

Comments at SRC Meeting  
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Issue: **Teaching Quality and Equity Platform** of Cross City Campaign for School Reform and the Education First Compact

I am here to speak in support of the Teaching Quality and Equity Platform of the Cross City Campaign for School Reform and the Education First Compact. The organizations that make up this coalition have been speaking out for many years in favor of reforms that would give Philadelphia's school children equal access to qualified and effective teachers. We know that the quality of a child's teacher is the biggest single school-related factor in his or her learning. We are gratified that this topic is now THE BIG ISSUE in education reform nationally and is a top priority of President Obama and Secretary of Education Duncan. The federal stimulus bill includes funds for districts to remedy inequities in teacher assignment and to improve the effectiveness of the teaching force, particularly in high-need districts.

Research for Action, a non-profit education research organization located in Philadelphia, and the Philadelphia Education Fund, have been conducting research on teacher staffing in Philadelphia for over a decade. RFA's 2007 report, *Closing the Teacher Quality Gap in Philadelphia*, summarized both the progress and the challenges that remain in Philadelphia on this issue.

Striking progress was made by the district after 2002 in response to the requirements of NCLB and state regulations. The district:

- increased the number of certified teachers, particularly in grades 7 and 8
- slashed the number of emergency certified teachers and replaced them with much more qualified Intern Certified teachers, mainly from alternate route programs such as Teach for America and The New Teacher Project;
- reduced the number of teacher vacancies (although some backsliding has occurred in the last two years)
- modestly increased new teacher retention
- implemented school-based site selection of new teachers and for teachers in newly opened schools as a result of the PFT-District contract in 2004

While these changes were substantial and truly noteworthy, we documented the persistent hurdles that remain in recruiting and retaining teachers and in ensuring their equitable distribution among all of the district's schools. We found that:

- The district has not changed the reprehensible practice of having the least experienced and least credentialed teachers in schools serving the highest

percentages of low income and minority students. We found a very strong statistical relationship between a school's poverty level and the average years of teachers' experience in that school and a similar relationship between the racial composition of a school and teachers' years of experience. Given what we now know about teachers' impact on student learning gains, these staffing practices have the effect of widening the achievement gap between low-income and minority students on the one hand and more advantaged and non-minority students on the other. We also argue that schools that have substantial numbers of new teachers year after year find it difficult to launch and sustain school improvement efforts.

- Long-term teacher retention rates are horrendously low. Of those teachers who were hired in the district in the Fall of 1999, only 30 percent remained in the district six years later (2005). A mere 16 percent remained in their same school.
- The hiring process is extraordinarily complex and slow which means that the district loses many if not most of the most talented prospective teachers who might want to teach in the system. Part of the complexity is due to convoluted transfer and school placement processes for new and veteran teachers. The district is unusual in that it does not have a district wide school-based (site selection) process for filling all teacher vacancies.
- Teachers of color remain seriously under-represented in the district's teaching force.
- The district lacks modern technologies, such as an Applicant Tracking System, that would make teacher hiring and placement more efficient.
- Data on these issues does not appear to be regularly collected or reported. The public lacks district-wide and school-specific information on updated turnover rates, the percentage of teachers who meet federal and state standards for being "highly qualified" for the actual courses they teach; more refined indicators of teacher qualifications (e.g. PRAXIS scores; route to certification); and the percentages of teachers each year who a) receive unsatisfactory ratings; or b) are denied tenure; or c) are terminated from the district.

As a result of our research, we feel there is an urgent need for the district to improve its teacher staffing policies and practices, including taking aggressive steps to insure that students in the hardest-to-staff schools get teachers who are as experienced and credentialed—and effective—as those in other schools in the system. NCLB requires that all children be taught by a highly qualified teacher, a promise that remains unfulfilled in Philadelphia.