

## Professional Development Plan

### **Professional:**

Districts: I am very concerned about finding a district and school that relates to my personal teaching style. I would also like to find a district that concentrates on the professional development of its staff. I am a person who appreciates strong leadership, and I would like to find a location with a strong administration that cares about and supports its staff as well as community; like I have witnessed with Iowa City Schools.

The type of schools and districts that I have begun to consider are located in areas where I would like to live. My plan is to move back to Colorado and to find a job opening in one of the larger districts with which I am familiar. I am interested in living in and around the following areas: Aurora, Castle Rock, Littleton, and Colorado Springs. Within these areas include Jefferson Public Schools, Douglas County Schools, Cherry Creek Schools, and Littleton Public Schools. These districts range from “medium” to “larger” sized districts within the outskirts of the metropolitan Denver area. I recently became interested in the Littleton Public School system because they offer the International Baccalaureate School program within their elementary schools. I was a graduate of this program at the high school level, and strongly agree with the hard work and discipline of learning that the program offers. I have been interested in these districts for a while based on their successful reputation. Even though these districts hold a successful reputation, I understand that I am going to need to ask a variety of questions about the type of district they are, their educational beliefs for students, and their support for faculty and staff, before I make any final decisions about where I am going to start in my career.

I’m not sure how possible this is, but even though I am interested in a larger district I’m hoping that class sizes can still remain small. I am not sure I am comfortable teaching in a classroom with 28+ students! Even though I have specifications about the districts and schools where I am interested in teaching, I am willing to accept finding a job to start with! My first job may not be my dream location

but I'm willing to continue looking for that job in the future.

Unions: After discussing the idea of unions with my interviewers this past week, I still don't believe that I have a strong concept of what a union is and what my participation will be within the union. Since I wasn't sure about my personal opinions about unions, I included a question about them within my interviews of other professionals within my school. I asked others if they were involved with the teacher's union, and why or why not. I got a blanket statement from the principal, the reading specialist, and the counselor about the purposes of unions: the union works towards the fair and equal treatment of teachers. This purpose of the union made sense, and that it was helpful and necessary for the teaching profession. However, not everyone is a part of a union. This could be because they are unwilling to pay the high union fees to maintain their membership. Mrs. Nelson, the school counselor, informed me that she left the union possibly because of its attitude or possibly even a particular way the union started going about with negotiations and business. She wasn't impressed with the way the union was heading, so she decided to leave. At this point I am not sure what my involvement with the teaching union is going to be.

Other Options: I'm glad I got a chance to interview different professionals from the Weber community. After doing so, I've realized that I am still going to continue my goals within the classroom teaching profession! This could be because this is where I feel the most comfortable at the moment. However, I may be up for some changes or challenges later on within my career.

I interviewed four professionals within the school. The interview about a position that I may be the most interested in at a later date was with the Media Specialist Judith Dixon. Judith is enthusiastic about her position as the Media Specialist at Weber Elementary. She has a lot of work to do throughout the building, but enjoys it very much. She started her career as a classroom teacher in a high school; her undergraduate degree was a teaching certification for grades 7-12. She ended up going back to school, to get her Masters in Library Science as well as a library endorsement for K-12 media. She has a great

background in technology; however, she continually needs to update her coursework as technology is always changing. She informed me that even though she tries to follow the classrooms' curriculum, she also has her own curriculum and lessons to incorporate. Therefore, it is difficult to continuously integrate the media curriculum into the regular classroom curriculum. My favorite aspect of this job, and this is Judith's, is the constant reading of children's literature. I love reading children's literature. Judith's goal is to expose the children of Weber to as many award winning materials as she possibly can. This is a very daunting task, because books are continuously being written, and therefore it is extremely difficult to keep up with. However, I feel that it would be wonderful to get a chance to read to all the students of my school, and expose students to the wonderful world of books and reading. I feel that libraries are such an exciting place, and I would greatly look forward to passing on those feelings to my own school of students! The least favorite thing about this career choice that I wouldn't enjoy is the technology aspect of it. Judith is always helping the Weber staff, as well as surrounding schools, with technological questions about their computers and their TV broadcasting systems; I don't have a strong interest in this.

