

**Advice from SRU  
graduates who  
are now  
teachers. They  
have some great  
ideas to share  
with you:**

Comments from Sarah Swiger, an elementary education graduate who landed a full-time teaching job after graduating in May 2010.

“As far as job search/interview advice, I know that having the **mini-portfolio** and **educational brochure** really assisted me during the interview. I made sure to place **pictures with short captions** in my portfolio, along with other **visual documents**. For example, I had photocopied the covers of some of the teacher's manuals I taught from during student teaching. I placed those into my mini-portfolio, and one of the instructional programs (**SRA Reading Mastery**) was a big topic during my interview as the panel looked over my portfolio. The school uses the program with their at-risk and below basic students, and they were impressed that I had experience using it as well. The brochure also helped with several of the interview questions they asked. I was able to refer to it for questions about **classroom management techniques**, **successful lessons**, and **qualities** that make me a good teacher.”

Eric Kraus, a December 2010 elementary education graduate who is now a full-time 2<sup>nd</sup>-grade teacher, provides this advice:

**1) Communicate with principals**

You may start with human resource persons, but you'll want to eventually connect with principals.

**2) Be persistent**

Find out how vacancies are posted and check this resource regularly. Do your research into the school district which includes figuring out who are the right people to contact.

**3) KNOW YOUR READING CURRICULUM INSIDE AND OUT!**

“Before I even walked into the interview, I was given a packet with a short story and directions to come up with 3 questions about 3 different parts of the book. I was also asked to write my philosophy on **reading instruction**. There is an emphasis on reading right now that is nothing like when I was in elementary school. **Bring a unique reading lesson** to share with the principal or whomever you interview with.”

## **More from Eric:**

4. Take every interview you can.

“I had 2 other interviews before I got my job. After each interview, I compiled a list of questions that I was asked. Many of the questions dealt with **classroom management**, the **first day of school**, **parent communication**, and **future goals**. I always felt that my next interview was better than the last one.”

## **And some advice for getting started with that first job:**

“Being a first year teacher, I was very stressed out when setting up my room. I was so worried that I didn't have enough color and exciting things around the room. In the end, It worked out well because with second graders, they could get distracted easily with too much to look at! Be prepared to spend some money! Teaching supplies aren't cheap. **Check with the principal or another teacher to see what you absolutely NEED to buy and what is provided.** I made the mistake of buying supplies that the school already had.”

## Abbie Stonebraker, Teacher in the Seneca Valley School District

- Get as **many experiences as possible**, in as many settings as possible, and document everything.
- Ask for letters of reference from professionals who have seen you teach and get their contact information for listing on applications.
- Get as many **certifications** as possible.

### Interview Advice

- Create an interviewing **portfolio** of your work and **know it thoroughly**. Not just what each item is but which one you would use for a question on differentiated instruction, which one you would use to show growth, which one shows collaboration with peers, etc.
- Practice interview questions** as much as possible. Almost every time I had an interview at least half of the questions were similar to the practice interview questions I had rehearsed.
- Write a hand-written thank you note to everyone who interviewed you.
- If an interview went poorly, see if someone will tell you what to do differently. My first two interviews went so poorly, but the administrators were kind enough to tell me what I could improve upon which greatly helped me in later interviews.
- If you get questions you don't know how to answer, pause, state something like I'm trying to give this questions the depth of thought it deserves, and then answer it the best you can. Also ask for clarification to make sure you answer the question being asked. **Don't try to fake an answer**; they'll be able to tell if you're making an answer up.
- No matter how poorly an interview goes keep a **positive attitude**.

## Abbie Stonebraker, continued

- **Research** the school as much as possible (a first hand source in the district is the best resource) but their website and local newspaper are also valuable. Then come up with appropriate questions to ask.
- Always **ask insightful questions** as it shows interest in the district. For example:
  - “On your website, I noticed SVSD had recently begun the OLWEUS anti-bullying program; what other district initiatives are you currently undertaking?”
  - “I heard that your elementary schools are participating in instructional coaching to using meta-cognitive thinking strategies in guided reading; what changes have you noticed in the schools as a result of these initiatives?”



