

# Teacher Recruitment: Strategies for Widening the Teaching Pool in a Shrinking Economy

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

The negative consequences of the current economic recession are vast, both for the education field and for all sectors of society. Yet one benefit has emerged from these recent tough economic times: Teaching is becoming a more attractive career choice.

Although states and local policymakers should *always* work proactively to attract effective teachers to the profession, the impact of the economic recession—combined with a new public agenda focused on social responsibility—can open a window of opportunity to renew these efforts to encourage talented, caring, and committed professionals to consider teaching, particularly in chronic teacher-shortage areas.

### In This Brief

This brief explores a surge in interest in teaching as a career choice during the economic recession and presents ideas and strategies for individuals involved in efforts to encourage talented, caring, and committed professionals to consider teaching, particularly in chronic teacher shortage areas.

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## Introduction

As layoffs increase, employment prospects grow bleaker, and an idealistic and education-minded new generation of workers begins to make career decisions (Behrstock & Clifford, 2009), many individuals evaluating the salaries and job security of different professions are considering teaching. Within months of the 2008 economic downturn, prestigious alternative-route teaching programs have seen a marked increase in their applications. In the first three months of 2009, Teach For America received 35,000 applications—42 percent more than the previous year (Associated Press, 2009), with as many as 10 percent of seniors at some top universities applying to this teaching program (Borsuk & McClain, 2008). Likewise, during that same period, nearly 30,000 applications—a 44 percent increase over 2008—floated in to The New Teacher Project (TNTP), which helps people transition into teaching from other careers (Associated Press, 2009).

This heightened interest in teaching is not restricted to U.S. teaching programs. The Japan Exchange Teaching program saw a 15 percent increase in U.S. applicants in

the first three months of 2009, and Reach to Teach, which sends recent university graduates to teach in Taiwan, South Korea, and China, saw a 100 percent increase in the number of applications between September 2008 and March 2009, compared to the number of applicants over the same period last year (Yam, 2009).

At least one traditional teacher preparation program abroad also has seen a surge in applicants. In England, applications to teacher training programs increased by more than 10 percent between September 2008 and February 2009, compared to the same period the previous year (Scott, 2009).

States and districts can capitalize on this heightened interest in the profession by enhancing and strategically targeting recruitment efforts to the areas in greatest need. Indeed, it is arguably *only* by providing all children access to high-quality teachers that the types of higher order thinking and communication skills needed for 21st century jobs and 21st century global peace and stability will be sufficiently prevalent.

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## Promoting the Teaching Profession

Promoting the teaching profession, however, can be a challenging endeavor. Although rated a higher prestige occupation than blue-collar professions, teaching ranks behind law, medicine, accounting, academia, and science and is often considered a “semiprofession” (Ingersoll & Perda, 2007; Lortie, 1975).

Public perception about teaching may be driven in part by the comparatively low salaries of teachers (Ingersoll & Perda, 2007) and the perceived drawbacks of the profession. In a 2000 Public Agenda survey, recent college graduates not employed as teachers cited more downsides than advantages in the teaching profession. Drawbacks included low pay, lack of appreciation and respect, unsafe working conditions, and lack of opportunities for advancement (Farkas, Johnson, & Foleno, 2000).

Consequently, many schools and districts face teacher recruitment challenges and teacher shortages. Recruitment is most difficult for schools and districts in high-poverty areas that serve minority students. Students in these schools are least likely to be taught by high-quality teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2002; DeAngelis, Presley, & White, 2005; Goe, 2002; Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2004; Ingersoll, 2002; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Useem & Farley, 2004). Teacher

shortages also persist in certain subject areas—mathematics, science, bilingual education, and special education—and in urban and rural schools with high numbers of inexperienced and out-of-field teachers; large populations of students with special needs or English language learners (ELLs); and poor, minority, and highly mobile students (Jacob, 2007; Monk, 2007; Reeves, 2003; Southeast Center for Teaching Quality, 2002). Isolative school structures and work environments that persist in many urban and rural schools, along with geographic isolation in rural areas and lower-than-average pay in many urban and rural districts, often make these schools unattractive prospects to teachers. All this leads to inequitable distribution of teachers as more of them head to mid-sized and suburban districts (Levin & Quinn, 2003; Reeves, 2003).

