

**National Implications for Urban School Systems:
Strategic Planning in the Human Resource
Management Department in a Large Urban School
District**

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses several key ongoing issues in a large urban school district. Literature focuses on what make a large urban school district effective in Human Resource Management. The effectiveness is addressed through recruitment and retention practices. A comparison of the school district with current research is the main approach to the investigation. The most valuable resource in the education of students is the quality of the people hired for this specific assignment.

Introduction

Effective recruiting plays a major role in the Human Resource Management domain. The targeted urban school district in the research must employ at least 8,000 employees annually with 4,000 being classroom teachers. Qualified teachers must be selected through a legitimate framework. Research will examine how to implement effective recruiting and retention practices.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of the article is to investigate the best practices of recruiting and retaining quality school teachers in a large urban school district. These best practices are the gate-keeper practices to an effective Human Resource Management Department.

Recruitment: First Step in Effective Human Resource Management

The first step to effective Human Resource Management is recruitment. For school districts this begins with a needs forecast. Forecasting your internal demand for teachers begins with projecting student enrollment at all grade levels. Human Resource Management directors should work closely with local businesses and pay close attention to area housing developments, census and demographic data and enrollment of feeder institutions to help prepare enrollment projections. The local businesses will provide Human Resource departments with current enrollment projections based on current enrollment at each level, promotion rates, students leaving the district and applications of new students. Longer-range enrollment projections can be made on area population changes based on significant factors like new housing, new business development of feeder institutions. Feeder institutions are public or private schools or day care centers that currently serves students who will eventually transfer to your school district. Enrollment projections should be compared to current instructor rosters at target student-teacher ratios to determine hiring needs (Thompson & Kleiner, 2005).

Human Resource Management department should set up recruitment time-lines. Recruitment should start early enough to attract the best possible pool of applicants. Human Resource departments must keep abreast of the external demand for teachers such as the needs of other local school districts. This can be done by attending functions with colleagues from other districts such as Human Resource meetings and meetings at county department of education offices. Human Resource department directors can also pick up current trends and hiring needs through lunches and regular phone conversations with administrators at other school districts. Holding offices in community or trade groups or boards of other districts or joint powers associations help directors keep in touch with the trends of the area. Human Resource Management departments also must keep close track of the supply of qualified teachers. Close relationships with area college career centers are helpful (Thompson & Kleiner, 2005).

Class size is a key concern of all of the stakeholders of any district. One of the jobs of the Human Resource Management director is to monitor the targeted class sizes at

each grade level and at each school in the district. The challenge is to try to balance efficiency with effectiveness. Efficiency is sometimes referred to as productivity. Efficiency is the ratio of outputs to inputs. Effectiveness is determined by the relationship between an organization's output and its objectives. In summary, an organization is efficient if it does things right, and it is effective if it does the right things (Anthony & Govindarajan, 2001).

Human Resource Management departments must also be flexible to act when significant changes in the environment occur. For example, preparing the best possible enrollment projections based on the information available is essential. However, even the best possible projections can turn out to be inaccurate. The Lennox School District in Los Angeles County experienced significant increases in kindergarten enrollment in the late 1990's. This small elementary school district is located in a low-income area directly adjacent to the Los Angeles International Airport. The district boundaries covered only about a single square mile. There was no new housing or apartment construction to explain the increase in enrollment. So, the district had to act quickly when new enrollment were submitted to recruit teachers to meet the demand of the new students. The administrators speculated that the increase in enrollment was due to heavy immigration from Mexico and multiple families living in existing homes (Thompson & Kleiner, 2005).

A Large Urban School District Deploys Comprehensive Recruitment Plan

Aldine Independent School District, a large urban school district, deploys a comprehensive plan to recruit teachers. Throughout the 2006-2007 School Year, the Aldine Independent School District will attend recruiting events in Texas, in major markets where teacher production is high and teacher demand is low, and in markets where Aldine ISD has a university partnership. One director from the Human Resource Management department will attend each recruiting event. Large events will include a second recruiter from the Human Resource Management department. At several large job fairs, Human Resource Management department will invite a teacher, principal, and student teacher. Following the event, a report will be generated determining the effectiveness of including non-traditional recruiters at a job fair. This position supports the purpose of this research tremendously. The effectiveness will be based on the number of applicants, interviews, Letters of Intent, and feedback from those hired at the event. Guest recruiters shall include campus leadership and campus teachers who are alumni or the recruiting event.

