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## Characteristics of the 2004-05 Cohort of New Teachers in Philadelphia

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In recent decades, federal, state, and local policies have demonstrated renewed efforts to address the concerns of both teacher quality and quantity, resulting in initiatives to attract, reward, and retain qualified people in the teacher profession. Concerns about teacher quality have increased as the accountability measures stemming from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 have intensified pressure on schools and districts to push student achievement to new levels. This pressure is especially prevalent in low-performing schools, where low-income and minority students are those most likely to be taught by underqualified and inexperienced teachers (The Education Trust, 2003; Oakes, Franke, Quartz, & Rogers, 2002; Hirsch et al., 2001; Haycock, 1998; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). Furthermore, according to any of the commonly used indicators of teacher quality – years of experience, college major, or subject-area certification – urban students are less likely to have well-qualified teachers (Neild, Useem, & Farley, 2005; Hardy, 2002; Jerald, 2002; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Useem & Neild, 2001).

Efforts to address teacher quality in urban schools are often coupled with retention strategies to counter teacher turnover rates. Some researchers estimate that as many as 40-50% of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years on the job (Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Brewster & Railsback, 2001). Teacher turnover is especially problematic in urban and rural schools serving low-income students (The Education Trust, 2003; Haycock, 1998; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996). To complicate the situation further, those teachers with the greatest skills are those who are most likely to leave poor, urban schools for schools that are believed to be less challenging (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). Research has documented that factors such as poor school climate, weak school leadership, and inadequate preparation for the challenges of teaching in urban classrooms drive teachers out of urban schools (Birkeland & Johnson, 2002; Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Kardos, Johnson, Peske, Kauffman, & Liu, 2001). Moreover, the delayed hiring processes of urban districts means that many talented teachers have been "hired away" by suburban districts by the time the cities get around to making job offers. That is, teachers interested in working in urban districts often receive offers from suburban districts well before receiving an offer from the urban district. Anxious to be hired and to start planning for the upcoming school year, new teachers accept the suburban offers before the urban districts make an initial bid for the new teacher. When urban districts

with late hiring processes finally make offers, the best teachers are no longer available. This further increases the odds that students in urban classrooms are assigned to the least-prepared teachers.

Initiatives to address the problems of teacher quality and quantity often take the form of recruitment and retention efforts designed to both attract teachers and support them in ways that will increase the likelihood that they remain in their school and/or district. The School District of Philadelphia is an example of a district making strides towards improving their recruitment and retention strategies. To begin to understand the impacts or effects of these efforts to address teacher quality and quantity, it is important to account for the influence that teacher preparation, teacher hiring, school placement, and targeted supports may have on the experiences of first-year teachers. This paper utilizes a one-time survey of new teachers to gain insight about the characteristics of teachers recruited to the School District of Philadelphia for the 2004-2005 school year. The data reveals information about teachers' preparation, hiring experiences, knowledge of school assignment, and expectations as they enter the School District of Philadelphia. Analysis of this data has implications for actions that the district may consider taking to ensure that their recruitment strategies are supplemented by their retention initiatives, which take the form of a variety of new teacher support activities and programs.

## **Literature on Teacher Preparation, Hiring, School Assignment, and New Teacher Support**

### *Teacher Preparation*

Given the challenging circumstances that exist in many urban school systems, scholars have raised questions about what it means to prepare teachers for their work in urban schools (Leland & Harste, 2004; Singer, 1996). While teacher educators often argue that a cadre of certification courses, accompanied by student teaching experience(s), is crucial to the preparation of new teachers (Laczko-Kerr & Berliner, 2003; Freytag, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2000, 1990), others, such as proponents of alternate certification programs, emphasize the value of subject-matter knowledge and on-the-job training (Hess, 2001; Ballou & Podgursky, 2000; Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1999; Hawley, 1990). Either way, when new teachers enter urban schools with little or no experience teaching urban students (or when they altogether lack certification), questions should be raised about their level of preparedness. In many cases, new teachers are not adequately prepared to take on the positions to which they are assigned, where they face new challenges and real-life student needs and behaviors that are not covered in textbook scenarios (Liu & Meyer, 2005).

### *Teacher Hiring*

Hiring practices in urban school districts are often lengthy and have been blamed for discouraging and/or keeping high quality candidates out of urban classrooms because these candidates often accept other positions before they are offered jobs by the urban district (Rothman, 2004; Levin & Quinn, 2003; Munoz, Winter, & Ronau, 2003; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). Hiring delays are largely due to transfer and resignation policies that allow veteran teachers to give late notification of their intentions to exit their current position, thereby making it difficult for districts to formulate early predictions of their specific hiring needs. Many large cities utilize district-based hiring processes, where candidates are hired to the district, but do not immediately know the exact school, and, in some cases, grade(s) and/or subject(s) they will be teaching (Liu, 2005; Useem & Farley, 2004). Research findings caution that such a hiring approach limits the ability to consider specific teaching vacancies or the needs

of individual school contexts (Liu, 2005). Further, these practices hold the potential to discourage qualified teaching candidates from seriously seeking a position within an urban district if they are weary of the uncertainty that accompanies the hiring and school placement processes.

### *Possible Influences of School Assignment and Knowledge of School Characteristics*

Once hired to a district, school assignment plays an important role in the experiences of first-year teachers. New teachers in urban districts are often recruited and assigned to fill vacancies in the hardest-to-staff schools and positions, increasing the possibility that they will leave their position within a few years (Ingersoll, 2001). Liu (2002) highlights the importance of making good matches between teachers and their schools and/or positions during the hiring process. He argues that the long-term interests of schools will best be met if applicants have “realistic expectations” about a school prior to accepting a position, thereby increasing their job satisfaction and likelihood to remain in their school assignment. Liu’s (2005) surveys of teachers in four states found that those teachers who obtained a clear understanding of the position that they would be filling during the hiring process were more satisfied with their jobs than those teachers who did not have a similar understanding (p. 40). In districts that have centralized hiring processes and late school assignments, new teachers have minimal opportunities to learn about their schools and/or positions before beginning the new school year.

