

Math, Science, and Kids!

Teachers Needed

KEEPING YOU IN THE LOOP & ON TARGET FOR YOUR TEACHING LICENSE

SUMMER 2008 ISSUE



Left to right: Akiko Nishiyama, Tiffani Lam, Jennifer Stallo, Dr. Ted Fowler, Michelle Means-Walker, Donald Hawkins, Mary McCann, Ryan Falta, Tom Nickell and Kathie Maynard

DO YOUR HOMEWORK TO SNAG TEACHING POSITION

IF YOU APPLY TO WORK in the country's largest career-and-technical education district, chances are you'll encounter Michelle Means-Walker, Great Oaks Career Campuses director of human resources. The Cincinnati-area district that touches on 12 counties currently has 31 openings.

And Means-Walker is no stranger to the hiring process. She was associate superintendent of human resources at Princeton City Schools for nine years before this position.

So, when she spoke to a group of Teachers Needed candidates, they listened.

THE BEST WAY TO KNOW what positions Great Oaks and many other districts have available is to look online. "We post all of our positions on the web," Means-Walker says. "You can apply online – it doesn't matter if you fax or e-mail."

Obviously, content knowledge is essential and you won't get the interview without it. In some districts – not Great Oaks – potential teachers are screened using a phone keypad and, based on that score, may or may not be granted an interview. "Patterns indicate potential to be a good teacher," according to Means-Walker.

What really does matter, she stresses, is that you demonstrate a dedication to students. "The most important thing is that desire and commitment to help students

grow and learn. I am also looking for ways (an interviewee) will develop and maintain relationships with students, peers, their supervisor and how they accept feedback. I want them to understand the connection that has to be formed between parents and the school."

SHE'S LOOKING BEYOND THE USUAL

newsletter and open house. "That's the one-way stuff," she says. "How about a survey? Will they call parents and introduce themselves? Will they provide parents with their e-mail address? Will they invite them into the classroom?"

She also wants to know:

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CAREER CHANGERS

HAVE CONTENT, NEED KID MANAGEMENT

WHEN SONNY TUDOR, DIRECTOR OF HUMAN RESOURCES at Oak Hills Local Schools, hires a teacher, he calls it the district's "million-dollar investment" as he hopes to retain that person for their teaching career.

He also takes his relatively new position – he has taught and served as administrator at all levels – very seriously. "I am the gatekeeper" and that begins with recruitment on college campuses to watching the tape of every first interview. He makes the final sign off for all nine district buildings and can't help but keep tabs on good prospects anywhere he is.

Last year he hired a career changer and has just hired three more. Generally, he'll hire 50 staffers in a year. The greatest need is for special-service personnel such as psychologists, intervention specialists, speech and language specialists, etc. After that, it's math and science teachers.

WHEN HIRING, IT'S A GIVEN THE CANDIDATE has the content ability, otherwise they would not begin the process. After that, Tudor looks for "high energy, a student-centered person who can connect with the kids. Today, you've really got to engage the kids, particularly in math and science."

In evaluating those abilities, Tudor asks many informal questions "to determine what

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kind of personality” a candidate has.

He often looks first to substitutes, aids who have previously applied for teaching positions and student teachers “because we get to watch them, build a relationship and observe their classroom management.

THAT – CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

– may be one of the hurdles career changers face. “You can bring the content, but if you can’t relate to the kids or control them, you’ve got a problem,” according to Tudor.

His 8,000-student district with the state’s largest coed 9-12 high school highly subscribes to the “21st-Century learning” philosophy.

In fact, he asks applicants what that means to them. “They often want to say it’s all about computers and technology.” That’s now standard. At Oak Hills, it implies an educational style that is student-centered, imparts critical thinking, emphasizes projects

and collaborative work and totally engages students.

“IT’S REALLY WHAT HAPPENS in the business world with adults,” Tudor says. And that’s an advantage career changers have – provided they can translate their experience for a student world.

This approach is a refreshing change from what Tudor calls “sit-and-get or drill-and-kill like I had in high school. I would have done better if I had been engaged.”

He believes Oak Hills is progressive beyond that philosophy and has taken up the mantle of high-school reform with dual credits, a program ripe for career changers and possible because of a partnership with the University of Cincinnati.