**Notice how specific her questions are!**

## Abbie Stonebraker on finding a local job in challenging times

- **Network** intensely before graduation and then **sub** until you find a job.
- Some of my friends have chosen other more consistently paying jobs that are unrelated even though they really want to teach. What they don't realize is that almost all hires are either subs in the district or subs in other districts.
- Word of mouth about your **reputation** is one of the most important factors, so put in 100% effort in every job as a substitute. A while ago a substitute teacher was there for another teacher; he told me his degree was in English, so he couldn't help with anything. He sat at the desk and read the whole day. He has been substituting and cannot find a permanent position.
- Understand that even if no administrator sees you, **other staff will surely notice** a fantastic or a mediocre substitute and mention this to people who have the power to hire.
- Do something as a substitute, student teacher, or field student **that will get you noticed in a positive way**. Then take any job they offer you. **Any job is a foot in the door** towards a permanent position.
- Even though SVSD did not legally have to give me back my job after my furlough, they started the summer by offering me a 6-week, long-term sub position, then a semester long, then a full-year, and finally a permanent position. I know that this job offer was a **direct result of the impact I made as an educator** with my principal.

# Former student returns as St. John's teacher in Plum

By [Karen Zapf](#), Trib Total Media, Wednesday, August 13, 2014

Third grade was **Megan Derry**'s favorite year as a student. Derry, 22, of Plum, spent her elementary years at St. John the Baptist School. Now, she has returned to her alma mater — **this time as a third-grade teacher**. Classes start Aug. 21.

"I am excited to be a part of the staff," Derry said earlier this month as she arranged desks and books in her classroom at St. John, in Plum. Derry replaces St. John teacher Anne Jacobus, who retired. Derry is a 2010 graduate of Plum High School. **She graduated in May 2014 from Slippery Rock University with a bachelor's degree in early-childhood education.**

In addition to having fond memories of her third-grade year of school, Derry taught third grade in the Butler Area School District during as her student-teaching assignment. St. John Principal Theresa Szmed, who was Derry's science teacher when Derry attended the Catholic school, said of the dozen or so resumes she received for the job, Derry stood out. **"I know her character,"** Szmed said. "She has very effective strategies working with little children that you don't (typically) see in new teachers." Szmed said **Derry is skilled in both the use of activities involving interactive touch-sensitive whiteboards — as well as in differentiated instruction — tailoring teaching to meet individual students' needs.**

"Using technology was how I was taught to teach," Derry said.

Derry said her desire to become a teacher evolved in part from her positive experience working with preschoolers in the family-and-consumer-science program at Plum High School. She became more interested in teaching as a profession after returning to St. John to observe some classes during her freshman year at the Community College of Allegheny County Boyce Campus in Monroeville. **Derry also kept in touch with the faculty at St. John** as her younger siblings attended the school.

Still, returning to St. John as a teacher is a different experience. "When I walked in the door (after being hired), I thought, 'Is this happening?'" Derry said. "She is still calling everyone (teachers) by Miss or Mrs.," Szmed said with a chuckle.



**Julie Ortiz**, May 2014 Graduate Hired by Cleveland County, NC -  
Township Three Elementary School as a 2nd Grade Teacher

I put in the application, then emailed the principals at the schools with a letter of introduction, and attached a copy of my resume. I made each email specific to each school and mentioned something specific about the school.

Most of the interview questions surround **RTI, Positive Behavior Plans** and how to engage students in **active learning**. I made tri-fold **flyers** to take with me and had copies of my resume and letters of recommendation for every one in the interview. Every school I spoke with had **looked at my website extensively**.

I wrote (by hand) thank you notes and had them in the mail the same day as the interviews.