At the conclusion of each recruiting event, all resumes, applications, interview sheets, and offers will be collected by the recruiters and organized into the following categories: 1) Interviewed Applicants – Offered a Contract; 2) Interviewed Applicants – Invited to the Private Job Fair; 3) Interviewed Applicants – No Action; and 4) Collected Resumes and Applications With No Interview.

All resumes, applications, and results will be entered into a database in the Human Resource Management department. Applicants offered a contract will be processed (criminal background check completed and all references called). A special file containing the resumes and applications of those offered a contract will be maintained in the Human Resource Management Recruitment department. This is vital for a large

school district in employing over 8,000 employees annually with approximately 600 teachers to recruit annually.

Results from each recruiting event will be evaluated against the cost of the event. An on-going report will be generated as part of the weekly recruiting reports and distributed to each director showing the current cost analysis for each job fair. A detailed report will be developed in July. The detailed report will be used to determine recruiting focuses for the following year, including the locations to recruit, the number of recruiters to take to each event, the types of certifications generated from each event, and the amount of advertising and materials to take to each event.

A new DVD video was produced that can be played on laptops at Job-Fairs, in the front lobby of the Human Resources building, on the webpage, and at other events. The video will be high impact and will focus on Houston, Aldine ISD, teaching, and the student/teaching relationship in Aldine ISD. Aldine ISD does not have the name recognition that is common in many competing school district markets. The DVD highlights both Aldine ISD and Houston, removing some of the name recognition issues from the recruiting process. The DVD was developed to showcase Houston as many applicants in the target markets have no knowledge of Houston, or visual references as background knowledge. The DVD is intended to build name recognition and to provide details about Aldine ISD when a recruiter is not able to talk directly with an applicant.

Advertising Plan Details in a Large Urban School District

Aldine ISD will target potential applicants with specific certifications that have been difficult to locate. The target audiences include applicants: 1) holding bilingual certification; 2) holding critical needs (science and math); 3) applicants with Korean, Vietnamese, or Chinese language skills; and 4) applicants that are highly qualified.

Aldine ISD has a long history of attracting bilingual applicants from the Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Advertising of bilingual teachers targeting applicants from the Rio Grande Valley will be initiated through major market newspaper advertisements including newspapers in McAllen, Harlingen, Brownsville, and Corpus Christi. Radio spots played for a two week period of time during the traditional spring break period will be broadcast on multiple radio stations in the Rio Grande Valley. Concurrent to the radio advertisements, pre-show theatre advertisements and billboards advertisements throughout the Rio Grande Valley will be activated.

With a focus of hiring critical needs teachers, Aldine ISD will hold monthly interview days on Saturday's beginning in February. These interview days will be advertised in the local major market newspaper. The newspaper will target certified existing teachers in surrounding districts. The school district will target applicants with specific language skills by advertising in local and major market newspaper that target special population. Advertisements will focus on attracting applicants to Aldine ISD and provide them with resources needed to apply for a position. Advertisements will be developed in the targeted language. Also, Aldine will target the recruitment of highly qualified applicants at university job fairs by advertising in the university newspapers two to three weeks prior to the event. The goal is to build excitement and name recognition prior to the event.

Aldine ISD will utilize a variety of advertising media at key times to attract target population. Each media was selected for a specific purpose and targets a selected audience. Local newspapers, including the Houston Chronicle (3 fall opening specific; 4 spring weekend interviews; 3 spring opening specific; and Vietnam Post; and 4 spring weekend interviews) are utilized. Aldine ISD is required to advertise in major newspapers for specific positions if H1B Visa's are sponsored. Further, Aldine ISD seeks to attract applicants from surrounding districts that are already certified and have experience teaching. Utilizing the local newspapers achieves both of these requirements. Major market newspapers are used for both fall and spring weekend interviews. Markets are selected based on economic conditions of the target area, teacher supply, and district demand. Aldine ISD is frequently targeting national location that has recently completed a reduction in force or that has an excess of teachers in critical needs areas. Advertising in large major market papers allows the school district to set interview schedules and determine the value of a trip prior to making arrangements.

Advertising at student teacher partner universities two weeks prior to on-campus job-fairs and interview sessions reap many benefits. Ad placement is typically for a minimum of 2 consecutive editions. Each year Aldine ISD attends more than 75 university sponsored job fairs. Many of the applicants at university job fairs are unfamiliar with Aldine ISD and are unwilling to interview for positions. Advertisements in the local university newspapers two to three weeks prior to the job fair, build name recognition. Advertisement fees in university papers are typically very inexpensive. The recruitment aspect of a large urban school district is a major task.

