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# Improving Teacher Recruitment & Retention in Delaware

*Phase One*

by Dennis Loftus and Audrey Bare  
on behalf of the  
Delaware Academy for School Leadership



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in cooperation with the  
Delaware Department of Education and the Rodel Foundation

## **Preface**

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**Jerome R. Lewis, Ph.D., Director, Institute for Public Administration**

As the Director of the Institute for Public Administration at the University of Delaware, I am pleased to provide this report, *Improving Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Delaware: Phase One*. This assessment, written on behalf of IPA's Delaware Academy for School Leadership (DASL) and co-sponsored by the Delaware Department of Education and the Rodel Foundation, is a key element in understanding the teacher recruitment and retention activities of Delaware school districts. In addition, this evaluation provides deeper insight into the possible improvements and initiatives that could be undertaken to improve recruitment and retention in the state.

This report is part of a larger teacher recruitment and retention movement that began in April 2005 with the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Conference, which was held on April 6–7 in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. At the conference, educational leaders from across the state shared their ideas for improving teacher hiring and retention. These discussions provided the impetus for this effort, as representatives from DASL, the Delaware Department of Education, and the Rodel Foundation attempted to clarify particular issues around teacher employment and attrition in Delaware school districts. This report documents these groups' activities from May 2005 to April 2006. This documentation will continue with Phase Two of this research, as these leaders attempt to develop a better understanding of the “teacher pipeline” (or teacher supply and demand) in the state.

The Institute for Public Administration is appreciative of the funding received from the Delaware Department of Education, Rodel Foundation, and the State Board of Education, which helped provide for the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Conference and continued research. These funds provide valuable opportunities for IPA staff and students to participate in important projects that make a positive impact on the delivery of high-quality educational services to all Delawareans.

## **Improving Teacher Recruitment and Retention in Delaware: Phase One**

In the past ten years, some disturbing trends have been identified in the teacher recruitment and retention activities of Delaware school districts. At a time when competition for the most highly qualified teachers was occurring nationally, Delaware school districts were hiring over 70 percent of their new teachers after July 30 of each year, leading to many of the best and brightest teachers being hired elsewhere. In addition, the new teacher retention rates were decreasing at an alarming rate.

The Secretary of Education, Valerie Woodruff, and the President of the State Board of Education, Joseph Pika, requested that a committee be formed to gain more awareness and understanding of these trends. Leaders from the Department of Education, the University of Delaware, the Institute for Public Administration, and the Rodel Foundation began to review issues and develop strategies that shed new insight into the teacher recruitment and retention activities of the state.

The committee members decided that it would be beneficial to bring together additional school and state representatives to discuss these issues in greater detail. The Teacher Recruitment and Retention Conference was held on April 6–7, 2005, at the Atlantic Sands Hotel in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware. The conference was sponsored by the Institute for Public Administration, the Delaware Department of Education (DOE), the State Board of Education, IPA’s Delaware Academy for School Leadership (DASL), and the Rodel Foundation. Other invited guests included State Board presidents, superintendents, assistant superintendents, personnel directors, and other key leaders

from all 19 school districts in Delaware. Representatives from charter schools and professional teachers of general and higher education also participated.

Besides presentations from various speakers, each day of the conference included a breakout session in which invited guests discussed barriers and activities needed to implement changes in hiring practices and retention strategies. The specific questions posed were:

- If our goal is to decrease the number of teachers leaving the profession by 50 percent in the next five years, what barriers or issues at the district and state level need to be addressed?
- If our goal is to hire 70 percent of all new teachers before July 30, what barriers or issues at the district and state levels need to be addressed?

After each breakout session, participants shared their responses to these questions. These responses were collected and organized to allow more clarity and analysis for future reference.

On May 16, 2005, the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Planning Committee met to discuss these breakout responses. Dr. Wayne Barton, Director of Professional Accountability for the Delaware Department of Education (DOE), agreed to fund a University of Delaware research assistant, directed by Dr. Dennis Loftus, Program Coordinator for the Delaware Academy for School Leadership (DASL), responsible for examining current hiring practices of Delaware school districts. Dr. Loftus and his graduate research assistant, Audrey Bare, Master of Public Administration student and graduate research assistant for the Institute for Public Administration, developed a recruitment and retention questionnaire dealing with five broad themes identified during

the breakout sessions and follow-up meeting.<sup>1</sup> These included: website utilization, pay and benefit detractors, unit count and staff projection strategies, Future Educators Association (FEA) activities, and how the perception of high-quality is utilized in hiring activities within school districts.

