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From the Los Angeles Times

California's new teachers are ready but have no place to go

Newly minted educators are looking for jobs during a time of decreasing positions, school budget cuts and declining enrollment. Some are looking out of state, some overseas.

By Seema Mehta

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Diana Nguyen has dreamed of teaching high school since she was inspired by her ninth-grade world history instructor, who made the subject jump off the page. But when the UC Irvine student receives her teaching credential this summer, she plans to move to Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, to teach English.

Why the change in plans? Simple, Nguyen, 23, said in her characteristic upbeat way. There are no jobs for a social studies teacher.

"Because of the education budget cuts, I decided to travel abroad before settling down in a district," said Nguyen, a Garden Grove resident and student teacher at Carr Intermediate in Santa Ana.

"This is a good chance to travel, build my resume up and relearn the Vietnamese language."

Nguyen is one of thousands of prospective teachers who are graduating in the coming weeks during a time of decreasing jobs, school district budget cuts and declining student enrollment.

New teachers hoping to find positions near their homes are being forced to seek work in other parts of California, across the United States, even overseas, and some are applying to private and charter schools.

Others are hoping to find work as long-term substitutes, typically receiving lower pay and no benefits.

"I can't remember a worse time. It's desperate," said John Eichinger, an education professor who has taught at Cal State L.A. for 16 years and had taught in public schools for 15 years. His students "are very excited and idealistic, and they can't wait to get out there, and there's no place to go."

California education officials worry that these graduates will leave the state, or the teaching field entirely, and that fewer students will enroll in teacher-preparation programs, as occurred five years ago when mass layoffs were threatened. This could gravely affect the state's ability to replace retiring teachers with well-trained understudies; one-third of the state's 308,000 teachers are expected to retire over the next decade.

"I'm worried," said Jack O'Connell, state superintendent of public instruction. "Many of these individuals have the potential to be outstanding teachers. Yet if they're not hired, or if there's not an economically viable option, they'll leave the teaching profession."

O'Connell said he was concerned, too, about other states poaching California teachers. School districts in Nevada, Texas, Hawaii and Virginia, among other states, have been recruiting in California. Fort Worth, Texas, school district officials placed billboards in San Diego reading "Your Future Is in Our Classroom" and held a three-day job fair earlier this month.

School districts issued layoff warnings in March to as many as 24,000 teachers, librarians, nurses and others in the wake of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's January budget proposal, which would have cut billions in education funding for 2008-2009. His revised budget proposal, unveiled May 14, improved education spending, although many districts still anticipate multimillion-dollar shortfalls.

Although the number of layoffs and job openings won't be known until this summer, the proposal has already had a chilling effect on the hiring process. UC Irvine canceled its annual spring job fair because so few California districts were interested in recruiting.

The website www.edjoin.org, a job clearinghouse, lists 14,145 statewide vacancies, about 2,000 fewer than at this time last year, said Rick Cornish, director of the Center for Educational Development and Research at the San Joaquin County Office of Education, which runs the site. Of those jobs, nearly 8,400 are teaching positions. California credentials roughly 25,000 teachers annually.

Cornish is confident that once the numbers shake out this summer, districts will resume hiring.

"This just delayed the start of the recruitment season," he said.

For students, that's little comfort.

Connie Morales, 28, wants to become an elementary school teacher, a career that would allow her to combine her love of children with a stable job that provides solid health and retirement benefits -- and summers off.

"I'm going to graduate and not have a job," said the Cal State L.A. student. "It's scary."

Administrators and professors at education departments are urging students to become credentialed in fields with shortages, such as science, math or special education.

Additionally, they are encouraging students to be flexible in looking for positions in other parts of the state and the nation that still are hiring.

"We really encourage students to consider not just the immediate area, at least as a way to get started, and they can move back at a later date if that's what they want," said Bonnie Crawford, director of the credential office at Cal State Northridge. "There are jobs in Hawaii! I look at some of our young people and say, 'If that works for you, go for it. Nothing is forever.' "

That's Nguyen's mantra. She hopes to land a social studies teaching job in Orange County once she returns from Vietnam, but fears that job prospects may still be dry -- because of the economy and a strong emphasis on English, math and science programs -- when she returns next summer.

Another option for new teachers is working as a long-term substitute. If a substitute performs well and has a good relationship with a school's principal and faculty, that familiarity could provide a foot in the door once the job market frees up. But pay is low, typically a little over \$100 a day, without benefits.

"For someone with five years of education, a full year of graduate education, that's a pretty dismal salary," said Bruce Baron, principal at South Lake Middle School in Irvine and an instructor in UC Irvine's education department. Stacy Randolph has been working as a long-term substitute at private and public schools since she finished student teaching in December. She lives with her mother and is going without health insurance to make ends meet.

"Pray I don't break my arm or something," said the 26-year-old Glendora resident.

Randolph grew up in a large Italian family, with more than 30 first cousins. As one of the older children, she frequently tended the younger ones.

Her desire to be an educator came early: She recently found one of her kindergarten assignments in which she was asked what she wanted to be when she grew up.

She had written "teacher."

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