

# Schools aren't hiring like before

But after huge funding cuts, some districts have openings because of more retirements.

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Blanche Desjean-Perrotta, associate dean for teacher education at UTSA, says students are being told the death of teaching jobs in Texas won't last forever.

On paper, Katie Chalkley is the perfect applicant. Certified to teach fourth- to eighth-grade math, she has spent three years as a substitute teacher in Denton where her students had a 90 percent TAKS pass rate.

"I've filled out 73 applications since the beginning of summer," said Chalkley, 25, who graduated from the University of North Texas in May. "(The districts) tell me, 'We want to hire you, we wish we could.'"

After months of applying to five schools a day, Chalkley finally heard back from a school in Athens in the Fort Worth school district, for a position as a sixth-grade math teacher.

“I got hired on the spot!” she said. “I have been crying since I walked out of his office.”

Because of the Legislature's initial \$4 billion cut from public school funding, districts are slicing at least 6 percent from their budgets for the first year of the biennium. Options for grads trying to get their foot in the teaching door look bleak. But as districts work out budgets for the coming school year, many are finding a little more room than expected to hire new teachers because of resignations, retirements and pre-emptive cuts.

## School hiring down

With \$4 billion in cuts made during the legislative session to Texas public education, local school districts are trying to find ways to save money by greatly reducing hiring. In some cases, spaces left vacant by retirees are being filled with teachers who would have been laid off and people are being reshuffled inside the district to fill positions.

District	Teachers hired 2010-11	Teachers hired 2011-12	Teachers retired	Teachers resigned	Total teachers	Total employees
Alamo Heights	45	10	16	17	323	580
East Central	72	43	16	53	583	1,328
Ft. Sam Houston	15	11	2	14	114	243
Harlandale	N/A	53	32	15	N/A	2,000
Judson	98	75	45	211	1,554	3,000
Lackland	83	7	3	4	82	184
North East	394	152	124	192	4,273	8,358
Northside	1,000	36	500	300	7,000	12,344
Randolph Field	9	5	12	12	89	187
San Antonio	438	150	176	155	3,500	8,086
Schertz-Cibolo-Universal City	43	11	12	31	785	1,553
Somerset	29	33	14	26	245	520
South San Antonio	N/A	7	25	11	N/A	N/A
Southwest	76	5	18	21	732	1,750
<b>Totals</b>	<b>2,302</b>	<b>598</b>	<b>995</b>	<b>1,062</b>	<b>19,280</b>	<b>40,133</b>

Note: Data not available for Edgewood and Southside

Sources: Individual school districts

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“Some districts, like those in San Antonio, may have skewed things when they offered incentives or people decided to retire,” said [Linda Bridges](#), president of [Texas American Federation of Teachers](#). “So districts will have to hire, but not in the large numbers they were before.”

Based on a general survey of most districts, the number of new teachers hired is down by 74 percent from last year. Though districts are hiring, open positions are limited. Many are shuffling employees to fill newly consolidated positions. Chalkley said she hit many such walls — notices stamped “For internal applicants only” — when applying in the Austin Independent School District.

In addition to the lower hiring and recruiting numbers, teachers are being hired later in the year. Jobs typically available in April or May might not appear until August, if at all, and graduates are starting to panic, said [Denise Staudt](#), dean of the [Dreeben School of Education](#) at the [University of the Incarnate Word](#).

University counselors and educators like Staudt are suggesting, often even requiring, students get specialized certifications to make them more marketable, especially in areas with fewer teachers such as bilingual education, math, science, Spanish and special education.

Students majoring in early-childhood through sixth-grade education at UIW walk out with a minor in reading in addition to certification to teach special education. Other schools such as [Trinity University](#) require their students to intern for a year with a master teacher in a public school, which exceeds usual requirements.

“Having a full year under your belt really makes a difference in background and experience,” said [Shari Albright](#), chairwoman of Trinity's department of education. “The districts tend to know the students well and if a school can pick up an intern, then just think about how far ahead those students are.”

But even graduates with experience and specializations are having difficulties finding jobs. Many end up attending graduate school in hopes of waiting out the storm.

“I guess my initial thought was that I'd get a certification and get a job, but it didn't pan out that way so I decided to go to graduate school,” said [Hope Passmore](#), who is certified in English, language arts and reading, and now studies counseling at UTSA's graduate school.

“I've looked at different teaching and counseling positions to see what's out there, but there are not a lot of opportunities,” Passmore said.

The schools are emphasizing the long-term outlook.

“We're telling them that this isn't going to last forever, people will start retiring and things will turn around a little bit,” said [Blanche Desjean-Perrotta](#), associate dean for teacher education at UTSA.

When positions open, districts are likely to hire those on probationary leave or already within the district. Such was the case with Judson ISD, where officials cut teaching positions in April, but in the wake of retirements and resignations hired back 60 who had been put on leave.

The [Teacher Retirement System of Texas](#) has seen a 25 percent increase in retirements since 2006, climbing to 16,706 in 2010. If those numbers continue to rise, districts will have to hire more than they planned, Bridges said.

“If people are reading the economic forecast and looking at some of the job statistics, we have an aging workforce across the country,” Albright said. “Consequently, statistics would tell us we need new cadres of teachers.”

Because the younger generation is more mobile, some worry good candidates will move out of state in search of better jobs that promise upward mobility, which would hurt the quality of the available teaching pool.

“It definitely hurts us being low on the totem pole compared to experienced teachers,” said [Marivel Garcia](#), who graduated from UIW in December and is now teaching kindergarten full time in East Central ISD. “We’re not getting anywhere unless experienced teachers are retiring.”

Many applicants might also be put off by the starting salaries: The average minimum for a teacher in Texas without experience is about \$27,000. Before the cuts, census data showed Texas ranked 31st in average teacher salaries and 42nd in spending per student for 2008-09. Cutting an additional \$4 billion from schools statewide will have a serious impact on the quality of education, said Rep. [Mike Villarreal](#), D-San Antonio.

“This is part of a larger conversation about the quality of the state's workforce,” he said. “We know that quality jobs will only come to Texas if we have a quality workforce and only if we have strategic smart investments in our children's education and in retaining adults who have better skills.”

Although the situation looks better than expected, when the next round of cuts begins in 2012, teachers will face more uncertainty. With the passage of Senate Bill 8, school districts would be allowed to impose furloughs, reduce salaries and change contract notification requirements to cope with reduced budgets.

Because the bill did not pass with a two-thirds majority, it will not take effect until Sept. 28, after contracts begin. That means the issues dealing with contract rights technically can't be worked out until the 2012-13 school year, Bridges said. So those trying to find a job in the current market may see even fewer opportunities next year.

“Some students may be able to hang in there financially and some won't be able to wait until the market turns around and will get another degree,” said Desjean-Perrotta. “Most of our students, though, are committed to being teachers, so they will wait it out and hope the market turns around.”