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## Teachers Facing Weakest Market in Years

By WINNIE HU

PELHAM, N.Y. — In the month since Pelham Memorial High School in Westchester County advertised seven teaching jobs, it has been flooded with 3,010 applications from candidates as far away as California. The Port Washington District on Long Island is sorting through 3,620 applications for eight positions — the largest pool the superintendent has seen in his 41-year career.

Even hard-to-fill specialties are no longer so hard to fill. Jericho, N.Y., has 963 people to choose from for five spots in special education, more than twice as many as in past years. In Connecticut, chemistry and physics jobs in Hartford that normally attract no more than 5 candidates have 110 and 51, respectively.

The recession seems to have penetrated a profession long seen as recession-proof. Superintendents, education professors and people seeking work say teachers are facing the worst job market since the Great Depression. Amid state and local budget cuts, cash-poor urban districts like New York City and Los Angeles, which once hired thousands of young people every spring, have taken down the help-wanted signs.

Even upscale suburban districts are preparing for huge levels of layoffs. School officials and union leaders estimate that more than 150,000 teachers nationwide could lose their jobs next year, far more than any other time, including the last major financial crisis of the 1970s.

Juliana Pankow, who just graduated from Teachers College at [Columbia University](http://www.columbia.edu), has sent out 40 résumés since January. A few Saturdays ago, she went to a school in Harlem because she heard the principal would be there (she was invited back to teach a demonstration lesson, but it may be for naught since the city has a hiring freeze). Now, Ms. Pankow said she might have to move back in with her parents in Scarsdale, N.Y., and perhaps take up SAT tutoring.

"I can't think of anything else I'd rather do," said Ms. Pankow, 23, as she waited outside the principal's office at Pelham Memorial last week, among 619 people applying for one English position. "Which is a problem, because I might have to do something else."

At Teachers College, so many students like Ms. Pankow are looking for work that two recent job fairs attracted a record 650 students and alumni, up from 450 last year. Last month, the college added a job fair focusing on schools in Harlem.

But job postings are down by half this year, to one dozen to two dozen a week, mostly in [charter schools](#), said Marianne Tramelli, the college's director of career services.

Charter schools, which are publicly financed but independently run, are practically the only ones hiring in New York and elsewhere because of growing enrollments amid expanding political and economic support for school choice. Even so, they do not have nearly enough jobs to go around.

In New York, where the Success Charter Network is hiring 135 teachers for its seven schools in Harlem and the Bronx, some of the 8,453 applicants have called the office three times a day to check on their status. Veteran teachers have also offered to work as assistant teachers.

"It's heartbreaking — there's much more desperation out there," said [Eva S. Moskowitz](#), a former councilwoman who is the network's founder and chief executive.

[KIPP](#), another charter school network with 82 schools nationwide, has received 745 applications since January at its seven schools in the San Francisco Bay Area, compared with 385 last year.

At the [University of Pennsylvania](#), most of the 90 aspiring teachers who graduated last weekend are jobless. Many had counted on offers from the Philadelphia public schools but had their interviews canceled this month after the district announced a hiring freeze.

"We're trying to encourage everyone to hold on," said [Kathy Schultz](#), an education professor at Penn. "But that's very difficult because students have taken out loans and want to be assured of a job."

[Michigan State University](#) has pushed its 500 teaching graduates to look out of state. As local jobs have dried up, it started an internship program in Chicago, a four-hour drive from campus. Professors now go with students to the annual campus job fair to make sure they do not hover around the Michigan tables, but walk over to, say, North Carolina, Texas or Virginia.

"We have a culture of people wanting to stay here and teach where they went to school, but we also want them to get jobs," said [Suzanne Wilson](#), the chairwoman of the department of teacher education.

Along with five other former teachers, Jade Stier, 27, finally gave up and enrolled in a nursing program last fall, after three years of looking for an elementary school job. She sent out hundreds of résumés, only to land one interview a year. She settled for working as a substitute teacher, earning \$85 a day with no benefits.

“Spending \$50,000 for an education you can’t use is really frustrating,” Ms. Stier said. “I definitely miss teaching, but I felt like I had no other choice.”

If there is an upside to the shortage of teaching jobs, it is that schools now have their pick of candidates.

[Teach for America](#), which places graduates from some of the nation’s top colleges in poor schools, has seen applications increase by nearly a third this year to 46,000 — for 4,500 slots. From Ivy League colleges alone, there are 1,688 would-be teachers.

Here in Pelham, [a well-regarded district](#) where teaching salaries range from \$50,000 to \$134,000, high school administrators and teachers have spent recent weeks winnowing applicants’ résumés. Candidates with grade point averages below 3.0 were eliminated (3.3 in some departments), as were those who missed the April 30 application deadline. Almost 200 were invited for interviews.

“It’s very difficult,” said [Jeannine Clark](#), the high school principal in Pelham. “More so than in years past because there are so many very qualified candidates.”

While Ms. Clark and the English supervisor were meeting with prospective teachers last week, candidates for the social studies job were down the hallway typing a 40-minute timed essay on the French Revolution. Upstairs, interviews for physics and biology teachers were being conducted.

“People will come in here begging for anything,” said [Dennis R. Lauro Jr.](#), the superintendent, who started closing his office door this year because out-of-work teachers would drop in unannounced to hand him résumés. “We’ve never seen these kinds of numbers before.”

Top candidates will be asked to return several more times to meet with Dr. Lauro, parents and students and to teach a demonstration class.

Ms. Pankow is hoping she will be among them.

“It would be unbelievable,” she said. “I would love it here, but I’m not necessarily putting all my eggs in this basket.”

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