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The Interview for Educators

The hard work that you put forth with your resume and cover letter has paid off. Now you have an interview! You have the opportunity to present yourself to an employer and explain why *you* are the *BEST* person for the position. Personal presentation and preparation will determine whether or not you secure the role.

The interview allows you to match your skills, abilities and experiences to the needs of the employer. You should also use the interview to acquire insights and information to determine whether or not this is the right position for you. Interviewing involves a mutual exchange of information, rather than an inquisition or interrogation. Careful and thorough planning for each interview is necessary to present yourself and your qualifications in the most effective manner.

To learn more about what an employer is looking for in a candidate, keep these things in mind. Most employers evaluate a candidate's:

- **Presentation** (appearance, body language, dress, poise)
- **Education** (level, type, caliber of institution)
- **Experience** (type, amount, quality and level of responsibility)
- **Performance** (grades and evaluations)
- **Potential for development** (leadership experiences)
- **Characteristics** (communication skills, work ethic, enthusiasm, teamwork, work habits)

Here are some tips on how you can put your best foot forward in an interview:

Preparation

Self Assessment: Know yourself and what YOU can offer the school/organization.

- What qualities do you have? (*personality traits*)
- What is important to you? (*values*)
- What working conditions would you like? (*needs*)
- What abilities do you possess? (*skills*)
- What are your aspirations and career direction? (*goals*)

You need to present to the employer confidence in yourself and your abilities. If you have difficulty identifying your strengths in these areas, make an appointment for a mock interview or to speak with a professional in the Office of Career Development.

Research: Learn as much as you can about the school/organization with which you will be interviewing:

- mission and goals
- level of parental involvement
- student population
- who decides what materials are covered
- type of discipline enforced
- how much autonomy is allowed

You can find this information using:

- http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/reportcard
- http://www.greatschools.org
- networking contacts
- the school/organization's website

Interviewing Attire

Men:

- Wear a suit, not a sports coat/slacks (if you can, unless otherwise noted by employer).
- No flashy colors or styles, solid-colored suits work best.
- Polished, clean dark dress shoes and socks; no boots.
- Express your personality through your shirt and tie, but err on the side of conservative.
- Avoid soiled, wrinkled or worn clothing.
- Hair, mustache and beard should be well trimmed.
- Pay special attention to clean hands and groomed nails.
- No strong colognes or aftershaves.
- Remove piercings before the interview.

Women:

- Wear a suit; a skirt or pant suit is acceptable.
- Skirts should be knee length or below.
- Always wear stockings (opaque in flesh tone or neutral colors). Bare legs are not acceptable.
- Hairstyles should be clean and neat.
- Use make-up moderately.
- Do not overdo the use of jewelry—nothing that dangles or "clinks". Piercings in places other than your ears should be removed.
- Do not forget to shine shoes and clean fingernails.
- No strong perfumes.

Try not to carry too much to an interview, but do have a padfolio or something presentable in which to write and refer. It is acceptable to use the pad of paper to write your questions for the organization. However, do not read from this, simply refer to it. In addition, bring copies of your resume, a list of references, and, if you have one, a portfolio of your work.

A reference list or letters are necessary. Many employers want the names or letters of 3-5 references once you have reached the interview stage. Be sure that you have spoken to each of the references about your job search and keep them informed. When you have accepted a position, be sure to send a thank you note to the people who helped you get there.

On the Day of the Interview

- Arrive approximately 10 minutes early.
- Use good communication skills:
  - Avoid using slang expressions—"ya know", "like" and "kids".
  - Maintain eye contact and watch your body language.
  - Listen carefully and respond to the interviewer's questions.
  - Speak in a controlled voice of reasonable volume.
- Be career-directed; express an interest in the position/career field for which you are interviewing. Summarize your qualifications and interests.
- Cite examples—avoid yes and no answers, articulate and expound upon statements.
- Be specific—"I earned 75% of my college expenses".
- Silence is golden! If you are not certain how to answer a question, take a moment—think about your response, then express it. You will sound more thoughtful and articulate.
- If asked about salary, give a range.
- Be positive—do not talk negatively about former employers.
- Be polite to all personnel.
- Ask intelligent questions of the interviewer.
- Practice interviewing with anyone who is willing (parents, friends, supervisors, faculty, Career Development staff members...).
- Project confidence, enthusiasm, sincerity, and commitment.
- Smile!
- Follow-up quickly.

