said "yes," 25 percent said "maybe," and only 12 percent said "no." Some were hoping to land a job in an elementary or high school within the District.

Teachers who had received in-class curriculum coaching and/or had attended Talent Development workshops or courses were far more likely to say they would like to stay in their current school, at least for the short term. Of the 24 teachers who said they wanted to return to their current school, 21 (88 percent) had availed themselves of curriculum coaching in one or more subject areas. Only 3 (12 percent) who wanted to stay had not received coaching. Of the 23 teachers who said they wanted to leave the school, 11 (48 percent) had coaching and 12 (52 percent) had not. Those who said "maybe" were nearly equally divided. Put another way, of the 38 teachers who had coaching, 21 (55 percent) said they wanted to stay in their school compared to only three (14 percent) of the 22 who had not had coaching. Teachers with coaching, then, were about four times more likely to report wanting to return to their school next year or for the next few years. (The correlation between these two variables is 0.29; $p=0.02$).

The same relationship exists between participation in Talent Development workshops in one or more curriculum areas or in the Skillful Talent Development Teacher course. (Again, the correlation coefficient is 0.29; $p=0.02$) Of those who wanted to stay at the school, 88 percent had attended workshops versus only 12 percent of those who had not. When participation in coaching and workshops is aggregated into a “total participation” variable, the correlation between that variable and a desire to return to the school is 0.34 ($p=0.01$). That is, the more intensive a teacher’s participation in Talent Development activities, the greater is his or her proclivity to return to that middle school.

Table 5
Teachers’ Plans for Future Employment in their Middle School
and in the School District of Philadelphia

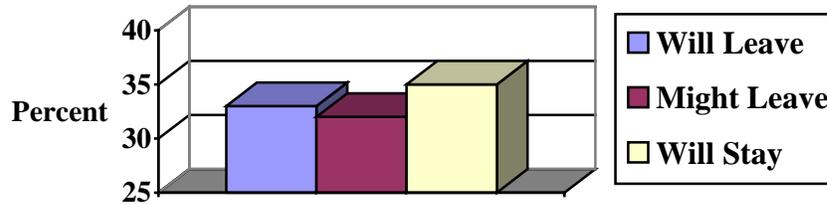
	Yes	Maybe	No
Would you like to return to your school next year or for next 3 yrs.?	40%	22%	38%
Would you like to return to teach in the SD of Philadelphia next year?*	63	25	12
Would you leave the SD of Phila. within the next 5 yrs. if you got an acceptable offer elsewhere?	67	22	12

*Many wanted to stay in the District but teach in an elementary school.

Teachers were asked whether they would leave the District within the next five years if they got an acceptable offer elsewhere. Two thirds (67 percent) said they would leave, 22 percent said they were not sure, and only 12 percent said they would stay no matter what. The residency requirement loomed large in this discussion. (Chart 5) A third of the teachers said the residency requirement would cause them to leave the District, another third said it might cause them to leave, and only 35 percent claimed that the residency requirement would not lead them to seek employment outside of the city system.

Chart 5

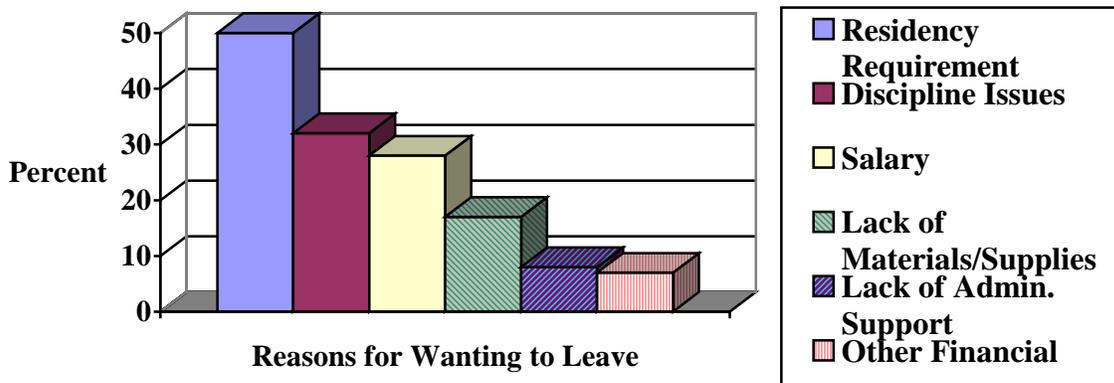
Will the Residency Requirement Cause New Middle School Teachers to Leave the District?



