

Special Report

10 Things Every Teacher Needs To Know In Order To Receive Tenure!

By Adam Waxler

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About the Author



Adam Waxler

Adam landed his first teaching job at Springs Middle School in East Hampton, New York. At Springs, Adam was basically given free reign to run the middle school social studies department as he wished. He worked quickly to revamp their outdated program, moving away from the textbook, teacher driven social studies curriculum to a more student-centered constructivist curriculum.

After creating curriculum maps for both 7th and 8th grade social studies, Adam set his sights on other aspects of school life. He became the 8th grade advisor responsible for organizing and running both the 8th grade trip and the 8th grade graduation ceremony, as well as the advisor for the 8th grade video editing team.

However, Adam's biggest break in teaching came through the professional development courses offered by Jean Anastasio and Dave Perry at APL Associates. He credits these workshops for literally changing his career.

By combining the teaching strategies taught in these workshops with his own constructivist methodology, Adam was able to increase standardized test scores, get 100% classroom participation, and eliminate classroom management problems.

Of course, when Springs started their teacher mentor program, Adam jumped at the chance to help new teachers learn to become *Master Teachers*.

After a few of years of mentoring, Adam decided to create an ebook on teaching strategies. Now Adam uses his ebook, *eTeach: A Teacher Resource for Learning the Strategies of Master Teachers*, as an integral part of his new teacher training, including workshops on how to implement the strategies put forth in his ebook.

Adam currently owns and operates two web sites. One of which promotes his ebook on teaching strategies at <http://www.teaching-teacher.com> and the other which teaches people how they can earn extra money working from home on the Internet at <http://www.money-teacher.com>. He has several other projects in the works.

Adam is also the publisher and editor of *The Teaching Teacher's Newsletter*, a free monthly ezine that provides teaching tips, articles, book reviews, web site reviews and much more. For your free monthly subscription send a blank email to: teaching-teacher@getresponse.com or visit <http://www.teaching-teacher.com>.

When he's not working, Adam loves to spend time with his lovely wife Tanya and wonderful son, Levi. You can usually find them at the beach.

Introduction

Teaching is truly a wonderful profession whose rewards cannot be measured by a simple paycheck. However, in order to appreciate and enjoy this fulfilling career one must first receive tenure.

This report was written for the purpose of helping people achieve tenure.

However, in writing this report I refrained from editing too much and allowed my own cynicism of the tenure system to shine through. This made writing this report much more fun and hopefully more enjoyable to read.

While you may or may not agree with my obvious views about tenure, the report, if followed, will nevertheless help you achieve the goal of receiving tenure.

Of course, nothing I tell you in this report compares to having a repertoire effective teaching strategies. That is precisely why I made this report part of a package deal for purchasing my ebook on teaching strategies, *eTeach: A Teacher Resource for Learning the Strategies of Master Teachers*.

It is the teaching strategies in that ebook that are most important when it comes to obtaining tenure and having a truly fulfilling teaching career.

Unfortunately, great teaching is often not enough...

Let's get started...

Let's get one thing straight right away. I think the whole concept of "tenure" is just ridiculous.

The fact that after three years of service you cannot get fired from your job is something that I have never understood.

There are many that argue that tenure is vital to the protection of academic freedom and that without tenure we will return to the days when faculty were dismissed for teaching unpopular opinions.

That argument makes absolutely no sense whatsoever.

Guess what? Teachers are still dismissed for unpopular opinions. Before a teacher receives tenure (usually a 3-year probationary period) he has absolutely no rights and can be dismissed for no apparent reason whatsoever.

If the person in charge wants a particular teacher out, all he has to do is write up a couple of bad observations and then tell the teacher that they won't be hiring him back the following year.

Actually, the supervisor doesn't even have to go to extent of having bad write-ups to back up his decision. The fact is a non-tenured teacher does not have to be given any reason at all. Here are some more facts...I have seen non-tenured teachers dismissed all around me for years. Some for perfectly valid reasons and some for completely personal reasons. I have even seen a teacher "dismissed" because she was pregnant! (Yes, you read that right...Of course, it can't be proven...but then again it doesn't have to be proven...)

