



Teaching in Independent Schools

A Snapshot of Independent School Teachers

Independent schools boast well-balanced faculties with an even distribution of experience -- from recent college graduates to very experienced master-teachers. Of the teachers employed at NAIS member schools in 2003-04, 21 percent had five or fewer years of teaching experience; 20 percent had six to 10 years of experience; 20 percent had 11 to 15 years of experience; 18 percent had 16 to 20 years of experience; and 22 percent had 21 or more years of experience. This range of tenures on independent school faculties provides a healthy balance of fresh, new perspectives and classroom-tested experience.

In 2003-04, 65 percent of independent school teachers were women and 35 percent were men. In coeducational schools, women outnumbered men nearly two to one, but in boys' schools, that ratio was reversed, with nearly two male teachers for every one female teacher. In girls' schools, 81 percent of the teachers were female.

Independent schools actively seek candidates from diverse backgrounds. In 2003-04, 9 percent of all teachers in independent schools were people of color.

Teacher Salaries

Salaries for teachers at independent schools vary dramatically, depending on years of experience, school type (day/boarding, coed/single-sex, elementary/secondary), school size, and region. NAIS data compiled for the 2003-04 school year show that the median salary for all teachers at independent schools was \$41,470. For beginning teachers, the median salary was \$29,484, and the median for the highest paid teachers was \$61,575. Factors that influence salaries for independent school teachers include: total years of teaching experience, the number of years employed at the current school, merit and performance, teaching load, and degrees and credits.

Why Teachers Choose Independent Schools

Researchers at the Klingenstein Center at Teachers College, Columbia University, have identified four factors that draw teachers to independent schools: the autonomy and empowerment associated with independent schools, the unique atmosphere of an independent school, the quality of students, and the school facilities. Teachers value their curricular freedom; small class size; and close-knit relationships with students, faculty, and administrators. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) supports the Klingenstein research. According to the Digest of Education Statistics 2002, 88.9 percent of private school teachers feel there is cooperative effort among staff, and 85.5 percent of private school teachers were satisfied with size of their classes.

Some independent schools have internal teacher associations but there is no independent school teachers' union. In a few rare instances, however, independent school faculties belong to national public school teacher unions.

Independent schools range from very small campuses (some with fewer than 100 students) to fairly large schools (a few with more than 3,000 students). Average enrollment in NAIS member schools is 488 students and a median enrollment is 387. NAIS statistics for the 2003-04 school year show that the median student/teacher ratio at member schools was 8.6:1. Independent school teachers are often responsible for counseling students, coaching athletics, and/or advising extracurricular groups, in addition to planning lessons, grading papers, and serving on school committees. In boarding schools, faculty members often live in dormitories as resident advisors.

Teacher Candidates

Independent schools develop their own criteria for hiring teachers. At the elementary level, independent schools seek teachers with solid grounding in early childhood education and those teaching middle school are expected to understand the developmental issues critical to this age group. At the secondary level, there is a strong preference for teachers with undergraduate and graduate degrees in the liberal arts and sciences, and for teachers who have demonstrated academic achievement by succeeding at colleges with competitive admissions standards. These teachers are recognized as specialists in their major fields. Independent schools also value the professional work experience offered by candidates turning to teaching as a second career.

State certification is not usually required of independent school teachers. Independent schools hold themselves publicly accountable through accreditation – a process of peer evaluation that certifies that schools meet certain standards of educational quality, fiscal operation, and staff competence as defined by an independent entity. All independent schools accepted for membership at NAIS must be accredited by an approved state or regional association.

Independent schools welcome applications from recent college graduates (at both the bachelor's and graduate levels), experienced teachers (from independent schools, public schools, and colleges), and people changing careers. Typically, independent schools begin interviewing and hiring teachers earlier in the year than public schools, with most of the action occurring between February and May in preparation for the next school term.

Source: www.nais.org © 2004, National Association of Independent Schools