Dr. Pika, Dr. Loftus, and Audrey Bare visited 17 of 19 school districts in Delaware between July and August 2005 in order to discuss the questionnaire with district superintendents and personnel directors. The research group prepared a report of its findings, which was presented to the Teacher Recruitment and Retention Planning Committee on September 12, 2005. The group also made similar presentations at the September meeting of personnel directors (September 21, 2005) and the Chief School Officers Association's fall conference (October 5, 2005).

The research group made a number of key findings. First, although lag pay was identified as a major barrier at the spring conference, this was not identified as a barrier during the summer meetings. As such, only a few districts have tried to assist teachers by providing personal loans on a case-by-case basis. However, superintendents and personnel directors did identify the 90-day qualification period for health benefits as a major recruitment and retention barrier. At the moment, only six of the seventeen districts questioned provide local insurance coverage during the qualification period. All other districts' employees must wait 90 days for their benefits to begin. Whether they cover the qualification period or not, all districts indicated that they would appreciate state coverage of insurance costs.

A second important discovery involved district and state hiring websites. Although the state has a hiring website available for use by all districts, most personnel

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<sup>1</sup> Please see pages 10-11 for Teacher Recruitment and Retention Questionnaire

directors said that they employed their own websites much more frequently than the state website. Personnel directors said that they may be more likely to use the state website if website managers made several improvements. These include the creation of an application filter, better connections to district websites, and more effective marketing of the state site.

Besides this extensive use of technology, personal connections were also cited as an effective hiring method. In fact, the consultants at the spring conference suggested that proximity to one's home school was the major determinant for 50 percent of teachers who applied for and accepted teaching positions at their home schools. Given this trend, the research group was surprised to find that most districts do not have Future Educators Association (FEA) chapters at their schools. If they do have chapters, they are fairly inactive. However, districts did indicate that they certainly do encourage the hiring of homegrown teachers, perhaps just not through this particular vehicle.

At the spring conference, the consultants also discussed the fact that districts hire 70 percent of their teachers after July 30, which of course causes problems for the delivery of high-quality instruction since vacancies occur up to and beyond the beginning of the school year. Although originally attributed to the unit count (which occurs on September 30), the research group found that late hiring is actually a result of business practices such as internal transfers within districts. Six of the districts questioned allow internal transfers within their districts up to certain dates throughout the summer, often as late as July 30. Once a position is filled internally, the vacated position is then advertised externally, which causes problems as teachers in other districts leave late in the summer to fill these new positions. These "bumping and jumping" practices have resulted in the

creation of two hiring seasons: The first occurs from April to June and consists of known hires, which are vacancies created by the end of the school year. The second hiring season occurs from late July into and beyond the beginning of the school year and consists of unknown hires, which are vacancies created by business practices such as internal and external transfers. To discourage late hiring, the research group suggests that districts either attempt to change contract language allowing internal transfers or set a contract obligation date at some point in the summer (July 1, for instance).<sup>2</sup>

In conjunction with the recruitment and retention questionnaire, the group also developed an employment questionnaire which was presented to a focus group composed of University of Delaware education majors on August 18, 2005.<sup>3</sup> The goal of the second questionnaire was to gain insights from prospective teachers on their perceptions of teaching in the state. In addition, the survey attempted to determine how prospective teacher candidates at Delaware universities pursue teaching positions.

In conducting their employment search, a majority of students indicated that they would use district and state websites most frequently, although more students said that they would use district websites. Another popular hiring method is job fairs, and most students were planning to attend the University of Delaware's education job fair, Project Search, in the spring. Most spring graduates expected to begin their job searches in January or February and be offered full-time positions in May or June.

Choosing from salary, benefits, location, and personal relationships, the students overwhelmingly indicated that location would be the most important factor influencing their decisions to teach at certain schools. Many of them want to return to their home

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<sup>2</sup> This summary details the most important conclusions of the research group's findings, but a more detailed report (Teacher Recruitment and Retention: Questions and Answers Report) can be found on pages 12-19

<sup>3</sup> Please see pages 20-22 for Employment Questionnaire

states to teach, although only a small number of them were actually members of Future Educator Association (FEA) chapters in high school. Though many of the students described their ideal jobs as ones in their home states, a good number of students said that they would be “willing” or “semi-willing” to accept other positions if they were offered earlier than their ideal jobs. Once hired, a majority also said that they would honor their original contracts even if their ideal positions were later offered to them. About half of the students indicated that lag pay and qualification periods for health benefits were important concerns for them, although they also indicated that these issues would not necessarily influence their job decisions in dramatic ways.

