

## **“How to Obtain a Teaching Job in the Current Environment”**

Finding a teaching job in today’s economy will not be easy. Layoffs at traditional big corporations are making teaching jobs – with their promise of tenure look more attractive than ever. This means people are starting to flood the marketplace and public teaching jobs have become more competitive than ever before. That does not mean that there aren’t some tips and tricks that can help you get the steady job that you deserve.

- Try to get as many certifications as possible. Figure out which areas have a shortage and get certified in them.
- Be will to move.
- Make sure your student teaching performance shines.
- Volunteer or work part time to gain experience.
- Don’t expect to just teach. Schools need people who will also coach and supervise after school activities.
- Keep trying! Make sure many districts know you are interested!
- Create a strong portfolio.
- Substitute teach so that you become familiar to district officials.
- Use family and friends to network.

### **Substitute Teaching**

Substitute teaching can be a great way to get your foot in the door. First, however, you need to approach it the right way. Too many people just show up and do nothing once they are there. You need to socialize and become popular! This is your chance to be first on mind when a new teaching position becomes available.

Be nice to everyone – not just administration officials. Secretaries are often the real powerhouses in any school district. Be nice to them! Be friendly. Always say hello!

Say hi and smile to the secretaries. You have to be known to everyone. Do not let students take advantage of you. When you are in the teacher’s lounge introduce yourself and get known on a first name basis. Do not treat this as a babysitting job. If you do your job poorly, you will never get hired on a full-time basis. Ask the secretaries about the rules that are unique for their school. They will like the fact that you are taking them seriously. Your reputation will follow you – so make sure everyone thinks well of you. If you are thought of as reliable, friendly and not a troublemaker, you will move to the top of the list when they are looking for a full-time teacher. Keep your resume up to date and let it be know that you are interested in teaching full time. People quit teaching jobs all the time and opening often pop up midyear. Be there and be available for the opportunities. Be dependable.

## **Finding a Teaching Position**

New teachers are always needed. People leave teaching for a variety of reasons and turnover can be fairly high. The important thing is to keep track of what specialties are needed and where the jobs are. Secondary school teaching is a growing field with a huge demand right now. Math, science, ESL and special education particularly need new teachers. Try to become certified in these disciplines. Inner city and rural schools are facing a teaching shortage. Many schools are looking for diversity hires.

If you are planning to enter the teaching profession, you need to understand that it has changed considerably over the years. Rote memorization from textbooks is no longer popular. These days' teachers tend to use props and help "coach" children into learning new concepts through application. Sometimes these are called "manipulatives". These help students learn how to apply abstract concepts in real life. Some teachers even use board games to solve math problems! Learn about these terms and how they are applied, so you can discuss them at your job interview.

One of the biggest challenges facing public schools today is educating students from various diverse backgrounds. Often a school will have a wide mix of religious and ethnic heritages. Schools are looking for teachers with a demonstrated ability to teach and relate to these minority communities.

While some schools offer training to help current teachers face these challenges, it is far more cost effective to hire a teacher who already has these diversity skills. Many community college and night schools offer courses in relating to the diversity community. Having a proven expertise in this much-valued skill can put your resume to the top of the pack. Another good idea, if you are a substitute teacher in a district is to keep aware of any diversity training programs they offer. If one becomes available sign up for it – even if you have to pay for it out of your own pocket. It will show that you are dedicated to finding a way to fill the shortages in their teaching needs.

## **Teachers Responsibilities**

Before your first interview you want to become comfortable with all aspects and duties that will be expected of you as a teacher. You may be asked about any or all of them. Be prepared to discuss your experience and how you would handle each of these chores:

- Designing classroom presentations to meet the needs of your students.
- Work with students individually.
- Planning and assigning lessons
- Grading tests
- Listening to oral presentations
- Maintaining classroom discipline.
- Evaluating student performance
- Evaluating student potential

- Create new assessment methods
- Provide additional assistance in areas where a student needs help
- Grade papers
- Prepare report cards
- Meet with parents

This is just a small list of the most challenging tasks. You will also be expected to work study halls and homerooms. Most teachers need to supervise some sort of extra curricular activity. You will be expected to keep your eyes open for potential cases of parental abuse or drug and alcohol problems. If you sense a problem you will have to have the courage to take action and report your suspicions to the appropriate agencies.

High school teachers are often asked by students to recommend universities or career development programs. Do you think you can pay enough attention to your students to figure out what the best life track for them would be?

You will also be asked how you will deal with the frustrations that are the downside of teaching. Yes, teaching can be a very fulfilling experience when you help a child overcome a problem and truly learn. But, it can also be very frustrating. You will have to deal with promising children who fail. You will have to deal with bright students who fall prey to drugs, violence and teenage pregnancy. Can you be strong enough to confront these disappointments? Schools are sometimes violent and class sizes are growing. Can you adapt your teaching methods to reach classes of 30 or more students? Can you keep them under control?

