



RESEARCH for *ACTION*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# ONCE & FOR ALL

**Placing a Highly Qualified Teacher  
In Every Philadelphia Classroom**



**WHAT WE KNOW** *and Need to Do*

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A report from *Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform*



# ONCE & FOR ALL

## Placing a Highly Qualified Teacher In Every Philadelphia Classroom

### WHAT WE KNOW *and Need to Do*

Quality teaching matters—particularly for low-income, inner-city students who perform below grade level. But these students are often taught by the least-qualified and least-experienced teachers. Philadelphia schools will not be able to improve student performance dramatically without more teachers who have the skills, experience, and rich content knowledge needed to help every student achieve high standards.

*Once & For All: Placing a Highly Qualified Teacher in Every Philadelphia Classroom* examines the current status of teacher quality in the city and what the School District of Philadelphia is now doing to ensure that all classrooms have highly trained, motivated, and knowledgeable teachers ready to boost the achievement of the district's 188,000 students.

For the first time, thanks to information provided by the School District of Philadelphia, researchers have been able to identify what we know about the qualifications, experience, and school assignment patterns of Philadelphia's 11,700-member teaching force. The study was conducted by a group of scholars who have launched *Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform*, a three-year research project designed to measure and help the public understand the impact of the 2001 state takeover of the Philadelphia schools, the school management partnerships undertaken with external for-profit and non-profit organizations, and the reforms initiated by the state- and city-appointed School Reform Commission (SRC) members and School District of Philadelphia CEO Paul Vallas.

Led by Research for Action (RFA), a Philadelphia non-profit, the research team includes investigators from the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education and the Wharton School, the Philadelphia Education Fund, Swarthmore College, Rutgers University, the Consortium on Chicago School Research, and other organizations.

## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT TEACHER QUALITY ISSUES

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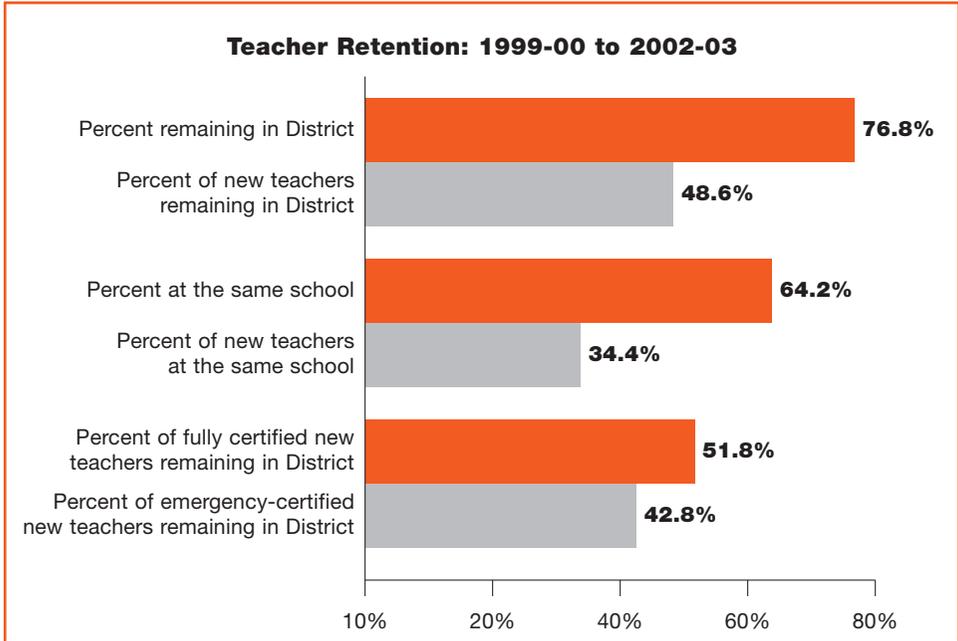
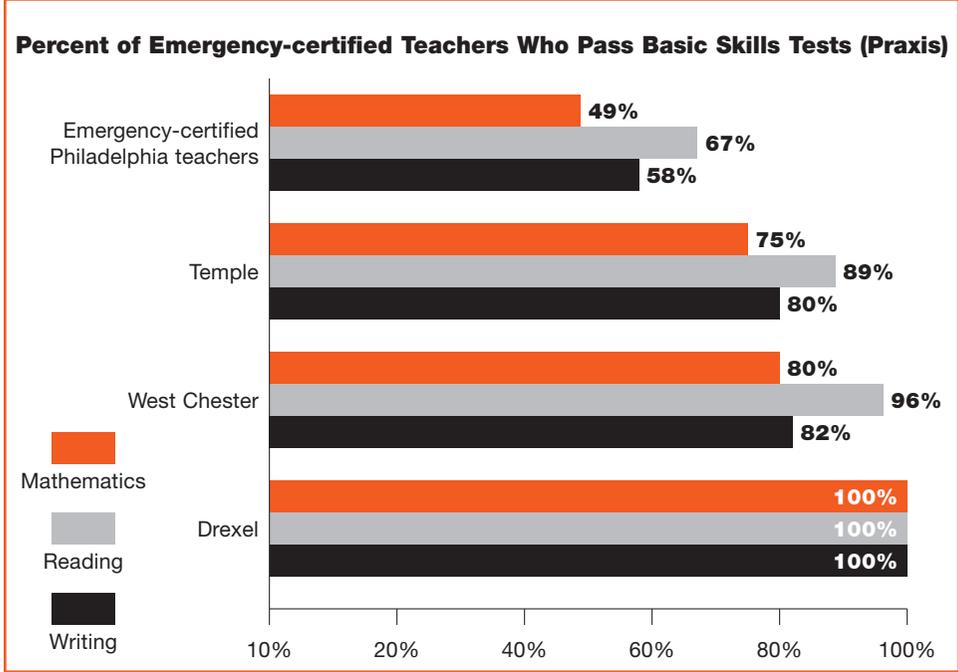
The report shows that teacher quality in Philadelphia has not been what it could be and has been exacerbated by policies and practices that undermine the capacity to ensure that every child has a highly qualified teacher.