After evaluating the results of both the recruitment and retention and employment questionnaires, additional Teacher Recruitment and Retention Planning Committee meetings were held to develop a path forward according to the priority issues that emerged from these discussions. The status of these activities through April 1, 2006, is as follows:

- **Lag Pay and Coverage of Health Benefits**

After the Delaware Academy for School Leadership (DASL) met with the State Budget Office and several Delaware credit unions, it was determined that credit union partnerships would be the most effective way of providing a solution to the lag pay issue. Using this method, districts could form partnerships with local credit unions, perhaps inviting them to new teacher orientations in the summer. According to a representative from a local union, teachers with good credit and proper documentation could obtain loans only 48 hours after applying. Besides



lag pay, superintendents and personnel directors also indicated that coverage of health benefits for their employees was another important concern for them. However, due to the high estimated costs of providing a solution to this issue, they indicated that this problem would be secondary to energy concerns for the 2005-2006 school year.

- **Technology and Interviewing Techniques Workshops**

Superintendents and personnel directors agreed that workshops in these areas would be useful. Comprised of personnel directors and representatives from The Delaware Department of Education (DOE) and the Delaware Academy for School Leadership (DASL), the Technology/Interviewing Planning Committee met in December 2005. The primary focus of this initial meeting was technology, and committee members discussed issues relevant to improving website technology for school districts in the state.

After receiving a brief update on the status of the state's teacher hiring website, Teach Delaware, committee members discussed ways in which to improve the implementation of the site. At the moment, every district has its own employment application, and personnel directors agreed that it would be more effective to employ one statewide application. Therefore, at the next meeting of personnel directors, they will attempt to prepare one common application, using the current Teach Delaware application as a template. Besides a common application, committee members also discussed the necessity

of an integrated state hiring system, as state and district hiring systems are fairly unconnected because the systems cannot “talk” to one another.

The committee’s ultimate goal is to plan a technology workshop for spring 2006.

The workshop will highlight districts with best practice websites and allow them to share specific techniques with other districts. Districts will also discuss the implementation of some of the suggestions outlined above. The committee will also be responsible for planning interviewing training workshops for school principals, with the hope that these workshops will eventually evolve into ongoing training pieces supervised by personnel directors and the Delaware Academy for School Leadership (DASL). This will be the next issue on the agenda for the committee meeting in March 2006.

- **Contract Obligation Date**

Employing language from school district contracts in Maryland and Virginia, a new contract obligation policy has been drafted for inclusion in the state’s teacher contract language. The new policy sets a non-renewal notification deadline of July 1, except in cases of emergency. If the notification deadline is not adhered to, school boards may exercise judgment on a reasonable basis, which could include dismissal of the employee and a recommendation to the Department of Education to suspend the employee’s license for one year due to breach of contract.

- **Future Educators Association (FEA)**

Superintendents and personnel directors are also willing to work with the state to create a renewed Future Educators Association (FEA) to address teacher supply issues, especially in critical needs areas, like math, science, and special education.

The Teacher Recruitment and Retention Planning Committee will continue to address these issues during the 2005-2006 school year. In addition, the committee would like to examine teacher supply (or the “teacher pipeline”) in Delaware. Representatives from the state’s higher education institutions have shared enrollment data relative to the number of entrances and exits of education majors at their institutions in the past five years. Examining this supply data, as well as need data from all 19 districts, should lead to phase two of this initiative: acquiring a more informed understanding of the teacher pipeline and determining which improvements could help provide higher quality teachers in all areas of need.