Hiring the Best Teachers is the Only Option

The first step in gaining a competitive edge in the hiring process is to recognize that the recruitment of the best talent available is a strategic imperative, not an option. Several years ago, the McKinsey Quarterly published an article titled "The War for Talent" which chronicled the impending shortage of superior management talent in companies throughout the country. The article contended that there was, and is a "war" for managerial talent among companies, most of which are ill prepared for the competition. They concluded that only those companies that recognize that they are in a highly competitive hiring situation, and that take aggressive action to compete for talent, will be able to thrive in the coming years (Lee, 2005).

Strategic imperatives are manifested in school districts. The superintendent needs to make talent management, including the hiring of the best teacher talent, a top priority for the district. In the best corporations in America, the CEO spends an inordinate amount of time in talent management. These CEO's are actively involved in the recruitment, interviewing, selection, development and placement of talent because they believe that talent management is a strategic issue. Likewise, the superintendent needs to become the "CEO for talent" in the district. This means that a substantial amount of the superintendent's time, energy and involvement needs to be focused on talent management (Lee, 2005).

Paul B. Ash, in an article in the School Administrator, gives an example of how he, a superintendent, interviews all candidates for teacher positions within the district before any job offers are made. This serves a number of purposes: it provides a check on

quality; it reveals the hiring standards used at each school; it aids in attracting the best candidates since it reinforces to the applicant the importance placed on teachers in that district; and it is a check on the entire selection process including administrative ease, involvement by staff. The personal involvement of the superintendent also sends an important message to the district and school administrators and staff: Hiring the best teachers really is a top priority for the district and the superintendent supports this priority by being personally involved in the process (Ash, 2001).

The superintendent cannot delegate this responsibility. There is only one CEO in the district. The impact on the candidate, the principal, and the staff will not be the same without the superintendent's involvement. In larger districts this role may need to be shared with the assistant superintendents, but the superintendent still needs to play the leading role. In Aldine ISD, the assistant superintendent of Human Resource Management reports to the superintendent. Although it is difficult to measure, think about the potential competitive impact on the teacher candidate faced with the decision to accept a job offer from one district over district over another. Remember also that the involvement of the superintendent sets a standard for others involved in the process, from human resources to the principal to other teachers. Being selected as part of the interview team should communicate to those selected that they are among the district's best teachers, and that they have been identified to help hire the best talent for the future. They should be motivated to select and attract the best talent from among those recruited, since they are referring the final candidate to the superintendent and the quality of that candidate will reflect on each of them (Ash, 2001).

The superintendent must also insure that the district is prepared to market its teacher career opportunities in a way that sets it apart from other districts. The key to this marketing effort is to integrate a winning employee (teacher) value proposition into the entire recruitment and selection system. The value proposition is really a school's "brand" or what it has to offer teacher candidates. The value proposition may include things such as: the opportunity to utilize innovative teaching methods or curriculum; the opportunity to work in a collegial environment that is professionally stimulating exciting, and fun; supportive school and district leadership; competitive compensation and benefits (hiring bonuses; loan forgiveness, etc.); real professional development opportunities, the opportunity to be part of a respected team of professionals; state-of-the art facilities, technology, teaching aids/media labs; mutual respect between teachers and parents; and a record of excellent teaching outcomes (Ash, 2001).

Challenges exist in writing a teacher value proposition. The superintendent should start with a committee of administrators, teachers, parents, and students, and ask them to answer two questions:

1. "With which districts are we competing for teachers?"
2. Given the opportunities at these competitor school districts, why would the best teachers available want to work here?"

They should consider the job itself, the quality of supervision, co-workers, pay and benefits, district culture, innovative curriculum, community factors, professional development opportunities, evidence of educational excellence and any other compelling

factors impacting the decision to work in that school district. One caution – the value proposition must be realistic so that expectations raised in the recruitment process can be fulfilled once employed in the district. This allows candidates to make an informed decision about any job offers and helps reduce turnover caused by unmet expectations (Lee, 2005).

The next step in the development of a teacher value proposition is to see how you compare to your competition – the other school districts that hire from the same applicant pool as your district and the likely competition for the best candidates. Your value proposition should really differentiate your district from other districts. Changes must be made to sharpen your competitive position. Remember, it may be possible for other districts to pay the same salary or to offer the same hiring bonuses, but it is difficult for others to copy your culture, the quality of colleagues, your values, and innovative teaching methods. Many times you may decide to simply match competitors pay and focus on your outstanding culture, curriculum offerings, or the quality of the existing staff as your compelling value or competitive edge (Lee, 2005).