### The Problem of Underqualified Teachers

- **Declining certification rates.** The percentage of certified teachers in Philadelphia declined steadily over the past four school years across all grade levels, dropping from 93 percent in October 1999 to 89 percent in October 2003. Only about half of the new teachers hired by October 1, 2002, for the 2002-03 school year were fully certified.
- **Poor performance of emergency-certified teachers on standardized licensure tests.** According to state data, many emergency-certified teachers in Philadelphia who took licensure (Praxis) exams during 2002-03 did not pass them. On the basic skills tests, for example, fewer than half passed in math, two-thirds passed in reading, and 58 percent passed the writing test. Pass rates of graduates from teacher certification programs at local colleges, by contrast, were considerably higher.

### High Attrition, Unstable Staffing, Many Vacancies

- **High overall teacher attrition rates from the district.** Between 1999 and 2003, about a quarter of the district's teachers departed the system. For teachers new to the district, the attrition rate was much higher: 27 percent left after just one year, and more than half had left the district three years later.
- **Unstable staffing at the school level.** Only 64 percent of the district's 1999-00 teachers remained in the same school by the fall of 2003. Some had left the district while others switched to different schools. Middle schools experienced the most turnover, retaining only 59 percent of their 1999-00 teachers three years later. At the highest-poverty middle and K-8th grade schools, less than half of the original 1999-00 staff were still teaching at these schools three years later.



● **Elevated one-year attrition rates in schools targeted for radical**

**intervention.** Some of the schools whose management was taken over by outside providers or converted to charter status for the fall of 2002 experienced higher than usual rates of teacher turnover between June and September of 2002.

● **An improving but still too-high number of teacher vacancies.**

The number of teaching vacancies in the district has declined substantially over the last two to three years, largely the result of the abolition of the residency requirement in 2001, the streamlining of the hiring process, and targeted recruitment efforts for high-need areas. Reforms included the initiation of the Literacy Intern Program in 1998, which created a robust pipeline of qualified recruits whose retention rates have exceeded those of other first-year teachers. Still, 138 teaching vacancies existed in mid-September 2002, and 4 percent of the district's June 2003 teaching staff started their jobs on or after September 15, 2002. Teaching vacancies have a negative impact on staff morale and student learning, since schools often handle vacancies by sending students from the affected class to other classrooms (thereby increasing class size) or requiring teachers to "cover" the class during their preparation periods. Vacancy levels are predicted to drop significantly for fall 2003 as a result of the increase in teacher applications.

## **Inequitable Distribution of Qualified Teachers Across Philadelphia's Schools**

● **Teacher assignments that vary by poverty composition of the school.**

Like many other districts, the least-qualified teachers, whether measured by certification status or years of experience, are assigned to the highest-poverty schools. Almost all of Philadelphia's public schools have relatively high proportions of poor students, but the disparities in teacher quality between the poorest-of-the-poor schools and the not-quite-so-poor schools are striking. In 2002-03, only 83 percent of the teachers at schools serving 90 percent or more low-income students were certified, compared to 92 percent in schools with less than 80 percent low-income students. These disparities occur in part because of school transfer rules that offer the first pick to teachers with the most seniority.

