

Swimming Upstream: The First-Year Experiences of Teachers Working in New York City Public Schools

**Educational Priorities Panel
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**Donna Tapper, Author
Mary Orovan, Research Assistance
Andrea Estepa, Research Assistance**

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Preface

The Educational Priorities Panel (EPP) is a coalition of 26 civic and parent organizations which advocates for the needs of children in the largest public school system in the nation through the monitoring of administrative and budget practices of the New York City Public Schools. In order to accomplish this, EPP conducts monitoring studies, analyzes fiscal and other data, and disseminates its findings through reports and conferences.

A long-range goal of the organizational members of the Educational Priorities Panel, one that continues to shape the coalition's day-to-day activities and policies, is to eliminate the gap between the academic achievement levels of New York City public school students and public school students in the rest of the state. There is ample research showing that schools serving large numbers of children from low-income communities and children whose home language is not English face additional instructional challenges in helping their students perform at grade level or above. A key strategy in closing this "achievement gap" is to improve the capabilities of the public schools' teaching force. The New York City Board of Education's recruitment, hiring, certification, and teacher-training practices can either contribute to or hinder efforts to attract and retain highly skilled and dedicated teachers.

This study carries forward previous work of EPP that was published in a 1987 report, "A Teacher for the Apple." This study found that in order to secure a New York City teacher's license in a given subject area, teachers often had to wait five years for an exam to be offered and then wait up to a year to find out whether they had passed the exam. This documentation of the inefficiencies of the Board of Examiners' licensing system contributed to its elimination by the State Legislature in 1990. The legislation abolishing this independent agency also created a new teacher licensing system, the Office of Recruitment, Professional Assessment and Licensing (ORPAL), to be administered by the New York City Board of Education.

In the spring of 1991, EPP began the monitoring study reported here. The objective of this study was to identify possible problems in the retention of teachers after their first year of employment by the New York City public school system. EPP conducted interviews with first-year teachers, one group in the spring of 1991, and another two years later. In 1999, we interviewed 24 new teachers and an additional 11 individuals who unsuccessfully sought teaching positions. In 1993 we interviewed 21 new teachers and 15 individuals who were unable to find teaching positions. Findings from both sets of interviews, supplemented by information obtained from Board of Education and Community School District officials in 1994, are included in this report.¹

In many respects, the 1990 school year was the worst year to study new teachers. It was a new teacher's nightmare. Taking effect in the middle of the school year, the new system for City licensing was in a state of transition and confusion under the administration of an understaffed and overwhelmed Office of Recruitment, Professional Assessment and Licensing (ORPAL). At

the same time, the Board of Education had changed the names, titles and requirements for uncertified teachers, and the usual sources of information - school secretaries, assistant principals, principals, UFT chapter chairs, and superintendents - were unfamiliar with the new system. Also, State teacher certification requirements had changed the year before.

In addition to uncertainty over changes in testing and certification, mid-year budget cuts made many of those who were interviewed wonder if they would have a job in the next school year. Consequently, many of the new teachers contacted in 1991 were angry and worried.

The new teachers in 1992-93 were far less confused about the licensing system and less worried about budget cuts. In the third year of the new ORPAL system and new titles and requirements for uncertified teachers, written information on licensing was available and new teachers could get reliable and uniform information about procedures from central, union, district, and school staff. There are, however, many similarities in the experiences of both the 1990-91 and 1992-93 groups of new teachers whom we interviewed that point to the need to make major reforms in the way that teachers are trained, recruited, and licensed.

This report is written so that new teachers speak for themselves and, whenever possible, their answers are quoted. However, we recognize that these teachers and their unsuccessful counterparts do not represent all the experiences of the more than 3,000 of their colleagues who were hired during each of the two study years. Rather, their answers are intended to be illustrative of first-year teaching experiences when combined with information from other sources.

To protect their confidentiality, the names of respondents are fictitious, and neither their schools nor school districts are identified. To improve readability of the report, some of respondents' answers have been edited to eliminate some of the jargon.

The Educational Priorities Panel would like to thank all of the respondents for their cooperation and assistance, and the New York City Board of Education for providing the requested information and statistics.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

This monitoring project was undertaken to contribute to the understanding of teacher recruitment and retention problems in New York City, a city which has the highest teacher turnover rate in the State, in which 14 percent of teachers are not certified, and where the least experienced and most uncertified teachers are assigned to students who are most at risk of not graduating.

The report presents findings of the monitoring study that examined hiring, licensing, and teaching experiences, professional development and support, and attitudes about teaching through the eyes of first-year teachers in the New York City Public Schools as well as some of their colleagues who were unable to secure a teaching position. Two groups of new teachers were interviewed. The first group of 24 new teachers and 11 unemployed teachers was interviewed in the spring of 1991. A second group of 21 new teachers and 15 unemployed teachers was interviewed in the spring of 1993.

This study's findings were updated in 1994 with interviews with officials at the central Board of Education and community school districts as well as a series of tests to gauge the level of difficulty that an individual interested in becoming a teacher would have in obtaining information from the Office of Recruitment, Professional Assessment and Licensing.

Hiring, Assignment, and Licensing

New York City's elaborate and rigid formal procedures for the hiring of new teachers do not allow school principals to make many decisions. On paper, licensed teachers are to be randomly assigned to schools from the Board of Education's central office and principals have the opportunity to reject the first two applicants but must accept the third (this is called the "rule of three"). But just about all the new teachers in this study and in our 1987 study, "A Teacher for the Apple," were actually hired by principals through a much more informal process. Most respondents obtained their teaching position through someone they knew in a school or district or because they were already known to the school through their experience as a student teacher, paraprofessional, or substitute teacher. Several new teachers described having to constantly visit or write a large number of schools to learn if there was a vacancy. Once hired, they completed their state and city teacher licensing requirements. Only a few new teachers in 1991 and none in 1993 had been assigned a position through the efforts of the Office of Recruitment.

Central assignment of teachers is defended as a means of placing teachers in hard-to-staff schools and as a means of ensuring teacher diversity. Neither objective is being met by this centralized process. Most hard-to-staff schools do their own hiring through the informal network without many candidates knowing of openings. Teachers of color tend to have fewer contacts in this informal network so they are at a disadvantage in finding job openings. A more open information system coupled with the expansion of programs to help paraprofessionals get degrees could significantly increase the diversity of the teaching force.

School principals, in actuality, made the majority of hiring decisions through this informal process, but they had to hire unlicensed teachers in order to have a say as to whom they could hire. A New York City principal cannot post a vacancy in a teaching position and then proceed to interview licensed teachers who might be interested in the position. A formally announced teacher vacancy would mean that the position has to be filled through assignment by the central office of the Board of Education with only two opportunities by the principal to reject the three licensed teachers assigned to her/him.

State Education Department officials have described a very different hiring process in most other school districts in the State, especially those districts that are well run: (1) There is a public notice of a teaching position opening, usually in the community's newspapers and possibly in The New York Times; (2) the superintendent of the district ensures that the process at the school-site level has been fair and that a large number of applications have been received; and (3) interviews of applicants and ultimate selection of the person to fill the position of the teacher are done by the principal alone or in conjunction with a school team made up of teachers and parents. In other words, there is maximum flexibility at the school-site level, but there is also supervision and monitoring of the process by the district superintendent. This process allows for the selection of the most qualified individual among a large pool of applicants. In order to be hired, candidates have to hold a state teacher license, on either a provisional or permanent basis.

New teachers in 1993 had a better understanding of State and City certificate requirements than did the teachers interviewed in 1991. Although teachers' views of the licensing process and the information and treatment they received by the Board of Education while applying for a license had improved over this time period, in 1993 about half of the new teachers still voiced complaints. Frustrations were directed exclusively to the Board of Education, none toward the State Education Department.

In an attempt to verify the new teachers' treatment by the Board of Education, EPP staff tried to obtain information on requirements and procedures in five different personnel situations. The fictitious scenarios included: (1) an out-of-state licensed math teacher who had just moved to New York City; (2) a parochial school teacher with a New York State permanent certificate; (3) a CUNY senior majoring in speech and education who wanted to become a special education speech teacher; (4) a teacher who last taught in the city system five years ago; and, (5) a New York City school teacher asking about how to obtain credit for teaching out-of-state. EPP staff called the Board 15 times, at different times of the day and days of the week, and succeeded in speaking with someone less than one-third of the time. Most of the time, the caller was transferred from the main switchboard to some extension that was never answered. Not only is this poor treatment, which wastes everyone's time, as new recruits must make more trips than necessary to 65 Court Street, it may also turn away potential teachers from considering a career in the New York City Public Schools.

The majority of new teachers relied on information from the Board of Education, though a minority of our sample was assisted by their college. If the Board of Education remains the major source of information on licensing, the ability to respond to phone inquiries must be improved.

Many of the new teachers had experience teaching in other countries, or had obtained or were working on a master's degree. Recent college graduates had bachelor's degrees in education. For many, teaching was a second career and they brought experiences from a variety of fields.

Recommendations :

- #1: Eliminate the Office of Recruitment, Professional Assessment and Licensing.**
- #2: Eliminate central assignment of licensed teachers.**
- #3: Allow school-site hiring of teachers by school-based teams.**
- #4: Expand pilot new teacher recruitment efforts to additional hard-to-staff districts.**
- #5: Create a clearinghouse of information at 65 Court Street on openings in teaching positions throughout the school system.**
- #6: Expand incentive programs to enable paraprofessionals to become certified teachers.**

First Year Classroom, Peer Support, and Staff Development Experience

Classroom management, time management, and lesson planning were cited by the new teachers as their greatest problems during their first year. Student behavior was also mentioned as a problem, by foreign-born teachers in particular. As for positive experiences, new teachers' satisfactions centered around gratification derived from teaching and from the children and from the support received from their colleagues.

Many teachers spent significant sums of their own money on supplies and some reported problems with ordering supplies from the Teacher's Choice program. Some new teachers reported a shortage of textbooks for their students and relied heavily on elaborate arrangements for making photocopies of instructional materials.

The response of new teachers to the informal assistance they received from more experienced teachers, from their supervisors, and their attendance at the New Teacher Orientation Conference were strong and extremely positive. Support from fellow teachers was both professionally and personally important to the new teachers.

Staff development opportunities ranged from none to very little to a lot. Courses most frequently mentioned as helpful were multiculturalism, English as a Second Language, and special education. Among the recommendations made by the new teachers were that training should be geared to their level of experience, with teachers having an education degree receiving training separate from others; meetings should be scheduled to review paperwork requirements; there should be opportunities for new teachers to observe experienced teachers prior to taking over their own classes.

Few of the teachers were assigned mentors through the Teacher Mentor Program and their judgement of its effectiveness was mixed. Some found it helpful, others did not.

Although the New Teacher Orientation Conference was praised, many respondents noted that time constraints prevented them from attending the subsequent required workshops.

Recommendations:

- #7: Improve the experiences of new teachers through professional development, mentor opportunities, meetings with district administrators, and the provision of adequate supplies.**
- #8: Target schools with a high number of vacancies and successive waves of new, inexperienced teachers for intensive staff development geared to new teachers and to improving school administration.**
- #9: Monitor and support new teachers to ensure that they complete certification requirements.**

College Preparation

Respondents were divided in their opinions about their college education courses or their current studies, however, most viewed their student teaching experience in a positive light. Some respondents believed their coursework did not prepare them for the real world of teaching. They felt that the courses were too theoretical and not relevant to the reality of teaching in difficult situations.

