

# **Barely Breaking Even: Incentives, Rewards, and the High Costs of Choosing to Teach**

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## **Introduction**

Recent predictions that, within the next decade, the U.S. will need to hire 2.2 million teachers (Gerald & Hussar, 1998) and rising concerns about the quality of the teaching force have focused attention on strategies to attract and retain new teachers. Amidst these concerns, analysts and policymakers are revisiting the issue of teachers' compensation. In examining the research literature, they are likely to discover that the question of whether (or how) money matters in attracting and retaining new teachers remains an open one.

Some scholars who have examined the question maintain that increasing salaries is an ineffective policy for attracting and retaining teachers (Ballou & Podgursky, 1997; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1999). Drawing upon statistical analyses of large data sets, they argue that salary increases do not work as intended because: (1) teachers are motivated more by intrinsic rather than financial rewards (Public Agenda, 2000); (2) teachers frequently make career decisions based on factors other than pay (Hanushek et al., 1999); and (3) the labor market for teachers has certain structural features (e.g., tenure, seniority-based hiring, and certification requirements) that blunt the effects of money as an incentive (Ballou & Podgursky, 1997).

Others, however, also using quantitative methodologies, have arrived at somewhat different conclusions. Murnane et al. (1991) argue that higher salaries should be one component of a policy to attract talented graduates into the teaching profession. They base this argument on their findings that salaries affect the length of time teachers stay in the profession, and that "salaries affect the career decisions of beginning teachers more than the career decisions of experienced teachers" (p. 120). This suggests that a promising strategy for attracting and retaining teachers might be to front-load the salary scale by increasing starting salaries (Ferris & Winkler, 1986; Murnane et al., 1991).

While many studies have sought to measure whether and to what extent money matters to teachers, little is known about *how* money matters to them. Reports that rely on forced-choice survey questions, such as the recent Public Agenda report (2000), provide little insight into how salary considerations are entangled with other concerns that teachers have. As a result, their data and interpretations may underestimate the importance of salary in teachers' career decisions. Previous research has also ignored potential differences between the perspectives of individuals who are entering teaching as their first career and those of individuals who are entering teaching at mid-career.

Using a qualitative methodology, this study explores how new teachers view the available incentives and rewards of teaching. In particular, it seeks to understand the meaning that money has for new teachers and the role that it might play in their decisions to enter or leave the profession. To do this, we interviewed a diverse group of 50 first- and second-year teachers in Massachusetts public schools, paying close attention to differences in the experiences and responses of first-career and mid-career entrants.

Our findings suggest that while money is not the primary incentive to enter teaching—intrinsic rewards provide the main incentive—it can serve as a disincentive or a barrier for those who might otherwise be attracted to teaching. According to the new teachers we interviewed, the costs of entering (and remaining in) teaching are quite high and very discouraging. Although our respondents initially chose teaching in spite of the low pay, many worry about being able to "afford to teach," and are uncertain if they will stay in the profession long term.

## Context

We explore incentives and rewards for teachers within a context that differs, in important ways, from the context of many previous studies. This new context consists of a strong economy undergoing rapid technological change, new organizational forms and workplaces, new opportunities to make money as well as find interesting work, and higher expectations for a standard of living. Within this context, new teachers' perceptions of the costs and benefits of choosing to teach might be expected to differ from those of previous cohorts of entering teachers. This seems especially likely, given recently published reports that suggest that the opportunity costs of choosing to teach have increased dramatically for prospective teachers (Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000; Olson, 2000).

While it has long been recognized that teaching pays significantly less than other professions, recent research reveals that the earnings gap between teachers and other college graduates has grown substantially over the past few years. An analysis conducted by *Education Week* shows that the 1994 salary gap between teachers with bachelor's degrees and nonteachers with bachelor's degrees was \$11,035. Just four years later, in 1998, this gap was \$18,006.<sup>1</sup> For master's degree recipients, the analogous salary gap between teachers and nonteachers was \$12,918 in 1994 and \$24,648 in 1998 (Olson, 2000).<sup>2</sup> Further, in 1998, young teachers (age 22 to 28) with only a bachelor's degree earned an average of \$21,792, which was \$8,192 less than their non-teaching peers.

Another recent report, from the National Center for Education Statistics, provides additional evidence that teachers have lost ground to their peers. Among bachelor's degree recipients who graduated in 1992-93 and were working full time five years later, teachers "earned among the lowest annual salaries of their college cohort" (Henke et al., 2000). For highly educated individuals, choosing to teach has always meant foregoing higher-paying alternatives. However, now, more than ever, this career decision requires significant sacrifices.

As if this were not enough, today's prospective teachers also face higher costs of preparing to teach. Over the past twenty years, college tuition has grown much faster than inflation, while median family incomes have stayed almost flat.<sup>3</sup> As a result, student borrowing has risen dramatically. In 1995-96, half of all bachelor's and master's degree recipients graduated with some federal student loan (American Council on Education Division of Government and Public Affairs, 1997). On average, bachelor's degree recipients had borrowed \$12,000 from public institutions and \$14,300 from private institutions. Master's degree recipients graduated with, on average, \$15,100 in loan debt from public institutions and \$21,400 in debt from private institutions. Today's cohort of entering teachers often carry such debt. In very real terms, choosing to teach and paying for the preparation required is much more costly today than it was for previous generations of teachers. Today's prospective teachers must consider both their ability to pay off loans from their undergraduate education, as well as their ability to finance additional training that might be required for permanent certification.

We chose to conduct our study in Massachusetts, a state that is just beginning to experience teacher shortages in certain schools and subjects. While typical public schools in California currently are staffed by large cohorts of young teachers holding emergency credentials (Shields et al., 1999), typical public schools in Massachusetts still tend to be staffed by certified teachers, the majority of whom are veterans. In Massachusetts, it is the charter schools—both state-sponsored and within-district—where one finds high

proportions of young, non-certified teachers. A second important feature of the Massachusetts context is the recent introduction of a high-stakes student assessment, MCAS, which is aligned with state curriculum frameworks. Until relatively recently, local control ruled the day in Massachusetts, and state policy had a very modest impact on curriculum and instruction. This situation has changed dramatically with these new frameworks and high-stakes tests, which will be used to determine graduation qualifications in 2003.