**Teacher Experience by School Poverty Level, 2002-03**

Poverty Level	N	Avg. yrs. exp.	New	1-5 yrs
90% + poverty	1773	9.6	11.0%	40.1%
80% to 90% poverty	4099	11.6	8.3%	33.1%
0% to 79% poverty	5839	16.3	5.3%	20.0%

● **Fewer highly qualified teachers in schools with high minority student enrollment.** Philadelphia’s highest-poverty schools also tend to have high percentages of minority students. Our data show that the percentage of certified teachers at a school declines as the percentage of minority students increases. In 2002-03, 96 percent of the teachers were certified at schools with less than 50 percent minority enrollment, compared to 86 percent at schools with at least 90 percent minority students.

**Teacher Certification by School Percent Minority**

Percent Minority	N (02-03)	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03
less than 50%	1467	98.3%	97.1%	95.7%	95.8%
50% to 89%	3375	95.5%	93.3%	92.2%	90.8%
90% plus	6874	91.3%	87.9%	86.7%	85.6%

● **Striking variations among school levels in teachers’ experience.** High school teachers, on average, have the longest tenure in the district (17 years) while middle school teachers, located in the most troubled sector of the system, are significantly less experienced with an average of 11 years of teaching. During 2002-03, more than half of the teachers at the highest-poverty middle schools had five years of experience or less.

**Teacher Experience by School Type: 2002-03**

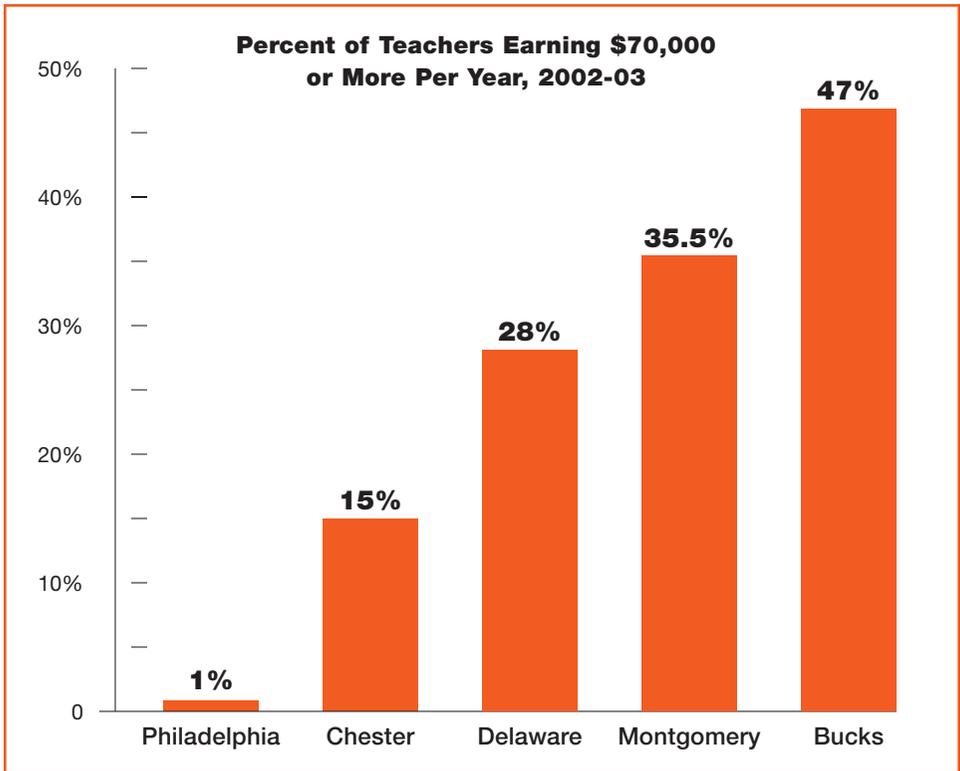
School Type	N	Avg. yrs. exp.	New	1-5 yrs	6-10 yrs	11-20 yrs	21-30 yrs	31+ yrs
K-8	1707	14.3	4.3%	26.7%	14.9%	24.3%	21.7%	8.1%
Elementary	4550	12.5	7.6%	30.4%	14.3%	24.4%	17.7%	5.5%
Middle	1971	11.4	9.3%	31.7%	16.3%	23.3%	15.2%	4.2%
High school	2963	16.6	6.7%	21.5%	14.1%	14.7%	31.1%	11.9%
Other	399	15.3	7.3%	21.8%	17.3%	16.8%	27.1%	9.8%
Total	12052	13.8	7.1%	27.4%	14.7%	21.4%	22.0%	7.4%