In addition to inequitable distribution of teachers and teacher recruitment challenges, some schools and districts struggle to retain teachers, and the teaching profession continues to face high attrition levels. One recent study on teacher attrition estimated that 157,000 teachers leave the profession each year, and an additional 232,000 move to a different school each year, often in search of better working conditions (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2008). New teachers, who often face different and

greater challenges than their experienced counterparts (Fessler, 1995; Huberman, 1995), may be the most vulnerable to the organizational factors that contribute to teacher attrition, such as inadequate administrative support and poor working conditions (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005).

Nonetheless, there are many known advantages to teaching. Teachers who stay in the profession cite a desire to work with children, the value and significance of education in society, and interest in their subject matter as the top three reasons they are still teaching (Feistritzer & Haar, 2005). Of the college graduates under the age of 30 surveyed by Public Agenda, the vast majority agree that teaching would provide job security, allow them to do

work they love, and allow them to do work that is more beneficial to society than their current jobs (Farkas et al., 2000).

Indeed, teachers play a crucial role in society, and their work can be rewarding and stable. By publicly emphasizing the positive characteristics of teaching, states and districts can widen the pool of effective teacher candidates and, ultimately, reduce shortages and create a stronger teaching force. In England, for example, where the economic recession prompted a renewed focus on strategic advertising for the profession, the long-standing teacher-shortage areas of mathematics and science have seen an increase in applications of 25 percent and 23 percent, respectively (Scott, 2009).

## RECRUITMENT RESOURCES

The TQ Center website contains numerous resources on teacher recruitment, including several Tips & Tools Key Issues that address teacher recruitment for key areas such as mathematics and science, and for special populations, such as ELLs. For example, see the following resources:

- Garcia, P., & Potemski, A. (2009). *Recruiting teachers for schools serving English language learners* (Key Issue). Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved June 11, 2009, from <http://www2.tqsource.org/strategies/recruit/recruitingTeachersforSchoolsServingELLs.pdf>
- Hayes, K. (2009). *Recruiting teachers for urban and rural schools* (Key Issue). Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved June 11, 2009, from [http://www.tqsource.org/publications/KeyIssue\\_RecruitingUrbanRural.pdf](http://www.tqsource.org/publications/KeyIssue_RecruitingUrbanRural.pdf)
- McGraner, K. L. (2009). *Recruiting science, technology, engineering, and mathematics teachers* (Key Issue). Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. Retrieved June 11, 2009, from [http://www.tqsource.org/publications/KeyIssue\\_RecruitingSTEM.pdf](http://www.tqsource.org/publications/KeyIssue_RecruitingSTEM.pdf)

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## Getting the Message Out

There is much to be done—including improving teacher preparation and induction, working conditions, and compensation—to make teaching a more attractive profession. Such efforts to improve working conditions and support school leaders so they can, in turn, provide adequate support to teachers must occur alongside measures to promote teaching as an attractive profession.

Those leading changes to policy and practice must get the message out to high-quality prospective teaching candidates that the profession has much to offer them. A first step toward reaching out to expand the pool of high-quality teachers is to tap into the following groups and make it easy for them to find necessary information and guidance:

