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## **Broward schools seek new teachers -- in New York**

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“TEACH near the BEACH!” read the education jobs posting in the Feb. 28 edition of The New York Times.

The ad was for the Broward school district, which is recruiting teachers this week -- in New York City.

Yes, this is the same district that laid off nearly 400 teachers last summer and faces another budget shortfall that could result in more lost jobs this year.

Yet Broward is looking to the Big Apple -- as well as locally -- to find teachers to fill jobs in critical areas where there is a consistent shortage, said Rebecca Brito, the school system's director of instructional staffing.

“People sometimes get crazy about the weather, and they want to leave,” she said of applicants from northern states.

The district has not sent recruiters out of state in a while -- definitely not last year, Brito acknowledged, “but our pool of critical-shortage area teachers has been dwindling.”

For the 2010-11 school year, the Florida Department of Education has designated eight fields as critical teacher shortage areas: secondary math, science and English; reading; exceptional student education; foreign languages; technology education/industrial arts, and English for speakers of other languages.

Broward has openings or expects to have openings in math, science, English, reading and special education, Brito said. The district also needs speech pathologists with master's degrees.

With unemployment in Florida at 11.8 percent, the Broward Teachers Union doesn't think the district should be looking for prospective employees anywhere but here.

“They are threatening to lay off teachers in June, and they're going out of state in order to hire teachers,” said BTU President Pat Santeramo. “It does not make any sense.”

Superintendent Jim Notter said recruiters are not going out of state to make immediate job offers but to find a pool of talent.

“We did not lay off secondary math, reading or science teachers last year,” he said. “We're like any other business; we have to match our needs.”

Despite layoffs to other teaching areas last year, the district hired more than 400 teachers in critical shortage areas, Notter added. And he said the district is also considering sending recruiters to Detroit, another big city with lots of people looking for work.

Already, more than 50 applicants from the New York City area have e-mailed the district, according to Brito. Two district recruiters are heading to New York March 11-13 to attend a minority teaching fair and interview the applicants.

Funding for the trip will come from a federal grant for teacher quality, which districts can use to recruit "highly qualified" teachers. Those are taxpayer dollars that the district should not be using to send recruiters out of state, the BTU says.

Hiring teachers from outside Florida was common in the boom days of yore when districts were taking in 20,000 to 30,000 new students a year. But the state has seen little of the practice since the economic downturn began, said Mark Pudlow, a spokesman for the Florida Education Association.

"This is the first I've heard of anybody going out of state in three or four years," he said.

Miami-Dade does not have plans to send recruiters outside Florida this year, a spokesman for that district said; its last recruiting trip was in April 2008 to an in-state event.

Florida has 700 to 800 fewer teachers than it did last year, Pudlow added, though it is unclear if those people remain unemployed or have taken jobs outside public education.

Last June, Broward laid off 394 teachers -- most of them elementary educators in their first couple of years in the district -- due to budget woes and declining enrollment.

The school system has since rehired most of them as vacancies opened up when other teachers retired, resigned or lost their jobs because they didn't update their state certifications. Some 23 teachers remain jobless, according to the union, which is in the midst of rocky teacher contract negotiations with the district.

Since July, the district has posted teacher openings for spots that the laid-off educators don't qualify for because they don't have the correct certification.

The union has argued that the district should move currently employed teachers with the right certification into the open spots, potentially opening up other jobs for the laid-off teachers. Notter has said the school system is adhering to the rules set in the union's contract.

Broward will also use money from the federal grant to hold local job fairs and to attend the Great Florida Teach-In, an annual, statewide job fair, Brito said. Last year, that fair was virtual instead of in-person for the first time because a majority of districts didn't have enough money or teacher vacancies to attend.

School system recruiters also visit Florida universities to attract graduating students to Broward, Brito said, though it sometimes faces steep competition from the Miami-Dade and Palm Beach school districts.