## **Sample and Methodology**

We conceived this as an exploratory study and, therefore, selected a sample that would evoke a wide range of views, held by a diverse group of respondents, in a variety of settings. In selecting our sample of 50 first- and second-year Massachusetts teachers, we sought to maximize diversity on a wide range of measures and, thus, identified four “sources” of potential respondents, each of which we thought might lead us to a different group of new teachers. These sources included private college and university teacher education programs; public university teacher education programs; charter schools (both state-sponsored and within-district); and the 1999 recipient list of the Massachusetts \$20,000 Signing Bonus. The MA Signing Bonus Program recruits individuals who have never taught in public schools by offering extra income of \$20,000 over the course of four years as well as a six-week summer training program that leads to a provisional teaching certificate, the same credential held by graduates of teacher education programs. In each case, we sought variety within the source groups as well, including, for example, teacher education programs geared at both undergraduate and graduate preparation, charter schools offering different kinds of programs, and signing bonus recipients who were first-career and mid-career entrants to teaching. We asked directors of teacher education programs to provide the names and addresses of recent graduates, who were currently employed in Massachusetts public schools. Although we made no effort to identify particularly able or promising candidates, we found that program directors tended to identify individuals they deemed especially able or promising. We contacted charter schools directly, either through the heads of these schools or through individual teachers working there. We contacted recipients of the Signing Bonus program directly, using a list of names and schools provided by the Massachusetts Department of Education. We built this sample gradually, seeking to attain variation and balance in the makeup of the sample of individuals (by gender, race, ethnicity, and age) and the types of schools they worked in. We focused our inquiry on urban and suburban settings—60% of our respondents taught in urban schools, while 40% taught in suburban ones—and included elementary, middle, and high school sites.

Data collection involved conducting one long interview (1½ to 2½ hours) with each respondent individually. The interviews were designed to gather the respondents’ general responses to the experience of being a new teacher as well as to elicit their views about our four areas of focused inquiry—career, incentives and rewards, professional culture, and curriculum and assessment. An interview protocol is included in the Appendix. Because the interviews were semi-structured, they were shaped, in part, by the teachers’ responses, although each covered the same topics and gathered roughly comparable information. All respondents also completed a brief survey asking for information about age, race/ethnicity, teacher preparation, and years of teaching. We tape recorded all interviews and had them transcribed for our analysis.

The size and geographical restrictions of the sample limit generalizations that might emerge from this study. While the sample is not representative of all new teachers, it does offer a broad understanding about the experience of new teachers, as well as focused insight into the experiences of particular groups of individuals (men, people of color, mid-career entrants, and bonus recipients) working in particular types of sites (urban schools, charter schools, and professional development schools). The experiences of these teachers can inform both policymakers and practitioners as they contemplate the demands for new teachers and assess competing strategies for recruiting them and supporting the early years of their work.

TABLE 1  
*Summary of Sample: Selected Characteristics of Respondents (N=50)*

	N	%
Gender		
Female	33	66
Male	17	34
Race/Ethnicity		
White	35	70
Person of color	15	30
Age		
22-29	30	60
30-39	14	28
40-49	4	8
50-54	2	4
Career		
First-career entrant	26	52
Mid-career entrant	24	48
Experience		
1st year	36	72
2 <sup>nd</sup> year	14	28
Level		
Elementary	22	44
Middle School	15	30
High School	13	26
Setting		
Urban	30	60
Suburban	20	40
School Type		
Traditional public	37	74
Charter (including within-district)	13	26

## Incentives and Rewards

### Intrinsic Rewards

Consistent with prior research (Johnson, 1990; Lortie, 1975), the new teachers we interviewed reported entering teaching in search of intrinsic rewards. When asked to explain their reasons for choosing teaching over other professions they had considered or left, none of the respondents mentioned salary or financial rewards. Instead, they talked about the value of meaningful work, the appeal of working with children, and the enjoyment of pedagogy and subject matter.

*Meaningful Work.* Many teachers in our study reported seeking and finding satisfaction in the service aspect of teaching. Teaching offered them fulfilling work and the feeling that they were making important contributions to society. Lori<sup>4</sup>, a 23-year-old elementary school teacher, expressed a typical sentiment: “I feel like I’m really giving something. I feel like what I do is important, which is important to me.” This sentiment was not restricted to young individuals entering teaching as a first career. Rather, for many mid-career entrants it was precisely the prospect of meaningful work that led them to leave their previous careers for teaching. Amanda, a 33-year-old elementary school teacher who one day walked out of her job as an accountant, never to return, explained that teaching is a good fit for her, because: “I need to enjoy what I’m doing. I need to feel useful. It seems to fulfill all of my needs, and I hope I’m doing the same for the kids.” Similarly, Clark, a former industrial chemist, explained that teaching offered him “the personal reward of doing something good.” Both Amanda and Clark left jobs that paid them considerably more than teaching.

*Working with Children.* Many of the respondents talked about the appeal of working with children. Abe, a first-year high school teacher at a suburban charter school, said: “I need to be doing something that involves working with people. I wouldn’t be happy doing anything that didn’t. I need something human, and fluid, and constantly throwing surprises at you.” Amanda, the former accountant, offered a powerful description of the rewards she gets when working with children:

I went into [teaching] for the kids. . . . It can take one comment from a child’s mouth . . . [and] for the rest of the day nobody can touch you. Somebody can cut you off on the road and you’re fine with that. Fine.

Some teachers, especially teachers of color, mentioned the importance of serving particular communities or working with specific student populations. Sally told us, “as a person of color I wanted to be able to work with kids of color.” Jayson, a 25-year-old chemistry teacher who asked to teach the lowest-track classes at his suburban high school, said: “To me, educating young black kids . . . is a huge priority, . . . [as is] letting them see a positive, black male role model.” Adam, a white 24-year-old elementary school science teacher, suggested that for him the rewards of teaching in a working-class school were greater than they would be in a more affluent school: “It’s a little bit more of a reward in a school like this, where the socioeconomic status of families [is] just very, very low. And I can tell that I’m needed here, whereas if I was at a suburban school, I wouldn’t get that feeling.”

*Pedagogy & Subject Matter.* Many new teachers found enjoyment in planning lessons, tackling the challenges of pedagogy, and interacting with students about subject matter they loved. Gwen, a young second-year teacher, explained: “I like coming up with lesson plans. I

like coming up with a plan on how to teach something. And I like giving kids the vehicle to understand a concept.” Similarly, Robert, a former lawyer in his fifties, commented that one of the things he gets from teaching is the opportunity to discuss history with students:

I get to interact with kids. I get to talk about history, which I like doing. . . . I mean you’re covering material and you’re talking about material. . . . In the law, the stuff that I enjoyed the most was just doing the research, putting together a story, and writing it up. And in history basically that’s what I’m doing for the kids. I’m putting together a story for them and presenting it and interacting with them about it.

## Financial Rewards

Although intrinsic rewards drew them into teaching and provided ongoing satisfaction, the new teachers in our study were by no means unconcerned about financial rewards. Many were very dissatisfied with their pay, especially given the importance and difficulty of their work. While they stressed that they did not enter teaching “for the money,” they worried about whether they could “afford teaching” and stay in the profession over the long term.