### *New Teacher Support*

Research suggests that teachers who participate in some form of induction (targeted support for new teachers) are more likely to stay in teaching (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 1996). Induction can take the form of many different activities, such as mentoring, professional development, and structured observations and feedback. When teachers are intentionally supported and “folded into” the culture of their schools, they are made aware of available resources, have the opportunity to engage with their colleagues in collegial conversations about teaching skills and objectives, and develop a greater sense of efficacy (Hope, 1999; Bainer & Didham, 1995; Newman, Rutter, & Smith, 1989). Furthermore, those teachers who receive mentoring (one of the most common forms of new teacher support) early in their careers have been found to be more effective (Humphrey, Adelman, Esch, Rielh, Shields, & Tiffinay, 2000; Feiman-Nemser, 1983). Collectively, this research highlights the fact that organizational aspects of schools may influence teacher retention rates and that recruitment efforts alone will not necessarily solve the staffing problems in schools. Instead, ongoing, school-based support and training for new teachers is also necessary when attempting to resolve the problem of teacher attrition (Johnson et al., 2001).

## **Teacher Recruitment and Retention Initiatives in the School District of Philadelphia**

Philadelphia is one of many urban districts that has had difficulty staffing classrooms with enough qualified teachers. This has been especially true in middle schools and/or those schools with the highest poverty levels, where positions are less likely to be filled by veteran teachers (Neild, Useem, & Farley, 2005). New teacher retention rates in Philadelphia have improved in recent years, with 85% of new teachers hired in 2003-2004 returning the following year, up from 77% of those hired in the 2002-2003 school year. However, unlike wealthier suburban districts, the district is still forced to hire a large number of new teachers each year to fill vacancies left by teachers who depart the district (Neild, Useem, & Farley, 2005, p. 17).

Like other large cities, Philadelphia has a centralized process for hiring teachers, with a

limited number of schools having choice in the teachers who fill their vacancies (Useem & Farley, 2004). Instead, qualified applicants are given a list of vacancies and are required to choose a position from that list. Because the principal may never meet the new teachers before the first day of school, this current system makes it difficult to facilitate good matches between the specific needs of individual schools and the qualifications of new teachers entering the district.

Under the nationwide pressure of NCLB requirements that mandate a highly qualified teacher for every classroom by June 2006, the district has greatly increased efforts to recruit and retain new teachers. The district's recruitment efforts include a marketing campaign that reaches out to local undergraduates, implementation of a streamlined, online application process, and the creation of financial incentives to attract teachers to the district. New Teacher Coaches assigned to support new teachers, an expanded induction program, and school-based content-area coaches have been established to offer support and increase teacher satisfaction. The district hopes that these efforts will help improve retention. The district has also made efforts to decentralize and speed up the hiring and placement of new teachers in the city's schools by allowing site-based selection of teachers by schools, and quicker hiring timelines so that high quality applicants do not accept other job offers before an offer comes from the School District of Philadelphia.

With the vast amount of energy and financial resources that the School District of Philadelphia has invested into teacher recruitment and retention, it is fair to say that the district has taken measures to try to live up to the spirit of NCLB. Thus, it is worth investigating what kinds of teachers it has been able to attract to the district. This paper represents results from preliminary analyses of this new teacher survey data and answers the following questions:

- *What kind of formal preparation did new teachers have for teaching?*
- *How much experience did new teachers have working in urban schools?*
- *When were teachers hired and when did they learn of their specific school assignment?*
- *How familiar were teachers with their school placements?*
- *What expectations did teachers have about being a new teacher in the School District of Philadelphia?*
- *How long do new teachers plan to teach in the School District of Philadelphia?*

The answers to these questions will help us begin to understand the limits and possibilities of the kinds of recruitment efforts that the district has put into place. Further, this data may inform how the district's retention initiatives could be targeted to support cohorts of new teachers.

In this paper, the variety of preparation and prior experience in urban schools is examined, followed by a discussion of teachers' experiences with the hiring and school placement process. Next, teachers' familiarity and expectations of their school assignment is considered. Teachers' expectations and anticipated challenges as first-year teachers in Philadelphia are also reviewed. Finally, the analyses provide a first glimpse of how long teachers intend to teach in the School District of Philadelphia. In some cases, results from the 2004-2005 survey are compared to survey results from teachers new to the School District of Philadelphia in the 2003-2004 school year, allowing for comparison of new teacher characteristics from one school year to the next. Collectively, this information will allow us to gain greater perspective on how the district's recruitment efforts are playing out in the city's schools.

## Methods

At the onset of the 2004-2005 school year, a team of researchers from the University of Pennsylvania surveyed 345 newly hired teachers entering the School District of Philadelphia. The paper and pencil survey was distributed to the newly hired teachers at the district-sponsored induction program. All of the new teachers present on this particular induction day completed the survey. Because this induction concluded one week before the start of the school year, late hires are not represented in this sample. The 58 item survey included basic questions about teachers' educational background, teacher certification, and type of prior teaching experience (if any). Questions also asked about the factors influencing teachers' decision to apply to the School District of Philadelphia, their experiences with the hiring and placement process, and how long they plan to remain in both the district and in the profession in general. Finally, several questions included a Likert response scale to determine the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with a variety of statements about their expectations for the school year and about challenges they anticipated as first year teachers in the School District of Philadelphia. Although a follow-up survey is planned, it has not yet been conducted, so only preliminary conclusions can be drawn from this study. Table 1 offers characteristics of the 345 survey respondents.