## **Advice for seeking an out-of-state job:**

I first applied to Hendry County because of an e-mail you sent! You mentioned that the district was especially interested in Slippery Rock University student teachers. Thank you very much for passing that on!

Some advice that I would give to education majors would be to plan out road trips if they are thinking of moving out of state. When I visited Florida for my interview, I called other school districts to see if I could stop in to talk or have an interview. I received two job offers from my interviews in Florida!

Sincerely,

**Laura Hershberger, May 2014, PK-4  
Hendry County (Florida) Early Childhood Teacher**

*My name is **Amanda Kasperski** and I graduated from SRU in May 2015. I wanted to share my education career with you and the rest of Slippery Rock's Education department because I feel that as a soon-to-be-graduate I was very nervous and anxious to find a teaching position in Western PA. I feel that my story may encourage others that are finishing up student teaching and about to graduate!*

*After I graduated, I was a day-to-day substitute for the end of the school year. I subbed for schools like Pine-Richland and Fox Chapel. While subbing, I had the opportunity to receive interview opportunities with schools such as Franklin Regional, Seneca Valley, Slippery Rock, Propel Schools, as well as a Catholic school. A couple of these interviews were second and third round interviews that I thought were going to be promising. They were not. I was denied about 8 times hearing or seeing the words "I am sorry to inform you we have chosen another candidate". I did not give up. (continued on next slide)*

*Moving forward, during the summer (since school was not in session) I was a nanny and I started working at a preschool as a head teacher for 2-3 year olds. Yes that was a "Head Teacher" position and looked amazing on a resume, but it still was not a classroom setting teaching curriculum to students. I kept striving on and applying like crazy. As an aspiring teacher, I knew my heart was not in it to teach 2-3 year olds and teaching them potty training, etc. (even though they were very cute).*

*The day I decided to put in my two weeks notice at the preschool, I received a phone call from Propel Schools asking my if I would like to be a Propel-Wide Long term Sub. This was a position that I jumped on immediately! I was very nervous to start subbing at Propel because I student taught at middle to high class districts, and I had no experience teaching an inner school population of students. My first Long-Term position at Propel was at Propel Northside (by Heinz Field) as a 4th grade ELA teacher. I was in that classroom for 12 weeks. I worked very long hours and built a lot of relationships. This past week, two positions became available. The principal called me and basically gave me the option of the two positions. I was very thrilled to accept a 3/4 special equation position.*

*The whole reason for this email is to share my story! After getting rejected from districts that I thought would be the most amazing schools to work for, I kept striving on and look where I am now! I have a full time teaching position (only 7 months after graduating) at a school that I would not trade anything in the world for. I want to encourage new and future education graduates to go out of their comfort zone when applying to jobs. I did not think I would enjoy an inner city school, but I have fallen in love with the community and most importantly the students.*

*I go into work every day knowing that these students need me more than I even can know or understand ,and I leave work every day knowing that I made a student feel loved and safe.*

*Thank you for allowing me to share my story with you.*

## **Brittany Bednar** teaching in North Carolina

Be prepared with a solid resume, practice what you want to say to each school district and have questions ready. Also, don't be afraid to be persistent and keep in touch with the administrators that you meet. Keep in contact and make it clear that you are pursuing a career in their school district. If you are willing to move, go visit the school and the area and make sure you like the school/area. There are definitely jobs out there but you have to work for them.

If anyone has any questions that they would like to ask me, feel free to give them my email address ([Bednar.brittany@gmail.com](mailto:Bednar.brittany@gmail.com)) and I'll try to help as much as I can :)

**Brittany A. Bednar**

Early Childhood and Special Education

Slippery Rock University, May 2014

My most important advice would be to go outside your comfort zone!

Also, it is definitely easier to relocate with someone else.

