

You're Hired! Making a Successful Transition from Student to Classroom Professional

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“BRING A TOUCH OF CLASS WITH YOU AS YOU STEP INTO YOUR CLASSROOM. YOU ARE A POWERFUL ROLE MODEL, SO TAKE PRIDE IN YOUR JOB, YOUR APPEARANCE, AND SET A POSITIVE EXAMPLE FOR YOUR STUDENTS.”

Congratulations! You have completed your teaching licensure requirements and have successfully achieved Highly Qualified Teacher status. You've just heard the two words that are the goal of every newly graduated teacher candidate: "You're hired!"

You celebrate! You are about to make your official transition from student to professional entry-year teacher in your own classroom. As a new teacher, you will quickly discover that reality is often different from your vision.

Deal or No Deal?

Who decides your salary? In many states, the minimum teacher salary is set at the state level. States and even local districts determine the parameters for possible salary negotiation rules. For instance, Ohio has no signing bonuses, relocation assistance, or retention incentives, whereas high-demand states such as Nevada and Florida do allow for these financial extras. Check state and district websites for information on salaries.

Can teachers negotiate?

- Yes. But only at private, independent, and charter schools.
- No. In public school districts where starting salaries are set by contracts.
- Maybe. Teachers with years of experience, or those in high-demand areas, can sometimes negotiate where they are placed on the salary schedule.

Total compensation is more than just salary. Become an expert in school district compensation packages because not all districts provide the same benefits. Take time to research health

insurance, retirement system policies, personal days, and sick leave. Look at the options the district may offer, especially tuition assistance for advanced study, merit-pay alternatives, bonuses for teaching in academically challenged schools, release time to work with your mentor, or other situations which are unique to the district.

The contract is a binding legal document between you and the school district. Read carefully and be sure that you understand every word in the contract. Ask questions to verify and clarify details. You need to be 100 percent confident in your decision to accept this specific teaching position in this specific building in this school district before you place your signature on the bottom line. Once you have signed the contract, you are legally committed to working as a teacher in that district for the agreed time frame. This is not a time to sign a contract and then keep looking for a better one!

Celebrations and Challenges

Your employer celebrates the skills, knowledge and experiences you bring to your classroom: diversity, new energy, creativity, an understanding of minority and urban students, motivation to help students, and compassion.

Your employer also recognizes the challenges you face as a new teacher: classroom behavior management, absenteeism, diverse learning styles, and an understanding of the cultures and backgrounds of all of your students. Employers wonder if new teachers have a solid work ethic, will appreciate the resources they offer, and will adjust to the school's culture.

Professional Image

A major concern of employers is the professional image of new teachers in the classroom. Would you wear sweatpants and flipflops into the classroom? Of course not. But some teachers have.

What should you wear to your new-teacher orientation or your first day in the classroom? Think professional image and select business casual choices. These include tailored slacks and skirts, collared shirts, dress sweaters (twinsets for women), blazers or jackets, an optional necktie, conservative hosiery, comfortable shoes, limited jewelry, and minimal makeup.

Bring a touch of class with you as you step into your classroom. You are a powerful role model, so take pride in your job, your appearance, and set a positive example for your students.

Maintaining Professional Standards

Most states require school systems to have an entry-year or mentoring program for new teachers. Make sure you take advantage of the assistance available to first-year teachers.

All states have in place a system for new teachers to almost immediately begin the next step of advanced education, testing and observation, and licensure (and you thought you were done!). Familiarize yourself with your state's specific criteria by visiting the department of education's website.

As an educator, you have the responsibility to yourself, your students, and your district to be a professional every day! Hearing "You're hired" may be the end of your student chapter but it is also the beginning of your professional teaching career.