

Research Brief



Philadelphia's Teacher Hiring and School Assignment Practices

Comparisons with Other Districts

By Elizabeth Useem and Elizabeth Farley

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A report from Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform

Recent History of Philadelphia School Reform

On December 21, 2001, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania took control of the Philadelphia public schools, declaring the school system academically and financially distressed. At that time, the School District of Philadelphia became the largest school district in the country ever put under direct state control. The state initially proposed placing the Philadelphia school district under the private management of Edison Schools, Inc. As a result of community pressure, this management model gave way to a "diverse provider" model, in which a set of low-performing schools is operated by multiple for-profits, nonprofits, university partners, and a new district office for restructured schools. Adding to the complexity, a CEO, known for centralizing authority, was placed in charge of the Philadelphia school system, including its subset of privately managed schools.

The resulting school reform effort clearly is high stakes locally. It also is being watched closely nationally as an indication of what may happen to other distressed school districts across the United States. With the enactment of the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) legislation, states have the mandate to assume control of failing districts when less drastic interventions fall short of bringing about improvement. Philadelphia is an important test case as educators and policymakers debate the efficacy of various private and public management remedies for urban public school failure.

Learning From Philadelphia's School Reform

Research for Action is leading *Learning From Philadelphia's School Reform*, a comprehensive, four-year study of Philadelphia's complex and radical school reform effort. RFA researchers are working with colleagues from the University of Pennsylvania, Rutgers University, Swarthmore College, and the Consortium on Chicago School Research to examine the impact of state takeover, the efficacy of a diverse provider model, the success of district-level leadership in managing a complex set of reform models, the influence of community groups on district policy and school improvement, and the key factors influencing student outcomes under various school conditions and school management models.

Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform includes a multi-faceted, vigorous public awareness component that engages leaders and citizens in the process of educational change and informs and guides the national debate on school reform. The project disseminates information broadly through public speaking, reports, bulletins, and articles featuring clear, timely, and credible analysis of the real impact of school improvement efforts.

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Introduction

The Philadelphia public school system, along with other U.S. school districts, is under intense pressure to hire qualified teachers expeditiously and to insure that staff in the neediest schools are as qualified as staff at other schools within the district. In the research reported here, we compare Philadelphia's current teacher hiring and school placement policies with those of other large, urban districts across the country and other districts in the Philadelphia region.

We undertook this study to inform the current debate about possible changes in the way Philadelphia hires and places teachers in schools. We have found that many of Philadelphia's practices diverge from those of other systems, which leaves the city poorly positioned to take advantage of the region's sizeable oversupply of newly-certified teachers. These practices—including restrictions on school-based hiring and teachers' automatic voluntary transfer rights—stem from provisions or interpretations of the system's collective bargaining agreement with the city's teachers. This contract is being renegotiated in 2004.

While Philadelphia faces some unique obstacles to hiring and placing teachers, it is similar to other urban districts in its lack of success at distributing qualified teachers equally across all schools. As is the case in most other districts, Philadelphia has focused on improving recruitment and retention across the system but not yet implemented a comprehensive package of incentives to attract and retain teachers in its lowest-performing, high-poverty schools. We note how some districts have made progress in that area in this paper.

Efforts to recruit strong teachers for all schools are now fueled by the mandate of the federal 2001 *No Child Left Behind* legislation requiring that all children have a highly qualified teacher and the companion requirements that both schools and districts be held accountable for raising student achievement among *all* groups of students. Emerging reforms in

human resource policies and practices are also a response to harshly critical reports across the country documenting bureaucratic bungling, over-centralized employment processing, and inflexible provisions of collective bargaining agreements. Management theories stressing the importance of careful selection of work teams, and new research linking school-based hiring with teacher retention and a sense of collegiality among teachers, provide support for the view that schools and teacher candidates should scrutinize one another before making a match. This is particularly important because school features that increase trust within schools, such as staff stability and strong professional communities, have been linked to gains in student learning.¹

In response to these pressures and evidence, many big-city school systems nationwide are modernizing, expediting, and decentralizing the ways in which teachers are recruited, hired, and placed in schools, as well as offering a range of new incentives to attract and retain teachers. Districts are rapidly adopting new employment processing technologies, notably automated applicant-tracking systems, online applications, and Internet job postings to help accomplish this goal.² Philadelphia, too, is adopting technologies that speed and rationalize the hiring process.

