

# A Booming Time for Teachers

by Joel MEGGS

The Rodd Charlottetown, Friday 2:00pm. Packed. Swarms of Education students fill both the upstairs and downstairs conference rooms, scouting out potential future employers. On the other side of the equation, over thirty boards are represented, desperate to talk to as many candidates as possible. Some of these reps have come with contracts, and will could be handing them out the following day.

"I have four contracts with me," says one school board rep from Alberta. "We're looking for math and science teachers primarily, though we have all sorts of positions to fill."

That sentiment was echoed by many representatives. "If you are a math or science teacher right now, you can write your own ticket," said a Calgary board rep.

This was the general consensus upstairs and down. Looming shortages in all areas of the country as thousands upon thousands of teachers retire, and those with math, science, and computer skills are lured away to private industry.

What this means for education students graduating in the coming years is that their prospects of unemployment are far less than they would have been in the past.

"I've already lined up three interviews for tomorrow," exclaimed one elated candidate.

Some boards are downright competitive with one another. One representative from Alberta, when asked about the another, more rural board from Alberta, said "Look at the pictures they have. They have a picture of a guy holding up a fish and a guy playing hockey . . . that's because [fishing and playing hockey] is all they have to do there," presumably trying to steer people away from more remote boards to his more urban location.

For years, talk about impending shortages have spurred rumours of recruiters luring teachers right out of teachers college with signing bonuses of up to \$20,000. While no bonuses



Teachers.

that large were evident at the fair, there was no shortage of wheeling and dealing to entice potential teachers to relocate, including signing bonuses, subsidized housing, memberships to fitness centres, and travel and food allowances.

The registration table, the first stop at the fair, immediately raises candidates' expectations.

"How many interviews did you receive as a result of the Education Job Fair? . . . How many job offers did you receive?" reads the registration form, which is to be turned in at the conclusion of the fair.

Of the thirty or so boards that were represented at the fair, twenty-four of them had conference rooms booked for the following day to do interviews.

Some boards were harder to get to than others. The Halifax Regional School Board had a long line-up for a good part of the afternoon. Calgary, too, generated a substantial amount of interest. The boards that had no line-ups were those that were most in need of teachers: the Northwest Territories, Northern Quebec, and other remote boards. Yet, these are the boards with the most to offer.

The Kativk School Board in Northern Quebec, for instance, offers starting teachers around \$35-40,000 a year in salary, subsidized housing, isolation pay of up to \$16,000 a year, and signing bonuses of up to \$9,000 a year. For a teacher just starting out and trying to get some experience, this could be a very attractive offer.

Another school, from Mexico, was offering the equivalent of \$1200 Canadian a month, free living expenses, and a membership to a health club, and they, too, would dole out up to \$5000 U.S. upon completion of the contract.

Perhaps these boards weren't generating enough interest simply because, with the current climate of opportunity, many potential teachers feel they don't have to move in order to get experience.

In Ontario alone, 45,000 new positions will become available by 2005. British Columbia is in the same boat, with demand for teachers progressing to the point where boards have taken to hiring university students as substitute teachers. Nationwide, the unemployment rate for teachers is down to 2.5 percent. In 1995, it was 4.3 percent.

However, the picture is not

nearly so rosy in the Maritimes. According to one New Brunswick representative, the fact that the Maritimes has so many teachers colleges for such a relatively small population means that there hasn't been and isn't likely to be any real shortage of teachers, though she did express the much lamented difficulty in finding math, science, and computer teachers.

PEI is perhaps the worst province for teachers right now. According to the PEI Job Futures site:

Few, if any, new positions will be created for teachers due to the decreasing size of the school age population. Approximately one-quarter of the employed teachers in P.E.I. are eligible for retirement by the year 2003. In March of 1999 the provincial government offered a Workforce Renewal Plan as an incentive for teachers within two years of retirement age to leave early. This will allow for a more gradual decline in the number of retiring teachers and immediate job opportunities for new teachers. Some of the job openings will allow teachers who are presently working as substitute teachers, job sharing positions or working less than full-time hours an opportunity to apply for permanent, full-time, year-round teaching positions.

According to Ricky Hood, Director of Human Resources and Administration for the Eastern School Board, PEI has experienced no shortage in applicants. "We will continue to hire, probably an average of fifty to sixty teachers a year. We have a fairly large pool at the moment [of substitutes and part-timers waiting for full time positions] . . . we have approximately 340 applications on file in the database, and we have about 300 substitute [applications on file]—that's healthy."

Hood claims that he gets a lot of e-mails from Islanders who have left to go where the jobs are, asking when there will be opportunities on PEI so they can come home.

This year, Hood expects to