Once a value proposition that articulates a compelling reason to work in your district has been refined, then devise a marketing (recruitment) plan based on the value proposition. This includes a thorough review of all aspects of the recruitment and selection process to insure that the entire process is consistent with, communicates, and reinforces the value proposition. This is critical since applicants will judge your value offering through the prism of the recruitment and selection process by how they are treated, by whom they meet and by what they see and hear through out the entire process.

The recruitment and selection process has two objectives, to select the candidates who best match the district's teacher profile and to allow the candidates to gain information about the job, the school and district, coworkers, and school and district leadership. Time and effort should be allocated to both objectives throughout the entire recruitment and selection process since both hiring objectives need to be met in order to hire the best talent in a competitive market.

You should begin the review by rereading all printed and online materials used in the recruitment process to see if they support and communicate the value proposition. The materials need to reinforce the same compelling values and clearly answer the question “why would I want to teach here rather than in another district?”

One should be sure that areas of common complaints of applicants about the recruitment/interviewing process do not negate the benefits of the value proposition. Be sure to:

1. Reduce the bureaucracy of the selection process. Is all the paperwork necessary? An overly bureaucratic hiring process communicates to the applicant that the school or district operates bureaucratically in other areas as well.
2. Make sure that there is one contact person who can knowledgeably answer applicant's questions about all aspects of the hiring process, including position openings, requirements, selection process, timing, and so forth.

3. Follow up with applicants at each stage of the process to let them know where they stand, and to inform them of next steps and timing. Personalize all communications.
4. Make sure everyone from the office staff to human resources to the district administrators who come into contact with applicants treat applicants in a professional and courteous manner. Applicants should feel that they are important and everyone's first priority.
5. Give full attention to the applicant in interviews. Avoid distractions.
6. Plan and organize each event or recruitment activity. For example, one teacher candidate went to a job fair at a hotel only to find out that the fair had been moved to a larger hotel. When they arrived at the second hotel, they witnessed total chaos, with no one appearing to know what was going on. Remember that the manner in which the recruitment functions are managed reflect how the district or school is managed in general.
7. Train interviewers and everyone who comes into contact with candidates so that they understand their critical roles in both selecting candidates who match the district's teacher profile as well as in the "marketing" of the value proposition during the entire interview process.
8. Recognize all staff that participates in the selection process in any way. Make it a "big deal" for staff to be asked to work on the selection team.

In short, the applicant needs to feel that district values them during each step of the process. Only then will the candidate truly believe that hiring the best teacher talent is the objective of the district (Lee, 2005).

Supporting New Teachers

Induction and retention begin at the end of the interview. All schools should have planned professional development for their new teachers that includes orientation before school starts, ongoing support seminars during the school year, and a mentoring program. Share details of your induction opportunities with candidates during the interview, reminding them of the support and help available at your school (Clement, 2002).

Although money isn't everything, new teachers are concerned about surviving financially. Some schools pay a stipend to new hires who attend a week's worth of orientation sessions and training before the regular back-to-school workdays, and this stipend may help a new teacher on a tight budget. Arranging for the first year's salary to be spread over 13 months instead of 12 may make a difference in a candidate's decision to start teaching at your school as well. (A 13-month year provides a paycheck the first August through the following August, yet costs the district nothing extra.) The complete benefit package, including insurance for dependents and early retirement options, may be the deciding elements for some (Clement, 2002).

Just as the education profession has adapted behavior based interviewing from the business world, so too should we consider other business examples. The quality of the workplace will always be a factor in attracting and keeping the best new teachers, so we must provide “the schools our teachers deserve” (Cohen, 2002). All teachers deserve a workplace that is professional in both its physical setting and its administrative support.

Finally, many people enter the teaching profession with a sense of mission or from a sense of calling. Supporting this positive attitude in new teachers will not only help retain faculty but also may help the new teachers rejuvenate the veterans. An interview that asks about specific past experience and behavior should help to determine the candidate’s mission and calling, allowing you to hire the best qualified candidate for your faculty (Clement, 2002).

Retention and Mentorship Plan in a Large Urban School District

After hiring the best teachers, retention is the next aspect of an effective Human Resource Management department. Retention rates and satisfaction surveys will be completed to determine the partnership program can be improved and presentations adapted to target large numbers of potential applicants. Throughout America, the number of applicants available to each teaching position is declining while demand for teachers, especially in areas that historically had few opportunities for employment, are increasing. Thus, while recruiting costs increase, the supply and return on the recruiting effort decreases. Thus securing teachers through the university partnership program is a key component to Aldine’s long-range goals of having a qualified pool of applicants available for each teaching position that is available. Knowing what attracts student teachers to Aldine ISD and what the district can do to make the experience better will help increase the number of participants and increase the rate of retention on those teachers in the program.

