

Teacher quality inequitable in Philadelphia's schools

Schools that have a student population with 10 percent or more White students are more likely to have certified and experienced teachers and low teacher turnover than schools whose student bodies have fewer White students, a new analysis of data on Philadelphia teachers shows.

This work, conducted by Elizabeth Farley at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education, updates a prior analysis in *Once and For All: Placing a Qualified Teacher in Every Philadelphia Classroom*, a 2003 report published by Research for Action (RFA), as well as a March 2005 RFA report titled *Quest for Quality*.

Those reports, based on a data set on the teaching workforce provided by the District's Office of Human Resources, provided statistical analysis of how poverty and race impact teacher certification and experience in Philadelphia schools.

Teacher certification

On average, in the 91 Philadelphia schools where 10 percent or more of the student body is White, 93 percent of teachers were certified in any subject in 2003-04, the most recent year for which data were available.

What do 'Mixed Minority' and 'Racially Isolated' mean?

The three tables adopt categories and definitions used by Judge Doris Smith-Ribner in the School District desegregation court case. "Mixed minority" schools are those with student populations that are more than 90 percent nonwhite, but do not have more than 90 percent of any one race. "Racially isolated" schools are those with student populations that include more than 90 percent of one race.

In considering "racially isolated schools," Philadelphia's lone school with a student population that is more than 90 percent White was excluded.

In this article, "racially isolated" and "mixed minority" schools are collectively referred to as "predominantly nonwhite schools" – or schools with 90 percent or more students of color.

TABLE 1: Mean percentage of teachers certified in any area at Philadelphia schools, 2003-2004

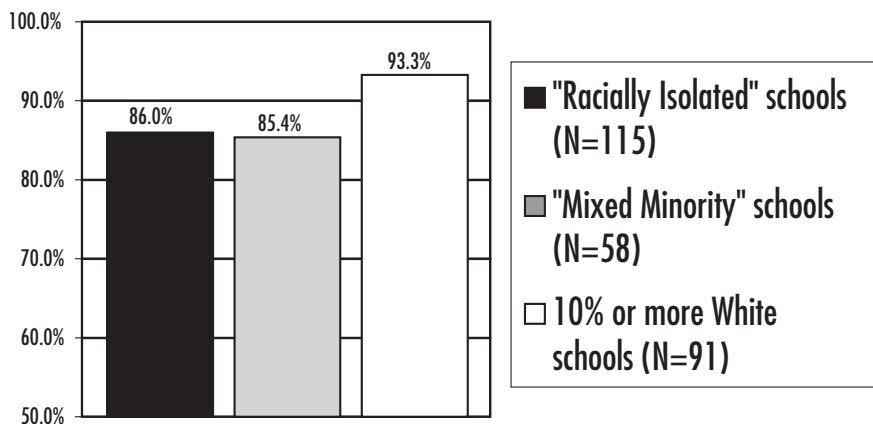
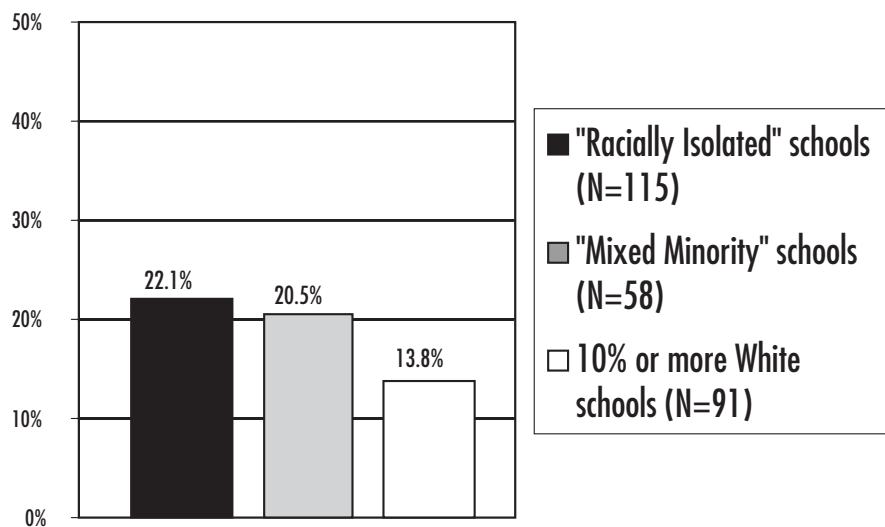


TABLE 2: Mean percentage of teachers leaving their school after 2002-2003



In comparison, only 85 to 86 percent of teachers in Philadelphia's 173 predominantly nonwhite schools (less than 10 percent White) were certified (Table 1).