Recommendations:

- #10: Collaborate with CUNY to provide college education majors with classroom experience beginning in their freshman year.**

Why Did They Come ... Will They Stay?

Teachers cited the economic benefits of teaching in New York City public schools as well as altruistic motives. In general, there was a strong positive identification with public education. Younger teachers believed the salary level to be adequate; older and second-career teachers noted the inadequacy, compared to what they made in previous jobs.

While new teachers in 1991, in the midst of budget cuts and layoffs, expressed great uncertainty over their future in teaching, new teachers in 1993 voiced a strong commitment to continue teaching in the following year and in the next five years -- many planned to remain in their current schools.

Introduction

The purpose of this monitoring study was to examine issues critical to the successful recruitment and retention of teachers in the post-Board of Examiners era, through the eyes of new teachers and their colleagues who were not successful in finding a job. These issues are: hiring, licensing,

first-year teaching experiences, professional development and support before and during their first year, prior training, and attitudes about teaching in the City's public schools.

The New York City Board of Education has maintained an elaborate formal hiring system with time consuming procedures for teacher certification and licensing. Substantial resources are devoted to maintaining this system despite the fact that most teachers are hired through an informal system. Once hired, resources sufficient to support new teachers professionally are not available.

EPP's report, "A Teacher for the Apple," published in 1987, helped to eliminate a far worse system -- the New York City Board of Examiners. Several years later, there have been significant improvements at the Board of Education and interviews with Board of Education officials in 1994 identified the beginnings of model initiatives in teacher education and preparation and in teacher recruitment. EPP believes these initiatives should be sustained and implemented throughout the system. However, as is discussed in the section on findings and recommendations, none of them depend on the continuation of the Board's Office of Recruitment, Professional Assessment and Licensing (ORPAL).

Background

Recruitment and retention of teachers have been issues of concern not only in New York City but also across the nation, especially in urban school systems, for the last two decades. Ironically, during this same period, a decline in the student population across the country has led to fewer job openings for teachers in many suburban areas. The average age for teachers in Connecticut, Massachusetts and in some New York City suburbs is now over 40 years, and some individuals who are fully licensed to teach can only find employment in schools as paraprofessionals.

Recruitment and retention remain important, however, because we need the best-qualified teaching force in our schools and because of issues related to competing opportunities and long-term commitment to the profession. This is a particularly American problem, non-existent in many comparable nations, rooted in the vastly larger system of elementary public education in the United States in the 19th century. Even before the Civil War, primary schools in large cities began to serve a huge influx of immigrants with no increase in their tax base. School boards addressed this problem by feminizing their primary school teaching force -- and paying female teachers half the wages of males. A century later, as professional opportunities for women expanded in the 1970s and as women remained in the workforce after marriage and childbirth, the low status, and low pay, of teachers emerged as an issue.

Prior to this, however, another transformation had taken place as a result of urban migration patterns and changes brought about by the Supreme Court's desegregation decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. After World War II, large numbers of Puerto Ricans and southern blacks moved to northern cities. By the mid-70s, their children made up the majority of the school population in large urban areas.

Ironically, at a time of urban concentration of black public school students, black educators were losing positions in public school systems. Between 1964 and 1970, the consolidation of formerly race-segregated school systems in the South led to a disproportionate decrease in the number of black educators. Testimony before the United States Senate reveals that desegregation resulted in the termination of 90 percent of black principals in Kentucky and Arkansas, 77 percent in South Carolina and Tennessee, 50 percent in Georgia, 78 percent in Virginia, 30 percent in Maryland, 80 percent in Alabama, and 96 percent in North Carolina. It is estimated that desegregation displaced more than 31,000 black teachers in southern and border states.²

By the 1970's there were far fewer black principals and teachers than before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and, in many northern school systems like New York City, where there had never been large numbers of black teachers, no sizeable increases occurred. A far more racially diverse student population was being taught by a largely white teaching staff. A quarter of a century later, teachers in New York City remain overwhelmingly white.

Within this context, there is no contradiction between the need to recruit and retain new teachers and the decreasing need for new teachers overall. The real issue is not the pressing need to fill vacant teaching positions, because applicants outnumber openings, but how to attract talented and committed individuals -- women, African Americans, Hispanics and Asians -- who now have access to many more professions other than teaching.

The problem of integrating the teaching staff by race is particularly salient in New York City, even though the New York City school district is doing considerably better than other urban districts in the State. One-third of classroom teachers are from minority groups (20 percent black, 11 percent Hispanic, 2 percent Asian). All the other large city school districts, with a student population nearly two-thirds minority, have a teaching staff that is only 18 percent minority.³ The current formal hiring, assignment, and licensing process does not help hard-to-staff schools find qualified candidates nor help minority teachers locate job openings. In addition, local school administrators can avoid responsibility for the hiring decisions they make largely because when they do hire, they do so "informally."

Another factor contributing to the lack of a significant increase in the diversity of the teaching workforce in New York City public schools has to do with unequal educational opportunities offered to African-American and Latino students in the schools. Fewer blacks, Hispanics, and other minority groups are awarded bachelor's degrees in education from the CUNY system than would be expected based on demographics. A study of CUNY enrollees entering from New York City high schools found a large disparity in the high school preparation of white and minority students. Twice as many white as black and Hispanic CUNY students completed 15 or more academic units in high school, prior to enrolling in CUNY.⁴

Besides integration of the teaching force, New York City has other recruitment and retention problems, evident in a variety of statistics published in a State Education Department⁵ report on the 1992-93 school year, the latest statistics available, which found that:

- New York City has the highest teacher turnover rate in the State (13 percent), approximately twice as high as the other four highest school districts (6 percent).
- Fourteen percent of New York City's teachers are not certified compared with about six percent in the rest of the State's Big Five school districts (Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse and Yonkers) and eight percent in the rest of the State. (In the 1992-93 school year, out of 4,725 new teachers hired by New York City Board of Education, only 459, or 10 percent, were fully licensed when they began teaching.)⁶
- High rates of teacher turnover and large numbers of uncertified teachers are concentrated in community school districts in the poorest neighborhoods, serving students who are at greatest risk of not completing school. Community school districts 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 13, 16, and 30 had annual turnover rates of 17 percent or higher. Among these districts, the lowest rate of uncertified teachers (not holding either a permanent or provisional license or teaching a subject for which they hold no license) is 12 percent, the highest is 18 percent.
- One out of seven teachers in New York City has less than five years seniority, again, the highest proportion of any school district in the State.

Recommendations

The interviews and the supporting information obtained by EPP lead to the conclusion that, in order to improve the system's ability to retain new teachers, the system must shift from a requirements-based policy to a support-based policy. Instead of devoting scarce resources to the maintenance of a duplicative credentialing system, and then watching teachers leave the system in frustration, resources should be allocated to the professional development and support of new teachers so that they become excellent teachers committed to teaching in the New York City public schools.

EPP makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation #1: Eliminate the Office of Recruitment, Professional Assessment and Licensing. Rely solely on state certification.

In all parts of the State outside of New York City and Buffalo, new teachers must only meet State requirements for temporary or permanent certification. In New York City, teacher licensing requirements were established in the 19th century, at a time when the State had no standards. As the State implemented standards and improved upon them, City requirements have become increasingly unnecessary.

ORPAL's existence has been justified by the need to create a citywide list of qualified prospective teachers or appointees based on passing an oral test, and to assign them to positions on a citywide basis. Yet, the half hour oral examination given by ORPAL is not a performance-based assessment of an individual's ability to teach in front of a classroom of children. It is merely another bureaucratic hurdle that new teachers face, and that few fail. According to the Board's statistics, 88 percent of the candidates passed the oral tests given in the spring of 1994; 94 percent passed the tests in the fall of 1993.

Several of the new teachers who were interviewed commented on the irony of having to meet a multitude of paper credentials when they could observe that some of their fellow teachers "should not be in a classroom with children." The goal of improved professionalism and instructional effectiveness is not served by a duplicative, and costly, City licensing system for teachers. What should remain is a much smaller central office to help facilitate recruitment. (*See Recommendation #4.*)

Recommendation #2: Eliminate central assignment of licensed teachers.

EPP's interviews indicated that new teachers commonly learned about teaching positions through personal contacts -- relatives who teach in schools, student teaching assignments, pre-existing familiarity with a particular school -- not through the formal central assignment process. Nor has the central assignment of teachers by the Board of Education been effective in placing certified teachers in hard-to-staff districts. If the proportion of certified teachers in hard-to-staff districts is any indicator, it shows the Board's past lack of success in this area.

Strong recruitment efforts combined with professional support during a teacher's first year, as described below in Recommendation #4, will do more for hard-to-staff districts than central assignment.

Recommendation #3: Allow school-site hiring of teachers by school-based teams, using a process to select the most qualified candidate from a large pool of applicants including minority applicants.

School-based teams, including the principal, teachers, and parents, should be allowed and encouraged to hire teachers using a uniform, highly public process to select the best possible candidate for an opening from as large a pool of applicants, including minority applicants, as possible. This could be modeled after the C-30 process used for the selection of school

administrators, which requires posting of the opening and documentation of a diverse candidate pool. Specific openings in a given school should be advertised in newspapers. In community school districts where patronage hiring has been a problem, the central office of the Board of Education should be responsible for coordinating district recruitment efforts, advertising teacher openings at specific schools, maintaining responses, and having representatives present at all hiring interviews.

Recommendation #4: Expand pilot new teacher recruitment efforts to additional hard-to-staff districts.

With the elimination of ORPAL and central assignment, the Central Board of Education should shift its purpose to recruitment, expanding pilot programs in collaboration with districts. The apparent success of one recent initiative offers some promise. In 1993, collaboration between Community School District 23, a hard-to-staff district with a high proportion of uncertified teachers (53 percent in 1994), and the recruitment arm of ORPAL resulted in a targeted joint recruitment effort at area colleges and universities. Potential teachers attended a district open house and met with principals. ORPAL facilitated candidate licensure prior to September. Recruits, who were paid stipends, attended a five-week summer academy that included observation and internship in summer school.

Seventy teachers went through the program the first year and the majority were hired. The District reports that few have left while, normally, half of their new teachers leave after the first year. The program was continued in District 23 on a smaller scale in 1994 and the district plans to continue this approach but depends on the availability of staff development funds and State grants, neither of which is certain in the current climate of cutbacks. Unfortunately, plans to implement an inservice after-school program were abandoned for lack of funds.

ORPAL expanded the college outreach component of the program to three additional hard-to-staff community school districts and a high school superintendency, but without replicating District 23's summer academy.

The Board of Education also should distribute information on teacher certification requirements to CUNY and other area colleges early on to ensure that students have access to this information once they have chosen education as a major. Several new teachers interviewed expressed exasperation at the lack of information they received in college about the requirements they had to meet to be licensed before they sought employment.

Recommendation #5: Create a clearinghouse of information at 65 Court Street on openings in teaching positions throughout the school system.

Despite improvements in handling inquiries, large numbers of individuals still have difficulty in getting accurate information over the phone on procedures. Worse, there is no information available at 65 Court Street on where openings in teaching positions exist.