The Aldine ISD Human Resources Department has maintained a mentorship and retention tracking program for more than 10 years. During the tenure of the program, district administrators have followed and reported annually the results of the retention rate. While Aldine ISD has shown retention improvement, the Human Resources Department understands that without sound programs and a solid plan based on data, the retention plan could slip.

Aldine ISD Human Resources Department short term mentorship and retention goal is to rewrite and deploy new cooperating teacher, mentorship, and first year teacher programs, and to deploy a new student teacher seminar plan. The department is also visiting all first year teachers and student teachers on a regular basis. The Human Resources Department has set long terms goals aligned with improving the retention rate by incorporating best of class practices in the mentorship program and the student teacher coop program.

Professional Involvement by Teachers is the Key to Retention

Research in teacher retention indicates that teachers who are highly involved professionally are more likely to remain in teaching. In fact, teachers have reported that collegial exchange and support are their greatest source of professional stimulation and a

major reason to stay in teaching (Yee, 1990) Therefore, promoting professional integration during the induction period is critical (Gold, 1996; Huling-Austin, 1992). Opportunities for professional growth, financial support for attending conferences, time to develop curricula, academic leadership, time to work with colleagues, opportunities to experience different roles, and opportunities to take part in workplace decision making are examples of the professional support teachers find most satisfying, according to Yee.

Collaborative environments are critical to achieving this goal, according to several researchers. Colbert and Wolf, for example, tested an induction model of cooperative team planning, designed to provide urban teachers with systematic support and assistance and to reduce their feelings of isolation. The result was that over 95% of the beginning teacher participants were still teaching in their urban classrooms after 3 years (1992). Recently, in a five-year qualitative study of 50 new Massachusetts teachers, Johnson and Kardos (2002) found that teachers' decisions to stay or leave were largely a factor of the professional culture of their schools. Those who found themselves in veteran-oriented cultures; where modes and norms of professional practices are determined by and aimed to serve veteran faculty members; felt left out of the professional life of the school. Likewise, new teachers received little professional guidance in schools that had a novice-oriented professional culture, staffed largely with new recruits. However, teachers whose induction occurred in schools characterized as having an integrated professional culture, distinguished by teamwork and camaraderie, were better served and were more likely to remain in teaching.

Specific sources of support and satisfaction for alternate route teachers have been identified as classroom teaching experience, other interns, other teachers in the school, university course-work, and mentors (Knauth and Kamin, 1994). In addition, Knauth and Kamin found that interns who were involved with committees and other planning efforts at their schools were more satisfied with their choice to become a teacher than those who were not involved.

Mentoring has been found to be a critical factor in the professional integration of new teachers, whether they are prepared through traditional or alternate routes. Mentoring that is embedded in an integrated professional culture provides the most effective support, in contrast to mentoring programs that are not continuous and school-based, according to Kardos (2002). The positive critical roles of mentoring include the improvement of teaching performance, the facilitation of transfer of knowledge from teacher education, the promotion of personal and professional well-being and socialization to the institutional culture (Huling-Austin, 1986a, 1986b; Jackson & Leroy, 1998; Odell & Ferraro, 1992). An integral component of most alternate route program, mentoring has been found to have a strong correlation to retention (Guyton et al., 1991; Stoddart, 1992; Dill, 1996). In alternate route program, mentors' roles expand, according to Shulman (1989) to include that of teacher educator.

The Quality of the Workplace a Key for Retention of New Teachers

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The Role of Compensation for Retention of New Teachers

Attracting and retaining quality teachers are growing concerns among education officials and the public. This is especially true for beginning teachers as school districts compete with each other and other industries for additional teaching personnel to cope with growing enrolments and an aging workforce. Increased salaries potentially provide a means of attracting and retaining the increased numbers of quality young teachers who will be needed in the years ahead. As a wave of younger teachers hired in the mid 1970's has aged, a demographic shift in the age of teachers has occurred. For example, in 1975, 53 percent of all full-time teachers were younger than age 35; in 1993, the percentage of younger teachers fell to about 23 percent (Thompson & Kleiner, 2005).

The annual median teacher salary in constant 1998 dollars increased only \$986 or 2.9% from 1971 to 1998 nationwide (National Centre for Education Statistics, 1999). This moderate increase to the median teacher salary of \$35,099 in 1998 has occurred while the demographic shift has been an increase in older teachers who typically earn more than younger teachers. In the 1971 the median teacher with bachelor's degrees earned 16.5% more than the overall median teacher. In 1998 this gap shrunk to 6.6% probably due to the fact that more teachers earn bachelor's degrees now than thirty years ago. Local, as well as nation wide trends must be consulted when human resource departments begin to develop salary schedules (Thompson & Kleiner, 2005).