## Teacher Recruitment and Retention Questionnaire

*This questionnaire was discussed with district superintendents and personnel directors in meetings held during the summer of 2005.*

1. Have you developed alternatives (short-term loans, etc.) to assist teachers in adjusting to lag pay? If so, can you please describe these alternatives in detail?
2. Have you developed alternatives to assist teachers in adjusting to the 90-day qualification period for health benefits? If so, can you please describe these alternatives in detail?
3. Is your district website an important recruitment tool? If so, can you estimate the percentage of (newly hired) teachers who were hired via a web-based application to your district website in the past year? If the website is not a significant tool, which recruitment methods do you use more frequently?
4. How effective has the state website been as a recruitment tool? How could the state website be improved to assist your recruitment efforts?
5. The consultants at our spring 2005 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Conference suggested that proximity to one's home school was the major determinant for 50 percent of teachers who applied for and accepted teaching positions at their home schools. The Future Educators Association (FEA) could be an important way to make the most of this trend. Is there an FEA chapter in your district? If so, can you please describe some of its activities?
6. Do you think FEA is an effective teacher recruitment tool? If your answer is no, how could the organization be improved?
7. How would you describe a *high-quality* teacher? (What does the phrase *high-quality* mean to you?)
8. Given the fact that Delaware school districts hire 70 percent of their teachers after July 30, how would you rate the caliber of teachers hired after July 30? Would you rate them as (a), high-quality, (b), average-quality, or (c), low-quality? Using the same scale, how would you rate the caliber of teachers hired before July 30?
9. The current research suggests that many teachers are hired after July 30. What factors contribute to this trend?
10. Can you please describe the methods your district employs in designing its unit count forecast?

11. In your attempt to hire good teachers, what specific criteria do you use when screening applicants?
12. Can you please describe the activities your district uses to develop its new teachers?

## **Teacher Recruitment and Retention: Questions and Answers Report**

*This information was collected during interviews with district superintendents and personnel directors during the summer of 2005.*

### **Question 1:**

*Have you developed alternatives (short-term loans, etc.) to assist teachers in adjusting to lag pay? If so, can you please describe these alternatives in detail?*

Although lag pay was identified as a major barrier to recruitment and retention at the April conference, superintendents and personnel directors did not identify this as a major barrier in the summer meetings, claiming that they have not heard many complaints and have not had prospective teachers refuse job offers because of lag pay.

Because lag pay does not seem to be a major problem for teachers, only a few districts have tried to assist teachers by providing personal loans on a case-by-case basis. One district does offer a \$500 interest-free relocation loan deducted from the 26 pay. This same district also pays teachers immediately after Orientation with a check funded by local money.

To gauge how lag pay affects our regional competitiveness, we are checking to determine whether or not states like New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland have lag pay. If these other states do have lag pay, providing a solution to this issue for teachers in Delaware would certainly be good public relations for recruitment purposes and possibly give Delaware a regional advantage. It would also ease new teachers' financial burdens and allow them to devote their time to teaching rather than financial issues.

One possible solution may involve a partnership between DSEA and the business community (companies like MBNA/Bank of America). These groups may be able to provide a no-interest credit card for new teachers for a certain number of months.

A second option would be to determine if credit unions would be willing to establish accounts and credit lines for new teachers, as credit unions are already established benefit providers in the state payroll system. Teachers would certainly benefit from the extra money, and the businesses would benefit from the addition of some 400-800 new members each year.

### **Question 2:**

*Have you developed alternatives to assist teachers in adjusting to the 90-day qualification period for health benefits? If so, can you please describe these alternatives in detail?*

Six of the seventeen districts visited have purchased a rider to provide insurance coverage with local funds during the 90-day qualification period. The state provides this option to all districts through its contract with the state healthcare provider, but only certain districts have taken advantage of the option because of the cost to local districts or employees. For districts that have purchased the insurance rider, their employees' benefits start on the first day of the month after beginning employment (usually September 1). Employees in all other districts experience a 90-day qualification period for health benefits.

Superintendents and personnel directors identified the qualification period for health benefits as a major recruitment and retention barrier. Even districts that cover the qualification period with local funds identify this issue as a barrier because they spend a considerable amount of money each year to purchase the rider. One district estimated that it spent \$34,000 last year to cover the 90-day qualification period for its new teachers.

Six districts would definitely be interested in state coverage of insurance costs because they would save a large sum of money each year. The other ten districts have not purchased local riders simply because they cannot afford to do so; therefore, they would also be interested in state coverage of insurance costs. A rough estimate of the cost of covering the qualification period for all of Delaware's new teachers is \$1.2 million. More research will have to be completed with the State Insurance Commissioner's office in order to obtain a more accurate cost estimate.

Questions 3 and 4:

- 3) *Is your district website an important recruitment tool? If so, can you estimate the percentage of (newly hired) teachers who were hired via a web-based application to your district website in the past year? If the website is not a significant tool, which recruitment methods do you use more frequently?*
- 4) *How effective has the state website been as a recruitment tool? How could the state website be improved to assist your recruitment efforts?*

Most personnel directors employ their own district websites for hiring much more frequently than the state website. Only a few districts use the state website more frequently, most likely because their own sites have not evolved as quickly as sites in other districts.