**Table 1: Respondent Characteristics (n=345)**

Characteristic	% of Total Sample (n=345)	Characteristic	% of Total Sample (n=345)
Gender		Certification Status	
Male	24%	PA (or other state) Certification	57%
Female	76%	Emergency Certified	25%
		Intern Certified	15%
Age		Multiple Certifications	3%
Under 25 years of age	24%		
25-34 years of age	33%	Race/Ethnicity	
35-44 years of age	22%	White, Non- Hispanic/Latino	63%
45-54 years of age	16%	African American	25%
55 years of age or older	5%	Asian American	4%
		Biracial/Multiethnic	3%
		Hispanic/Latino	2%
		"Other"	3%

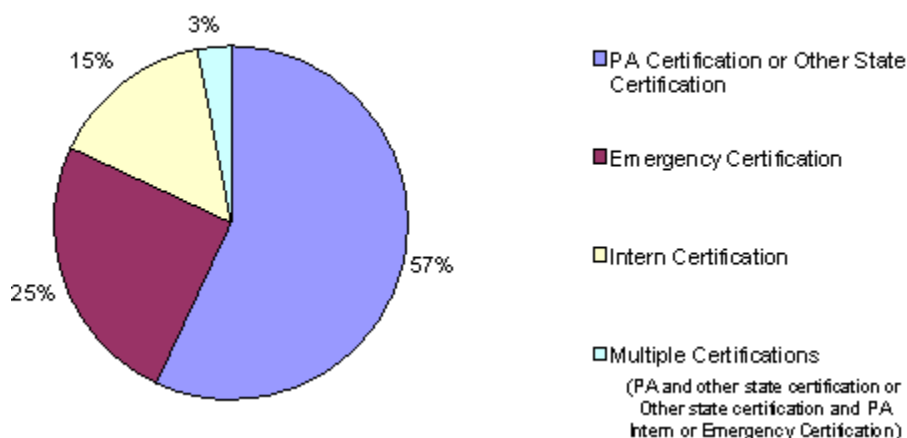
## Findings

Survey data from the 345 respondents provides insight about several characteristics of new teachers entering the School District of Philadelphia in the 2004-2005 school year. Close to three-fourths of the teachers are certified to teach, yet a limited number have experience teaching in urban schools. Seven areas are the focus of the findings in this paper: teacher preparation and certification, prior experience in urban schools, hiring, school assignment, district preservice training, new teacher expectations, and intentions to remain in the School District of Philadelphia. Details about each of these findings are discussed in the sections that follow.

## Teacher Preparation and Certification

The first research question considers teachers' preparation and certification as they enter the School District of Philadelphia. Survey results from this study suggest that teachers newly hired to the School District of Philadelphia obtained their certification through a variety of pathways—including undergraduate programs, traditional Masters programs, and several alternate route programs. In Pennsylvania, a “fully certified” teacher is one who has state certification. A teaching candidate may be granted a provisional Intern certificate upon providing proof of passing the initial Praxis certification exams and of actively working towards certification through coursework. This certificate meets the “Highly Qualified Teacher” provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act. As Figure 1 demonstrates, close to three-quarters of new teachers surveyed are considered “highly qualified” to teach in the School District of Philadelphia, with 57% of these teachers holding Pennsylvania state certification and 15% possessing Intern certificates.

**Figure 1: Certification Held By Survey Respondents**



It is also important to note that one-quarter of the new hires are Emergency certified, suggesting that they may not have adequate preparation for teaching in the city's classrooms. This percentage of new teachers hired in 2004-2005 who are emergency certified (25%) is similar to the percentage of new teachers hired in 2003-2004 who were emergency certified (26%).<sup>1</sup> The significance of the new teacher certification rates in the School District of Philadelphia becomes clear when they are compared to those of all teachers in the School District of Philadelphia and those employed in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. See Table 2.

**Table 2: Percent of Teachers “Highly Qualified” and “Emergency Certified” in Pennsylvania and Philadelphia**

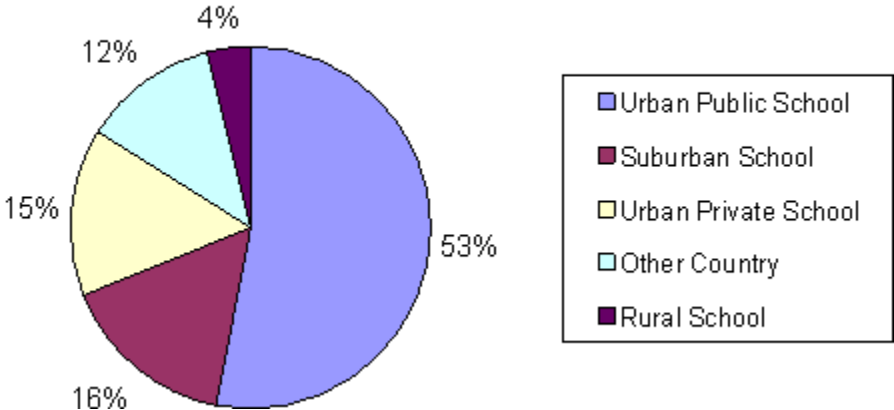
	2003-2004		2004-2005	
	PA <sup>2</sup>	Philadelphia <sup>3</sup>	PA	Philadelphia
Percent of <b>All</b> Teachers considered “highly qualified”	96.79%	84.9%	96.99%	86%
Percent of <b>New</b> Teachers considered “highly qualified”		74%		75%
Percent of <b>All</b> Teachers Emergency Certified	1.75%	10%	2%	9%
Percent of <b>New</b> Teachers Emergency Certified		26%		25%

In 2004-2005, 86% of teachers in Philadelphia were reported to be “highly qualified”, while 96.99% of the state’s teachers were deemed as such. However, only 75% of the *new* teachers surveyed in the School District of Philadelphia would be considered “highly qualified.” Further, based on the fall 2004 survey results, the percentage of *new* teachers who were emergency certified (25%) was higher than the district-wide percentage of emergency certified teachers (9%), and significantly higher than the statewide average of 2%. Because certification status is one of the most commonly used indicators of teacher quality, the figures from this survey data raise questions about the quality of new teachers who entered the School District of Philadelphia at the onset of the 2004-2005 school year.