There should be a central clearinghouse where applicants can pick up information on how to become a teacher and where job openings are. In addition, the Board of Education could advertise in newspapers, so that schools get large numbers of resumes to review.

Recommendation #6: Expand incentive programs to enable paraprofessionals to become certified teachers.

Paraprofessionals are an obvious group to target in the development of potential teachers. They are already working in schools, directly with children, and many come from the communities in which they serve. The Board of Education should expand current scholarship programs and other incentives so that larger numbers of paraprofessionals can upgrade their skills and become licensed teachers. Although the current fiscal crisis has thinned their ranks, the Board can still recruit from among former paraprofessionals to meet future teaching personnel needs. This also would aid in achieving a more diverse pedagogical staff and meet affirmative action goals.

Recommendation #7: Improve the experiences of new teachers through an early support system including such measures as:

- **professional development;**
- **mentor opportunities;**
- **meetings with district administrators;**
- **the provision of adequate supplies.**

A past Board of Education's Task Force on Professionalism stated, "In the critical first years of learning, the new employee can quickly gain increased skill and competence it supported or turn inward and become defensive. If the large numbers of new teachers who will be coming into the system are not provided with early support and positive learning experiences, we will lose the opportunity to build a strong, competent, committed, and professional teaching corps."⁷

Teaching classes of the neediest students in the poorest performing schools in the poorest districts will continue to be a means of entry into the public education system for many new teachers, but these schools will continue to experience high turnover if supports for teachers are not in place.

The good news that we learned from this monitoring project is that there was surprising uniformity among all respondents about the positive support they had received from other teachers and the value of the annual New Teacher Conference. These were universal experiences in our small respondent group of new teachers -- obviously, some things worked and they tended to work for an overwhelming majority of new teachers. But this was followed by a disturbing fall-off of positive reports about what was helpful.

For some new teachers, some workshops were worthwhile, some schools and districts extended a helping hand, and some gave them the skills and understanding they needed for their careers. One reported that, once a week, her school sets aside time at the end of the day for teachers to meet. A lucky few felt they had good staff development programs, caring supervisors, and valuable academic training in combination. Their experiences are proof that good teacher preparation is not an unobtainable ideal.

The sad reality, however, is that the vast majority of respondents felt a lack in some aspect of teacher preparation, and an unlucky few felt they had not been helped by any one individual or institution other than informal assistance from fellow teachers.

Progress in the area of teacher preparation and support will, in the future, create a corps of new teachers who feel as positively about their college and graduate education and the workshops they attended as they do now about peer support and a preservice conference. We know that good academic preparation and staff development are not magic elixirs that guarantee that individuals who receive this preparation will be good or even adequate teachers. Given our interview format, we had no way of ascertaining through observation whether the lucky few that had good college preparation, supportive administrators and meaningful training were better than those without this preparation. On the other hand, the lack of widespread effort and sustained investment by the Board of Education in influencing academic teacher preparation and in encouraging school and district administrators to develop support systems for new teachers stands in contrast to the enormous effort and investment that the Board of Education makes in maintaining a duplicative City certification process.

From the new teachers' perspective, they are given little support in their actual teaching duties, but forced into a time consuming and frustrating credentialing process. What they want is to become more competent classroom teachers as soon as possible.

- **Professional Development**

Only one of the teachers interviewed reported being allowed to observe other teachers conducting classes for one week prior to the beginning of her assignment. This one-week introduction to a variety of teaching and classroom management styles could cost upwards of three million dollars if implemented for the entire public school system, but it would be preferable to thrusting new teachers, many with no academic training or prior teaching experience, into classrooms with 25 to 35 children.

Introductions to a variety of peers within the first week and the assignment of a "buddy" teacher also would accelerate the informal peer support system that is so critical for new teachers. These protocols are followed in some schools. While stage fright will afflict most new teachers, the current "sink-or-swim" attitude of some school administrators makes the first few days of

teaching more terrifying than necessary and subjects students to a serious lack of even the most basic teacher preparation.

- **Mentor Opportunities**

Without exception, peer support stands out as the most crucial form of assistance available to teachers new to the classroom. Counselors' caseworkers and neighboring classroom teachers pitched in to help the new arrivals with classroom management and lesson planning.

The Teacher Mentor program which assigned more experienced or retired teachers to individuals without classroom teaching experience and which formalized peer support and hands-on demonstration techniques was largely suspended by the time the interviews were begun in 1991. In the 1992-93 school year, a more limited Teacher Mentor program was re-established using teachers only, rather than retirees. However, the number of new teachers interviewed who expressed dissatisfaction with this program suggests that more attention should be paid to the assignment and training of mentors.

In 1993-94, under the Mentor Teacher Internship Program, newly hired Provisional Preparatory Teachers (PPTs) who have not completed either student teaching or the required number of education credits for provisional certification, and PPTs hired the year before who didn't have mentors, were to be assigned them. Mentoring activities would include demonstration lessons, intervisitations, and conferences. An after-school component would give interns the opportunity to complete a tuition-free three-credit graduate course.

To be successful, this reconstituted program should ensure that mentors are selected on the basis of their mastery of teaching skills and their ability to facilitate a successful mentor-intern relationship, not on the basis of seniority or favoritism.

- **Meetings with District Administrators**

Districts should provide basic employment-related information on licensing and paperwork requirements as well as new teacher professional development. Districts should offer different levels of professional training that fit the range of new teachers' backgrounds so as not to create yet another meaningless, pro forma requirement for the more experienced and credentialed new teacher whom the public school system is trying to retain. Both in EPP's interviews and in surveys conducted by the United Federation of Teachers, respondents complain that too frequently all new teachers are "lumped" together and receive the lowest level of basic training even though their backgrounds may range from a bachelor's degree with no courses in education to a master's degree in education -- from no prior teaching experience to substantial experience, especially in other countries.

Special education teachers (in 1991) seemed particularly overwhelmed with paperwork, having received little formal instruction on how to complete forms and Individual Education Plans

(I.E.P.s). Adequate briefing on personnel and procedures should reduce the frustration level of these new teachers.

- **The Provision of Adequate Supplies**

The unavailability of supplies for new teachers through the Teachers Choice program, because of the lag from order to receipt, is an obvious problem. The larger problem, however, is the scarcity of supplies in many schools. New teachers, as well as those with more seniority, must spend significant amounts of their own funds to equip their classroom, a phenomenon unheard of in other professions. Professional teachers require the tools with which to practice their profession.

Recommendation #8: Target schools with a high number of vacancies and successive waves of new, inexperienced teachers for intensive staff development geared to new teachers and improving school administration.

There needs to be, finally, a commitment by the Board of Education to make the first year of teaching less punitive by creating early support systems. More than that, schools with a high number of vacancies and thus successive waves of new, inexperienced teachers, must be targeted for intensive staff development geared to new teacher retention.

Recommendation #9: Monitor and support new teachers to ensure that they complete certification requirements.

Teachers hired after March 1986 are mandated to follow-up their attendance at the New Teacher Conference with 18 hours of workshops. Several respondents indicated that they could not find time to attend them in between their teaching job, university coursework for certification, and family responsibilities. With attention freed from operation of its own licensing process, the Board should ensure that new teachers fulfill these and other state professional development mandates within the required time period and by offering more opportunities, perhaps in the community school districts, for professional development.

Recommendation #10: Collaborate with CUNY to provide college education majors with classroom experience beginning in their freshman year.

With the exception of student teaching, college courses were often cited by the new teachers we interviewed as not being meaningful and not preparing teachers for the real world of the classroom.

The Board of Education should collaborate with CUNY to create a model urban teacher education and training program, which includes a teaching practicum starting from the freshman year. Like medical education, teachers should have more opportunities to observe model

teachers, be exposed to different age groups and subject areas, take part in “hands on” internships, and be better prepared prior to taking on their first teaching assignment.

Looking to the Future

Whether New York City teachers will turn to other occupations is not particularly urgent in the current economy. If the school population of the surrounding suburbs continues to decrease, the issue of whether New York City teachers will seek jobs in these areas is also less significant for the near future.

Currently, the New York City public school system has a competitive edge over surrounding systems in that it has job openings. It has a competitive edge over the nonpublic school systems in that it offers better salaries and benefits. The Board of Education also has a window of opportunity during the next few years to attract talented individuals who at other times might not consider teaching as an occupation. If support is provided to these new entrants, the quality of teaching in the New York City public school system could be improved and, if the salaries continue to be competitive, once the economy improves the majority may choose to remain in the system.

Resources and strategies should be deployed to create stability in high staff turnover schools so that, over time, the children in those schools will benefit from more experienced and more confident teachers who also have a more positive attitude towards the school and higher expectations for the students.

The commitment of teachers to public education in general and to the specific schools in which they were teaching was much stronger in 1993 than two years before. These new teachers expressed their intention of continuing to teach in the New York City public schools. In sharp contrast to the 1991 group, most of them planned to continue teaching for the next five years, many in their current schools. It would be a shame, and detrimental to the future of our children, to lose their commitment.

Hiring, Assignment, and Licensing: *I Heard It Through the Grapevine*

Persistence, luck, and ties to people already in the school system still appeared to be major factors for most of the teachers who found positions in the New York City public school system.

Respondents were asked, “What mechanisms did you use (hiring halls, calls to central, district offices, individual schools, personal contacts or friends and relatives) to find your position?” Only a minority of the interviewees in 1991 had relied on the Office of Professional Recruitment and been successful. None of those interviewed in 1993 had taken this route.

A majority of those interviewed in 1993 were employed directly by a school, without the assistance of central or a district office. Some of the new teachers were sure that their application to a community school district had resulted in their being sent to the school that offered them a job.

This is in sharp contrast with hiring practices in most of the State's school districts, where teacher positions are widely publicized in newspapers in order to attract the largest pool of qualified applicants and where the superintendent has the responsibility for ensuring that a large number of applicants are considered and that the selection process is a fair one.

The Informal Network

The interviews revealed that it helps to have a relative or friend in a school or to be on the school premises. Although studies of how Americans actually get jobs find that informal methods are used with greater success than formal mechanisms (replying to help wanted ads, applying for civil service positions, cold calls to employers), it is still striking how often these new teachers succeeded in obtaining a position through a close relative, a tip from a friend, or by having been a substitute teacher, student teacher, or other school employee.

Nearly three-fourths of the respondents obtained their teaching position because they knew somebody in a school or district or were known to the school. Almost half of these had friends or relatives who gave them critically important information.

"I taught three years in a private school. A friend of mine who works in a district office got me my position."

"I got my job through my family. My mom was a teacher. It took me one week."

"I subbed from September to March. I subbed one or two days at eight schools in District _ and mostly at the school where my sister is a teacher. In February, the school got money for an additional reading teacher. I saw the position posted and applied for it. None of the other teachers applied for it."

"I got information from girlfriends who were a year older -- I learned from their mistakes. To get sub jobs I went around to different schools with my resume, and they started calling. It was hard getting sub jobs in elementary schools, but not too difficult in junior high schools. After subbing from September to February, a vacancy came up."

"I couldn't find anything, so I started subbing ten to fifteen days a month. Then a girlfriend told me that someone was leaving her school in Brooklyn. I started subbing there, and I got the job."

“I was a student teacher at _ high school and a principal from another school called my principal to ask if he knew anyone who was looking for a job. He recommended me.”

