



Reply to: Philadelphia

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**MINORITY STUDENTS HAVE LESS ACCESS TO QUALIFIED TEACHERS, COMPLAINT  
ASSERTS**

**Education Law Center files complaint with the Office of Civil Rights**

Philadelphia, PA March 8, 2004 -- Children of color in the Philadelphia schools are more likely than others to have teachers who are uncertified and inexperienced, and to attend schools with high levels of teacher turnover, according to a complaint filed today by the Education Law Center of Pennsylvania (ELC) with the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights.

"A knowledgeable and experienced teacher can make a huge difference in a child's achievement," said Len Rieser, co-director of the Law Center. "Unfortunately, in Philadelphia, the schools with the largest numbers of minority students are also the ones with the largest numbers of new teachers and teachers who aren't yet certified. These are also the schools with high teacher turnover, which makes it hard to develop a stable program."

The problem arises, the complaint says, from the way the District assigns teachers to schools. "The District allows qualified and experienced teachers to select their school assignments as they acquire

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time in the system,” Rieser said. “And schools serving large numbers of students of color get left behind in this process.”

The complaint cites numerous studies, all of which have shown that high-minority schools have higher teacher turnover and larger numbers of inexperienced and uncertified staff. One such study, by Philadelphia-based Research for Action, found that “it is not uncommon for 20 percent of the staff at the highest-poverty middle schools to have experienced less than a full year of teaching in the district.” And, the study notes, the teacher certification rate in high-minority middle schools in 2002-03 was under 79% -- compared to nearly 99% in low-minority middle schools.

“We need policies that will assure a better balance of experienced and inexperienced teachers, and certified and uncertified teachers, in each school,” Rieser noted. “And we need more incentives that would help keep qualified and experienced teachers in schools serving large numbers of minority children.”

The complaint also notes that, because experienced teachers command higher salaries, significantly more money is spent per child in lower-minority schools than in high-minority schools.

The complaint comes as a coalition of community organizations begin a campaign to improve teacher quality in Philadelphia. Last week, the Philadelphia Student Union, Philadelphia Citizens for Children and Youth, and a long list of other groups urged the School Reform Commission change its teacher assignment system and create incentives that would lead to a more “equitable balance” of teachers among schools.

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**The Education Law Center is a nonprofit education advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all Pennsylvania’s children have access to a quality public education.**

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