Many first time teachers take jobs in inner city communities to get experience. Often these schools are run down and will not have the basic amenities you expected when you were a student. Will your self-respect and self-confidence be able to handle these problems? Principals and superintendents will not expect a simple yes response. They will want to know exactly how you will deal with these challenges. Prepare and memorize a response in advance.

Teaching is also not the low hour workload it used to be. Because most teachers have to go through professional development courses and supervise after school activities, you will often be working more than 40 hours a week. The upside of course is that you will have summers off and many breaks throughout the school years.

A recent development in some districts is the year round school year. Before you interview find out if your district plans to adopt this model. If they do, make sure that you would be interested in working year round. If not, you might consider applying to a district with a more traditional schedule.

Tenure laws are still in effect in most states. This does not mean however that once you are hired you are guaranteed a job for life. For the most part you will have to work for three years in the same district before you are offered tenure. Check the district out and make sure it is worth a three-year commitment on your part before you apply.

## The Teaching Situation

In the year 2000 there were about 3.8 million teaching jobs including about 1.5 million were elementary school teachers, 1.1 million were secondary school, 590,000 were middle school, 423,000 were preschool, and 175,000 were kindergarten teachers. About 15 percent of teachers were employed by private schools. Bigger states have more schools and therefore more teaching jobs.

You must have a teaching license in order to teach in a public school. Most licenses are granted by State boards of education. The licensing requirements will change depending on the grades you want to teach. For example, if you had a license to teach high school, you would need to get a different license to teach elementary school. In many cases different subjects require different teaching licenses. You will want to check with your State board of education to find out what requirements you will need to teach the subjects and age groups you are interested in.

No matter what state you are in you will need to have a bachelor's degree and completed some amount of teaching training. There are some states that will require you to have a master's degree.

To keep your license you will almost certainly have to pass some sort of Basic Skills test and undergo some type of ongoing educational training.

In a small number of states, Vocational Education teachers will not have to have a bachelor's degree if they have a specialized expertise in a vocational subject.

Recently the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards has begun offering voluntary national certification for public school teachers. These teachers become nationally certified, by demonstrating classroom expertise, creating a portfolio and passing a written assessment of their educational abilities.

Make sure that teaching is for you and that you are not simply looking for a secure job. Simply knowing a lot about a subject does not mean you have the skills to communicate that subject to students. You need to inspire trust in your charges and be sensitive to their emotional needs. Communication is very important, as is responding to the different learning patterns for different children. You need to be organized and dependable. You need to be creative and have oodles of patience!

Mavericks tend to not do well in the teaching community. You will be expected to be a team player. As your career progresses you may find yourself no longer teaching, but working in the library a specialist or a supervisor. No matter what job title you hold, you will have to be able to communicate and represent yourself well to parents, the school board and the community as a whole.

Teacher Mentors are growing in popularity. If you become a mentor, you will not only be teaching your students, but you will become responsible for teaching younger teachers how to teach.

Generally the older the students you teach, the more you will be paid. Demographics and the growing population suggest that the need for teachers will rise steadily between now and 2010.

Most specialties are expected to grow with some notable exceptions. Physical Education and Social studies are currently flooded with teachers. Unless you have an exceptional educational background, this is a bad time to try to become a history teacher!!

Math, Science, Bilingual Education and Foreign Languages have many vacancies. If these are your areas of expertise, this is a great time to be entering the teaching field. If you can teach English As A Second Language and know Spanish, you will be in great demand in California, Arizona and Texas.

## **Salary Expectations**

There is a wide range of teacher salaries depending on the law of supply and demand. You can increase your odds of a high paying job in several ways including:

- Looking for a job in the South or Southwest where a growing population is increasing demand
- Taking extra classes in bilingual education, ESL, Math, or Science. These subjects are in demand!
- Putting yourself into a school district as a substitute teacher or teacher's aid in order to demonstrate your dedication to education.

## **ESL**

We cannot stress this enough. Picking the right subject is the key to both getting a job and getting a decent salary. ESL is the number one desired subject in public schools today. Fewer children speak English as a primary language than ever before. Districts are in desperate need of teachers who can provide them with lessons of English As A Second Language.

To qualify, you will probably want to be able to speak basic Spanish and have specialized credentials and training in reaching these students. A regular English degree won't cut it.

## **Special Education**

Teachers who are trained to reach learning-disabled students are also very much in demand nationally. Sometimes you will be expected to help a regular teacher in the classroom. At other times you will be asked to move between schools in a district. More than 96 percent of all districts have a need for additional Special Education teachers. If you can get these specialized credentials, you have a great chance at finding a job and a good salary.

