

Communicating Effectively

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Developing Your Message

When interviewing, you must be able to talk about yourself effectively. Especially with the basic issues of why you want to teach and how your past experiences will help you succeed as a teacher. You don't want to be caught off guard with any of the basic questions; rather, you want to hit these softballs out of the park! Like a good salesman or politician, you need a sales pitch. Developing an effective sales pitch takes time and effort.

First, you need to familiarize yourself with the general questions that might be asked, you can gain some insight by reading our article "What Will They Ask." Spend some time thinking about and coming up with your answers, followed by practice and refinement. Delivering your message points should become second nature.

DEER IN HEADLIGHTS

Prevent a 'deer in the headlights' situation! Don't get caught off guard with basic questions.

BASIC MESSAGE

Develop for yourself a basic bio about how you got to this point of looking to the teaching profession and why you think you'll enjoy it. Principals like bringing real-world experience into the classroom; use your diverse employment background as a positive aspect to set you apart. You don't need to over think it or make it too difficult, just make sure you have given it some thought so that you are not unprepared. You need to be able to give a quick impression of who you are and how your experience can benefit the campus. Remember, it should all come back to the kids. Some Human Resource recruiters call this your "60 second commercial", and they expect you to have one.

MESSAGE FOR SUCCESS IN CLASSROOM

Move on to developing your talking points of why you think you'll be successful in the classroom. This will require you to take elements from your background together with the topics of the Six Common Themes. For example, what in your background leads to your ability to create a good classroom management system, or what experiences do you have that will help you to be a professional team member on campus. Anticipating the questions and having technical answers prepared is great, and

when you can relate it to your own background then you have a very effective message and a compelling sales pitch.

SPECIFIC MESSAGES

Besides having generic messages for why you want to teach, etc. that you can use with anyone for any position, you also need to have very specific, custom-made message points for a particular teaching position within a particular district or school. In fact, you are expected by the interviewer to do your homework and be able to talk specifically about any details with the position you are interviewing for. In this case you would want to relate your abilities and interest specifically to that unique teaching position and district. Principals will be looking for how you fit onto their campus specifically, so make sure you can tell them!

TAILOR YOUR MESSAGE FOR THE MOMENT AND THE ISSUE AT HAND

UNDERSTAND YOUR CERTIFICATION PROCESS

In addition, you need to be able to talk about your status, progression and requirements in your program. Recruiters want to know that you fully understand what the certification process is for you, what you have to do and when you need to do it. They want to be sure that you are moving quickly along in the program with no issues or unnecessary barriers that could limit your availability to teach. You need to be telling them how the certification process works—not them telling you. This is a big selling point that shows your ability to manage your situation. In particular, you need to be able to explain your progress in completing your pre-service requirements.

Practice and Prepare

Setting yourself apart from your competition takes time and effort on your part. Think about how you can communicate your answers to the sample questions included with a principal and then practice.

Making a Great Impression

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Principals and Human Resources staff are going to assume that you are at your very best when dealing with them at job fairs and in interviews, so be sure to set a high standard for yourself by following these tips.

Position Yourself for the Win

BE SURE TO FOLLOW THESE HELPFUL TIPS:

- Be sure to arrive 10-15 minutes early for your appointments.
- Be courteous to everyone in the office and greet everyone with a quick, firm handshake (when appropriate). Beware of the “wimpy” handshake!
- Everything about you says that you are a warm, caring person. They have to like you. You must show some “affect” in your demeanor.
- All supporting documents to your resume are available and copies are easily accessible.
- You have a brief, but well-prepared “commercial” or pitch about yourself. This helps alleviate the nervousness at the beginning and sets the tone for the interview.
- Your responses have purpose. You know what you want to convey and how you want to market yourself.
- Know about the details of your progress with Michigan Teachers of Tomorrow. Be able to clearly explain what you have completed and what you need to complete with the program. Talk about the certification area in which you are eligible or plan to become eligible. Let them know that you have your “ducks in a row” and are on top of all the details.