The second professional choice within a school that I may be interested in is a reading specialist or support for reading. I interviewed Diane Clark, the Reading Recovery support specialist for Weber Elementary. Diane started teaching in a variety of different elementary grade levels, with an Elementary Education degree. She also dipped into substitution positions for a while, while she was at home with her family. For the position that she has at Weber Elementary, she needed to receive a reading endorsement as well as take some special education courses through Iowa. She gained an interest about a new reading program called Reading Recovery, in 1995. At that time, she took the training and the course hours necessary to obtaining that training certification. Currently, she needs to continue education classes to keep up on her Reading Recovery status for Iowa City School District. The least favorite thing that she likes about her job at this point is that she doesn't always get to "get in

on” the children’s literature aspect of teaching elementary students, because she’s always working with the lowest readers of the school. It is also difficult to figure out what to do for students to get them accelerated enough to catch up with their classmates, and to continue their progress once they’re out of the Reading Recovery program. I feel as though this position would be a difficult one, because I would often feel as though I personally was unsuccessful if students weren’t progressing in the way that I was intending. Even if you change different tactics and strategies for students, you may have some students who just aren’t “getting” reading. I don’t know if I could handle that responsibility and accountability for those lower readers’ success, at this point in my career.

The school guidance counselor would be a very difficult position for me. Peggy Nelson is the school counselor for Weber. She actually has her Bachelors in Elementary Music Education. While she attended North Dakota State University, she was introduced to a group that was sort of like a counseling position, because people talked about a variety of different issues within their schools. She was real successful with such a group, and it was recommended to her that she should start working towards her Masters in Counseling Education. She did so, and needed to complete a total of 56 hours for the program that she attended. She also suggested that it is important to start with a Bachelor in Education. The school counselor is a profession with “many hats,” as Peggy informed me. She is responsible for the entire community; she works with individuals, small groups, and classes, teachers, students, parents, etc. She told me that she tries to have as many whole class sessions as possible, because that is a way to be preventative with problems, versus correcting problems. There are difficult parts and easier parts about her job, as with any other profession. She told me that the toughest part of her job is helping out students whose parents are in jail or who abuse. She isn’t a therapist, and therefore often needs to recommend students for further evaluations and support if she isn’t able to provide for them. I feel as though I wouldn’t be able to handle the emotional stresses that counselors often deal with, with students at such a young age. I am a very emotional person and can get attached

easily. I do like helping people; however, I feel that if I needed to help children with such difficult situations continually I wouldn't be able to stay in the profession for very long. I didn't ask, but I do wonder if a school counselor is a profession with high burn out?

The last profession, which I originally thought about considering, was that of an elementary school principal. To get more information about this professional choice, I went to Weber's principal Chris Gibson. She was such a wonderful person to interview because she has much enthusiasm for what she does. Coming out of her interview, I've decided that administration is not a career choice that I am interested in pursuing; at least at this moment. However, I do understand that after a long while in the teaching profession, it is important to be aware of other opportunities that are available. Chris taught fourteen years before she got into the profession of school administration. She now has her Masters with Educational Leadership and an Administration Endorsement. She started with an Elementary Education degree with an endorsement in reading. She was extremely interested in leadership and staff development as a teacher, and had a variety of opportunities to present at different conferences around the country. One of the hardest parts that Chris has to deal with is the fact that she is always hearing and dealing with the negatives. She has a lot of responsibility within the school as well as the district. She walked me through her schedule for that day, which included a teacher observation, a parent complaint about a conference, the hiring of a new long-term substitute, a staff development meeting, as well as dealing with the physical aspects of the building issues. She is also continually bombarded with emails (which makes me wonder what we did in days before emails). She tries to be within the classrooms as much as possible, so that students and teachers are able to see that she is taking care of the school and taking an interest in their education. If I were to become a school principal, I would definitely try to accomplish this ideal as well, even though it is extremely difficult with the variety of other issues that come up during the day. There are many more components that go into a principal's work load that I cannot even imagine. I can make a definite statement that I am not

interested in becoming a principal at this time in my life. I believe that it would be too stressful, with the responsibility and actions that are necessary in order to be a successful principal. Again, I'm not going to disregard this profession option entirely. However, I don't see becoming a principal as a part of my career goals in the near future.