The first- and second-year teachers who participated in this study reported full-time salaries between \$15,000 to \$41,000.<sup>5</sup> At the low end of the salary range was one teacher who had his own class as a full-time permanent substitute and made \$85 per day (about \$15,000 for the year).<sup>6</sup> At the high end were teachers who had master’s degrees, teachers with law degrees who were given credit on the salary scale for having a doctorate, and two teachers who were working at higher-paying charter schools. Excluding the full-time substitute, the median for the entire group was \$34,000.<sup>7</sup> Table 1 below summarizes the range of salaries, by degree held, for the teachers in our study.

TABLE 2

*Self-reported salaries of participating first and second-year teachers, by degree held (N=48)*

	Low	Median	High
Bachelor’s	26,000*	32,000	38,000
Master’s	27,800	34,500	41,000
Doctorate	33,000	38,000	40,000

\*Part-time salaries were converted to their full-time equivalents.

Not surprisingly, none of the participants in our study mentioned being attracted to teaching because of the pay. Jake, a 26-year-old middle school teacher, noted matter-of-factly, “Well, teaching is the reward itself. I didn’t go into teaching because I wanted to be a millionaire, you know.” Similarly, Becky, a 25-year-old teacher in a charter school, explained: “I work because I like it. And if I make a lot of money at it, that’s really great. If I make a little bit of money at it, well, I’ll figure it out.”

That most of our respondents maintained that they did not enter teaching for the money was predictable. First, of course, there is not much money to be made in the profession. But also, as Lortie (1975) observed twenty-five years ago, “teachers tend to underplay the role of material rewards in their decision to enter the occupation,” in large part

because “many people both inside and outside teaching believe that teachers are not supposed to consider money, prestige, and security as major inducements” (p. 30). Mia, a 41-year-old, mid-career entrant, might have been reflecting these norms when she said: “I’m not here for the compensation. . . . I’m okay with it. I don’t really care one way or the other. I guess, philosophically, I think you need to have people in this field that are intrinsically motivated to be in it.”

When Mia and other teachers said that they did not enter teaching for the money, however, they did not seem to be saying that money did not matter to them, but rather that they entered teaching *in spite of* the low pay. For instance, Amanda, who mentioned that teaching “seems to fulfill all of my needs,” also explained that “you look at it all, and you think, ‘why the hell am I doing it?’ . . . I mean, it’s definitely not for the salaries, and the perks, and the attitude from the public.” Clearly, money still mattered to Amanda:

I love the kids, don’t get me wrong, [but] every day in the back of my head, even when I’m showering or cleaning my oven, I’m thinking, “What can I get into? What profession could I get into that’s just as rewarding, but I don’t have to put up with the . . . salary and [not being] treated as a professional?”

A few teachers also hinted that they coped with their low pay with denial. Steve, a 36-year-old former businessman, noted that he tries “not to think about how much [I’m] being paid and just enjoy what [I’m] doing.” He appreciated that the job allows him to spend time with his children, yet “one side of me feels like I’m doing my family a disservice by doing this, because of the sacrifice in income.” Patricia, another mid-career entrant, said:

I’m thinking, “Mm, good thing I really love my job.” Actually, I’m fortunate so far in that I don’t think about the financial benefit of my position. I don’t think about the money at all, which is a good thing. Because if I did, it would be frustrating.

Patricia seemed to contradict her assertion, “I don’t think about money at all,” by holding down two additional part-time jobs, managing an office and running a house cleaning business. She did this to “supplement” her income, “to bring in a couple more hundred dollars a month.” Given her financial obligations, she was “always looking for ways to increase [her] financial reward.”

In our study, we had no way to identify and interview prospective teachers who chose *not* to teach. It seems likely, though, that many may have been attracted by the prospect of intrinsic incentives but chose other work because of the higher pay. This conjecture is supported by the recent Public Agenda survey (2000), which identified a group of college graduates under the age of 30 who were in jobs other than teaching but who expressed considerable interest in the profession. These “leaners” reported that they would seriously consider teaching if pay, working conditions, and support for teachers were improved (p. 14). Public Agenda’s interpretation, however, downplayed the role that money might play in attracting these individuals to the teaching profession. Instead, it suggested that policy makers ought to focus on helping teachers to realize intrinsic rewards and their hopes for “making a difference” (p. 17).

In contrast, what new teachers in our study told us about the high costs of choosing to teach suggests that money may be influencing whether individuals enter and stay in the profession in subtle and complex ways. Focusing on costs as well as the benefits in our

analysis highlights the sacrifices that individuals often make in order to teach. It sheds new light on concerns about low pay, and turns our attention to barriers that might exist to entering the profession.

## **The High Costs of Choosing to Teach**

In various ways, respondents talked about the high costs of choosing to teach—costs that are rarely mentioned in policy discussions about teacher compensation. These costs consist of the opportunity costs of choosing teaching over higher-paying occupations, and the costs—both opportunity and out-of-pocket—of teacher preparation and required master’s degree programs.

*Opportunity Costs.* Opportunity costs are “the costs associated with opportunities that are foregone by not putting one’s resources to their highest value use” (Pindyck & Rubinfeld, 1995). Participants in our study were quite aware that, in choosing teaching, they were committing their skills and efforts to a profession that would pay them less than other professions they could have pursued. First-career and mid-career entrants, however, differed in how they talked about the opportunity costs of choosing to teach. Mid-career entrants often had a very clear and specific sense of how much money they were giving up in choosing to teach. For them, the opportunity costs were more real or more salient.

Many of the twenty-four mid-career entrants in our sample took significant salary cuts to enter teaching. Valerie, who worked at IBM before teaching, estimated that if she had stayed at the company, she would currently be making \$80,000. Deciding to teach involved accepting a “huge” pay cut of more than 50 percent. Esther, a former engineer, reported “taking a hit of 50 percent.” When asked about the pay cuts that they took to enter teaching, two former lawyers laughed before replying. One said, “Annually? I’d say . . . forty grand . . . . Big, big pay cut. Big pay cut.” The other simply said that he is now making “a small percentage” of what he once did.

Other mid-career entrants took less dramatic, but still substantial, pay cuts to enter teaching. For instance, Clark reported making about \$10,000 less than he had as an industrial chemist. Patricia reported that, in her previous job in sales, she had a salary of \$50,000 plus commissions, use of a company car, and an expense account. She now makes \$36,400. Of course, some mid-career teachers (less than a third) did not take pay cuts to enter teaching. Three mentioned earning about the same, while four mid-career entrants reported earning somewhat higher salaries in teaching than in their previous occupations.

First-career teachers were also quite aware of the opportunity costs of choosing to teach, though they had less precise notions of how their teaching salaries compared to what they might have earned in a different profession. They calculated opportunity costs on the basis of possibilities rather than realities. For example, Fred chose teaching from a number of options: “I could have been anything I wanted to be. I wanted to be a teacher.” In high school, he considered becoming a physician or a law enforcement officer before deciding to teach. He also could have taken over his father’s wire manufacturing business. Instead, Fred chose teaching because he “realized that teachers have a greater impact than any other profession in the world.”

