

Director's Report

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Here are some statistics to digest:

- The Baltimore City Public School System hires approximately 900 new teachers each year. Of that number, 520 – more than half – in 2001-2002 were new hires with no experience. 467 were provisional (non-certified) teachers. In 1999-2000, 330 first-year and 165 second-year teachers left the BCPSS. In 2001-2002, 248 first-year teachers and 138 second-year teachers left the system.
- The Prince George's County School System hires 1500-2000 new teachers and loses 1500 each year. 545 of their newest hires are beginning teachers, 369 of whom are provisional.
- Overall, 30% of Maryland teachers have less than five years' experience. One of our 2002 Summer Fellows, Tracey Happhold Brown, described to us a frightening scenario in her school: she has two years of teaching experience. In the next two years, everyone else in her department will be retiring, leaving her, with four years' experience, as the senior member of her department.

It is clear from these stories that there are not enough support mechanisms in place to help new teachers transition into urban school systems. They come to the job eager to play a thoughtful, caring, and influential role in the lives of young people, but the rewards of teaching can be fragile and uncertain. One young teacher said, "I started the year with excitement, confidence, and lots of ideas. But I find the encounters I have in my classroom often feel like battles and I'm the one who ends up with the most bruises and lost lifeblood."

The National Writing Project (NWP) understands that for novice teachers, career entry is a vulnerable phase, especially for those in urban settings, where the national dropout rate has been reported to be as high as 50% in the first two years. Always on the cutting edge of educational reform, the NWP has created the New Teacher Initiative (NTI) to address this crisis in teaching. The initiative asks us to discover what it takes to support new teachers so they will remain in the profession and develop into highly effective classroom educators.

The Maryland Writing Project was one of eight sites to receive a \$10,000 grant from the NWP to work with new urban teachers. This past year, we have used the grant to support T-Cs who mentored new teachers in their own schools, transmitting to them the culture of the system and decreasing their sense of isolation. Our mentors provided these new teachers with personal, emotional, and problem-focused support, but both the mentors and their mentees benefited from sharing in a supportive atmosphere, learning from each other and sharing their concerns. Because this initiative fostered professional growth not only for new teachers but for the T-C mentors as well, it has strengthened our site as a whole.

As the first year of the Maryland Writing Project's New Teacher Initiative comes to an end, I'd like to take some time to reflect on the important work that the T-Cs involved in this project have been engaged in. Renate Jones '01, Gina Anazco '02, Jennifer Goulston '02, Diane Pinkney '02, Linda Wharton '91 and Del Arnold '97 deserve several "Whoohoos!" for their efforts to help achieve our goals of supporting new urban teachers and helping to integrate them into the profession. And since this initiative is sponsored by the National Writing Project, of course writing has been integral to achieving these goals.



(l to r) Jen Goulston '02, Diane Pinkney '02, Del Arnold '97, Renate Jones '01, Gina Anazco '02, (seated) Linda Wharton '91

The anecdotal data we have collected illustrate the growth and level of satisfaction the new teachers have experienced. Jen Goulston reports that one of her mentees, Joe Manko, told her that the support he has received this year has been crucial for him to make it through each day. Gina Anazco reports that through her work as a mentor she has already seen the benefits of the New Teacher Initiative in her school. The teachers she works with have had the opportunity to be presented with best practices in writing. In addition, her principal was grateful for the program and an enthusiastic supporter of Gina and her two mentees, Erica Czaja and Veronica Lay, noting that they looked more confident and happy which

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(l-r) Gina Anazco '02, NTI mentees Skylar Edgecomb and Erica Czaja, and Diane Pinkney '02 at the NTI retreat at Bon Secours Spiritual Center.

she hopes will result in their students' success.

Miya Jackson, one of Diane Pinkney's mentees, noted how flexible the program was, custom-made and tailored to meet her specific needs. And Diane's other mentee, Skylar Edgecomb, added that the NTI has been a positive experience for her in this, her first hectic year of teaching.

Our T-C mentors have been available to listen to their mentees' successes, frustrations, and challenges while being patient and accepting. The new teachers' concerns have guided them. They report that their experience this year has greatly impacted their way of thinking and working. At the professional level, they have had to think about others' needs along with the potential instructional implications of the work that they have been doing. As facilitators, they have learned to plan, prepare, and conduct weekly meetings, skills that they can use throughout their professional careers.

The T-C mentors had other professional development opportunities as well. Jen, Renate, and Diane all participated in the NWP Annual Meeting in Atlanta, where they were able to meet with other NTI sites, and Linda, Diane, Gina, and Del all traveled to Boston to an end-of-the-year NTI retreat at Babson College. Gina and Renate flew to the annual Urban Sites conference in California, the theme of which was "Writing Under the Influence." Gina says, "My experience at the Urban Sites Conference in Santa

Barbara gave me the opportunity to network with other professionals who share common interests and visions, learn effective proven writing techniques, and get inspired to write 'under the influence.' I have become a stronger writer and thinker. My professional and personal learning has been enhanced by the many opportunities afforded by this project, particularly through the professional interaction and inspiration inspired by so many dedicated educators."

Linda Wharton adds, "This experience has been awesome. It has been the glue that has strengthened and enriched my MWP experience for the past year. The connection is so important to my professional growth. I love the intergenerational feel of this experience!"

The MWP has been awarded a renewal of this grant for the 2003 -2004 school year. We are looking forward to continuing our work.

MWPily yours,
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New Teacher Initiative mentors and mentees at the NTI retreat: (seated) Frederick Price, Cornelia Vanderlain, Erica Czaja, Stephanie Shorr, Gina Anazco '02 and Joe Manko; (standing) Skylar Edgecomb, Diana Sennaar and Miya Jackson