*Teacher Experience in Urban Schools*

In addition to licensure, prior teaching experience may also play an influential role in determining whether a new teacher is prepared to work in urban classrooms. Slightly more than half of the survey respondents reported having *some* job experience prior to teaching. However, only 30% of all respondents reported having experience as a full-time teacher. Of those teachers who *did* have prior teaching experience before working for the School District of Philadelphia (104 total), slightly more than half taught in an urban public school. See Figure 2

Figure 2: Location of Prior Full-Time Teaching Experience (n=204)



However, this means that only 16% of the *total* survey respondents had experience as full-time teachers in urban public schools before the 2004-05 school year. When asked about student teaching experiences, 217 (63%) survey respondents reported having some formal student teaching experience. Because only 169 of these 217 respondents reported the *location* of their student teaching assignment (urban public school, suburban public school, etc.), the data may underestimate the percentage of teachers who have student teaching experience in an urban public school. Of the 37% who did *not* report having formal student teaching experience, it is likely that 11 of these respondents (3% of all respondents) *did* have student teaching experience in an urban school prior to entering the district because they were enrolled in Teach For America, an alternative certification program that requires a summer student teaching experience. Table 3 reveals that slightly more than one-third (35%) of the 345 newly hired teachers surveyed reported having a student teaching assignment in an urban public school.

Table 3: Student Teaching Location

Student Teaching Location	Number of respondents	Percentage of <b>all</b> survey respondents

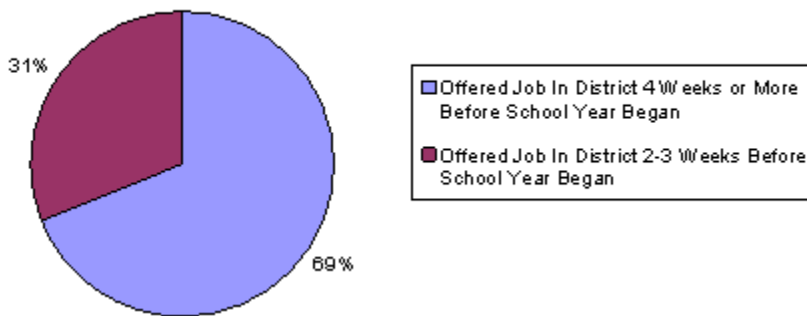
		(n=345)
Urban public school	121	35%
School District of Philadelphia	97	28%
Other Urban Public School	24	7%
Suburban public school	29	8%
Rural public school	10	3%
Urban private school	5	1%
Other country	4	1%
TOTAL	169	49%

Although data is missing from half of the respondents, the information in Table 3 about prior teaching and/or student teaching experience suggests that the School District of Philadelphia’s new teacher recruitment efforts have been successful in attracting candidates who are either new to the profession (70%) or unfamiliar with urban schools (with 16% having full-time teaching experience in urban schools and only 35% having urban student teaching experience). The extent of prior experience in urban schools has potential implications for the type (and amount) of support these new teachers may need to handle the challenges of working in urban classrooms.

*Teacher Hiring*

A third major finding of the survey is that district hiring was delayed for close to one-third of respondents, while close to 60% of new teachers did not know the exact grade or courses they would be teaching one week before school began. As displayed in Figure 4 (below), close to one-third of new teachers were hired 2-3 weeks before the school year began.

Figure 4: When Hired to the School District of Philadelphia



It is important to note that because this survey was given out one week before the start of the school year, these figures do not capture the percentage of new teachers who were hired just before (or after) the first day of school. Unfortunately, data was not available that provides information about the preparation or prior experience of those teachers hired just before (or after) the first day of school. Further, the preliminary results of this survey cannot reveal how many new teachers were hired after this time, nor how this may have impacted the schools to which they were eventually assigned. Based on the existing hiring practices of the district, which include teachers’ opportunities to select the most desired vacancies, it is safe to assume that many of the last minute vacancies that were filled likely included some of the least desired positions in the least desired schools. This may contribute to the fact that these schools and positions that are most prone to teacher turnover.

