



NJDOE News

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Back to School 2003

Department of Education Steps Up Recruitment Efforts and Advances Streamlined Certification Process to Ensure Adequate Supply of Talented Teaching Applicants

The beginning of a new school year is traditionally a busy time as local school boards seek to fill vacancies or add staff based on last minute adjustments to enrollment. This year, the New Jersey Department of Education is increasing its efforts to ensure the quality and quantity of educators in New Jersey's 2,381 public schools. NJ Hire, the free, web-based service provided by the DOE to connect prospective teachers with school districts looking to fill vacancies, has seen promising numbers of registered teachers and school districts as a result of its promotion efforts. In addition, improvements to the teacher certification process are scheduled to be implemented this fall, and are expected to streamline the certification process.

The department's activities are part of Governor James E. McGreevey's commitment to strengthen teacher quality and quantity. Governor McGreevey's teacher reform initiatives include:

- Raising the minimum passing score required for New Jersey teachers on the national PRAXIS exam.
- Raising the minimum college grade point average required for teacher candidates.
- Requiring teachers to demonstrate core competency in their specific subject areas.
- Establishing uniform standards for teachers.
- Offering financial incentives for teachers seeking national certification, and encouraging the business community to fund mentoring support for candidates for national teacher certification.

"New Jersey is an exciting place to be a teacher," said Commissioner of Education, William L. Librera. "We are diverse in geography, diverse in community make-up and diverse in the types of students who come to our schools to learn. Teachers who live and work in New Jersey are located near the cultural centers of greater New York City and Philadelphia, and our location mid-way between Boston and Washington, DC provides many opportunities for teachers to enhance the quality of their personal and professional lives.

"In addition to location advantages, school districts in New Jersey pay their teachers well in comparison to other states. When polls on annual teacher salaries are published, New Jersey is always listed at or near the top of the list," continued Dr. Librera. "Despite all of these advantages, we are working to do even more to attract and retain educators.

"Our goal is to become the most desirable state for teachers and administrators to teach, to lead, and to develop as outstanding professionals."

Working towards attracting and maintaining a qualified pool of teachers in New Jersey has been the central task of the Teacher Recruitment Initiative, first announced in 1999. Recognizing that as many as a third of New Jersey's teachers may retire in the next ten years, the initiative was created to avidly promote careers in education and assist local school boards in fulfilling their hiring needs.

The success of the NJ Hire Web site is dependent upon school districts and teaching candidates registering at the site (www.njhire.com), and use of the Web site by both groups has been significant over the past year. An average of 2,171 new teaching hopefuls have registered on the site each month since the start of 2003, bringing the pool of registered teachers seeking employment to 57,000 as of July. Between 70-75 percent of New Jersey's 616 school districts are currently registered to use NJ Hire as an employment tool. The numbers of new school districts registering has held fairly steady this year at around 40 a month through July.

Last year the American Association for Employment in Education cited teacher shortages in the Northeast region in all areas of science and math education, as well as in special education. Shortages also exist in the area of computer science/technology education, bilingual education and English as a second language (ESL), as well as in certain world languages (including Spanish and Japanese.) An imbalance of genders is also an issue, with far fewer males earning their living as educators.

In response to these specific findings, the Department of Education has established recruitment efforts up and down the East coast and as far away as Puerto Rico. Lori Howard, the state liaison for teacher recruitment, has traveled to career fairs at colleges from Rhode Island to Tennessee. The desirable aspects of working in New Jersey, as well as the legwork of recruitment officers, have helped New Jersey attract out-of-state candidates.

According to last year's *Survey and Analysis of Teacher Salary Trends*, New Jersey has the second highest beginning teaching salary in the nation (at \$35,300) and the eighth highest average teaching salary (at \$50,115). Beyond these monetary enticements, New Jersey has many other aspects to attract teachers, including quality of life.

"I explain to potential candidates that there is more to New Jersey than the Turnpike," said Howard, the liaison for teacher recruitment. "The proximity to two major metropolitan areas as well as the diversity of geographical regions within New Jersey are instrumental in attracting out-of-state candidates."

DOE recruiters are planning to participate in at least six different events from now through mid-November: Richard Stockton College Career Fair on October 9; Rutgers University Math and Actuarial Career Day on October 10; Stony Brook University Fall 2003 Career Day on October 15; Rutgers University Business and Liberal Arts Career Day on October 17; Central Pennsylvania Fall Teacher Job Fair at Penn State University, November 6; and the Mid-Atlantic Association for Employment in Education Job Fair, November 11.

The Alternate Route to Certification program is a valuable asset for increasing and enhancing New Jersey's teaching pool. New Jersey was one of the first states to incorporate an Alternate Route program as an option for certification. The program allows teaching hopefuls who work in another industry or have not completed an undergraduate teaching preparation program to change career plans. They earn the credits, expertise and licensure required to teach in the state through a shorter, intensive preparatory program.

The *Troops for Teachers* program is an example of an innovative recruitment effort that addresses several critical objectives. The program, which is a joint undertaking between the U.S. Department of Defense and Department of Education, targets retired military personnel who are interested in an alternative way to continue serving the public. Recruited teachers are sent into low income, high needs inner city districts. New Jersey currently has around a dozen members of the program serving throughout the state, in districts such as Trenton, Lower Camden, Plainfield and Jersey City. As retired military personnel, they are able to take the experience and value of their military background into the classroom and often address the shortage areas of math, science, technology, and vocational subjects. The program also works to reduce the deficit of male teachers and male role models within schools.

Instrumental also in maintaining the quantity and quality of teachers in New Jersey classrooms are the improvements being made to the teacher certification process. The revisions will begin in mid-September when the first part of an online teacher certification information system will be ready. The imaging of all documents required for the certification process will create an easier, paperless application process.

"The imaging of all documents required for the certification process will create a paperless process that will reduce time and effort spent by the applicant and the Department staff," said Margaret Smith, Coordinator of Licensing for the Office of Licensure and Credentials at the Department of Education. "It will greatly increase our ability to respond to the demand for increasing the speed of the certification process."

Smith anticipates an early 2004 completion date for the aspect of the system that will allow certification candidates to submit all required materials via the web. Online application will also accelerate the process, because the applicants will enter their data instead of Department employees having to enter the information for each of the 250-300 applications they receive each day.

The projected improvements in the teacher certification process represent a change that the Department of Education is eager to celebrate. "What we are most interested in is improving customer service," said Smith. "We are excited because streamlining the certification process will allow us to deliver the kind of customer service we've always wanted to give."

Smith noted that Deputy Commissioner of Education Dwight Pfennig was instrumental in making this project a priority and committing the funds necessary to make the streamlined certification project possible. "We had determined that we needed to be computerized in a more appropriate way, and we are now on the way to making that happen."