WATCH OUT FOR THESE PIT FALLS:

- Make sure you don't display limited or unsophisticated social skills. Principals want you to be a role model for their students, as well as for you to get along well with your co-workers.
- Don't be too loud or aggressive in your responses, rather be thoughtful and measured and always exude confidence.
- Chewing gum is never acceptable.

- Coming across as a “robot,” both in your body language and your responses, shows you are too rehearsed and generic. You must demonstrate personality and connect with the interviewer effectively.
- Never slouch during the interview. Sit up straight, be attentive, and exude excitement.
- Try not to ramble during your responses. Listen to the question, ask for clarification when needed, and then be methodical in your response.
- Make sure your clothes and breath are fresh and not smelling of cigarette smoke (or alcohol!). Avoid overpowering perfumes or cologne.
- Don't dress like you are going to a nightclub or a picnic. These two extremes are not appropriate and most interviewers will not take you seriously.

Dress for Success

The first impression sets the stage for the rest of the interview. Keep in mind that teaching is a conservative profession. You cannot be too professional or formal when dealing with school officials. Dressing “corporate” is always the best choice.

THINGS TO AVOID:

- Clothes that are “loud” in any manner (color, style, etc.).
- Clothes that are not properly ironed.
- Clothes that are too big, too small or too tight.
- Short skirts for women. The skirt/dress should be of appropriate length when sitting. You may be asked to interview sitting directly across from an administrator without any furniture between you.
- Excessive and/or distracting jewelry.
- Shoes that are not polished.
- White socks for men.
- Tattoos that are visible.
- Hair that is not neatly groomed.
- Facial hair on men that is not neatly groomed.

Making a Great Impression *(continued)*

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A Very Simple Strategy for Attire

FOR MEN:

A fairly new suit of current style, pressed and fitted properly. Dark blues, grays and black are the best. White and blue shirts preferably. Solids are best, but some modest stripes or subtle patterns are acceptable. Ties should be worn and the top button of the shirt should be fastened. Try a red tie or other conservative color and style that works with the blue or white shirt. Tie clips are not necessary.

Try to keep your jacket buttoned until you sit down. Conservative and formal black business shoes, black socks and very well polished. A nice simple black belt. It's best to limit your jewelry to the bare minimum of a watch, wedding ring and/or class ring.

FOR WOMEN:

Suits are always the best way to go for a job interview. Dark blues and black are the best. Choose suits that are professional and "business" looking rather than cutting-edge fashion. Always err on the conservative side and avoid anything that is too tight, low cut or skirts that are too short. Avoid excessive and/or brightly colored make-up, jewelry and accessories. Wear closed-toe shoes that compliment your suit (stockings optional). Don't wear shoes that are too colorful, tall, or stylish. Carry a subtle handbag that isn't oversized.

It might be time to freshen up your job seeking wardrobe. Remember everything you do (and in this case, spend) is an investment into you obtaining teaching employment.

There are plenty of great places where you can get the attire you need without spending too much. Most retailers all have perfectly suitable inexpensive options that will do the job just fine. This is not about looking like a million bucks or showing off your stylish attire, it's about saying you are a serious and professional person who knows what is expected of you at the interview. The excitement should not be in your clothes but in you!

What Principals Will Be Looking For



You want to become a teacher who utilizes your skills, talent, and passion to educate students and motivates our youth to achieve success. You know that with hard work and the right training, you will be a terrific teacher reaching your personal goals and making a positive impact in the lives of children. But, to make this happen, you first have to get a job as a teacher!

What are principals and administrators looking for in teacher candidates? Well, we asked a number of principals and hiring officials throughout Michigan this very question. The responses were not surprising, nor were they unique. Overwhelmingly, principals indicated they are looking for candidates that have a passion for education and for working with children—a desire to do something important.

They also want a candidate that is prepared for the position, and has demonstrated they can deal with adversity and problems in the classroom. Principals are looking for teachers who will make sure their school makes annual progress and who understand, can implement, and have the maturity to be effective classroom managers. A principal's job is to ensure student and campus success; so, they want to hire people who are similarly committed to this goal.

It's important that you not just state that you have these qualities, but that you can speak about specific experiences that demonstrate these qualities and these experiences.