Background: Philadelphia Hiring and Placement Practices

Like other urban districts, Philadelphia has been aggressively revamping its human resource efforts. The district has undertaken an impressive range of recruitment efforts and incentives, developed an attractive and informative Web site with an online application, put new supports for novice teachers into place, and succeeded in getting most retiring teachers to give early notification of their retirement.³ Its vacancy rate in September 2003 was half of what it

was in September 2002, and retention of new teachers during the 2003-04 school year has increased significantly.⁴

Philadelphia's teacher quality initiatives, however, remain hobbled by provisions in the teachers' collective bargaining agreement that result in an unusually centralized system of assigning teachers to schools and in the practice of filling vacancies with teachers transferring from other schools and positions before hiring new teachers. This practice slows down the hiring timelines for new recruits. Hundreds of new teachers (more than 1200 were hired for 2003-04) find themselves selecting schools that they know little about from a limited list of vacancies during late July and August, and even into the start of the school year. They typically arrive at the schoolhouse door to be greeted by administrators and colleagues whom they have never met before (and who have never met them).⁵ Similarly, most schools have little choice over the assignment of veteran teachers to their buildings; these teachers have the automatic right to fill a vacancy (in an area for which they are qualified), based on seniority.

As it is now, only 44 of Philadelphia's 264 schools use what is called "site-selection" of teachers, which gives school personnel committees the right to interview and select teachers for their building from a pre-qualified pool of eligible candidates (which can include transferring teachers along with new recruits). The current teachers' collective bargaining agreement stipulates that two-thirds of a school's faculty must vote for such status by December 31st of each year. If a school's Building Committee (school union committee) votes not to hold a vote, no vote is even taken. These limitations have kept site selection from being adopted more widely. The rules apply to schools managed both by the district and by outside partner organizations.

Schools that have not voted for site-selection must wait until voluntary and involuntary teacher transfers have been processed (usually around the end of July) before new teachers are assigned to fill remaining vacancies in their schools. Because of the delays caused by these policies and other factors such as budget uncertainties, many teachers are "pre-hired" to the *district* in the spring and early summer but are not hired to a specific *school* until much later in the summer, a practice labeled by *Education Week* as an "inferior deal" that causes many of the most qualified teachers to seek jobs elsewhere.⁶

Civic leaders and community activists argue, and our evidence shows, that these practices have the effect of broadening inequities in teacher qualifications among Philadelphia schools.⁷ School district researchers have documented how seniority-based transfer policies support the migration of veteran teachers from

less-advantaged schools to buildings with higher test scores and fewer low-income students.⁸ During the summer, when new teachers choose schools from among available vacancies, teachers who rank higher on the state-mandated eligibility list choose a school before those ranked lower. These first teachers generally avoid selecting high-poverty, low-performing schools, and the vacancies in the most distressed schools are usually the last ones to be filled.⁹

Philadelphia's policies with regard to site selection and automatic voluntary transfer rights based on seniority are being looked at carefully in 2004 as the district takes up these issues in collective bargaining negotiations with the teachers' union, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT). (The current contract expires in August 2004.) The School Reform Commission (SRC) and the Vallas administration have signaled their interest in altering hiring, school placement, and transfer policies and cite their own study showing principals' support for site selection. Contract negotiations also present an opportunity to address the need for strong incentives to promote the equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers.

It is possible, however, that the status of site selection and seniority transfer rights will be addressed outside of collective bargaining. Philadelphia's school system was taken over by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in December 2001 after it was designated a "distressed" district by the state. The provisions of the *Distressed School Districts Act* passed at that time stipulate that the five-member School Reform Commission that replaced the Board of Education has the power to act unilaterally on matters of teacher assignment and distribution. As an April 2004 brief by the Education Law Center in Philadelphia put it, "The Superintendent and the SRC are not required by law to negotiate about these issues. If they decide to negotiate about these issues, this would merely be a strategic decision."¹⁰

Research Approach

Our research into how Philadelphia's teacher hiring and school assignment practices compared to those of other school districts had two parts. First, we looked at teacher hiring and school assignment processes in 13 large urban districts, including five of the seven districts larger than Philadelphia.¹¹ During February and March 2004, we examined collective bargaining agreements, looked at recruitment information on district Web sites, and read relevant reports or news articles about the districts. We also conducted telephone interviews with officials in human resources departments,

leaders in local education partner groups, and teachers' union officials. In all, we interviewed 30 informants in other large urban districts.¹²

Second, we examined staffing practices in a sampling of New Jersey and Pennsylvania school districts in the Philadelphia region—systems that draw from the same labor market for teachers as Philadelphia. We chose nine relatively large districts near the city that represented a range of demographic characteristics. We conducted personal interviews with their directors of human resources (director of recruitment in one district) between February and March 2004.¹³

How Teachers Get Hired and Placed in Other Urban Districts

Urban school districts across the country vary in whether they have an overall teacher shortage. Philadelphia's declining enrollment and location in a state with a substantial oversupply of newly-minted elementary teachers means that the city has less difficulty filling vacancies at the elementary level than districts located in growing areas, such as cities in the South and Southwest.¹⁴ But Philadelphia shares certain key problems with nearly all other districts:

- A shortage of teachers in certain fields, notably special education, Spanish language, secondary sciences and mathematics, and bilingual education,
- Delayed hiring of new teachers well into the summer due to a) budget uncertainties; b) late notification of retirement and resignations; and c) last-minute initiatives of central offices, such as reconstituting or consolidating schools or reducing class size,
- Difficulty attracting and retaining qualified teachers in high-poverty, high-minority schools.

