

STEP 1

The Need for Best Practice in Hiring

How principals hire, assign, and provide growth opportunities for teachers likely has major ramifications regarding teacher quality.

(Donaldson, 2011, p. 27)

The value of an effective teacher can hardly be disputed. Marzano (2010) wrote, “Today it is considered common knowledge that a classroom teacher is probably the single most powerful influence on student achievement that is within the control of the educational system” (p. 213). Donaldson’s research supported the claim, “There is growing evidence that, of all school resources, teachers have the largest impact on student achievement” (2011, p. 27). If, as Kersten’s work indicated, “a growing body of research has confirmed the link between excellent teachers and increased student achievement,” then “consequently, selecting outstanding teachers is critical” (2008, p. 355). Put succinctly, “One of the single greatest opportunities to improve educational outcomes at any school or school district is to make better hiring decisions” (Rose, English, & Finney, 2014, p. 9).

What differentiates an effective teacher from a less effective one? James Stronge’s work centered on the qualities of effective teachers, summarizing research on the teacher as a person, followed by his/her management, organizational, and instructional skills (Stronge, 2002; Stronge, Tucker, & Hindman, 2004). Stronge and

Hindman (2006) furthered their work by developing a protocol for teacher selection based on the qualities exhibited by effective teachers. They stressed that when one knows the qualities, one can interview for those qualities.

Other researchers have looked at the dispositions of a successful teacher. Wasicsko (2004) developed a checklist for assessing dispositions; it included items such as attitude, believing in students, and being people-oriented. “When we hire a teacher with the right dispositions, students learn and grow, parents are happier, and district administrators can attend to the business of education” (Wasicsko, 2004, p. 40).

Once the strongest teachers are in classrooms, the issue of retention emerges. What will keep the best teachers in their positions? Put another way, why do teachers leave? Ingersoll and Smith’s (2003) research on retention suggested that teachers leave both to pursue jobs that they perceive as better and because of their general dissatisfaction with teaching as a career. In some cases, less pedagogical training is an indicator of those more likely to leave teaching (Ingersoll, Merrill, & May, 2012). Could a better interview lead to the nonselection of teachers who may leave the profession quickly? Should a more thorough hiring process result in higher retention rates of teachers?

WHAT DOES THE TEACHER JOB MARKET LOOK LIKE?

The *Job Search Handbook for Educators*, published annually by the American Association for Employment in Education (AAEE), provides an overview of shortages and surpluses of teachers by field. The 2013 report indicated that no education fields are experiencing considerable shortages, but that several fields have some shortages of teachers. Those fields include “nearly all of the remedial and special education fields, the more advanced math and sciences fields, ESL/ELL, and certain Asian languages” (p. 53). As noted in past AAEE surveys, there continues to be a state of surplus of “teachers of lower grades, and for those in the arts, social sciences, English, and physical education” (AAEE, 2013, p. 53).

With reference to the oversupply of teachers in some fields, the teacher job market might be considered an employers’ market, as those hiring can pick and choose from among the top elementary education candidates, and from the top art, social studies, English,

and PE majors. However, an oversupply creates a unique problem for employers—having to sort through hundreds of applicants to find the right one.

Shortages still exist in certain fields and in certain regions of the country. Finding a highly qualified physics teacher for a small rural school or finding enough special education teachers for positions in a large, urban district are examples.

Faced with the challenges of filling all positions with the best people, and knowing that effective teachers make a difference in student achievement, hiring is a critical area that requires year-round attention.

DELIBERATE BEST PRACTICE

The need for best practice in hiring seems straightforward. Sawchuk (2011) reported that districts are becoming more strategic with regard to hiring teachers, emphasizing that deliberate hiring reinforces the value placed on quality teachers. Principals want teachers who get their jobs done without a lot of constant reinforcement or support, or, in plain terms, without a lot of drama. New hires should already know the latest trends, research, and best practice in their disciplines.

Despite the almost universal acceptance of the need for effective teachers, and the recognition that successful teachers should be retained, many school districts still omit hiring from descriptions of the most urgent and timely jobs of school leaders. There are constraints put on hiring and the hiring process. Time and money are always issues in hiring. Some principals indicate that excessive centralization of hiring is an obstacle in their selection of the best candidates (Donaldson, 2011). Many administrators find that teacher shortages in certain areas make hiring very difficult and that they must resort to hires who are either provisionally or nonfully certified. Some employers deal with contractual obligations, union issues, and longstanding cultural norms as constraints to hiring.

While no one can provide a crystal ball to predict that a hire will or won't be successful, and will or won't stay in the position, the use of best practice in hiring will alleviate much of the uncertainty of the process. There are indeed good and better ways to write a job description, sort candidate paperwork, manage preliminary interviews, and make decisions. The use of longer on-site interviews and

multiple assessments of the candidate’s experience can help to ensure an effective hire. The knowledge base of teacher selection continues to grow. I hope that this book adds to the knowledge base, while offering concrete, user-friendly ideas to all who hire.

Figure 1.1 Best Practice in Hiring

| DO | DO NOT |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Divide hiring into year-round responsibilities. 2. Use multiple assessments of teacher qualifications. 3. Use objective criteria—experience and expertise. 4. Involve teachers in hiring colleagues. 5. Recognize that hiring is recruiting. 6. Know that good hiring leads to retention. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Delay hiring unnecessarily. 2. Use one measure or one interview. 3. Rely on a gut feeling or on hiring acquaintances. 4. Rely on non-subject-matter experts to hire. 5. Overlook the value of making the candidate feel “wooded.” 6. Think that retention of new teachers just happens. |