What Are The Options For Our Prospective Teachers?

Loretta Konecki

Linda McCrea

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The world continues to change and the options for Grand Valley State University prospective teachers change as well. Beginning ten years ago, headlines in newspapers and news magazines were heralding a tremendous need for teachers to meet the demand of retiring baby boomer educators and an increasing student population. Despite the predictions of a need for new teachers, many of GVSU’s newly prepared graduates have not been finding the education jobs they desire. Were the predictions wrong? Yes and no. There is an increasing need for teachers but not in most West Michigan districts. Why not here?

The need for new teachers is dependent upon a number of factors. The first is the number of school age children. Michigan is not seeing the increase in students that many southern and western states are experiencing. This means that the number of educators needed to teach Michigan’s children is approximately the same as it was five years ago. It is being predicted that after 2009 the number of school age children is likely to slowly decrease, especially in states like Michigan. A second factor in determining the number of new teachers needed is class size. Even a slight increase in class size decreases the number of teachers needed across the state. Because the economic stress on Michigan’s economy is reflected in the funding of school districts, class size in Michigan schools is trending upwards. This means that school districts do not need as many teachers to teach the same number of children. A third factor in determining the need for new teachers is teacher retirement rates. In Michigan, it appears that numerous teachers are continuing to teach beyond the time when they first qualify for retirement. This means that there is not a need for new teachers to replace as many retiring teachers as may have been predicted. A fourth factor in determining the need for new teachers is determined by the academic and curricular needs of schools. Academic needs of students have been identified by the disaggregation of the achievement data for students who are economically disadvantaged, racially and culturally diverse, English language learners, and those with special needs. The emphasis on facilitating these students’ academic achievement means that new teachers must be...
able to effectively accommodate the student population that is found in classrooms. In addition, teachers need to meet the changing academic expectations of the state including the new high school graduation requirements. Taken together, these factors suggest that the demand for new educators in Michigan is limited.

However, the supply of teachers applying for positions in Michigan continues to increase. Unlike other states, numerous Michigan college students continue to select teaching as a career. At GVSU around 700 new teachers are certified each year. Here in West Michigan, students from numerous colleges (GVSU, Aquinas College, Calvin College, Hope College, Cornerstone University, Central Michigan University, Western Michigan University, and Michigan State University) compete for jobs.

Questions and Answers—Something to Consider in Pursuing a Teaching Degree

What can prospective teachers do to make themselves more likely to obtain a teaching position?

1. Select majors or endorsements in areas of higher need such as special education, mathematics, and English as a Second Language.

2. Gain successful experience in working with diverse students, English language learners and disabled students through courses or as a volunteer.

3. Apply for many positions including openings for teaching in districts in other parts of Michigan, especially in very rural or urban settings.

4. Seek teaching positions in states and districts outside Michigan that are experiencing growth in their student populations.

5. Be willing to teach in private or charter schools in addition to public school districts.

6. Be willing to substitute teach for a year or two.

7. Be willing to tell everyone you know that you are looking for a teaching position and to let you know if or when they know of an opening.

What is GVSU’s College of Education doing to help students find positions?

1. Requiring that all prospective teachers have at least one of their field experiences in a setting with diverse learners.

2. Encouraging students to participate in learning experiences in international settings. Dr. Barbara Lubic and Dr. Sandra Miller coordinate a teacher assisting program in South Africa, GVSU is affiliated with the COST program, which coordinates programs for student teaching overseas and is led by Dr. Sherie Williams.

3. Providing a student teaching program in Broward County, Florida. Participants in this program, coordinated by Dr. Loretta Konecki and Dr. Linda McCrea, were offered and accepted positions teaching in Florida, Michigan and other states. Students cited their experiences in teaching diverse, poor, urban students in Florida as being a key in getting jobs.

4. Bringing representatives to GVSU from districts throughout Michigan and the nation, Ginger Lange of the GVSU Career Services Office provides students with an opportunity to know more about employment opportunities throughout the country. Students have been hired to teach in districts from Alaska to Las Vegas, Houston, South Carolina, Chicago, Florida and Virginia.

5. Advising students as they make career decisions to follow their passions while still being aware of job opportunities. Faculty encourage students to gain the content knowledge and teaching skills used by effective teachers, who establish positive relationships, teach rigorous content in relevant ways, and reflect on and re-think their practice to meet the needs of students and society.

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