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By Vicki Ortiz Healy, Chicago Tribune reporter



Unemployed teachers finding work as nannies

As job prospects remain bleak, new and laid-off educators put skills to use in different field

Two years after graduating with a [bachelor's degree](#) in education, Amanda Davis is thrilled finally to be working full time with children, earning a steady salary and paid time off.

But not as a teacher. As a nanny.

"It's just there's such a need for nannies in the city, and you really are paid well," said Davis, 24. "It's a good in-between for now."

As job prospects across the state and nation remain bleak for new and laid-off teachers — more than 8,800 Illinois teachers received pink slips in 2010, according to officials — many are finding welcome work as nannies and baby sitters.

Nannies increasingly say they have found that parents jump at the chance to leave their children with someone with a teaching background, offering generous incentives such as signing bonuses and extra time off. The popularity has inspired the creation of one local website — [sitterworks.com](#), which plans to launch soon — specifically for unemployed teachers and nurses hoping to find work in child care.

"Parents want more from the nannies they're bringing into their house," said Kimberly Walker, who co-founded the website with Elizabeth Patano Jawarek, another mother. "Despite how tough economic times are right now, parents are still willing to pay for someone who is very qualified."

Someone like Olivia Romine.

After spending more than 30 years as a special-education teacher around the Chicago area, Romine was laid off in June from a job at the Easter Seals' Therapeutic School in Chicago.

After unsuccessfully applying for teaching positions at school districts in the fall, Romine, 55, recently posted a profile on child-care job sites, including [care.com](#) and [sittercity.com](#). She holds a [master's degree](#) in administrative education.

"I'm not going to get a public school job because I'm too old and I'm too expensive," she said. "I went into teaching to help kids, so either way — if I'm a nanny, tutor, baby sitter, au pair, whatever — I still feel like I'm helping the kids."

The shortage of jobs is a depressing reality for administrators at the state's top teaching institutions. Officials at Illinois State [University](#), with the state's largest teaching program, have found there are three to four education school applicants at ISU for every teaching job filled after graduation.

So new teachers are being encouraged to consider related jobs — as corporate trainers, substitute teachers and day-care providers — until classroom prospects improve, said Deborah Curtis, dean of the university's college of education.

"When you graduate and you're not able to be employed, you worry about your credentials getting stale," Curtis said. Holding a similar job "allows you to make the case that you are using your skills and your degree."

Kim Alberts, 25, will graduate from Harper College in Palatine with an [associate's degree](#) in early childhood education this month. She said she has applied to more than 15 schools near Wheeling, where she lives — so far with no luck.

The opposite is true of the baby-sitting and nanny job listings she has applied to on [sittercity.com](#).

"None of the parents turn me down," Alberts said. "They all want me."

Breanne and Mike Failor are among the parents vying for nannies with an educational background. The Chicago couple recently began interviewing applicants to watch their 7-week-old son, Elliot, and have been pleasantly surprised with the candidate pool.

"Lucky for us, I guess, that there's an opportunity to have somebody with a really great degree and background," Breanne Failor said. "I'm just hoping for somebody that will be able to challenge him and give him activities so he can continue to grow."

A nanny typically cares for children at a family's home, full time or part time.

The allure of the job is sweetened by a nanny's earning potential. While nannies typically are paid \$10 to \$15 per hour to watch one child, those with teaching experience generally are offered \$15 to \$20.

By comparison, starting salaries for Illinois teachers with [bachelor's degrees](#) were \$23,042 to \$54,747 during the last school year, according to the Illinois State Board of Education.

In the hunt for the right nanny, families have split or paid the cost of health care, said Erin Krex, owner of First Class Care domestic placement agency in Chicago.

"I think that the teachers sometimes go into it as, 'I'll do this for a year and then I'll go back into the classrooms,'" Krex said. "But then they actually stay way longer than they think they will."

Because of this reality, some career nannies are frustrated with the presence of teachers in the industry, arguing that they're taking all the good jobs with no promise of longevity, said Walker of [sitterworks.com](#).

"They were just very frustrated and thought that if they had 20 years of experience but they didn't have a degree, they were being overlooked," Walker said.

Some families who hire teachers as nannies worry the placements will last only as long as teaching positions are hard to find.

They often are concerned that if they bring on a nanny, it will be only a one-year-solution to their child-care needs, Krex said.

"The teachers, you always kind of have in the back of your mind, are they going to want to get back in the classroom?" she said.

That isn't a concern of Heather Chase, 35, who was happy when she found Care in the Square, a home day care run by a former teacher in Bucktown.

At the day care, her 21/2-year-old daughter, Amelia, has her day broken up into blocks of time, or "classes," for such subjects as art and [music](#).

Chase said she's amazed that her daughter comes home each day pointing out letters of the alphabet, singing new songs and counting up to higher numbers.

"If someone has a background in childhood [psychology](#) or education, why would you not want to take advantage of that?" said Chase, adding that she and her husband also employ a high school teacher as an occasional baby-sitter during the summer.

"Now that we know the market is out there, we'll kind of always look for that," Chase said.

The teacher, Sarah Simanskey, opened the day care 18 months ago while finishing her [master's degree](#) in education at DePaul University.

Pregnant as she searched for jobs after [graduation](#), Simanskey quickly realized that if she went back to work, she would pay more for her child's day care than she would earn as a teacher, she said.

She charges \$320 to \$350 a week for children who attend [full time](#); \$85 to \$90 a day for part time.

Simanskey said she believes she is helping educate the children she works with and doesn't believe that she has made a choice between teaching or not teaching.

"I'm just teaching in a different way," she said.