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**THE COUNCIL OF  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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**HON. GIFFORD MILLER**  
*SPEAKER*

**A staff report of the  
New York City Council Investigation Division  
on**

**Teacher Attrition and Retention**

**to**

**Members of the Committee on  
Oversight and Investigations**

**Hon. Eric Gioia, Chair**

Hon. Tracy Boyland  
Hon. John C. Liu

Hon. Miguel Martinez  
Hon. Peter Vallone, Jr.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New York City faces a “brain drain” in our City’s schools; a staffing crisis looms on the horizon as New York City public school teachers retire or leave the system at alarming rates. A report by the New York City Council Investigation Division (CID) shows that over 70% of the most experienced NYC public school teachers are likely to retire within the next two years, while more than 25% of mid-career teachers and nearly 30% of newer teachers say it is likely that they will leave the system within the next three years—potentially creating as many as 30,000 vacancies in the City’s classrooms in that time.

There are currently over 80,000 teachers in New York City’s public school system.<sup>i</sup> In NYC, the two-year attrition rate for teachers is 25%, with 18% of teachers leaving in the first year—while the national rate is only ten percent.<sup>ii</sup>

To find out how many teachers are thinking of leaving the school system and possible reasons why, CID investigators, with the assistance of UFT staff members, conducted a telephone survey of 2,781 teachers currently employed by the DOE. Respondents, who were randomly selected, were called during the weeks of April 26 and May 3, 2004. For the purposes of analysis, teachers were divided into three categories based on their

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<sup>i</sup> The Department of Education reports that “approximately 80,000 teachers” are employed in NYC’s public schools (see <http://www.nycenet.edu/offices/dhr/forms2/TEACHERmanualJUNE232003revisedwebversionDEC2003.pdf>), while the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the union representing NYC’s public school teachers, estimates that approximately 86,000 teachers are currently employed in the system.

<sup>ii</sup> “Good Apples: Recruiting and Retaining Quality Teachers in New York City.” A Report of the New York City Council Committee on Education. 6 May 2003. <[http://www.council.nyc.ny.us/pdf\\_files/reports/goodapples.pdf](http://www.council.nyc.ny.us/pdf_files/reports/goodapples.pdf)> Accessed 4 May 2004.

experience—new teachers (1-5 years experience in the classroom), mid-career teachers (6-24 years), and eligible retirees (25+ years).

### **Key Findings**

- Over 70% of the most experienced teachers (those with 25+ years of teaching experience) are likely to retire over the next two years.
- Over 26% of mid-career teachers say it is unlikely they will be teaching in NYC in three years.
- Over 29% of new teachers say it is unlikely they will be teaching in NYC in three years.
- Teachers are most dissatisfied with two things:
  - Salary and benefits
  - School safety and discipline
- New teachers are also unsatisfied with:
  - Availability of instructional materials and supplies
  - Class size

### **Recommendations**

- Increase salaries to more competitive levels.
- Improve school safety and discipline.
- Lower class sizes.
- Expand the Teacher Choice Program and give teachers the classroom resources they need.

## BACKGROUND

There are currently over 80,000 teachers in New York City's public school system.<sup>1</sup> The national two-year attrition rate for teachers is approximately ten percent, but in NYC, the rate rises to 25 percent, with 18 percent of teachers leaving in the first year.<sup>2</sup> Recent studies have found the following statistics on teacher retention in the New York City public school system:

- 19-25% of new teachers leave the system within one year of being hired.<sup>3</sup>
- The Department of Education (DOE) estimates that the three-year attrition rate in New York City schools is approximately 40%.<sup>4</sup>
- Figures from the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the union representing NYC public school teachers, indicate that 42% of teachers leave within three years.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Good Apples: Recruiting and Retaining Quality Teachers in New York City." A Report of the New York City Council Committee on Education. 6 May 2003. <[http://www.council.nyc.ny.us/pdf\\_files/reports/goodapples.pdf](http://www.council.nyc.ny.us/pdf_files/reports/goodapples.pdf)> Accessed 4 May 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Wolf, Andrew. "Schools' Rocky Start." *The New York Sun*. 19 September 2003, 9. See also Herszenhorn, David M. "City Plans Ads to Recruit Teachers and Praise Teaching." *The New York Times*. 16 April 2004, B3.