### **Educational:**

One of my main reasons for attending a graduate program to obtain my Master's Degree would be for financial benefits. Professionals who obtain a Master's Degree have a higher rate of pay. At this point in my life, I'm not strongly interested in continuing my education with a graduate program. However, possibly further down the road, if I do obtain an interest in higher pay and furthering my education, I have looked into a few programs located in Colorado. I chose these programs making the assumption that when I choose to go back to school I will still be residing in Colorado. However, this may possibly not be the case. I am planning a wedding for next summer, and therefore will be a part of a partnership. Since I may need to take into account my husband's career choices as well, these preliminary graduate plans are apt to change.

Graduate Schools: The University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, Colorado was actually one of my choices to attend for my undergraduate studies. They have a Master's Program entitled School Library Education M.A. The hours for the coursework seem light, at 32 credit hours. However, from what I've gathered is that the program starts in the summer and continues into the fall. This may be difficult to accomplish, if I actually have a teaching job that begins in the fall, unless evening classes are available. In order to apply for this program, previous work experience is a necessity as well. I find this program to be of interest after my interview that I had with Weber's media specialist. I wouldn't mind working within a school's library, as long as I still got a chance to work with kids. I also enjoy this program because of the accreditation and location of the University of Northern Colorado. This university is the number one teaching school within Colorado, and is located in Greeley, Colorado. I

am interested in living in Fort Collins, Colorado, and therefore would have a minor commute to classes on the University's campus.

The second graduate program that I found, that is of some interest to me, is actually an online course. Provided by the University of Colorado, Denver, the program's name is Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education. I was interested in locating a program with an emphasis in Early Childhood development, because I recently found out that there are many places that won't allow you to teach kindergarten without an endorsement or a license specific to early childhood. This program is also offered for students who are able to attend classes on the University's campus. I chose the online version as an option because I'm not quite sure where my life will take me and online courses may be helpful. In order to take the online courses, you need to provide rationale for not attending the University, as well as attend a seminar in Denver during the summer. I like the idea of having the option to take classes online because I have been attending classes in person for 16 years now, and I want to try something different. This program also offers the opportunity to be able to take part in an administrative and supervisory position in Early Childhood Educational programs, such as Head-Start, daycares, and other home-based programs.

One more program that seems to be the most interest to me at the moment is offered by the University of Colorado at Boulder. The graduate Master's program offers four general areas for continued education, including Instruction and Curriculum in the Content Areas (ICCA). This program can cover grades K-12 in humanities, math and science, and literacy. I'm more interested in the literacy area of this program. Also, with the completion of the 30 hour program, I would be eligible for a Reading Teacher K-12 endorsement from Colorado. I really enjoy the University's statement about literacy as well, defining reading "as complex, integrated processes in which teachers guide children toward making meaning from existing texts as well as creating new texts." I agree with this statement and feel as though I would enjoy working in an academic community that stands by this belief as well.

One concern I have about this program (and wouldn't mind looking into more thoroughly) is the availability of classes. I'm not sure when the courses are offered, and how long it would take to accomplish such a program (at 30 hours). For any graduate program that I look into, I'm going to want to make sure that it is logistically compatible with my current job, or that I am financially supported enough that I wouldn't need to work and I could just attend classes.

Professional Reading: Depending on what I actually end up going into, will determine the professional reading materials that I may subscribe to. I have found one that may be interesting if I pursued a career in librarianship, called *Teacher Librarian: the Journal for School Library Professionals*. This magazine gives updates about materials that are new and related to the profession. There are also articles that keep librarians up to date in the latest information technology.

*The Reading Teacher* is also another serial that interests me, because it contains research, creative strategies, and support surrounding reading. While looking through information about *The Reading Teacher*, I found another teaching association program that I could join. The International Reading Association (IRA) could possibly be an organization that I would like to be part of. There are great member benefits if you join as well, including discounted subscriptions to a variety of different reading journals.

*Teaching pre-K-8: Professional Development and Classroom Activities for Teachers* may possibly be another publication of some use for me. I am interested in finding a magazine or journal that is more specific towards the elementary teaching profession. I feel that this magazine could offer a variety of different creative ideas for the classroom, support in planning, as well as suggested articles for professional development.

As for presenting at teaching conferences, I already know that I am unprepared to do so. I have yet to have the opportunity to attend a teaching conference, on any specific topic. However, I am looking forward to do so. While looking for jobs within districts, I am going to want to include

questions about professional development conferences that are available, and that other teachers in the area have possibly attended in the past. On top of that, if my school has a mentor program like Iowa, I'm hoping that my mentor will be able to provide support both academically and encouragingly, for conference presentations.