*School Assignment and Familiarity with School Placement*

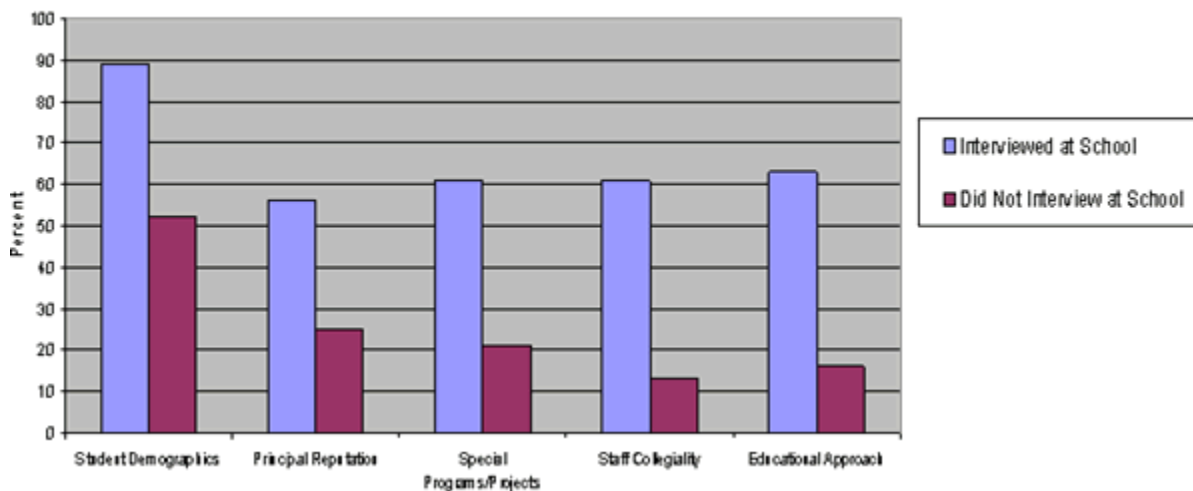


Once hired by the School District of Philadelphia, new teachers are assigned a date to come to the central office to select a position from available school vacancies. This is when they officially receive their school assignment. In most cases, teachers have no information about the principal, students, or existing teachers at the schools they are selecting. Roughly one-third of new teachers surveyed received school placements four weeks or more before the start of the school year, while another third learned of their school placements two-three weeks before the start of school. Still, one week before the start of the school year, many of the surveyed teachers were still uncertain about the exact school (34%) and exact courses or grade(s) (59%) that they would be teaching. Those who received their placements closer to the start of the school year may have been placed at a disadvantage because they did not have much time to plan or prepare for the subject and grade they would be teaching, or to learn about the specific school where they would be working.

The effects of late hiring and placement were felt by new teachers. They may also have been felt by schools in the district, many of whom were likely left to scramble to staff their schools up until the first day of school. Without knowing who will be assigned to teach in their schools, administrators are unable to create accurate rosters and organizational plans for the start of the school year. This does not support a smooth start to the school year.

Most new teachers surveyed in fall 2004 knew little about their schools when they made their selections at the district office. Through the site selection process at select schools, a small percentage (15%) of new teachers interviewed at their specific school before being hired. As seen in Figure 5 (below) those teachers who *did* interview at their specific school reported knowing considerably more about their schools than those who did not interview at the school site.

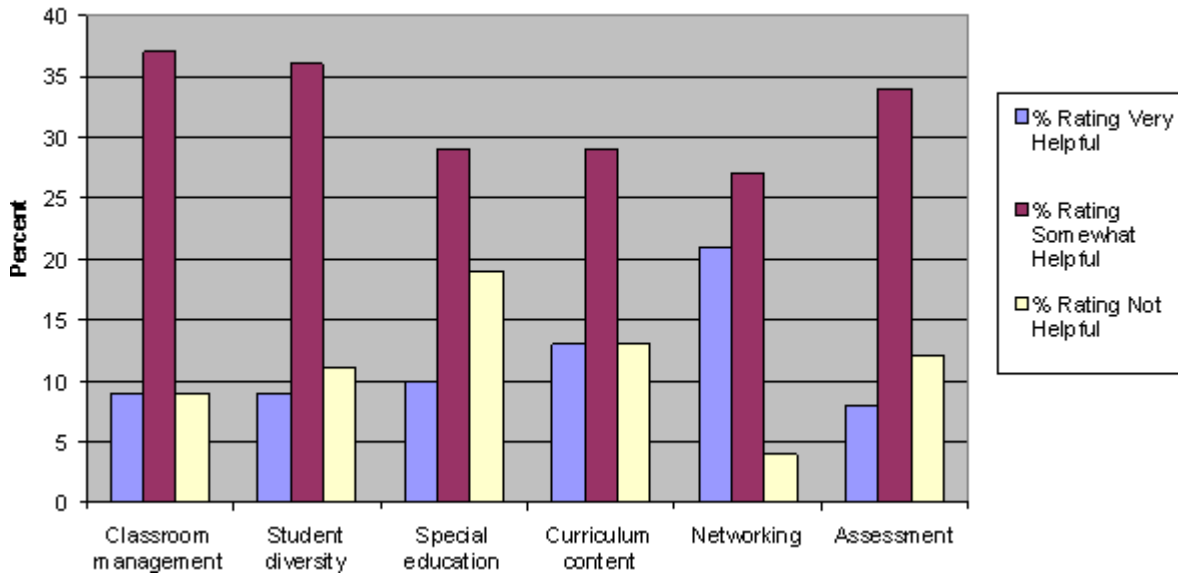
**Figure 5: Knowledge of School**



*Respondents' Evaluation of District-Sponsored Pre-service Training*

During August 2004, all new teachers hired by the School District of Philadelphia were required to attend a minimum of two weeks of pre-service training. This survey asked respondents to rate the value of several dimensions of the training. Figure 6 displays that the majority of respondents felt that the various aspects of the pre-service training were only somewhat helpful. Similar percentages of teachers found classroom management, student diversity, curriculum content, and assessment both very helpful and not helpful.