“I was working for the Board of Education as an administrator at 65 Court Street. But I love children and wanted to find a way to work with them on a steady basis. It took me the summer to find a job. I knew that student teaching was a good way to find a job, but I applied to 15 other schools anyway. They said they wouldn’t know until September. The school where I had student taught in the spring had an opening, so I took it because it was secure.”

“I got a job at the school where I student taught. I was hoping that would happen and it did.”

“I had lots of good contacts and experience both from my student teaching and as a para so I could figure out my niche.”

“I have a B.A. degree in speech and so I got a job immediately as a junior high speech teacher. I know somebody who told me to contact a speech teacher in one school district. When I went for an interview she told me there were no openings. But she sent me to another supervisor in another district on the same day. That woman hired me and placed me right away. So it took one day.”

“I worked in a summer program hoping that the school would keep me on for the fall. It worked.”

“It took me two months to find my job. I started looking when I got my file number in October and I started working in December.⁸ A friend recommended me to her principal to replace a colleague who went on sabbatical due to illness.”

Here is how two other new teachers found their teaching positions and how one was unsuccessful.

Jane Goodens

“I got a job teaching at a high school. I’m what’s called a trade teacher, but I have a B.A. degree, which you really don’t need to start. I tried for 10 years to get a position like this with the public schools. For 10 years whenever I went to the Board of Education, I was told I had to see a Ms. Brown before they would allow me to fill out an application. Ms. Brown never answered my letters or phone calls. Finally, Ms. Brown died and several trade teachers retired so my timing was right.

“This time I filled out the forms without any hassle. I got my certificate on Friday, and on Saturday, the very next day, I went to the High School Fair [held in October/ with my son. I went around to the booths and left my resume. I got two interviews out of the Fair, and at one I was offered a position and went to work later that week.”

Fran Ames

“To tell you the truth, my really lucky break came through waitressing. But let me tell you, I also started early. My mother works as a teacher in the Bronx. I began the process of getting my certificate six months before graduating from college. I started with an interview at my mom’s school, and I finished everything including the fingerprinting before I graduated. When I was a student, I was working as a waitress, and a woman I was waiting on told me about Citywide Special Education, so I called up and had an interview. I was placed in a job two days after graduation in a summer program that started July 6, as a speech teacher. My college major was speech.”

Digna Martinez

“I was a teacher in South America before I moved to this country. I’ve worked as a Special Education para for three years. I finished my B.S. in bilingual education and passed all the tests, but I failed my oral interview. It is very hard to get an opportunity.

“Since I didn’t apply for a TPD certificate, I couldn’t even look for a teaching job, and I’m continuing to work as a para. I passed both the Spanish and English written tests and the Spanish oral. I don’t think I failed because of the quality of my English, but it was my answers. He didn’t like them. My interviewer asked me why I wanted to be a bilingual teacher and I told him I wanted to help the Spanish children in the city. He seemed unhappy with that answer and asked me what I’d do if I were assigned to a school where the children were Chinese. I asked him why they would send someone who was bilingual in Spanish to a school where the children speak Chinese when there are so many children who speak Spanish. That did it, I think.”

The overall impression from these interviews is that school administrators made the majority of hiring decisions, an impression borne out in Board of Education data.

Out of 4,725 new teachers hired during the 1992-93 school year, 4,266 (90 percent) were not fully licensed.⁹ With some exceptions, these individuals would not be referred by Central’s Division of Human Resources but would be nominated by district superintendents and hired directly by schools.

The following table presents the number of new teachers hired each month during the 1992-93 school year.

New Teachers Hired* in 1992-93 by Month

Month Hired	Total	Regularly Appointed	Substitutes
September	2,883	434	2,449
October	397	5	392
November	264	4	260
December	147	2	145
January	151	3	148
February	500	9	491
March	213	2	211
April	114	0	114
May	54	0	54
June	2	0	2
Total	4,725	459	4,266

**New hires with no prior service.*

Source: New York City Board of Education, Office of Pedagogical Personnel.

The advantage of the informal network over the formal process for school employees is that the applicant is a known quantity, either through direct observation or through the positive references of another employee. The advantage of hiring new teachers who have worked as a substitute or student teacher is that the new employees should know what to expect since they have been at the school and will not “disappear” or quit suddenly because they don’t like teaching, school conditions, or because they can’t handle their classes. Some school administrators want their new teachers to have served “an apprenticeship.”

There are, however, significant system-wide disadvantages to having a relatively weak formal hiring process. Hiring decisions by school administrators may depend more on who is on hand or who knows whom than on who is the most qualified or has the better credentials. A candidate who is fully licensed or comes from another city or country with substantial teaching experience may never be interviewed in favor of the substitute teacher with no prior full-time teaching experience, who may be several years away from a license. Competition for the most qualified is lessened.

A formal hiring process does not, however, have to be like New York City’s “rule of three” which has the effect of limiting competition. Instead, it can be structured to ensure competition among a large pool of qualified applicants as it is in most other school districts in the State where there is widespread advertising of teacher openings at specific schools.

Applicants without an informal network are placed at a disadvantage over applicants who have relatives or friends who can tell them about job openings or how the hiring system “really” works. This disadvantage could be a factor in the lack of success of the Board of Education’s efforts to hire more African-American, Latino, and Asian teachers. Informal hiring procedures tend to replicate the racial and ethnic characteristics of personnel already employed by the system, while formal hiring procedures can be structured to expand the employment opportunities of racial and ethnic minorities.

Informal hiring procedures can also be used by school employers to circumvent requirements for hiring applicants through a formal process. Some of the reasons might be valid, such as a desire to have maximum discretion over hiring of teachers while other, less valid, reasons, might include a reluctance to hire candidates of a certain ethnicity or race. Similarly, informal hiring procedures can also be used by applicants to circumvent referrals to largely poor and minority districts or districts located far from their homes.

Another readily apparent disadvantage is that working as a substitute is a lengthy and uncertain method of securing a full-time job. Some of the unsuccessful teacher applicants wanted to teach in the public school system but took positions teaching in Catholic schools, day care centers, or remained in their school jobs in other titles because they needed a job right away and couldn’t afford working as a substitute without the certainty of a full time, permanent position. Of those interviewed who had teaching positions but who took from five to six months to find them, all had worked as substitutes.

“How Long Did It Take to Find a Position?”

Half of the new teachers reported that they were hired right away or within, one week after they received their certificate. This is an impressive improvement over the experiences of new teachers with B.A.s in education described in “A Teacher for the Apple” who had to wait on average a year and a half after graduation to receive the paperwork to be assigned centrally to a teaching position. Of course, this group includes Jane Goodens who had tried for ten years to secure employment before getting her certificate as a trade teacher; Tom Eames who had applied unsuccessfully four years previously as a teacher of mathematics, a license shortage area; and others who had worked as substitute teachers for periods of three months to a year. Some new teachers had spent anywhere from one to three months looking for a job before securing one. Others finally secured full-time employment, usually as a replacement or in a temporary funded program, only after five or six months of working as a substitute teacher or other school employee.

The Licensing Process: *A Long and Winding Road*

The process of obtaining city and state teaching credentials is well known for its complexity. In a recent union newspaper article, the UFT outlined the various routes to licensing in New York City, in the form of a subway map, and the state’s teachers union, the New York State United Teachers, described the State process in the form of a board game. Termed “Riding the NYC

Licensing Subway,” the city map detailed the many stops and starts, and the fees involved, from college education to appointment and permanent licensure. The “New York State Certification Game” showed many of the requirements and pitfalls on the road to state certification.¹⁰

EPP asked respondents to “Describe your experience applying for a teaching position: How did you get information about the process, needed qualifications, licensing, and placement?” and “Are you fully licensed; have you been informed about licensing procedures?” (and by whom).

These questions, along with a separate question asking for recommendations on improving the licensing process, produced a torrent of harsh words and emotions in the 1991 round of interviews. By 1993, however, the process as reflected by the new teachers’ reactions seemed to have improved.

In 1991, when this topic was broached, respondents began bombarding the interviewer with questions about when oral interviews for licensing would be scheduled and why they had not received their TPD (Temporary Per Diem) renewals in the mail.

In 1993, new teachers were much clearer about City licensing and State certification requirements¹¹ and, as a group, were more evenly divided in their reactions to their treatment by 65 Court Street. Several respondents indicated that things weren’t as bad as they expected, however, others were quite upset about their experiences.

Here is a sample of their experiences as reported in 1991:

Carrie Manners

“The City license thing is holding me up. It’s really discouraging. I’ve had my fingerprints taken five times and paid for it each time within this ten-month period. What do they do with those records? I took the TPD test for regular education and special education. I took the NTE and passed all three parts. The National Teachers Examination is standardized test required by the State. I took all my education credits. Now I have to take this City exam? I’m waiting for my test to come up. And this is the experience of someone who worked there -- people knew me and pushed some papers through. And then they say go be a teacher!”

Rose Whachtel

“The whole process at 65 Court Street needs to be streamlined. In addition to the licensing, I applied for a promotional differential and had to go back again with my transcript. That building has so many copies of my transcript -- for the TPD, for the license, for the differential -- I had to go back with a transcript three times. Don’t they have a central records office? Don’t they make copies of the transcript they already have? As a new teacher, I didn’t have a lot of time to

request transcripts and run them to the Board of Education. It's ludicrous. And it's expensive, between all the fingerprinting and the physical."

Nancy Arnell

"Just calling 65 Court Street is a horror. The first person who answers always refers you to someone who is the wrong person. Then they refer you to the right person. As a rule that third person is very knowledgeable and gives you the answer. But you can't do this from a public phone -- never! Every time each person switches me, I'm put on hold ten minutes at a time, I'm not exaggerating. I had a terrible time getting my differential. [Nancy had worked previously as a teacher for three years in a parochial school.] The U.F.T. chapter chair was helpful. He's a friend. The U.F.T. had to help me get this differential -- no individual could do it on her own, not in a million years."

Carrie Martinson

"I had to file the same exact papers four times -- passport, etc. They'd send me letters that some thing wasn't right and I'd have to go back in person. Why isn't one time sufficient? They have this list, supposedly, that they talk about but I don't know where this list is. You're supposed to be on a list and wait your turn to be called for a job. I haven't figured it out. I don't understand how it works. I don't understand why they don't call you in order. It's very political and very unfair. They don't make it clear. The principals tell you to go to the district and the district tells you to go to the school. Everyone you talk to says someone else is responsible for hiring. I have friends that slipped right through, but they knew somebody. I don't know what to do about next year -- what to try or whether I should bother."

Eileen Mitchell

"They've tried to make things more confusing. At one point I didn't even know what my title was and we had to call 65 Court Street to get a clarification. And my college didn't clarify the requirements. Now that I'm actually teaching, I understand better what the steps are -- but they could have done this in college. Another thing I don't like is all the exams I have to take."

Reports in 1993 reflected improvement, but there were still some negative experiences:

Jack Norton

"Applying was easy. There was on-campus recruitment at my college. The representative from the Board of Education was great. She helped me and got me

a file number in a week. [But while Jack didn't have trouble getting his CPT or job,] they lost my papers for insurance ... the only way to get anything done is to go down and scream, and I don't have time. The bureaucracy is 'mind-boggling.' Even thinking about it makes me sick."