Ten Ways to be Effective in Retaining Quality Teachers

There are some things with regard to teacher morale which you can control, but there are others which you cannot control. Much of the responsibility for this lies with the building leader, but changes can be made at the district level, too.

Here are 10 things which you can do in order to make your schools great places to work. And remember that, in any building where the adults are happy and productive, the children are bound to be happy and productive, too.

Support New Teachers

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, one-third of the new teachers in the United States leave the profession during their first three years. Almost half leave during the first five years.

The price of high turnover is enormous in terms of money productivity, and morale. The average cost of recruiting, hiring, preparing, and then losing a teacher is \$50,000, according to the National Education Association.

“If a teacher is struggling with out support, it undermines quality,” says Carroll. “That teacher is gone, and students are taught by a passing parade of short-term folks. It definitely has an effect on teaching quality.”

Turnover is exacerbated by the isolation that new teachers often feel, along with the common practice of giving the most difficult classes to the least experienced hires. This sink or swim situation often proves disastrous when it comes to keeping new teachers.

One way to slow the turnover tide is by providing support to new teachers, and structured mentoring programs are part of that effort. In the Blue Valley School District in Overland park, Kansas, mentors are assigned to each teacher who is new to the profession. The mentors, who are nominated by their principals and paid a stipend, receive a day’s training and meet twice over the course of the year in order to discuss how their charges are doing.

“The training is important, so they understand what they are supposed to do,” says Walter Carter, Blue Valley’s director of professional development. “It’s not always intuitive.”

Mentors work at the same schools as the new teachers, at the same grade level or in the same subjects. New teachers and their mentors meet for at least 30 minutes a week. A full-time master teacher also works with 20 to 25 teachers each year. Peer assistants, as they’re called, watch new teachers in the classroom and meet with them before and after lessons.

It’s a reflection for the teacher on what worked, what didn’t, and what you would change,” says Carter. “It’s a feedback loop. It supports them in what they are doing well, and it’s helpful for them to hear that they appear to be successful.”

Before the program was started, Blue Valley hired about 200 new teachers each year, with 75 of them new to the teaching profession. Since the program started in 2000, Carter says, the district has lost only about one new teacher a year.

Clue in to Climate

What happens at faculty meetings? What traditions and ceremonies do teachers and staffs have in order to celebrate successes? These are elements of school climate, underlying attitudes and expectations.

Climate affects morale enormously, but it's not always easy to read. In fact, schools may have a toxic culture that you are not aware of, says Kent Peterson, an education professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and co-author of *Shaping School Culture*.

In toxic cultures, he says, there's hostility between teachers and conflict on an ongoing basis. Rumormongers pass on negative information, he says, and they only talk about things that don't work.

How can toxic school culture be improved? The first step to take is for the principal to find a core group of staff members who believe in the school and build from there. By confronting negativity and hostility, it's possible to restore hope over time. But if negative cultures are allowed to exist for long periods, they become part of the school's reputation and are more difficult to change.

School climate can turn from positive to toxic quickly if leaders are not vigilant with regard to this. Peterson uses the example of a school where staff members were very collegial; they had fun and could joke with one another. This atmosphere made it easy to share best practices and discuss important issues openly.

Then, says Peterson, a new principal came in and made decisions behind closed doors. Certain teachers gained more influence, which increased hostility and eroded collegiality. The staff stopped working together and began to use hidden agendas to get more resources. "It took less than three months," Peterson says.

He points to a second example in which leadership decisions caused a school to lose its heart. At this school, ceremonies were held at the end of the school year that was funny and serious at the same time. In late May, the principal stopped the events because he believed they took time away from instruction. "Those were community-building ceremonies," says Peterson. When the ceremonies stopped, "the community fell apart."

The importance of celebrations was not lost on Ruzicka when he took over at Capital High School. He asked teachers at the first faculty meeting what they did to celebrate and have fun. "It's really hard to be a teacher," he told them. "We have to work hard and play hard."

Ruzicka broke the faculty into four groups, and each one of those groups came up with ways to have fun. One group decided that each department would have lunch together once a month. Another group opted for the idea of having potluck meals.

"We started to do more functions together," he says. For example, the school held a staff picnic at the beginning and the end of the school year, with families invited to come. The teachers asked each other why they hadn't done this before, but they just hadn't," says Ruzicka. "It was so fun and easy to get this going."

