

HELP! What do I Look Like to a Prospective Employer in WECAN?

by Benjamin Heninger, Ed.D.



As the lone presenter (with invaluable assistance from Ms. Sierra Sargent, UWSP graduate student and former Band Teacher from Gresham School) in the Lecture Hall during 'Session B', I was uncertain about how many conference attendees would find relevance in this seminar, even though it was carefully designed with pre-service student teachers in mind. Much to my surprise, the room was filled with several dozen individuals who, by luck or by chance, happened to find me in the midst of a significant transition in my own professional life; preparing to move from a role as high school principal to becoming the superintendent of a different school district. This fortuitous happenstance was a perfect segue to remind job seekers in the room that the importance of locating a teaching position which is a mutual 'fit' cannot be emphasized enough. Furthermore, one's ability to articulate

a passion for working with children of varying ages, backgrounds, and abilities must be omnipresent in all areas of an effective application narrative.

Throughout the fifteen-plus years spent as a professional educator in Wisconsin's public school system, I have witnessed the consolidation of nearly a dozen different hard copy and electronic portfolio application systems into one that is now utilized by almost all state school districts. WECAN (Wisconsin Education Career Access Network) offers a computer-based electronic portfolio by which an educator can document all of the materials that one would routinely submit to a prospective employer into a well-organized and meticulously streamlined process. The end result is an experience that is mutually beneficial for both applicants and employers.

School principals (and other executive-level administrators) are typically responsible for hiring highly qualified and appropriately-licensed educators to work in their respective school districts. Through my own experience, this task is far less cumbersome to navigate when the application process is relegated to the acceptance of electronic documents only. While there has always been a perception that ONLY electronic submissions of application materials should be permitted, I have worked for employers who will also accept paper applications from individuals who request this as an alternative (who may also have access or other limitations regarding the use of technology). The benefits of utilizing WECAN are numerous, as letters of recommendation are scanned into 'pdf' format, the applicant's profile is directly linked to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction license file database, and supporting documentation is neatly organized within the application and accessible with just the click of a button.

Job seekers, once a user profile has been created, enjoy unlimited access to an 'Applicant Dashboard', which links them to a wide array of criteria that can be used to narrow their respective search. For example, checkboxes for all 12 CESA regions (including a full listing and map), categories of positions (part-time, teacher, temporary, etc.), and individual school district employers can be selected. Depending on the area of interest and licensure, applicants may select: 'Music - Choral', 'Music - General', and 'Music - Instrumental'. It is recommended to choose as many categories that are relevant to a candidate's area of interest. Once an application (including additional employer questions) has been submitted, candidates may be contacted directly by potential employers. HELPFUL HINT: Prospective employers can also reverse-search for qualified applicants if this option is selected under the 'Certified Staff Standard Application' (green box: 'Allow school district to see application without applying'.)

Participants in this session asked thoughtful questions throughout the presentation. As alluded to in the printed conference description, I was able to walk through the process of submitting an application to a prospective employer for an instrumental music teaching position in real-time using WECAN. I also shared what a fully-completed application looks like from the 'employer side' of the system. In addition to indicating their willingness to acquire more licenses (as applicable), attendees were encouraged to weave a

school's 'mission, vision, and values' statement into their thoughtfully-crafted cover letters (ideally not to exceed one page). This small, yet important addition, can significantly augment an application and signal to an employer that a mutual 'fit' is only an interview away (versus the all-too-common application that merely appears to be 'testing the waters').

In conclusion, I took one final opportunity to remind attendees that prospective employers and school administrators almost always notice applicants who are able to 'tell their story' and connect how it will have a meaningful and positive impact on children. Once an interview is offered, it is only a matter of time before a candidate discovers whether or not a particular teaching position (or employer) is the right 'fit' for them.

"The Wisconsin Education Career Access Network (WECAN) was started in 2001 to help educators search for teaching jobs across Wisconsin and streamline applicant review, selection, and recruitment processes. WECAN launched with approximately 10 schools and today serves more than 500 schools each year. WECAN is a nonprofit venture supported by membership fees from school districts across Wisconsin. WECAN was developed through a collaboration of Wisconsin school districts, teacher training colleges and teachers with WASPA - Wisconsin Association of School Personnel Administrators. WECAN is managed and maintained by Graduate & Extended Learning at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse in collaboration with WASPA."

Works Cited

<https://www.wecan.waspa.org> (2022)

Biography

Dr. Benjamin Heninger is Superintendent of the Butternut School District. Prior to joining the staff in Butternut, he spent six years as the High School Principal and Assistant Principal/Instrumental Music teacher in the Gresham School District. He has also served as a Dean of Students and Band teacher for the Parkview School District, and an Instrumental Music educator for the La Crosse and Oconomowoc Area public schools. His doctoral dissertation, Instrumental Music-Study and Student Achievement, has been cited in music journals and academic publications. Dr. Heninger is honored to serve as a State Arts Advocate on the Wisconsin School Music Association executive board.