

**Prospective Teachers in Philadelphia's Pipeline: What Student Teachers
Think about Working in the School District of Philadelphia
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Each semester, somewhere between 200 and 400 prospective teachers from local area colleges and universities fulfill their student teaching requirement in Philadelphia's public schools.¹ Because these candidates make up the single largest pool of recruits from which the District can hire each year, their views on possible employment with the District are a key barometer on the relative attractiveness of teaching jobs in the city to newly-minted teachers. The Philadelphia Education Fund has surveyed these student teachers each semester since the fall of 1998 in order to find out about their plans and their perceptions about the attractions and barriers to teaching in the District. This report looks at responses to a survey conducted in late April and May 2000. A little less than half (47 percent) of the respondents who received the survey (n=192) completed and returned it.

Descriptors of the Student Teachers

Student teachers' responses to several background factors were as follows:

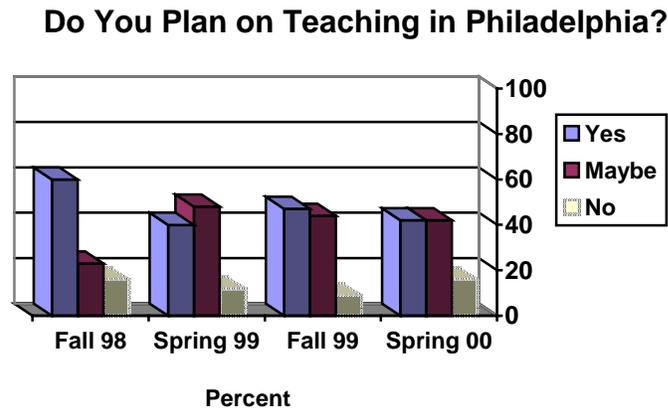
- 63 percent lived within Philadelphia's city limits; another 24 percent resided in Pennsylvania suburbs; 13 percent lived in New Jersey or Delaware.
- 45 percent attended Philadelphia's public schools at some point in their school careers; 35 percent reported they had graduated from a Philadelphia public high school.
- 39 percent of those who identified their college or university reported that they attended Temple University; 11 percent attended Holy Family College; the rest were scattered among a number of other colleges.²
- 56 percent student taught at the elementary school level; 16 percent were placed in K-8 schools; 11 percent were in middle schools; and 16 percent did their student teaching at the high school level.

Plans for Seeking Employment in Philadelphia

Once again, a substantial percentage of student teachers (42 percent) indicated they planned on teaching in the School District of Philadelphia. This percentage is similar to

that found among respondents to the survey in two of the three previous semesters. (Figure 1) Forty-two percent said they might teach in the District. Only 16 percent said they had no plans to do so.

Figure 1



As before, those who had attended Philadelphia public schools were almost three times as likely as non-Philadelphia attendees (64 percent versus 23 percent) to say they planned to teach in the city. Similarly, nearly two thirds of the student teachers currently living in the city said they were planning to teach there (64 percent) compared to only 23 percent of the non-residents. A significantly higher proportion of those who did their student teaching in middle schools said they were not interested in teaching in Philadelphia (38 percent) compared to just 9 percent of those placed in elementary schools and 29 percent located in high schools.

The student teaching experience was an important predictor of future plans as well. Respondents were significantly more likely to say they wanted to work in Philadelphia if they felt that 1) the school and/or classroom where they did their student teaching provided effective learning environments for students, or 2) their cooperating teacher provided a good role model, or 3) the school's faculty displayed positive attitudes about teaching in Philadelphia.³ Interestingly, however, student teachers' responses to these and three other items about their student teaching experience, while still positive overall, were comparatively more negative across all items than they had been in any other semester. (Table 1) For example, they were less likely than in other semesters to agree that the school faculty displayed positive attitudes about teaching in the District, that the other teachers were welcoming to them, that their professors encouraged them to teach in Philadelphia, and that the principal made an effort to acknowledge their presence in the school. Could these responses have been some hint that faculty morale in their schools had taken on a more negative cast with the then upcoming teachers' contract negotiations and District budget shortfalls?

