

'Critical shortage' of science, math teachers continues

Saint Augustine Record, Jan. 18, 2019, by Travis Gibson tgibson@staugustine.com

A [report presented to the Florida Board of Education on Wednesday](#) detailed an ongoing critical shortage of science and math teachers in public schools across the state.

"We have school principals who say 'I am nervous. If my chemistry or science teacher resigned, I don't know who would replace them,'" said Jewel Johnson, St. Johns County School District Director for Instructional Personnel.

The report, which is required by law each school year, also showed critical teacher shortages for a wide range of subjects including English, English for speakers of other languages, reading, technical education and Exceptional Student Education.

Johnson said that local teacher openings follow closely with the report's findings.

As of Jan. 7, there were 28 unfilled instructional vacancies in St. Johns County. Seven openings were for adult/vocational positions at First Coast Technical College, six were for associate teachers and five were for ESE (VE, Gifted, Pre-K). Of the remaining 10 openings, four were in the areas of math and science.

The trend is nothing new.

"Since (the 1999-2000 school year), staffing challenges have lessened but remain in math and special education, but since 2003-04 staffing challenges in science have failed to improve. Colleges in many states are overproducing candidates with expertise in already-staffed, low-demand subjects such as elementary education and under-producing candidates with expertise in understaffed, high-demand subjects such as science and math," the Education Commission of the States report said.

Florida is not unique in its struggle to find science and math teachers. Forty-eight states reported math teachers shortages and 43 states reported science teacher shortages for the 2017-18 school year, [according to U.S. Department of Education data](#). Forty-six states report shortages in special education.

The most popular teacher certification in Florida, according to the report, is elementary education, which makes up just over 22 percent of all certifications for the current school year. By contrast, just 1.5 percent of teachers (6,254) hold certifications for general science.

One trend causing the shortage is that teachers in areas like math and science are leaving for higher-paying private sector jobs, Johnson said. And students in the STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and math) can make more money in other professions. The St. Johns County School District must also compete with other area school districts, Johnson said, for the limited pool of teachers. The district targets local college students on the verge of graduating and teachers who are moving to the area.

In order to combat the draw to the private sector, Johnson said she focuses on the intrinsic value of teaching, as well as letting candidates know about the monetary bonuses that are available for teachers.

It's a problem that doesn't look like it will change any time soon. Nationwide, teacher education enrollments dropped 35 percent between 2009 and 2014, the most recent year for which data are available, according to the Learning Policy Institute. At the University of North Florida, [just 1,100 of the more than 16,500 students who declared a major were enrolled in the College of Education and Human Services in 2017](#), the lowest enrollment out of all the colleges on campus.

<https://www.staugustine.com/news/20190118/critical-shortage-of-science-math-teachers-continues>