Ellen Sallie

"It's a nightmare at the Board of Ed. I've never seen anything like it. No one knows what anyone's doing. They send you from room to room, just for fingerprints. It takes months. [Where I used to work in another profession] we got them in 48 hours. My principal probably finagled getting me to her school. I was lucky I did student teaching at P.S._. The principal there sent me for an interview and I got the job."

Marisol Sona

"I got most of my information on licensing at the Board of Ed. My experience was good. Sometimes they make mistakes, but for me it's been a good experience. I went through a long process... I got a file number as a sub first, last year. Then, I got a PPT through the school that hired me. Now that I'm in the school, the Union is helpful in getting me through the next steps which are to take the NTE and to take some more bilingual ed. courses to qualify for the State license. I already have one master's."

Lisa Thomas

"I started as a paraprofessional and knew exactly what to do. I went to Albany with everything ready. The experience at Court Street was different but I had an easy time compared to most of my friends because I had everything in order. I also did everything in the normal order they wanted. I have a CPT now and I'm working on a master's in reading. Court Street sent me a book, "Nuts and Bolts" which is excellent and had all the information. But just because I didn't have a problem with Court Street -- others do. There are some nice people, but there are some nasty ones, too. You want to be treated like a 'professional' and you're not at Court Street. You have to sit for hours, and they seem so unorganized."

Susan Martin

"Going to the Board of Ed, I felt like a piece of cattle. People are nasty, ridiculously inefficient, demeaning. No instruction in what to do. I don't understand why it takes so long. It's like the motor vehicles department times ten."

In 1991, three-fourths of the new teachers described their frustration with certification and licensing procedures. A few of those were in master's degree programs in special education where they reported being given clear and accurate information about procedures and any changes. One even went up to Albany to shepherd her papers through at the suggestion of her master teacher.

Of the 18 respondents in 1991 who spoke at length and with anger about the licensing process, 11 mentioned the difficulty in just getting accurate information. Phrases such as, "Nobody seems to know;" "It's a run-around;" "It's totally confusing;" "They never tell you what you need," reoccurred.

Other specific complaints which occurred frequently were about the need to provide a new set of transcripts with every application and about repetitive and costly fingerprinting requirements.¹²

In 1993, about half of the new teachers had no problems while half voiced complaints about the process or their treatment by employees of 65 Court Street. A single teacher's comments encompassed the contradictions of his experience.

"A Board of Ed. person came to my college six months before graduation ... it was excellent. All paperwork and even fingerprints were taken there. We filed everything in January or February with both the City and State. [But after a slowdown in Albany,] I didn't get paperwork for a final file number for the City. The college finally gave us a paper stating that everything was in order and completed and recommended that the City give us clearance. At the Board of Ed., I was switched from person to person, room to room. We didn't get a file number until the last minute right before school started."

More than half of the respondents who were not successful at finding a teaching job in 1990-91, but only a few of the 1993 group of respondents, mentioned difficulty in getting information from the Board of Education as a contributing reason for not pursuing a search for a teaching position in a public school. Of these, two were teaching in private schools and one in a day care center. Most of the complaints in these brief interviews were not specific, but they included familiar statements such as "red tape," "a run-around," and "tedious," or concerned lost transcripts, computer errors, and misinformation.

There were two surprises in both sets of responses. The first was that, with one exception in 1993, the new teachers' frustrations were directed exclusively at their dealings with the New York City Board of Education. No negative comments were directed at the State Education Department (SED), which they called "Albany." Not one of the respondents cited this agency as a source of confusion, despite the fact that prior to the first set of interviews, SED also had changed their requirements for temporary certification. In 1989, the State ended its policy of allowing New York City to grant temporary certificates to new teachers with only 12

undergraduate credits in education and began to require a minimum of 24 credits and a mandatory course on child abuse.

The second surprise was that all of the respondents, when asked, “What steps must you complete to be fully licensed?” answered knowledgeably about State requirements. This suggests that the State Education Department has done a better job of communicating with and responding to new teachers than the New York City Board of Education.

Still, by 1993, responses about license and certification status were clearer overall. Without hesitation or mistake, the teachers recounted their CPT, PPT, or permanently certified status; the credit and NTE test requirements needed to obtain certification; and the time period allowed to accomplish the requirements.

Access to Information

Since the 1990-91 school year was a transition point between the previous City licensing system under the Board of Examiners and the new system under ORPAL, some of the lack of information and uncertainty experienced by new teachers in 1991 disappeared by 1993, as school and district staff become more knowledgeable. Yet, in response to complaints by the new teachers who were interviewed, EPP staff called the Board of Education pretending to be interested in teaching in the public school system, or teachers with certification questions.

A series of scenarios were developed in which each caller presented herself as seeking information on requirements, documentation needed, and procedures. The callers pretended to be (1) a teacher with an out-of-state math license; (2) a teacher in a parochial school in New York City; (3) a CUNY college senior majoring in speech and education, (4) a teacher who has been out of the city system for five years; and (5) a current public school teacher seeking credit for years of teaching out of state.

Calling at 15 different times of the day during the course of several weeks resulted in successfully reaching a staff person less than one-third of the time. In most cases, the caller was transferred to an office where the phone rang ... and rang ... and rang, while EPP staff held on for up to eight minutes before finally giving up. Although staff were polite and provided appropriate responses when they did answer the telephone, this happened much too infrequently. And all requests to receive information by mail were met with the response that these must be picked up in person. It should not be so hard just to get information.

Help With the Licensing Process

EPP asked interviewees who provided information to them about licensing procedures and whether either the Union or their college was helpful. The sources of information about and assistance with negotiating licensing procedures shifted from 1991 to 1993, illustrating improvement in 65 Court Street’s response to new teachers over this period and, as would be expected, reflecting greater stability two years after the elimination of the Board of Examiners and the introduction of new license categories.

In 1991, when new teachers were asked “How have you been informed of the changes in licensing procedures due to the elimination of the Board of Examiners?” only one in five teachers specified the Board of Education. Six relied on the United Federation of Teachers and seven on school personnel. A few individuals received assistance from friends, their college, or the school district office.

In contrast, in 1993, nearly three-fourths (15) relied on information from the Board and 9 were helped by their college. In some instances, respondents mentioned that Board of Education representatives visited their college campus as part of an on-campus recruitment. Several also mentioned that they had received help from their college with the State process.

School principals, friends, and the UFT were reported to have helped a few respondents.

Uncertified, But Some are Very Qualified

The teachers were asked, “Do you have prior teaching experience? Where? How many years? Is teaching your first job, or a career change?”

In discussions about the high proportion of “uncertified” or “unlicensed” teachers in New York City, the focus sometimes shifts away from a discussion of the inefficiency of the New York City Board of Education to implications that teachers who are unlicensed are unlikely to be able to secure the credentials to become licensed, and thus are unqualified to be teaching children. Though our respondents are not representative of all unlicensed teachers, their varied backgrounds dispelled any thoughts that these individuals are lacking in the ability to secure the credentials needed to become teachers.

In 1991, six of the respondents had been teachers for at least 3 to 12 years, including one who had been a college professor in Puerto Rico. Half of those interviewed in 1991, and almost 7 out of the 18 respondents with CPTs or PPTs in 1993, either had a master’s degree or were in the process of securing one.

In 1991, those from foreign countries and Puerto Rico were the most heavily credentialed and/or had the most teaching experience; this did not hold for the 1993 respondents, more than half of whom were age 30 or under.

Although nine of the new teachers in 1991 were just out of college, and teaching was their first fulltime job, five of them majored in education and had previous student teaching experience. In 1993, all six of the recent graduates had bachelor’s degrees in education.

Coincidentally, the same number of respondents in each of the two years (9) had switched from another career or area of work to teaching; about one-third of them had master’s degrees. Their backgrounds varied widely and they included a clothes designer, commercial artist, three who were in business, a trade school dean with a master’s in urban affairs, a City manager on

maternity leave, a Board of Education administrator, an engineer who had been a college dean in Russia, and several who had worked in computers, brokerage and insurance firms.

In 1991, but not in 1993, some of those who came from another field mentioned their frustration at having to take undergraduate courses in education rather than being able to earn these credits on the master's level. Board of Education officials stated that, with the exception of trade teachers who are not required to have a bachelor's degree but must get undergraduate education credits Upon hiring, they saw no reason why individuals with bachelor's degrees could not meet State and City requirements by taking graduate courses in education. Possibly some of those who were interviewed had been misinformed by the university where they were taking their education credits. Others complained of having their course credits for a master's degree in another area not count towards their master's in education. This was clearly an issue between the individual and the university they were attending, and not the result of Board of Education policies or misinformation.

The qualifications of some of the respondents reinforced the "paper chase" aspects of the City certification procedures and added poignancy to their expressions of frustrations with the Board of Education. The question arises about the need for an additional certification process which amounts to a half hour generic oral examination in New York City, where the needs of the public school system for talented individuals to serve as teachers is the greatest. Indeed, several of the new teachers questioned the need for a City licensing procedure. A few, including the new teacher quoted at the beginning of this chapter, wondered why the emphasis was on teacher credentials rather than teacher performance. One noted,

"Too much paperwork – this doesn't guarantee getting good teachers."

First Year Classroom and School Experiences: *Up a Creek Without a Paddle*

The Problems

The first day a new teacher stands before a classroom of children has been likened to a trial by fire -- and the trial repeats itself every day in the first couple of months or years. The Board of Education's Task Force on Professionalism in its report, From Hiring to Retiring, commented, "It is not hyperbole ... to state that, for many people, the first year of teaching is one of the most traumatic experiences of their work lives."¹³

In the EPP interviews, some of the new teachers who had never taught before vividly remembered their first days on the job.

Una Thomas

“This is a career change. I thought I could give something back. I’ve been in corporate sales and sales training, so I thought I possessed the dynamism to go into the classroom and be effective. If I felt I wasn’t quick, I would have walked away from it. I had a class that hadn’t a regular teacher since September. [She was hired in December.] They were wild and out of control. The kids need so much – that’s painful some days.”

Marta Zarzuelo

“It’s a big adventure. When you start, there is the room and there are the students. I made many, many mistakes at the beginning. It was so hard at the beginning because I was comparing the students to myself when I was their age and to students in Puerto Rico.”

Fran Ames

“I walked in with a pen and a pencil and that was all. The three speech teachers share the same room, so with their help and the help of two caseworkers that I depended on all the time, I made it. But the paperwork! It was my other major problem -- the paperwork was enormous. They don’t give a course on how to write I.E.P.s. If they’re going to let people with just a bachelor’s work in the schools, then they need to give us instructions on I.E. P.s. I had a caseload of 40 students.” [An I.E.P., Individual Education Plan, must be written for each individual student in a special education class or receiving related services. A new I.E.P., which includes short and long-term goals for the student, must be written every year.]

The respondents’ answers to the question, “What are the greatest problems you face as a new teacher?” fit the textbook descriptions of new teachers’ weaknesses. With consistent regularity, those without prior teaching experience or with only student teaching, cited classroom management, time management, and lesson planning as their major problems. U.F.T. literature directed at new teachers does a good job of reflecting these concerns with “Teacher Tips” on classroom management and lists of workshops on this topic as well as lesson planning and time management.

