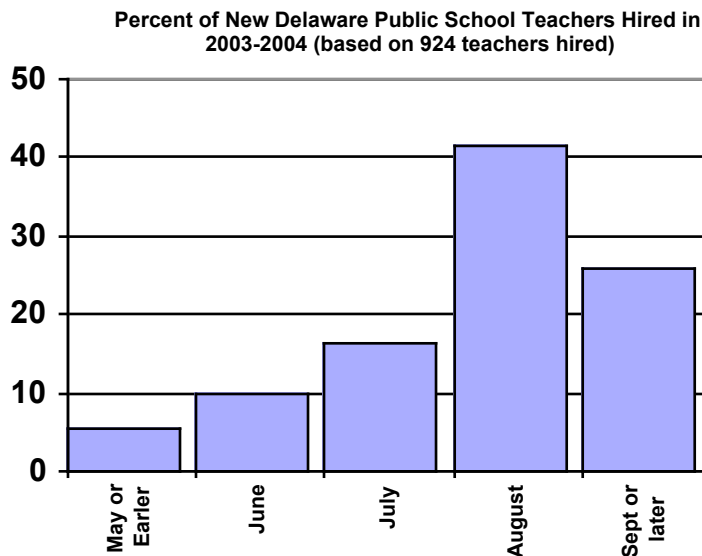


Education Policy Brief

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Late Hiring of New Teachers in Delaware

Public school districts in Delaware hire approximately 66% of their new teachers in August or later.¹ This pattern of late hiring can cost Delaware districts the chance to attract the best new teachers. This Education Policy Brief examines factors that delay the hiring of new teachers and identifies policy issues for consideration in Delaware.



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INTRODUCTION

Nationwide, there is a shortage of highly qualified teachers, especially in critical needs subject areas like mathematics, science, and special education.² This shortage has become even more apparent under the provisions of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. NCLB mandates that by 2005-06, all public school children must be taught by “highly qualified” teachers.³ In general, this requires that all teachers be fully licensed and have an academic major or its equivalent in the subject they teach.

Concern for teacher quality is well founded. Research suggests that highly qualified and skilled teachers contribute to improved student achievement.⁴ Being hired late makes it more difficult for novice teachers to get to know their new colleagues and school communities. Moreover, new teachers lose critical time for planning when they are hired right before the school year begins. Therefore, it is important for Delaware school districts to attract the most highly qualified candidates before they accept other offers, and to give newly hired teachers the time they need to prepare for their demanding jobs. What factors interfere with the timely hiring of the best new teachers?

NATIONAL STUDIES OF LATE TEACHER HIRING

National studies of teacher hiring shed light on policy trends and challenges in Delaware. A recent national study examined four high-needs, urban public school districts.⁵ These districts made most of their job offers to new teachers in July or August. Even though many new teacher applicants preferred to work in these urban districts, they accepted positions in non-urban districts because they received those offers first. New graduates are often too concerned about their immediate financial security to wait to hear from districts that make offers in July or August. Researchers conclude that high-needs districts must act more quickly to hire the best new teacher candidates before or soon after they graduate.

A Harvard Graduate School of Education survey of a random sample of first and second-year teachers in California, Florida, Massachusetts and Michigan found that approximately 64% were hired within one month of the first day of school.⁶ Late hiring is just as pronounced in Delaware. Annual school district surveys conducted by the University of Delaware’s Institute for Public Administration show that for each of the last three years, at least two-thirds of new teachers were hired in August or later.⁷

National studies identify several factors that contribute to the late hiring of teachers:

Late notice of retirement – District administrators commonly learn of vacancies due to teacher retirements shortly before the school year begins. By this time, many of the best new teachers have accepted other positions.

Internal transfers – Teacher contracts often require that tenured teachers be considered for vacancies before new hires are made. This can have a ripple effect that delays the hiring of new teachers.