Practice and Prepare to Your Advantage



Setting yourself apart from your competition takes time and effort on your part. Read through the questions below; they form the basis for all your messages. Think about how you can communicate your answers with a principal and then practice. Practice in front of a mirror, or practice on a friend. You need to practice enough that the answers become automatic.

What's special, unique, distinctive, and/or impressive about your experiences?

What are the most compelling reasons you can give for the district to be interested in you?

What details of your life might help the district better understand you or help set you apart from other teacher candidates?

What are your long term career goals in education?

When did you originally become interested in being a teacher?

What have you since learned during your training at Michigan Teachers of Tomorrow or during your observations that has reinforced your conviction that you are well suited to teaching?

Have you had to overcome any unusual obstacle or hardships in your life?

What personal characteristics do you possess that would enhance your prospects for success in education? Is there a way to demonstrate or document that you have these characteristics?

What skills do you possess?

Why might you be a stronger candidate and more successful in teaching than other applicants?

Are there any gaps or discrepancies in your academic record that you should explain?

Qualities of an Effective Teacher

REVIEW THESE ESSENTIAL TRAITS TO HELP YOU DEVELOP YOUR TALKING POINTS AND ANSWERS TO INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Has well-prepared lessons/materials
- Uses sound judgment
- Flexible
- Life-long learner
- Good sense of humor
- Establishes positive relationships
- Has high expectations
- Consistent and fair
- Makes classroom connections to real life
- Differentiates instruction
- Communicates effectively
- Uses technology
- Proactive
- Seeks collaboration/input from others
- Creative
- Organized

A Wealth of Practice Questions

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Go through these questions and see if you have well-developed answers that you can quickly give for each. Consider having a friend play the role of the interviewer and ask you the questions.

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

- What is your philosophy of education?
- We often use the phrase that “all children can learn.” What does this phrase mean to you?

GENERAL QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR SKILLS/GOALS AS A TEACHER

- Why do you want to be a teacher?
- What makes you the best candidate for this job?
- What are some of the challenges you will face in beginning a career in education?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

EXPERIENCES WITH CHILDREN/JOB-RELATED SKILLS

- How do you transfer the job skills that you acquired in your present job to that of a teacher?
- What experiences do you have working with high school students?

CONTENT KNOWLEDGE:

Be well acquainted with the academic standards for the target content area. Explain to what extent you are acquainted with the “Six Traits of Writing” model. (Reading/Writing)

- What knowledge foundation should students have prior to teaching them about the Civil War? (History)
- How are you going to teach the difference between the Imperfect and Preterite tenses in a Spanish II class?

TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR THE TARGET CONTENT AREA:

Employers understand that content knowledge is not enough. A teacher must possess strategies which are age appropriate to teach the content.

- Which strategies will you use to teach reading at the 2nd grade level?

Describe the strategies you will use to teach “the writing process”. (Reading/Writing)

Describe how you will effectively implement Balanced Literacy in a 3rd grade Reading/Writing class.

- How will you effectively promote higher order thinking skills in your lessons?
- How will you integrate technology into your lesson plans?

TRAITS OF A DIVERSE CLASSROOM:

A teacher understands that recognizing diversity is very important. Students learn in diverse ways (different learning styles), at different paces, and have different academic foundations.

- What does it mean to have a “diverse classroom”?
- What are some of the challenges facing a teacher in a diverse classroom?

LESSON DESIGN

- Take me through a basic lesson on Photosynthesis. What would it look like? (Science)
- What is your thought process when you are designing a lesson?
- Briefly explain the merits of Madeline Hunter’s Direct Instruction Model.

DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION

- How would you differentiate instruction to accommodate the reluctant learner?
- Explain why appropriate “pacing” of a lesson is so important.

STUDENT-CENTERED INSTRUCTION

- What is the difference between teacher-centered and student-centered instruction?
- Describe how you would establish a strong student-centered environment in your classroom.

MOTIVATION/VALUE/IMPORTANCE

- How are you going to get the students excited about speech communication? (Speech Communication)
- How will you be able to stress the importance of learning decimal points?

ASSESSMENTS

- How do you know the students are learning anything?
- What is your plan for monitoring student progress?

