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## Career Strategies for Teachers

Author: EdWeek

The teacher job market has become increasingly complicated in recent months. News of layoffs and cutbacks compete with stories of projected shortages and new government funding directed toward supporting the profession. Meanwhile, new types of certification programs have broadened opportunities for nontraditional teacher candidates, even as schools have revamped recruitment plans and ratcheted up expectations for new educators. Two experts in the field of education employment will discuss current opportunities for teachers on the best ways to find a new teaching position or advance your career.

### Experts:

- **Kent McAnally** is the director of career services at Washburn University in Topeka, Kan., and director of finance and budget for the American Association for Employment in Education.
- **Mark T. Brophy** is staffing/mentor coordinator for the Worcester, Mass., public schools and the director of long-range planning and development for the American Association for Employment in Education.

**KentMc:** I'd say the big difference this year is that demand is slowed by the economic uncertainty. We're telling our teacher candidates that there's never a "panic time" and hiring is going to be a little later. In our state, for example, the legislature just adjourned after setting state aid in the very last week. We're beginning to see some jobs being filled now.

**Anthony Reboras:** So you're still feeling pretty positive about the market in your area at least?

**KentMc:** Well, I'm always positive about the market for the strong candidate. It does look like hiring is going to be down, so it's even more critical than ever that the candidate present the best possible picture of his or her ability to the potential employer. I think hiring is going to remain soft for a year or two. Despite some stimulus money, states are cutting back on aid to K-12 and higher ed as well, so there are going to be some **teachers** who won't find jobs, unfortunately.



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[Comment From Lisa]

New graduates express concern that with the budget cuts if they do get a job they will be asked during their first year or years of teaching to do many things in addition to classroom teaching. They feel they need a few years to focus on becoming proficient teachers. What are your thoughts about this possibility, their fears, and whether schools are going to require teachers to wear multiple hats whether they want to, feel equipped to, or not.

**KentMc:** Lisa, it's not new for schools to ask new teachers to wear multiple hats. Administrators have long thought that new teachers are open to sponsoring activities, working extra duty, and so forth to increase the paycheck - sorry to burst your bubble. I don't think this is going to change. I would recommend that you talk with the prospective employer about their mentoring program and what assistance the mentors provide the new teachers in taking on additional responsibilities. This might alleviate some of the anxiety.

[Comment From Leesa]

What advice would you give a new teacher (change of career) looking for a position in this job market?

**Anthony Rebora:** While Kent's working on that, let's get a quick survey of our viewers' impressions of the job market. ...

**Are you frustrated with the current job market for educators?**

yes

( 91% )

no

( 9% )

**KentMc:** Wow, Leesa, that's a big question. My advice really doesn't change a lot in this type of market. First, I always recommend casting a wide net. The larger the geographic area you are open to, the more potential opportunities there are. Second, focus on what it is that you have to offer the prospective employer. Can you define those things and provide specific examples of the attributes you have that schools want? Third, going back to Lisa's question, if you are willing to help with other things, it will likely increase your chances of landing a position. Finally, your materials must just be perfect. Resumes and applications must be without error. And references do matter - a lot.

**Mark Brophy:** Hello Mark, here...just logged on



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**Anthony Rebora:** Kent, I know AAEE does a lot of work on supply and demand of teachers, and we're getting some questions on that issue. Here's an example

[Comment From Brenda]

Are you seeing a large demand for teachers in any part of the country right now? The places I sent students in the past are no longer in need.

**Mark Brophy:** We need sped. teachers in the Northeast

**KentMc:** Well, I'd say that there is no particular part of the country that we're hearing from at this moment where there are huge shortages for things like elementary, phys ed, social studies. But most areas are still short of math, special ed, sciences, Spanish.

**Mark Brophy:** We also need math, science and ESL teachers as well

[Comment From Sharon]

I keep hearing about how the new stimulus plan is going to create jobs. However, my experience is that school districts are telling their administrators to NOT hire staff, as hiring is a long term commitment and the stimulus is not. How exactly are we supposed to be benefitting from the stimulus plan? thank you

**Mark Brophy:**

Also...to help the surplus teachers...ie..SS Elm, ECE...