## **Math and Science**

This is a secret boards of education are trying to keep from parents. Less than half the math and science teachers in America majored or minored in math or science in college. Only about one in four even has a specialized certificate in math or science education. Therefore, if you minor in math or science, or can get a specialized teaching certificate in either field, you will have districts knocking down your door to hire you.

## **Urban and Rural Schools**

Urban and rural districts are really suffering from a lack of qualified teachers. Everyone wants to work in the suburbs. No matter what teaching level you aspire to, you are apt to find a wealth of openings if you are willing to teach in these under-resourced schools.

Because the demand for teachers is so high in these regions, they are often willing to pay more than their bucolic counterparts.

## **Teachers of Color**

America is continuing to become less White and more Multi-racial. Yet, advances in Affirmative Action in other industries have led to a decline in the number of qualified non-White teacher applications. While America's school-age population is becoming more multicultural and multi-ethnic in makeup, its teaching workforce reflects a trend in the opposite direction.

Qualified teachers of African American, Hispanic and Latino, Asian, and Native American descent can write their own ticket in many school districts.

## **Guys Rule**

Diversity cuts both ways. There are far more female applicants for teaching jobs than male applicants. Yet, districts need an even number of male and female teachers. Given the rise in single parent households, male teachers are becoming increasingly important as father figures and role models. Being a guy can be the key in the door to a teaching job.

## Getting A Job Once You Are Qualified

Here are five great strategies to help you find your perfect job.

- 1. Network.** Student teach. Teach summer school. Tutor and volunteer. Tap colleagues, family and friends and put the word out that you want to teach!
- 2. Don't be afraid to bother districts.** Keep sending out letters of interest, resumes and transcripts to every district you would consider teaching in. They won't get tired of you.
- 3. Classified Advertisements.** Read and respond to classified ads every day.
- 4. Use the Internet.** Sites like Monster.com usually have hundreds of teaching jobs posted. These sites allow you to store your resume, so you can reply to multiple ads in minutes – and not have to pay postal charges!
- 5. Job Fairs.** Job fairs are often offered by the state, universities, or associations. Look for them and attend!

# The First Impression

The most important rule when trying to get any job is making a good impression.

These tips should help you out.

- 1. Letters of Inquiry.** Craft a one page laser printed cover letter that highlights your strengths and what administration officials should look for on your resume. When you send it, be sure to include copies of your college transcript and teaching licenses.
- 2. Always Follow Up.** About a week after you have sent out your letter of inquiry, send a follow up email or make a telephone call to confirm that they have received your material.
- 3. Portfolio.** Create a folder containing and documents that can demonstrate your teaching abilities. Bring it with you to your job interview.

4. **Research.** Public schools must make all of their records public. Go on the internet and find out a little background on the class size, educational attitudes and recent events that have affected your target district. Have the information on hand so that you can bring it up at the job interview and impress administration officials with your dedication and interest in the district.
  
5. **Rehearse.** You can probably predict what sorts of questions you will be asked. Write them down. Give them to a friend and have him or her ask you the questions. Respond to them as you would at the interview. Then ask your friend if he or she was impressed. Do this several times until you know exactly what you want to say!
  
6. **Ask Questions.** At the end of any interview the administration official will ask if you have any questions. Believe it or not, most people have no response. Plan some questions out in advance and ask them. It will show genuine interest in the job and impress your interviewer.

7. **Follow Up Again.** A couple days after the interview send a letter to the district thanking them and asking if they have any additional questions for you. It will show genuine interest!

## Interview Tips

The following tips include basic things to keep in mind when trying to get a job interview, during the interview and for your follow up. Think about each one in the morning before you start sending out your letters of inquiry and again once you have returned from the interview.

- Be neat and complete when you fill out your application.
- Make sure your resume and cover letter are informative and highlight your skills well.
- Try to drop off your resume in person if practical. If you do so, dress professionally.
- Triple check the time of your interview.
- Memorize the interviewer's name and make sure you know how to pronounce it.
- Learn about district before your interview.
- Ask questions.
- Bring extra copies of your resume.
- Bring a pen.
- Dress professionally
- Arrive about 15 minutes early.
- Use a firm handshake.
- Make eye contact.
- Be positive
- Smile.
- Don't sit down until you are asked to.
- Don't rush.
- Wait until invited to take a seat.
- Think before you speak.
- Relax.
- Inquire about job requirements.
- Show that you are interested in children.
- Say only nice things about former employers.
- Be a good listener.
- Use complete sentences when speaking. Do not trail off.
- If you do not understand a question, ask for a clarification.
- Tell the interviewer why you would be good for the district.
- Inquire about when the position needs to be filled.

- Ask what the district's timetable is for filling the position.
- Say "Thank You" at the end of the interview.
- Thank the interviewer for spending time with you.