But even those new respondents who had prior teaching experience stated that student behavior had been a problem for them as well. As stated previously, in the 1991 round of interviews, many of those who had taught three or more years had done so in their country of origin. While only two native-born Americans mentioned “culture shock” as a problem in their adjustment to the classroom, foreign-born teachers much more frequently expressed difficulties in understanding the culture or behavior of their students.

In 1991, ten of the fifteen teachers in special education mentioned paperwork as a major problem or their only problem. The words of Fran Ames, quoted above, about not getting any guidance on filling out I.E.P.s, were echoed repeatedly. However, in 1993, only two out of five special education teachers mentioned this as a problem. One regular education first grade teacher did agree with some of her colleagues in special education. She commented,

“It takes too long to refer a student to special education ... I still have a child who had problems in kindergarten and whose mother wants her referred to special services, but it’s very hard to do ... too much paperwork, takes too long.”

“What are the Greatest Satisfactions of Being a New Teacher?”

Just as the new teachers, with only a few exceptions, focused on the classroom when asked about problems, they focused on the classroom and children almost exclusively when asked about their satisfactions. Some also recalled their gratification at receiving support from other school staff. In interview after interview, their answers echoed each other almost verbatim.

“When you teach first grade, you really see great changes. My students learned to read and write. And watching them master these skills really felt good.”

“Satisfaction ? The kids. Sometimes you feel like you’re getting through to some of them. There’s been some improvement socially, in terms of how they behave. The support of other teachers is a positive because there are many days when I wonder why I’m doing this.”

“Even though my students didn’t like me at the beginning of the year, by the end of the year they saw their work and they thanked me.”

“Some of my kids benefited from what I was doing. I made the environment cheerful for the children and the workers. Some of the kids are now toilet trained.” (--Special education teacher)

“My students appreciated me as their teacher. I earned their respect and they didn’t call me names.”

“The kids are great ... some are tough, but if you’re tough too you can get through. It can be creative to teach. If and when it works, it’s great.”

“Everything! The students are terrific. Working with the students is the best thing.”

Combining the responses in 1991 and 1993, 14 new teachers specifically mentioned seeing their students learn or progress as their main source of satisfaction; 8 spoke of the satisfaction gained from the feeling of helping or getting through to children; 6 singled out the improved behavior of

their students; 4 mentioned “just being with the children.” As some of the quotes above suggested, earning the respect of the children was important to the respondents. Six cited the support or praise they had received from other teachers as a major source of satisfaction and four mentioned their own acquisition of teaching skills as a positive experience.

School Resources

When asked, “Did you have access to adequate basic supplies (paper, chalk, photocopying, etc.)?” fully half of the teachers in 1991 and one-third in 1993 said they did not. Yet, overall, only four new teachers mentioned a lack of resources as a major problem in their first year.

But the real surprise was that even among those new teachers who stated that access to basic supplies had not been a problem, responses to a subsequent question, “Do you ever use your own money to buy supplies for your classroom?” revealed serious problems. Many of these teachers seemed to expect, and accept, that they would spend their own funds on supplies and classroom materials.

Here are what some new teachers told us about their access to supplies in their schools:

“I don’t have enough supplies. They send around a form and ask for what you need, but that doesn’t mean you’ll get it. I spent about \$50 in the first three weeks buying rmagic markers, motivational charts, and teacher’s charts.”

“The system works. You request supplies and the next day I get them or all or an explanation of why I can’t get them. The woman who is in charge of supplies is efficient.” (--High school teacher)

“Yes, there were adequate supplies. But my father works for the City and things would fall off the truck, if you know what I mean. So I never lacked for paper. I’ve only spent between \$75 to \$100 out of my own pocket for supplies and extras.”

“No, there aren’t adequate supplies. When I first got here I didn’t know where anything was. There’s a shortage of paper now -- the woman in supplies has drawn lines on plain paper and Xeroxed it. I haven’t spent too much of my own money -- about \$50. I’ve bought things like spelling lists, vocabulary lists -- there just aren’t enough materials to plan lessons with. I have to buy Band-Aids once a week. They lead you to think there’s a budget, but there isn’t one.”

“We were given a ‘starter kit’ with some supplies -- two pieces of chalk, a couple of red pens, a couple of pencils, and some paper clips. I had to buy everything else. I’ve spent \$300 to \$400 this year. I bought tape, a tape dispenser, staples and stapler, scissors, pens, pencils, loose-leaf paper, decorations for the classroom, and rubber stamps.”

“Yes, there are adequate supplies, but I do find it frustrating that you have to go through department chairperson to get what you need. It’s demeaning. Why can’t I just go to the supply room and ask for what I need? And, I’ve never gotten the Teacher’s Choice stuff I ordered. I’ve spent about \$100 of my own money on maps, photocopying, and extra books.”

The range of what the new teachers spent out of their own pocket was as surprising as the range of their answers. When asked, “How much do you spend for supplies?” the largest number (13) of teachers (for the two years combined) reported spending between \$300 to \$1,000 over the course of the year. Seven estimated their personal monetary contribution at \$100 to \$200 and six spent from \$50 to \$75 over the year. Sixteen did not expend any personal funds on supplies. One teacher reported spending \$2,000, including the purchase of her own copying machine!

Since teachers get their supplies from their last school year’s order through Teacher’s Choice, new teachers come into the classroom without these materials. Unless the school provides them with extra supplies, they must dip into their own pockets. Teachers Choice didn’t solve supply problems for some new teachers:

“I lost my Teacher’s Choice because the principal told me to keep a copy of the order form for my records but never told me I had to phone my order in.”

“I like Teacher’s Choice, but I feel that the items are overpriced and not well described. For example, I ordered a set of 50 big ‘safety signs’ that are important for my kids to recognize. [She teaches as SIE VI class.] These ‘safety signs’ should come in different sizes and shapes -- you know, red stop signs are round. Instead, when they came they were all yellow and all rectangular. I just threw them out.” [SIE stands for Specialized Instructional Environment, which is a range of services in self-contained classrooms for functionally disabled students. VI designates the service as appropriate for the “emotionally disturbed/mentally retarded.”]

“Teacher’s Choice gave us \$70 a year -- so far I’ve only gotten scissors. I just keep getting more and more scissors. I ordered paint and paper, they haven’t arrived yet.”

Textbooks and Photocopiers

In response to the question, “Are there an adequate number of textbooks for your students?” only six teachers in 1991 and seven in 1993 stated that they there were, and that their condition was good. Fourteen new teachers in 1991, but only two in 1993, reported that they didn’t have enough textbooks for all their students. In each year, some reported that the textbooks were old and out-of-date or that they did not go with the curriculum. One cannot generalize to all

teachers from these two groups of respondents, but it is clear that an adequate supply of textbooks cannot be assumed.

“Do you have to photocopy textbooks or assignments? Who pays for this?” Another surprise concerning the availability of school materials was the sheer volume of photocopying done by some teachers -- and some of the quirks in school policies. Again, some new teachers said that they had no problems gaining access to photocopying, but when questioned about the supply of textbooks or how much money for supplies had come from their own funds they would state that they solved the textbooks shortage by photocopying the books or workbooks and paying for this out of their own funds or supplying their own paper. Nine of the 1991, and six of the 1993, respondents reported a very high volume of photocopying of books, tests, homework assignments, and materials for distribution to children. (As already mentioned, one bought her own copying machine.)

In some of the schools the photocopying machines frequently were broken. One teacher commented, “The machine is broken a lot and I have to give the paper for it ... to use our machine at school you have to be there at 7 a.m. and it’s broken by 9 a.m.” In one school, the forms for gaining permission by the principal were so complicated that the teacher went to the copy shop on her way home instead. At another school, a new teacher who reported no problems nevertheless mentioned that there was an eight-minute quota at the Xerox machine. Another did not allow the reproduction of class sets. One teacher would “sneak into” a friendly community school district office and another into a funded program to photocopy; several relied on family or friends to reproduce materials at their own places of employment.

Peer and Administrative Support, Staff Development, and College Preparation: I Get By With a Little Help from My Friends

In both years, new teachers were virtually unanimous in their positive responses to the series of questions, “Did you make any effort to seek any informal assistance from more experienced teachers? Were they helpful in giving you assistance in helping you to teach? Was the New Teacher Orientation Conference held at the end of August/beginning of September helpful? Did you receive any other training/staff development at the school or district where your work?” Teachers had experienced a tremendous amount of support from other teachers in the school, and they found the Conference and workshops very helpful.

In 1993, the interview included the additional question, “Is your principal or assistant principal or another school administrator/supervisor helpful?” Here too, responses were nearly universal and glowing.

In 1991, the critical factor of peer support became a major theme of the interviews even though it was structured as a minor follow-up question. Often, by the time the interviewer came to this question, it was superfluous because peer support had already been mentioned as one of the positive experiences as a new teacher. (As noted, the question was asked more formally in 1993.) What was striking was how grateful the new teachers were, how often they stated that it made the real difference in whether they could face their classroom yet another day, and how often they mentioned that they learned the most from their experienced colleagues. Their words were reminiscent of how soldiers talk about their “buddies” and stand in contrast to many new job holders in other fields who may find a highly competitive workplace with very little support shown new arrivals.

Here are a few examples of some of their experiences of friendship and assistance, qualities, which were repeated by most of the other respondents.

Brad Richardson

“Another source of satisfaction this year has been the support I got from my fellow teachers ... I was not given a mentor because I had student teaching experience. But a lot of teachers helped me. I have what I call a buddy teacher, but he’s not assigned to me or anything. He just teaches next door to me. Even though he’s a music teacher and doesn’t know anything about science, he’s come into my classroom on more than one occasion and helped show me classroom discipline techniques. I go to him all the time.”

Una Thomas

“I was not given a mentor because the school doesn’t have the resources. But the other teachers have been very helpful. In fact, on the first day, the teachers gave me some pointers and I have solicited advice since. One of the teachers was telling me today (she came into my class and took over for 15 minutes and I observed her), she told me she resented the fact that I hadn’t gotten the support I needed. She helped me figure out organization -- how to do lesson plans. It’s a very difficult job. I have gained such respect for teachers, which I didn’t have coming from the corporate world.”

Mae T’sue

“My mentor was extremely helpful. Other teachers were also helpful. The teacher next door and a counselor were especially helpful. The counselor, who didn’t know me at all, was passing by my classroom when she noticed that my kids were completely out of control. She came in and helped me calm down the class. Her help made me better at classroom management. This counselor is now a personal friend of mine.”

Rose Rachelstein

“I asked other teachers for advice all the time -- things like disciplining techniques, managing time during the semester, ideas for motivating kids, lesson planning. And they’d give me pep talks, emotional support.”

On their own, new teachers seek out and rely on assistance from other teachers. An extraordinary example of the search for knowledge comes from an adult education teacher who was given no staff development opportunities by the Board of Education, but created them for herself:

“I didn’t have a mentor, but two other teachers in my school were very helpful to me. But I was real aggressive in getting advice. I met other adult education teachers at the New Teacher Conference and I kept in touch with them and even went to another region to observe a classroom. I even formed a ‘buddy teacher’ relationship with one of the women I met.