## Barriers to Hiring, Induction, and Retention

● **A highly centralized hiring and slow school assignment process.**

In Philadelphia, the district hires teachers and controls their school placement. Teachers have very limited choice in their school assignment. The schools have almost no choice: Only 31 schools have voted for school-based selection of teachers, an option that is limited by the teachers’ union contract requirement for an annual “yes” vote by two-thirds of the teachers in a school. Because of provisions in the teachers’ collective bargaining agreement, the central assignment of new teachers takes place only after all transfers are processed. This sequenced processing of large batches of people results in an excessively delayed timeline for hiring, placement, and summer training of new teachers. The problem is further aggravated by the fact that many new recruits and some veteran teachers, lured by last-minute offers from the suburbs, resign from the district during the last two weeks of August.

- **A rocky induction for new teachers.** High percentages of new teachers do not have the basic supports and information during their first week on the job. For example, many principals are slow to assign mentors. By late October of 2002, nearly 40 percent of the new teachers reported they had not yet met with their mentor teacher.
- **Salary disadvantages for teachers who stay.** While Philadelphia’s *starting* salary and hiring bonus make it competitive with salaries in districts in surrounding counties, its top teacher salaries are significantly lower. Only 1 percent of Philadelphia teachers earn more than \$70,000 compared with more than 30 percent of Montgomery County teachers and almost 50 percent of Bucks County teachers.



Source: Philadelphia Inquirer

## A Mixed Picture

The results of the study indicate that the district is not doing notably better or worse than other major urban districts when it comes to teacher turnover rates and certification levels. It is on a par with many districts in the state and region in starting salaries and teacher experience levels.

The bad news is that the data presented in the report show a disturbing picture of teacher attrition, reliance on lesser-qualified teachers, and inequities in the assignment of qualified teachers to schools with large percentages of low-income children. These patterns are reflective of other urban systems nationwide. However, Philadelphia's hiring and school assignment systems are unusually centralized because of collective bargaining rules, a situation that sharply limits the ability of schools and teachers to forge a good employment match.

The good news is that the district's ambitious recruitment efforts that were jump-started by CEO Paul Vallas—and boosted by the tight labor market and drop in demand for teachers in other districts—have led to an improved selection and assessment process, an increase in teacher applications, and a decline in vacancies for the opening of the 2003 school year. Knowledgeable observers and school officials expect that the administration's aggressive pursuit of a teacher-focused strategy of improvement should lead to a reduction in teacher turnover and less reliance on emergency-certified teachers.

## WHAT IS BEING DONE: THE DISTRICT RESPONDS

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District CEO Paul Vallas has made a commitment to placing qualified teachers in every classroom, and his efforts have thus far been backed up by strong action. The School District of Philadelphia has already indicated that it will not settle for minimal requirements. In fact, by requiring new teachers who are not fully certified to participate in summer training, the district's definition of a "highly qualified" teacher is more rigorous than the federal and state definitions of that term.

In addition, the system has undertaken a host of new initiatives designed to recruit and retain teachers, many of which were conceived of and carried out by its Campaign for Human Capital, led by Tomás Hanna, an educator in the district. Business and civic leaders have joined the Campaign, which is co-chaired by Rosemarie B. Greco, director of Pennsylvania Governor Rendell's Office of Health Care Reform, and by Sandra Dungee Glenn, a civic leader and member of the School Reform Commission. The most significant of these initiatives include:

**Incentives for those interested in pursuing teaching careers to teach in Philadelphia.** The district will provide \$1,000 stipends to student teachers and to their cooperating teachers in the schools if the student teacher becomes employed in the district. All teachers will receive a tuition reimbursement of up to \$1,000 annually after completion of a year of teaching to help pay for continuing coursework required by the state.

**Expanded outreach and marketing efforts.** To better attract highly qualified teacher applicants to Philadelphia, the district has launched a new Web site that lists vacancies by school and has opened a "one-stop shopping" Welcome Center where recruits can fill out an application, learn about employment benefits, and get on-line assistance for licensure tests. The district has hosted open houses in selected schools where prospective candidates can learn about employment opportunities and hiring processes and has introduced a Teacher Ambassador program that pays Philadelphia teachers a \$500 finder's fee for each new teacher they recruit—or \$1,000 if the new hire is in a hard-to-staff subject area.

**Changes in the hiring process.** The district is making progress in developing an electronic application and an automated applicant tracking system.