Nearly all of the districts we studied have mounted ambitious recruitment efforts for both certified teachers and alternate-route program participants (e.g., Teach for America members and participants in local versions of that initiative). All are integrating new technologies to make hiring more efficient and user-friendly, both for candidates and for schools, and all are figuring out ways to get their teachers to comply with the new requirements set out in *No Child Left Behind*.

Hiring and school placement of new teachers

In other urban districts, the hiring process goes something like this: Candidates view employment opportunities and recruitment processes on an attractively designed Web site. Jobs are usually posted on the Web

site by both school and subject area. Candidates send their applications online to the human resources (HR) or personnel office and generally go through some sort of pre-hiring review at HR, a process that may or may not require an initial interview with HR staff. All but one of the other cities we looked at (Atlanta) accept online applications, and most also allow mail-in applications.

In three districts we studied—Chicago, New York City (some schools), and Cincinnati—candidates can also apply directly to schools, although at some point their credentials must be approved by HR. As a result of the state legislature's passage of a broad education reform act for Chicago in 1988, Chicago led the way among cities with a history of strong teachers' organizations in radically decentralizing through site-based hiring.¹⁵

Two districts—Houston and Washington, DC—have gone “paperless,” with candidates uploading their applications into the district's electronic database, which can then be perused by HR staff and principals. Seven districts overall have started using automated tracking systems of applications and resumes. Paperwork has been further reduced by several districts by not requiring an official review of a candidate's credentials until a hiring offer has been made by a school.

The urban districts vary as to whether candidates apply to the district as a whole or just for a specific position at an individual school. Two systems do “open contracts” or “pre-hiring,” whereby new recruits get hired to the system and then go to schools for placement interviews. In all others, a prospective teacher does not have a job until he or she is chosen by a school. Philadelphia, by contrast, hires new recruits to the district—not to a school—and does not conduct placement interviews.

In the urban districts we studied, the actual hiring process is almost always based at the school building level. No vote for site selection at the school level is required. Once HR receives applications, it sends school principals the applications of candidates who are suited for the vacancies listed by their schools. This is done electronically in many systems. Principals, often assisted by school teams, review the applications and call promising candidates in for an interview. Pittsburgh, the only other large urban district in Pennsylvania, has adopted this process. The only system we studied that required a vote at the school level to institute site-based selection was New York City.

New candidates (and often transferring teachers) are interviewed by a school team in 8 of the 13 urban districts we studied. These teams typically include teachers (who constituted a majority on the team in New York City site selection schools) and administra-

tors, but sometimes include parents and/or community members. In five of the districts, either the principal or a team interviews candidates; in some cases, the method varies by the type of position that is vacant.

Only one district, New York City, has a hiring process similar to that of Philadelphia and, even there, significant differences exist. The six new Regional Operations Centers in New York City handle hiring and school placement of new teachers. But schools can vote annually on whether to be a School-Based Option school. Thus far, 38 percent of the city's schools have voted to become School-Based Option schools (a 55 percent vote in favor is required), even though the current teachers' union contract called for all schools to have become so by June 2003. The city's teachers' union, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), had backed site-based hiring in past negotiations, the opposite position of that taken by the teachers' union in Philadelphia. The UFT became interested in site-based hiring some years ago as a result of its work with partner nonprofit groups in the opening of new small high schools.¹⁶

Among urban districts, hiring fairs are also a common venue for principals to market their schools and do some on-the-spot interviews. Frequently, promising candidates then follow up with a school interview. Baltimore has a two-day event for recruitment. Prospective teachers come for a fair on day 1 and some choose to accept a job on the spot by a school after an interview at the fair. On day 2, candidates who want to look more carefully can visit schools and have interviews. This works well for out-of-town recruits.

After a principal and/or school team decides on a finalist(s), principals check written references and sometimes check references by telephone. Racial balance must be taken into consideration in staffing decisions in several of the districts studied. School administrators in Chicago, New York City, Cleveland, and Los Angeles are under court order to racially balance school faculties. All but Los Angeles have had difficulty complying with these orders. Other districts take such balance into account in an informal way, often along with other factors such as gender and experience. Principals in Los Angeles must also look at new or transferring teachers' salaries since there are regulated salary allotments and ranges by school.