About half of the districts questioned have an online application available in PDF format. Personnel directors appreciate this capability, as well as the availability of community information on their own sites. Besides the district and state websites, most personnel directors also employ *teachertoteacher.com* for its special education hiring component. This is a service the state provided for districts beginning last year.

Districts suggested several ways to improve the implementation of the state website. First, it would be helpful if the state had a filter for its application. At the moment, there is no way to screen candidates for certification and quality. The site would be more effective if the state or even Delaware universities screened candidates for these factors, so personnel directors did not have to sift through large numbers of unqualified candidates. Second, the state website should be better connected to district websites. At the moment, personnel directors have to retrieve candidate information and applications from the state website. It would be useful if candidate information was automatically sent to all districts. One district informed us that the Alternative Routes to Certification (ARTC) program has improved upon this connection from their site to the state site, so perhaps district and state webmasters could learn from this example. Finally, the state needs to market its site more effectively. Most personnel directors claimed that they had to learn about the state site on their own. To increase awareness and understanding of the state site, state website managers could do periodic demonstrations of their site's capabilities for personnel directors.

To improve web technology for districts, it would be useful to plan a meeting between districts with best practice websites and state webmasters, so that these groups can share information and suggestions for better connections between both sites. These same districts with best practice websites could also conduct a technology workshop for other districts.

Questions 5 and 6:

- 5) *The consultants at our spring 2005 Teacher Recruitment and Retention Conference suggested that proximity to one's home school was the major determinant for 50 percent of teachers who applied for and accepted teaching positions at their home schools. Future Educators of America (FEA) could be an important way to make the most of this trend. Is there an FEA chapter in your district? If so, can you please describe some of its activities?*
- 6) *Do you think FEA is an effective teacher recruitment tool? If your answer is no, how could the organization be improved?*

Most districts do not have an FEA chapter at their schools. If they do have one, it is fairly inactive, except for a few exceptions. One district does have an especially active FEA organization, and if other districts desire to start a chapter at their schools, it would be helpful to study this district for its best practice FEA organization.

Although most districts have inactive or non-existent FEA chapters, almost all districts do encourage the hiring of homegrown teachers. They do this mainly by providing local graduates an interview, at the very least. Some districts also concentrate on recruiting their student teachers. Last year, one district even interviewed and hired its student teachers before its formal hiring process began.



Districts have been fairly successful in hiring homegrown teachers, but this phenomenon has not been effective in recruiting critical needs candidates, such as minorities and math, special education and science teachers. All districts claimed to have major problems recruiting critical needs teachers, and thus it may be effective to use FEA (or a redesigned FEA) for targeting and recruiting these candidates.

Question 7:

*How would you describe a high-quality teacher? (What does the phrase “high quality” mean to you?)*

To all districts, high-quality involved more characteristics than those defined by No Child Left Behind. All districts agreed that although important, teachers need more than content knowledge to be high quality. Varied descriptions of high-quality teachers included:

- Creates conditions where large numbers of students achieve or exceed the standards.
- Has varied experiences (especially a good student teaching experience) and capable of articulating where they are and where they have been.
- Has ability to use technology in the classroom.
- Has a high GPA and test scores (although all districts emphasized these were not the number one indicator of high quality).
- Reaches all the students in the class, engages students in the subject matter.
- Bright, enthusiastic, passionate, persistent, a mover and shaker.
- Accepts differentiated instruction and teacher collaboration.
- Comes to work prepared to teach.
- Understands the importance of professional development and keeping to the content.
- Willing to adhere to policies and procedures.
- Open to improvement, continual learner.
- Good classroom manager.
- Helps students feel ownership in the class.

Question 8:

*The current research suggests that many teachers are hired after July 30<sup>th</sup>. What factors contribute to this trend?*

Several complex factors contribute to large numbers of teachers being hired after July 30. For example, each school district has its own personnel policies and practices that differ from neighboring districts' policies and practices. In addition, about one-third of the districts have negotiated teacher contracts that specify different timelines and procedures to be followed when determining teacher vacancies and the posting of these vacancies. As districts work within their individual environments, they impact the work being conducted in their neighboring districts. These different

policies and timelines create work and extend the hiring season from March to October statewide through the “bumping and jumping” of teachers.