A Wealth of Practice Questions *(continued)*

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- Give me examples of formal/informal assessments that you could use to measure student understanding of the “Cold War”. (History)

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

- What constitutes an effective classroom management plan?
- If I were to walk into your classroom during a lesson, what clues would impress upon me that you have a good classroom management plan in place?

DISCIPLINE MANAGEMENT

- How do you handle a disruptive student who continues making outbursts during a lesson even after being redirected several times?
- Explain the key components of a strong discipline management plan?
- What resources would you use in handling a student with persistent behavior issues?
- Describe your progressive discipline plan for persistent low-level misbehaviors.

TEAM PLAYER MENTALITY

- Describe a time when you have been an integral part of a collaborative team.
- Grades are due this afternoon. A colleague comes to you to ask for help because he/she has not finished entering his/her grades into the system. You have not entered all of your grades either. What do you do?
- How do you deal with colleagues who are continuously negative?

ESTABLISHING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

- Explain to me the importance of establishing positive relationships with students. How will you effectively achieve this?
- What strategies have you used in your current job to establish good relationships with your colleagues?
- How do you “reach” that student who is extremely withdrawn in your classroom?

POSITIVE ROLE MODEL

- Convince me that you would be an appropriate role model for your students.

- Why is it so important for teachers to be good role models?
- Life-long Learner – Be prepared to share recent activities/opportunities that would qualify you as a life-long learner.

WORKING WITH PARENTS/COMMUNICATION

- What are some strategies that you will use to effectively communicate with parents?
- At what point do you contact parents when a student is performing poorly in class?
- A parent is irate because his/her child is failing your class. The parent is requesting an immediate conference with you and an administrator. What do you do?

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES :

Many employers are becoming more curious about potential candidates' social networking habits on Facebook, MySpace, etc. Be prepared to comment on your views of social networking sites as they pertain to someone in the teaching profession.

ATTITUDES/SELF-REFLECTION

- Transitioning into the education field can be challenging as well as very rewarding. Where do you see yourself needing the most support?
- You are having tremendous success in your classroom. An administrator meets with you and asks that you change your teaching strategies because that is not the way the content is taught at that school. You feel strongly that your current strategies are very effective for your students. How would you handle the situation?
- Describe one of your most favorite and effective teachers that you have had. What made them so special? Which of these characteristics do you possess?

MISCELLANEOUS

- What do you do if a student tells you that he/she likes you?
- What qualities/skills would you bring to the team?
- What are some of the challenges facing a teacher teaching in a rural setting?
- Describe a situation/experience which would define you as a risk-taker.

What Will They Ask?

Six Common Questions

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Principals want to hire people that are going to produce results! Set the right tone early in your interview by communicating your ability to be effective in the classroom:

- Make sure all answers focus on your potential students. The words “children,” “student,” “child,” etc. should be a part of every answer;
- Have a repertoire of options or strategies that you can match to a situation;
- Use examples rather than just providing textbook answers.

Six Common Themes

Most principals or hiring officials have a bank of several dozen questions they pull from. However, almost every question falls into one of six basic themes.

Knowing the six themes, knowing how principals ask questions to gather information about those six themes, and being able to target your responses to demonstrate your effectiveness as a teacher is critical to your ability to be hired.

1. PHILOSOPHY

The purpose of philosophy questions are to gain a better understanding of you and your educational beliefs. Questions often include:

- Tell me a little about yourself.
- Why do you want to work for our district/school?
- Would you describe an experience you’ve had that’s helped prepare you for teaching?
- Why did you choose to become a school teacher?
- What do you consider to be your biggest achievement? Why?

2. ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

In schools, we teach what we assess and we assess what we teach. Many new teachers believe assessments are quizzes, tests, exams, and finals. Assessment is much more. Principals need to make sure you understand and will be able to use informal assessment (observations, questioning techniques, class discussion, projects and rubrics) and formal assessment (quizzes, exams and benchmark tests) to improve student learning and increase the efficiency of instruction. Questions typically include:

- How do you evaluate lessons/achievement?
- How would you determine grades for the lesson you described a few minutes ago?
- What procedures do you use to evaluate students other than tests?
- How would you use both informal and formal assessments?