“My region held no workshops but that didn’t stop me. The real turnabout in my knowledge came by taking a federal training program -- it was called the ‘EDCE’ program. It was to help welfare people get skills. I was recruited to take a two-week training program on how to teach immigrants. This was just what I needed as an ESL teacher. I credit this two weeks with really improving my lesson planning abilities and understanding my students. I wasn’t hired by the program, but it was free and it was what I needed at the beginning.”

The Teacher Mentor Program

The importance of peer support for new teachers is generally recognized, so it is not difficult to understand that the Teacher Mentor program was structured to formalize it. As a form of staff development, the Teacher Mentor Program involved aspects of apprenticeship training and real life, on-the-job training, and was superior, in many respects, to staff development conducted in a workshop format.

At the time the interviews were conducted in 1991, the State-mandated Teacher Mentor program had been suspended due to budget cuts, and by 1993, only a very limited program was in existence.

In the 1991 interviews, only eight of the new teachers were formally assigned a mentor by their school, a surprisingly low rate even when taking into consideration prior teaching or student teaching experience. Six of the 1993 respondents were assigned mentors, although one never resulted in any contact because of illness in the mentor’s family. Complaints by the United Federation of Teachers about the low level of compliance with this program would seem to be valid. However, when the Teacher Mentor program worked, it was invaluable to new teachers.

Two teacher's stories are particularly touching, considering that the program was abolished by the time the second school semester began:

“A retired teacher came three days a week and spent at least four periods a week with me. She was laid off during the middle of the school year, but I still kept in touch with her. She was extremely helpful.”

“Both the administration and the union felt I needed a mentor, so they continued the mentor program for me throughout the year. My mentor was a senior teacher. I really needed him at the beginning but in the second semester I tried to ‘wean’ myself from him. I got a lot of help from the other teachers and always felt that I was free to ask them questions.”

A third new teacher also reported spending a good length of time with her mentor and how much this helped in lesson planning and classroom discipline. But these are only three positive reports out of the total of eight new teachers in 1991 and three positive out of six teachers in 1993 who were assigned mentors. Others did not find the mentor program particularly helpful. These experiences suggest that some of the mentors needed training or were poorly assigned.

“We met two periods a week. We planned lessons and talked about special projects, but it was hard because she had her own classes to deal with. It helped somewhat, but it was not the greatest. I did get to know some other teachers who gave me a lot more ideas on things to do with the children.”

“I was given a mentor sort of late. I found the situation very ambiguous, because he had no background as a speech teacher. He didn't come around that often either. Then there was an audit of the school. Suddenly this teacher became very interested and kept trying to help me. But he was of very little assistance because he was used to classroom teaching. That's not what I do. So you could say I had a half-time mentor. He's going to retire. Other teachers were very helpful.”

“It didn't work out because the mentor had several deaths in her family and was not available. So when the mentor program was abolished, they assigned me to a teacher who was responsible for supervising student teachers. Since I didn't have any teaching experience, this suited me fine. What I really did was depend on two caseworkers. If they were not there to help me, I didn't know what I would have done.”

“I was given a mentor, a retired teacher. But the program really confused me. I don't know if my mentor knew what she was supposed to be doing. I thought it was someone to watch me and make suggestions. A lot of mentors believe they're there so you can take a break. Sometimes it was an annoyance. I would be on a

roll, doing something with the kids, and then she would want to takeover the class. She came twice a week for three periods each. She would take the class and I would watch her teach, but she wouldn't be prepared. In my class, the mentor wasn't a necessity and not really helpful. But I did work closely with a teacher I had done student teaching with. She's been great and the A.P. is very involved in our classes. We'll meet once a week to discuss my class."

Some teachers, in both interview years, were formally assigned a "buddy" teacher, not part of the Teacher Mentor program. The reactions to these assignments were mixed. In 1991, all five teachers involved reported them to be very helpful. Among the five teachers in 1993, two felt they were not helpful.

Supportive Supervisors

In 1991, only five respondents mentioned assistance given to them by their department, an assistant principal, or their school in general. The 1993 interview specifically asked about help from school administrators: nearly all new teachers gave favorable reports, not only regarding the provision of staff development opportunities but also in setting a school climate of teacher responsibility and respect.

"The principal is great. She's very big on courses in the district. We take three professional days at other districts and she sets up the whole thing."

"The principal is extremely helpful. He's open to you. He builds confidence. Also, you can disagree and you can verbalize things. Other places aren't always like this. Supervisors, assistant principals are all great. They treat you with respect and they give you recognition."

Staff Development Opportunities

The range of staff development opportunities varied from none to very little, (cited by those who attended only one offering by their school or district, or a few meetings at school) to a plethora of workshops offered by their school, the district, and central as well as college courses. In 1991, roughly a third fell into each category. In 1993, about half had participated in a wide variety of workshops in different settings.

What is more interesting than the frequency of training is the types of training new teachers found especially valuable. In 1991, new teachers, both foreign- and American-born, frequently cited workshops on multicultural sensitivity as giving them a better understanding of their students and clues about the students' behavior.

"I had quite a culture shock because I come from a white, middle class background... There are Haitians in my class. They tend to look down when they're being disciplined. I thought they were being disrespectful in not looking at

me when I was speaking to them. I wish I had known this was their culture when I started out."

The courses most frequently mentioned as "helpful" after issues of multiculturalism were those on English as a Second Language and special education techniques. Respondents cited workshops on early childhood education, science, whole language, math, and cooperative learning, among others.

The teachers made some noteworthy recommendations, most of which could be easily implemented:

"New teachers with bachelor's degrees in education should not be trained with people who don't because the workshops have to cover all the basics. It wastes my time." (Recommended by two teachers)

"The principal or a supervisor should have a new teachers meeting at the beginning of the year just to go over paperwork. There's so much, and it's hard to know what your priorities should be."

"They need to provide more training before you actually go into the classroom. My friends who have gone into regular ed. are swamped."

"New teachers coming in should be put on the payroll observing experienced teachers for three or four days before they start teaching so they could look at different styles and techniques, and see remedial math and remedial reading."

One new teacher stated that she had a supportive school, that her district had meetings for new teachers, and that she sat as an observer in several classes for almost a full week before she began teaching in her classroom. Another noted that the school day ends early one day a week to allow time for teachers to meet. These experiences were exceptions.

The Union

An annual New Teacher Conference takes place just prior to the beginning of the school year. It is jointly sponsored by the New York City Board of Education and the Union, but more than one respondent referred to it as the "U.F.T. Conference." (Several teachers added that they found the mailings and the newsletter of the U.F.T. helpful to them as new teachers.)

As already stated, there was near universal praise for this conference. Some teachers appreciated receiving the literature and sample lesson plans that were handed out, others remembered in detail the workshops they attended and how the lessons learned helped them to cope with their first day in the classroom or to know how to get their students attention. For some, the information on licensing, benefits, and paperwork requirements was found to be helpful. Workshop leaders were perceived by a few as master teachers who were "in the

trenches” and were much more impressive than their current college professors or district workshop leaders. One teacher suggested that the sessions be divided between teachers who had a job and those who did not yet have a position.

Although the New Teacher Conference was universally praised, there were some indications that many of the respondents did not attend the follow-up workshops for new teachers. Three teachers told us quite frankly that they could not find the time between their employment and their graduate courses to attend any of the workshops offered. Almost all of the teachers were subjected to the same time pressures and few mentioned attending workshops. However, officials at the Board of Education stated that new teachers are required to attend these workshops, that new teachers are fulfilling these requirements, and that the Board of Education officials are monitoring whether uncertified teachers are taking college and workshop courses.

College Preparation: Abstract Academia

Respondents were divided in their opinions about the relevance of their previous college education courses or current studies, when asked “Were there any college courses or student teaching opportunities in college that you found helpful in your job?”

In 1991, half of the new teachers had positive attitudes towards their academic experience, including two that felt that it was only their student teaching experience that was relevant. In 1993, most teachers were very positive about their student teaching experiences and some specific courses as well. The positive reaction to student teaching may be related not only to the valuable classroom experience but also to the new teachers being hired as a result of the contacts made during that time.

Some branded all courses as a “waste of time” or having nothing to do with reality. One individual who switched to teaching from another career commented, “Nothing could have prepared me for what I saw in my classroom. If I had been 25, I would have quit.”

Most of the negative comments centered on how “abstract” the courses were in relation to their real life experiences as teachers. Two angry statements from 1991 were particularly telling:

“My advice is to change the way education courses are taught in college. Get the professors out of college, and get them into tough schools so they stop spouting theory.”

“There should be better information given to college students. In my college, I found the education department hostile. I was a speech major. When I learned that I would need a certain amount of courses in the area of education, I applied to take these courses. They told me that they would not allow me to do this -- that I had no right to be a teacher with so little preparation. But I wouldn’t take no for an answer. Then they told me that I could take the courses, but that they would make it as difficult as possible for me to take these courses. They forced me to

take the courses I needed at night. They also told me that if the classes were at capacity, they were not going to make an exception for me as they would someone who was an education major. If a student is not majoring or minoring in education at _ , they are not given any information or help. Other friends of mine at were just told “no “ by this stupid department.”

This last reported experience is alarming, given both the critical shortage of speech teachers in special education and the proposed new alternative teacher certification procedures which the New York State Education Department hopes to implement at some future date.

Why Did They Come ... Will They Stay?

A goal of this study was to learn about teachers' first-year experiences and evaluate their willingness to continue to teach in New York City public schools. Many responded at length with the problems they were having with classroom discipline, or their frustrations in trying to get certified, or their gratitude for the assistance they received from fellow teachers.

EPP asked “Why did you want to teach in a NYC public school,” “Did you consider a position in a private or parochial school or a school in another district,” “Do you plan to continue teaching in a NYC public school,” and “Do you think you'll still be teaching in five years.” They were also asked about salary and supplementary income: “Do you feel the starting salary is adequate,” “Did you do any moonlighting to supplement your income.”

Whenever the questions probed their motives, however, “Why did you go into teaching? Do you want to continue to teach?” their answers were short and sometimes guarded. One explanation is that the questions were simple ones, which did not ask for further explanation. The interviewer asked, whether they wanted to continue teaching, followed by several questions which could be answered by a simple yes or no. Yet, other questions that could have been answered briefly elicited greater detail. Another explanation is that these questions, unlike others, were more personal. Respondents may have found it easier and less invasive to be asked, “What did you see?” than “What are your plans?” In short, they were eager to share their observations but far less eager to be the objects of observation.

Many studies of employee motivation, including studies narrowly focused on retention, posit rational human behavior. It is assumed that actors will respond to strictly market forces. Yet, classic studies on workers' motivation have found a more complex web of motivations. An individual worker's interest in better compensation and the availability of opportunities for improvement (which may be predetermined by gender, class, race, ethnicity, religion, and age) do not by themselves fully explain either behavior or motivation. The need for autonomy or inclusion, societal or subgroup values, and concepts of self worth, among other factors, play an

important role in choice of occupation and willingness to seek other trades or locations of employment.

So we come to a central irony of our small interview study of new teacher retention: In an area of greatest human complexity, our respondents gave the most limited, least descriptive answers. A wealth of detail voluntarily offered to us by new teachers as a result of our questions about their experiences simply does not exist when we asked them questions about their motivation even when they were asked follow-up questions. Nevertheless, some clear patterns emerged from their answers about motivation.

