



State of Delaware
Office of the Lieutenant Governor

Report of the Delaware Teacher Hiring Task Force

*Delivered to the President Pro Tempore of the Delaware State Senate and
Governor of the State of Delaware, November 30, 2010*



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The Teacher Hiring Task Force was established by Senate Resolution No. 18, passed by the Delaware State Senate on June 30th, 2010. The Task Force's charge was to make recommendations to the State Senate and other government entities regarding steps that could be taken to have Delaware school districts hire teachers earlier in the calendar year.

The members of the Task Force were: Lt. Governor Matthew Denn (chair), State Senator David Sokola, Jack Buckley (representing Delaware School Board Association), Jennifer Carlson (Delaware Office of Management and Budget), Heath Chasanov (representing Delaware Association of School Administrators), Karen Crouse (representing Delaware State Education Association), Michael Morton (Delaware Controller General's Office), Holly Powers (appointed by the Senate President Pro Tem), Renee Purzycki (appointed by the Senate President Pro Tem), and Peter Shulman (representing the Delaware Secretary of Education).

The Task Force has completed the work outlined in Senate Resolution No. 18, and makes the following findings and recommendations to the Delaware State Senate and Governor.

Extent and Consequences of Late Hiring

The Task Force's recommendations were informed by the research of Professor Jeffrey Raffel of the University of Delaware, who has studied the new teacher hiring practices of Delaware public schools for several years.

Professor Raffel noted that for the most recent school year, over 60% of new public school teachers hired by the state's 19 school districts were hired in August or later. That is a substantial increase from the 2007-2008 school year, where approximately 50% of teachers were hired in August or later, and a further increase from the 2005-2006 school year when only 42.2% of teachers were hired in August or later.

Delaware charter schools hire a substantially smaller percentage of their new teachers in the late summer and early fall, as compared to public school districts. In the 2009-2010 school year, Delaware charter schools hired only 31.9% of their new teachers in August or later, just over half the percentage of public school districts.

Professor Raffel also noted that the number of new teachers who entered into a contract with one district and subsequently broke that contract in order to accept a position with another Delaware district substantially increased between the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. Although the total number of such incidents (34) represents



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a relatively small percentage of the reported late hires (5% of the total number of teachers hired in August or later), it is a growing percentage.

Professor Raffel and members of the Task Force noted a variety of consequences arising from hiring of teachers in the late summer and early fall. First, school districts lose the opportunity to recruit the top candidates from graduate programs in and around the state of Delaware, as school districts from surrounding states make offers to those top candidates in the late spring and early summer. Second, new teachers hired in the late summer and early fall lose the opportunity to receive professional development and other important orientation information about the schools in which they will be teaching. Finally, the appearance of new teachers in schools after the school year has started usually results in the reshuffling of student classroom assignments, which is extremely disruptive to students.

Causes for Late Hiring

With the assistance of Professor Jeffrey Raffel of the University of Delaware, the Task Force concluded that although there are a number of factors that contribute to the late hiring of teachers in Delaware (including recruitment difficulties for certain teaching specialties, transfers between districts by teachers who terminate contracts, and transfers within districts by teachers exercising contractual rights), the predominant cause of late hiring is uncertainty by local school districts regarding the amount of state funding they will have during the coming school year to pay teachers.

Local school districts in Delaware receive 'unit' funds from the state to pay for a portion of teacher salaries, and those funds are based upon a count of student population at the end of September. To the extent that local school districts overestimate the student population they will have at the end of September, those districts may hire teachers in the summer for whom state financial support will not be forthcoming based upon the September unit count. Therefore, school districts must choose between (a) the risk of hiring teachers who must be supported entirely with local school district funds, and (b) the harm to schools of delaying hiring teacher decisions until the districts have more certainty about their fall student populations.

Because of the Task Force's conclusion with respect to the predominant cause of late hiring, its recommendations center upon that cause. However, the Task Force also believes that efforts underway to address the other identified causes of late hiring should continue.

Task Force Recommendations



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The Task Force's recommendations are driven by three basic findings.

1. The predominant cause of late teacher hiring is uncertainty on the part of local school districts about the amount of state funds the districts will receive following the September unit count.
2. Due to improvements in survey techniques, the ability of local school districts and the state to predict student population in the following school year has vastly improved, assuming proper technical assistance.
3. The school districts and state should share the risk of error with respect to student population predictions, with the state providing the districts a guaranteed partial level of funding based upon a spring student population estimate, and the districts being held accountable to use that guaranteed funding to make earlier hiring decisions.

The Task Force's detailed recommendations are as follows.

- **The State of Delaware should provide a central resource to local school districts to allow them to make concrete student population projections for the coming school year in the early spring.** The Task Force was given information suggesting that survey techniques already being employed by state agencies and third parties with whom those agencies contract are sufficient to provide relatively reliable student population estimates to local school districts of their student populations for the coming school year. Currently, however, no such student population estimates are being conducted on an annual, district-level basis. The Task Force recommends that the state coordinate an annual student population projection for each of its local school districts in the early spring of each calendar year, estimating student population for the coming fall. There will be a cost to this exercise – the Task Force was provided with estimates up to \$100,000/year for the cost of the survey. However, the Task Force believes that if the right to conduct the survey is opened up to competitive bidding, the cost can be substantially reduced, and that in any event an investment of this amount is appropriate to address a problem of the magnitude described above. The Task Force also recommends that the state seek out private foundation funding for the first one to two years of this survey process, given the number of private entities that have expressed an interest in the success of Delaware's public schools and the significant implications the problem of late hiring has for educational quality.



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- **The State of Delaware should guarantee local school districts a minimum level of unit count funding based upon the late spring population estimate. That minimum level of funding should cover most, but not all, of the risk of error.** Given that fairly accurate projections regarding student population are now possible, and will in fact occur in the spring of each calendar year if the Task Force's first recommendation is implemented, there should be relatively little financial risk to the state in guaranteeing that it will provide school districts an amount of state funds roughly similar to that suggested by the spring projection, notwithstanding the amount dictated by the final unit count in September. In order to ensure that the risk of an erroneous projection is shared by the state and the school districts, the number of units guaranteed should be a significant percentage of the number suggested by the spring estimate, but not the full amount—the Task Force recommends a percentage between 95 and 98%. This guarantee of unit funds should permit local districts to aggressively hire in the late spring and early summer, with the assurance that there is a cap on the amount of local funds for which they will be responsible should the spring estimates prove too high.
- **After assessing the success of Recommendations #1 and #2 in the fall of 2011, the state should consider consequences for school districts that continue to make late offers without good cause.** The implementation of Recommendations #1 and #2 should allow school districts to make hiring offers to teachers in the spring and early summer, and dramatically reduce the percentage of teachers who receive offers in July, August, and September. The results should also be visible very quickly: if the population estimates are done in the spring of 2011, the state will know by the time districts fill out their hiring surveys in late 2011 which districts successfully reduced the percentage of teachers who are hired in the late summer or early fall. For districts that continue to hire substantial numbers of teachers in the late summer and early fall notwithstanding the implementation of Recommendations #1 and #2, the state should consider specific consequences for those districts.
- **The state should publicly disclose late hiring statistics at the district level.** Currently, school districts are required to report late hiring statistics, but the public reporting of those statistics is done only at a statewide level. This prevents local parents and taxpayers from holding their districts accountable for late hiring. The state should disclose late hiring statistics at the district



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level, and in order to ensure consistency and accuracy of reports, should (a) conduct random audits of the late hiring reports to ensure that they are accurate, and (b) adopt uniform definitions for use in preparing the reports so districts can be fairly compared.