

# PART 1

## The 10 Truths of Student Teaching

*“Twenty-first century education is being dramatically redefined through educational reform. We are teaching in new times. These new times require a next generation teacher—what we are calling a teacher leader. We believe that teacher leaders should be at the vanguard of technological applications in the classroom. They should also have a deep and nuanced understanding of assessment practices and understand the role that schools play in building healthy communities.”*

—Dr. Peter Hlebowitsh, Dean, College of Education, University of Alabama

### My To-Do List

1. Discover the 10 Truths of Student Teaching and plan for a successful classroom experience.
2. Set the stage for a productive relationship with your cooperating teacher.
3. Plan for a successful student teaching experience by knowing who you are, finding experiences, not waiting for them to find you, and becoming a strong team player. Be a teacher.

### My Project Overview

1. Take 5: Getting Ready for Student Teaching
2. My ePlanner
  - a. *Demographics and Data*: Using data to make decisions.
  - b. *Field Experiences Summary*: Organize past experiences for future success.
  - c. *Goals*: Long and short-term goals to get you ready for your career.
  - d. *My Weekly Summary*: Key observations and self-assessment.
3. Take 5 Again: Discover Your Strengths; Know Your Needs

The student teaching experience is a bit like study abroad: total immersion. Those who study abroad are changed by the experience—you too will be changed by student teaching—you’ll become a teacher. For some of you this transformation will be very real and noticeable, and for others that change may be less obvious. What’s important is to acknowledge and embrace these opportunities for growth as they occur. There is no such thing as a perfect student teacher. You’ll enjoy several successes along with a few bumps in the road. All of your experiences

during your internship will be beneficial in your development as a career teacher. Employers expect to hear what you've learned during your student teaching, and how those experiences—good and bad—have made you the teacher sitting in front of them at the interview.

## TAKE 5

### Getting Ready for Student Teaching

It's time to launch the most important part of your development as a teacher. Time to take 5 and write about student teaching. Use the space below to jot down your thoughts about student teaching. Be prepared to discuss these ideas with your cooperating teacher, university supervisor, peers, and a potential employer—you're all part of a team now.



If you were to write a status update on Facebook or Twitter about your first day of student teaching, what would it be (140 characters or less)?

Gandhi once said, "Be the change you wish to see in the world." How do you hope to make a difference as a student teacher?

How would you want students to describe you, the new student teacher, to parents?

## IDENTITY IN FLUX

Your student teaching internship is just the beginning of an immense professional identity transformation. Teaching is complicated, and master teachers devote years of attention to the processes, products, and professional knowledge it takes to become a teacher leader. Few careers have such a long development cycle. Teaching is a serious profession, and taking your profession seriously—early on—is a must if you plan to have a successful career in teaching.

*Jeff McCanna, Human Resources Director of one of the largest school districts in the nation, says: “Our future rests in our next generation—we must have good teachers in our classrooms. Because of the unprecedented growth in our region, we recruit year-round, in the United States and abroad. Each year we pass school referendums and build new schools—that’s the easy part. Finding talented new teachers to help each student succeed is our biggest challenge.”*

Part of taking your profession seriously means seeing yourself as a professional. Very few student teachers walk into their new classrooms chin up and chest out; in fact, quite the opposite is true. If you’re a new student teacher there’s a good chance you feel nervous, intimidated, and insecure about your abilities. If that’s not enough, some of you are probably even having second thoughts about your chosen vocation. This is totally normal, and in order for us to begin the task of transforming your identity to one that embraces your strengths rather than apologizing for inexperience, we offer 10 truths of student teaching that will inform your job search, and prove to an employer that you have what it takes.

## TRUTH #1

You’re going to make mistakes—learn from them.

Some may be considered “naturals” in the classroom—but even “naturals” make mistakes. Teaching is a challenge—particularly in 21st century American classrooms. Accept mistakes as learning opportunities. This first transformation will be fundamental in your professional development—not to mention during the interview process. The reflective practitioner is constantly reviewing, observing and taking note of classroom successes and shortcomings. Employers and student teaching supervisors alike will want to hear about your missteps in teaching and—most importantly—how you’ve turned those mistakes into mastery.

