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The New York Times

City Will Offer Housing Subsidy to Lure Teachers

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Abstract (Document Summary)

New York City will offer housing **subsidies** of up to \$14,600 to entice **new** math, science and special education teachers to work in the **city's** most challenging **schools**, in one of the most aggressive housing incentive programs in the nation to address a chronic shortage of qualified educators in these specialties.

Ms. [Elizabeth Arons] said the housing incentives were aimed at experienced teachers from other districts and those who had left the profession largely because there were so few teachers coming out of graduate **schools** certified to teach science or math. "There are no math and science teachers coming out of universities," she said. "This is not anything that's **new**, it's across the nation. It's been talked about for the last 20 years. We are all faced with the alternative structures."

The shortage of math and science teachers has recently moved to the forefront of the nation's education agenda. According to a recent report by the National Academy of Sciences, nearly 60 percent of eighth graders in American **schools** -- double the international average -- are taught math by teachers who neither majored in math nor studied it to pass a certification exam.

Full Text (1355 words)

Copyright New York Times Company Apr 19, 2006

New York City will offer housing subsidies of up to \$14,600 to entice new math, science and special education teachers to work in the city's most challenging schools, in one of the most aggressive housing incentive programs in the nation to address a chronic shortage of qualified educators in these specialties.

To be eligible for the subsidies, teachers must have at least two years' experience. City officials said they hoped the program, to be announced by the city Education Department today, would immediately lead to the hiring of an extra 100 teachers for September and, with other recruitment efforts, ultimately help fill as many as 600 positions now held by teachers without the proper credentials.

Under terms of the program, negotiated with the city teachers' union, the administration of Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg will pay as much as \$5,000 up front to the recruits for housing expenses, including the cost of moving to the New York area, a down payment on buying a home, or broker fees and security deposits for renters.

The program will also pay a \$400 monthly housing stipend for two years. Teachers can live wherever they want within the metropolitan region but must commit to work for three years in one of New York City's toughest middle schools or high schools. The city's effort comes as the nation faces a chronic shortage of math, science and special education teachers that has sparked heavy competition to court such educators.

City education officials said they plan to market the new program forcefully on recruiting trips to the Northwest, the Southeast and especially California, where housing costs are also high.

Former New York City teachers who have been out of the system for at least two years will also be eligible for the subsidies. Teachers already living in the New York area who switch to the city schools could simply use the money to pay their existing rent or mortgage.

"What you are starting to see is a very different compensation structure for teachers in the City of New York, different from the traditional lockstep thinking on teacher pay and seniority," Schools Chancellor Joel I. Klein said in an interview yesterday, "based on system need and performance."

Mr. Klein also cited a provision in the latest city teachers' contract, approved this fall, that created a new master teacher position with additional pay of \$10,000 a year. "The differentials will have power to attract people," Mr. Klein said, "to give our city a competitive advantage."

Depending on experience, teachers eligible for the subsidies will earn base salaries of \$45,600 to \$69,840 a year. The city projects that the housing assistance will cost about \$15,000 per teacher, including federal payroll taxes and other ancillary charges, for a total of perhaps \$1.5 million a year until the shortage abates.

While that is a relatively minor sum in the context of the system's annual budget of more than \$15 billion, officials said the program had a value that far outstripped its cost.

"It has a major impact as far as really sending a signal to those teachers that we want you and will be really creative in attracting you here," said Deputy Mayor Dennis Walcott, the mayor's top education aide at City Hall.

Elizabeth Arons, the city Education Department's chief executive for human resources, said that for September the city expected that it would need to hire 800 math teachers, 450 science teachers and 1,300 special education teachers simply to fill routine vacancies created by retirements, sabbaticals, leaves of absence and attrition.

Most of these jobs will be staffed by participants in alternative teaching certification programs like Teach for America and the New York City Teaching Fellows, she said. Even once these positions are filled, there will be about 100 to 200 positions in each specialty filled by a teacher not specifically certified for that subject.

It is common for science teachers to be assigned to math classes and vice versa and in some schools English and history teachers also must teach math and science.

Ms. Arons said the housing incentives were aimed at experienced teachers from other districts and those who had left the profession largely because there were so few teachers coming out of graduate schools certified to teach science or math. "There are no math and science teachers coming out of universities," she said. "This is not anything that's new, it's across the nation. It's been talked about for the last 20 years. We are all faced with the alternative structures."

The shortage of math and science teachers has recently moved to the forefront of the nation's education agenda. According to a recent report by the National Academy of Sciences, nearly 60 percent of eighth graders in American schools -- double the international average -- are taught math by teachers who neither majored in math nor studied it to pass a certification exam.

President Bush this year proposed to retrain teachers to increase the ranks of advanced placement and international baccalaureate teachers in math and science by 70,000 over four years.

The shortage of qualified math and science and special education teachers has also become a much more urgent problem for states and school districts because of the federal No Child Left Behind law, which sanctions schools that do not make sufficient annual progress in certain subjects.

The law currently requires annual testing in English and math and will mandate testing in science beginning in the 2007-8 school year. In addition, states and districts must show progress among various subgroups of students, among them children receiving special education services.

Randi Weingarten, the president of the teachers' union, the United Federation of Teachers, said that her union had growing concerns that the state might force the transfer of veteran teachers into struggling schools if steps were not taken to create incentives and get volunteers.

"We solved the problem in probably one of the most innovative ways we could," she said. "Affordable housing is really important to recruit and retain teachers."

The deal marked a rare example of cooperation between the union and the Bloomberg administration.

While other school districts across the country have sought to make housing more affordable for teachers, experts said New York City's program appeared to be one of the most concerted and generous efforts specifically aimed at teachers in subject areas with the worst shortages. Chicago, for instance, offers up to \$7,500 in housing aid to all teachers but requires newly hired teachers to live in the city.

In California, a state program offers teachers substantial help with the down payment on a home that depending on the local market can amount to \$20,000 or more. But the money must be repaid.

And some local districts, like Santa Clara and San Jose, in extremely hot housing markets have their own programs that include monthly stipends or subsidized rentals in district-owned housing developments. When programs are combined, some teachers can get as much as \$100,000 in home-buying help, said Ken Giebel, a spokesman for the California Housing Finance Agency. But much of the money has to be repaid.

In New York City, teachers who get the housing assistance would likely also be eligible for four years of up to \$3,400 in annual tuition reimbursement from New York State under a separate incentive plan promoted by the Pataki administration several years ago to recruit educators into high-needs schools.

And they would potentially be eligible to use their housing assistance from the city in conjunction with an existing federal program called Teacher Next Door that offers teachers the chance to buy homes in depressed urban neighborhoods at half price.

Andrew M. Cuomo, who as federal housing secretary helped create the Teacher Next Door program, praised New York City's new effort. "It's smart," said Mr. Cuomo, a Democrat who is running for State Attorney General. "The cities tend to pay lower salaries than the surrounding suburbs and the cost of housing is higher, so it's double trouble."

Teachers receiving housing assistance will have to sign a contract requiring them to repay part of the money if they fail to serve three years in a struggling school.

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