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Three Words:
Hardworking, Alpha Male,
Jackhammer. . .
Merciless, Insatiable¹

*Land a Teaching Job (and Get
Paid for Student Teaching)*

Long before you stand quaking in front of a room full of wiggling, eager faces (if you teach elementary) or sullen, glazed stares (if you teach secondary), you have to get a job. Landing that first-paying teaching job could be incredibly challenging, particularly if you teach a subject that has a lot of readily available and licensed applicants. That being said, schools need passionate, hardworking teachers. Why not be at the forefront of their mind when they see a job posting arrive that you might fit?

¹This is a quote from *The Office* and one of the girthier titles for a chapter, so I think Dwight would approve.

My Story: Provisionally Licensed and Yet Somehow in Charge of Your Kid

The gym echoed with the nervous voices of fellow teacher candidates as they desperately pleaded with the administrators to hire them. I picked nervously at my nails and felt the sweat pooling in unholy areas. I was in a squeaky, plastic chair, across from one of the local principals, and she glanced down at my resume, tapping with a pen. Clearing her throat, she asked.

“How would you ensure equity and make sure all students are treated fairly?”

I knew that her school had a high minority population, and I also knew that I needed to express myself in a way that conveyed my desire to build up the self-esteem and self-advocacy of all of my students. Further making me sweat, the principal interviewing me was a woman of color and I am paler than milk, so I wanted to confidently and intentionally express through my answers that I was *not* racist (anti-racist wasn't a common phrase at that point in education-speak). It perhaps helps to know that just 10 minutes up the freeway from where I was sitting at that moment was a massive Confederate flag flapping in the breeze over the Interstate. So, it unfortunately did NOT go without saying that I was, in fact, quite happy about the North winning the Civil War.

I wanted to say something about not judging a book by its cover, but couldn't get that out because all I could think, for some reason was, “Don't say black. Don't say black.” Why was I afraid of saying black? I have NO idea why I was afraid of saying black, but I think it mostly stemmed from not being confident whether black or African American or Person of Color was the correct term. I couldn't simply state that I would meet the needs of all students, regardless of ethnicity. I just was so nervous and kept thinking, “I'm not racist, but what if she thinks I am racist? And I shouldn't talk about race. Or I should. I shouldn't say black. Is it supposed to be African American? What is the right term? Or do I just say black. No, WHY WOULD I SAY BLACK!?” So what I ended up mumbling was, “I think students, they're all different, right? And they are all different books. And covers. They all have covers. And they're different covers. But not that some covers are better than other covers. All covers are good. But the insides are the same. And different.”

I did not receive a callback.

On top of those top-tier interviewing skills, I was unlicensed during this search. When I started my licensure program, the student-teacher year loomed ahead of

me-mocking me with its utter *lack* of a paycheck. I decided that I was going to do every freakin' thing I could to differentiate myself as I started my licensure program. In the first year in my program, which I attended while still working full-time as a technical writer (gross). Each week, I would check the job postings, email principals, and attend every possible job fair that I could. When I did my immersion hours, where I went and shadowed a teacher at a school, I requested to meet with the administrator to “pick their brain” about their pedagogy (i.e., get an informal interview where I ask them questions but am really just trying to network).

After an entire year of living like a fangirl of every administrator in the surrounding counties, I was hired on a Provisional License to teach English 12 in a rural, Title 1 school. Trial by fire? Absolutely. But was it a paying job with insurance coverage? Yes. Yes, it was.

Steps for Success

If you are still unlicensed, you are a bit of a risk. I'm gonna be real with you, if they're not desperate for a teacher, they're more than likely going to trash your resume in favor of licensed and experienced teachers. Ideally, ones that did their student teaching at the school and have been tested. The best way to figure out who might be desperate enough is to check mid-year or late summer with the schools in surrounding counties.

Don't be afraid to acknowledge that but highlight how your inexperience can be assuaged by your efforts and your eagerness to learn from such a fantastic establishment (or something else that downplays your inexperience and highlights what an asset you are).

Step 1: Search Smart and NETWORK

The biggest thing you can do to get your foot in the door is to hone in on around five schools at which you would like to teach. Then from there, you're looking for which one might be a good match for you. When you spend time or talk to folks at these schools, consider the pay, school culture, student needs, community expectations, and unionization.

If you're not currently spending time in schools yet, you can still find a school that is the perfect match. There are some things you can do to get started. It is important to be proactive, because these schools often get a ton of applications,

and you can differentiate yourself by being intentional, direct, and persistent. The squeaky yet respectful wheel sometimes gets hired just so they stop getting emails from you (the metaphor is mixed, but you get it).

Contact the districts and find out their hiring policies (some counties will be more willing to hire you before you officially have your license than others). Look for schools that are more desperate to have quality teachers, and you absolutely can be quality even if you are not licensed yet. Private schools and Title 1 schools may be more flexible on licensing requirements because of lower pay and higher turnover rates. Do not be afraid to call around HR departments and ask whether they consider provisionally licensed teachers.

Be upfront about your licensure status from the start – make sure to tell them what your plan is to obtain your license and what the timeline will be for them and you. You do NOT want to get an offer just to have it rescinded when they learn you're a class and a few Praxis tests away from having your full license.

