What Does it Take to Become a High School Math Teacher?

It is a typical morning, just like any other.

“Boys, get in the car. It’s time to go,” I say as I walk out of the bathroom; my hair is still warm from the hair dryer. “Aaren, why don’t you have your shoes on?” I ask as I am walking down the hall. He looks at me as if he could not believe I just asked him that question.

“But Tejay doesn’t have his on!” he screams. I round the corner to find Tejay lying on the couch, covered up with his favorite orange blanket. I encourage him to put his shoes on and get into the car.

“How can I put my shoes on?” he yells as he pulls his blanket back, “I don’t even have my clothes on yet!”

“What have you been doing?” I ask as I throw my hands in the air in a state of confusion and frustration. “Get dressed! It’s time to go!” He looks at me with a scowl on his face.

“But I’m tired!” he yells, as if this will change the fact that he needs to get in the car and get to school.
Ten minutes later, I scream in desperation, “Boys, let’s go!” Tejay finally gets dressed and gives me the look of death as he slams the front door with all of his might before he walks to the car. I take several long, deep breaths of the cool morning air as I slowly walk to the car. Looking to the horizon, I notice the beautiful, golden sunrise. For a moment, it seemed as if time was no longer an issue.

I arrive at work, late as usual. I sit at my desk and begin to think about the events of the morning and how I wish I had more time with my children so we wouldn’t always be so rushed. I think of what I could do that would make it possible for me to spend more time with them. It is then that I realize that being a teacher would be ideal for my circumstances. The more I think about it, the more it becomes clear that becoming a teacher is what I needed to do. Then all of the “what-ifs” filled my head. I think maybe I am too old to begin a new career. I am 27 years old and have never set foot on a college campus. I recall that my mom began school for her current career when she was thirty-six years old. I remember her saying, “It is never too late.” That was all it took for me to decide to do it. I don’t want to waste anymore time, so I jumped in without a second thought. I am enrolled in school and am in the process of finding out what I must achieve in order to become a high school math teacher.

I begin my research by making a list of what I think I will need to know, such as; how much schooling do I need, what other education is required, and how long will it take me to complete these requirements. I am learning that in order to be a high school math teacher, I need a bachelor’s degree along with the completion of the Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.) program, and I must successfully complete all of the Praxis tests. In this paper, I will discuss the process of becoming a high school math teacher; obtaining the proper education, becoming certified, and some of the general job requirements.
The Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) states that while requirements differ from state to state, all states require a minimum of a bachelor’s degree along with the completion of a teacher training program which consists of education and subject specific credits along with supervised teaching (Bureau of Labor Statistics). The University of Arkansas (U of A) has a program specifically designed to meet the certification process. According to the U of A website, the M.A.T. program will give me classroom experience as well as the credit hours required for a master’s degree. The program consists of thirty-three credit hours that will be completed over three semesters (“Master of Arts”). I have decided that this is the path I will follow in order to obtain my degree and teaching license.

The Arkansas Department of Education web site (AR Dept of Ed) explains that before I can obtain my standard teaching license, I must successfully complete the Praxis I, II, and III. The Praxis I is a series of exams that are designed to test the basic knowledge in the foundational areas of education: Reading, Math, and Writing (“Teachers”). I need to pass this exam before entering into the M.A.T. program with the University of Arkansas (“Master of Arts”). The Praxis II, as described by the AR Dept of Ed, is taken near the end of a teaching program and contains more advanced assessments of actual teaching abilities and knowledge of the subject in which I will be specializing. It is also noted on the website that the Praxis III must be completed after I have begun teaching as it is a complex evaluation of teaching style and ability. When I complete the Praxis III, I will obtain my standard license to teach. This license is good for five years. However, in order to renew my license, I must complete a minimum of 60 hours of professional development per year (“Teachers”).