- Individuals with subject-area expertise who might not have previously considered teaching—particularly in high-needs subjects (mathematics, science, bilingual education, and special education), high-needs grade levels (Grades 6–12), and high-needs schools (urban and rural districts with high numbers of inexperienced and out-of-field teachers; large populations of students with special needs and ELLs; and poor, minority, and highly mobile students).
- People who are already considering teaching as a first career or second-stage career (e.g., job changers) or even retirees considering it as an “encore career.”
- Overflow applicants to prestigious alternative-route teaching programs, such as Teach For America or urban teaching fellows programs, who might consider joining the profession through other avenues.
- The “reserve pool,” that is, certified teachers who do not currently hold a teaching position for various reasons, including taking time off to raise children or pursue other employment.
- Substitute teachers. Many districts saw a surge in substitute teacher applications in the months following the 2008 economic slowdown.
- Teacher retirees or those nearing retirement. According to a 2008 report by the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, more than half of today’s teachers will be eligible to retire in the 2010–11 school year. In addition, the report indicates that 70 percent of those teachers would be interested in staying if offered phased or flexible retirement, and nearly 75 percent of them favor the idea of cross-generational learning teams that would allow them to share their wisdom and experience with less experienced educators (Carroll & Foster, 2008).

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## Ideas for States and Districts

States and districts can take a variety of approaches to reach out to these potential pools of teachers. Several efforts to promote the teaching profession are outlined in the following examples:\*

- The New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) launched its I Teach NYC program to address the shortage of high-quality teachers in the city's high-needs schools. The ad campaign includes advertisements on subway cars, busses, bus stop shelters, billboards, and television. In addition, video advertisements can be viewed online. NYCDOE also promotes its New York City Teaching Fellows program, an alternative certification route to teaching, through advertisements on subway cars, busses, bus stop shelters, billboards and television, and a website.
  - I Teach NYC website (<http://www.teachNYC.net>)
  - Television/online advertisements (<http://www.adcouncil.org/default.aspx?id=244>)
  - NYC Teaching Fellows website (<http://www.nycteachingfellows.org/>)
- In response to a resurgence of interest in the state's Future Educators Association, the New Jersey Department of Education held a statewide conference in 2008 to promote the teaching profession to high school students. More recently, the New Jersey Legislature created the Traders to Teachers Program at Montclair State University to expedite the certification process for dislocated finance professionals to teach mathematics and science.
  - Future Educators Conference (<http://www.nj.gov/education/news/2008/0523rec.htm>)
  - Traders to Teachers Program (<http://www.montclair.edu/news/article.php?ArticleID=3477&ChannelID=7>)
- Teach Arkansas, a section of the Arkansas Department of Education website, includes a short video, *Teacher, Teach Me*, which illustrates the positive characteristics of becoming a teacher (See [http://www.teacharkansas.org/teacher\\_teach\\_me\\_renewal\\_zone.html](http://www.teacharkansas.org/teacher_teach_me_renewal_zone.html)).
- The Kansas Educational Employment Board website includes four short videos that encourage teacher recruitment: one that highlights the benefits of teaching in Kansas, one geared toward career changers, one virtual recruitment fair, and one message from Governor Kathleen Sebelius (See <http://www.kansasteachingjobs.com>).

\* Because few efforts at recruiting teachers and principals into the profession, especially in high-needs schools and districts, have been evaluated for their effect on the overall educator workforce, it is beyond the scope of this brief to provide evidence of the effectiveness of these strategies or to endorse them. The strategies are offered as suggestions to spur additional ideas.

The following additional strategies for districts and states also hold promise.

### District Strategies

- Create a page on Facebook or other social networking sites, which are growing in use and popularity among people of all ages. Many U.S. teaching fellows programs and teacher associations promote themselves on Facebook.
- Network strategically with Teach For America, Reach to Teach, and urban teaching fellows programs. For example, Teach For America offers applicants who are not accepted into the program the opportunity to complete a contact release form so that other organizations, including school districts, can contact these prospective teachers.
- Expand or create alternative-certification programs, which often are quicker routes to teaching than traditional paths.
- Create programs to recognize top teachers, such as the Golden Apple program in Illinois (<http://www.goldenapple.org>).
- Create a public relations, advertising, and marketing department that uses technology to promote the positive attributes of teaching. This can be accomplished as a single district or as a pool of districts within a region.