The first hiring season occurs between April and June and consists of known hires; those positions created by vacancies that have occurred by the end of the school year. The second hiring season occurs from late July into and beyond the beginning of the school year and consists of unknown hires; those vacancies created by certain business practices like late retirement decisions and “bumping and jumping.”

Many districts offer early retirement notification incentives. These monetary incentives seem to have a profound effect on retirement decisions. Now, only a small number of teachers choose to make their retirement decisions later for personal reasons. However, these late retirement decisions do cause one form of “jumping,” because many of the teachers applying for these retirement vacancies come from other districts. The other phenomenon that spurs the second hiring season is “bumping,” or internal transfers within the district. Seven districts (three of which are high-paying) allow internal transfers within their districts with deadlines ranging from July 15 to September 1. Once a position is filled internally, the vacancy created by this internal transfer is advertised externally. Just as in retirement vacancies, this other form of “jumping” occurs upon the opening of new positions as teachers vie for higher salaries, more desirable positions, or more appealing locations. The “jumping” occurs when teachers leave their own districts for more appealing positions in other districts. In this way, all districts are impacted by internal transfer rules that exist in other districts’ contracts, because they experience the “jumping” caused by the “bumping.”

One way to deal with these practices is to attempt to change the contract language regarding transferring and “bumping” privileges. Although districts would still have to fill new vacancies, they would be able to fill them much earlier so as not to conflict with teacher orientations and the beginning of the school year. Another solution to this problem is to set a contract obligation date. At the moment, hired teachers can break contracts without any repercussions. It would be helpful to employers if Delaware implemented a law similar to the law Maryland has employed in which teachers have their licenses suspended for one year if they break their contracts after a set deadline. A law such as this would certainly discourage late “jumping” and moreover, the need for late hiring.

**Question 9:**

*Given the fact that Delaware school districts hire 70 percent of their teachers after July 30, how would you rate the caliber of teachers hired after July 30? Would you rate them as (a), high quality, (b), average quality or (c), low quality? Using the same scale, how would you rate the caliber of teachers hired before July 30?*

Many districts indicated that they noticed a difference in teacher candidates after July 30; namely, that the quality and size of the candidate pool drops noticeably after this date. Furthermore, the quality of the candidate pool becomes even weaker by mid to late August. However, districts noted that it is important not to make sweeping generalizations. For instance, because there is a large supply of elementary education teachers, there is a reasonable chance that many good candidates may still be looking for jobs after July 30. On the other hand, there is little chance that critical needs candidates will still be of high quality after this date. To be fair, some districts did indicate that they noticed no drop in quality after certain dates, and the districts that did notice this trend had no hard data to support differences in quality according to date of hire.

Confusing the issue of high-quality candidates is the way in which temporary contracts are handled. Many districts automatically give temporary contracts to teachers hired after the first day of school. Districts estimated that they rehire 50 to 70 percent of teachers on temporary contracts the following year, which is a significant number of rehires. This may either suggest that the candidate pool is deeper for some districts, or that having the opportunity to observe candidates teaching during the year reshapes districts' perceptions of their abilities.

Question 10:

*Can you please describe the methods your district employs in designing its unit count forecast?*

The September 30 unit count projection is an important aspect for school financing in all the districts we questioned. Almost all districts have developed a well-designed process to do monthly or even weekly unit counts through the year. Most districts also use previous enrollment trend data to help estimate future projections. This historical data, along with constant unit counts, allows districts to estimate their unit counts fairly accurately from year to year.

While some districts have contingency funds set aside for over-hiring, other districts cannot afford these funds and must concentrate on accurate unit count projections. Districts in high-growth areas also must take note of community changes, such as new developments and incoming charter schools, which can dramatically affect unit count data. Districts in regions with highly transient populations have the opposite problem and must make sure never to overestimate enrollment numbers. Although all districts have effective methods to predict unit counts, many districts indicated that it would be helpful if the state funded a guaranteed unit count for over-staffing. This would be especially useful for districts in high-growth periods.

Question 11:

*In your attempt to hire good teachers, what specific criteria do you use when screening applicants?*

Only one district shared a specific indicator that they felt translated to highly effective teachers; namely, high SAT or GRE verbal scores. Other districts claimed that they had no specific indicator, but could identify high-quality teachers through the interview process.