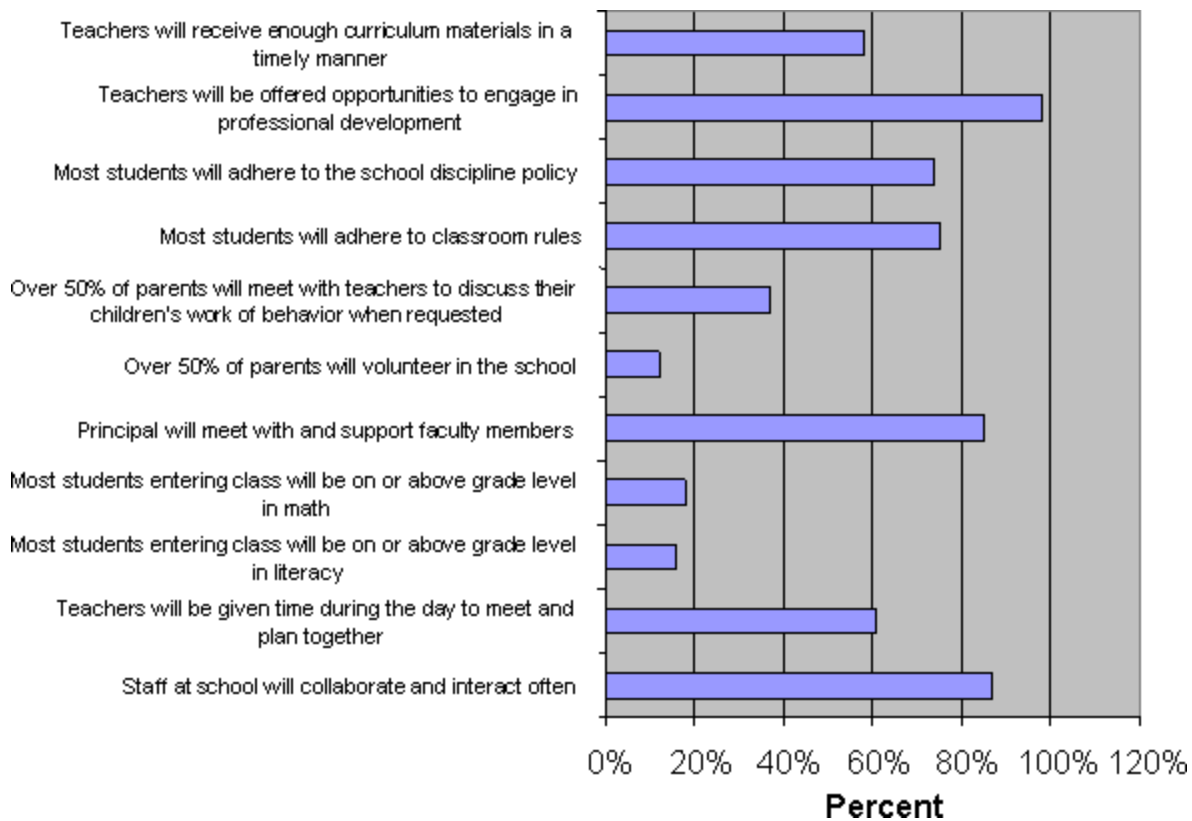
**Figure 6: Evaluation of District-Sponsored Preservice Training**



*Expectations and Anticipated Challenges as New Teachers in the School District of Philadelphia*

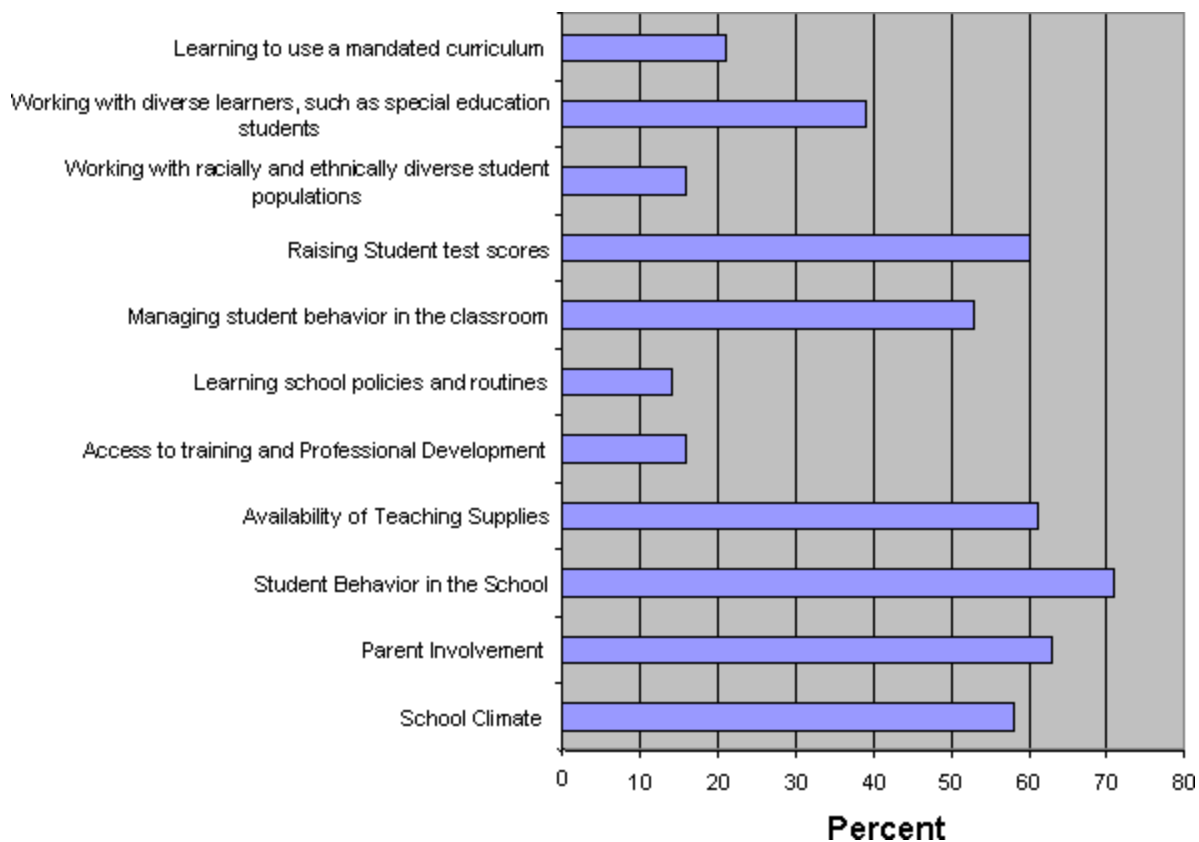
The sixth area of focus from the results of the Fall 2004 survey is the expectations that new teachers had before teaching in the Philadelphia public schools. Overall, respondents had very positive expectations about professional development, receiving support from their principals, and interacting and planning with their colleagues. In addition, a majority of new teachers expected that their students would adhere to both school and classroom rules. However, teachers reported very low expectations about students and their parents. Over 80% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed that their students would be on or above grade level in math and literacy. At the same time, slightly more than one-third of teachers expected that parents would meet with them to discuss their children, and only 12% expected more than half of parents to volunteer in the school. The percentage of new teachers who agree or strongly agree with the statements about teaching in Philadelphia are displayed in Figure 7.

