

# Finding Success at Education Career Fairs

Career Services  
University of Missouri-St. Louis  
278 Millennium Student Center  
314-516-5111  
careerservices@umsl.edu  
careers.umsl.edu

*This workshop is designed to help participants understand the general format of an education career fair. In explaining the process, general techniques such as preparing for the event, initiating conversations with district representatives and on-the-spot interviews are explored.*

## The Purpose of a Career Fair

Career fairs are a great way for you, the job seeker, to establish contacts, gather information, and explore opportunities. Some career fairs will be smaller in scale, such as those sponsored by an individual school district. Others will have multiple districts in attendance, such as the fairs hosted by University of Missouri-St. Louis, thus allowing you the potential to speak with numerous districts in one location. School districts hold or attend career fairs because they are able to publicize information about their organization and meet with a large volume of potential candidates within a few hours. You have only a short period of time to make a great impression. Career fairs rarely allow for long discussions. It is important to learn what to expect ahead of time to avoid feeling overwhelmed on the day of the event. Clarifying your goals ahead of time will maximize your success!

As a job seeker attending a career fair, your goals could include, but are not limited to . . .

- Determining potential teacher **openings** in **districts of interest** to you.
- Gathering information about the **application process**, and distributing **resumes**.
- **Networking** with teachers and school administrators.
- Participating in on-site **screening interviews**.

## Preparation

As a job seeker, it is imperative for you to **learn who is attending** ahead of time and **research districts**. Career Services always posts a list of districts attending University of Missouri-St. Louis Education Career Fair on our web page. Conducting research allows you to determine appropriate districts to approach at a career fair. Additionally, you will be better prepared to have a meaningful conversation with the employer and maximize your chances of creating a positive impression.

**Focus** your research on the following areas: district background/history, size, location, and latest news/events. Minimally, explore the organization's web page. Examine newspaper articles and stay up-to-date on current trends within the field of education. Your research should allow you to ask engaging questions (for example, "I noticed that your high school pom squad was nationally recognized. I participated in this activity in high school and have a great interest in becoming a sponsor. How are teachers assigned to extracurricular activities?").

**Set priorities** to target your top districts first if time constraints are a concern. Managing your time ensures that you can make the maximum amount of contacts that time allows. However, keep an **open mind**. Explore every possible opportunity.

**Complete online applications** with your priority districts before the career fair.

## Initiating Your Conversation

Prepare a **professional introduction** summarizing your background, skills, and interests. This will create a smooth start to your conversation. Do not forget the value of a firm handshake and a smile.

Here are some sample introductions:

*Hello, my name is Theodore Cleaver. [Shake hands.] I will graduate in May 2012 from the University of Missouri-St. Louis with a Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education and will be certified to teach mathematics.*

*Hello, my name is Kim Jobb [shake hands] and I am interested in a middle school teaching position within the River High School District. I am dually certified to teach grades 5-9 Language Arts & Spanish. Congratulations on getting Proposition XY passed in your district.*

**Practice** your introduction so you appear polished and poised.

Although you want to build a rapport with the employer, keep the conversation on a professional level. Do not ask personal questions. This will demonstrate that you respect the time of both the district representative and your fellow job seekers.

## Distributing Your Resume

After generating that initial connection, you will most likely be asked to provide them with a copy of your resume and to follow up using the district's specific application process. A resume that is **polished, perfected and mistake-free**, along with your conversation with the employer, will help you stand out as a candidate. Career Services can assist you in creating a well-written, marketable resume.

Print your resume on neutral-colored paper that is **professional in appearance**. Use only black ink, and do not include any graphics or pictures on your resume. Use a font that is easy to read at a glance.

In terms of carrying your resumes, be sure to keep them in an easily accessible **location** to prevent awkwardly searching for them in front of an employer. Also make sure that your resumes are not wrinkled, rained on, or otherwise blemished.

Be sure to bring plenty of **copies** of your resume. For instance, you may plan on speaking to 10 districts but after arriving at the career fair, end up speaking to 15. You do not want to run out of resumes, and a copier may not be easily located – which could especially become problematic if you are limited in the amount of time you can spend at the fair.

## Initial Interviews

Some districts will have a designated area to conduct brief (30 minute) initial interviews. Keep in mind that these are “real” employment interviews and you should **prepare** accordingly. Be prepared to answer interview questions and develop your own list of questions to ask in advance. Focus on two questions that are most important to you, keeping in mind that the person you are speaking with may not be the most appropriate person to answer your question(s).

Preparing to possibly interview with more than one district at a time could pose a challenge. Think of **answers to general questions** covering topics of concern to multiple districts, such as:

- Why did you choose teaching as a career?
- What is your educational philosophy?
- How do you handle classroom management?
- How do you include parents in your children’s educational process?

Remember to remain patient in the interview area. Scheduling interviews in a large setting can become tricky and interviews may not always run on schedule.

## Closing the Conversation

As previously stated, your conversations will remain brief. In closing your conversation, be sure to **learn the next step** and inquire how to **follow up**. Ask if they are the appropriate contact person with whom to follow up or if it is someone else. If it is another person, obtain their business card or note their name, title, and other contact information. You can use this information to follow up with a short thank you letter thanking the district representative for the introduction to their organization or send a resume, cover letter, and other application materials to initiate contact with an alternate individual, if applicable.

Do not be disappointed if you are not asked to interview on site on the day of the fair. Depending on your certification area and time of year, districts may not yet be able to anticipate openings. Every contact with a district is a mini-interview. How you behave can help or hinder your future job search.

## Other Important Items to Consider

- Bring a **pen and paper** with you in case you are asked to write something down or complete an application on-site.
- If you are interested in districts utilizing the **REAP** system, be sure to complete your online application prior to attending any career fair. District representatives **WILL** ask if you have taken this step.

- Dress in **professional business attire** (i.e., a suit for both men & women). Wear comfortable business-style shoes to remain comfortable while waiting in line. Choose conservative accessories, hairstyles, and makeup. Your goal is to look like a teacher, not a student. As a teacher, you are entrusted with the welfare of a room full of other people's children. Make sure your appearance matches that great responsibility!
- Consolidate the number of items you are carrying. It will be more manageable to carry one briefcase or portfolio, for example, than to juggle several items at once. You will feel less awkward in speaking with district representatives – and appear more organized!
- Put your best foot forward – act in a way that is **polite** to everyone with whom you come into contact as soon as you are on the career fair property – this includes the parking lot, entrance to the building, etc. District representatives are not just located at their booths!
- Remain **calm** while waiting in line. Becoming impatient does not create a positive first impression! No matter what your chronological age, districts seek teachers that display maturity.
- **Arrive early** if possible. While speaking with district representatives, keep in mind that they may step away from their table to take a lunch break, get a drink of water, etc., or that lines could be excessively long at peak times. Re-visiting districts of interest may be required.
- Write your first and last name as well as your certification area on your **nametag**.
- Interact with representatives on your **own**. Do not visit the booths with a group of friends. Make your own positive impression!
- Never **bring** family members. **NO CHILDREN!**

*Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions regarding your job search!*

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*Your Key to Success!*