## TRUTH #2

Come early, stay late.

Teaching is hard work—and your student teaching experience will demonstrate that this profession isn’t for everyone. There will be days where you second guess your ability to stay the course—pay attention to those moments, resolve to work harder. Go the extra mile, put in the extra time—in the end it will pay off not only in an exemplary recommendation, but in the extra knowledge you gained from that hard work. You’ll need a good recommendation to get a job and the only way to get that is to prove that you’re worth recommending.

*“We’re looking for new teachers who are going to go the extra mile for students and those who truly understand their content knowledge, build relationships with students, and are willing to look at the individual student and their needs—that’s what will make a difference in our schools.”*

—Dr. Mario Andrade, Assistant Superintendent

## TRUTH #3

### Know your students—know your school.

Unfortunately too few student teachers really get to know their students in the short period of time that they spend in the classroom. This isn’t necessarily a time issue—it’s an issue of initiative. Employers need individuals who are able to make a connection to the students in their classrooms. You know from your teacher education coursework that American classrooms are composed of diverse learners who bring all sorts of variables to the learning environment. How can you possibly be an effective teacher without knowing your students? A concerted effort should be made to know the demographics of the community, school, your classroom, in addition to the unique learning needs of individual students. Perhaps your school or community has unique alternative programming or resources available to families. Each school is different, and a thorough examination of your field experiences will reveal the different contexts in which you’ve already worked. How were your field experiences similar? How were they different? How can you describe the various student populations you’ve experienced during your studies? Employers are curious about how well you’ve gotten to know your students and thus how committed you are to the success of all learners.

## TRUTH #4

### When working with adults—act like an adult.

Teaching is high stakes in this day and age. That means your cooperating teachers, teacher preparation program, and university supervisor have a lot riding on you. They’re going to need to give you feedback and sometimes even take corrective measures to ensure that your experience—and the experience of your students—is what it should be. Most of you will waltz through student teaching with no conflict—but few of you will leave with no disagreements. They might be small disagreements—you might teach something or approach something differently—or they might be larger in scale—you completely disagree with how a discipline situation was handled, or you felt embarrassed with the way your

cooperating teacher called you out when you did something wrong. It's never easy to address potential conflicts that may arise between student teachers and cooperating teachers, but it is realistic to acknowledge conflict and address it when it occurs. Most difficult conflicts are the result of avoidance and inattention to improve. Often, student teachers take offense to honest feedback they receive from cooperating teachers, supervisors, even the students. Feedback is a good learning tool—listen to it, learn from it, and don't take it personally. Most conflict is easily rectified in the form of utilizing different approaches, reconsidering a lesson plan, or making creative changes to the learning environment. Seldom is conflict so severe that individuals beyond the student teacher/cooperating teacher team need to be involved. Conflict during your student teaching is a good dose of reality for work in the real world. Conflict is a normal part of worklife—and conflict resolution is a critical skill—and one that employers want to hear you address.

## TIP

Dr. Kristen Rickey, Superintendent, suggests that serious thought be put into how you have handled an adult disagreement in a school setting. "If you can't talk about a difference of opinion or style, then I might assume that you won't be able to handle a conflict when one does arise. Good conflict resolution skills are important for students and teachers."

## TRUTH #5

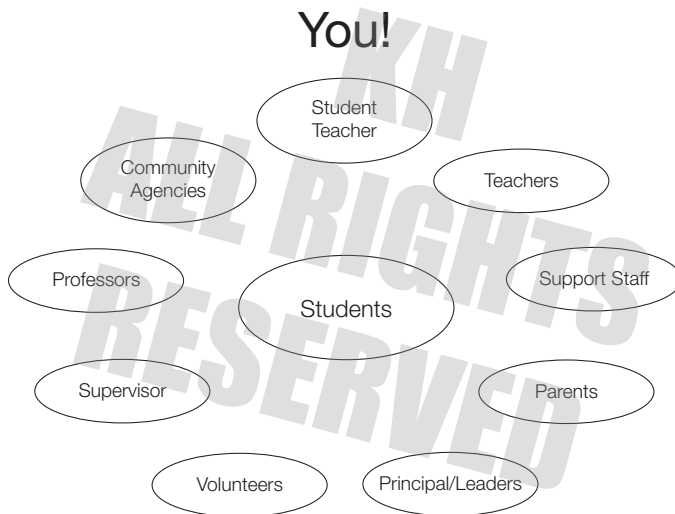
### Practice makes perfect—organize, plan, practice.