Table 1
Mean Scores of Responses to Statements about Student Teaching Experience
 (Scale of 1-4; 1=strongly disagree 4=strongly agree)

Statement	Mean Fall 1998	Mean Spring 1999	Mean Fall 1999	Mean Spring 2000
My cooperating teacher was a good role model	3.50	3.42	3.47	3.40
The classroom provided an effective learning environment for students.	3.42	3.29	3.43	3.35
The school provided an effective learning environment for students.	3.36	3.19	3.28	3.27
I was welcomed into the school community by other teachers.	3.20	3.43	3.45	3.29
Faculty from my college encouraged me to teach in Philadelphia.	(na)	2.88	3.03	2.85
The principal made an effort to acknowledge my presence in the school.	3.05	2.72	2.77	2.62
The school faculty displayed positive attitudes about teaching in Philadelphia.	2.79	2.70	2.76	2.54

Factors Attracting Student Teachers to Employment in Philadelphia

Respondents who said they had some interest in teaching in Philadelphia were asked to check off the three primary factors from a list of eight that positively influenced their desire to teach in Philadelphia. The responses to this question have shown a high degree of stability over time. (Figure 2)

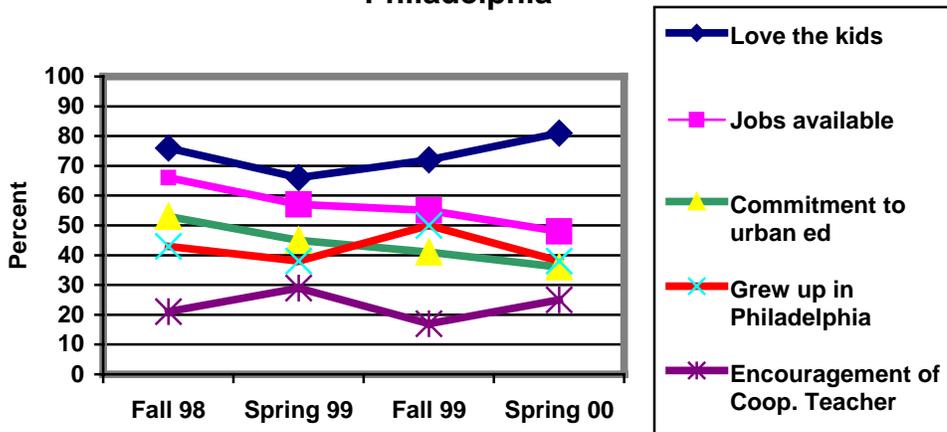
- A substantial majority, 81 percent, of the spring semester 2000 student teachers cited “loving the kids” as a reason they were attracted to the city schools. This factor is the most frequently chosen item each semester although the percentage with this group of respondents reached an all time high.
- Nearly half, 48 percent, said that the “availability of jobs” was what attracted them, again a factor that rates second from semester to semester.
- The third most popular reason given was “I grew up in Philadelphia,” a factor cited by 38 percent, one that was also among the top three items in the previous semester.

- Respondents' selection of "a commitment to urban education" took fourth place (36 percent), continuing a pattern of decline each semester since the survey began in the fall of 1998.

Smaller percentages checked off other items: "encouragement of cooperating teacher," 25 percent; "I want to be part of the reform agenda," 18 percent; "the new hiring bonus," 18 percent; "encouragement of the principal," 6 percent.

