

# Educators meet to discuss teacher shortfalls

Recruiting, retaining qualified teachers key to improving local schools, leaders say

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Recruiting and retaining qualified teachers is one of the biggest keys to improving educational achievement, according to educators who gathered at UC Santa Cruz on Friday to look toward the future of education in the Monterey Bay region.

"It is a real problem in Santa Cruz County," said county Superintendent Michael Watkins, who noted teacher turnover was 15 to 16 percent in the county this year.

The problem is widespread throughout the region. About 140 administrators from local schools, colleges and universities in Santa Cruz, Monterey, and San Benito counties brainstormed at the educational summit how to attract and keep more teachers. The event was hosted by the UC Santa Cruz Educational Partnership Center on behalf of the Monterey

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Bay Education Consortium.

In an effort to get a handle on the problem, participants took a close look at recent research findings. That data showed there are a tremendous number of teachers switching professions.

"We don't make the profession attractive enough to retain teachers," said George Blumenthal, newly appointed chancellor of UC Santa Cruz. The average teacher in California stays on the job for five years, he said.

Educators are also facing additional losses as longtime teachers near retirement age.

Twenty-eight percent of teachers in

the tri-county area are over 55, said Watkins.

"It portends a demand for many new teachers," he said.

Participants also looked at other challenges school districts are facing, including job satisfaction among educators, along with working conditions, teacher salaries and benefits, as well as the price of housing along the Central Coast.

"Wages are a huge challenge," said Dianne Harrison, president of Cal State Monterey Bay. "The cost of living here is so terribly excessive."

To help ease the teacher shortage, administrators at CSUMB are aggres-

sively recruiting students for its teacher education program. Math, science and special education teachers are especially in demand, Harrison said.

The campus has made significant gains in recruiting students interested in teaching special education classes, Harrison said.

"We had zero students in that program in 2000, and we have 400 in that program now," Harrison said.

The education summit was convened so that educators could work together to find solutions to finding and keeping more teachers. Solving the issue is critical to improving education for all students, participants said.

"We have a real duty to educate all students to the maximum of their potential," Blumenthal said. "One of the things we want to do is help each other ... so students can be successful and go to college."

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