Empower Teachers and Staff

People are happiest when they have some control over their work environment. Autocratic, top-down leadership tends to quash teacher and employee morale.

Richard Ingersoll, a professor in the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education, has done a great deal of research on why teachers leave the profession. He discovered in the course of that research that a major element of dissatisfaction for teachers is how much decision making they are allowed to do.

Ingersoll, who is the author of *Who Controls Teachers' Work*, says schools where teachers have more say see less staff disharmony and less student misbehavior. "If you give teachers more say, you'll have more positive climate and less teacher turnover," he says.

Giving teachers a role in school decisions doesn't necessarily mean the use of site-based management. It means that teachers and other staff members have a voice in decisions that affect them. Talking teachers' views and opinions into account, particularly regarding instruction, shows them that they are respected and valued.

The ability to make decisions is especially an issue with young teachers who have graduated from college within the past few years, says Antonia Cortese, who serves as the executive vice president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). They want to be considered as professionals who deserve a voice in the workplace, she says. That attitude doesn't jibe with the top-down decision making in many schools. "Take note that this is important to teachers," says Cortese. "If we want to keep the retention rate up, teachers must be used for their professional expertise."

Recognize and Reward Teachers and Staff

Letting teachers know they're doing a good job and recognizing their achievements publicly goes a long way toward making them feel appreciated. School boards can recognize the good work of all school employees – not just teachers – at their meetings, suggests Dick Anderson, who serves as associate executive director of federation member services at the National School Boards Association.

Good school leaders find other ways to provide people with opportunities to feel special, says John Nori, director of instructional leadership resources for the National Association of Secondary School Principals. A former high school and middle school principal, Nori says he looked for at least one positive thing during the course of his walk-through observations. When back at his office, he'd write the teachers notes, telling them what he'd like about their work. "Giving them positive feedback," he says, "that's the whole idea of being a good instructional supervisor."

Good principals recognize their role as a promoter of their teachers, says Rosemarie Young who serves as principal of Watson Lane Elementary School in Louisville, Kentucky, and president of the National Association of Elementary School Principals. Doing small things, such as leaving encouraging notes or candy in teachers' mail boxes or giving the staff occasional treats, sends a message that the principal notices and appreciates their hard work. "That's important to establishing positive morale," she says.

Don't Ignore Administrator Morale

Unhappy principals hurt morale. And administrator turnover – another concern for school boards and superintendents – forces teachers to get used to new sets of rules and expectations.

“When your boss leaves and there’s a new sheriff in town, you don’t know what the rules are,” says Nori. “It takes time and energy, and it’s difficult for morale.”

Workload is a major element of principal morale. Expectations that principals attend every school event and deal with every small detail of building management should be scaled back, says Nori. “Does the high school principal have to be there when the maintenance guy turns off the sprinkler on Sunday? The expectation that that’s the norm takes away energy and focus on instruction,” he says. Principals need to have the authority to delegate, or they risk burnout.

Another thing to watch is the relationship between the school board and the superintendent. If that relationship is dysfunctional, “that spills into the district,” Anderson says.

Deal with Student Discipline

Disruptive student behavior damages teacher morale and leads some teachers to leave, says Ingersoll. New teachers in particular have trouble with classroom management, and teachers who leave say they don’t feel adequately backed up by principals when it comes to disciplining individual students.

Cortese, the AFT official, says discipline must be consistent from student to student and building to building. If rules are not consistently enforced, this sends a mixed message to students and makes it harder for teachers to keep order in their classrooms.

Principals must maintain balance in student discipline, says Young. If a principal doesn’t agree with the teacher’s decision, he or she should let the teacher know in a way that doesn’t make the teacher seem like the bad guy. It’s an opportunity to show the teacher a better way to handle discipline, she says.

Treat teachers as Professionals

Teachers need professional development and time to collaborate with colleagues. If they know they are expected to be continuous learners, as their students are, they see themselves as professionals. “Teachers need to see a professional career path that lets them grow, be recognized, and paid for accomplishments,” says Carroll.

Sonia Nieto, a professor of education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, spent a year working with a group of Boston high school teachers for the purpose of finding out why they stayed at their jobs even though they were facing difficulties there. The teachers, who chose to remain in high-turnover urban schools, saw themselves as intellectuals and researchers, she says. They were creative. They were involved in professional development programs, and they presented at conferences.

“You don’t see a focus on the intellectual side of teachers, to show them that they can change the future for young people,” says Nieto, author of *What Keeps Teachers Going?* “Teachers want to know that they have the intellectual stamina and intelligence to make a difference.”