For teachers, a lot of schools in NC are hiring numerous teachers. If you find a friend/partner to apply to the same schools or schools in the same area, then you could move together. Even if you don't live together, knowing at least one person to start makes it easier. If you live together, you can share expenses. It's okay to still have a roommate after college, especially when those school loans kick in!

Even in different fields, the research triangle (Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill) is currently one of the fastest growing areas in the United States. Which means jobs are being created as well. So, even those in other fields could find a friend to apply for jobs in the same area. The cost of living is a little higher there than where I am. I'm about an hour north of the triangle and rent is almost cut in half. So many people live 30 to 60 minutes away from the triangle and commute. You spend more in gas, but it is cheaper than PA!

Also, some schools offer relocation bonuses. Mine did not, but they might pay for moving expenses. It is something to ask about...not on the first interview, but maybe when considering job offers.

**Danielle Faggioli, Mathematics Teacher, Spring 2015 Rock Graduate  
Granville County Public Schools, Granville Early College High School  
Creedmoor, NC**

I have had an absolutely AMAZING time here in NC teaching. The area I live in is wonderful (and sunny!) and I still wake up enjoying to come to work each day. This by far has been the hardest job I have ever had, and I definitely get lightly teased by administrators about how much time I spend after school working, but I fully believe you get out of an experience what you put into it. I'm trying my best everyday to help my second graders succeed as students and people in general! I'm very fortunate that I got my ideal grade level (second), and that I have a great group of co-workers, administrators, and mentors to help me when I need support.

Our school is actually splitting next year into K-2 primary and a 3-5 upper elementary school which is the first time this has happened in our large county. It's been really exciting being a part of everything! Funny how pretty much all the things I learned about teaching in Slippery Rock are just now being introduced into schools down here. I have done really well on all my observations and administration-based conferences, and I chalk a lot of that up to the education I received at SRU. I know my principals are really proud of me, and I have already had several teachers come in to tell me they've requested their child to be put in my classroom next year (crazy--guess I'm doing something right). Overall, it's been a long, hard, and for sure a survival year...but worth every second. I'm excited for next year to refine my teaching skills and make them even better!

Hmm words of advice...where to even begin? I've learned so much this year.

Going to the career education office always helped, and PERC was the game-changer that got me the job. Emily Herring and I talked to recruiters together as a package deal (while interviewing separately), which our principals said was a great strategy because we were both highly qualified; if we came down together we'd have a support system and would be less likely to leave.

I'd also say keep applying to schools. It wasn't until the end of summer that interviews and job offers started rolling in and things fell into place for me. Finally, I'd suggest the cliché of getting involved in as many things as possible. My experiences with NSTA, taking on extra responsibilities in student teaching and student teaching in Mexico really set me apart, and I had plenty of things to talk about in interviews. Let me know if you ever need or want help with things for graduates getting ready to be first year teachers--I learned a lot this year and am always available to help.

**Emily Sivak, Early Childhood May 2015 graduate**

Cabarrus County (right outside of Charlotte, NC) Odell Primary School

emisiv611@aol.com

My biggest tip would be to not waste time after graduation to apply for positions. I came to realize there were application deadlines within the week after I graduated in May, so don't hesitate to start looking and filling out applications! Educate PA ( <http://www.educatepa.com/> ) was my best friend during this time. I highly recommend this website for anyone looking for a PA teaching job. Every listing is available, it updates weekly, and takes you right to the application. It also wouldn't hurt to start filling out the PA Standard Teaching Application before graduation, I found almost every position required the essay portion, if not the whole application.

I also suggest to only list references who can really highlight their character. My position was between one other candidate and myself and the principal called **all** of my references and even asked if there were any others I would like her to contact. **Don't just list people because they sound important, if they don't know you that well it won't be beneficial.**

BE YOURSELF in the interview. It'll be the scariest 45 minutes of your life, but it's so important to keep your smile and your personality. My final interview was with the principal, the school psychologist, and the other kindergarten teacher whom I'd be working with. The kindergarten teacher said the deciding factor for her was "the warmth I had" and "the passion I showed." They want to know the real you.