When asked in an open-ended question about the factors that might cause them to leave the District, half of those interviewed cited the residency requirement (about which many were vehemently opposed, including some who had grown up in the city) and nearly a third pointed to the problems of student behavior and discipline or school climate issues. (Chart 6) A little more than a quarter (28 percent) brought up salary. The lack of materials and supplies was cited as a reason by 17 percent. Smaller percentages mentioned lack of support from the principal on discipline (8 percent) or other financial issues such as the city wage tax, the lack of tuition reimbursement for continued education, and high auto insurance (7 percent).

Chart 6

New Middle School Teachers' Reasons for Wanting to Leave the School District of Philadelphia



New Teachers in the Seven Schools: Summing Up

Data from these interviews with all of the teachers new to seven middle schools and to the School District of Philadelphia confirm the long-held belief in the system that teachers assigned to middle schools enter these schools feeling unprepared and disappointed in their placement. Most are certified to teach at the elementary level, and the majority of the emergency-certified Apprentice teachers are enrolled in elementary education programs. Only six of the 60 wanted a placement in a middle school and only six had done their student teaching in grades seven or eight. Although placed in schools that had opted to undertake a demanding comprehensive school reform effort, the teachers and school administrators had no genuine opportunity to meet and choose one another prior to the placement. Lacking a chance to investigate key features of a school's culture and philosophy, new teachers chose a school primarily according to its geographic location in the city.

Approximately 33 to 40 percent of these teachers were assigned to teach courses where their academic preparation was manifestly thin, and another 40 to 50 percent had academic credentials that fell short of adequate preparation for the classes in their schedules. Almost a third of them had teaching loads that spanned three or four core subject areas. Some of the principals, however, were successful in limiting the number of separate courses and grades.

Although most of the teachers were pleased and surprised at the support they found from their colleagues—many raved about the collegial professional community they found at their schools—the majority hoped to find another school assignment within one to three years, usually at the elementary level, either within the District or in nearby suburbs. The District's requirement that teachers live in the city after three years of employment was the primary reason given for wanting to leave the system. (Residency requirements are not common. Chicago, Providence, and Pittsburgh are among the cities with such requirements, but these limits on

hiring are increasingly rare.) Discouragement with student behavior and discipline issues was the second most common reason given, with salary a close third. Only seven teachers said they would choose to stay in the system over the long haul even if they got an acceptable offer from another district. Long-term loyalty to an institution or city did not frame their plans for the future; instead, like others in their generation, they appeared to be managing their personal and professional lives with a cool eye to options in a wide regional job market.

Within this context, the Talent Development effort tried to develop teachers' subject matter expertise through in-classroom support from curriculum coaches, after-school and Saturday workshops, and a course in classroom management and pedagogy. An impressive proportion of the new teachers, 80 percent, participated in some form of the training. Many expressed concerns about aspects of the curricular features of Talent Development but, for the most part, they felt they benefited from the professional development opportunities and appreciated the fact that there was a common core curriculum and supporting materials. (Many middle schools in the District do not have a schoolwide core curriculum.) Most significantly, teachers who had taken advantage of the coaching and/or the workshops and courses were much more likely to say they wanted to return to the school next year. These data, then, provide evidence of the importance of school-based professional development in retaining teachers in high-poverty middle schools.

The challenge facing developers and implementers of comprehensive urban middle school change models is clearly a daunting one. A high proportion of new faculty arrive at the school unprepared to teach standards-based courses in core subject areas. Trainers work intensively with these teachers, many of whom leave the school in the following years, along with veteran colleagues. An even more common problem, documented by researchers at Johns Hopkins, is that teachers are routinely switched from subject area to subject area from year to year, undercutting the development of their content knowledge and pedagogical skills (Balfanz &

MacIver, 2000; Ruby, 1999, 2001). They note that such a pattern requires that a quasi-permanent training structure be in place in schools such as these. The good news, though, is that participation in this schoolwide reform effort appears to dampen turnover rates.

