

# Despite bleak job market, future teachers are confident they'll find jobs



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Published: 28 November 2011 11:13 PM

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The bleak job market for teachers doesn't scare a group of students enrolled in an adolescent development class at Southern Methodist University.

These future teachers are determined to pursue their chosen career — and they're confident they'll find jobs educating middle and high school students.

"We might have a competitive edge as new teachers," said Stacy Alvizo, who plans to become a Spanish teacher.

While jobs are scarce, she believes cash-strapped school districts would prefer to hire rookie teachers who are on the low end of the wage scale over more experienced educators.

And, said Jessica McGarvey, there's still a call for math and science teachers.

"I just worry that so many are responding to the call," said McGarvey, who plans to teach math at the middle school level.

Despite the youthful optimism, it's hard to overlook the impact of education cutbacks, even as experts warn about the prospect of a teacher shortage.

An estimated 294,000 jobs in the education sector have been lost nationwide since 2008, according to the American Association of School Administrators.

In Texas, almost 12,000 teaching jobs were lost during the 2010-11 school year, according to Moak, Casey and Associates, a Texas school finance and accountability research firm.

## Thinning ranks

The Dallas school district thinned its ranks by more than 1,000 teachers through a recent buyout offer. The district is now considering closing 11 schools.

The Lewisville school district is considering continuing a buyout program that shed more than 200 employees at the end of the last school year. Trustees are discussing spending up to \$2 million to encourage another 250 employees to quit in 2012.

Richland College is phasing out its two-year teacher preparation program in the face of declining enrollment and dismal job prospects.

"We didn't feel there were adequate job opportunities," said Mary Daring, dean of learning enrichment and academic development at the Dallas community college.

Michael Berg, a senior at the University of North Texas, knows how the cutbacks are affecting teachers.

His parents are teachers in the Denton school district, which laid off 80 employees in April.

"They were scared about losing their jobs," Berg said.

As a result, he reconsidered his plan to become a science teacher and landed an internship with a financial company. But the experience didn't prove as fulfilling as teaching.

"Doing my student teaching has reaffirmed my decision [to become a teacher]," said the 22-year-old, who will graduate in May. "Interacting with kids is something that's unexplainable."

## Alternative path

Students getting their credentials through the traditional college route may have an advantage over those who have become teachers through the alternative certification program.

"They are in the best position to get a job if there is a job," said Dr. Pamela Harrell, an associate professor in the College of Education at the University of North Texas.

When Irving ISD cut teachers in April, most of the casualties were products of alternative certification training programs. Like other districts, certification was the first factor officials considered in layoffs.

Not surprisingly, the University of North Texas — which has one of the largest education departments in the state — has seen a significant drop in teachers going through the alternative program.

Last year, only 27 UNT graduates received this type of certification, down from 69 in 2007, according to the Texas Education Agency.

At the same time, UNT saw an increase in the number of students becoming teachers through the traditional college route. Those numbers grew from 542 in 2007 to 618 in 2010.

Other area universities saw similar increases over the last four years, even though teaching positions were slashed during that period.

At the University of Texas at Arlington, students who received traditional teaching certificates grew from 288 in 2007 to 325 in 2010.

Southern Methodist University saw those numbers increase from 27 to 34 during that period, according to Texas Education Agency data.

But experts warn those numbers can be deceiving.

After peaking in 2008, the number of new teaching certificates issued by the state declined over the past two years, according to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

Board spokesman Dominic Chavez believes the drop is linked to the tight job market.

"It's got to have some impact," he said.

Last year, 25,078 teachers were certified, 27 percent below the goal of 34,600, board data shows. If the trend continues, Texas won't meet its goal to have 44,700 new teachers certified in 2015.

To remain competitive, Texas must have sufficient numbers of teachers to keep up with attrition and population growth, Chavez said.

"If we don't have enough effective teachers," he said, "we can't hope to have enough college-ready students who will graduate and meet our workforce needs in the future."

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