Think about getting a 2nd license in SPED, Reading, ESL or the sciences especially in the middle grades

**Anthony Rebora:** How about Sharon's question: Are teachers at this point benefitting from the stimulus?

**Mark Brophy:**

Good question...

Not only do I work in HR but I also sit on a School Committee...

Regarding the stimulus \$\$\$..as I understand it..it is only good for 24 months...after that we \$\$\$ dry up...not wise to hire teachers on short money

**Anthony Rebora:** Well, then here's a good follow up for you:



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**Mark Brophy:** the benefit will be in long term commitment to education that needs to happen

[Comment From Emily]

Does this make it a good time to consider graduate work in education?

**Mark Brophy:**

Yes...still pursue your passion to teach...

Get involved in a teacher training program and see if there are \$\$ reliefs available

**KentMc:** Education may be one of the few fields where I might say yes. Generally, "Because I can't find a job" is not a good reason to go to graduate school - you come out with more debt, and for many employers "over-qualified." In education, however, that master's will pay off. From a career counseling standpoint, I'd say just make sure you're doing something to which you're committed for several years.

**Anthony Reboras:** Kent, here's one in your area.

[Comment From Megan]

What is your advice on getting resumes past the initial screening and getting an interview?

**KentMc:** That depends some on the district. If they are using some kind of screening system that is automated, you want to be sure it's perfect, using some of the education jargon. If it's a little smaller district, those personal contacts can help. If you know **teachers** in the district or administrators in the district, give them a call and remind them why you are a great candidate. Have your references make calls as well.

[Comment From TS]

I was also wondering what sort of "marketing" strategies would be useful when applying to highly sought after jobs.



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**Mark Brophy:**

from a district's point of view

Follow the HR instructions and wait...

It is okay to network with people you know...but follow the HR procedures for hiring...it does work

**Are you looking for a new teaching job right now?**

Yes. I'm fresh out of college.

( 32% )

Yes. I'm a teacher looking for a new position.

( 23% )

Yes. I'm looking to switch careers.

( 23% )

No. I'm content where I am.

( 23% )

**KentMc:** I tend to stay away from gimmicky things, and not just in education. Use your contacts.

[Comment From Leesa]

Every Job posting that I have seen has required "experience". As a new teacher, how do you get a district to even consider you.

**Mark Brophy:**

Start as a subst. teacher...Long Term Sub...

Even start as a paraprofessional...

The objective is to get in...

be persistent in your search...Sub, rural or urban

**KentMc:** I know you all think you're **teachers**, but the reality is that you are in the sales business at this point. You are the product. You have to sell what you have convincingly. You must not be timid about all the experience you have in working with children and youth, and you must let the potential employer know about it. You have experience, but you have to present it as such. Those who do so, and those whose experience is more significant or made a difference (which is what administrators want to know) will do best.



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[Comment From Sue]

Hello, I just received my Master's Degree in Elementary Education after teaching for a short time overseas. I have applied to 10 districts in my state so far. From what I have heard, only two people from my program have heard back from any districts, which were about 3+ hours away. If you were in the shoes of a recent graduate, would you keep applying to school districts throughout the state and the surrounding states, or would you feel comfortable that we will hear something over the next two months and hold tight? Thank you.

**KentMc:** I never recommend the "hold tight" strategy. You can always say no if you are offered a position that you really don't want after the analysis, but if you don't apply, you won't get offers. You should never take anything for granted.

**Anthony Rebora:** Mark, let's address this next one to you specifically.

[Comment From Bruce]

What advice would you give to career switchers in terms of getting the best preparation and strategies to get into the teaching career?

**Mark Brophy:**

We are in the hiring season...major problem is the budget...  
Regarding Elm...we are probleby hiring 15 to 20...

We will be hiring soon...

DO what you think is best...and check out the district you want to work with

**Anthony Rebora:** OK, Mark's now looking at Bruce's question on career switchers ..

**Mark Brophy:**

best advise...

