

# State Explores Teacher Recruitment



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## State explores teacher recruitment

Career switchers are seen as fresh option for swelling shortage in trained educators

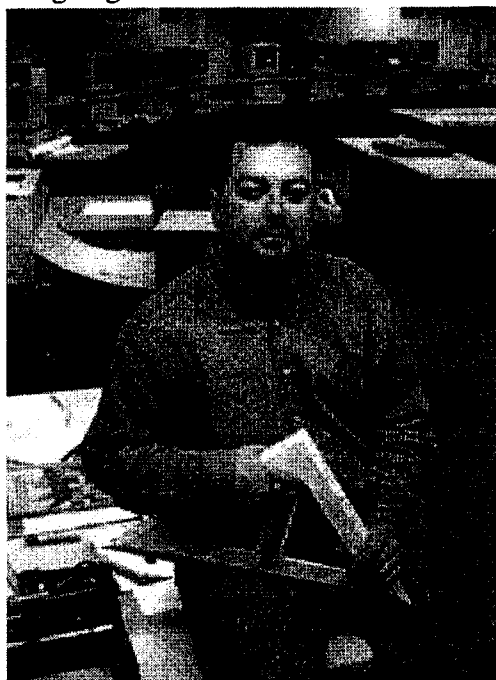
By Amy Lee / The Detroit News

UTICA -- Ten years in the construction business earned John Chateau a comfortable lifestyle, but left him feeling restless -- so he headed back to college for a teaching degree.

"Being a drywall finisher, I worked by myself all the time doing the same thing over and over. It gets boring. When you teach a kid something, they get an opportunity to pass it on to someone else. It's kind of a legacy."

Chateau, 32, a vocational drafting teacher at Eisenhower High School in Utica, is one of hundreds of teachers nationwide to opt for a mid-career switch into teaching. School districts are targeting experienced career individuals for recruitment into teaching to help curb the shortage of teachers.

An expected onslaught of retiring teachers, coupled with swelling student enrollment and an emphasis on smaller class sizes, has prompted Michigan and other states to explore alternative ways to recruit new teachers. Gov. John Engler's office is drafting legislation to be introduced this summer that would ease the rules for those who already have embarked on a career to switch into teaching. Career-switchers already represent



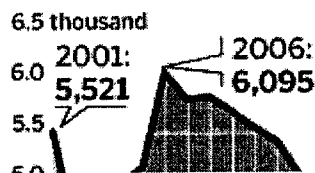
Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News

John Chateau, 32, switched to teaching after years as a drywall finisher.

### Retiring teachers

The state anticipates a shortage of teachers as the Baby Boom generation begins to retire.

#### Projected teacher retirement



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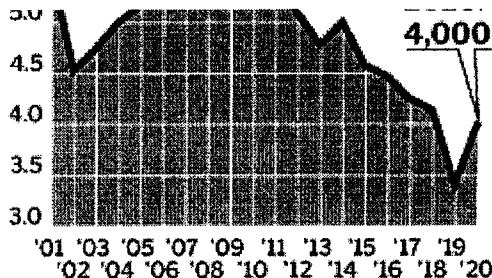
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2000).

...teachers already represent about 5 percent of the nation's 2.8 million public school teachers.

"We haven't really been assertive in the area of alternative certification and alternative routes to certification, but the need is upon us," said Carolyn Logan, director of the Michigan Office of Professional Preparation, which certifies about 6,500 Michigan teachers annually.

"We've looked at it in a restrictive way, and there are other ways to get well-prepared teachers and maintain the learning opportunities for students."

Experts in Michigan agree finding competent teachers to fill science, math, vocational education and special education openings tends to create headaches for districts. But shortages can vary by district. For instance, urban areas, such as Detroit, often are in constant need of committed teacher candidates.



Source: Michigan Department of Management and Budget

*The Detroit News*

**Is preparation adequate?**

Shepherding other professionals into teaching has become a hot-button issue for educators.

An accelerated certification program at New York Fellows in New York City allows career-switchers to embark on a four-week program on teaching methods and lesson plans -- and pass two state exams -- before they head up a class of students. A Massachusetts program, rolled out in 1998, offered successful recruits a \$20,000 signing bonus and classroom training through teaching summer school with about nine or 10 students per class.

But critics of these so-called fast-track certification programs argue there is a substantial difference between knowing a subject and teaching a subject. Michigan is home to 32 teacher education colleges.

"I don't think you can ensure quality with these kinds of programs," said Nancy Pietraszkiwicz, a Central Michigan University teacher education professor and director of the school's southeast Student Teaching Center in Troy.

"You get a warm body in the room and probably not much else."

Both Chateau and Alethia Barnes, a design teacher at the GM Technical Academy in Auburn Hills and former 29-year GM designer, said while they are comfortable with their knowledge level in their respective subjects, the demands of classroom teaching took them off guard.

"You play a lot of different roles as a teacher: referee, teacher, planner, organizer, coach, mediator, confidante -- the list goes on," Chateau said. "You're on stage every day, and you have to try to make things interesting and fun. It's not like every kid is dying to sit in your class."

class.

Barnes said that while she had been a mentor to GM student for years, she was not fully prepared for the classroom stresses when she became a teacher in 1998.

"The hardest thing was having to be able to have my focus in many different directions at one time. As a designer, you're in a cubicle at a computer and you have interface with a couple of other people throughout the day," said Barnes, 49. "Now, it's Ms. Barnes this and Ms. Barnes that. I have to be able to turn my head around at a moment's notice, and I haven't had to do that since my children were little."

### **State has plan**

Michigan's alternative certification legislation, which hasn't been introduced and does not yet have a sponsor, would allow those with five or more years of teaching experience at the college and university level to teach their area of expertise in the lower grades.

It also would allow career-switchers with two or more years experience as a substitute to teach in their subject area. A fully certified teacher with 10 or more years of teaching experience and a master's degree would serve as mentor to these would-be teachers, said Susan Schafer, the governor's spokeswoman.

"We've got some spaces to fill in the K-12 system, and these folks are looking for alternatives to utilize their background," Schafer said. "Just because they didn't go through the door in the first place doesn't mean they can't enter now."

Both options would require teachers to eventually pass the same tests required to obtain a teaching certificate in Michigan. Central Michigan University and the state's Office of Professional Preparation are both laying the groundwork for alternative certification pilot programs.

Creating an environment that is supportive of teachers is key to both retaining new teachers and recruiting new ones, said Margaret Trimer-Hartley, director of the Michigan Education Association.

"There's no shortage of certified teachers in Michigan -- there's a shortage of those who chose to teach," she said.

Of the 55,000 teachers that retire each year nationwide, about 6,000 - or roughly 11 percent -- are Michigan teachers. Nationally, 30 percent of new teachers drop teaching for another career within the first five years.

A career-switcher may bring more real-life experiences to students, Barnes said.

"My experience is right there and it's not too far removed," she said. "I know I'm doing something good and tangible, and down the line, I know the kids are going to benefit."

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