Finally, pay attention in your College Writing courses. Two school districts, including the one I'm now working for, have a Screening Interview for those who get past the application round. This Screening Interview is a 30 minute question and answer interview with 2 principals from the district, followed by 30 minutes to type an essay on a given prompt. You have to be able to piece together an organized essay on a topic you may not be too familiar with in 30 minutes. If you pass the Screening Interview, your information then goes out to the buildings and you receive specific building interviews for a position.

Please let me know if I can assist in any way! SRU has truly prepared me for the teaching world in every way. Candidates just have to be dedicated and patient. Good luck to all!

**Ashley Hill**

**May 2016 Early Childhood / Special Education Graduate**

**Kindergarten Teacher, Doyle Elementary School, Central Bucks School District**



I have officially started my new job as a teaching fellow at a charter school in Charleston, SC. It is located in North Charleston and called Meeting Street @Brentwood. It is such a wonderful school and I am so thankful to be a part of it!

Some advice that I would offer would be to take a leap of faith and try something new. I feel as though relocating helps you grow and learn a lot about yourself. Each school is different and unique, especially charter schools. I work for a school that has a specific mission to serve under-resourced students in my community. It makes me feel like I have a greater purpose here at Meeting Street and that I am making a difference. I would have never gotten this opportunity anywhere else, so take a chance on a new experience!

Rachel Trueman  
SRU '17 Graduate  
Early Childhood PK-4, Special Education PK-8

## From September 2016: SRU graduate named Teacher of The Year

James Wood High School math teacher **Brian Sullivan** was named Frederick County Public Schools' 2017 Teacher of the Year during the school division's annual convocation program this morning. Sullivan is entering his fifth year as a teacher at James Wood.

Schools Superintendent David Sovine says, "Mr. Sullivan is an outstanding representative of the teachers who work with the students across our school division each day. He is a life-long learner **who is extremely dedicated to each of his students**. Mr. Sullivan is a highly successful math teacher because he understands the importance of being open to change, seeking input from students and offering engaging instruction that connects the concepts being taught to real world experiences. He is a fine example of an educator who is committed to his students, his profession and working with his peers to ensure all students receive the best education possible."

Sullivan says he knew he wanted to become a teacher from the time he was a student in seventh grade. He says, "As a middle school student, I remember setting up a classroom and teaching my sister and her friends on the weekends. I would make up my own tests and quizzes and can remember the thrills of teaching students for the first time. Throughout high school, I learned different teaching styles and remember writing down what I liked and didn't like about the teacher, the structure of the class and the classroom management."

Sullivan earned a bachelor's degree in math and master's degree in education at **Slippery Rock University** in May 2012 and began his teaching career at James Wood High School that fall.

## More from Brian Sullivan

Sullivan believes outstanding teachers have to be committed to **life-long learning** and be willing to accept and implement change. He also believes that listening is a skill that's vital when working with students. He says, "I listen to my students and make them feel like what they have to say is important. **By creating that rapport in the classroom consisting of equal contributions by both the teacher and the students**, everyone feels like their thoughts are well represented and everyone benefits."

Although it's often a challenge to get high school students excited about math, Sullivan has found that he can **engage students in the learning process by taking an interest in them individually, building relationships, connecting math to the real world and adapting his teaching style to fit the individual needs of his students**. He says, "I do not have any secret recipes for making students like math. Everyday students walk into my class, they know they have my respect and that I will attempt to engage them in a lesson to which they can relate. **By building relationships, students know you are invested in their well-being** while in school and this enables teachers to make a connection which is the single most pivotal piece to capturing students' interest in learning." He adds, "The teachers I had throughout my schooling had the largest impact on helping me be the teacher that I am today. They taught me to be willing to try new things and to not be afraid of change."