

MIT Alumnus Perspective on Teaching Careers after MIT

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Breaking into Teaching (the 3C's and 2 S's)

Commitment is the most important ingredient – the administrators can spot from a mile away someone who is only teaching as a stop-gap to an engineering or consulting job. If you're not sure, decide whether you want to try teaching for a year or two – or you can decide to try consulting or engineering for a year or two, and see if you want to return to teaching. Being a teacher is an identity that will stay with you even when you are not at work; it is a source of pride for some people; it is also hard work that will leave you feeling drained most weeknights.

Start by substitute teaching – even if you are a certified teacher, you will need to prove that you can manage the classroom, especially in an inner city setting. Certification makes it easier to get a contract, but if you're uncertified then you'll almost certainly have to start with subbing. Consider the city districts to build credibility (but, of course, if you are fully certified, be sure to at least call the Boston Latin and the Cambridge Rindge & Latin). Some resources:

- Boston Public Schools – <http://boston.k12.ma.us/jobs/subbing.asp> (The subbing qualification test is easy – I passed it in 45 minutes flat from having zero credentials).
- Cambridge Public Schools – <http://www.cpsd.us/HR/jobs.cfm>
- Somerville Public Schools – <http://www.somervillepublicschools.com/resume.html>
- Brookline Public Schools – http://employment.brookline.mec.edu/jobs_display.asp
- Massachusetts Educators Career Center – <https://www4.doemass.org/elar/mecccommon/MeccAnchorPageControl.ser>

Science teachers are in demand – Being a science teacher has its pros and cons. Science teachers have less grading to do than math teachers generally speaking, but science teachers must set-up and supervise labs. However, many more people are generally qualified to teach math than science. You may find that you have to pay for science supplies out-of-pocket, but these are tax-deductible (and you can likely gather supplies through MIT-reuse, or make connections with local businesses to secure donations or at least demonstrations and tours).

Certification is important – if you are not certified, you would be expected to complete the certification process within the first 1-2 years of being hired either as a sub or as a teacher. Tell them you intend to certify, and prove it by registering to take the MTEL as soon as you can.

Children are important – Remember, they are your clients. In some schools, they have some say over whether you're hired. The administrators will sometimes ask their favourite kids if they are learning something in Mr. or Ms. so-and-so's class. In other schools, a criteria of continuing employment is "Does the staff member have a positive relationship with the children?" Learning children's names and being aware of them as individuals will help in solidifying your position as a teacher and improve your ability to instruct effectively.

Consider a program like MINT – The Massachusetts Initiative for New Teachers recruits new teachers for school districts with a documented shortage of teachers. It is generally designed for people without a college background, but if you are prepared to work in the designated suburban districts within the program, this can be a great and economical way to become certified in teaching. See <https://www.doemass.org/mint/> for more details.

Networking in Teaching Jobs

Locate supportive administrators by calling around (about potential vacancies and/or asking for advice) and following up with people who seem to be committed to develop you as a teacher professionally. Supportive administrators will be interested in your MIT degree, even if you don't have a teaching certificate. Don't waste your time with people who don't recognize the value of your degree, or those looking for something quite specific (e.g. certification, background) that you don't have.

Visit the school if you can – set up a time with the district, or simply drop in and explain that you have identified a vacancy on the website and wanted to see the school before applying. Sometimes initial interview can take place during your visit. Evaluate the work environment during your visit.

Network with professional teachers – The teachers who actually work in the classroom (as opposed to teachers' trainers and/or administrators) can sometimes have useful tips on how you can maximize your chances of getting an open position. They can also introduce you to key decision makers if they are convinced of your capability. If you know any teachers, or if you meet any teachers as part of your interview process, be sure to talk to them and get some career advice. Some will be more helpful than others. Treating your colleagues with respect will go a long way towards finding helpful people.

Attend professional development events and workshops – Some universities offer summer courses for either current teachers or prospective teachers. There are other events that are geared towards peer-learning between current teachers. (Some are free and some you will have to pay for – the pay ones are usually worthless.) You can usually hear about these by becoming a sub. Most events are by invitation only, but if you talk to the right people or express an interest, you can usually get an invitation. These events are a great place to hear from fellow teachers and create connections.

Classroom Management

This is harder than people generally expect. In an inner city setting, some of the kids realize that you have no authority over them, and that they can walk in and out of your classroom at will and there will be (most likely) no consequence. Particularly if you're a substitute, this can get particularly bad. I've had classes where only 45% of the class was present and only 20% of the class was on-task (and the remainder were talking amongst themselves while I was trying to lecture). Some useful points to note:

The vast majority of students do not wish to fail their class. If you are a long-term substitute and have grading powers, then you should make that known.

Make note of the regular teacher's name and imply that you have contact with them. If you say that you will report their bad behavior to their regular teacher, that may help – even if you do not follow up with an actual report.

Exercise discretion in calling the office or sending students to the office. Although administrators are there to support the teachers, they are not always available to deal with errant situations in your classroom or a badly behaving student. There could be other issues within the

school building that requires their immediate attention at the same time. In general, you should not call the office unless there is a genuine emergency, e.g. a serious medical condition, or an explosive (potentially violent) interpersonal dynamic. In my experience, volatile situations are almost non-existent.

Make expectations clear, but do not over-enforce. You should tell disruptive students that they are expected to sit in their seats and do work if they are in your class, but in general you should spend time positively reinforcing good behaviors (and focus on transmission of knowledge) rather than trying to correct negative behaviors.

Collect evidence of work as attendance. In a classroom where you do not necessarily know everybody's names, you can ask for a hand-in at the end of class as evidence of their attendance.

Tests for Licensure in Massachusetts

- MTEL Writing and Communications (look for the practice book at Barnes & Noble or Amazon called "MTEL" published by REA Research and Education Associates).
- MTEL Subject Specific Tests (AP Level Exams – If you passed your GIR's then you should be able to handle Math, Physics, Chemistry, and Biology subject tests.)
- To prepare for subject-specific tests, try some of the AP sample questions from the College Board. <http://www.collegeboard.com/student/testing/ap/subjects.html>
- See <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mtel/> for more information. The official Test site is at <http://www.mtel.nesinc.com/>.