

Teacher shortage reaching crisis stage

By Mary Rodrigue
staff writer

A mild baby boom coupled with a teaching staff eligible for retirement has combined to make a critical shortage of teachers the latest education crisis in the state.

"We're on the threshold of a major crisis in education. This coming fall, there will be 12,000 more vacancies of teachers than graduates to move into those jobs," said George Garver, Livonia School Superintendent.

"At the current rate, by 1993 there will be 70,000 more vacancies than graduates who are qualified."

Garver's words were echoed by other educators during a panel discussion Monday sponsored by the University of Michigan-Dearborn's division of education alumni.

In a complete turnaround from just a decade ago when the supply of teachers far outweighed the demand, about 150 U-M education graduate alumni gathered on the U-M-D campus to hear superintendents from two of Michigan's largest school districts, Livonia and

Warren, warn of the impending crisis — one that has grown acute already in many parts of the nation.

"ALMOST NO ONE has been hired in our district since 1989," Garver said. "One half of our current administrative staff is now eligible for retirement."

"There has been some influx of kindergarten and first-grade students into the district while the number of teachers on recall has dwindled considerably," he said. "One out of 10 students must pursue an education (degree) in college to fulfill the current needs. But only one in 20 is pursuing a career in education. That must change."

Panel moderator Richard Morshead, dean of U-M-D's division of education, emphasized that the public is unaware of the mounting problem, falsely believing there is still a teacher surplus. "There is growing evidence of a serious shortage," said Morshead. "The problem requires public understanding."

John Pagan, superintendent of the Warren Consolidated Schools, said there is no simple solution.

"There is a slight baby boom now but that is not the only cause of the teacher shortage," Pagan said. "During the 1970s it was devastating for young people to work hard, study and earn good grades, and then not be able to find a job in the teaching field."

"Competent teachers with 10, 12, even 14 years experience were being laid off because of declining enrollment. They were devastated. Word spread. People backed off from the field. Experienced teachers joined private industry."

Adding to the problem, both Garver and Pagan cited the fact that women, who comprised the majority of teachers, have far greater career opportunities today than in the past.

"At one time a woman interested in pursuing a career could choose to be a secretary, nurse or teacher," Pagan said. "Today the options for women are endless."

Stating that the trend in education is cyclical, Garver recalled opening

schools with empty classrooms because of lack of teachers and hiring any available applicant, regardless of qualifications.

"I DON'T WANT to revert to that time," he said. "I would like to look into the marketplace and find several qualified candidates from which to choose."

"I'm confident that significant opportunities are about to occur."

His remarks drew raves from the audience, many who identified themselves as frustrated teaching graduates (products of the glutted market of the '70s) who found occasional employment substitute teaching and then abandoned the field altogether for steady employment.

Garver said he hopes teachers who abandoned the field for lack of jobs will provide the pool to carry schools through the immediate shortage.

"There will be education classes on our own campuses to facilitate re-entreeing teachers," he said. "But we don't know how many will want to return."

Added Pagan: "Many teachers we assumed would be available for callback are doing so well in the private sector that they can't afford to come back."

Garver identified several things that need to be done over the next few years.

"We must get the cooperation of colleges and universities to push education as an alternative," he said. "We have to get the attention of the state Legislature, many who believe there is still a glut of teachers."

"We have to talk to high school seniors again. Education has to be seen as a viable career alternative," Garver said. "And we have to examine our own institutions: the salary, the structure and the support system in order to build a good teaching environment."

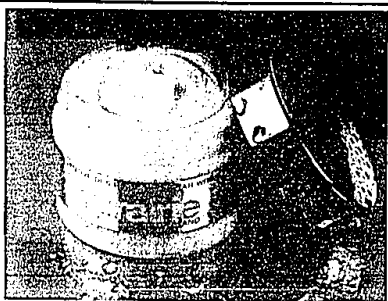
Pagan forces the need to increase the minimum salary of teachers from its current base in the low 20s to

\$25,000 — something that has not been a priority issue with unions since more than 90 percent of the membership is at the top of the pay scale in most districts, he said.

In answer to other queries from would-be teachers in the audience, the superintendents said they are required to give substitute teachers with 120 teaching days in the district priority when the first openings are available.

Pagan identified math, science and computer science as the first areas that will be affected by the shortage, followed by data processing, special education, earth sciences and reading. He urged teachers to become certified in more than one area in order to be more marketable.

"We must have the skills to compete on a worldwide basis," Pagan said. "We need to get the best people to fill these jobs. Our future is at stake."



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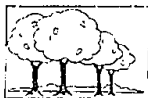
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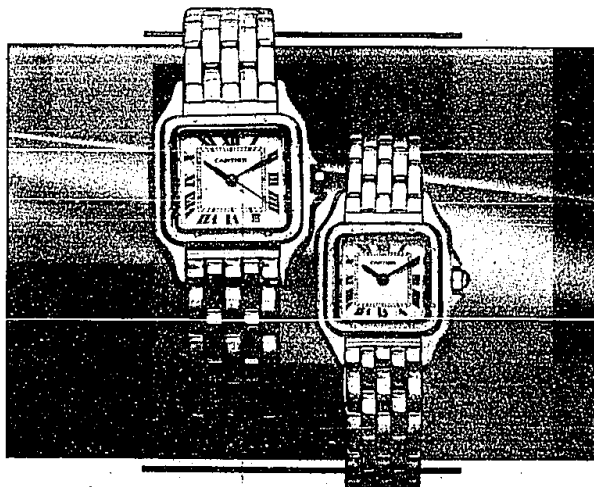
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