I'll say it again, "In most cases, a non-tenured teacher does not have to be given a reason for dismissal."

My point here is simply that the argument that tenure in any way protects anyone is simply ludicrous. The only people tenure protects are those who know how to play the game long enough that they actually receive their tenure. And once you receive tenure, you are virtually untouchable.

Ok, ok... Maybe I am being a little cynical here, but the fact of the matter is unless you know how to play the "tenure game" you can kiss your career goodbye.

However, the purpose of this report is not to convince you that tenure is wrong. The purpose of this report is to help you succeed within a system that is highly flawed.

You don't have to agree with me about tenure, but I strongly suggest you follow the guidelines set forth in this report, get tenure, then we can discuss the merits of the tenure system until the cows come home.

You see, while I may be wholeheartedly against tenure, the fact remains that you absolutely need to get it, and in order to receive your tenure you need to know how to play the "tenure game".

That's right, getting tenure can be compared to playing a game. If you do not know how it is played you certainly won't be any good at it. You could have the best baseball skills in the world and it wouldn't do you much good if you ran to the wrong base.

Bottom Line: You need to know the rules of the "tenure game".

The purpose of this report is to help teachers understand the rules of this game.

However, let me make one thing perfectly clear, knowing the rules of the game is not enough. First, and foremost, you need to be well versed in teaching strategies that will enable you to get 100% class participation, increase standardized test scores, and virtually eliminate classroom management problems. These are the skills you need to become a *Master Teacher* and these are the skills you need to have a truly fulfilling career.

To gain an arsenal of effective teaching strategies I strongly recommend you read my ebook: *eTeach: A Teacher Resource for Learning the Strategies of Master Teacher* (<http://www.teaching-teacher.com>).

Unfortunately, being a great teacher is also not enough. You need to know the rules... You need to know how the game is played.

So without further ado, here the rules that every teacher needs to know in order to receive tenure:

1. It's Negotiable.

First thing you must understand, even before your first interview is that the length of your probationary period is negotiable.

Teachers are usually hired for a probationary period; this is the time that a teacher remains non-tenured. The *unwritten* rule is that a teacher will remain non-tenured for three years.

During this time, the teacher will go through various procedures depending on the particular school's contract. For example, at my school a teacher is "supposed" to have four observations from an administrator per year. At least two of those observations will be formal observations that include a pre-observation meeting with

the administrator, a specific time to be observed, and a post-observation with the administrator.

Also, at my school, all non-tenured teachers must go through our teacher-mentor training program until they receive tenure. And, my ebook: *eTeach: A Teacher Resource for Learning the Strategies of Master Teachers* (<http://www.teaching-teacher.com>) plays an integral role in that teacher training program. Not only does every new teacher receive a copy of the ebook, but I start the year by giving a three-hour workshop on the teaching strategies put forth in that ebook. And, it is those teaching strategies that our administrators are specifically looking for during teacher observations.

In most cases teachers either receive tenure at the end of their three-year probationary period or they lose their job. However, in some cases teachers will be given a fourth year extension. In this case the teacher is basically given an extra year to prove that he is deserving of his job.

This is one aspect of tenure that I never understood. First of all, why does it even take three years to determine if a teacher is deserving of tenure?

How long do you have to work with someone before you know if they are going to work out or not?

4 years?

3 years?

I would argue that 1 year is more than enough time.

Let's face it, after working with someone for an entire year, you should know if that person is going to work out or not. At most you should give the person an extra year if you think he needs some improvement, but why in the world would you need three or even four years to figure this out!

Now here is the important part. When you are first offered a job, you need to understand that the length of your probationary is absolutely negotiable.

If you can make a case for yourself, you can negotiate that your probationary period should only be one or two years. This often happens when a teacher has many years of experience and then moves to a new district. That experienced teacher is usually not required to go through the full three-year probationary period, often times subject to only one year.

This makes complete sense...If I was to move to a new school district I would make the case that if you are unhappy with me at the end of my first year, then let me know

and I will move on, however, if you want me to continue teaching here then you must give me tenure after my first year.

