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Fewer choosing teaching jobs

By Kavan Peterson, Stateline.org Staff Writer

Classroom enrollment is up in most parts of the country and so is the demand for public school teachers. But many states report that fewer people are choosing to become teachers -- a trend that could lead to a national teacher shortage crisis, especially if baby boomers, who make up the largest age group in the profession, begin retiring en masse.

Increases in college tuition and new pressures to up student test scores have made low-paying teaching jobs less appealing, education advocates say. And because today's college graduates and new teachers typically change careers every five to seven years, turnover for teachers is at a record high.

An estimated half of all teachers leave the field within five years. The turnover costs states an estimated \$2.2 billion a year, according to one [estimate](#), and leaves shortages in critical subject areas.

The shortfall is hitting schools hardest in the core subjects of math and science and in traditionally hard-to-staff areas such as special education and language training for non-English speakers, according to the American Association for Employment in Education (AAEE), which has tracked teacher supply and demand trends for nearly 30 years.

President Bush spotlighted the problem in his State of the Union address in January by proposing \$380 million to recruit more math and science teachers to boost America's international competitiveness. Many governors are pushing initiatives of their own, such as Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney's recent proposal to offer \$15,000 bonuses to attract new math and science teachers.

State institutions of higher education have not been graduating enough teachers in math, chemistry and physics for more than a dozen years, said AAEE executive director B.J. Bryant. But in 2005, school administrators surveyed by AAEE in nearly every region in the United States reported not having enough teachers to fill positions in more than 30 subject areas, nearly half the 64 fields covered by the survey. Besides shortfalls in the sciences, nearly every state reported significant shortages in qualified special education teachers, who specialize in teaching students with mental and physical disabilities.

The shortage is expected to get more severe because nearly one-third of all U.S. teachers are ages 55 and older, Bryant said.

"Whenever that group of 55-year-plus begins to feel secure enough to retire, we'll see a demand in almost every field of teaching that will be impossible to meet," she said.

Sun Belt states such as California, Florida, Georgia, North and South Carolina and Texas are feeling the worst crunch, Bryant said.

North Carolina, for example, has to look outside the state to fill more than half its 10,000 teaching openings every year, according to the state Department of Public Instruction. By fall 2006, Florida will need to fill 30,000 teaching positions, almost double the amount in previous years because of a spike in retirement and the demands of a 2002 constitutional amendment to reduce classroom sizes. California was able to fill fewer than half of the 2,100 openings for high school math teachers in 2004, according to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing.

