Attracting and retaining quality teachers is the key to quality in Michigan’s education system. How likely is a teacher shortage in Michigan?

Unlike California, Texas or New York, few people are moving into Michigan. As a result, according to population projections from the Bureau of the Census, the total population of Michigan is likely to increase by only 315,000 persons (3.2%) over the next 25 years. Most of the increase will be among the elderly. The preschool population is projected to increase by 1.4% (9,000), but the school-age population is projected to decline by 2.5% (45,000). The college-age population is expected to decline by 5.2% or 49,000 people.

In 1987, 72.3% of teachers in Michigan were between the ages of 30 and 49; in 1993, this group had decreased to 59.6%. In contrast, only 10.2% of teachers were between the ages of 50 and 54 in 1987; six years later, this age group accounted for nearly 20% of teachers. One in ten teachers are over the age of 55. Clearly, a growing percentage of Michigan’s teachers are now eligible for retirement.
In 1998-99, there were 75,538 teachers in Michigan. The number of newly certified teachers has steadily increased over the past ten years. In 1997-98, 7,365 new teaching certificates were issued which is equivalent to about 10% of all current teachers. This number appears to be sufficient to replace retiring teachers in most areas of the state.

In addition, salaries in Michigan are higher than in neighboring states, which should allow Michigan to attract experienced teachers from surrounding states.

Detroit has had to hire 1,000 or more new teachers in each of the past two years; replacing approximately 14% of the current teaching force each year. During the 1999-2000 school year, Detroit Public Schools was issued 259 full-year and emergency permits by the state to employ noncertified teachers in regular teaching assignments. According to the former CEO of the School Reform Board, the loss of certified teachers is likely to continue because:

- Detroit teachers are retiring in large numbers;
- Detroit teacher salaries have averaged in the bottom 15 to 20 percent compared with average teacher salaries in Wayne, Macomb and Oakland counties. This makes it hard to hire new teachers.

It is unlikely that Michigan will face an overall shortage of teachers in the foreseeable future because of the combination of slow population growth, a large supply of new teachers from state universities, and higher teacher salaries, which allows Michigan to attract new recruits from neighboring states. However, in some curriculum areas, specifically math, science, and special education and in some urban school districts, the state may need to take additional steps to ensure that all children have capable teachers in their classrooms.

Analysis by Bettie Landauer-Menchik, Policy Analyst, the Education Policy Center at MSU

Additional information is available at www.epc.msu.edu. See Publications: Policy Briefs.