Abe and Armen, both high school teachers at charter schools, considered management consulting. Ivy-League graduates, they both interviewed with consulting firms during their senior years, but only half-heartedly. Armen explored consulting mainly because,

Among the high paying jobs, that seemed to be intellectually the most attractive. So I said, “Okay, this is worth a run through.” Teaching for me was worth more than a run through. It’s what I really wanted to do, if I could get enough money to pay my student loans.

He estimated that management consulting would have paid him \$40,000-\$50,000 right out of college.

Other first-career teachers considered work that paid about the same, or even slightly less, than teaching. Carolyn and Camilla both considered working for nonprofit organizations. Although interested in educational policy, Carolyn turned down a job offer at a school reform organization. If she had not gone into teaching, Camilla would have “pursued some sort of non-profit position” involving social work. While she thought that her starting salary right out of college might have been the same, she believes that if she had worked for a nonprofit, “within a few years I would have been way ahead” financially.

The new teachers that we interviewed had options. Many considered a number of professions before choosing teaching, and almost half had switched to teaching from other work. The opportunity costs of choosing to teach loomed large in respondents’ thoughts and comments on whether to stay in teaching. Seeing their peers make more than they, while working no harder, or missing the income from their previous jobs, many teachers doubted whether their choice of teaching was worth it.

*Tuition & the Costs of Preparation.* The other major cost that respondents mentioned was the cost of preparing to teach. Several talked about the burden of having to pay back college loans as well as the daunting prospect of taking on additional debt to finance required master’s degrees. A few mentioned the helpfulness of tuition reimbursement and loan-forgiveness programs. Many others mentioned the attractiveness of programs or policies that enabled them to move straight to teaching and avoid most of the costs of preparation. Both those who invested in traditional teacher education programs as well as those who chose alternative routes to teaching reported that the costs of preparation played, and continue to play, significant roles in their career decisions.

Sally and Clark, for instance, discussed how student loans factored into their choice of a first career. For Sally, a first-career entrant, student loans made her hesitate before seeking a teaching job right after college. At first, she tried to resist the lure of teaching, despite encouragement from friends and family. She described thinking to herself: “No, no, no, I’m not going to be a teacher. . . . I can’t be a teacher . . . [because] I have thousands of dollars in loans and I’m not going to be able to pay off my loans.”

For Clark, student loans actually prevented him from teaching immediately after college, even though he always knew he wanted to teach. Given his huge debt load, he felt short-term pressure to make money:

I came from a very poor family and I had to pay for everything basically. I got a lot of financial aid, but still, there was \$40,000 that was not covered by financial aid because I went to a very expensive private school. So I basically said I am going to have to work in industry. And I got a great job working for a cool company doing waterproof breathable polyurethane. . . . [I] made a lot of money and had fun, but I never felt great about what I was doing.

Clark eventually quit his job as an industrial chemist and pursued his interest in teaching.

Unlike Sally and Clark, Lori was able to choose teaching without having to worry about paying off student loans. Lori earned a tuition-free master's degree in education, which helped reinforce her decisions to enter teaching. She explained:

I had thought about getting into social work, counseling, or something to that effect . . . but I always knew that teaching was something I wanted to do as well. I wanted to go to [this university] because they had a really good psychology program. But also at that time . . . they had just started this new program, the fifth year free program. . . . If you maintain[ed] a certain grade point average, you could apply to get the fifth year of your master's degree for free. . . . The fifth year free program really sealed it for me.

Her story, and the stories of a few other respondents, illustrate the benefits of tuition reimbursement and loan forgiveness programs.

In our study, some of the most revealing comments were from individuals who mentioned the role that alternative routes to the classroom played in their decisions to teach. Many of these individuals were mid-career entrants, for whom the costs of entering teaching were particularly onerous. While the costs of preparing to teach were already high for first-career entrants, they were even higher for mid-career entrants, many of whom had to quit their previous (often lucrative) jobs in order to enroll in teacher preparation programs. Those who could take courses part-time while continuing to work still had to leave their work to complete their student-teaching. The high costs of choosing to teach come into greater focus, when one considers two ways in which teachers in our study actively tried to avoid or minimize these costs. They did this by taking advantage of the Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program and the state's charter school legislation.

The Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program – The Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program for New Teachers was instituted in 1998. Its legislated goal is “to encourage high achieving candidates to enter the profession who would otherwise not consider a career in teaching” (Chapter 280, Section 19B of the Acts of 1998). To further this goal, the legislation called upon the state Department of Education to select “the best and brightest teaching prospects” and provide them with “a \$20,000 signing bonus over at least three years with at least \$8,000 distributed in the first year of the bonus.” In order to receive each year's bonus payment, recipients had to be certified to teach and employed by a public school in Massachusetts. The Department of Education sponsored a free summer training program that culminated in accelerated certification. In the first year of the program, “over 800 people from 36 states and 4 countries, applied for the Massachusetts Signing Bonus Program” (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2000). From this pool of over 800 individuals, the Commonwealth selected 59 recipients. Of the 50 teachers who participated in our study, 13 were members of the state's first group of signing bonus recipients.

Respondents who received the Massachusetts signing bonus suggested that an accelerated route into the classroom was a significant incentive to enter the teaching profession and that the requirements (and costs) of preparation and licensing had posed powerful disincentives. Repeatedly they said that they and their fellow signing bonus recipients had been attracted by the accelerated route to certification rather than the \$20,000 the program offered. Indeed, in various ways, many were already on their way to teaching and would have gone into teaching on their own, although it might have taken them longer

to do so. The Bonus Program simply “galvanized their resolve,” as Mike put it, by reducing the costs. While it did not make teaching any more desirable, it made it possible.

In describing the Signing Bonus Program, Esther, a former aerospace engineer, remarked: “Oh, I think the signing bonus is excellent. It’s a quick and dirty way to get into the classroom. I mean it’s fast.” Asked whether she was more attracted to the program by having quick access than by receiving the bonus, she quickly answered: “Oh, yes. Ask anybody who’s in the program, I mean, they’re not doing this for the money.”

Bernie, had a similar response: “Oh, it wasn’t the money, you know (*Laughs*). I mean, the twenty thousand over four years, I’m taking that five times over in terms of a pay cut. . . . So it wasn’t the money, it was the fast—it was the bypass of what I didn’t think was necessary.” The Signing Bonus Program as a whole facilitated Bernie’s entry into the profession and spurred him to act on his *existing* interest in teaching. Before, it seemed, the costs of switching into teaching were too great: “I wasn’t in the situation where I could take the time off to do a student teaching gig.” Indeed, Bernie said that if he had been offered only the accelerated route to teaching without the \$20,000 signing bonus, he “would have given it some serious consideration.” However, the first year’s installment of \$8,000 had been useful in helping to cover his living expenses during the summer, when he had to quit his old job to attend the summer institute.