Another important aspect of professional development is the opportunity to collaborate with peers, says Nieto. “Teaching can be a very lonely profession,” she says. Teachers find working with their colleagues to be intellectually stimulating, and the

ability and time to collaborate on lesson plans and projects is another reason that they stay at their jobs.

Ask Employees What's Going On

If you want to know about teacher and staff morale, you can take a simple but powerful action in order to find out: Ask. Gathering employee input, whether through informal chat sessions or by a written school survey, gives the staff a chance to be heard on important issues. It also can alert administrators and others to potential problems.

“People need to be heard,” says Paul Houston, a former superintendent and executive director of the American Association of School Administrators. “If you create mechanisms for people to provide input, you’ll give them a chance to vent before morale problems start.”

While serving as a superintendent, Houston regularly met with clusters of teachers and school staff members so they could talk about any issue they wanted. These meetings, he says, gave him the opportunity to set the record straight when people had misconceptions: “I was able to say, “You don’t have the story right.”

When Ruzicka started as principal, he held what he called “the good, the bad, and the ugly” meeting with each teacher. They talked; he typed notes on his laptop. That first year, he worked to solve issues that came up during those meetings. “It’s about building trust,” Ruzicka says. “People said, “He wants our opinion; he’s following through.”

Keep Facilities Tidy

In 2004, Wentworth Elementary School in Rockingham County, North Carolina, was named one of the state’s eight best schools to work in by the governor’s office. Principals Paige McCargo believes her new building has a lot to do with it. Seven years ago, the school was in an 80-year-old, three-story building with no air conditioning or hot water. Today, Wentworth’s facility features large teacher work areas and restrooms that are convenient to classrooms.

McCargo, who usually sees teacher turnover only when teachers elect to retire, says the architect asked the teachers and the community for design ideas. The input, she says, helps teachers and staff members feel as if they actually own the building.

Not everyone can work in a new building, of course, but it makes sense that the state of school facilities affects morale. Teachers who work everyday in crumbling buildings with leaky roofs and broken plumbing are bound to feel that their work isn’t especially valued.

Morale is especially poor when schools are in disrepair because voters won’t pass bond issues, sending a message about the community’s lack of commitment to education. As Cortese says, “That’s a difficult hurdle to jump.”

Develop Emotional IQ

The phrase “emotional intelligence” was coined by journalist Daniel Goleman, who wrote a book on the topic a decade ago. His subsequent book, *Primal Leadership*, talked

about the importance of bosses who show empathy, sensitivity, respect, and the other characteristics that, in Goleman's formulation, make up emotional intelligence.

"Everyone needs to feel emotional support from the person they work for," he says. "Being empathic, recognizing and appreciating good work, validating efforts, appreciating a well-done job, helping people develop new strengths. All of these things are what good leaders do to help teachers work at their best."

In the corporate world, says Goleman, leaders increasingly are being recruited for these qualities. The idea that good bosses must be cold, tough, and impersonal is fading.

A leader with strong emotional intelligence is a godsend to any building – or district, for that matter – that struggles with staff morale. Such a person finds ways to motivate staff members to work to their highest abilities.

Teachers who feel good about themselves and their work will look for ways to reach all their children, even those who have struggled in the past. They create an atmosphere where everyone wants to be – students included (Vail, 2005).

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, the purpose of the article was to investigate the best practices of recruiting and retaining quality school teachers in a large urban school district. These best practices are the gate-keeper practices to an effective Human Resource Management Department. The research indicated that quality teachers are available but each school district must find ways to attract them. A large urban school district, Aldine Independent School District has developed the best practices to attract and retain quality teachers. The research revealed that retention is as important as recruitment when employing quality teachers. I am a quality teacher because I have been employed by the same school district for 42 years. Aldine ISD recruited me in 1965 and I have been nurtured and rewarded for my efforts. Aldine ISD has proven that quality teachers are available and can be retained. Currently, I am the Director of Safe and Secure Schools. My past experiences included 10 years as a mathematics teacher, 2 years as a counselor, 10 years as an assistant principal, 14 years as a high school principal, and the past 6 years, I have served as a director. I have developed an emotional IQ for my students and Aldine ISD. I salute the Human Resources Department of Aldine for the opportunity to serve! My final remarks are, "I am a teacher who closed the classroom door and empowered my students through learning the application of mathematics facts. I am a competent teacher. Through my dedication and willingness to succeed, I am proud that I had the opportunity to serve the students and parents in my community."

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