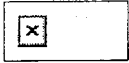


Teachers May get Housing Incentives



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Teachers may get housing incentives

July 25, 2001

BY FRAN SPIELMAN CITY HALL REPORTER

The Chicago Board of Education is exploring the possibility of offering a generous array of housing incentives--ranging from dormitories for student teachers to bargain rents for veterans--to lure teachers against the tide of a nationwide teachers shortage.

"This is a sellers market. This is not the old days, where we'd say to a candidate, 'Look, kid. You take this assignment and, if you don't like it, there's another person waiting right behind you,'" said Carlos Ponce, chief of human resources for the Chicago Board of Education.

"We are out there recruiting talent and we're trying to sell them on Chicago. We have to do the same thing the private sector is doing. . . . We're looking for ways to get an advantage."

Incentives offered to attract teachers could run the gamut--from low-interest loans and down payment grants to dorm space for student teachers, convincing developers to set aside blocks of affordable rental units and even establishing a nonprofit corporation to assist in the development of housing for teachers, Deputy Housing Commissioner David Saltzman said.

"Housing, if you package it right, can be a powerful incentive," he said.

After a nationwide recruiting drive that has featured visits to 60 college campuses, Chicago is currently 800 teachers short of its goal of hiring 3,000 teachers this summer. It hasn't been an easy task. Across the nation and here at home, teachers are retiring and vacancies are going unfilled.

Over the next five years, one-third of Chicago's 27,000 teachers are expected



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to be eligible for retirement. Meanwhile, rival big cities have raided Midwest talent.

On Tuesday, the Board of Education moved to take the offensive with an assist from a City Council committee. The Budget Committee on Tuesday authorized a \$48,000 grant to the Local Initiatives Support Corporation to help underwrite a \$134,000 study aimed at developing specific housing incentives for teachers.

The three-month study will be conducted by UniDev LLC, a Bethesda, Md., company that has developed similar incentives for Stanford University. Since 1997, all newly hired Chicago public school teachers have been required to live in the city, under a residency rule that exempted veteran teachers.

Ald. Freddrenna Lyle (6th) said she has no problem offering housing incentives--beyond the no-interest, \$3,000 to \$5,000 relocation loan currently offered to teachers in special education and other "critical needs" areas. But Lyle said at least some of the housing bonuses should be tied to a commitment to live and teach in impoverished neighborhoods--not to lure teachers to Lincoln Park.

"I have a community that has not had one [new] classroom in 39 years, so excuse me if I'm concerned about what we're doing with our money," Lyle said.

Saltzman said he anticipates a multitiered incentive package. "There'll be some generic programs that generally offer attractive financing for teachers, but there will be targeted programs that create powerful incentives for people to teach in areas that have difficulty recruiting teachers," he said.

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