“Why Did You Want to Teach in a NYC Public School”

Both the economic benefits of teaching in the New York City public school system and altruistic motives were of primary importance to many of the new teachers wanting to teach in the public schools. Many cited the salary level, benefits, the security of being paid, and the hours as reasons for teaching in the public schools. In 1991, when asked if they had applied to a private or parochial school, the overwhelming majority stated that they either had not applied or had actually turned down jobs offered to them by non-public schools because of the salary difference. Wages, obviously, cannot be understated as a means of attracting individuals to a career with the New York City public school system.

Non-economic motives -- a desire to get involved, make the public schools better, and work with people who care about the public schools and their students -- were as important. One teacher replied:

“It’s an important job. I’m a big supporter of public education. Kids deserve the best teachers and I’d like to be one of them.”

Another teacher in this group was more specific:

“I have a handicapped uncle. In the country where I came from, the disabled are hidden and don’t get developmental services. I feel personally comfortable with the severely handicapped because of my uncle and I want to serve this neglected population. You can do this in the United States, and so I’m doing it.”

Surprisingly, for all the negative images of public schools that exist in the media, among many of the respondents there was a strong, positive identification with public education.

“I had always wanted to teach, and I wanted to teach in the New York City public schools because that’s where I came from.”

“This is my first job out of college. I have an education degree. I always went to public schools. I knew them and thought I’d feel better than in a private school. And it pays better.”

“I attended a public school and then a parochial school. Believe me, I do not want to be in a parochial school ever again. I didn’t even think about it, even with these layoffs.” [1991]

It should be noted that a few respondents stated that they had applied for a job in the New York City public school system because they knew that they did not have the necessary credentials to secure a teaching position in a suburban public school system. Lower standards for hiring new teachers, though often criticized, can be viewed as a competitive advantage in recruitment that New York City has over nearby-public school systems. This leads to the questions of whether less credentialed teachers are necessarily less adequate, and whether, once fully credentialed, New York City will lose these teachers to nearby suburban school districts.

Teacher Salaries and Moonlighting

Teachers were asked if they felt that their starting salary was adequate. As could be expected, in both years, a majority of those new teachers who were young and just out of college stated that they found their a salary level adequate. One young woman stated, “since we got the raise, I think it’s decent. Of course I’d always ask for more. But I know I’m making more than some of my friends who went into other things.”

In 1991, a majority of those who were older or for whom teaching was a second career stated that they felt the salary was inadequate. Responses from the 1993 group were evenly divided, perhaps reflecting the decreasing availability of private sector jobs. Some of the second-career teachers stated that they were making less money teaching than before.

There were often qualifiers to positive answers. Several of the younger respondents said that they found they could live on their salaries but pointedly mentioned that they were still living with their parents. Similarly, some older respondents who gave a positive response qualified their answers by stating that their spouses earned a good income and that they could not have “afforded” to go into teaching without it.

New teachers complained about the cost of having to take graduate education courses as an actual reduction in their compensation. As already noted, many spent significant sums of their own funds on classroom supplies and photocopying.

A few of the second career teachers believed their salaries to be inadequate in light of the job of teaching.

“The salary is inadequate -- not for what we have to face in the classroom.”

“The salary needs to be bigger. I had no idea how strenuous it would be as a teacher. It’s a 24-hour job -- you bring it home with you. I work all the time on my job if I want to do it right. And I want to do it right!”

It must also be noted that some of the new teachers only secured permanent positions after months of working as substitutes. One woman said, “This is the least amount of money I’ve ever made when I total it up. I worked as a day-to-day substitute without any benefits. I won’t get paid this past summer because I was a student teacher.”

Asked about moonlighting to supplement their income, a small number of the teachers have an extra job after school hours, but, interestingly, there seemed to be no relationship between their “moonlighting” and whether they felt the salary was inadequate.

Plans to Keep Teaching Next Year and in Five Years

These questions brought out expressions of anguish among many of those whom we interviewed in 1991 but in 1993 teachers were virtually worry-free. In 1991, common reactions included statements such as, “What do you mean, next year? I want to be here, but they’ll probably lay me off” and “Next year? Will there be a next year?” This part of the interview turned out to be one of the danger zones where the respondents would often begin pleading with the interviewer for more information about how many new teachers were going to be laid off.

Responses in 1991 may have reflected the then economic recession more than a commitment to teaching. Virtually all of the new teachers wanted to continue teaching in the next year. When asked if they would be teaching in a public school five years into the future, only a few saw themselves in another occupation. Half of new teachers who saw themselves teaching in a public school in the next five years hoped they would be teaching another subject, or in another school or district, or outside of New York City. The fact that one-half of this group wanted a change could be seen as evidence of dissatisfaction with their current teaching positions. However, it should be recognized that these individuals want choices in their teaching careers, as reflected in the fact that a good number of these new teachers were in the process of applying for multiple licenses.

The situation was very different in the second round of interviews when only one teacher mentioned the possibility (and fear) of layoffs. With only one exception, teachers responded with a resounding “yes” when asked if they planned to continue teaching in a New York City public school. Looking further ahead, three-fourths of them had plans to continue teaching in the City’s school in five years; many desired to remain in their current school. These teachers were committed to educating the children of the New York City public schools. Only two did not plan to remain for five years: one because of a long commute from her residence on Long Island, another because of a stated preference for teaching in a private school. One teacher wanted to become a social worker working with children in special education.

Typical of many of the recent new teachers is the following comment:

"I love children. I can't picture myself doing anything else."

Appendix

1993 New Teacher Retention Telephone Survey

1. Describe your experience applying for a teaching position: How did you get information about process, needed qualifications, licensing, placement, etc.?
2. Did you get a teaching job?
_ Yes. What do you teach? Grade? Subject? School?
_ No. Why?
3. How long did it take you to find a position?
What mechanisms did you use (hiring hall, calls to central, district offices, individual schools, personal contacts or friends and relatives) to find your position?
4. Are you fully licensed?
_ Yes _ No
_ a CPT _ a PPT _ Don't know.
5. How many licenses do you have/want to have?
What steps must you complete to become fully licensed?
How long do you expect it to take?
6. Have you been informed about licensing procedures?
_ Board of Education (65 Court St.)? _ School Secretary?
_ Principal? _ District? _ Other?
7. Has the UFT been helpful? Who in the Union has been helpful?
8. Was your college helpful?
_ Yes, who was helpful? _ No
9. What is your BA/BS degree in?
Your master's?
Do you need to get another master's in education? . .
Did you have prior teaching experience? _ Yes, where? For how many years?
10. Is teaching

- Your first job? A career change?
What did you do before this job?
11. Why did you want to teach in a NYC public school?
Did you consider seeking a position in a private or parochial school or a school in another district?
12. Following your experience this year, do you plan to continue teaching in a NYC public school?
 Yes No
 Continue teaching but elsewhere? Where?
 Leave teaching profession entirely?
Do you think you'll still be teaching in five years? Yes No
In NYC public schools? Yes No
Elsewhere? Yes No
If you are thinking of leaving, what are the main reasons?
13. What are the greatest problems you face as a new teacher?
What are the greatest satisfactions of being a new teacher?
14. Have you been given a mentor?
 Yes No
If yes, is it a retired teacher or a senior teacher or other?
How much time do you spend together? What do you do together? Do you find it helpful? Are there any problems?
15. Did you make any effort to seek any informal assistance from more experienced teachers? Were they helpful in giving you assistance and helping you to teach?
Is your principal or assistant principal or another school administrator/supervisor helpful? No Yes
Who was helpful? How did they help?
16. Was the New Teacher Orientation Conference held at the end of August/beginning of September helpful? Why?
17. Did you get any other training/staff development at the school or district where you work?
 Yes No
If yes, what sort of training/workshops and when?
In what areas? Was it useful?
18. Were there any college courses or student teaching in college that you found helpful in your job?

- Yes No
19. Are there any college courses you are taking now that you find helpful?
 Yes No
20. Do you feel starting salary is adequate?
 Yes No
Do you do anything to supplement your income?
 Yes No
21. Do you have access to adequate basic supplies (paper, chalk, photocopying, etc.)?
 Yes No
If no, what is lacking?
Do you ever use your own money to buy supplies for your classroom?
 Yes No
What kind of items?
How much do you spend each payday for supplies?
22. Are there an adequate number of textbooks for your students?
 Yes No
What kind of condition are they in?
How recently were they published, purchased?
Do you have to photocopy textbooks or assignments? Who pays for this?
Does your school have a policy of not letting students take home books?
23. How many standardized tests are given in your class?
How much time did you spend preparing students for tests?
Was there a school or district mandate for doing certain kinds of preparation or a minimum amount of time that was supposed to be devoted to test preparation?
24. Do you have recommendations for improving the process in the following areas:
a) recruitment
b) application
c) licensing
d) placement
e) training
f) professional development
g) working conditions
25. Is your school an SBM/SDM (school-based management/shared decision making) school? Do you have an SBM team at your school?
 Yes No Don't know
If yes, has that had any impact on you as a teacher?

26. Age: _ 20 to 25 _ 26 to 30 _ 31 to 35 _ 36 to 40 _ 41 to 50 _ 50+
Race/ethnicity: _ White _ African American _ Latino _ Puerto Rican heritage _ Other
Latin American country _ Other

¹ Respondents were first contacted by the staff of the Educational Priorities Panel at the September 1990 and 1992 Conferences for New Teachers sponsored jointly by the New York City Board of Education and the United Federation of Teachers. EPP staff asked Conference participants for their names and home telephone numbers so that they could be contacted later about their first-year experiences. From late spring to late summer, these individuals were interviewed for 30 minutes to an hour using the questionnaire that appears in the appendix.

² Kenneth J. Meier, Joseph Stewart, Jr. and Robert E. England, Race, Class and Education. Madison, Wisconsin,: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

³ New York State Education Department, Annual Report to the Governor and the Legislature on the Educational Status of the State's Schools, February 1994.

⁴ Presentation by CUNY Chancellor W. Ann Reynolds at Educational Priorities Panel, Annual Meeting, May 14, 1991.

⁵ New York State Education Department, Annual Report to the Governor and the Legislature on the Educational Status of the State's Schools, February 1994.

⁶ Ninety percent of new teachers hired in 1992-93 were hired as "Substitutes." They are teachers who are eligible for and have applied for New York State certification and/or a New York City Regular License but had not received these when they began employment. According to the Board of Education's Office of Pedagogical Personnel, many of them were regularly licensed and appointed shortly after being hired.

⁷ New York City Board of Education, Task Force on Professionalism, From Hiring to Retiring, April 1988, p. 30.

⁸ A file number is an identification number for an employee of the Board of Education. Without this number, an individual cannot be placed on the payroll.

⁹ See footnote 6.

¹⁰ New York Teacher, November 14, 1994.

¹¹ The previous all-inclusive temporary certificate called Temporary Per Diem (TPD), was eliminated and two new certificates were created: Certified Provisional Teacher (CPT) for individuals who hold a State provisional or permanent certificate but not a City license, and Preparatory Provisional Teacher (PPT), for those who have not completed the requirements for State certification.

¹² The Board of Education's Division of Human Resources now has an arrangement with State authorities to allow fingerprints to be kept on file if they were taken after July 1, 1990. This eliminates the need for new fingerprinting with every application.

¹³ New York City Board of Education, Task Force on Professionalism, From Hiring to Retiring, April 1988, p. 30.