A Promising Program: Temple University's "Excellence in Teaching Partnership"

Temple University has tried to increase the number of prepared middle grades teachers in the city through its partnership with the School District of Philadelphia's Office of Human Resources, three of the District's middle schools, and the Philadelphia Education Fund. Their Excellence in Teaching Partnership (ETP) initiative trains undergraduates for middle grades positions and then places them upon graduation in middle schools within the District. Temple established a middle grades endorsement program for students majoring in elementary or secondary education in 1998. This program offers coursework in middle grades teacher preparation, arranges for students to have practicum and student teaching experiences in the three high-poverty middle schools located near the campus, offers professional development opportunities for teachers in those schools, and works with the District to assure the rapid hiring of the graduates to teach in these or other middle schools.

The ETP program has resulted in a notable increase in the numbers of qualified middle grades teachers for the city. In 1997-98, Temple did not place a single student teacher in the District's middle schools. By the 2000-2001 school year, 19 student teachers from Temple were teaching in middle schools and another 71 undergraduates were in practicum placements in middle schools. Seventy percent of those who have completed the program have gone on to teach in the District. The three middle schools have developed a ready supply of new recruits who are familiar with and willing to teach in their schools: as of the Fall of 2000, ten student teachers from the program had become full-time teachers in those schools.

Directions for Change

Schoolwide reform efforts that seek to make middle schools more academically rigorous and more personalized for students depend on reasonably qualified and stable teaching staffs. At this point, new teachers in Philadelphia middle schools enter their buildings handicapped by inadequate preparation in core academic subjects and inexperience working with young adolescents, conditions that encourage their frequent and rapid departure from those schools. New state and District standards accompanied by new graduation and promotion requirements along with upgraded requirements for students' eventual employment spotlight the need to address this alarming circumstance.

This situation can be addressed by policy changes at four levels: the state, the school district, the school, and higher education institutions. The **state** of Pennsylvania could enforce its current regulation that permits elementary-certified teachers to instruct courses in the seventh and eighth grades only where their preparation and proficiency level is “commensurate with the learning outcomes” of the course. In addition, the state could redesign its new optional middle level certificate in a way that guarantees subject matter specialization in two academic areas, not a smattering of coursework in multiple areas of the curriculum. And the state could work towards requiring specialized preparation for teaching the seventh and eighth grade, either by inserting competencies appropriate for the middle grades within the secondary subject-area certificate, adding on specialized coursework to the elementary certificate (in either undergraduate or graduate programs), or through a middle level certificate. Pennsylvania could also take the lead in offering financial incentives of various kinds to encourage teachers to work in low income middle schools. Lastly, greater fiscal support for the Philadelphia schools from the state would enable the system to pay competitive salaries that attract and retain teachers. To its credit, the

state has passed more stringent academic requirements for certification and for admission to teacher education programs.

The **District** too could alleviate the shortage of trained teachers at all grade levels by changing its residency requirement, instituting tuition reimbursement for graduate-level work, developing a loan forgiveness program, automating the hiring process, and speeding up the hiring timeline (Philadelphia Commission on Children and Youth, 2001). It could also aggressively implement the new hiring option that would enable schools to choose their own staffs from a pool of veterans wishing to transfer or new teachers who are pre-qualified by the District.

At the **school level**, principals could stem the outflow of new teachers by deepening new teacher induction supports. Where schoolwide reform efforts such as Talent Development are being implemented, principals could require new teachers to participate in at least some form of the training, particularly on-site support that does not interfere with new teachers' other induction and continuing education obligations. Assignment of new teachers to a limited number of course preparations and grade levels both during the first and in subsequent years is another strategy for developing expertise and self-confidence in particular subject areas.

Colleges and universities in the Philadelphia area could 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. The Temple University program offers a model of such training, along with its partnership with the School District of Philadelphia, to streamline the hiring of their graduates.

