

NEWSLETTER

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May | 2005

Things to Remember During *the* **TEACHER HIRING** *Season*

Teacher hiring is about to move into high gear in schools and districts throughout the country. In this month's newsletter, we offer research-based advice and resources designed to help schools and districts find, employ, and place effective and qualified teachers.

Of all the factors that schools control, teacher quality is the one that most affects student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000). In fact, researcher Eric Hanushek (2002) found the difference in annual student achievement growth between a student taught by an effective teacher and one taught by an ineffective teacher can be as much as one grade-level equivalent. And the results are cumulative; the impact of an effective teacher on a student's achievement is still measurable two years later

regardless of the effectiveness of the intervening teachers (Sanders, 1998).

Research indicates that effective teachers share many of the same characteristics, regardless of school resources or student population. They are fully certified, have in-depth subject and pedagogical knowledge, and several years of experience (Rice, 2003).

To find teachers like these, schools and districts must engage in a thoughtful and focused hiring process. They need to recruit widely and make job offers selectively. We offer four specific suggestions for school and district leaders to consider during the teacher hiring season.

Start Early

The New Teacher Project, a New York-based organization that works to improve teacher hiring, studied four large urban school districts and found that lengthy hiring

processes drove away many candidates (Levin & Quinn, 2003). The four districts received five to seven times more applications than needed to fill open positions, but the authors say as many as 60 percent of the candidates withdrew when the hiring process dragged on into late summer. Levin and Quinn also claim the teachers who pulled their applications were significantly more qualified; they had higher grade point averages and were more than 40 percent more likely than those who were finally hired to have a degree in their teaching field.

“Districts need to hire early and effectively to capture the talent that is out there,” says Jessica Levin, chief knowledge officer of The New Teacher Project. The organization recommends that schools and districts finish all hiring by May 1, and certainly no later than June 1. To reach that goal, the group advises school districts to begin taking the following steps:

- Ensure that all teachers give early notification of resignations.
- Reform collective bargaining transfer requirements so that transfers and hiring can be done more quickly.
- Create earlier and more predictable budgets.
- Revamp human resources departments to establish greater efficiency.

Levin and Quinn identify some school districts that have had a measure of success instituting reforms like these. In 2001, the Rochester City School District in upstate New York was able to place all new teachers by June by offering significant financial incentives to potential retirees if they announced their decisions by March 1. Rochester also gave hiring committees greater responsibility in selecting teacher transfers. In Clark County, Nevada, principals can now interview new teacher candidates after April and consider them along with teachers requesting transfers.

Other reforms provide local control *and* more efficiency. The Memphis City School District in Tennessee is planning to institute a Web-based system that will allow principals to view the qualifications of applicants and choose those they will interview. “We’re always behind the eight ball

because the system we have is highly inefficient,” the Memphis district’s human resources director said of the old paper-based application system (Kumar, 2004). “... You know it doesn’t sound very interesting when you talk about revamping human resources. People want to talk about curriculum and students, but what we do has a direct effect on the classroom.”

Know Yourself

To create and sustain improvement and establish a strong academic culture, schools and districts need to know who they are, where they are heading, and what sort of teacher will help get them there. High-achieving schools don’t just look for a “good” third-grade teacher. They know the knowledge, skills, experiences, and beliefs they are looking for in teachers, and they develop ways of uncovering those qualities through the screening and interview process. Should the applicant be familiar with a specific reform model? Is it necessary that he or she has experience with team teaching or planning? Does the school want a candidate to demonstrate a strong commitment to reaching all students? The more specific a district and school can be about the vision of the teacher they are looking for, the more likely they are to realize it.

Collinswood Language Academy, a public magnet school in North Carolina’s Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District, requires all applicants for English as a second language teacher positions to fill out a detailed, locally developed teacher practice survey. Questions include “Tell us how you assess children and how you use information to drive instruction” and “What would you use as a basis for designing an effective schedule of services for ELL students at Collinswood?” Some schools find that including teachers on the interview panel and using a rubric they develop together to assess applicants helps provide this focus.