During the Interview

1. **Initial Greeting:** The first impression is extremely important. Walk toward the interviewer and firmly shake hands. Make eye contact and introduce yourself.

2. **Ice Breaker:** The interviewer may try to relax you by making small talk. Answer with more than "fine". Taking the time to talk could help with any nervousness you may have.

3. **Career Interests and Goals:** An interviewer wants to hear a well thought out response and they need to know if your goals correspond with their future needs. They may ask:

- Why did you choose to go into the teaching field?
- Why are you interviewing for this position?
- What are your goals as a teacher?

Note: Try not to say that you are interested "because you want to work with students". Instead, specifically indicate HOW you want to work with students (i.e. "I enjoy motivating students to learn...")

4. **Your Qualifications:** The employer will be looking for tangible results or achievements and transferable skills gained through student teaching experiences, internships, community or voluntary involvement, coursework or co-curricular activities. It is extremely important to provide concrete examples. To prepare for this area of questioning, review the job description and your own resume. Think about how your past experiences, accomplishments, and skills demonstrate your ability to perform the necessary teaching responsibilities.

5. **Organizational Information:** The interviewer will either spend time talking or asking you what you know about the organization. This is precisely why it is important to research their organization prior to the interview!

6. **Questions:** Prepare to have at least 10 questions for the interviewer, as employers often judge how interested a person is in the position by how thoughtful their questions are. The interviewer does not want to answer questions relating to what has already been explained on the organization's web site (unless you ask for more specific information). You should have read the information prior to your meeting. Also, it is **not appropriate** to ask questions about salary and benefits in the initial screening interview. *Don't ask a question that you could have learned had you done your homework!*

Topics you might ask about include:

- Use of technology in the classrooms
- Mentoring programs available for new teachers
- The use of teacher aides or parent volunteers
- The environment in the building
- Expectations for teachers, including out of class commitments

7. **The Close:** If the interviewer does not tell you what the next step in the selection process will be, ask. Finally, reaffirm your interest in the school/organization and reiterate your qualifications for the position. Think about this summary statement prior to the interview. Thank the interviewer for his/her time.

8. **Follow Up:**

Notetaking: If you're interviewing with a number of organizations, jotting down notes immediately after each interview will help you keep track of your experiences. Record your likes, worries, and the next step in the process.

Follow up notes: Do your best to collect business cards; this makes it easier to respond to each person that interviewed you. Follow-up notes should include a thank you for their time and specific information about the interview with them. Also, talk about the organization and reiterate why you are interested in them. Finally, should you have forgotten to mention any important aspect of your candidacy, mention it here. These notes can be handwritten or word processed and mailed or e-mailed. They should be short and sent within 48 hours of the interview.

Follow-up calls: Keep a list of organizations you have interviewed with and their individual follow-up process. If you have not heard from the organization within the time period indicated by the interviewer, you should telephone to inquire about your status. Have confidence when you call to ask about their decision.

Questions

1. Traditional:

These are questions that you would normally expect during an interview. Be honest and have an answer for each question:

- Why did you choose this profession?
- Describe yourself.
- What kind of experiences have you had working with children?
- What were the toughest challenges in your student teaching placements?
- How would your students describe you as a teacher?

2. Behavioral

These questions are founded on the premise that your past behavior predicts your future performance. In other words, how you do your job, volunteer experiences, classes, and activities is as important as what you do. You may be asked:

- Describe a situation where you had to "think on your feet" in an unexpected situation.
- What specific approaches or ideas do you have for dealing with at-risk students?
- Describe your experiences working with a diverse student body.
- What parts of your portfolio best indicate your teaching style?

These are questions that require complex answers. Think STAR, (describe the Situation or Task, talk about your Action and try to include the Results) when answering. Not only do they want a brief outline, but they will typically move on to more probing questions, such as:

- What was your role?
- How did you get involved?
- What were the steps that you took?
- Who else was involved?
- What was the outcome?

3. Technical

These are questions designed to test your knowledge of the career field you are choosing. If you are in a secondary field (biology, chemistry, math, English, foreign languages) an employer will want to know specifically what you can do. Be prepared to talk about equipment, lab procedures or content knowledge.

Types of Interviews

Individual - This most common type of interview takes place one-on-one. You will often interview with multiple individuals one-on-one during your day.