Ranya spoke of the disincentive that certification requirements pose to potential career switchers and said that she pursued the Signing Bonus Program, “simply because of the fact it’s an easier process than certification. If I had to do it by myself, I would have to take so many classes and it’s a thousand steps, before you get to the first level.” Ranya reported that without the signing bonus, she would not have entered teaching. However, when asked whether she would have entered teaching if she had received the quick route but not the \$20,000 bonus, she replied, “that still would have been good.”

Some teachers said the bonus did not so much influence their decision to teach, but rather their decision to teach in public schools. Laura, Abe, and Armen, all uncertified, sought jobs in private schools before the signing bonus gave them a way to get certified at no cost and teach in public schools.

Charter Schools – Charter schools provided another opportunity to avoid the costs of preparing to teach. Thirteen of the teachers in our sample taught in charter schools, which in Massachusetts are not required by law to hire certified teachers. Mia, a former engineer, mentioned that she did not have any specific preparation for teaching and that she did not believe that traditional teacher education was worth the time and expense. She took a few education classes to see what they were about and concluded: “You learn [to teach] in a classroom. You learn by interacting with kids and being able to observe somebody who knows how it’s done, because there is so much of it that is just not easily translatable into a classroom without children.” Once Mia realized that “it would be very hard for me to go back to a [traditional] route to become a teacher,” she decided to pursue a position at the charter school that her children attended.

## **Tight Finances: The Result of Low Salaries and High Costs**

“I’m breaking even, you know,” Gwen told us. “I’m not putting anything away, just kind of surviving for awhile.” Gwen is unable to save any of her \$28,000 salary, largely because she must pay off undergraduate student loans and cover her basic living expenses.

While she plans to stay in teaching a long time, as a second-year teacher, she already worries about how to pay for the master's degree that she will have to earn to maintain her Massachusetts teaching credential beyond five years: "I mean, with the salary that I have, I can't imagine—well, I don't want to go back on financial aid, but I can't see being able to pay for the classes that I need to take to remain a teacher."

Adam, a 24-year-old teacher at an elementary school in the same district as Gwen, said that he "get[s] by barely" on what he makes, even though he is currently living at home with his parents. "Every now and then," he said. "I have to ask my dad to borrow a hundred bucks, and it shouldn't be that way." After his first year of teaching, Adam almost took a job selling educational toys. He would have made \$40,000, \$11,000 more than he was making at the time we interviewed him. In the end, however, he just could not accept the idea of a desk job and decided to stay in teaching. Theresa, a 23-year-old middle school teacher, was also just scraping by. She said, "I have undergrad loans and now graduate loans, and between all that and food, [I] barely [cover my expenses]. I am definitely not making enough. By the end of the month, there's typically not much money that I can put into savings."

Gwen, Adam, and Theresa's situations were common among the new teachers we interviewed. Respondents described "living paycheck to paycheck," having "no extra money," and "feeling like I'm struggling." Many told us that, while they could cover their basic expenses, they were finding it difficult or impossible to save any money. Jayson, described his situation:

You're out of school; you want to be an adult. I can pay my rent; I can buy food; I can pay my loans, mostly, and my bills. But what if an emergency came up? You know, the car needs repairs. You need to send money to your family. My brother needs books. And it's like I'm living check to check. There's no opportunity for saving, or for growth in that. It makes it difficult.

Miriam, a 52-year-old mid-career entrant, said simply, "I have bills, because I borrowed money to go to school, so I have school loans." And Derek, a second-year teacher who had decided to leave teaching after one more year, mentioned his debt load in the context of his decision to leave: "The bottom line is the money is not there. I make less money—I owe more in loans than I make in salary. You just can't do it."

## **Coping with the Costs of Choosing to Teach**

Respondents coped with the high costs of choosing to teach in a number of ways. One group reported that they could afford to teach and live comfortably. This situation, however, was often conditional or temporary. In contrast, another group experienced and endured hardship. Within this group, individuals coped by taking on additional jobs to supplement their salaries, tightening expenses, or scaling down their expectations for a standard of living.

*Having an Existing Second Source of Income.* Asked whether they could cover their living expenses on what they made as teachers, Rachel and Valerie replied that they could only teach because they were married and had a second source of income. Rachel said, "If I wasn't married, this would not be an option. No. Very difficult, especially going to school [to get certified]." With a second income, "It's very comfortable. You can afford to teach and

you can afford to live well and go on vacation as long as you budget and you don't have a lot of debt." Similarly, Valerie said that she could only afford to teach, because her husband was an engineer. Going back to school to get certified, however, was still quite difficult: "[P]eople can't support themselves and student teach. You know, to me, there should be some stipend. You know, it was really hard on us financially for me to quit my job and to work and not get paid." Bernie suggested that his wife's salary helped make it possible for him to switch careers. He noted that: "My wife works anyway, and she had just landed a new job that paid her more money."

One teacher told a compelling story about going to a lawyer's office to discuss initiating a divorce and realizing the financial implications of going ahead with it. Sitting in that office, the teacher began to think:

"You know what, I can't even leave." You know, [my spouse] pays the mortgage. I almost felt like, jeez, I've got no right to even ask for half this house, because I don't contribute anything. My entire salary just covers my debt from school, my car loan, insurance, that kind of thing. And what's left over for disposable [income]? I don't think I had any disposable. You know, just like from when you're a student, and it's tough. It was tough for me.

For this individual, teaching did not offer financial independence.

Other teachers were able to afford teaching because they had made large sums of money in previous careers and could draw upon investment income or savings. Jerry had "made a lot of money from software. . . . I have investment income and so forth. . . . I'm lucky that I can afford not to worry about the pay." Robert, the former lawyer in his fifties, said that he was able to consider teaching when "the financial side . . . began to fall into place, so I could [be] consistent with my responsibilities [and] take a very substantial pay cut." Teachers in our study even had inheritances or family money. Doug had "always thought about being a teacher" but stayed away because "it didn't pay enough money." However, an inheritance from his grandparents allowed him to afford graduate school and not worry so much about pay: "That has enabled me to say, 'You can do whatever you want with your life. You can take on whatever job you want because you don't have to worry about this money.'"

*Being Young and Single.* Some participants said they could afford to teach because they were currently young, single, and had few financial obligations. Yet even then, some described their finances as tight and worried about their future ability to support a family. Victoria's comment was typical of the group of these respondents:

To me, it's comfortable in the sense that I'm managing. I'm not struggling to pay my bills right now, because I'm single. I have no other responsibilities but to myself. And I'm sure someone else that has a family [and] kids may feel different.

Laura, too, could manage because "I am single . . . and I split rent with a couple other people." Carolyn, however, anticipated problems in the future: "I mean right now the salary is fine. I'm single. I'm not sure what my family situation, what my [future] husband's salary might be or not [be]. So it might be because of salary that I might [leave teaching]."

