Teacher’s Forum: Survey Highlights

The following questions in the 2013 Teacher’s Forum Survey were posed to a group of 35 educators who represent many years of experience in the roles of teacher, principal, and superintendent. It is the hope that their candid thoughts will support your own pursuit as a teacher and help you to widen your perspective of what it means to make an impact and be a dynamic educator.

1. What are the three most important characteristics that you look for in a teacher candidate?
   - Personable, Team-member, Student-centered
   - Ability to effectively articulate skills, abilities and interests, to be flexible in a variety of situations, problem-solve effectively, and be reflective in one’s practice
   - For a counseling candidate: likes working with young people, counseling style, and how can you make it work in our school, team player
   - Outstanding classroom manager, curriculum knowledge at a superior level, and high positive expectations for all students
   - Someone who clearly loves students and likes to build relationships with them, someone who is intrinsically motivated for lifelong learning, someone who comes early and stays late and does not watch the clock. They do it because the work needs to get done.
   - Love for children and a passion to ensure that they achieve success in life, a willingness to continue to learn, a positive attitude and desire to spot the best in others and encourage others
   - Counseling candidate: intellectual curiosity, collaboration, leadership
   - Creative, honest, hard-working, innovation, collaborative manner, and “coach-ability”
   - Professionalism, knowledge of material and methodology, and passion and caring attitude
   - Positive attitude, uses a variety of instructional methods, and embraces technology
   - Expertise in the field, people skills, energy and enthusiasm
   - Concern for students and their learning, life-long learner, able to change and adapt, passion in educating others in their content area
   - Personable, flexible, unique skills and experience, passion about student-centered classrooms
   - Knowledge of Curriculum, collaborative learning (both in classroom and with colleagues), understanding of diverse learners
   - Willingness to work as a team passion for subject matter, enthusiasm for student learning
   - Commitment to school culture, collaboration, range of teaching strategies
   - Creativity, sense of humor, kind, hard worker, and problem solver
   - Personality, organization, passion for school community
   - Clear educational philosophy, curriculum matching logic, content background
   - Knowledge of how students learn, genuine caring for students, high expectations for all students
   - Engaging with people, articulate, knowledgeable
   - Passion for working students, knows the subject and “modability”
   - Academic, social, and emotional needs are all areas of concern for candidate. Positive attitude, uses a variety of instructional methods, and embraces technology
   - Build positive relationships, commitment to rigorous curriculum and classroom environment, knowledge of content and pedagogy

2. What pitfalls should teachers try to avoid making in an interview?
   - Being too confident or thinking they have all the answers.
   - Be sure to answer the question — and all parts of any question asked! Avoid digressing into a tangent conversation that is not relevant to what was being asked.
Not using examples from their experiences when answering questions
- Being a know it all!
- Being too comfortable and too informal
- Complaining about what others have done, being closed minded about ideas/philosophies different from their own, pretending to know things that they don't
- Counselor – pretending to be someone you are not, stay true to talents, don’t apologize for experiences you don’t have
- Teachers should be sure not to use a binder of lesson plans or artifacts to describe their teaching
- Not having eye contact, not giving specific examples based on experiences, not answering the question, and dominating the interview
- Talking too much, arrogance, not being prepared, and not giving enough information
- The pitfall that I see most often is that applicants forget to talk about students and learning. They often speak only about themselves and their accomplishments. While this is important and often why you were called for the interview, I want to see teaching candidates show that they care about students and their learning
- When asked if you have questions, please have some for us. It is a chance for you to find out more about the school and its culture. The most over asked question is “do we have a mentoring program?” It would be better to ask a question that is open-ended. You want the question to lead to a discussion. It also shows your interest in the school and community. i.e. What programs do you have to get struggling students back on track? How do you balance standardized tests and life skills in content areas?
- Trying to be someone they think the interviewer wants.
- Not researching the school/community beforehand, unprofessional dress
- Claiming to know everything, being unwilling or inflexible
- Arriving late and disorganization
- Say negative things about previous employer - Say there are no chances of "re-takes" or making up work - Not having examples/scenarios ready
- Avoid speaking in generalities and provide specific examples
- Generalizing students with special needs
- If you bring a portfolio, discuss what is in the portfolio in an organic manner.
- Trying to bluff through an answer by throwing “buzzwords” at me.
- Trying to be something the think people want to be. Young teachers should embrace their youth and need to learn rather than try to pretend they have experiences they do not.
- Listen carefully to the questions; do not take the interview question off topic and demonstrate knowledge and experience
- Just be honest, slow down, and be yourself.

