
Teachers go abroad for work

Move provides some rewards.

Story by [Catherine Martin](#)

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As U.S. schools struggle with dwindling budgets and shrinking staffs, some teachers are opting to find jobs elsewhere.

In recent years, the number American teachers going to other countries has drastically increased, say representatives from teach abroad placement programs LanguageCorps and Teach Away Inc.

LanguageCorps reported a roughly 25 percent increase in the past three or four years, and Teach Away reports a 45 percent increase over the past 12 months and a 167 percent increase between April 2008 and April 2010.

Catherine Carpenter of Columbia is one of the teachers who took such an opportunity.

Harris spent nine years teaching in Columbia Public Schools, including five at Lange Middle School and four at West Junior High. But when her job changed in 2009, she decided it was the perfect time to try teaching abroad.

"I can't help but think the planets had aligned in such a way that it made it a perfect time to take advantage of this opportunity," she wrote in an email. "The kids were grown ... my husband had been downsized from Cumulus (in Columbia) and my job in the district was changing. It was now or never."

Carpenter saw an ad online for teaching opportunities abroad and ended up in the United Arab Emirates on a two-year contract. Recently, she signed another agreement with a local university to stay for two more years.

As a former ESL teacher, Carpenter said there are several differences when teaching abroad — she, not the student, is now the stranger; she teaches at a girls school and only interacts with other women; and she sees more formal manners from the students, such as standing when she enters the classroom.

But overall, she said she has enjoyed her experience abroad, especially the many opportunities to travel. She's made trips to the Eid ul-Adha in Oman, Italy, Egypt and Jordan.

Teaching abroad also has allowed Carpenter to meet teachers from all over the world. Some come from districts that had to make staff cuts, others are beginning teachers looking for experience and some are looking for something new and different after many years of teaching, she said.

Dave Frey, director of Teach Away, said the program has opportunities for teachers at all levels of experience.

He said the benefits include full medical insurance for family members, a roundtrip flight, a flight home in the summer, a signing bonus, education allowances and free tuition for families with children. Jobs in the UAE also offer a tax-free salary, he said.

Right now, teachers are in high demand in Asia and the Middle East, Frey said, as governments there are spending a lot of money on education. In Korea, the government wants to get one native English speaker in every public high school, and the UAE is

undergoing similar education reform.

As the countries are encouraging students to learn to speak English fluently, teachers are not required to speak the native language, and Frey said it is often preferred that they do not.

Teaching abroad also can offer teachers young and old many cultural benefits, Frey said.

"People who come back generally said it's the best experience they've ever had," he said. "When you work or live in a country you get to experience it in a way you can't get in a movie or even as a tourist. You learn about what the culture is about, what makes people tick — when you're working with them on a daily basis you get that cultural fluency."

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I hope the people who commonly compare our educational system to those of other countries realize there are big differences. In other countries an education is seen as highly valuable. Those who are lucky enough to have the opportunity to go to school seize the opportunity, so it is a very different teaching experience.

We attempt to educate all students regardless of their needs or economic status in the United States, which I feel is definitely the right thing to do, but every time an education issue comes up in this country there are some who are quick to compare us to other countries. There is just no comparison. When is the last time students stopped and stood silently in a public school here when a teacher entered a classroom?

April 16, 2011 at 10:40 a.m. ([permalink](#) | [suggest removal](#))

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