3. CURRICULUM AND LESSON DESIGN

Principals need to verify you have a sound background and understanding of basic instructional strategies and pedagogy.

Lessons should be planned with a clear learning objective, lesson delivery targets, learning styles, readiness and abilities, as well as multiple activities that keep the students engaged. The overall lesson should focus on student-centered learning. On-going assessment and closure are also key components of good, strong lesson plans.

Questions about Differentiated Instruction, Cooperative Learning, and Learning Communities are not uncommon. Common questions include:

- Describe a good lesson. Tell me about the parts. How do you know it is good?
- Learning Style: Discuss activities and delivery methods that target the Multiple Intelligences.
- Learning Readiness: Discuss assessments and activities that identify different levels of learning readiness.
- Learning Abilities: Discuss strategies that target the gifted learner, the average and the slow learner.

What Will They Ask? Six Common Questions

(continued)

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4. CLASSROOM AND DISCIPLINE MANAGEMENT

A lack of good management in this area is the most common reason for teacher failure. This theme may be included several times using different questions. In an urban school, classroom management may be the focus of the interview.

Classroom Management is about routines, procedures, learning environment and protocols. Having well-prepared materials, lessons that engage the students and seamless activity transition help promote good classroom management.

Discipline Management deals with setting up boundaries that promote respect in the classroom. Good classroom management will alleviate 90% of the discipline problems. The other 10% are dealt with through classroom protocols and rules. Progressive discipline is a good start in dealing with student discipline.

It is important to have a repertoire of strategies that you can discuss when asked. Be prepared to answer the following questions:

- What is your discipline philosophy? Give me an example of how you used this philosophy.
- How do you get students to do what you want them to do?
- Describe your management style.
- Compare positive and negative reinforcement and the effects of each on students.
- What are rules and what are procedures? When do you use each?

5. CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

Building a classroom environment that is warm, motivating, inviting and safe is critical to your success. You can be the most amazing instructor, but if there is hostility in your room, students will not be able to contribute to the lesson. Principals want to ensure you have the skills and strategies needed to make your classroom environment supportive of student learning. Questions you need to be prepared for include:

- What would I see if I looked in your classroom?
- How will your students know you care about them?
- Describe how you are going to make your room a warm and inviting location that all kids want to be a part of.
- You have a child who just moved into your classroom. What are you going to do to make him feel like he or she is part of your class?
- How do you engage students? / How do you engage parents?

6. PROFESSIONALISM AND DEVELOPMENT

Principals want to make sure you are going to be a team player. It is not uncommon for a principal to ask questions about your past history of dealing with others and adversity. The variety of questions is as vast as the category, so it can be hard to prepare for this theme. We have included several questions that are commonly asked:

- What will make you a good teacher?
- If I called your last supervisor, what would he/she say about you?
- What would you include in your Open House presentation to parents?
- How could you use team teaching to provide your students with a better education?
- How do you keep your principal informed?

Putting Your Best Foot Forward at Job Fairs



Job fairs provide you with the unique opportunity to stand in front of a decision maker and sell yourself. They also provide you with many opportunities to prospect in a single day.

MULTI-DISTRICT JOB FAIRS:

Job fairs held by universities, and other regional organizations, invite many districts to attend (as many as 100). Each district is usually given a booth and 2 recruiters attend, often Human Resources Department staff.

SINGLE DISTRICT JOB FAIRS:

This is when one district will host a job fair for their district only. At these events, every campus in the district will have a booth, and two campus principals will recruit at their campus booth.

Quick Tips for Job Fair Success

Be sure to arrive early, preferably even before the event starts. Most job fairs have many attendees and you don't want to be wasting time standing in line. You typically will not have enough time to visit all your booths, so you will need the full allotted time of the event. There will be no food available, so eat a big meal beforehand so that you can go many hours comfortably at the fair. You will also be on your feet the entire time.

RESUMES & PORTFOLIOS

Take many copies of all your documents (and/or portfolios). You'll want to have at least 20 or more, depending on the size of the event and number of districts you are targeting.

MAKE A GREAT IMPRESSION

You are trying to sell yourself from the moment you approach the recruiter, and be aware that they will be sizing you up immediately. Dress very conservatively and show that you are a professional in every way.

COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

Be able to quickly explain the basic reason you want to teach and what your relevant experiences are. Also, know your status, progress and requirements in your certification process with Michigan Teachers of Tomorrow including the areas for which you are eligible for an Interim Teaching Certificate.

APPLY IN ADVANCE

Apply online to all your districts before the job fair. Otherwise, they may not wish to spend time on you if you didn't spend time applying with them.

GO TO AS MANY AS POSSIBLE!

Increasing your Chances for Success



Target many school districts to find more opportunities for employment. Also consider charter and private schools. The more opportunities you can find the better. Cast a wide net and be willing to commute for this first year teaching.

GETTING HIRED

Take the time to formally apply online with each district and charter/private school that you target. This may take some effort, but you must officially be in their database to get any attention from the Human Resource Department. Be sure to complete the application fully. Also, apply to districts before you meet them at job fairs, and they will be impressed!

You can target individual schools as well, after you've applied through the district. Always be very professional and polite and never pushy. Be understanding if they don't have time to meet you. All efforts, if done properly, can lay the groundwork for your employment.

It's a good idea to follow up any of your meetings, or even your attempted meetings, with a thank you note. These small courtesies and elements of professionalism are not lost on your potential employers.

Don't worry too much about what jobs are posted, or not posted, on a district Human Resource employment page; the postings are not always kept accurate. Apply to your targeted districts for the positions you are seeking whether they are posted or not.

If you pass an exam in another subject area after you have applied, remember to update your application to inform the district of the new area you are eligible to teach. Often districts will let you amend your application on file, but with some you may need to replace it with a completely new application; call the Human Resource Department for specific instructions.

CHOOSE YOUR CERTIFICATION AREA WISELY

Consider the high need subject areas like Math, Science, Special Education and Bilingual. Talk to your advisor about what subject areas and strategies that you should consider pursuing.

COMPLETE PRE-SERVICE QUICKLY

Pre-Service refers to your training and Field Based Experiences, and completion of Pre-Service is a requirement for the Interim Teaching Certificate. When you fully complete this you will get the Letter of Eligibility that has no contingencies and you'll also be eligible for employment. The sooner you complete Pre-Service, the sooner you are able to impress districts with your determination and achievements to be eligible for employment. In addition, you need to be able to explain your progress on Pre-Service as you complete it.

SELL YOURSELF IN TWO ASPECTS: REAL WORLD EXPERIENCE AND BASIC TEACHING SKILLS

Principals are looking for the qualities of a good teacher and a good employee. The good employee aspect is what you, as an alternate route teacher, are very strong in naturally because of your work experience in the "real-world". You have that professionalism, maturity and real-world experiences that employers want. To impress potential employers with your knowledge of teaching skills, turn to your Michigan Teachers of Tomorrow training to learn the fundamentals of teaching and how to explain many of those concepts in an interview.

GET EXPERIENCE

As an alternate route candidate, you may not have any classroom experience; that's okay, most don't. However, try to get some subbing experience, or volunteer to gain experience in the classroom (charter/private schools are a good place to get this experience). Gaining this experience (even just a few days) will allow you to demonstrate to districts your sincerity to better understand the classroom environment, and your commitment to teaching. These can also count toward your Field Based Experiences (FBEs) requirement.

Increasing Your Chances for Success *(continued)*

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NO TIME TO WASTE

Every day is a good day to get hired! While the summer may be the busiest hiring season, districts continue to hire every day of the year. Take advantage of all the time you have to complete your requirements as quickly as possible. Take your content tests and complete your pre-service requirements to get into the applicant pool as soon as possible!

HAVE YOUR MESSAGE DOWN

Make sure you are ready and able to communicate on the basic questions that will be asked in every interview. Have a prepared answer for why you want to be a teacher, what in your background lends itself to making you successful in the classroom and so forth. Don't get caught in a 'Deer in Headlights' situation and blow an opportunity.

READ YOUR EMAILS FROM MICHIGAN TEACHERS

We will send you updates on Job Fairs, targeted openings that fit your background, and other job related information to help you get hired.