Career changes are welcome int the teaching profession...

look for a district based program..connected with a college...

you need good information on standards based instruction, good planning,  
how to manage time and classroom insrtuction and how to woek with  
diverse learners

**Anthony Rebora:** We've heard a number of rumours about this next issue--in Diane's question. Are you guys seeing it.



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[Comment From Diane]

Do you see any trend of hiring new teacher candidates (at the base end of the salary scale) as opposed to experienced teacher candidates who may be relocating(at the higher end of the scale)?

**Mark Brophy:**

Where I work...we want the best teacher..no cap on \$\$ regarding hiring

**KentMc:** I've gotten this kind of question a lot over the years. Every time I've asked a school administrator about this, they tell me that they are looking for the best teacher to go into the classroom. That may be a new teacher, may be an experienced one, may be a bachelor's degree, may be a master's. But ultimately what matters is who will provide the best education for the students.

[Comment From Sharon]

How does a new teacher who has been unable to get a position explain this a year or two down the line...to potential employers?

**Mark Brophy:** however, I also have heard of some districts getting "hamstrung" in regarding \$\$\$

**Mark Brophy:**

My recommendation is be proud of your experience and schooling credentials..

do not let anyone not recognize them

**KentMc:** Good question, Sharon. You have to keep your skills and knowledge current - that's absolutely critical. Continue to grow as an educator. You then have to be able to say to administrators that you might not have been ready for your own classroom at that time, but you have added to your knowledge base, and presumably to your experience through subbing, volunteering, working with scouts or youth groups, and now you feel more ready to enter the classroom on your own.

**Mark Brophy:** yes to 5 yrs

**Anthony Rebor:** Kent, here's follow up to one of your earlier responses:

[Comment From Mark Harris]

Regarding the casting of a "wide geographic net" -- how do you best search effectively in many states at once?



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**KentMc:** I would say it's difficult, Mark. A wide net may not be over several states. However, target areas in different states if that's what you need to do. Know the areas, know the districts, and target your materials to those places. Learn what you can about the prospective employers so that you can sell yourself as a match. And most importantly, keep good records of what you send, whom you talk to, what messages your sending.

[Comment From LMcDowell]

What are some of the newer options for non-traditional candidates looking to enter this field?

**Mark Brophy:**

Wide net...Many schol districts are now using web-baed application programs..

once you complete a profile ..use it to send to other districts

go to Job Fairs...

Look at AAEE and local colleges

it works

**KentMc:** I'm sure Mark is going to talk about district-based programs, and he has one or more in Worcester. Also look for things like what we call "Transition to Teaching," which is a grant -funded program for professionals to be credentialed.

**Anthony Rebor:** Mark, can you talk a little about "district-based" programs for nontraditional teachers ...

**Mark Brophy:**

yes...district based programs can work providing thee is support given to you especailly in the first 3 yrs...

also look at colleges for alternative programs as well...

Colleges are becomming better partners with school districts...not just a customers

**Anthony Rebor:** oK, we have time for one more. This one seems like a good summing up:

[Comment From VE]

How can candidates set themselves apart from one another when everyone student teaches and has similar built-in practical experiences in their curriculum?



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**KentMc:** I think candidates set themselves apart from each other before and during the field experience. What other work with children and youth do you have? Can you show results from your work or from your teaching? What new ideas did you put in place or create during your student teaching? How did you engage students? How did you align your teaching with standards? I think the ones who can do this and present it well will be the ones who will stand out. And all the "selector" instruments keep coming back to empathy. It has to be the complete package.

**Mark Brophy:** You need to have good references and I believe you need to show and convey these attributes;  
caring, competent, team player, believes that students learn differently then you must teach differently,, believes that you want to work in a learning community and I will work hard for ALL students  
hope this helps

**Anthony Rebora:** Unfortunately, that's all the time we have for now. Thanks for all the questions--they were really great. I'm sorry we couldn't get to all of them. For job listings and career news, please check out [Topschooljobs.org](http://Topschooljobs.org)--Education Week's career site.