

More teachers green in the classroom

By Greg Toppo, USA TODAY

Updated 9/5/2012 7:21 AM

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WASHINGTON – With three years of teaching under her belt, Allison Frieze nearly qualifies as a grizzled veteran. The 28-year-old special education teacher at E.L. Haynes Public Charter School here already has more experience than the typical U.S. teacher.

She remembers her first year and says no new teacher really wants to relive that. "You have so many pressures on you and you're kind of swimming, trying to keep your head above water with all of the things you have to do," Frieze says.

Research suggests that parents this fall are more likely than ever to find that their child's teachers are relatively new to the profession, and possibly very young.

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Recent findings by Richard Ingersoll at the [University of Pennsylvania](#) show that as teacher attrition rates have risen, from about 10% to 13% for first-year teachers, schools are having to hire large numbers of new teachers. Between 40% to 50% of those entering the profession now leave within five years in what Ingersoll calls a "constant replenishment of beginners."

The end result: a more than threefold increase in the sheer number of inexperienced teachers in U.S. schools. In the 1987-88 school year, Ingersoll estimates, there were about 65,000 first-year teachers; by 2007-08, the number had grown to more than 200,000. In the 1987-88 school year, he found, the biggest group of teachers had 15 years of experience. By the 2007-08 school year, the most recent data available, the biggest group of teachers

had one year experience.

What should parents expect from these new teachers, and how should they interact?

For one thing, get used to communicating online with them, says Susan Fuhrman, president of Columbia University's Teachers College.

"They're going to be much better at technology," she says. "They're going to have grown up digital natives," drawn to technology and less afraid of it than their parents' generation. They're also more likely to see the possibilities in emerging software such as games, simulations and classroom management software.

The growth of publicly funded, but privately run charter schools such as Haynes, where Frieze now works, means that more young teachers view parents as consumers and likely won't be put off by probing questions, says Tim Daly of TNTP, formerly known as [The New Teacher Project](#), a New York-based non-profit that provides teachers to schools nationwide. Daly notes that today's 22-year-old teacher was 11 when the federal No Child Left Behind law was born. It mandated annual

By Sam Roberts, AP

Students across the country are more likely to see new teachers this fall.

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Teachers get greener
Teachers with five years of experience or less

Source: Richard Ingersoll and Lisa Merrill, University of Pennsylvania

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testing in reading and mathematics nationwide. "These people came of age in an era when teachers were beginning to be held accountable for outcomes," he says.

Fuhrman, who acknowledges the excesses of too much test prep, actually thinks this may be a good thing with new teachers. "They're very used to standardized testing," she says. "They've grown up with it in some way. Maybe that's healthy, in that they would be less obsessed with it."

Heather Peske of Teach Plus, a Boston-based non-profit that works to improve teacher quality in six cities, says parents should ask new teachers to explain the tests they're using. Parents shouldn't just settle for cursory descriptions either. Instead, she says, ask, "What do those enormous acronym mean? What is DIBELS (a reading test)? Explain those to me and explain to me where my child falls relative to other kids in the class."

Most students have their reading skills tested early in the school year. "As a parent, I would want to see the assessment and I would want to see the results of the assessment," Peske says. "And I would want the teacher to help translate for me what that means for my child." Even new teachers should also have a plan to improve kids' learning.

Jessica Stefon, a fourth-year teacher at Stanton Elementary School, also in the [District of Columbia](#), says she makes it a priority to keep parents in the loop because it's essential for a student's success. "You're a collective unit boosting that child up," she says.

Peske says the so-called greening of the profession doesn't necessarily mean that families will find "fresh-faced 23-year-olds in every classroom." Like Stefon, who's 30, many new teachers are career-changers who have experienced functional workplaces. These teachers will expect adequate materials, for one thing, and the chance to collaborate with co-workers. "I do think that's good for the profession," Peske says.

But parents shouldn't be surprised if young teachers soon leave the classroom for better paying jobs. With teachers moving around more, parents should also ask how the school keeps their replacements current on student progress.

"If there's not stability in the (teaching) force, what is the stability of the information about my child?" Peske says. "If the kindergarten teacher leaves after two years, how do I know the second-grade teacher is not going to replicate the same topic?"

Frieze, who's also earning her master's degree, says she has questions of her own each fall. She likes to find out as much about her students as possible: Who lives with the child? What does he or she do after school? What's the family routine? She looks for "red-flag concerns" such as whether a student needs help getting to school on time. "It's helpful to know all those things up front," she says. "Finding it out as you go along kind of makes things difficult."

After only three years, Frieze has become more comfortable in the classroom. "Things come more naturally — you just become more efficient and it isn't as emotionally taxing," she says, then reconsidered. "It still is, but it isn't as overwhelming."

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Posted 9/5/2012 7:00 AM | Updated 9/5/2012 7:21 AM