Even though I will be licensed to teach, that does not mean the work is over. In the book *Qualities of Effective Teachers* (2nd Edition), Stronge suggests that in order to be an effective
teacher, I must possess the “four C’s: Care deeply, recognize Complexity, Communicate clearly, and serve Conscientiously.” He also notes that caring about the students is more than just a shot of encouragement. To really care is to not only motivate the children but to assist them in reaching their goals (100-101). The Encyclopedia of Careers points out that it is important to be caring, understanding and most importantly, patient. High-school-aged children have unstable emotions that affect their behavior. Some students lack respect, so it is important to form a connection with them to let them know that you care about them and their future (“Mathematics Teachers”). During my interview with Will Riley, a local high school math teacher, he expressed that by teaching at the high school level, he feels that he has the opportunity to identify with students and give them the support they need to improve their lives and pursue their dreams (Riley).

Stronge explains that recognizing complexity is understanding that all children are different and knowing when they are ready to move up the scale of complexity. I must pay attention to each student individually so that I may adjust the course material and lesson plans in order to challenge them (101). The third “C” may be the most important of them all, communicate clearly. He points out that in order to effectively communicate, the subject material must be well understood by the teacher and relayed to the students in a manner in which they can understand it (102).

Stronge writes that being conscientious of professional development opportunities will only increase the effectiveness of a teacher (102). Mr. Riley demonstrates the final “C” of being an effective teacher by serving conscientiously. Riley spends about three weeks of the summer attending professional development workshops (Riley). As I mentioned before, a minimum of 60 hours are required per year in order to renew the teaching license. Riley stated
that in addition to the minimum required workshops, he attends others that he feels will benefit his students and himself (Riley).

At this point in my research, it is apparent that being a teacher is hard work. According to the OOH, most teachers work ten months out of the year with a two month summer vacation (Bureau of Labor Statistics). Riley notes that much of that summer vacation is spent fulfilling the required hours of professional development. He also states that “most teachers get to work around 7:30 and leave around 4:30” (Riley). The OOH recognizes that teachers have plenty of duties outside of the classroom. Some of these include being the supervisor of study hall or lunch monitor, attending field trips with students, or even coaching a team which may or may not have additional monitory benefits (Bureau of Labor Statistics). Teaching may have many rewards, but it also has a downside. The Encyclopedia of Careers states that teachers are required to do a lot of talking, be on their feet most of the day, and maybe worst of all, they must be cheerful and energetic, even when they don’t feel up to it (“Mathematics Teachers”). Teaching can also be very stressful, according to the OOH, especially when students do not behave, are disrespectful, or if they become violent. The federal requirement for standardized testing may create stress as well (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

The Encyclopedia of Careers explains that while teaching jobs are not readily available, I can work as a substitute teacher until a teaching position is available. Working as a substitute will give me more hands on experience and an opportunity to experience different school districts (“Mathematics Teachers”). The OOH states that the job outlook for a high school math teacher is very good because this is an area of high demand (Bureau of Labor Statistics). Riley stated that the pay for math teachers in Northwest Arkansas is higher than anywhere else in the state starting around $40,000 per year. However, according to the OOH, the “median annual
earnings of... secondary school teachers ranged from $43,580 to $48,690 in May 2006” (Bureau of Labor Statistics). Riley also says that I will be entering into a high demand position and I should not have any problems finding a job (Riley). It is very promising that I will be able to obtain a well paying job, shortly after I obtain my degree.

My research has revealed that in order to become a high school math teacher, I must obtain my master’s degree through the University of Arkansas’s M.A.T. program and complete the entire collection of Praxis tests. I have learned that in order to become the effective teacher that I desire to become, I must remember to show my students that I care. Riley says that an effective teacher needs to “treat the students with respect and have high expectations.” I will enjoy being a teacher because caring is what I live to do. I am glad that I did not listen to the voices in my head that were telling me I was too old to begin a new career. If I stay on track, I will achieve my goal in four years. My oldest son will only be thirteen years old when I graduate and I will finally have the time I have been looking for to spend time with my kids. I cannot wait!
Works Cited