3. Given the volume of teacher candidates, how can new teachers stand out to principals?
- I am usually looking for a teacher to fill a specific position, so I need someone who has the credentials (certificate endorsements) who match the position.
- Make sure you have a variety of experiences on your resume – not just student teaching and required field experience. Volunteer, tutor, community-based and service-learning projects!
- Take ownership in your internship experience, as small as it might be at the time. Don’t talk about what you did with your supervising counselor. Don’t be afraid to toot your own horn. Also, do some research on the school and find a way to show you are a team player.
- Network through people already in the building
- Be a pro-active candidate that has done their homework!
- Bring It! You got a presentation? Bring it! You have a portfolio? Bring it! You got an awesome student project? Bring it! You want this job? Bring it!
• Know the school’s culture and climate, mission and vision - show interest by asking relevant questions that reflect your knowledge about the school - discuss, without sounding boastful, what you bring to the school...how will the school be better because of you...
• Counselor – know how to use data to effect change and advocate for student needs
• Resumes need to indicate special talents or interests.
• Unique experiences that could contribute to creative classroom opportunities or extracurricular activities, have multiple endorsements, bilingual abilities.
• Skills in Technology, writing, ELL, reading in content areas, executive functioning, proven success in working with students with IEP’s or 504 plans.
• New teachers need to demonstrate energy and share all of the accomplishments above and beyond that which is required (eg. volunteerism)
• At the high school level, send your application to the department chair, athletic director, and principal. All of us are involved in the hiring process.
• Know about what a school is trying to accomplish.
• Sincerity

4. Please share three key areas new teachers should prioritize in order to be successful in teaching.
• Planning and Preparation, classroom management/instructional delivery
• Counseling candidate – active listening skills, ability to empathize, able to organize chaos
• Planning, classroom management, organization
• Love your students, be a team player, work well with parents.
• Develop a strong rapport with students and families; SHOW that you care., understand what it is students need to learn through accurate assessment, study your content area, and prepare instruction accordingly
• Counselor – know how to use and analyze data, how to advocate and navigate the school system for the benefit of your students, understand the role of school counselor and how to implement a comprehensive program do that you are not doing the job of someone else
• Organization, flexibility, honesty, collaboration, listening, and being decisive
• Excellent lesson planning, understand and implement the mission of a school, listen and communicate frequently with students, parents, colleagues, and administrators
• Take time to know students and staff as individuals, the personal connection is crucial to development relationships and success.
• Collaboration with other teachers – a professional learning team pushes all of us to be better and more productive teachers. Don’t forget to sleep, eat well, balance is key to avoid burnout. Most of all – don’t be too hard on yourself
• Write down typical classroom miscues and practice your reaction to them. Learn where to get great information from (teachers, online sources, peers, etc.) Learn what helps shape your identity and keep doing it (working out, poetry, etc.). Make time for it because it will keep you human. :)

5. What does excellent classroom management skills mean to you? .
• Interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.
• In counseling, the ability to connect with students and show them you are a real person who has gone through many of the situations they might be dealing with today.
• Students are engaged in a task because they are interested in the learning, they have a meaningful work outcome, and they have the skills to problem solve social/emotional situations
• Establish effective rules and procedures for students to follow.
• Without it, it doesn’t matter what you know or how badly you want to share it, if the students are not managed, they will not learn.
• I view classroom management as a necessary component to success in the classroom and good personal health for teachers and students. I believe that when students feel that their classroom is
in order and structure in the classroom, it makes them feel safe within the classroom. When fear is taken out the equation, students are free to take part in and enjoy the learning process. Also, less time is wasted on non-educational distractions, which gives students mere time to focus on learning AND reduces stress for teachers. So, excellent classroom management is conducive to student learning as well as to both the teacher's and students' mental and physical health.

- The ability to keep students engaged, to translate information so that it is accessible and relevant to their lives.
- Excellent classroom management skills means that you understand how to properly manage a classroom and meet the needs of all the learners in your classroom.
- Having a consistent positive plan that involves students and parents.
- Control of the classroom, organization of each lesson, and rapport.
- An understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior -- creating a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.
- Being in control of the learning environment so that students are actively involved in learning while respecting each other and the needs of the classroom community.
- Providing all that is necessary to teach (ie. organized classroom environment, good discipline, and treating everyone with dignity and respect).
- Excellent classroom management skills encourages students to be actively engaged in learning and in the community. The classroom doesn't always have to be quiet. Those with strong management skills have high expectations for students and have a back-up plan just in case.
- Having great relationships with students and a classroom instruction that keeps them active.

