

Education Week

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Costly Consequences Surface in Revamped Hiring System

By [Vaishali Honawar](#)

New York City teachers who have been unable to find new jobs in the district under a new hiring policy, but remain on the payroll, will cost the city \$81 million by the end of this school year, a [report](#)  says.

The [New Teacher Project](#), which partners with the city's education department on teacher recruitment, prepared the report, which lauds a "mutual consent" hiring system put in place in 2005. The system, established under a contract with the city teachers' union, did away with the practice of allowing teacher transfers on the basis of seniority. School administrators now directly hire teachers they believe are a good fit. The district also abandoned the practice of letting senior teachers "bump" less experienced teachers from their positions.

Dan Weisberg, the chief executive for labor policy and implementation for the 1.1 million-student district, described the new system as "a quantum leap ahead for New York City schools."

The teachers' union, meanwhile, has filed an age-discrimination suit against the district over the hiring system.

Despite the New Teacher Project's praise for the system, the authors of its report found the hiring policy had created a small but financially significant problem among what the report calls "excessed" teachers—those whose jobs were lost because their schools were closing or downsizing and who then became part of a reserve pool. Under the new system, they are no

longer assigned by the central office to new teaching jobs, but have to apply and be interviewed by principals like any other hires.

In 2006, of the 2,700 teachers placed in the reserve pool, 235 remained jobless by December of the next year. After that, the hiring rate for those teachers remained relatively low, even as thousands of teacher vacancies were filled by newcomers to the school district. In 2007, 430 more teachers had failed to find jobs six months after being put in the reserve pool.

The teachers, who work as substitutes and other temporary replacements, receive full pay and benefits, unlike regular subs, who generally earn less. Most are tenured, and some even acquired tenure while waiting to find a job, said Timothy Daly, the president of the New Teacher Project, which is based in New York City.

"There is no requirement that excess teachers get a job. In fact, they are not even required to apply for a job," Mr. Daly said.

'Slanted and Inaccurate'

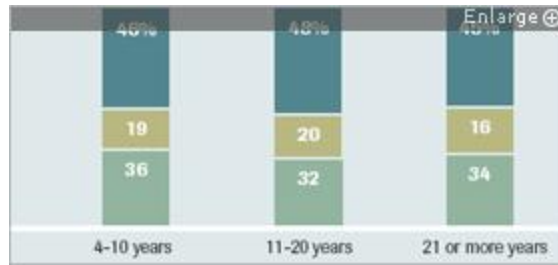
The report, and some recommendations it makes to improve the situation, drew the wrath of the United Federation of Teachers, the local teachers' union, which slammed it as "slanted and ill-considered and factually inaccurate."

A statement from Randi Weingarten, the president of the UFT, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers, dismissed the New Teacher Project as one of the city education department's "wholly owned subsidiaries." The report blames experienced teachers who, "through no fault of their own, were excessed from their teaching jobs," she added.

The New Teacher Project, a nonprofit organization that has arrangements with more than 200 school districts on teacher-recruitment projects, runs the New York Teaching Fellows program, which has hired more than 8,000 teachers for the city. The group also partnered with the district to launch and manage a support center to find placements for the teachers removed from their jobs in 2006 and 2007.

Transferring In

Under New York City's revamped hiring system, the majority of teachers who transferred voluntarily ended up in schools that had the same or a higher level of poverty than those they left.



Source: New Teacher Project

The report says that, by and large, the effects of the mutual-consent hiring system were positive. Teachers found new jobs at similar rates, it said, regardless of their seniority or their status as excess teachers or voluntary transfers.

In surveys conducted by the group, teachers themselves appeared to like the new system. As many as 87 percent of the transfer teachers who responded, and 82 percent of teachers in the reserve pool, agreed that it was important for principals to believe the teachers were good fits for particular schools.

Return to the Past?

The UFT filed a lawsuit in state court last month, charging the district with age discrimination. Because principals are given a limited pool of money, they are likely to hire younger, less expensive teachers, the union contends. But the report found that experienced teachers performed on a par with their junior counterparts in job searches. For example, 38 percent of teachers with 20 or more years of experience were hired by schools, compared with 45 percent of teachers with 13 to 19 years of experience, 41 percent of teachers with four to six years of experience, and 35 percent with zero to three years of experience.

The report maintains that teachers who didn't find jobs were less assertive in looking for new ones, and that nearly half did not even apply for a job through the city's online job-posting system. Unselected teachers, it says, were also six times more likely than other city teachers to have received an "unsatisfactory" rating on performance evaluations.

It recommends changes to the practice of allowing teachers who are in the reserve pool to remain without defined jobs indefinitely, and it calls for placing nontenured teachers on unpaid leave if they are unable to find a job within three months. Tenured teachers would have one year to find a job before they went on unpaid leave.

Tenured teachers would retain the right to return at the same level of seniority and salary when they did find a job within a certain number of years that could be negotiated by the district and the union, Mr. Daly said.

Ms. Weingarten of the UFT called the proposals "terrible education policy."

But Mr. Weisberg expressed hope that a solution could be reached.

The mutual-consent system, he said, has worked well in the district, but failing to resolve the issue of the unselected teachers could force a return to the old hiring system. "And that means forcing teachers into schools regardless of whether they are a good fit or not," Mr. Weisberg said.