If you are already spending time in schools because of a practicum or student teaching, you have even more options. When you are already demonstrating your teaching abilities, you have a huge leg up on teachers who have not yet built those relationships. However, you can still work on being direct, persistent, and amazing at your job. **Networking is absolutely vital**, but it's important to do it in a way that helps you build relationships with the people who will actually be hiring and have the responsibility of making decisions about potential hires. It should not be a secret that you are looking to be hired: be explicit. Don't make them guess your intentions; tell each person you speak to that you would love to be considered for a position and why you would be a great fit at their school.

Another option to **build relationships in an organic way** is through asking to observe classes. You can ask department heads or seasoned teachers if you could "observe" their classroom to learn from their teaching style. As valuable as it is to get to know the teachers, especially the seasoned ones, the administrators also need to like you. Take a step further, and ask the assistant principal or principal to meet with you and discuss what THEY look for in a teacher. This is like getting the cheat codes if you do, in fact, land an interview with that school later. The principals and assistant principals at the schools where you are interested and ask to meet with them. Interview them to get advice on the types of things they look for in a candidate. That will provide lots of good feedback and allow you to get face time with the people who help make the hiring decisions.

Being intentional with the relationships is very important. Write hand-written thank you cards for *every single person* with whom you meet. Every single one of them. When in doubt, write a thank you card. It seems small, but it makes a huge impact.

Step 2: Substitute

This is one of those, “do as I say and not as I do” situations. One of the easiest ways to get relationships with schools is to substitute. Now, I want to add a caveat: please do not think that subbing and teaching are equivalent: subbing is so much worse. Subbing is the hard part of teaching without a bulk of the relationship building, so if you don’t love subbing it does not necessarily mean you will hate teaching. When subbing, do not just show up, do the sub job, and leave. Push yourself to meet the department heads when you are subbing. Introduce yourself and be friendly. Let them know that you are looking to land a teaching job.

This should be obvious, but **be a GOOD substitute**. Administrators talk to each other – they will absolutely find out from each other if you are a waste of classroom space. Follow the sub plans to the last detail and always leave a note for the teacher discussing how the students did. Teachers talk, and administrators are likely to hear about it if you don’t follow the lesson plan *or* if you do great.

Step 3: Hiring Fairs

Hiring fairs are a great opportunity to meet a lot of people all at once. Although it is great to show up, it is better to remember that it is an interview, so prepare accordingly:

- Dress the part: make sure you are dressed in business attire (i.e., dress professionally).
- Bring printed copies of your resume printed on heavy-weight paper. If possible, include printed contact information for your references and a cover letter that is specific to the school. If you are meeting with numerous schools and are unsure of which ones you will meet with, write a generic cover letter explaining why you are a great candidate.
- Practice your interviewing skills before you show up.
- Hone in on your five favorite schools, if possible. Spend time at their booth and do all you can to demonstrate what you know about their school.

- Always write a handwritten thank you card to everyone with whom you met.
- Keep a notepad to take notes and names of those with whom you met.

Step 4: Keep Popping Up

It is a fine line between being annoying and persistent, and you have to dance that line like the prima ballerina of education that you are. Every four to six months, I emailed the contacts I had made at various schools, following up with some sort of question, and basically reminding them that I exist. This ensured that when a position did open up, it was impossible to forget me.

Tips on emails:

- Keep the emails short, sweet, and to the point.
- Write professionally – no shorthand and no slang.
- Think of an authentic question: this encourages them to respond. This can be as simple as “When will you be hiring for next fall?”

Step 5: Upload Your Resume on All the Sites

Many districts, particularly large ones, have a database of applications that they keep on file throughout the year. Make sure that you have your most up-to-date resume uploaded for each district, for whatever local school databases are being used in your county. If the website has an option for an official resume and cover letter, make sure you upload both. The more information you can give them about you, the better.

Finally, have a friend or professor proofread your resume and cover letter.

Here’s the Rub

The truth is rough, so I’m going to rip it off like a first-time Brazilian wax: landing a job can be hard. As I’m writing this, it’s a buyer’s market for jobs, but even within that, if you are teaching in a subject that has lots of teachers, it will be harder for you. Teachers in subjects for which schools are perpetually hiring will likely have a very easy time landing a job – and at the time I’m writing this, that would be special education, math, and science. The rest of us suckers will have to work harder. If you’re searching before you’ve completed student teaching, you

may live in a state or district that will not budge on the student-teaching time. I hope, for your wallet's sake, you do not have to work for free for the better part of a year. Unfortunately, the waxy truth is you may have to do exactly that. Even if you do, however, the advice still stands as the best possible way to line up a job so that when you are done, you have a job lined up for you.

TL;DR

Finding a teaching job is about your qualifications, but once you have those, it is mostly about you. All those soft skills we try and teach our students are profoundly important, so do all that stuff you know you should – especially if you want to land a job before you are licensed. Remember to be kind and courteous to everyone you come across, be intentional with your interactions, and get into the rooms where it happens. The more that these administrators and district people like you, the better chance you have that they will be willing to jump through hoops to get you into their building, especially if you are not officially licensed yet. Give them a chance to exercise a lil' nepotism. OK, unless it's your mom that's hiring, it's cronyism, but I prefer the term networking.

