

# San Diego Union-Tribune

## Pool of teachers being depleted

Experts say layoffs could dissuade potential educators

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By Chris Moran

Even with thousands of teachers statewide facing layoffs, recruitment experts are warning of an impending teacher shortage.

The numbers of teaching credentials issued and students majoring in education are in sharp decline. Experts warn that news of layoffs could exacerbate the trend by driving would-be educators into fields with better prospects.



Kawanda McLendon, a recruitment specialist with the San Diego County Office of Education, spoke to students at Southwestern College's career center in Chula Vista about teaching jobs. (Eduardo Contreras / Union-Tribune) -

If the pipeline of future educators slows too much, it may not refill the teaching pool quickly enough to keep pace with attrition.

“I really do see – two, three years out, depending on the economy – I do see a critical shortage,” said Chris Reising, who's in charge of teacher recruitment for the San Diego County Office of Education. “The front end of the pipeline is not being loaded because of the public perception that there are no jobs out there, that they're laying off teachers and not hiring them.”

More than 1,400 local educators received tentative layoff notices in March. Hundreds of those notices were rescinded in the following two months, but last week, local school boards followed through on hundreds of teacher firings.

“With all the layoff notices issued, at least for now teaching doesn't seem a good bet with regard to immediate employment after graduation,” said Margaret Gaston, executive director of the Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning in Santa Cruz. In the long run, though, “We're going to need these people.”

Teachers can still get their jobs back in coming months if school budgets improve. Even if they do, the damage may already have been done, Gaston said: Students who might have been eyeing a career in teaching could be thinking twice about making such a move.

Thousands of teachers statewide received tentative layoff notices during the budget crisis of 2003. In the following four years, the annual number of new teaching credentials issued by the state plunged by nearly 30 percent, from 27,150 in 2003-04 to 19,084 last school year.

“It doesn't appear that the state has really recovered from the last round of pink slips (in 2003), and we expect those numbers to be exacerbated by this latest round of pink slips,” Gaston said.

San Diego State University is one of California's larger teacher factories. At SDSU, liberal-studies majors – the most common major for future teachers, especially elementary teachers – have declined from 1,899 in 2002 to 971 last year.

The number of liberal-studies majors at Point Loma Nazarene University has dropped sharply, too, said Scott Shoemaker, associate vice president for enrollment.

The overall decline of education majors at universities coincides with analysts' forecasts of a wave of retirements from the state and national teaching corps.

More than 47 percent of California's teachers are at least 50 years old, according to a report from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. The commission projects that within four years, one-third of the nation's teachers could retire and that in less than a decade, more than half could.

The doomsday scenario is one in which the profession collapses at both ends as fewer new teachers enter the profession – or leave it quickly through layoffs or resignations – while retiring baby boomers deplete the teaching corps.

Southwestern College's teacher education program is bucking the trend. Program coordinator Randy Beach said that in addition to fresh high school graduates, he's had many inquiries from people laid off from other jobs. Dozens of people showed up for the “Getting a Job as a Teacher” seminar he organized at the Chula Vista campus in early May.

Charlie Littrell calls herself a cheerleader for the profession. In her Teaching as a Profession course at SDSU, she tells her freshmen and sophomores that a teaching career is still a good bet.

“There are going to be kids,” Littrell said. “Are there going to be banks? Are there going to be newspapers?”

Freshman Afifa Zaman, 18, one of Littrell's students, has taken the message to heart. She said she views the latest round of possible teacher layoffs as part of the boom-bust cycle of the larger economy.

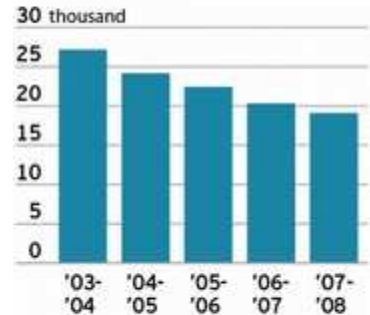
“By the time I graduate, by the time I make it, there's going to be a huge deficit of teachers,” Zaman said.

Littrell's students said they're well-acquainted with the headlines – and they ignore them.

Sophomore Morgan Malone, 19, said: “It's not going to make me stop, because I know what I want to do. There are negative things in every career.”

### CALIFORNIA TEACHING CREDENTIALS

The number of teaching credentials issued in California has fallen sharply the past several years, prompting some to warn of a possible teaching shortage in the near future.



SOURCE: The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning

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