Group - Many times, an organization will have more than one person interviewing a candidate at the same time. These interviews are not that different from a one-on-one interview in terms of strategies. The one thing to remember is to maintain eye contact with the person who asked the question, but do not forget the others in the room.

Teaching – Many districts are now requiring their prospective teachers to teach a lesson relevant to the type of position for which they are applying. In developing that lesson, research the school's web site to learn as much as possible about their curriculum. Consider also teaching a lesson that you've already used successfully in the classroom.

Typical Progression of the Interview Process

First Interview/ Screening: This will give the employer a chance to meet you and determine if you have the necessary skills and qualifications they seek. If distance is a factor, this may be done over the phone.

Telephone interviews need to be taken as seriously as an in person interview. To prepare, consider dressing as if you were going to an interview. It may help to increase your feeling of professionalism during your discussion with an employer. Also, be sure to research the organization and send a follow-up note to the person who took the time to interview. Many of the questions in a telephone interview will be the same as an in-person, so be ready. Consider reserving one of the Office of Career Development recruiting rooms for your phone interview to ensure privacy.

Second Interview: This more in-depth format is offered to candidates who are a good match and/or fit with the organization. Receiving an invitation to a second interview is an honor that you should be proud of, but it is not a job offer! To get that, you'll need to be prepared—do more research regarding the organization and the open position. They will want more specific information about you and what you can bring to their organization. If you can do all of this with professionalism and confidence, you are sure to become a top candidate for the job.

Things to look for when you visit the organization:

While on the visit or tour, you should be looking at the physical environment as well as the human element and work atmosphere.

- Do the people seem happy? Tense? Overworked?
- Do they honestly seem glad to meet you...to welcome you?
- Do they seem to be challenged? Bored?
- Are they genuinely enthusiastic about the organization? About their job?
- Do you feel comfortable in the environment you see?
- Do you like the people? The school? The teaching styles?
- Are your questions being answered honestly (as far as you can determine)?
- Are you receiving conflicting responses?
- Does it seem like a good place to teach?

Handling Inappropriate Questions

It is important to recognize that federal legislation prohibits interviewers from using information gained through asking illegal questions to make hiring decisions. Examples include (but are not limited to) questions concerning age, color, creed, disability, marital status, national origin, race, sex, sexual orientation, or veteran status as either disabled or of the Vietnam era. Employers cannot exclude individuals from employment consideration solely on the basis of any factors listed above. If asked an inappropriate (illegal) question, you will need to make a personal decision on how to respond. Regardless of how you choose to respond, it should be done tactfully and politely.

You have three options*:*

- Answer the illegal question. (Be aware that it may provide them with information they may use to discriminate against you.)
- Alert the interviewer to the illegal question. (This response could signal that you are uncooperative, so be careful.)
- Confront the underlying concern and address it in your answer. (This is probably the safest way to answer an illegal question, however you have to guess their intent. For example, they may ask if you are a U.S. citizen. You can then respond with, "I am authorized to work in the United States".)

Please contact the Office of Career Development if you feel that you were asked an inappropriate question or discriminated against based upon your response to an illegal question.

Reimbursement of Expenses

Sometimes organizations offer to reimburse your expenses for on-site interviews. These expenses usually include transportation, lodging and food costs. Obtain receipts for all expenses you incur. If you drive, indicate your round trip mileage. Reimbursement policies vary from organization to organization. Some organizations make travel arrangements for you, but often you will be responsible for taking care of them yourself. If you are unsure about expenses to be reimbursed, you should clarify before visiting.

The Job Offer

Acknowledgment of Job Offer: After an offer from an employer has been extended, it is important to acknowledge receipt of the offer by phone, letter or e-mail:

- Indicate the receipt of the offer and re-state the terms: position, title, and salary.
- Reaffirm your interest in the position.
- Provide a date by which you will contact the employer with your decision. If the employer sets the deadline for accepting or declining the job offer, beat that deadline. If you have other interviews scheduled with organizations that interest you, consider negotiating a later deadline. Try not to ask for a delay of more than 1 week.

Acceptance of Job Offer: Use this signed contract, letter or e-mail to formally accept a job offer, even if you have accepted over the telephone. This should be done as soon as you have made the decision to accept the job. It should convey the positive feelings about the job and your future with the new employer. Include the following elements:

- Indicate the date of receipt of letter or phone call.
- State position that was offered.
- State salary level at which you are accepting the position.
- Confirm the starting date.

