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## Teaching: A Demanding Job in High Demand

Kay Hyatt

*College of Education & Human Development, University of Maine*

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# COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

## *Selected News Releases*

### **Teaching: A Demanding Job in High Demand**

ORONO, Maine -- Increasingly, Maine is confronting the national problem of filling teaching positions, particularly at the middle school and high school levels, and key leadership posts with well-prepared, highly qualified educators. Even though the state is not experiencing a surge in K-12 enrollment like some other areas of the county, its well-established, senior teaching force is reaching retirement in great proportions.

The U.S. Department of Education has declared Maine a teacher shortage state in the following areas: Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics (Grades 7-12), French (Grades K-12), Spanish (Grades K-12), Teachers of Children with Disabilities (Grades K-12), and Speech Pathology (Grades K-12).

The teaching profession, like business and industry, is experiencing a severe supply and demand problem, reflecting a strong economy, shifting demographics and continuing growth and innovation in technology, according to Robert A. Cobb, dean of the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Maine. The College, through its nationally accredited undergraduate and graduate programs, prepares the majority of the state's teachers and educational specialists. Many graduates return to their home state or find teaching and educational leadership opportunities in other areas of the country.

"As a society, we know that the future hinges on the quality, commitment and work of teachers. That's why K-12 education is a top priority on the public and political agendas," says Cobb.

Mounting public expectations, private sector needs and state and national standards for teaching and learning, cast the profession of education in the spotlight and under the microscope. Cobb welcomes the heightened awareness and scrutiny. The quality of teaching and the educational experience is finally being recognized as an essential factor in shaping children's aspirations and character, as well as their academic abilities, says Cobb, long an advocate of strong performance-based standards and assessments for students and teachers.

"Today's teachers are in the midst of a huge transformation as child development and learning research constantly informs us and as technology changes the dynamics of teaching strategies," he says.

Aspiring teachers need to realize that teaching is an extremely difficult and rapidly changing job, Cobb advises. It's highly public and life consuming, requires year-round commitment and professional development, and the salaries don't begin to reflect the value of a well-prepared educator, he points out. The average starting salary of teachers in Maine is \$22,500, a fact that spurs many talented young people, especially those skilled in math, science and languages, to seek other career options in today's global market.

Research shows that most people who choose to teach know their income will be limited. They work for the love of the profession and the job of sparking a child's curiosity and kindling a love of learning that endures for generations. The intrinsic rewards and lasting impact of teaching are profound, says Cobb. However, he acknowledges that the compensation system must more accurately match the expectations and demands of the profession if Maine is to sustain a highly qualified and effective teaching force.

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**Contact:** Kay Hyatt, (207) 581-2761

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