

Steep Drops Seen in Teacher-Prep Enrollment Numbers  
California and other big states particularly hard hit, raising supply concerns  
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By Stephen Sawchuk

Fresh from the United States Air Force, Zachary Branson, 33, wanted a career with a structured day and hours that would allow him to be home in time to watch his kids in the evening. But just a month into his online teacher-preparation program at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, he had something of a crisis of faith.

It was brought on, he said, by the sense of being in the middle of an ideological war that surfaced in everything from state-level education policy on down to his course textbook, which had a distinct anti-standardized-testing bent. "I feel like teachers are becoming a wedge politically, and I don't want anything to do with that," Mr. Branson said.

He's not alone in having qualms about entering the teaching profession. Massive changes to the profession, coupled with budget woes, appear to be shaking the image of teaching as a stable, engaging career. Nationwide, enrollments in university teacher-preparation programs have fallen by about 10 percent from 2004 to 2012, according to federal estimates from the U.S. Department of Education's postsecondary data collection.

#### Teacher-Prep Enrollment Trends by State

Enrollments in teacher-preparation programs (including alternative-route options) have fallen dramatically in some states in recent years, while holding steady in others.

Some large states, like heavyweight California, appear to have been particularly hard hit. The Golden State lost some 22,000 teacher-prep enrollments, or 53 percent, between 2008-09 and 2012-13, [according to a report its credentialing body issued](#) earlier this month.

"It is an alarming trend," said Mary Vixie Sandy, the executive director of the California Commission on Teaching Credentials, which enforces the state's teacher-preparation standards. "We are going to see it play out in this year and in the coming year with an increase in demand, and a not very deep pool of teachers to fulfill that demand."

#### Weak Economy?

The federal data, from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, show an overall drop in education degree programs across all institutions.

Separate [state-by-state enrollment data collected under Title II of the Higher Education Act](#), meanwhile, suggest that the decline in teacher-preparation enrollments has accelerated in recent years, particularly since 2010. Under that collection, California, New York, and Texas, among the largest producers of teachers, have seen steep drops. (*See chart on page 4.*)

As befits a labor market that tends to be regional, though, the declines don't appear to be uniform across the country; some states have maintained stable supplies of teacher-candidates. (The Title II data, unlike the postsecondary collection, include teachers enrolled in nondegree-granting alternative-certification programs.)

Though the decline is probably due to a multitude of factors, the reason topping many analysts' list is the budget crunch that hit the nation in 2008. In California, Ms. Sandy believes that the state's layoffs of some 30,000 teachers during the Great Recession sent a clear message to potential candidates that the profession was no longer a reliable one.

"We've had a period of time with reductions, layoffs, the whole accountability concern about whether schools are producing results—it may not have been the most attractive time for young, talented individuals to go into teaching," Ms. Sandy said. "How we turn that narrative around is a very important question for the state."

#### Perceptions of Teaching

If an uncertain economy is one likely explanation for the drop, analysts also point to other, less tangible

causes: lots of press around changes to teachers' evaluations, more rigorous academic-content standards, and the perception in some quarters that teachers are being blamed for schools' problems.

"Whether or not it's actually that much more difficult of an occupation than it used to be, there's certainly a lot of press about teacher-evaluation systems, about upheaval," said Robert E. Floden, the co-director for the education policy center at Michigan State University, in East Lansing. "All those things that are in the press are bound to have some effect on people thinking about what they want to do."

North Carolina may be the epicenter for such stories. Last year, lawmakers there **eliminated teacher tenure**, only to have **a state court restore** it in May. And after much public lamenting over the state's low average teacher salaries in comparison with those of other states, legislators finally boosted pay in August.

But those increases are coupled with **a salary-schedule overhaul** under which some teachers are seeing increases of 15 percent or higher while others are barely getting raises. Meanwhile, the elimination of a pay premium of 10 percent for earning a master's degree is likely to suppress enrollments in master's programs.

Mr. Branson, the North Carolina teacher-candidate, said he's tried to stay away from the policy debates in the state. A pep talk from a friend has him, for now, determined to continue with his preparation program. "I really don't want to get caught up in someone else's ideological fight and I've done a really good job of not paying attention to that," he said. "But it doesn't seem very stable right now. People tend to go for careers that are very stable."

In all, enrollments in University of North Carolina teaching programs, the largest source of teachers for the state, have fallen by 17 percent from 2010-11 to 2012-13, said Alisa Chapman, the vice president for academic and university programs at UNC.

Assessing how the enrollment declines are playing out on the ground can be tricky, given varied patterns across credentialing areas. Colleges typically **produce far more elementary teachers than there are jobs**, but not enough math, science, and special education teachers to meet demand.

"Where we've been hit and where school districts are hit are not so much the special subject areas like music or Spanish, but in the low-incidence special ed programs," such as speech-language pathology, said Beverly Young, the assistant vice chancellor of academic affairs for the California State University system, the largest producer of teachers in the state. "Those are always hard to attract students into."

In Colorado, where **data show a 5 percent decline in enrollments** from 2012-13 over the previous school year—after a boom a few years earlier—the biggest worry is in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields. Those are subjects in which officials say education schools already weren't producing enough teachers to help meet state goals for increasing jobs in those sectors.

**"We don't have enough graduates to teach STEM and build the capacity of our STEM workforce,"** said Jennifer Arzberger, the educator-preparation project manager for the state education department.

The enrollment downturns already appear to be contributing to some unsettling hiring patterns. Texas districts like Dallas and Houston have been recruiting heavily—from North Carolina. San Francisco, caught between a pool of fewer teachers and more competition for them from nearby districts, currently has more than two dozen teachers on emergency credentials, the *San Francisco Chronicle* recently reported.

#### Long-Term Trend?

Districts may also begin looking to different pipelines for teachers, which can have consequences on overall educator quality. The Title II data show that, as enrollments in North Carolina's traditional university-based programs have declined, more teachers have entered through alternative routes.

But that's worrisome, Ms. Chapman said, given state data suggesting that, with the exception of those who come through Teach For America, high school teachers prepared in alternative programs **perform somewhat less well than UNC graduates**.

Also unclear is whether the downturn in enrollments is a short-term phenomenon or the harbinger of future shortages. Most of the federal data is, after all, on a lag time of about two years.

"It's hard to project what's going to happen," Mr. Floden said. "Is this a long-term trend? Gosh, I don't know."

The lag time means that states like California might face shortages for some time, even if enrollment begins to tick upwards. In California, Ms. Sandy said that early indications are that the state issued more teaching credentials in 2013-14. But it won't know for a few more months if those are for teaching jobs or other types of positions.

In North Carolina, Ms. Chapman believes the state is at the point where it needs to create recruitment incentives, such as by establishing a merit-based scholarship program based on getting teachers in the highest-need subjects. (The legislature **eliminated a well-regarded scholarship program** in 2011.)

The pressure is on colleges to ramp up their recruitment efforts, too. Ms. Arzberger said she's already seen signs in downtown Denver promoting the University of Colorado, Denver's teacher-preparation offerings.

"I remember walking on the 16th Street Mall and seeing ads all over, pins and buttons," she said. "They have some neat things happening."

*Chart on the next page*

# TEACHER-PREP ENROLLMENT TRENDS BY STATE

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