<sup>4</sup> Klein, Joel. "Remarks of Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein Business Breakfast Forum Crain's New York Business/Partnership for New York City Tuesday, January 27, 2004." The New York City Department of Education, Office of Communications & Media Relations.

<<http://www.nycenet.edu/Administration/mediarelations/SpeechesTestimonials/Chancellors+Crains+Speech.htm>>.

<sup>5</sup> Mcadoo, Maisie. "Just Passing Through...A Look At Teacher Retention." United Federation of Teachers. <<http://www.uft.org/?fid=203&tf=1153&nart=490>>.

- The number of retiring teachers has been increasing, up 20% in 2003, and up 67% from 1998 to 2002.<sup>6</sup>

The June 2002 contract agreement between Mayor Bloomberg and the UFT addressed the issue of recruitment by raising starting salaries for new teachers to \$39,000 per annum. One year later, Mayor Bloomberg heralded this agreement as a success in helping fill vacancies in the City's classrooms.<sup>7</sup> Yet just this year, the DOE has found it necessary to launch what DOE Chancellor Joel Klein and Mayor Bloomberg have termed the "most ambitious and comprehensive teacher recruitment campaign in the city's history."<sup>8</sup>

Just as there are several measures of the rate at which teachers leave the system, there are many opinions on the cause of the problem and how best to remedy it.

- Common concerns include "lack of support, lower pay than surrounding areas, and more difficult working conditions."<sup>9</sup>
- Many call for improved working conditions, such as additional funding, lower class sizes and designated parking spaces for teachers.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Lovett, Kenneth, and Carl Campanile. "Retiring Teachers Spur City 'Education Crisis.'" *New York Post*. 18 June 2003, 2.

<sup>7</sup> "Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg Outlines Education Accomplishments in 2002."  
<[http://www.nycenet.edu/press/02-03/n\\_52\\_03.htm](http://www.nycenet.edu/press/02-03/n_52_03.htm)>.

<sup>8</sup> "Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg and Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein Unveil Most Ambitious and Comprehensive Teacher Recruitment Campaign in City's History" (press release). New York City Department of Education. 14 April 2004.  
<<http://www.nycenet.edu/Administration/mediarelations/PressReleases/2003-2004/4-14-2004-18-16-26-314.htm>>.

<sup>9</sup> Campanile, 14 April 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Phillips, T. Edward. "Moskowitz: To Retain Teachers, Add to Perks." *New York Sun*. 2 March 2004, 14.

## **METHODOLOGY**

During the weeks of April 26 and May 3, 2004, New York City Council Investigation Division (CID) investigators, with the assistance of UFT staff members, made random blind phone calls to 2,781 teachers currently employed by the NYC Department of Education. The phone surveys were designed to learn how teachers feel about various aspects of their work conditions, how many are planning to retire or leave the New York City public school system, and the likely reasons for their leaving.

Teachers were divided into three categories based on their experience—new teachers (defined as having 1-5 years experience in the classroom), mid-career teachers (6-24 years experience), and eligible retirees (25+ years experience).

## FINDINGS

### **New Teachers (1-5 years experience)**

- Nearly a quarter (23%) said it was likely they would be teaching outside of NYC *next year*.
- Nearly a third (30%) said it is unlikely that they would be teaching in a NYC school *in the next three years*.
- Of those teachers who were thinking of leaving NYC public schools, the three changes in their work conditions most likely to entice them to stay were:
  - a new contract with higher pay;
  - class size reductions; and
  - better discipline and safety.
- The three work conditions that caused the greatest dissatisfaction among new teachers were:
  - discipline and safety in the schools (51% unsatisfied);
  - availability of supplies and instructional materials (44%);
  - and
  - class size (39% unsatisfied).

### **Mid-Career Teachers (6-24 years experience)**

- Twenty-six percent (26%) said it is unlikely that they would be teaching in a NYC school *in the next three years*.

- Of those teachers who were thinking of leaving NYC public schools, the three changes in their work conditions most likely to entice them to stay were:
  - a new contract with higher pay;
  - better discipline and safety; and
  - class size reductions.
  
- The three work conditions that caused the greatest dissatisfaction among mid-career teachers were:
  - discipline and safety in the schools (51% unsatisfied);
  - salary and benefits (49%); and
  - amount of preparation and planning needed (49%).

**Eligible Retirees (25+ years experience)**

- 72% responded they would retire *within two years*.
  - 75% of these said it is *very likely*.
  