In all of these districts, school-based hiring is sometimes cast aside in favor of hiring directly by the HR office. When "crunch time" comes (i.e., a school still has vacancies as the school year starts) HR will step in and fill the position. This may happen during the school year as well. In addition, HR often does the hiring in critical shortage areas, especially special education. Recruiters sign up such candidates quickly and then assign them to a school.

In reviewing the ways in which urban districts go about hiring and placing teachers, it becomes clear that Philadelphia's practices stand out as unusually centralized and bureaucratic.

Transfer rights of veteran teachers

The successful recruitment and retention of teachers depends on the way that districts handle the transfer of veteran teachers, as well as on the way that new teachers are recruited and placed. One important issue is timing—districts included in this study differed in whether or not the hiring of new candidates takes place after the transfer process is completed for veteran teachers. A 2003 report by the New Teacher Project highlighted the fact that the longer districts take to hire, the more likely they are to lose strong candidates and to start the school year under more chaotic conditions.¹⁷ We found that where transfers occur before new hiring, districts are attempting to expedite the transfer process so that new teachers can be hired before July.¹⁸ Philadelphia has tried to move up the processing of transfers to earlier dates, but its efforts to do so have been stymied in part by extensive movement of veteran teachers caused by special initiatives (e.g., creating new cadres of teacher-leader positions or transferring large numbers of former teachers from non-teaching positions back into schools to teach) in the late spring or early summer.

Another important issue is whether or not transferring teachers must interview and be accepted at the receiving schools. Teachers' absolute right to transfer among schools varies significantly by district. Increasingly, districts are decentralizing staffing decisions about veteran teachers as well as new teachers. This is very different from the situation in Philadelphia, where voluntary transfers can move to another school without the receiving school having any choice in the matter.

Voluntary transfers

- Washington, DC, and the majority of New York City schools (62 percent) have rules similar to Philadelphia's: Voluntary transfers have the right to fill vacancies ahead of newly-hired teachers and do not have to interview at, or be chosen by, the schools to which they are transferring. Washington, however, is now encouraging principals to interview transfers.
- Five districts allow teachers to transfer and fill vacancies first but they must interview at the school and be chosen by that school. Charlotte-Mecklenberg, for example, processes these transfers in March prior to the April fair for new teacher candidates so that new teacher hiring can proceed expeditiously.

- In six districts and in 38 percent of New York City schools, transferring teachers interview at schools at the same time as new candidates and have no priority in hiring. That is, schools can select a new teacher instead of the transferring teacher.
- In another variation on controlling the process of voluntary transfers, New York City and Los Angeles place a cap on the percentage of teachers who can voluntarily transfer out of a school in a single year (5 percent in NYC and 10 percent in Los Angeles).

Involuntary transfers The context surrounding involuntary transfers often affects the policy governing such movement of teachers. Forced transfers can be caused by many different factors: school closures; school reconstitutions; position eliminations at a school due to budget cuts; low enrollment or a change in curricular requirements; and, on occasion, the unsatisfactory performance of the teacher. For this reason, rules about involuntary transfers are complex. Overall, however, the rights of these teachers (often referred to as “excessed” or “surplussed”) to another job in the system are usually much stronger than those granted to voluntarily transferring teachers, and they tend to follow seniority rules. There are certain conditions in many districts where teachers’ rights are especially strong. We found the following patterns:

- In four of the districts, involuntary transfers have automatic transfer rights by seniority and are not required to interview at the receiving school, a process similar to that in Philadelphia.
- In seven districts, these teachers must interview and be accepted by a school but in the end will be placed in a job somewhere in the system by the HR office. This system was adopted citywide in 2003 in Pittsburgh. Other districts in this category include Atlanta, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and New York City.
- In Washington, DC, practices depend on the type of forced transfer. In some instances, principals have the right to turn down involuntarily transferring teachers whom they do not want. Under other conditions, they are required to take teachers assigned to them.
- All teachers hired after 1995 in one district, Houston, are on “term contracts” that do not give them rights to a job if their position is eliminated.

Again, Philadelphia’s practices with regard to the rights of involuntarily transferring teachers give receiving schools little control over who joins their staff.

Incentives to attract and retain teachers in the hardest-to-staff schools

Districts’ current teacher recruitment efforts are aimed primarily at increasing the size of the recruitment pool, not at distributing certified teachers more equitably among schools. Most districts have alternate-route programs (such as Teach for America) or alternative certification programs for new recruits to the profession that place novices into vacant positions in high-poverty, high-minority schools characterized by high teacher turnover. Many urban districts, including Philadelphia, rely on offering a modest annual bonus (\$2,000) and on directing people in alternate-certification programs to the neediest schools.

We found that the strength of districts’ efforts to hire certified teachers into distressed schools varied.