The need to be organized as a teacher goes without saying, but we're going to say it again: Organization is key—and essential to running an effective classroom as well as an effective job search. Teachers are constantly thinking on their feet—but teaching isn't spur of the moment. It's thoughtful, deliberate, and intentional. Planning is imperative as is practice (and we really do mean practicing everything from delivering your instruction, to introducing yourself to new colleagues or parents). You'll be able to make the most of your student teaching by staying organized, and developing a clear plan for your experience that addresses your responsibilities, teaching time, planning time, and opportunities to reflect on your experience. By having a clear plan for your placement, you'll make better use of your time. Don't forget, most of you will also be in the midst of the job search. Plan ahead, practice often, and utilize all organizational tools possible at your disposal, including those in the ePlanner.

## TRUTH #6

Be a collaborator and team builder—get to know your partners in teaching and learn from them.

Your cooperating teacher and university supervisor are but two of the individuals who make up your student teaching team. From faculty members and fellow student teachers to para-educators and even parents—there are so many individuals involved in the school enterprise that it's almost impossible to know where a working relationship begins and where one ends. It's critical that you understand how you as a student teacher and future teacher will fit into that web to maximize the effectiveness of your own collaborations, and most of all to promote student success.



## TRUTH #7

Time is not on your side—learn to prioritize early.

Establishing priorities is never easy—particularly when you're not exactly sure what your responsibilities or expectations will be. One approach is to establish a list of goals or things you hope to accomplish during your student teaching. Certainly some priority setting will occur naturally as you become more familiar with your students, your schedule, and the setting.



## TRUTH #8

### Prove it or lose it.

In a standards-based profession like teaching, you're going to have to demonstrate professional skills. An employer will need proof that you're able to meet the demands of the classroom while delivering a grade A instructional product. Your student teaching experience is designed so that you'll gain experience with all the inner workings of a classroom in your particular content area. An elementary classroom teacher works in a different context than a secondary foreign language teacher. You'll need to address your context by knowing the needs, realities, and outcomes of your particular area. You'll also need to have experiences with classroom management, providing accommodations and differentiated instruction for various learners, family involvement, assessment, lesson planning, communication, professional development, and competence in understanding the culture and environment in which learning occurs. There are a number of ways to demonstrate these competencies—from portfolios to the strategic way in which you'll answer interview questions. The best start is to notice everything and be incredibly attentive to your intention to make the most of this experience.

### TIP



"During your student teaching experience, you will meet master teachers, who are savvy professionals. These are also the folks who wind up on interview teams. They aren't necessarily looking for a ready made master teacher—they are looking for someone who has what it takes to become a master teacher. Prove that you can do it!"

—Shane Williams, Director of Elementary Innovation & Instruction



## TRUTH #9

### Know who you are.

This knowledge will serve you well as it helps you identify your needs, and make the most of your strengths. Every student teacher should enter their classroom knowing exactly what needs they have and what strengths they can immediately put to good use. A great deal of self-help literature focuses on improving that which we can't do well. It is our opinion that a much better approach to addressing weaknesses is to focus instead on what you can do well. You can count on

sharing your special attributes, your best abilities, and your exceptional qualities with potential employers. Start by listing a strength that you now have. (*Odds are good that it will be adjusted by the time you are finished with student teaching.*) These simple statements will help you eliminate the uncomfortable hesitation when you are asked to talk about your strengths and possibly a weakness, too.