Of course, this is easy for me to say, since I come with a great deal of experience. Nevertheless, the same rules hold true for everyone, and if you feel confident enough then you should make an argument for yourself.

Bottom Line: Your probationary period is negotiable, whether you want to take advantage of that or not is entirely up to you.

2. Know Your State's Law.

It is important that you familiarize yourself with your state's individual laws regarding tenure. Each state may have a slight difference in how the law is written.

It is also important to familiarize yourself with your school district's own rules regarding tenure.

I personally know of one teacher who was denied tenure, but since the proper procedures were not followed the school district was forced to pay her an extra five weeks salary. I couldn't possibly get into all the details in this report, but as it turns out, her mentor at the time did some research and that research worked in favor of the dismissed teacher. Not only did this benefit her, but it also benefited all the other teachers in the school as it became very apparent that the administration was not necessarily above the law. The teacher still lost her job, but at least she was compensated.

3. Be Prepared for Meetings

Ask any teacher and they will tell you that the school day is filled with all kinds of different meetings. Sometimes I think it is simply amazing that I actually have time to teach in between all these meetings. There are grade level meetings, CSE (special education) meetings, parent-teacher conferences, faculty/staff meetings etc.

Make sure you are prepared for every single meeting. When you are prepared for meetings you are simply making a statement that you are a professional. While being prepared may actually go unnoticed, I can assure you that coming to meetings *unprepared* will *not* go unnoticed.

Also, don't think that just because your administrator is not present at a particular meeting that it means you can act as if it is a Sunday afternoon in front of a football game. Believe me, everything gets back to your administrator. In schools of all

places, the walls have ears. It is simply the most gossipy profession I have ever been involved with so make sure you are not involved with the gossip.

Here are just a few tips on being prepared for meetings:

- **On time:** This is a no-brainer. Showing up late to a meeting is not only saying “I don’t care about the meeting,” but it is also saying “I don’t care about wasting someone else’s time.” If you show up late, that is exactly what you are doing...*wasting other people’s time.*
- **Pen/pencil & Notebook:** Don’t come across as one of your students who comes to class without something to write with or without something to write on. Have a pen and a notebook and take notes at the meetings. (Or at least look like you are taking notes). I have a special notebook that I have set aside just for meetings.
- **Questions:** Before meetings you may want to write down a few questions to ask. Again, this will make you come across as prepared and professional as well as help you remember what it is that you want to address.
- **Good Attitude:** Believe me, I have sat in my share of meetings that are a complete waste of my time and nothing gets me more frustrated than wasting time. However, DO NOT be one of those teachers that moans and groans about every meeting (at least until you have tenure). Come into every meeting with a positive attitude that indicates that the meeting has value.

4. Don’t Be Confrontational

You will be working with many different people in a school setting and teachers have a tendency to be extremely opinionated. *Just tell people you are a Republican in a public school on the East End of Long Island and you’ll see exactly what I mean by opinionated* ☺

It is very important that you try to be as non-controversial as possible. I am not saying you need to go around agreeing with everyone, but when you disagree do so in a way that it doesn’t come across as if you know it all and your opponent is a bonehead (even though you may think that).

A good tip is to always point out the positive points that someone brings up first. This works exceptionally well with parents.

Also, schools can be extremely disorganized. If you happen to work in one of those schools you might be faced with all sorts of unannounced events that disrupt your class, your teaching, and worst of all...student learning. Sometimes I think student learning is actually secondary in schools and as teachers we have to try to fit it in teaching where we can.

These unexpected interruptions can be extremely frustrating for those of us who spend a significant amount of time planning our lessons. During my first year as a teacher, the best advice I ever got was “ROLL WITH IT!!!” Don’t let those interruptions get the better of you or you will never survive in this profession and you don’t want to come across as someone who can’t survive.

5. The Classroom Management Killer

This is it. This is huge. This is the number one reason teachers do not get tenure. This is the thing that makes teachers wonder why they ever got into this profession in the first place. This is: ***Classroom Management***.

The fact is, if you do not have good classroom management skills you will not survive...It’s just that simple.