- Three of the districts studied, Charlotte-Mecklenberg, New York City, and Baltimore, have a track record of comprehensive efforts to hire and retain certified teachers in the hardest-to-staff schools. They have combined a number of incentives to attract qualified teachers to these schools. But New York City’s signature program was partially dismantled in 2003-04 by a new administration, and budget cuts are threatening the future of the Baltimore initiative.¹⁹

Charlotte-Mecklenberg has the most comprehensive package of incentives of all the districts. These are aimed at staffing its 52 EquityPlus II Schools.²⁰ The incentives include smaller class sizes, bonuses for teachers (\$2,500 for those with master’s degrees; \$1,500 for others enrolled in a graduate program), additional materials and supplies for the classroom, and reimbursement for tuition costs incurred in getting a master’s degree. Local colleges and universities offer courses in off-campus cohort groups for teachers in these schools. Qualified new applicants and select retirees may be directed to these targeted schools first. This effort is carefully monitored by the district and by a civic group, and early indications are that it is successful. According to a district official interviewed for this study, the coverage of costs for the master’s degree is the most popular of the incentives. A sizeable number of teachers in these schools are scheduled to get their master’s degree in 2004.²¹

New York City has also had success with the Extended Time School (ETS), a subset of the 26 lowest-performing elementary and middle schools with in the Chancellor’s District—a district established in 1996 for especially distressed schools—and 15 others outside that district. Excellent principals,

earning \$10,000 bonuses, were placed in these schools, and teachers were paid 15 percent more because they worked an additional 40 minutes a school day, either teaching students or engaged in professional development. Working with the union, uncertified staff and existing staff who wanted to transfer left the building and were placed in other schools. Vacancies were filled using New York's version of site selection of teachers, a process that enables hiring teams (with teachers forming the majority) to select staff who would be committed to teaching a common core curriculum, working longer hours, and participating in professional development, and who expressed a sincere interest in working in low-performing schools. Other incentives included smaller classes with additional materials and supplies. The initiative has led to higher student achievement in the ETS schools.²²

New York City has a new initiative, NY Urban Teachers, a recruitment program designed by the nonprofit New Teacher Project, which attracts certified teachers in critical shortage subjects from inside and outside the district to teach in high-need schools in the Bronx and central Brooklyn. Teachers in this program (500 in 2003-04 and 500 projected for 2004-05) are hired and placed in schools efficiently and quickly and, if adding a certification in a shortage area, are reimbursed for their tuition expenses.²³

Baltimore city schools have replicated the New York City Chancellor's District model, creating a CEO District of 10 low-performing elementary and middle schools in 2001-02. Four of the ten schools have been removed from the state's reconstitution-eligible list because of improvements in student test scores. The program's future is uncertain because of the severity of the district's current budget cuts. Baltimore also has several alternate-route teacher certification programs with generous tuition reimbursement incentives that direct candidates to high-need schools and subject areas.

It is important to note that the Hamilton County, Tennessee public schools, in partnership with the Chattanooga Public Education Foundation, initiated a similar initiative to attract and retain high-quality teachers and administrators in nine elementary schools (Benwood Schools) in 2003. Incentives include the assignment of effective principals to the schools (six out of the nine principals were replaced), salary bonuses for 26 high-performing teachers, the voluntary and involuntary transfer of 100 teachers out of the schools, improvements in teacher training, and funding of specialized master's degrees for

selected teachers. The program is partially funded by a \$5 million grant from the Benwood Foundation to the Public Education Foundation. The emphasis on attracting and retaining highly-qualified teachers along with other program enhancements in the area of literacy has already produced student test score gains. This program is receiving national attention.²⁴

- Three districts have some combination of incentives for teachers located in hard-to-staff schools that usually involve salary bonuses and tuition support, but the package of enticements is not as comprehensive as that found in Charlotte-Mecklenberg, New York City, or Baltimore. Austin attracts teachers to its low-performing "focus schools" with a combination of a hiring bonus, a stipend, and an "early-bird" bonus.
- Seven of the 13 districts we studied had no incentives but "were looking at it."

How Other Districts in the Philadelphia Region Hire and Place New Teachers

Philadelphia's hiring practices were placed further into context by comparing them with those of nearby districts. We interviewed the directors of human resources or personnel recruitment in five suburban Pennsylvania school districts and four New Jersey systems from January through March 2004 to learn about their teacher hiring practices. The nine districts, all of which had collective bargaining contracts with a teachers' union, had staffs ranging in size from 121 to 1548 (Camden) with an average of about 700 teachers. Their student demographics ranged widely from predominantly minority and low-income to largely white, upper-middle-class communities.