Many districts have decentralized their hiring process: a human resource team does the initial screening by checking a prospective candidate's certifications, qualifications, and references. The team then sends qualified applicants to interview teams for screening. Interview teams take many forms but are usually chaired by the school principal and include teachers, and in some cases, parents, PTA or board members.

Although many districts have similar interviewing processes, certain districts seem to be more structured with specific questions and activities designed to help determine the best fit for various positions. It may be helpful to have districts share some of these ideas at a best practice conference since most hiring is now being done at the principal level.

Districts indicated that demonstration of experience is the key factor in hiring many applicants. For most districts, this translates into attempts to hire most of their student teachers because they can affirm teaching effectiveness. Because districts cannot rely entirely on hiring their student teachers though, it would be useful for districts if prospective teachers included teaching demonstrations on CD in their employment applications. The University of Delaware recently required its student teachers to create electronic portfolios, and video demonstrations could be an additional component to this project. Other universities could also consider helping students make CD demonstrations, making them a required component of their teacher education programs.

Question 12:

*Can you please describe the activities your district uses to develop its new teachers?*

All districts run orientation programs while also participating in the two-to three-day state mentoring program. Most participants in these preliminary orientations are paid a daily stipend, although the amount of the stipend varies. After these initial days in the summer, districts follow up with professional development activities through the year during scheduled in-service days.

While some districts like to employ renowned national speakers, others like to have their own teachers give speeches and demonstrations particular to the district's focus. Issues addressed during orientations and professional development programs

include introductions to school facilities and communities, classroom management, instructional strategies, licensing information, and certain timely issues like minority recruitment.

Some districts indicated that the requirements of the statewide mentoring program interfere somewhat with their own orientations. Although they all believe that mentoring is important, many feel that the state mentoring program involves too many mandatory days and other requirements. Districts believe that new teachers are overwhelmed with the mentoring requirements that occur along with their professional development activities. They would like to find a middle ground between effective mentoring and the intensive state-mandated program.

## Teacher Recruitment and Retention: Employment Questionnaire

*This information was collected during a focus group held with prospective student teachers in August 2005.*

1. Please list:

a) Major (including specializations, minors)

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b) Home state

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2. Which job search tools do you expect to employ most frequently in your search for a full-time position? Please check all that apply and explain your answer.

☐ State websites (*www.teachdelaware.com* or others)

☐ School district websites

☐ Personal contacts

☐ Job fairs (Project Search or others)

☐ Other, please specify

3. Which do you think will be the most important factors influencing your decision to teach at a certain school? Please check all that apply and explain your answer.

☐ Salary

☐ Benefits

☐ Location

☐ Personal relationships

☐ Student teaching experience

☐ Other, please specify

4. When do you plan to begin your job search? When (which month) do you expect to be offered a full-time position?

5. Have you participated in any career counseling activities that have prepared you for your job search? If so, please describe these activities. Do you have suggestions for future programs?

6. Why did you decide to become a teacher?

7. Were you ever involved in Future Educators Association (FEA) in high school? If so, can you please describe your experience?

8. Where would you like to teach full-time? Is your ideal job in an urban, suburban, small-town, or rural area? In which state?

9. a) If you were offered another position earlier than your ideal job, how willingly would you accept this other offer?

b) If you were later offered your ideal job, would you still honor your other contract?

c) Would a signing bonus or payment for moving expenses dramatically influence your decision to teach at a school that is not your first choice?

10. Which job fairs do you expect to attend this year?

11. How high do you expect the demand to be for candidates in your teaching field this year? Why?

- a) High Demand
- b) Moderate Demand
- c) Low Demand

12. a) Do you have a hard-copy teaching portfolio? \_\_\_\_\_

b) Do you have an electronic teaching portfolio? \_\_\_\_\_

c) Do you have a videotape of yourself delivering a lesson? \_\_\_\_\_

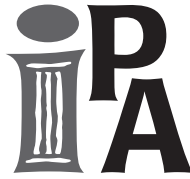
13. Many states are unable to pay new teachers until after they have completed their first month of teaching.

a) How do you expect to cover your living expenses during the interim?

b) If you could get paid sooner, would that make a difference in accepting a job offer?

14. Many states are unable to provide health insurance until the end of a waiting period, perhaps as long as 90 days. Is this an important concern for you?



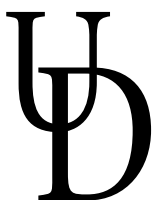


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