Figure 2

Factors that Attract Student Teachers to Philadelphia



Factors Discouraging Student Teachers from Employment in the City

When asked what factors influenced their decision away from employment as a teacher in the School District of Philadelphia, student teachers named three principal factors. They cited:

- student behavior/school climate (53 percent)
- residency requirement (43 percent)
- availability (lack of) supplies and materials (42 percent)

Looking at the pattern of choices over the four-semester period, interesting trends emerge. (Figure 3) Student teachers assigned to schools in the spring semester seem more concerned about student behavior than fall-semester student teachers. Could it be that students are acting up more in May than in November, the months of the survey administration? The percentage citing the residency requirement dropped substantially after the District loosened the requirement in the summer of 1999 so that teachers did not have to move into the city for their first three years of employment (instead of after one year). Nevertheless, the percentage discouraged by this factor remains very high. The number of student teachers focusing on the issue of the availability of supplies and materials has climbed substantially over the two-year period. About one quarter of the

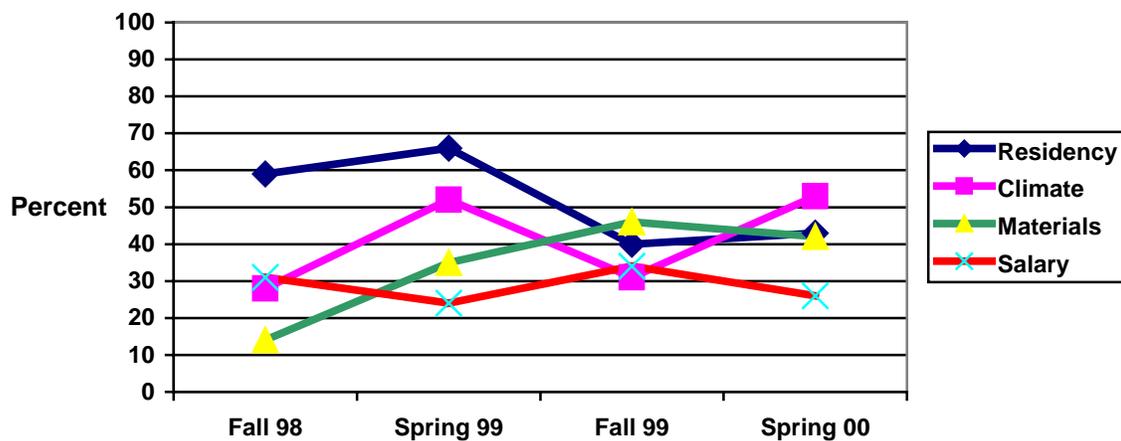
respondents cited other factors as one of the top three factors that served as barriers to employment. These concerns included:

- starting salary
- personal safety
- school facilities
- the degree of support from the administration

Other factors (wage tax, car insurance rates, lack of tuition reimbursement, low teacher morale, cost of living in Philadelphia) were chosen by fewer respondents. Only 3 percent said that “lack of information about job openings” was a problem. The great majority of them (79 percent) said they had been contacted by the Office of Human Resources about job openings in the District.

Figure 3

Factors Discouraging Student Teachers from Working in Philadelphia



Conclusion

Student teachers continue to indicate high levels of interest in teaching in Philadelphia. This is especially true among those who live in the city, who attended public schools there, and/or who had a positive student teaching experience. Few, however, are student teaching in middle and high schools, providing additional evidence of shortage in those areas. Student teachers are attracted by the qualities of the students themselves, the chance to teach in their home town, and the fact that jobs are plentiful. At the same time, many student teachers are put off by the residency requirement (many who currently live in the city plan to move out eventually), disciplinary difficulties with students, and the scarcity of basic supplies and teaching materials, among other obstacles. One worrisome trend in the data from the spring 2000 semester is that students were a little less positive than before in their appraisals of their student teaching experience. It will be useful to

check whether this trend reverts to the previous pattern or continues in subsequent cohorts of student teachers.

Student teachers constitute a critical source of new recruits for Philadelphia's school. Their concerns should help shape the policies and incentives that need to be in place to attract applicants in an era of a growing shortage of qualified teachers.

Endnotes

¹ The exact number is not known because some schools make their own arrangements for placements directly with institutions of higher education rather than through the District's Office of Human Resources.

² 22 percent of the respondents left this question blank.

³ The correlation coefficients between teachers' plans and these measures of their student teaching experience were .28 (p=.01), .28 (p=.01), .15 (p=.05), and .22 (p=.01).