Some differences exist in the hiring contexts of the two states. Pennsylvania has 93 colleges and universities with approved teacher education programs, a phenomenon that helps explain the state's substantial oversupply of newly-certified teachers, particularly in elementary education. Although New Jersey has an oversupply of elementary-certified applicants as well, the state has only a third as many higher education institutions with approved teacher education programs as Pennsylvania, and is also a "net exporter" of students for higher education—New Jersey high school graduates tend to leave the state to pursue higher education. Human resource directors in New Jersey described more aggressive out-of-state recruitment efforts than was the case with their counterparts across the Delaware River. Another state difference

that emerged in the interviews is that New Jersey educators take seriously the rule that a teacher must give 60 days' notice before leaving one public school district in the state to work for another. Enforcement of similar rules in Pennsylvania is lax.

Key findings from these suburban interviews include:

Site-based hiring All nine districts have site-based hiring where school personnel play a critical role in interviewing and selecting staff. Principals are most heavily involved, but teachers (and parents and/or students in two districts) also participate in teacher selection for positions in seven of the nine districts. The extent of teacher participation sometimes varies by the type of position. Positions are usually posted with specific information about school location, grade, and subject area, and at least one interview is conducted at the school site.

Teacher transfer rights In only *one* of the nine districts do veteran teachers have an automatic right to voluntarily transfer to another school in the district to fill a vacant position for which they are qualified. In the other eight districts, teachers have the right to apply for a specific vacancy, usually in early spring, and are granted a "courtesy interview," but principals and school teams are not required to hire them. Many, however, succeed in getting the transfer. This process does not appear to slow down the overall hiring timeline for new teachers. The one district that does grant automatic transfer rights has to delay hiring of new teachers until August of each year in order to accommodate the transfers, a process that is described as a "nightmare" by the HR director.

The candidate pool For the most part, these districts in both New Jersey and Pennsylvania rely on an internal labor pool to fill elementary-level positions and some secondary positions. This candidate pool is composed mostly of long-term substitute teachers, some per-diem substitutes, and student teachers. Long-term substitutes are certified and their credentials (in most districts) are carefully scrutinized at the time they are hired as a sub. The oversupply of elementary-certified teachers in the region makes it possible for these districts to rely almost exclusively on their internal candidates to fill positions at the school level. Camden, a district that hires around 250 new teachers a year, is the only one of the nine districts where there are significant numbers of external new hires each year.

Only one of the districts gives strong preference to hiring qualified graduates from its own high school or residents from its community. But five of the nine districts give "courtesy" first-round interviews to their

residents or graduates, a policy that gives the local applicants a significant advantage in districts that receive thousands of applications each year.

Use of hiring Web sites When suburban Pennsylvania districts seek candidates for harder-to-fill positions (typically special education, Spanish language, some secondary sciences, secondary mathematics, ESOL/Bilingual, etc.), they usually search the resumes posted on PA-REAP, an electronic job-posting system. Most of these districts discourage (or refuse to accept) paper applications, preferring instead that candidates simply mail in a letter expressing their interest in a position with the district and simultaneously make their resume available through PA-REAP.

A similar electronic job-posting system exists in New Jersey (NJ Hire) but is not relied on nearly to the extent that PA-REAP is among Pennsylvania districts. Two of the New Jersey systems use it, but not extensively. One district accepts only mailed applications.

Scrutiny of credentials In non-shortage subject areas, districts typically interview 3-5 candidates for each position (one interviewed 5-8 candidates). The number of interviews per candidate varies from 1 to 5 per district; that is, some districts call finalists back for several interviews, although this varies by subject area. Districts vary in the degree to which they review credentials but all use telephone references in addition to written references and examination of transcripts. Several of the HR directors talked about the importance of teachers' content knowledge. In most cases, they are already familiar with a candidate's teaching ability because of his or her previous work as a substitute or student teacher in the system.

Salary credit for experience These suburban systems have differing policies on giving newly-hired teachers salary credit for years of teaching experience they might have had in another district as a certified teacher. Two of the districts give no salary credit for those years while three districts give full credit for all such years. Two others allow full salary credit for up to five or seven years, respectively.

This study of the policies of a sample of districts surrounding Philadelphia shows that the city must compete for teachers against districts whose prospective teachers can examine a possible school assignment carefully prior to accepting a position. If applicants are offered a position, it is because administrators (and often fellow teachers) at the receiving school want them on their staff. School administrators also have much more discretion than those in Philadelphia over which teachers are allowed to voluntarily transfer into their buildings.

Conclusion

As we have seen, Philadelphia is clearly not in tune with what *Education Week* calls “a national trend...to make crucial hiring information readily available to principals and to shift most of the responsibility for hiring from central office to the schools.”²⁵ Indeed, Philadelphia’s highly centralized teacher selection practices, stemming largely from provisions in its collective bargaining agreement with teachers, stand in sharp contrast to this trend.