**Figure 7: Expectations About Teaching In Philadelphia**



Teachers were also asked about a variety of challenges that they may encounter in their first year of teaching. Respondents rated the following as the least anticipated challenges: access to training and professional development, working with diverse learners, learning to use the core curriculum, and learning school routines and policies. Student behavior, parent involvement, availability of teaching supplies, and raising test scores were the most anticipated challenges. The percentage of new teachers anticipating that each statement would be a major challenge or challenge is displayed in Figure 8.

**Figure 8: Anticipated Challenges**



*Intentions to Remain in the School District of Philadelphia*

Finally, analyses of this survey data offer hope that the short-term retention rates of new teachers will increase. Teachers surveyed in fall 2004 reported that they planned to teach in the district for longer than those surveyed during the 2003-2004 school year.<sup>4</sup> In fall 2004, 34% of the new teachers surveyed reported that they plan to stay in the Philadelphia schools for no more than 3 years, a decrease from 51% in 2003-2004. In addition, 50% of new teachers reported that they plan to teach in Philadelphia for six years or more, an increase from 36% in 2003-2004. In the 2004 survey, new teachers were also asked how long they intended to teach anywhere. The results are displayed in Table 4.

**Table 4: Years Planning to Teach in Philadelphia**

Years Planning to Teach	2003-2004 (n=454)	2004-2005 (n=345)
In Philadelphia		
1-3 years	51%	34%
4-5 years	13%	16%
6 or more years	36%	50%
Anywhere		
1-3 years	N/A	9%
4-5 years	N/A	8%
6 or more years	N/A	83%

The fact that only 50% of 2004-05 teachers plan to teach in Philadelphia for 6 or more years, while 83% of teachers plan to teach anywhere for 6 or more years suggests that close to one-third of new teachers entering the School District of Philadelphia intend to

make teaching a career, yet do not intend to stay in the district for long.

## **Discussion and Implications**

Preliminary analyses of the survey data obtained from newly hired teachers in the School District of Philadelphia offer insight about the preparation and teaching experience of new recruits, the district's hiring process, and teachers' understandings and expectations of their school assignments, as well as their plans to stay in the district.

### *Teacher Preparation and Experience in Urban Schools*

Although the district has made some gains in increasing the number of certified teachers working in the district, there is still room for improvement. If the district wants to close the gap in the percentage of highly qualified teachers that exists between itself and the state average, it will likely require continued vigilance and a greater effort to lower the number of teachers who are entering the district without the "highly qualified" designation. This means making every effort to avoid having to place teachers with emergency credentials in vacancies throughout the district. Not only would such efforts increase the quality of teachers in the city's schools, but these efforts would help ensure that the district is in compliance with the NCLB mandates requiring all teachers to be highly qualified by June 2006.

Less than one-third of the new teachers entering the district in 2004-2005 had full-time teaching experience, and only one-third of those reported experience student teaching in urban public schools. If future cohorts of new teachers entering the district have similar characteristics as those hired for the 2004-2005 school year, it is essential that the district recognize the amount of resources and supports that may be necessary to assist these new, and often inexperienced, teachers. In other words, because the district's recruitment efforts have netted a large pool of new teachers with little or no exposure to working in urban schools, it may be pertinent that the new teacher support efforts include activities and programs that assist teachers as they transition into the classroom and face the challenges of familiarizing themselves with the district, their school, and the colleagues, students, and families they are assigned to work with (Johnson, et. al, 2001; Hope, 1999; Bainer & Didham, 1995; Newman, Rutter, & Smith, 1989).

### **Teacher Hiring and School Placement**

Teachers surveyed reported having limited knowledge of what to expect once they began working at their specific school assignments. This may be largely due to the fact that teachers either learned of their school assignments very close to the start of the school year, did not have an opportunity to interview at their assigned school, or both. Because they may have little or no knowledge of the settings within which they will be teaching, new teachers may not be able to "hit the ground running," which could impact the quality of both teaching and learning as they adjust to their classroom responsibilities. This data (about late hiring and/or school placement) is similar to the teacher hiring practices documented by Liu (2005) and suggests that teachers may have had very little time to learn about the school, its students, their grade-specific curriculum, and the surrounding community before entering the classroom. As Liu (2005) argues, a limited understanding of school assignment may increase the likelihood that teachers later leave their positions because they are dissatisfied.

This combination of new, inexperienced teachers who have little or no knowledge of

where they will be teaching is troublesome on many levels. First, those schools with vacancies at the start of the school year are often those schools that experience the most turnover, meaning that they not only experience the negative consequences of staff instability, but that they are also assigned more new, and possibly inexperienced, teachers each fall. Further, if late hiring and placement in Philadelphia were to lead to dissatisfaction and teacher turnover, it could be argued that the district's recruitment efforts are undermined when the hiring and placement process does not afford teachers with adequate time to familiarize themselves with the school and community they will be working within.