*Second Jobs.* In order to make ends meet and/or maintain the standard of living they hoped for, several of our respondents held second or even third jobs. Fred was a part-time police patrolman and emergency medical technician; Jake tended bar at a restaurant; Peggy

worked in a dentist's office. Peggy seemed to speak for many when she said that it was a challenge, "trying to balance a job and teaching. But I really need it. I need to make that extra money [be]cause it's impossible to live on just a teacher's salary."

While they sometimes took on additional work out of need, the participants in this study saw themselves as professionals who should be paid well for teaching. Carolyn contended: "I still think that we shouldn't have to do all the extra outside stuff, outside the teaching, to get paid more in proportion to other professions in this society." Mary concurred:

I think what should happen is a teacher should be paid for the work that they do. And, you know, people don't expect to be paid like investment bankers. Money is not why you go into teaching. But you should be able to live on a teaching salary.

*Reducing Expenses & Scaling Down Standard of Living.* In order to live on a teacher's salary and afford the costs of choosing to teach, new teachers often had to reduce their expenses or scale down certain expectations. This was especially true of the mid-career entrants who were accustomed to a higher standard of living. Bernie, who took a pay cut of approximately \$40,000 in order to teach, remarked that before he entered teaching, he and his wife "got accustomed to being able to think prospectively about sending my kids to private school." Now, he questions whether he will be able to do so and is considering less expensive parochial schools. Esther, whose office was in a closet, mentioned wistfully, "You know, I'd like a slightly bigger house." Asked if he could cover his expenses, Steve answered, "Yes, depending on what choices we make about our standard of living."

While such comments were more prominent among mid-career entrants, young, first-career teachers voiced them as well. Six of the new teachers lived at home with their parents at the time that we interviewed them, and most implied that tight budgets were part of the reason.

The teachers in our study were both willing and able to make sacrifices or compromises in order to teach. We suspect, however, that there are many other people who are not willing (either for themselves or their families) or not able (e.g., single-parent providers) to do so. Indeed, many individuals in our study—individuals who chose to teach despite the costs involved—expressed doubts about whether or not their sacrifices were worth it or even wise.

## **Deciding Whether to Stay in Teaching**

While most new teachers found ways to cope with the financial challenges of choosing to teach, they resented having to do so. Faced with relatively low salaries and high costs, they suggested that salary level would significantly affect whether they would stay in teaching. Asked what would keep them teaching longer, many teachers replied, "pay." Derek said: "More money. Plain and simple." Tanya speculated, "You know, if they paid me more, I'd be all set. I mean, seriously. If I could do this for the rest of my life and live comfortably, I would have no problem with my career." Respondents made it clear that they did not go into teaching to become wealthy. Rather, they simply wanted to "be able to live on a teacher's salary."

For first-career teachers, being able to live on a teacher's salary meant being able to live on their own, pay for food and rent, cover their student loan payments, pay for holiday presents, and have something left over to "put into savings" or "for emergencies." For mid-career teachers (and first-career teachers looking ahead), this also meant being able to make mortgage and car payments, and pay for their children's education.

It was hard for these teachers—especially those in mid-career—to ignore the opportunity costs of choosing to teach. Esther spoke for many, when she said: "I'm wondering still if it's worth it. I don't know." Part of what makes her wonder, is that she finds that she is "doing a much harder job than I was doing when I was engineering and I'm getting paid half of that." In a different way, Valerie also struggled with the implications of choosing to teach. While she was confident that teaching was worth the sacrifice, she said her husband has doubts:

The fifty percent pay cut . . . is hard. It's just hard. My husband still is skeptical about the change. I mean, he was very supportive in my going to school, but now he sees the pay check coming home and he shakes his head, you know. "You really, really want to do this, don't you?" And, I'm like, "Yes. Yes."

Yet it is difficult to isolate pay as incentive or disincentive, since it is so enmeshed in other considerations and concerns that teachers have. Many new teachers' concerns about pay reflected their unsettling sense that a mismatch existed between how little they were paid and how incredibly hard they worked. Moreover, at a time when salary and status appear to be strongly linked in American society, low pay represents more than a financial problem; teachers also interpret it as a sign of society's low regard for their work. This is apparent in the reasons that Derek and Gail gave for deciding to leave teaching at the end of the next year.

Derek, a 26-year-old teacher in his second year at a within-district charter school, planned to leave teaching within a year, despite having just invested in a master's degree in teaching: "I need to make money. . . . If this profession offered me more money, I'd stay here forever, but it doesn't. And I would like to have a family, and you know, live a little better than I live now. So, I'm going to have to leave." He explained further: "One of the reasons I'm leaving the teaching profession is I don't like the shit that teachers get. I don't appreciate the way we're categorized. . . . I just don't feel that there is enough acknowledgement of the profession." Derek's third reason for leaving teaching was that he was discouraged by society's unwillingness to fund all of the supports needed to help children grow up healthy and ready to learn. This made his job more difficult and interfered with achieving the intrinsic rewards that drew him into teaching.

Gail responded similarly, linking low pay, lack of recognition, and lack of educational resources. Asked what it would take to keep her teaching longer, she replied:

Better pay; recognition of the hard work that teachers put into this. And what else? And make sure all the materials are there. I mean, provide us the tools, and we'll do a better job. . . . If I knew the resources were available . . . and that the income would be better, I think, "yes, why not [stay]?" . . . I think now teachers are looked at as nothing, and yet the thing with teaching, it's not a regular 9-to-5 job. . . . You bring it home with you. It continues. . . . And maybe if people saw it and recognized the hard work that goes into it, yes I think I would stay. But I'm not staying.

Other new teachers made similar comments. Hannah said she would stay in teaching, “If I felt like I was making a difference, and my salary was increasing, and if I didn’t feel like I freaking work so hard. It’s all those things.” Camilla said, “Probably more money, and more planning time, more materials.” Theresa focused on long-term earning potential, but she, too, was concerned about lack of support:

Money, definitely more money, no doubt. Not even starting off a lot, but the idea of knowing that, okay, if I stay in this for two or three years, I will get paid ten grand more or fifteen grand more, which is not the case. It’s like three grand more, if you are lucky. And I guess less obligations and more support.

Thus, these new teachers were concerned about both their opportunity to realize the intrinsic rewards that originally attracted them to the profession—which would be helped by having more “tools,” “planning time,” and “materials”—as well as financial rewards that would allow them to live comfortably and not have to struggle.