All districts we studied for this report have some form of school-based teacher selection processes increasingly facilitated by electronic applicant-tracking systems. Philadelphia’s current teachers’ union contract, however, not only retains a process that limits choice by schools over the hiring of novice teachers, but also gives schools little choice over accepting staff who come to the school as voluntary or involuntary transfers. Again, these ironclad seniority transfer rights are increasingly at odds with those of other urban districts and, in the case of voluntary transfers, have long been strikingly different from those of surrounding suburban districts.

The 44 schools in Philadelphia that have voted for site selection utilize school personnel committees that play an important role in making the final selection decision. This team-based approach, used by the majority of the urban districts we studied, helps build the collegial relations so necessary for raising student

achievement. Although some districts leave the decision entirely in the hands of principals, we think the hard work of long-term school improvement is boosted when teachers share in major decisions that affect instruction, including the hiring of like-minded colleagues.

When it comes to the difficult issue of staffing the most distressed schools with experienced and certified teachers, we are mindful that site selection and alteration of seniority rules that would expedite hiring do not by themselves solve that problem. These policy changes are important and necessary steps in reforming school staffing, but, to be successful, they must be supplemented by a package of meaningful incentives such as reduced class size, the presence of effective school leadership, and a collegial, professional community of teachers. Few systems have followed the lead of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, New York City, Baltimore, and Hamilton County, Tennessee, in developing a set of compelling enticements to attract and retain qualified teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

Philadelphia has made substantial progress in its teacher recruitment and retention efforts. These efforts, however, may have only a limited impact unless hiring and school placement decisions are expedited and decentralized. The mandate for equitable staffing initiatives that is implicit in the *No Child Left Behind* legislation places pressure on Philadelphia and similar districts to take the kinds of aggressive steps that have been pioneered in other districts.

Endnotes

¹ Bryk A. S. & Schneider, B.S. 2002. *Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for Improvement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation; Johnson, S.M. & S.E. Birkeland, “Pursuing a ‘Sense of Success’: New Teachers Explain Their Career Decisions,” *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(3), 581-617; Levin, J. & Quinn, Meredith. 2003. *Missed Opportunities: How We Keep High-Quality Teachers Out of Urban Classrooms*. New York: New Teacher Project. <http://www.newteacherproject.org>; Neild, R. C., Useem, E. L., Travers, E.M. & Lesnick, J. 2003. *Once and For All: Placing a Highly Qualified Teacher in Every Philadelphia Classroom*. 2003. Philadelphia: Research for Action. <http://www.researchforaction.org>

²Keller, B., “‘Hiring Headway’ in Quality Counts 2003: If I Can’t Learn from You ... Ensuring a Highly Qualified Teacher in Every Classroom,” *Education Week*, January 12, 2003, pp. 43-44; For information on improvements in the effectiveness of Human Resources offices in the Houston Independent School District and San Diego City Schools, see Campbell, C., DeArmond, M. & Schwumwinger, A. 2004. *From Bystander to Ally: Transforming the District Human Resources Department*. Seattle: University of Washington, Center for Reinventing Public Education. <http://www.crpe.org>.

³ Neild et al., *op. cit.*

⁴ Information about new district recruitment initiatives are from Hanna, Tomas, University Partners Meeting, March 18, 2004.

⁵ Murphy, P.J. & DeArmond, M. M. 2003. *From the Headlines to the Frontlines: The Teacher Shortage and Its Implications for Recruitment Policy*. Seattle: University of Washington, Center for Reinventing Public Education, <http://www.crpe.org>; Neild et al., *op. cit.*

⁶ Keller, B. *op. cit.*, p. 43.

⁷ See *Complaint to the Office for Civil Rights Concerning Teacher Distribution in the Philadelphia School District*, Education Law Center, Philadelphia, March 2004. www.elc-pa.org.

As of this writing, a coalition of organizations headed by the Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth, the Philadelphia Student Union, and participating organizations in the Education First Compact of the Philadelphia Education Fund are pressing the district for changes in staffing policies so that students in the neediest schools have access to qualified teachers. See also, Neild et al., *op. cit.*

⁸ Chester, M.D., Offenber, R.M. & Xu, M.D., “Urban Teacher Transfer: A Three-year Cohort Study of the School District of Philadelphia Faculty,” Philadelphia, PA: Office of Accountability and Assessment, School District of Philadelphia, 2002. Paper pre-

sented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle.

⁹ The eligibility list itself, imposed years ago by the state to prevent corruption in hiring in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, has become effectively obsolete since stringent standards for teacher certification in Pennsylvania now exist for all teachers.

¹⁰ See Education Law Center, 2004, "State Laws Related to Equitable Distribution of Teachers." Philadelphia. www.elc-pa.org

¹¹ Philadelphia is the nation's eighth largest district. Larger districts in this study included New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami-Dade County, and Houston, all districts that have even greater challenges in staffing their schools. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. 2003. *Characteristics of the 100 Largest Public Elementary and Secondary School Districts in the United States: 2001-02*. NCES 2003-353, Jennifer Sable and Beth Aronstamm Young. Washington, DC: 2003.