Some organizations have developed programs to help educators identify effective teachers who are a good match for their school or district. The Gallup Organization’s TeacherInsight—used in dozens of school districts including Milwaukee, Los Angeles, and Austin, Texas—screens teacher applicants

with a battery of research-based questions that help gauge interest and aptitude. Principals in urban schools are provided with extra questions and scoring rubrics more tailored to their setting, such as “Why do you want to work in this school?” and “What students do you work with most effectively?” Says Jo Ann Miller, a seminar leader with Gallup, “There is no difference between good urban or suburban teachers except for one gift, and that is their mission. [Successful urban teachers] are driven not only to help kids grow; they have a preference for kids with challenges.”

Recruit, Recruit, Recruit

To succeed in finding and hiring effective teachers who are a good fit, schools should recruit aggressively throughout the school year. Advertising, employment fairs, and job banks have all shown to be effective tools in attracting teacher applicants.

Recruiting New Teachers, a Boston-based nonprofit organization, advises that district and school

Resources

The New Teacher Project (<http://www.tntp.org/>) helps states, districts, and schools recruit and retain better teachers.

For more information on the TeacherInsight assessments, visit The Gallup Organization Web site (<http://education.gallup.com/>).

Recruiting New Teachers (<http://www.recruitingteachers.org>) provides information and advice on hiring strategies. The organization also runs the National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Education to provide information and resources for prospective teachers.

The National Center for Educational Accountability's self-audit allows educators to compare their staff selection and development practices with schools that have been successful with students from all backgrounds (http://www.just4kids.org/bestpractice/practice_definition.cfm?sub=National&study=Broad&detailid=194).

marketing efforts focus on teacher interests. The group calls them the “4Cs”: compensation, community (culture and core values), colleagues, and curriculum. Schools should be sure to promote their strengths within these areas. One way to do this is to profile a teacher in the school recruitment brochure and explain why that teacher chose and stayed at the school.

Some schools and districts have found success by “growing their own” teachers to better ensure a good match between candidate and vacancy. The Broward County School District in Florida, for example, recently began the Urban Teacher Academy Program. Graduates from the area’s high schools receive a scholarship to study education at a local college and are guaranteed a job in the school district after they become certified. The program was started in part because out-of-state teacher recruits would often leave after a year because they felt unprepared to teach the area’s many disadvantaged students (Cech, 2005).

Allocate Staff to Narrow Achievement Gaps

Although we know the significant impact that a classroom teacher has on student performance, tradition in many schools and districts still dictates that the most experienced teachers are assigned the highest performing students. There are many reasons for this practice, including everything from aggressive parents to union contracts, but it has led to an unfortunate consequence: Low-income and minority students are far more likely to have inexperienced teachers, and thus learn significantly less, than their wealthier, white counterparts. One recent study in North Carolina (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2003) found that nearly one quarter of the state’s black-white achievement gap can be attributed to teacher assignment patterns *within* schools.

“If teachers have expertise in a certain area, then they should be placed with the lowest performing students,” says Darlene Yañez, a research director with the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin who has studied schools that have narrowed achievement gaps. “In high-



performing, high-poverty schools, the focus is always about what is best for students... making sure those kids get what they need to get." Not all schools will be able to reassign all staff, but school leaders should be sure to pay attention to this issue during the teacher hiring and deployment process. "Start with small successes and recognize those and then build on that. Success breeds success," says Yañez.

Conclusion

Schools and districts need to know which teachers they want and where in the school they want them—and then go out and hire those teachers as quickly and efficiently as possible. While such hiring drives can be difficult and time consuming, improving the instructional capacity of a school may be the most important academic reform a school can undertake.

Administered by Learning Point Associates in partnership with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), the Education Development Center (EDC), and WestEd, and in collaboration with the Academy for Educational Development (AED), under contract with the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education of the U.S. Department of Education.

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