Panelists

- Jackie Polidor, School District of Philadelphia
- Kristen Long, Independence Charter School
- Sherry Coleman, Independent School Consortium of Greater Philadelphia
- Amy Sichel, Abington School District

Q: Please give us an overview of your school or district. Describe its culture and how that may influence your hiring practices.

Jackie: With the Philadelphia School District, hiring tends to vary depending on the time of year. Most of the hiring process takes place from March – June. The district tends to fill temporary positions a lot in December when teachers go on sabbaticals or long-term leaves. Hiring is generally based on need, though students can work with a recruiter to try to work in a particular region. The district hosts large fairs in the spring to allow students to meet with principals.

Kristen: Independence Charter School is a K-8 school with a focus on global education and languages. Therefore, we look for those who can deal with diversity. The staff tends to be very dedicated and not focused on the clock.

Sherry: The Independent School Consortium recruits teachers for pre-K through 12th grade. Independent Schools tend to look for teachers with in-depth knowledge of their content areas and a willingness to give outside of the classroom.

Amy: Diversity is seen as a strength and as an asset, more so than is typical in suburban schools. Therefore, meeting diverse student needs is a priority as well as keeping a rigorous academic standard. The depth of a person along with a sense of compassion and desire to work with children is also important. The superintendent and assistant superintendent interview every candidate. Candidates need to know about the district and should not ask questions that can easily be answered by perusing the district website.

Q: Are there any trends or issues in K-12 education that students should be aware of as it relates to their job search?

Jackie: Teachers often need to wear many hats, so versatility is key. Multiple certifications/specializations and multilingual skills are highly valued. It is also useful to consider getting middle years endorsements to be qualified to teach at middle schools. Classroom management is also a key skill. Efforts have been made to reduce the student to counselor ratio; recently, 200 counselors have been hired.
**Kristen:** Balance is needed in helping students perform well on tests while still teaching in innovative and student-centered ways.

**Sherry:** In independent schools, assessment tends to be connected with admission. However, there are benchmarks (ERB’s) used to assess student readiness for the next level. Well-roundedness beyond academics is also considered an important measure for assessment.

**Amy:** Formative and summative assessment is important and knowledge of the state standards and anchors is necessary. Candidates need to have an understanding of Pennsylvania standards for their subject area and be able to discuss how they can assess whether they are met. Make sure you know what’s going on.

*Q:* For those students involved with fieldwork (e.g. student teaching, counseling internship) as part of their programs, how would you advise them to make the most of that experience as it relates to their job search?

**Jackie:** Building relationships with cooperating teachers, other teachers, school aides and school secretaries is especially important. In addition to networking, students should utilize the resources at their assigned school, and participate in after school activities. The more flexible you are, the better. Keep an open mind. It is useful to visit other classes in order to observe other grades in your area of certification and other subjects in which you plan to get certified.

**Kristen:** Participate in professional development activities; this demonstrates your willingness to go the extra mile. Ask to be observed by an administrator while teaching, especially if you are interested in working at that school after graduation. Try substitute teaching in other classrooms to maximize exposure.

**Sherry:** Know about the school where you are student teaching and consider whether a given school placement is a good fit for you. Go beyond your classroom. For example, sit in on parent-teacher conference or advise a student club.

**Amy:** Delve into your area DEEP and WIDE. “Deep” means know what the school is doing in your content area and why. Read the teaching manual and try to understand the philosophy behind it. “Wide” means learn from others at the school. Know about your school, including the extracurricular activities, collaborative projects and the code of conduct.

*Q:* What are some tips for and things to note about the application process?

**Jackie:** Clearances have to be within one year of issuance. Two recommendations are required; make sure they speak to abilities in teaching or counseling. Once you are screened by initial interviews with Human Resources and deemed eligible to work for the School District of Philadelphia, you then move into customizing your resume/cover letter to specific schools and principals (typically from March – June) and contacting them via Site Selection job fairs or uploading your materials to the principals via the website.

**Kristen:** The cover letter should indicate why the candidate is interested in Independence Charter School (or whichever school) in particular. Don’t minimize other activities (besides student teaching) that may be relevant.
Sherry: Make sure your recommenders really want to write the reference, and give them plenty of advance notice. Make note of relevant volunteer and leadership experience on your resume. Cover letters should be coherent, concise and communicate interest and passion about the position.

Amy: Make sure your application is complete and realize that it will initially go to Human Resources. The PA application will inquire about preferences but also be as flexible as possible. Elementary candidates should consider getting middle school certifications even they didn’t have a field placement in a middle school. Your resume should include other work/volunteer experience that points to your passion for working with young people. In your cover letter, make sure you are clear about what job you are applying for, your certification(s), and what makes you special, different and good with young people. Absolutely no typos or mistakes in resumes or cover letters. Your recommendations should come from cooperating teachers or counseling/social work supervisors who really know you well.

Q: What about counseling/social work opportunities?

Jackie: Counselors should apply via the Office of Specialized Services. Social workers are not as much in demand, but perhaps retirements may open up opportunities.

Kristen: Independence Charter School employs two counselors at this point.

Sherry: Independent Schools do have support services (such as counseling), so counseling/social work students should inquire about these opportunities.

Amy: Make sure you are aware of requirements for the state. Make use of the richness of the social-emotional approach to child development that Penn emphasizes. Also, stress your ability to meet the diverse needs of a diverse student body.