### State Strategies

- Create programs that promote the profession to high school and college students or community members, including grow-your-own programs such as those in Illinois and in Aurora, Colorado. In North Carolina, the Prezell R. Robinson Scholars Program is designed to encourage high school students to pursue careers in teaching. The program is available only in low-wealth school systems with documented difficulty in recruiting qualified teachers.
  - Illinois Grow Your Own Teacher Education Initiative (<http://www.isbe.state.il.us/rules/archive/pdfs/60ARK.pdf>)
  - Aurora Public Schools Grow Your Own Program (<http://www.aps.k12.co.us/hr/growyourown.html>)
  - Prezell R. Robinson Scholars Program (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/recruitment/scholarships/robinson/>)
- Establish outreach programs for college students and experienced professionals with expertise in mathematics, science, and foreign languages, such as the UTeach Natural Sciences Program at the University of Texas at Austin (<http://uteach.utexas.edu>).

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## Precautions and Other Considerations

Although states and districts certainly welcome increased interest in the teaching profession, some applicants may be motivated by unrealistic notions about teaching's benefits (e.g., six-hour workdays and three months off in the summer). Therefore, states and districts should keep in mind the following considerations.

### **Emphasize the Advantages, but Be Honest About the Downsides**

Although teaching is a rewarding job, the work is also demanding. Although efforts to promote the profession should emphasize teaching's advantages, they should not ignore or downplay the more challenging aspects of the profession. For example, long, intense working hours or student misbehavior or apathy should be accurately and honestly presented during the interview process. A recent *New York Times* article cautions those who would consider teaching as a "fallback career" during difficult economic times about the challenges of teaching itself and of finding a teaching job in certain subjects and geographic areas (New York Times Editors, 2009). Efforts to promote the profession should not misrepresent these realities.

### **Carefully Screen Applicants**

Hard economic times can steer some individuals toward jobs or careers for which they are neither sincerely interested nor well suited. This could lead to ineffective teaching as well as high teacher attrition when the economy improves.

Layla Avila, vice president of teaching fellow programs for TNTF, suggests that districts increase the rigor of their screening and interview processes to ensure that teacher candidates enjoy working with young people, meet state qualifications to teach, demonstrate strong classroom management skills, and are committed to helping all students learn. To help districts accomplish this, Avila (personal communication, May 4, 2009) recommends the following:

- Start with the prerecruitment stage and identify district priorities (e.g., elementary bilingual teachers), and target sources already known to produce effective teachers with high retention rates.

- Develop a clear list of teacher competencies that are based on what the research says about characteristics and habits of effective teachers.
- Develop a clear, standardized list of selection criteria and interview rubrics for evaluating candidates.
- Train principals, human resources staff, and anyone else involved with teacher selection on the criteria and rubrics.
- Prioritize list of interviewees with preference given to candidates with experience in the environment in which they wish to teach. TNTP has found that candidates who already have experience in the school and community environment in which they will teach seem to be more effective in the classroom. For example, candidates who have tutored in a school with demographics similar to the school where the position is open or have worked in communities similar to that in which the district is located are likely to be committed to those populations and have a realistic understanding of the attitudes, skills, and behaviors needed to successfully teach in those settings.
- Align all recruitment messages. For example, if your district's goal is to recruit teachers committed to raising student achievement in challenging, high-needs schools, all messages should communicate that goal consistently, and district officials should set clear expectations for candidates as to what it means to teach in a high-needs school. "When you send these messages this way," Avila says, "people [who are not truly committed] tend to self-select out."
- Evaluate the selection model for its success in producing effective teachers.
- When possible, use a multitiered application and interview process such as that of TNTP (or, if time or resources do not allow for it, adopt as many of these components as possible). The TNTP process includes written responses, a teaching demo, a writing sample, a discussion group during which candidates talk about an issue related to teaching in high-needs schools, and a personal interview.