These disparities in teacher certification are evident since the 1999-00 school year, the earliest year for which Farley had data.

Following general District trends, the percentages of certified teachers were higher for all types of schools in the earlier years. On average, 97.1 percent of teachers in Philadelphia's 10 percent or more White schools were certified in any subject in 1999-00 compared to 91-92 percent of teachers in predominantly nonwhite schools.

The data used in the analysis count "intern-certified" teachers as certified. "Intern-certified" teachers, who may not have classroom experience and/or coursework in teaching methods, have passed the PRAXIS licensing exams and have enrolled in an approved teacher education program.

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Teacher turnover and experience

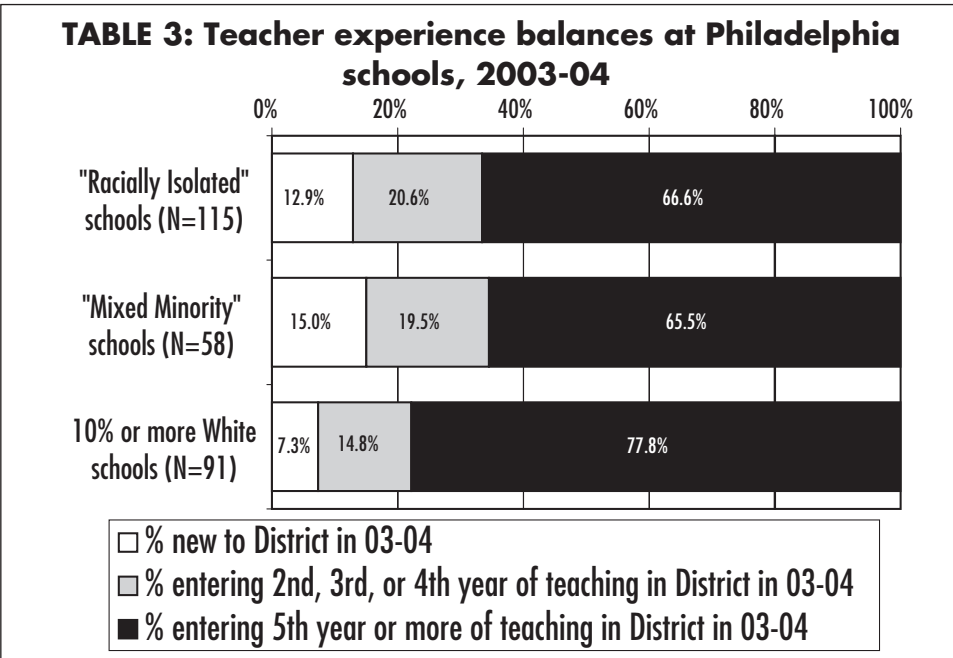
High teacher turnover is a problem across the District, but it is most pronounced in Philadelphia’s predominantly nonwhite schools.

On average, more than a fifth of the teachers departed from these schools at the end of the 2002-03 school year, the most recent year for which Farley had data on turnover. In comparison, slightly less than 14 percent of teachers departed from schools whose student bodies were at least 10 percent White (Table 2).

The teacher quality data show that the mix of experience levels among teaching staffs in Philadelphia schools varies according to the racial composition of the student body (Table 3).

In 2003-04 in the District’s schools that had 10 percent or more White students, an average of only 7 percent of the teachers were new (i.e. had taught in Philadelphia for less than a year), and more than three-quarters had five or more years of experience. In comparison, an average of about 13 to 15 percent of teachers in predominantly nonwhite schools were new, and only two-thirds had five or more years of experience.

In sum, even small differences in the racial makeup of student bodies appear to be associated with significant variations in the qual-



ifications and turnover rates of schools’ teaching staffs.

As District administrators craft initiatives to comply with federal mandates to provide highly qualified teachers in every classroom, these findings suggest that they will need to pay special attention to providing credentialed and experienced staff in schools where racial segregation of students of color is most extreme.

– Benjamin Herold is a senior research assistant at Research for Action, a nonprofit education research firm that is leading a consortium of scholars in Learning from Philadelphia’s School Reform, a research and public awareness project examining Philadelphia’s current wave of education reform.