Enrollment and budgets – Details of school budgets are often unclear until firm enrollment counts are made, typically after the school year begins. Consequently, administrators may delay new hires until they are confident about their staffing needs and resources.

Organizational inefficiency – District hiring procedures may lack clear and effective coordination among superintendents, human resource directors, principals, and other stakeholders. This can delay the flow of information to the people who need it (including job applicants), and/or place hiring and transfer decisions with those who are not fully aware of the needs of particular schools.

Nationwide, some states and districts have adopted policies intended to lower barriers to hiring the best new teachers in a timely manner. For example, some districts use the Internet to solicit applications from new teachers, providing on-line application forms linked to a comprehensive applicant database. In other

places, current and retired school administrators help recruit candidates and conduct pre-screenings. In one district where the internal transfer process runs from April 1 to June 30, the collective bargaining agreement allows school principals to consider new applicants, as well as transfers, beginning at the end of April. This helps the district place transferring and new teachers for the coming school year before the current year is over. In the San Diego Unified School District, a year-round recruitment and hiring plan is based on enrollment and budget forecasts. In January, May, and July, current teachers have two weeks to ‘bid’ on announced vacancies. If no bids are received, the positions are opened to new applicants.⁸

CASE STUDIES OF TWO DELAWARE DISTRICTS

School districts in Delaware face the same obstacles to timely hiring as those described in national studies. School funding is contingent on the September 30 unit count, which can make early hiring a budgetary gamble. Teacher contracts include provisions for filling vacancies through internal transfers that can delay job offers to new teachers. Approximately 30% of vacancies are due to retirements that may not be communicated to districts until well into the summer.⁹

Administrators, principals, and teachers in two Delaware school districts were interviewed to better understand the barriers to early hiring and to explore possible solutions.¹⁰ In 2002-2003, District A hired most of its teachers in July or earlier. District B hired most of its new teachers after July. The table lists several key comparisons between these districts.

Comparisons	District A - Hires Early	District B - Hires Late
District characteristics	Small, rural	Large, suburban & urban
Web-based technology	Web-based application form & applicant database	Paper applications entered into on-line database
Application & interview process	Prescreening by personnel director narrows the field to qualified candidates. Principals then select candidates. Interviews include the principal, teachers, & personnel director and/or superintendent. Candidates receive a tour of school & community.	District provides an unscreened applicant list to principals who conduct the interviews. Hiring recommendations then pass from the personnel director to the superintendent & the school board.
Incentive for timely notice of retirement	Notice of intent to retire forms are distributed in October; \$600 bonus for notification by January.	None
Internal transfer deadlines	July 15	July 15
Learning of vacancies	Many teachers tell their principals directly.	Some teachers tell their principals; many only notify the district personnel director.
Projecting enrollment & staffing needs	Based on retirement notifications & close contact with principals. September 30 th count slightly delays teacher hiring.	District meetings and parent surveys are used in a conservative projection formula. September 30 th count delays teacher hiring.

District A has a Web-based system that moves on-line applications directly into a searchable database. This streamlines the hiring process when compared to the paper application in District B. District A also has a systematic process to prescreen applicants for basic qualifications, which more efficiently identifies candidates for interviews.

District A is one of nine districts in Delaware to offer financial incentives to teachers for early notification of intent to retire. District administrators believe that this incentive policy improves their ability to make timely projections of hiring needs for the following year. In both districts, internal transfers take priority

over new hires until mid-July. However, District A's retirement notification incentive allows the transfer process to begin sooner, reducing delays in hiring new teachers. Administrators in both districts reported that their ability to attract the best new teacher candidates is hampered by the budgetary uncertainties that precede the September 30 unit count.

The size of these school districts seems to influence their teacher hiring practices. District A has flexible and personal lines of communication among administrative levels. Teachers commonly inform their building principals of their intent to leave their positions, giving principals firsthand knowledge of upcoming needs. In District B, teachers often only notify the district personnel director of their intent to leave. At the other end of the hiring process, a sense of community in District A contributes to a more personalized experience for job candidates. District A's response to applicants is more prompt, and candidate interviews include a tour of the community. There is an air of change in District B as it works to improve its teacher hiring procedures. But in that district, new teacher applicants remain likely to encounter a relatively slow, bureaucratic process.

