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March 12, 2007

# 75% of education school grads can't get jobs in Michigan

## State's economic woes hit teaching jobs hard, accelerating brain drain

**Marisa Schultz / The Detroit News**

Michigan universities continue to graduate large numbers of new teachers -- an estimated 7,000 will be certified this year -- but three-fourths won't land jobs here because there aren't enough teaching positions to go around.

That hastens the brain drain of young professionals who abandon Michigan to find jobs elsewhere, and it's a burden to taxpayers who help pay for college degrees that benefit other states, some say.

"It's just sad that after you've been in school for so long and work so hard, you have to go someplace else to do what you want to do," said Katrina Newnum, 29, a 2005 Grand Valley State University graduate who hoped to teach in state.

"I never thought that I would be moving all the way to North Carolina to be teaching."

Despite the glut of elementary teachers in particular, teaching remains among Michigan's most popular college majors. Yet the numbers of engineering and biomedical/health graduates have dropped since 2000 -- even though some experts believe those fields are critical to turning around Michigan's bleak economy.

On average, Michigan taxpayers spend \$5,800 to support each student for one year's study at a public university. "Education schools ... are farming out education grads at a rate much higher than Michigan can employ. In effect, we are exporting teachers at the taxpayers' expense," said John Bebow, executive director of the Center for Michigan, a public policy think tank founded by newspaper publisher Phil Power.

Lou Glazer, president of Michigan Future Inc., another Ann Arbor think tank, said the ultimate question is: What's the purpose of public funding for higher education?

"To fill Michigan jobs or to help kids who grow up in Michigan realize their dreams, no matter where they find work? They are both worthwhile goals. Historically, the answer has been the latter," he said.

Michigan State Superintendent of Public Instruction Mike Flanagan recognizes the vast disconnect between supply and demand.

"There are thousands and thousands of teachers without job opportunities in Michigan," he said.

While colleges keep producing elementary teachers, Michigan schools need teachers of special education, secondary math and science and language arts, he said.

Flanagan wants colleges to be held accountable to how well they are meeting the state's supply and demand needs for teachers. Scholarships, he said, are one way that colleges can help channel students to different specializations.

"Otherwise, you are subsidizing kids with public dollars who go to another state and we are still stuck holding the bag with not enough math and science teachers," Flanagan said.

## Future is in technology

Michigan is trying to jumpstart the diversification of its economy with the 21st Century Jobs Fund, a multiyear \$2 billion public-private venture designed to attract advanced technology businesses in the areas of advanced manufacturing, alternative energy, homeland security and life sciences.

"That's clearly where the state sees the future," said Michael Shore, spokesman for the Michigan Economic Development Corp., which administers the program.

About 45 percent of the bachelor's degrees conferred at Michigan's 15 public colleges in 2005 were in science, business, computers and math-related fields.

But over the past six years, the number of graduates has grown considerably in fields such as teaching (up 23 percent), communications and journalism (up 51 percent) and visual and performing arts (up 41 percent). At Western Michigan University, students who are undecided about their major have access to plenty of information on the job market and hot fields, said spokeswoman Cheryl Roland.

"Most students come to us with a career in mind and they are attracted to WMU by the quality of program in the major they plan to pursue," Roland said. "We can't slot students into being engineers or scientists when they aren't interested or academically prepared for that direction."

Even if Newnum had known of Michigan's surplus of elementary teachers, she wouldn't have picked another major.

She looked for a job in Michigan after graduation, but after one year and no luck, she moved to North Carolina, where a Michigan friend had already landed a job.

"I've always known I wanted to be a teacher," said Newnum, who loves her job. "I probably would have still chosen to be a teacher and just prayed that things change soon."

Her situation has become increasingly typical. There are about 125,000 certified teachers among the state's school districts. And there aren't 7,000 job openings annually to employ all the newly minted teachers.

Meanwhile, the declining school age population in Michigan means schools aren't creating many new jobs.

"You have students who really have a passion to teach elementary education and you can't sway them from that," said Crystal Walrath, a career development associate at Eastern Michigan University. "But a lot of students who are graduating haven't done enough research to realize that the jobs are not plentiful here in Michigan."

## More teachers exist than jobs

In 2005, Michigan granted the fifth highest number of education bachelor's degrees in the nation. Yet it ranks No. 8 in the nation for school-age children.

Like the other top teacher-producing states such as New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Illinois, Michigan produces thousands of more teachers each year than it needs.

States with teacher shortages -- Arizona, Florida and the Carolinas, for example -- clamor to hire Michigan education graduates. Grand Valley State University, in fact, holds a separate job fair for out-of-state districts. Competition is fierce for the few teacher openings in Michigan.

In Rochester, for example, 1,000 people applied for 54 teaching positions -- some of them part-time jobs at the start of this school year.

"Districts are definitely getting the best teachers that are out there, because they have so many to pick from," said Danelle Gittus, public relations specialist at Oakland Schools.

Universities could shrink their education programs to limit the excess teachers in the state, said Sharif Shakrani, director of MSU's Education Policy Center. But the programs are market-driven and graduates do find jobs -- just not necessarily in Michigan.

Growth in teaching jobs doesn't seem likely soon.

The state anticipates a loss of 15,000 public school students next year and the census predicts a steady drop in Michigan's school age population until 2015.

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