### Focus Recruitment Efforts on the Areas That Need Them Most

Although economic recession can cause talented individuals from other fields to increase their interest in teaching, it also has resulted in numerous teacher layoffs. Recruitment efforts should be targeted so they do not make reemployment for effective teachers even more difficult; instead, recruitment programs should attract effective teachers to the subjects, grade levels, and geographic areas with long-standing shortages of effective teachers. For example, teacher preparation programs see large numbers of elementary education candidates; thus, the recruitment emphasis should be on middle school and high school teachers, and recruitment advertisements should reflect that need by including photos of teachers with students from those grade levels. In addition, recruitment communications should be differentiated to include messages that highlight the aspects of teaching that are valued by those who can teach in the areas in which shortages persist, such as mathematics, science, foreign languages, special education, rural schools, and high-needs urban schools.

### Promote the Profession Through Good and Bad Economic Times

According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, "Relying on a bad economy [for enough teachers] is a terrible bet" (Carroll & Foster, 2008, p. 10). Economic downturn may facilitate district and state teacher recruitment efforts; however, the economy, with its unpredictable fluctuations, should by no means be viewed as a replacement for ongoing, proactive recruitment efforts to advance the teaching profession.

Promoting the teaching profession should not replace efforts to *improve* teaching as a profession, such as providing better working conditions, salaries, induction programs, and professional growth. Teacher retirements combined with continuing high rates of attrition among new teachers mean that simple recruitment efforts alone will not solve the problems of inequitable distribution or teacher shortages. By conveying to the wider societal pool of potential teachers the benefits of teaching without misrepresenting the profession, however, it may be possible to attract more

highly effective teachers to areas where they are much needed. During difficult economic times, when professionals from all sectors are reflecting on their career paths, sending a positive message about teaching is likely to be well received and to expand and diversify the pool of committed, effective teachers to ensure that all students are consistently taught to their highest potential.

Although many caveats and qualifications accompany approaches such as those described in this brief, there also are many reasons to believe that through coordinated, compelling recruitment campaigns, an influx of interest among highly talented, passionate, committed educators from all walks of life can be harnessed to advance the quality of the teaching profession for years to come.

## INTERACTIVE DATA TOOLS

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center) provides interactive data tools (<http://www.tqsource.org/dataTools.php>) that can help states target their teacher recruitment efforts. The tools allow users to generate customized data tables about teacher preparation and teacher recruitment. Customized data tables are based on data from the Schools and Staffing Survey and the Common Core of Data, both developed by the National Center for Education Statistics.

The TQ Center offers a brief that outlines how to use the Interactive Data Tools:

- National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality. (2008). *The value of reliable data: Interactive data tools from the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality* (Policy-to-Practice Brief). Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved June 11, 2009, from [http://www.tqsource.org/publications/TQ\\_PtoPractice\\_V1r16.pdf](http://www.tqsource.org/publications/TQ_PtoPractice_V1r16.pdf)

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## ABOUT THE NATIONAL COMPREHENSIVE CENTER FOR TEACHER QUALITY

The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (TQ Center) was created to serve as the national resource to which the regional comprehensive centers, states, and other education stakeholders turn for strengthening the quality of teaching—especially in high-poverty, low-performing, and hard-to-staff schools—and for finding guidance in addressing specific needs, thereby ensuring that highly qualified teachers are serving students with special needs.

The TQ Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and is a collaborative effort of ETS, Learning Point Associates, and Vanderbilt University. Integral to the TQ Center’s charge is the provision of timely and relevant resources to build the capacity of regional comprehensive centers to help states effectively implement state policy and practice by ensuring that all teachers meet the federal teacher requirements of the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

The TQ Center is part of the U.S. Department of Education’s Comprehensive Centers program, which includes 16 regional comprehensive centers that provide technical assistance to states within a specified boundary and five content centers that provide expert assistance to benefit states and districts nationwide on key issues related to ESEA.



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