POLICY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

This review of teacher hiring nationally and in Delaware highlights several key issues for Delaware's policy-makers to consider:

- Improve the timeliness of budget decisions based on enrollments
 - Budgetary uncertainties prior to the September 30 unit count can constrain the ability of Delaware districts to proactively recruit the best new teacher candidates. Districts currently develop conservative enrollment and staffing projections based on incomplete information, including parent surveys and notices from teachers about their intent to retire or leave.
- Increased flexibility regarding internal transfers and new hires
 - Giving transferring teachers preferential access to openings through mid-summer delays the hiring of new teachers until August or later. By that time, many highly qualified new teacher candidates have accepted other positions, often outside Delaware. Setting earlier dates to open positions to new applicants would improve districts' chances of hiring the best new teachers in the spring, before or soon after they graduate.
- Effective use of technology
 - Web-based teacher applications linked to searchable, on-line applicant databases can simplify the application process and make up-to-date applicant information available to all decision makers.
- Teacher retirement notification incentives
 - The effect of teacher incentives for early notification of retirement appears promising and deserves closer study. These incentives might be a useful strategy in a comprehensive approach to hiring the best new teachers in a timely manner.

¹ Raffel, J.A. and Prulello, M. 2004. Delaware Teacher Supply Survey Report 2004. Institute for Public Administration, University of Delaware, Newark, DE. Retrieved July 30, 2004 from http://www.ipa.udel.edu/research/publications/teacher_supply04.pdf.

² Education Commission of the States. 2003. Teaching Quality –Recruitment and Retention. Retrieved August 18, 2004 from <http://www.ecs.org/html/issue.asp?issueid=129&subIssueID=65>.

³ Teacher Quality: Frequently Asked Questions. (n.d.). United States Department of Education. Retrieved September 15,

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- 2004, from <http://www.ed.gov/print/nclb/methods/teachers/teachers-faq.html>.
- ⁴ Darling-Hammond, Linda. 2000. Teacher Quality and Student Achievement: A Review of State Policy Evidence. *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 8 (1). Retrieved August 18, 2004 from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v8n1/>.; National Research Council. 2001. *Educating Teachers of Science, Mathematics and Technology*. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.
- ⁵ Levin, J., & Quinn, M. 2003. Missed Opportunities: How We Keep High-Quality Teachers Out of Urban Classrooms. Retrieved July 30, 2004 from <http://www.thenewteacherproject.com/docs/reportfinal9-29.pdf>.
- ⁶ Liu, E. & Johnson, S.M. 2003. New Teacher's Experiences of Hiring: Late, Rushed, and Information-Poor. NGT Working Paper. Cambridge, MA: Project of the Next Generation of Teachers. Retrieved August 18, 2004 from <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ngt>.
- ⁷ Raffel, J.A. and Savickas, S. 2002. Delaware Teacher Supply Survey Analysis Report. Institute for Public Administration, University of Delaware, Newark, DE.; Raffel, J.A. and Scollon, K.L. 2003. Delaware Teacher Supply Survey Analysis Report. Institute for Public Administration, University of Delaware, Newark, DE.; Raffel, J.A. and Prulello, M. 2004. Delaware Teacher Supply Survey Analysis Report. Institute for Public Administration, University of Delaware, Newark, DE.
- ⁸ Levin and Quinn, 2003.
- ⁹ Raffel and Scollon, 2003.; Raffel and Prulello, 2004.; Scollon, K. 2004. Too Many, Too Late? A Study of Teacher Hiring in Delaware. Master's Degree Analytic Paper, School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy, University of Delaware, Newark, DE.
- ¹⁰ Scollon, 2004.