## **Implications For Policy and Practice**

While the size and geographical restrictions of our sample limit our ability to generalize the findings of this exploratory study, the experiences of these teachers can inform both policymakers and practitioners as they contemplate the need for new teachers and assess competing strategies for recruiting them and supporting the early years of their work. It is sobering that most of those we interviewed worried about their ability to afford to stay in teaching, for these were individuals who had already chosen teaching despite the low pay and might thus be expected to be less concerned with financial rewards than other individuals. Our study suggests that, at the very time when schools in the United States must hire large numbers of new teachers, many of those entering the profession are not sure that they will stay long. This is largely because of pay, but also because of other closely related factors such as professional status and working conditions. It further suggests that if public education is to attract, support, develop, and retain the quality teachers that schools need and children deserve, it must address the concerns of these teachers by either increasing the financial rewards of teaching, reducing the costs of entry, or implementing a combination of both strategies.

The new teachers interviewed for this study said clearly that pay was a significant factor in whether they would stay in teaching. While, by itself, increasing salaries may have limitations as a policy for attracting and retaining teachers, the dramatic growth in the salary gap between teaching and other professions, as well as the disappointment and hardship described by many participants in this study, require a response. Teachers’ salaries must be increased and the shape of the salary scale reconsidered. This would be true, even if the goal were simply to keep pace with the increases in compensation being offered to highly educated individuals in other professions. Given the need to hire 2.2 million new teachers over the next decade, however, merely maintaining teaching’s attractiveness relative to other professions may not be enough.

The teachers who participated in this study were not making extravagant salary demands. They did, however, expect to be able to maintain what they considered to be a reasonable standard of living. Several were troubled by the existence of such large salary gaps

between teaching and other professions they might have entered or indeed had recently left. Although they very much wanted to stay in teaching, they wondered whether, by accepting so much less in salary, they were doing themselves and their families a disservice. One promising note, however, was that several teachers said that if their salaries were higher, they would “stay in teaching forever,” or at least for a good part of their working lives.

These findings suggest that not only is it time to raise salaries, it is also time to reconsider the shape of the traditional single salary scale. Teachers entering the profession consider both starting salary and long-term salary potential. Although the current single salary scale is objective and rewards long service, it does not include differentiation that might attract and retain individuals with a variety of employment options and who are entering teaching at many different career and life stages. The participants in our study attached different levels of importance to salary. They differed in the financial obligations they had and in what they considered to be a salary that would allow them to afford teaching. This suggests the value of examining how salary is distributed over the span of the teaching career, and of experimenting with different ways of structuring the compensation of teachers. For instance, to attract first-career entrants and get more individuals to try teaching and perhaps stay, one strategy might be to front-load the salary scale (Ballou & Podgursky, 1999a; Ferris & Winkler, 1986; Murnane et al., 1991). Another possibility, which might attract a slightly different subset of prospective teachers, would be to create funded internship programs offering relatively low pay to novices but providing extensive classroom teaching experience, quality mentoring, and valuable training. Indeed, this is a strategy currently being employed by some professional development schools, charter schools, and private schools. To attract mid-career entrants, districts might more liberally credit individuals for experiences and skills developed in other occupations that might be valuable and relevant to teaching. Indeed, a few of the participants in our study mentioned that the districts employing them had, in essence, done this by placing them higher up on the salary scale than they technically should have been based on their levels of education and years of experience.

While increasing teachers' salaries might be one strategy for attracting and retaining teachers, another might be to reduce the costs of and barriers to entering teaching. Various proposals to do just this have been the subject of intense debate among both policymakers and academics. Some have argued for reducing or even eliminating certification requirements and emphasizing in-service versus pre-service quality control and accountability (Ballou & Podgursky, 1998; Ballou & Podgursky, 1999b; The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, 1999). This, they argue, would dramatically reduce the costs and barriers to entry and would attract a whole new group of teaching candidates. Others have argued that the solution is to increase, rather than reduce, entry standards and certification requirements, and to improve the quality of pre-service teacher education programs (Darling-Hammond, 1997; National Commission on Teaching for America's Future, 1996). This, they say, would lead to higher salaries which would more than offset the higher costs of preparation. The findings of our study suggest that both strategies have important elements but that neither alone may be sufficient. We have found that the new generation of entering teachers includes both individuals who are interested, willing, and able to invest time and money in quality pre-service teacher preparation programs, as well as those who, for a variety of reasons, desire quicker routes to teaching and are less willing or able to invest in such programs. Both groups want to make serious contributions to teaching.

Alternative routes are important in that they reduce the costs and barriers to entering teaching for those individuals who have a serious interest in teaching but may be uncertain about the length of their stay in teaching or who have difficult transitions to make from other lines of work. These individuals form an important pool of potential teachers who, in the short run, might make significant contributions to public education, and who, once they have experienced the challenges and intrinsic rewards of teaching schoolchildren, might decide to stay longer than they originally intended. By “alternative routes” we do not mean the wholesale avoidance of professional standards or certification requirements, but rather moving new teachers more quickly to the classroom and providing them with comprehensive support there. Currently, most schools are not organized to support new teachers adequately.

There are other ways to reduce the costs of entering teaching. The most obvious of these include tuition subsidies and loan forgiveness programs. Several teachers in our study mentioned how helpful these programs were, and the difference they made in making teaching affordable. Policymakers might consider implementing or expanding programs that help finance various aspects of teachers’ education and preparation.

Strategies to increase the rewards of teaching and reduce the costs of entry could productively be pursued in concert. In order to find enough quality teachers and adjust to changing conceptions of career, public education may find it necessary to reduce the costs of entry (i.e., through expanding alternative routes) and expect that many recruits will make shorter-term (3-5 year) commitments to teaching. In this case, it becomes even more important to create, develop, and reward a corps of highly expert teachers who would provide essential leadership within schools. To support this, policy makers might implement performance-based career ladders that offer differentiated roles and reward teachers for demonstrating expertise and taking on additional responsibilities, such as mentoring new teachers or developing curricula (Johnson, 2000; Odden & Kelley, 1997).

Pursuing one or both types of strategies would likely require additional funding for education. While there is not sufficient space to explore the issue of how to finance these strategies, we would suggest that with the retirement of a large number of veteran teachers, who were near the top of the salary scale, and the entry of a younger group of teachers, who are starting off near the bottom, public education can anticipate savings from the differences in the salaries of these two groups. These savings could be used to raise salaries for current teachers, and to move toward a salary scale that is differentiated by role and skill. With ingenuity and will, money can be found to finance strategies to recruit and retain the quality teachers that our children deserve. In fact, it must. For if this new generation of teachers does not find the financial incentives and rewards they need and deserve, it is unlikely that a high-quality cohort of individuals will choose to teach.