**Intense focus on addressing areas of teacher shortage.** The district has forged new partnerships with area colleges and universities to develop high-quality alternative certification programs in hard-to-staff fields and schools, and has chosen to expand the ongoing Literacy Intern (alternative certification) Program in grades K-3. In addition, Philadelphia has adopted the national Teach for America (alternative certification) program, resulting in the placement of 125 high-achieving college graduates in hard-to-staff schools or fields. The district is continuing its successful recruitment of teachers from around the world—Spain, Kenya, India and Ghana—to fill positions in Spanish, math, and the sciences.

**Enhanced preparation and mentoring for new teachers and additional training for teachers and principals.** The district now requires a two-week summer training (with stipend) for all new teachers and has created the new position of school-based New Teacher Coaches, who are assigned at a ratio of 1:10 to work exclusively with new teachers throughout the school year. Literacy and math content leaders in schools will work with veteran and new teachers. The district also requires summer training in teacher retention strategies for all school principals.

These initiatives—along with *reductions in class size* in the early grades, a *tightening of disciplinary procedures*, a *core curriculum* in the major academic subjects, and *facilities improvements*—encompass a broad-based effort to improve the incentives for teachers to come to and stay in the School District of Philadelphia.

Initial results from the Vallas-led efforts are encouraging. Applications for teaching positions rose substantially during the spring and summer of 2003 and veteran teachers are responding positively to a Teacher Ambassador program. Principals gave high marks to the three-day summer training on teacher retention strategies, and have developed a plan for retention activities in their schools. Business and higher education leaders interviewed for this study praised the new initiatives as well as the district's eagerness to use the expertise of outside groups, and they spoke of the "positive energy" exuded by CEO Vallas and Tomás Hanna, his special assistant for teacher recruitment and retention.

## REMAINING CHALLENGES

Clearly, the district has recognized that any school reform effort must focus on recruitment, retention, and better deployment of the best teachers. But considerable challenges remain and the pressure to make continued headway in hiring, retaining, and distributing “highly qualified” teachers will only increase as new federal and state requirements for teachers begin to take greater hold in the coming years. Can the district further streamline its hiring and school assignment processes, place qualified teachers in large numbers in high-poverty schools, and successfully implement efforts to hire only certified teachers or candidates pursuing a high-quality alternate certification program? Can the district and higher education institutions engage in long-term reciprocal efforts that ensure both the efficient hiring of local candidates and rigorous training and pre-screening of participants in teacher certification programs prior to their graduation?

Most importantly, the provisions of the next teacher contract must be consonant with what we know about what it takes to attract and retain quality teachers. Will the School Reform Commission and the Vallas administration take up contentious issues such as school-based selection of teachers with the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) in the 2004 negotiations? The PFT is deeply committed to maintaining teachers’ rights to transfer based on their seniority and has fought to keep the number of schools electing site selection for vacant or new positions to a bare minimum. Vallas and the SRC are committed to speeding up the hiring timeline and creating rational employment matches between new teachers and their schools. Would pursuit of such contract provisions risk sacrificing labor peace and would there be public support for taking that risk? In 2002, Philadelphia parents, community organizations, and advocacy groups vehemently protested the state takeover and privatization efforts. The question is whether teacher staffing issues may also rouse these constituencies, along with business leaders, to the point that they have a *de facto* place at the bargaining table.

## Future Research

*Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform* will continue to examine issues related to teacher quality and the effects of new policies and practices affecting teacher recruitment, retention, and deployment. Future research will address questions about the impact of site selection in participating schools, the status of teacher quality in the city's charter schools, and the racial/ethnic composition of the teaching force.

In addition to annual reports on teacher quality, future studies from *Learning from Philadelphia's School Reform* will explore:

- What school staff, principals, parents, and community groups in 20 of the low-performing schools say about their first year of assignment to one of several radical educational interventions in 2002-03;
- An analysis of the two standardized tests in use in Philadelphia, the TerraNova and the Pennsylvania State Standardized Assessment (PSSA), showing their similarities and differences and explaining their methods of assessing student achievement;
- An analysis of how the state of teaching and learning in selected case-study schools has been reshaped by the state takeover, policies of the Vallas administration, and the school management partnerships with outside, non-profit and for-profit organizations; and
- An examination of civic capacity—the joining together of civic and community groups for school improvement—during this period of reform.

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Bound copies of the full report can be obtained from Research for Action for \$10 (bulk orders @ \$8) by contacting: Research for Action, 3701 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104, 215-823-2500 ext 508, or [info@researchforaction.org](mailto:info@researchforaction.org). Additional executive summaries are available for free. Reports, articles, and single-page fact sheets are also available on the RFA Web site [www.researchforaction.org](http://www.researchforaction.org) and the Web site of the Philadelphia Education Fund [www.philaedfund.org](http://www.philaedfund.org).

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