

## **Finding the Right Independent School Job**

### **About Independent Schools**

Independent schools are private, non-profit elementary and secondary schools governed by boards of trustees. Their financial support comes from tuition, private gifts, grants, and endowment. They range in size from a handful of students to thousands. Their approaches to teaching and learning vary from open classrooms, team teaching and experiential learning to more traditional lecture with questions and answers. They can be coeducational or single sex, boarding or day schools. Independent schools are located in the country, in the inner city, and everywhere in between.

### **About Independent School Teachers**

Independent school teachers work in a personal, family-like environment, with a strong sense of community, high academic expectations, motivated students and involved parents. They have a chance to shape courses and curriculum, to collaborate with colleagues, and to affect the development of young people through their work in and out of the classroom. Classes are small and discipline problems are rare. Each independent school strives to admit students who will benefit the most from its program. The same rationale applies for selecting teachers and finding the right job often depends on finding the right match between your talents and interests and a school's philosophy and needs.

### **Choose Several Schools that Command Your Respect**

- Search for a school and a position that really suit you. The time and care you take reading, talking, visiting, and interviewing are much shorter and happier than the time you could spend suffering in a job or a school that is wrong for you -- or looking for a job again the following year.
- Make a list of preferences: type of school (boys', girls', coeducational); location (part of the country; urban, suburban, rural); philosophy (traditional, progressive); and grade levels (elementary, secondary, or all grades).
- Consult the directories of independent schools available in the reference section of your college or public library.
- Using your preferences as a guide, develop a list of the schools that meet your criteria.
- Learn all you can about the schools by reading their catalogues, handbooks, and other publications and whenever possible, talking to parents, students, teachers, and graduates.

### **Pursue More than One Route to School Job Openings**

- Consult your college or university placement office. Some college career planning officers have contacts in independent schools as well as copies of school profiles and catalogues.
- Carefully investigate the services of a teacher placement agency. The Educational Leadership Group at NAIS maintains a list of some agencies that independent schools use.
- If you are interested in boarding schools or you are new to independent education, teaching in a summer program can be a valuable introduction to life at an independent school. Talk to friends who have attended an independent school and to neighbors and relatives who have present or past associations with independent schools. Ask them to provide an introduction to their school.
- Investigate internship programs for novice teachers. These programs often offer a wealth of experience that can help you decide whether to make teaching a lifelong commitment.

## Visit the School for a Day

- Most schools welcome visitors who simply want to learn more about them. You may be able to set up a visit even though a school has no current job openings. If something should open up later, you will already be known to staff members and they to you.
- ♦ If you are invited for an interview, it is to your benefit to schedule as much time as possible at the school: find out as much as you can while you are there.

### **Talk to teachers:**

Are they happy at the school? Do they believe they are treated fairly? Do they interest you as potential colleagues? Is the school's philosophy of education compatible with your own?

### **Talk to students:**

Do they like the school? Are they challenged and hardworking? Bored? Too busy? Do they speak of the faculty with respect and enthusiasm? What is most important to them about the school?

### **Talk to administrators:**

What about faculty turnover? Too much may indicate dissatisfaction, too little may mean stagnation. Try to find out as precisely as you can what your teaching load, extra duties, and salary and benefits would be. Ask your interviewers to comment frankly on the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Are major changes envisioned in the near future that could affect teachers? What overall trends can be seen in recent admissions? What opportunities for your professional growth -- graduate study, workshops, conferences, seminars, courses -- would the school support with release time or money? How and when would you receive orientation and help during your first year at the school? By what standards would you be evaluated? If possible, talk with all faculty members and administrators with whom you would be directly involved.

## Review Any Offer Carefully

- ♦ Do not accept a position until you know what you will be paid and what you are to teach as specifically as can be determined. Each school sets its own salary ranges, and more and more schools are publishing this information in their faculty handbooks. A prospective teacher should be aware that independent school salaries as a rule are lower than those in neighboring public schools.
- ♦ Each school bases decisions about its salaries and benefits on its individual financial resources, but nearly all schools offer health and retirement plans. Beyond that, compensation programs can vary considerably. Boarding schools, along with a few day schools, offer rent-free or substantially subsidized housing in dormitories or other school-owned property. Meals for teachers and their families in the school's dining hall can be another major benefit. Many schools offer tuition remission or direct grants to children of faculty members.

For more information from NAIS (National Association of Independent Schools) about careers at Independent Schools, visit their website at [www.nais.org](http://www.nais.org).