## **Appendix**

### *Interview Protocol*

1. Before I get into the specific questions, I would like to get a general sense of your experience. How's it going?
2. Has teaching been what you expected? Why? Why not?  
What did you expect before you entered?
3. How would you describe your school—the people and programs—to someone who doesn't know it? How many teachers?
4. What is it like to teach here?
5. I understand that your assignment is to teach X. Beyond that, what other responsibilities do you have?
6. How did you decide to teach?  
First-Careers:
  - What other career options did you consider?
  - Did your parents influence you? What do/did your parents do?
  - Why did you decide to reject those other careers?Mid-Careers:
  - What did you do before you decided to teach? Why did you decide to make the career change?
7. People come to teaching by different pathways.  
What type of teacher preparation have you had?
  - Are you certified by the state?
  - How did you come to teach at this school?
8. Can you describe the type of support you've received as a new teacher, either within the school or the district?
  - Did you have a mentor?
  - Is the support you received what you needed?
9. I am interested in the contact that you have on a regular basis with other teachers, both formal and informal.
  - Can you tell me how often you talk with other teachers, in what kinds of situations, and what you talk about?
  - Do you watch other teachers teach?
10. Is what you just described typical of other teachers in this school?
  - How would you characterize the way they work together?

11. Is there a common sense among teachers of what teachers in this school should do in their work? Are there certain norms and expectations?

Yes:

- Could you describe these norms and expectations
- Where do these norms and expectations come from?
- How do you know/how did you learn what is expected of you?
- Do you share these norms and expectations?

No:

- Why do you think this is the case?
- Are there groups within the faculty that have certain norms and expectations?

12. How does it feel to be a member of this faculty?

13. Principals take on different roles in different schools. I am interested in understanding how you see your principal. What role would you say he or she plays?

- Is this what you think a principal should do?

14. Do you have a curriculum that you are expected to follow?

Yes:

- What kinds of things does it specify? (general goals, specific topics, specific lessons, how to use time?)
- In your view, is it a good curriculum? Why? (depth, structure, support, ideas, resources, creativity, results, consistency). Do you like using it? Does it work well for your students?
- Does anyone check to see that you're following the curriculum?
- Some people think that their curriculum provides too little freedom and some think that their curriculum provides too little structure. What do you think?

No:

- How do you decide what to teach and how to teach?
- In your view, does this process of deciding what to teach and how to teach it work well for you? Do you think this works well for your students?
- Does anyone monitor what you're teaching?
- Some people think that their curriculum provides too little freedom and some think that their curriculum provides too little structure. What do you think?

15. Are there tests you are required to give to your students?

- How closely are they tied to what you teach?
- How are the results used?
- Do the tests affect what and how you teach?
- Does MCAS affect what you teach and how you teach it?

16. Do you feel sufficiently prepared to teach in the way you're expected to teach here?

- Where do you go for information or advice about what and how to teach?

17. We are interested in incentives and rewards for teachers.  
What is your salary?  
How is it set?
- What benefits do you get? Are there any other perks?
  - Was there any way to negotiate your salary when you started?
  - How are your raises determined?
  - Can you take on additional responsibilities for extra pay? Do you?
  - Do you supplement your pay with additional work outside the school?
  - Can you cover your living expenses on what you make?
- Midcareer: How does your salary compare with what you made in the past?  
Firstcareer: How does your salary compare to what you'd be making if you pursued your second choice career?
18. What do you think of the idea of salary being based on performance?
19. Do you know anything about national board certification?  
No: It's a national process of identifying master teachers and paying them more.  
What do you think about this?  
Yes: What do you think about this?
20. What do you think about the Massachusetts signing bonus program?  
Recipient: What would you have done if you had *not* received the bonus?
21. There have been some efforts to create a structure, sometimes called a "career ladder" where a teacher would take on different responsibilities and earn more pay. Is that of interest to you?
22. Does teaching offer you a "good fit" as a career?
23. How long do you plan to stay in teaching?
- Will family influence your plans?
- If respondent plans to leave teaching:
- What would it take to keep you in teaching longer?
  - If a career ladder were in place, would that affect your decision to remain in teaching?
24. These are the four topics we are researching: Teacher Careers, Professional Culture, Curriculum and Assessment, and Incentives and Rewards. Given these topics, is there anything else that you would like to add?

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> All figures are adjusted for inflation and expressed in 1998 dollars.

<sup>2</sup> The *Education Week* analysis used data from the US Census Bureau's 1992-1999 "Current Population Survey-March Supplement."

<sup>3</sup> Average undergraduate tuition and fees at public 4-year institutions rose 79% from 1976-77 to 1996-97 from \$1,670 to \$2,987 (constant 1996 dollars). Average tuition and fees at private 4-year institutions rose 88% from \$6,859 to \$12,881. At the same time, according to the US Census Bureau, median household income has stayed flat (From \$34,244 to \$36,446 in 1998 dollars).

<sup>4</sup> All of the respondents, who were assured confidentiality and anonymity, are identified with pseudonyms throughout this discussion.

<sup>5</sup> Three of the teachers in our sample were teaching approximately half time. Their salaries are converted to their full-time equivalents for the purposes of reporting. In addition, one teacher whose salary is an outlier is excluded from this range. Her situation is atypical because she taught in another country and received special credit for this experience.

<sup>6</sup> Jerry, the full-time substitute, took his position because he wanted a foot in the door at the school. The teacher whose position he is filling is expected to retire after next year, and Jerry has an understanding with his principal that if he does a good job, he will be seriously considered as the replacement.

<sup>7</sup> According to the 1998 Salary Survey by the American Federation of Teachers (1999), in 1997-98 the average beginning teacher salary was \$27,238 in Massachusetts and \$25,735 in the United States as a whole.

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â€œBarely Breaking Evenâ€™: Incentives, Rewards, and the High Costs of Choosing to Teach,â€ with E. Liu, S. M. Kardos, D. Kauffman, and H. G. Peske. Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April, 2000. "Reform Bargaining and its Promise for School Improvement," with S. M. Kardos. Marginal cost is the change in total cost resulting from an action. As long as the marginal benefit of an activity exceeds the marginal cost, people are better off doing more of it; when the marginal cost exceeds the marginal benefit, they are better off doing less of it. To determine the optimal level of a public policy program, voters and government officials must compare the marginal benefits and marginal costs of providing a little more or a little less of the programâ€™s services.Â Comparing the benefits and costs of different allocation methods in order to choose the method that is most appropriate for some specific problem can result in more effective allocations and a more effective overall allocation system.Â 4. Incentives are the rewards or punishments that shape peopleâ€™s choices. Barely Breaking Even. Introduction Recent predictions that, within the next decade, the U.S. will need to hire 2.2 million teachers (Gerald & Hussar, 1998) and rising concerns about the quality of the teaching force have focused attention on strategies to attract and retain new teachers. Amidst these concerns, analysts and policymakers are revisiting the issue of teachersâ€™ compensation.Â Within this context, new teachersâ€™ perceptions of the costs and benefits of choosing to teach might be expected to differ from those of previous cohorts of entering teachers.Â Barely Breaking Even. Incentives and Rewards Intrinsic Rewards Consistent with prior research (Johnson, 1990; Lortie, 1975), the new teachers we interviewed reported entering teaching in search of intrinsic rewards.