The present difficulty of developing a qualified and stable staff in Philadelphia's middle schools is not an inevitable condition. It is a product of specific policies set in place in years past. New standards, new accountability systems, upgraded academic requirements for teacher

certification statewide, and a vastly expanded metropolitan job market, should propel policymakers to redesign incentives and regulations with the goal of placing and retaining proficient teachers in inner city middle schools.

References

- Balfanz, R., & MacIver, D. (2000). Transforming High Poverty Urban Middle Schools into Strong Learning Institutions: Lessons from the First Five Years of the Talent Development Middle School. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 5, 137-158.
- Bradley, A., & Manzo, K. K. (2000). Middle Grades: Feeling the Squeeze. *Education Week*, October 4, 2000, Special Supplement.
- Cooney, S. (1998). *Improving Teaching in the Middle Grades: Higher Standards for Students Aren't Enough*. Atlanta. Southern Regional Education Board.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1999). Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence. Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2000). Reforming Teacher Preparation and Licensing: Debating the Evidence. *Teachers College Record*, 102, 28-56.
- Erb, T. (2001). *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level School*. Westerville, OH: National Middle Schools Association.
- Haycock, K. (199). Good Teaching Matters: How Well-qualified Teachers Can Close the Gap. *Thinking K-16*, 3, 1-14. Washington, D. C.: The Education Trust.
- Haycock, K. (2000). No More Settling for Less. *Thinking K-16*, 4, 3-12. Washington, DC: The Education Trust.
- Haycock, K., & Ames, N. (July, 2000). Where Are We Now? What is the Challenge for Middle Grades Education? Plenary Address, National Educational Research Policy and Priorities Board Conference on Curriculum and Instruction in the Middle Grades: Linking Research and Practice. Washington, DC.
- Jackson, A., & Davis, G. (2000) *Turning Points 2000*. New York: Teachers College Record.
- Ingersoll, R. (1999). The Problem of Underqualified Teachers in American Secondary Schools. *Educational Researcher*, 28, 26-37.
- McEwin, K. & Dickinson, T. S. (1995) *The Professional Preparation of Middle Level Teachers: Profiles of Successful Programs*. Westerville, OH: National Middle Schools Association.

National Middle Schools Association. (1982, 1995). *This We Believe: Developmentally Responsive Middle Level Schools*. Westerville, OH: Author.

Offenberg, R. M., Xu, M. D., & Chester, M.D. (2000). *Urban Teacher Transfer: A Three-Year Cohort Study of the School District of Philadelphia Faculty*. Philadelphia: Office of Accountability and Assessment, School District of Philadelphia.

Olson, L. (2000). Finding and Keeping Competent Teachers. *Who Should Teach? Quality Counts 2000*, 12-18. Washington, DC: Education Week.

Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth & The Alliance Organizing Project. (2001). *Who Will Teach Our Children?* Philadelphia; author.

Ruby, A. (1999). An Implementable Curriculum Approach to Improving Science Instruction in Urban Middle Schools. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Montreal, Canada.

Ruby, A. (2001). Stability and Change Among Science Teachers During the Implementation of Comprehensive School Reform: Lessons from Philadelphia's Middle Schools. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle.

Strauss, R. P. 1999. Who Gets Hired to Teach? The Case of Pennsylvania. In *Better Teachers, Better Schools*, eds. Marci Kanstoroom and Chester E. Finn, Jr., 175-201. Washington, DC: Fordham Foundation Press.

Useem, E., Barends, R., & Linder Mayer, K. (1999). *The Preparation of Middle Grades Teachers in an Era of High Stakes and High Standards: Philadelphia's Predicament*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Education Fund.

Useem, E., Christman J. B., Gold, E., & Simon, E. (1997). Reforming Alone: Barriers to Organizational Learning in Urban School Change Initiatives. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* 2, 55-78.

Watson, S. (200). *Teacher Quality in Philadelphia: An Overview and Analysis*. Philadelphia: Center for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania.

Wenglinsky, H. (2000). *How Teaching Matters*. Princeton: Educational Testing Service.