- Of those who said they would retire soon, nearly a third (31%) said they are most likely to leave *this summer*.
  - Almost a quarter (23%) said they would retire next summer.
  
- Of those who said they would retire soon, the top three changes in work conditions most likely to change their minds were:
  - a new contract w/ higher pay;
  - change in management style; and
  - better discipline and safety.



- The three work conditions that caused the greatest dissatisfaction among eligible retirees were:
  - salary and benefits (52% unsatisfied);
  - discipline and safety in the schools (46%); and
  - flexibility in teaching approach (43%).

## CONCLUSION

The high rates of retirement and attrition among New York City public school teachers represent a “brain drain” in our City’s school system. Results from this study show that a great number of experienced teachers are planning to leave the NYC public school system; over 70% of the NYC public school teachers eligible to retire are likely to do so within the next two years. In addition, more than a quarter of mid-career teachers say it is likely that they will leave the system within the next three years. When they leave NYC’s schools, these teachers are taking years of institutional knowledge, teaching experience, and classroom skills with them.

Moreover, nearly 30% of teachers with five years experience or less say it is unlikely that they will still be in the NYC school system in three years.

This looming crisis is costing the City millions of dollars. To replace the teachers who leave, the Department of Education must pay to recruit, train and educate new teachers. But more importantly, high retirement and attrition rates bring a cost to our young people. That cost is one of inheriting new teachers with little of the experience and few of the immediate skills that more seasoned teachers bring to the classroom.

Two of the major sources of job dissatisfaction—salary and school safety—are common to teachers at all levels of experience. With significant numbers of teachers thinking about leaving within the next few years, these findings suggest that a key to retention is to address these issues directly and immediately.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Raise teachers' salaries to more competitive levels.**

New York City teachers need to be treated like the professionals they are. Raising salaries to a more competitive level so that our City's best and brightest stop fleeing to better-paying school districts outside the City will go far in addressing teachers' greatest dissatisfaction with their jobs and reflecting the value of their work.

- **Improve school safety and discipline.**

It is vital that teachers and students alike feel safe when they enter a school. Feelings that schools are unsafe are pervasive among teachers and one of their main sources of dissatisfaction. Teachers and students deserve comprehensive school safety plan that addresses safety issues at every school.

- **Lower class sizes.**

It is difficult for students to learn in a classroom with too many students. It is impossible for teachers to give students the necessary attention they deserve. We must lower class size to give our young people the level of instruction and attention they deserve.

- **Expand the Teacher Choice Program and give teachers the classroom resources they need.**

Few other organizations ask their workers to purchase their own supplies. Nevertheless, NYC public school teachers must purchase their own classroom supplies—including the post-it notes the new curriculum requires teachers to use. If this continues to be the requirement for teachers, the city should increase the amount of reimbursement we give to our teachers.

**APPENDIX A:**  
**Median Salaries for Public School  
Teachers**

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# Median Salaries for Public School Teachers in and around NYC

| <b>City or County in NY</b> | <b>Median Salary</b>        |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Scarsdale                   | \$90,000 <sup>1</sup>       |
| Bronxville                  | \$86,000 <sup>2</sup>       |
| Chappaqua                   | \$75,190 <sup>3</sup>       |
| Westchester                 | \$68,400 <sup>4</sup>       |
| White Plains                | \$68,000 <sup>5</sup>       |
| Yonkers                     | \$67,291 <sup>6</sup>       |
| Nassau                      | \$66,262 <sup>7</sup>       |
| <b>New York City</b>        | <b>\$47,345<sup>8</sup></b> |

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<sup>1</sup> Jonothan Kozol. *The Nation Magazine*. "Children in New York City public schools are being shortchanged – again". June 10, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Harris, Merryl Hyman. *The Journal News*. "Schools: Commitment To Education is Without Peer". October 26, 2003.

<sup>3</sup>Farber, Peggy. *The Gotham Gazette*. "The Teacher's Contract". September 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Westchester Magazine. April 2004. Available at: [http://www.westchestermagazine.com/cover\\_storyp04.htm](http://www.westchestermagazine.com/cover_storyp04.htm) [Last Accessed May 5, 2004].

<sup>5</sup> *Infra* note 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Infra* note 3.

<sup>7</sup> *Infra* note 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Infra* note 3.