Perhaps the School District of Philadelphia's new teacher recruitment efforts could best be maximized if they were adjusted to allow more candidates the opportunity to interview (or at least meet with) a building principal *before* being assigned to a particular school. Some steps have already been made in this direction. Following the most recent contract negotiations between the district and the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT), a greater number of schools will implement a site selection (school-based interviewing) process, thereby increasing the number of opportunities new teachers will have to visit and interview at schools they may be working in. While the effects of the greater number of site selection schools remain to be seen, there is hope that an expansion of the site selection process will, indeed, increase the number of appropriate "matches" that are made between school vacancies and needs and those teachers who are seeking employment in the district. The site selection process may allow principals and school-based selection teams to establish a balance of veteran and novice teachers at their school, rather than allowing all veteran teachers to transfer to the most desirable schools while all novice teachers are assigned to the most challenging schools and students. Such a recruitment and assignment strategy holds the potential to increase the retention of new teachers because they will have greater access to the assistance of more experienced veterans and will also be working in schools that experience more continuity in staffing from one year to the next.

### *Pre-service Training*

Although the district provided at least two weeks of pre-service training to all new teachers entering the district, survey respondents' reviews of this training highlight several components in need of improvement. Analysis of the survey responses suggests that the topics of classroom management, student diversity, special education, and assessment are those that most need to be revisited—either for future trainings with the 2004-2005 teachers or with future cohorts of new teachers. It is important to note that the district has since altered its pre-service training model, with new teachers entering the district at the onset of the 2005-2006 school year participating in a few days of district-wide training and then in more targeted orientation at their school sites.

While this site-based orientation may be useful in helping new teachers learn about their new schools, it is important to note that only those teachers with specific school assignments have the opportunity to benefit from this form of pre-service training. For those teachers who are not assigned to schools until a few days before (or after) the start of the school year, they may miss out on valuable elements of this pre-service training. If the district is unable to modify its preservice training to better meet the needs of all new teachers, it may be necessary to consider how the topics covered in the preservice training can be carefully reviewed in other trainings or programs available to new teachers during their first year in the district.

### *Expectations and Anticipated Challenges*

Survey data about the expectations and anticipated challenges held by new hires to the

School District of Philadelphia offer insight about how the district may target its new teacher support (and retention) initiatives to assist these new teachers, as well as those who enter the district in future years. Respondents had especially positive expectations about the professional development opportunities that would be made available to them, and were optimistic about the possibilities of meeting and collaborating with their principals and colleagues. Therefore, the district should continue to invest in both district-wide and school-based professional development opportunities. Further, the district may consider initiatives that would train and support building administrators in creating school cultures that afford opportunities for all staff members to work together towards meeting school- and district-wide objectives.

Survey respondents reported anticipating major challenges in working with students and parents. These issues are amongst those cited as the most common concerns of new teachers (Brewster & Railsback 2001; Feiman-Nemser, Schwill, Carver, & Yusko, 1999; Veenman, 1984), suggesting that the district should take specific efforts to work with teachers in working through this challenges, both early in the school year and throughout their first few years on the job, when attrition for new teachers is highest (Brewster & Railsback, 2001; Ingersoll & Kralik, 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2003).

New teachers' reported concerns about raising student test scores reveal some of the realistic and immediate pressures felt by schools and districts to improve student achievement. Because several new teacher retention efforts are already in place across the district, the School District of Philadelphia would be in a favorable position should it decide to address specific concerns of working with students and parents and raising student test scores held by new teachers. For example, the new teacher induction program could offer opportunities for teachers to collectively work through these concerns, while the New Teacher Coach assigned to each new teacher could work with individual teachers to address their specific needs or concerns.

#### *Plans to Remain in District*

The School District of Philadelphia's new teacher retention statistics have improved in recent years (Neild, Useem, and Farley, 2005), suggesting that their targeted efforts to both recruit and retain new teachers are paying off. However, 34% of the survey respondents reported that they only plan to teach in the district for one to three years. If respondents do actually leave within this short period of time, the district's attrition rates would be comparable to those of other urban districts (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001). However, such a situation would suggest that that the district's ability to attract qualified teachers may constantly be overshadowed by the fact that they must attract even more qualified teachers each fall to fill the vacancies left by those teachers who switch to other school districts.

Further, it is disheartening that nearly half (32%) of those survey respondents who plan to teach for more than 10 years (70%) do *not* plan to do so in the School District of Philadelphia. These figures lend further support for the argument that the School District of Philadelphia ought to take measures to ensure that their efforts to improve teacher quality in the city's schools do not stop with the recruitment of teachers who are considered "highly qualified" under NCLB, but extend to offering targeted supports that will assist new teachers, thereby increasing the likelihood that they will want to remain in the district.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

Once the NCLB "highly qualified" teacher provisions are in full effect for the 2006-2007 school year, the School District of Philadelphia should have access to more certified

teachers. However, it is likely that the district will continue to hire future cohorts of new teachers who have similar characteristics to those hired in the 2004-2005 school year. That is, many of the new teachers may be certified to teach, but may have little or no experience working in urban schools. Further, they may anticipate similar challenges as those identified by the 2004-2005 cohort of new teachers. Finally, if the district is unable to speed up the hiring and placement process, large numbers of new teachers may continue to start the school year with minimal information about school and student characteristics. With the knowledge of new teacher characteristics, the district is in a position to maximize this information to target their new teacher support and retention initiatives in ways that will best meet the needs of new teachers, assisting them in navigating the new, and often unfamiliar, terrain of an urban school and district, thereby increasing the chances they feeling successful and desire to return to the district in subsequent years.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> A similar survey was distributed to 454 first-year teachers hired during the 2003-2004 school year. This survey was designed and distributed by Joy Lesnick and Kira Baker-Doyle, doctoral students at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania.

<sup>2</sup> 2003-04 and 2004-05 state data were published in the [Pennsylvania State NCLB Report Card](#), retrieved February 7, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> 2003-04 and 2004-05 district data were published in the [District NCLB Report Card](#), retrieved February 7, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> A similar survey was distributed to 454 first-year teachers hired during the 2003-2004 school year. This survey was designed and distributed by Joy Lesnick and Kira Baker-Doyle, doctoral students at the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania.

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