The worst part is, it will be apparent very early on in the school year if you don’t have those skills. You see, whether or not your administrator comes into your classroom, the word will definitely get back to him because the kids will tell the parents and the parents will call the administration. If the parents that are calling are parents of high achieving “good” kids...You are in trouble.

I have told many new teachers, that as unfortunate as this may sound...*it is the kids that give you tenure*. So much for having time to learn and grow.

What’s worse, once you have been labeled as having management problems it is very difficult to shake that label.

That is why the first thing I work on with my new interns each year is just that: ***Classroom Management***

Fortunately for them that is precisely what my entire ebook is about. You see, classroom management is not about an elaborate system of rewards and punishments. Successful classroom management is about using teaching strategies effectively so that all your students are actively involved in all of your lessons.

For more information on how to use these teaching strategies make sure to read my ebook: ***eTeach: A Teacher Resource for Learning the Strategies of Master Teachers***. (<http://www.teaching-teacher.com>)

6. Participate in Extra Curricula's

It is simply much harder for an administrator to let you go if you are involved in running several school programs (school trip, plays, concerts, coaching, yearbook, student council etc.).

While the truth is, new teachers should be focusing a nothing more than designing lessons and working on implementing new teaching strategies, the reality is they need to make themselves invaluable to the school. And, *tenured* teachers are not under any pressure to run various extra curricular programs since they cannot loose their job. Therefore, the administrator's eyes usually fall on the non-tenured when looking for someone to fill these positions.

My suggestion is beat them to the punch by finding something you are genuinely interested in and ask to be a part that program, that way you are doing something you like rather than something you feel that you are being pressured into doing.

7. Observations

Know your Audience!!!

It is imperative that you know who the person is that is responsible for observing you as well as the guidelines for observations as set by you school's contract.

I already stated that at my school non-tenured staff have 2 formal observations that include a pre-observation meeting, the observation itself, and a post observation meeting. You need to know how to perform in all three parts effectively. In order to do this you need to know your audience.

What is it that your supervisor is specifically looking for?

Prepare your lesson to meet the specific needs that your supervisor is looking for. At my school, our superintendent/principal wants to see that you are using the teaching strategies that were presented in the opening teacher-mentor workshop and are also presented in the ebook that each of them received at the beginning of the year.

You definitely want to impress them with your teaching.

If you have a pre-observation meeting make sure to tell your supervisor specifically what you want him to look for. For example, one strategy in my ebook is the *check-for-understanding* strategy. I inform my intern (teacher in training) to tell our administrator to look to see if she is using this strategy effectively (which of course she is since I have worked with her specifically on how to use this one strategy). You may think it is silly to have an administrator focus on something you know you already do well, but you need to

look at your observations as part of the game. Let your mentor, your graduate courses, and professional development workshops improve your teaching, and let your observations lead you to acquiring tenure.

Next, during the observation itself, make sure to make it clear to both your students and your administrator what the specific objective of that lesson is. It is imperative that you, your students, and your administrator know what it is the students are to learn by the end of class...that is your objective...it is what your whole lesson is about. At the end of your lesson make sure you have some type of closure activity that clearly determines whether or not you have met your objective. This is extremely important, especially when it comes to your *post*-observation (as you'll see in a minute).

During your post-observation, listen to what your administrator has to say. I mean this, it doesn't matter if you agree with him or not in your mind, but what you *do* is listen and agree. The fact is, 90% of administrators got into the position because they are on some type of power trip. (Yes, of course, that is not all administrators, but the longer you are in this profession, the more you will see what I mean). Let them have their power or you will not receive tenure.

If your administrator gives you a suggestion tell him that it is a good idea and that you will try it in your next class (whether you agree with him or not). You may even want to approach that administrator later in the week to tell him that you tried his idea and it worked great.

Is this butt kissing? Yep, it's all part of the game. You can stop when you receive tenure.

Now, if you have done what I said to do during your lesson, particularly the part about making your objective clear, and making sure to have a closure activity to determine that the objective was met, then you have an "ace in the hole" when it comes to your post-observation.