## TAKE 5 AGAIN

### Discover Your Strengths, Know Your Needs

Time to take 5 more minutes and discover your strengths and know your needs. Chances are you'll be asked to talk about it. Use the space below to jot down your thoughts about student teaching. Be prepared to discuss these ideas with your cooperating teacher, university supervisor, peers, and of course, a potential employer. They'll want to know what you have to offer.

If students could give your past field experiences (or other related work) a grade—what aspects of your work with them would get an A?

What aspects of your work with students in past experiences would get a C or below?



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Start talking about your weaknesses as "areas of growth," "needs," "or skills in which you wish to improve."

That alone will help you transform weaknesses into experiences.



Use your weakness to set an attainable goal for student teaching—one that is realistic and will be of benefit to you as you search for jobs. For example, take a look at the table below of common perceived weaknesses of student teachers:

PERCEIVED WEAKNESS	PROPOSED GOALS
Classroom discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• work with challenging students,</li> <li>• implement behavior support mechanisms,</li> <li>• develop own classroom discipline philosophy.</li> </ul>
Experience with parents/families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• send parent newsletter,</li> <li>• create classroom blog,</li> <li>• participate in parent teacher conferences.</li> </ul>
Differentiating instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• observe special learning programs,</li> <li>• examine Individual Education Plans,</li> <li>• adapt lesson plans for multiple groups.</li> </ul>

Having a plan to address your perceived weakness will make your experience more meaningful, and it gives you useful information to discuss in an interview. Notice that each of the weaknesses were written in the form of needs statements. We find this approach makes addressing your shortcomings as a new teacher more practical. The general goal statements that follow each need are attainable, reasonable, and believable.



Let your cooperating teacher know what you hope to accomplish and areas of growth for your student teaching. They can't read your mind!

## TRUTH #10

Student teaching is the beginning of the job search—you are a professional.

Yep, the college days are over; from the moment you step into your student teaching classroom you are a professional. You might not feel like one, and unfortunately, students old enough to know the difference between you and your cooperating teacher will do their best to give you a run for your money. From day one, you have a big stake in how you and your work are perceived by the students, teachers, administrators, supervisors . . . all those people that make

up the web of your classroom. Nerves are requisite and may even be of benefit, if you turn that initial nervousness into positive energy and motivation to get involved from day one.

## TIP

**"Initiative is very important."**

- "When I'm walking down the hallway, is the student teacher greeting students?"
- "When I walk into the classroom, is everything ready?"
- "Is this student teacher seeking opportunities to meet people, to interact with the students?"
- "Is this student teacher looking for every opportunity to learn?"
- "I want to see dedication, serious planning, and intentional actions in a student teacher."

—Evelyn Cosmos Smith, Assistant Principal

## SUMMARY

### The 10 Truths of Student Teaching

Now that you've learned about the 10 Truths of Student Teaching you'll be able to make the most of your experience. If you've already started student teaching, don't sweat it—you can incorporate the ideas from the 10 truths starting right now. Treat each day of student teaching as a new start, a new challenge, and a new opportunity to grow as a teacher.

# ON THE WEB

Make the most of your student teaching placement and get ready to get hired. These activities will help.



## ePlanner Activities

1. *Demographics and Data*: Using data to inform decisions.
2. *Field Experiences Summary*: Organize past experiences for future success.
3. *Goals*: Long and short-term goals to get you ready for your career.
4. *My Weekly Summary*: Key observations and self assessment.

## eJournal

1. Write your thoughts about each of the 10 Truths of Student Teaching. Better yet—provide specific examples of actions you've taken or plan to take to make each truth a reality. Employers will likely ask you about each of these truths.
2. Conflict resolution is an important skill for all adults but especially teachers who are responsible to so many different constituents. Write about a conflict you've encountered with another adult in a professional setting (nothing personal here). What was the situation? What did you do to resolve it? And what did you learn as a result? Employers want to know that you'll be a productive and professional colleague.

## Video Tips

*Making the Most of Student Teaching*: listen up as an administrator shares his advice for making the most of student teaching. He'll share how you can be in the top 10 percent of job seeking candidates who won't have to worry about finding a job.