We also studied Pittsburgh, the only other large city district in Pennsylvania. Several other districts included in our review—Atlanta, Baltimore, Washington, DC, and Cleveland—were chosen because of their demographic similarities to Philadelphia, i.e., their student populations are predominantly low-income and African American. We looked at Charlotte-Mecklenberg County because we had read reports of its initiatives to address the problem of teacher qualifications in hard-to-staff schools, and we selected Cincinnati because of its demographic similarity and its history of innovative collective bargaining agreements. Austin was included because of its reputation as an improving urban district.

We did not make an effort to seek out districts that had implemented site selection (e.g. Seattle) or that had made significant inroads in seniority-based transfer practices. With the exception of Chicago and Charlotte-Mecklenberg, we had little prior knowledge of the practices of the districts we selected before we began our work. We did expect to find significant differences in seniority transfer rules in cities in the South compared to those outside of the South but were surprised to find few major differences in these policies.

¹² We interviewed 4 Directors of Human Resources or Office of Personnel; 1 Associate Director of Human Resources; 3 Directors of Recruitment; 2 Assistant Directors of Recruitment/School Assignment; 6 district Recruiters; 6 school district partner groups involved in education reform; 5 union officials; 1 news reporter; 1 principal known to be a leader in the district; and 1 district administrator in a special sub-district for low-performing schools.

¹³ Suburban districts in Pennsylvania included Upper Darby, William Penn, Lower Merion, Pennsbury, and Bensalem. In New Jersey, we looked at Camden, Cherry Hill, Haddon Heights, and Pennsauken. These were chosen because they represented a range of community types and because they had sufficient numbers of schools that internal teacher transfers among them might be an issue. The interviews with two of the New Jersey districts were conducted over the telephone. All other interviews were conducted in person.

¹⁴ Education Policy and Leadership Center. 2003. *Head of the Class: A Quality Teacher in Every Pennsylvania Classroom*. Harrisburg: Education Policy and Leadership Center. <http://www.eplc.org>.

¹⁵ Bryk and Schneider, *op. cit.*, argue that "under [mandated school] decentralization, principals for the first time were authorized to choose their own faculty, and these choices were not constrained by seniority considerations. In some ways, this was one of the most significant provisions in the entire law." (p. 186).

¹⁶ According to the official of the United Federation of Teachers whom we interviewed for this study, school district negotiators want school-based hiring across the district, with principals choosing teachers, while the union is advocating for a district-wide site-based option that allows hiring teams with teacher majorities to make the decision as is currently the case in the School-Based Option schools.

¹⁷ Levin, J. & Quinn, M., *op. cit.*

¹⁸ The New Teacher Project, based in New York City, is working with several urban districts to rationalize and expedite hiring.

¹⁹ The Chancellor's District has been disbanded as an administrative unit by the current administration. There are still 40 former Chancellor's District schools with the extra time and incentives dispersed around the system. The high schools in the initiative no longer have the smaller classes, and the literacy curricula have been changed to conform to new citywide guidelines. The United Federation of Teachers will be monitoring student outcomes from the 2003-04 school year to see how student achievement has fared under these new arrangements.

²⁰ According to an MDRC report for the Council of Great City Schools, Charlotte-Mecklenberg County has "the most highly evolved system for targeting and providing assistance to needy schools, including more qualified teachers." (p. 71) See Snipes, J., Doolittle, F., Herlihy, C. 2002. *Foundations for Success: Case Studies of How Urban School Systems Improve Student Achievement*. Washington, DC: Council of the Great City Schools.

²¹ See Charlotte-Mecklenberg Schools. 2004. *Equity Status Report*. <http://cms.k12.nc.us>

²² Koppich, J.E., "Using Well-qualified Teachers Well," *American Educator*, Winter 2002.

²³ According to a program manager for NY Urban Teachers, teachers who live elsewhere in the country who know they want to come to New York City are attracted by the early placement feature of this program. Some of these recruits are natives of New York, including some retirees from other systems.

²⁴ See <http://pefchattanooga.org>; "Benwood Schools Post Strong Academic Gains," *Chattanooga Times Free Press*. Friday, February 6, 2004; "A Move to Invest in More Effective Teaching," *The Washington Post*, February 10, 2004.

²⁵ Keller, B., *op. cit.*, p. 43.



Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based, non-profit organization engaged in education research and evaluation. Founded in 1992, RFA works with public school districts, educational institutions, and community organizations to improve the educational opportunities for those traditionally disadvantaged by race/ethnicity, class, gender, language/cultural difference, and ability/disability.

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