Websites Help States Find Teachers | CPD

How do rural schools attract teachers? How do districts attract special educators? Technical assistance helps districts in three states stay staffed. Many states grapple with a problem that plagues both education and special education: How do they keep rural schools staffed with teachers? And how do they replace baby boomers as they retire? The Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education center's Dale Brown is working with three states to find a positive answer. He is a program coordinator who provides information technology services to state departments of education in Arizona, Iowa and Nebraska. TAESE at Utah State University is the CPD's largest technical assistance provider. Through the center, Brown contracts with the three state departments to link job seekers to education jobs and provide other technical support. His main tool is recruiting websites. Focusing on education in general helps bolster both education and special education, he said. TAESE is able to provide services that help states place educators in schools that otherwise might not have found them—and the states receive the services without having to hire their own full-time staff. In Arizona, Brown maintains a job recruiting website and also facilitates online registration for the Great Arizona Teach-In, an enormous annual job fair. In April 2009 it attracted 1492 participants from 35 different states, who met with representatives of 88 Arizona districts. It's a one-stop event, said Joe Stubblefield, recruitment and retention specialist for the Exceptional Student Services Division of the Arizona Department of Education. Districts at the fair conduct interviews onsite and may hire on the spot. Brown and other staff members from TAESE were there to help. The numbers tell the story. In addition to facilitating the teach-in, Brown provides technical assistance for three Arizona websites that recruit, provide professional development and track data in order to fine-tune teacher training. Thanks to the arizondeducationjobs.com website, around 1500 education jobs were filled in 2008. In 2007, 3000 jobs were filled. In addition, the professional development website has attracted 35,000 subscribers. In Iowa, Norma Lynch has watched the impact of Internet recruiting for years. “It has been extremely successful,” said the personnel development consultant for the Iowa Department of Education. When they launched the Teach Iowa website in 2000, Brown went to conferences and conventions, urging school districts to use the website to post job openings. At the time, if the districts wanted to reach a broader audience they advertised in the Sunday edition of a statewide paper, but at $1000 per ad, some districts were getting priced out. Brown did not tell the districts to stop using the newspaper, Lynch said; he just asked them to use the website, too. Now, districts post there and job seekers—many of them from out of state—come there to see what is available. “They [the districts] soon found that it was a successful recruitment tool, and free.” In addition, the technology has helped Iowa keep abreast of some demographic trends: retiring baby boomers and the drain of young, educated people from rural areas. It is still a challenge to fill secondary education math and science slots, and special education positions in all grade levels. Still, Lynch said, the website strategy has helped the Iowa State Department of Education maintain its high standards for educators. “It has kept us with our head above water.” A second Iowa website was launched four years ago to facilitate licensing to teach special education. Iowa has long had a program that allows a student to go to one of nine colleges throughout the state to receive the training needed for a special education endorsement. The website facilitates this existing program, provides information and collects data. That data shows 160 current participants who will be out in the field in the next year or two, Lynch said. Likewise, the Teach in Nebraska website has become the best recruiting resource available to that state's department of education, said Sharon Katt, senior administrator for adult program services. For more information, take a look at the education recruitment websites in Arizona, Iowa and Nebraska.