BECAUSE EIGHTH GRADERS CAN earn high school credit, by the time they are seniors they are eligible to take classes for college credit that, often, career chang-

ers with master’s degrees can teach. “That makes them really valuable,” Tudor says. “It’s a great match.”

Sure, the earning high school and college credit early pushes kids, Tudor admits, “but they’re being pushed anyway. It’s really become part of the (state) report card in how well we are preparing them for college. Of course, there is the other track as well.”

A STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) partnership with The Southwest Ohio Center for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Education allows freshman with defined interests to pursue those areas in high school – another lure for career changers who can connect to students.

“THE CORPORATE CULTURE IS VERY different from school culture,” Tudor says, which offers a less-flexible schedule. “You have to deal with teenage kids.”

That’s why he strongly advises those thinking about switching to teaching to “experience a school and see the culture before you go down that road. Do some soul searching before you make the switch.”

In Oak Hills’ rigorous interview process, Tudor listens for candidates who are student centered. “It’s not about them, it’s about the kids.” He’s always warmed when interviewees admit the draw is to “make a difference, help kids or see that light bulb go on.”

ANOTHER PLUS FOR OAK HILLS as far as prospective teachers are concerned, according to Tudor, is the district’s financial and leadership stability. It was one of the first in the state to institute an inside millage transfer that is expected to last 15 years and eliminate the constant battle for tax levies. “We’ve been able to break out of that boom-and-bust cycle and those we want to recruit like to hear that. It gives us time to really focus on education.”

STAYING WITH ‘EM

Once in the door, Tudor knows he can lose a teacher in the first three years. That’s why “we stay with them.” The first two years they are paired with an experienced teacher as a mentor. That program includes:

- Observing classes,
- First-day assistance,
- Help with lessons plans or the lay of the building,
- Quarterly meeting with their mentor,
- Professional development that the mentor also attends.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK TO SNAG TEACHING POSITION CONTINUED FROM FRONT

- How will you develop relationships?
- How will you use technology as an instructional tool?
- How will you vary instructional methods and modes?
- What’s your experience with IEPs (individualized education programs)?
- What do you have to do differently as a result?
- How do you differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students?
- What’s your mission and the reason you want to teach?
- Before a test or quiz, how do you know if the kids got it?
- If students have difficulty after an assignment, what do you do?

Her structured-interview approach involves “content, relationships, teaching and purpose for teaching.” In an interview, Means-Walker expects candidates to have done their homework when she asks what they know about the district. “You should know about the particular school and, at least, have gone to the website.

“IT IMPRESSES ME WHEN YOU know something about my building or district,” Means-Walker says. “You really need to tell me why I should chose you from among the ten I have just interviewed. You have to get used to bragging. Tell me something that makes you stand out from the others. Maybe it’s this is your second career, that you are more mature or something about your work experiences.”

SUBBING BEST ROUTE TO PERMANENT JOB CONTINUED FROM FRONT

One of the surest ways into a school district is by becoming a reliable substitute teacher. The only requirement in Ohio is a bachelor’s degree with licenses filed by the district.

Michelle Means-Walker, Great Oaks human resources director, just hired two for permanent positions. “It really does carry a lot of weight when someone is applying,” she says. “I already know them and we have a relationship. I interview all of our subs. Most of us are dying for good subs. It gives me a taste of what they will be like in the classroom.”

You never know when a long-term subbing position opens. “I can not predict when a teacher will become pregnant, a spouse is transferred or there’s a medical emergency. They come up all of the time.”

Her advice for subs:

- Get there early.
- Introduce yourself to teachers whose classrooms are on either side of yours. Determine if they are willing to be helpful.

And, pointers for new teachers:

- Restrict touching to a handshake.
- Computer use should be work related.
- Be open to supervisor’s improvement suggestions.
- While there is room for creativity, abide by established curriculum.

Interview tips:

- Teacher candidates do not need to wear a suit.
- No jeans or gym shoes.
- Men should wear a tie, but a jacket is unnecessary.
- If it’s a screening interview, don’t push a portfolio. Learn the interview process and know with whom you’ll be interviewing (human resources, principal, committee).

Above all else, whether applying to substitute or teach permanently, if you are truly interested in helping students, “do not give up. You can get the job,” Means-Walker says.

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