6. What is one piece of advice that you can share with new teachers?

- Get as much experience teaching diverse groups of students and subject areas. Be patient with yourself as you are building up your teaching and management strategies.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help! If you need ideas, materials, lessons, texts, etc., utilize the expertise of accomplished teachers in your building or professional network.
- For counseling candidates: Spend some time as a teacher first, whether it be as a substitute or full time teacher. It will give you the ability to work with fellow faculty members more efficiently, and see things from their perspective. Ultimately, it will help you work with students efficiently.
- Always keep the focus on the children's learning.
- Make positive impressions on all those you meet.
- Cut yourself some slack. Remember that you are not going to know all the tricks of the trade in one year. BREATHE. Take time to enjoy the year and be in the moment. Journal when possible. Note at least one thing that went well each day. In your worst moments, remember why you wanted to teach...think about your students 10, 15, 20 years from now. What will matter most to them? What would you have done, said, given to them that will make a positive difference in their life. REMEMBER THE GOAL---TO ENSURE THAT YOUR STUDENTS HAVE A BRIGHT FUTURE...
- Counselors -- stay true to your passion of helping to transform student lives; that truth will prove to be your North star when obstacles (both internal and external) present themselves.
- I would tell teachers not to get frustrated during their job search. Stay positive and you will find a job that makes you happy.
- Focus on a few key pieces of the curriculum to become successful with each year and do not fear asking questions or asking for help!
- Be concerned about the overall welfare of your students while holding them accountable.
- If you feel out of control, you are. Take a deep breath, regroup, ask for help from mentors and administrators. If something is not working, stop doing it and don’t wait until next year!
- All decisions that we make must be in favor of the children whom we teach.
• Don’t be afraid to make a mistake, take risks out of your comfort zone. If you do, make a mistake, it is important to admit it to your students. They appreciate the honest and you are modeling an important life skill. We don’t grow unless we make mistakes.
• Welcome the setbacks and learn. Everyone, evaluators and fellow teachers, expects you to have missteps, and they are okay with it! They have been there in the past, and they want to help you because it helps them as professionals. They will be there to help you. Always remember to reflect and get better.
• Choose 1-3 areas of improvement for yourself and work to master those goals. You will want to improve on everything at once but that is not feasible. Break things down for yourself and be proud of the results you begin to see.
• I have two - -If you love your students first, your job is more than halfway done. You cannot teach if you cannot love. -Don't give up - on the children OR yourself. Anything is possible and miracles DO happen
• Be yourself! Finding a teaching position is about “fit” – will you fit the needs of the organization and will the organization fit your needs – it’s a two way street.
• Always keep the focus on the children’s learning
• Take on one new thing at a time
• Look at every student as an individual
• "Reach for the moon an you'll land among the stars," no day will ever be perfect, and that is okay, so long as you always putting in as much as you can.
• Make positive impressions on all those you meet
• Keep a journal, separated into different categories. This can help to prioritize all of the work that seems overwhelming in the beginning
• Teaching is a learning process; be humble enough to ask questions!
• Don’t get frustrated - stay positive and you will find a job that makes you happy
• Act professionally in every way.
• Focus on a few key pieces of the curriculum to become really successful with each year
• Enjoy the fact that you have chosen one of the most rewarding careers on the planet!
• Do not do it alone, find people to collaborate with
• Be concerned about the overall welfare of your students while holding them accountable.
• Develop a vision of student success and S.M.A.R.T. Goals.
• Keep learning.

7. Can you list an interview question that helps you gain a better understanding of a teacher candidate?
• With what literary charter would you most identify with an why?
• Explain what you might do if a child is acting out in class and his data shows that he is scoring exceptionally low?
• What are you looking for in a department and how will you contribute to our professional learning community?
• Do you have any questions for us? If they do, it typically means they have prepped for the interview, if not, it means they are interviewing anywhere just to get a job, not to get THAT job.
• Why did you become a teacher?
• Talk about a failure or challenge and what you learned in the process.
• Describe a plan you made that was a failure and how that experience will allow you to mature into a better teacher. We all fail. Only confident and reflective people learn from those experiences.
• Explain multiple measures of assessing student’s academic performance?