Note: It is courteous to express personal thanks to particular people who were especially helpful during the interview process. Also, indicate any change of address that will occur before you start your job.

Rejection of Job Offer: Not all job offers will suit your career goals, needs, or interests. In the event you are offered a job you cannot or will not accept, it is appropriate to write a careful and thoughtful letter or e-mail of rejection. It should accomplish three things:

- Extend your thanks for their consideration and offer.
- Explain your thoughtful deliberation of the position.
- Express your decision to decline their offer.

Questions Interviewers/Recruiters May Ask

One purpose of an interview is for the interviewer to find out about you, the prospective employee. The employer wants to know about you to make a decision about hiring; you want the employer to know you to make the decision favorable. Formulating your answers to the questions below in advance will help you express yourself in the most accurate and positive manner.

Remember, nothing beats proper preparation.

General or Opening Questions

- Why did you choose to go into the teaching field?
- Why are you interviewing for this position?
- What kind of experiences have you had working with children? With children of this age group?
- What are your goals as a teacher? Or, what do you hope to have students gain from you as their teacher?
- What is your priority (or greatest concern) in a classroom? Or, what one thing would you select that your students could have at the end of the year? How would you go about doing that?
- Describe the developmental level of: the pre-first child, the primary age child, the adolescent.
- What is your philosophy of education?
- What three words would your students use to describe you as a teacher?
- What coursework have you taken that you feel has made you an especially competent teacher?
- Describe one of the best elementary teachers you had in school?
- What is your favorite subject to teach in the elementary grades? Why?
- What were the toughest challenges in your placements?
- How would you differentiate instruction in a blended classroom?
- How confident do you feel in teaching the various content areas?

Strategies Questions

- What teaching techniques have you found to be effective for you within the classroom?
- Describe a lesson in any subject area, stating the learning objectives and the activities you used to teach it. How did you evaluate student success of that lesson?

- How would you challenge the slow learners and the advanced students within the same classroom?
- How will individualized instruction be provided in your teaching day?
- How do you intend to motivate your students?
- What kind of reading do you prefer? What are the strengths? What are the weaknesses in other programs?
- How should a student's educational achievement and progress be measured?
- What provisions will you make for keeping parents informed and involved in the education of their children?
- What behavior management strategies will you employ?
- What is your plan for maintaining student behavior and order in your classroom?
- What will you do to prepare your students for standardized tests?
- How would you teach a child with a disability?

Behavioral Questions

- Describe a situation where you had to "think on your feet" to handle an emerging, unexpected situation.
- What specific approaches or ideas have you used for dealing with at-risk students?
- Describe a behavior management plan based on a specific example from student teaching.
- Describe the process you would use to deal with a student who was disrupting the class.
- Describe the parts of your portfolio that best indicate your teaching style and beliefs.
- What provisions do you make for meeting the range of skills and needs commonly present in a classroom?
- Describe a team project you have done and your role.
- What steps have you taken prior to a parent-teacher conference to ensure its success?
- Describe your experiences working with a diverse student body.
- Explain a difficult situation, how you handled it, what you learned from it and what you would do differently now.

General Knowledge and Closing Questions

- Explain how you would use technology in the classroom.
- What talents can you share with your school to make it better or run smoother?
- What type of teachers would you like to work with on your grade level team or academic subject?
- What topics of staff development are most important to you now?
- What do you feel are your greatest strengths?
- What seem to be your greatest weaknesses?
- What professional journals do you read regularly?
- What book have you most recently read?
- Who are your favorite children's authors? Why?
- What else would you like to tell us about yourself?
- What would you like to ask of us?
- Might be asked a "news of the day" question.

The other purpose of an interview is for you to learn about the employer in order to make a good decision for yourself and your career.

Questions You May Ask

- What is the teacher/student ratio in your district?
- Do you encourage teachers to earn graduate degrees? (Some out of state districts do not require a Master's degree)
- How many classes a day will I be expected to teach?
- What types of school activities promote parent-teacher interaction?
- Tell me about the students who attend this school.
- What textbooks and/or curriculum does the district use in this subject area?
- Do teachers participate in curriculum review and change?
- Does the administration encourage field trips for students?
- Does your school use teacher aides or parent volunteers?
- What is the educational philosophy of the school district?

**Please refer to AAEE Job Search Handbook for additional information.*