You see, even if things did not go so well, you can explain that the objective, which is the whole purpose of the lesson, was met. And, if you used a closure activity you can prove that the objective was met.

For example, I might say "The objective of my lesson was for students to be able to argue what type of foreign policy the U.S. was using when building the Panama Canal and by examining the letters they wrote to president Roosevelt (my closure activity) it is easy to see that the objective was met."

I would even show him the letters the students wrote. Believe me, this is powerful. It is hard for any administrator to ignore the most important aspect of a lesson: *the objective!*

8. Go to Your Superintendent/Principal for Ideas and Suggestions

Is this more butt kissing? Yep, you better believe it. However, you can and should also do this for legitimate reasons.

Stop by the office...let them know what you are thinking...what your ideas are...how you plan on teaching a particular unit or how a particular lesson went really well. Ask your administrator what they think about a particular teaching idea...

Let your enthusiasm for teaching show!

9. Know Your Chain of Command

As stated before, you need to know who observes you, but you also need to know who you are supposed to go to for various issues. Remember, a lot of administrators are power hungry and would hate it if they found out that you went around/above them to get something done.

This will vary from school to school, but here are some things to think about:

- Know who you should go to *first* in every situation.
- Is there a chairperson for your department?
- Do you have a mentor? If so, use this person. An intern-mentor relationship is (or should be) confidential.
- Do you have a Vice Principal? What is his role?
- Principal?
- Superintendent?

Like I said, it will vary from school to school. At my school our principal became superintendent when the position opened (don't ask me how, I'll never know), but he was unable to give up his Principal's powers and therefore wanted to do everything, which is funny since he actually can't do anything, but that is what I mean about being on a power trip.

One day a former intern of mine told me about a great idea he had, but unfortunately, our superintendent gave some BS reason why it couldn't be done. I told the intern that it was too bad, he should have come to me first and would have told him not to go to the superintendent, but instead go to our new principal as she is absolutely fantastic and would have loved his idea. Naturally, the intern then wanted to go talk to the principal right away, but I told him that he should absolutely NOT do that. The time for that had come and gone and if he goes to the principal *now*, the superintendent will definitely see that as questioning his authority. My suggestion to him was to let it go...at least for now.

10. Dress

You would think that “dress” would go without saying, but I find it amazing how many teachers dress unprofessionally. Obviously every school will have their own culture and how teachers dress is part of that culture, but I strongly believe teachers should set a high standard and that starts with a professional appearance. If you want to dress like a slob, at least wait until after you have tenure. ☺

Final Thoughts

Despite all the cynicism that may come through in this report, the fact of the matter remains that teaching is an absolutely wonderful profession whose rewards go beyond a simple paycheck.

However, while teaching is truly a rewarding profession, I am the first to say that the system itself has many flaws. My own personal belief is that the “tenure system” is one of those flaws. However, it is easy to say this since I already have tenure. And, the fact is having tenure *is* a fantastic feeling.

It is also easy to criticize something without offering any viable alternatives. I have not provided a single one, nor do I intend to...well at least not in this report.

As I stated earlier, the sole purpose of this report is to help teachers work within this system. A system in which your entire career may be dependent on you receiving tenure.

You see, if you do not receive tenure, it may be extremely difficult for you to obtain another teaching job. When interviewing for a new job you will obviously have to explain why it is that you did not receive tenure. This becomes especially difficult when looking for a job at a nearby school district. I have seen teachers try for years to obtain a new teaching job after being denied tenure. In fact, I can honestly say that of all the teachers I know who have not received tenure, I don't know of any who obtained a new teaching job without some serious relocating.

That is why I think this report is so important.

There is not one single thing that will automatically get you tenure. As stated before, your teaching ability is the single most important factor in whether or not you receive tenure, but it is far from the only factor.

If you combine the teaching strategies put forth in my ebook, *eTeach A Teacher Resource for Learning the Strategies of Master Teachers*, with the guidelines set forth in this report you will most certainly receive tenure and have that fulfilling teaching career you have always dreamed of.

If not, let me know and I will give you a full refund! ☺