



Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Teachers

How to staff your school with the best of the best

By John F. Eller and Sheila A. Eller

In light of the teacher shortage, recruiting, hiring, and retaining good teachers are crucial tasks for principals. The three elements are listed together in this article because they are interconnected. We'll look at each element separately, but keep in mind, they work together to help you have the best teachers at your school.

Recruiting

Successful schools and principals are always recruiting. Here are a few common elements to keep in mind in the recruiting process:

- **Reputation.** The public reputation of your school can be a recruiting tool to attract teachers. If the public perception of your school is good, you will have ample applicants. If it is poor, you may have trouble attracting good candidates. Think about how people outside of your school view it, and how this perception might impact applicants.
- **Your reputation.** In addition to the reputation of the school, teacher candidates may also look at your reputation when making an application decision. If you are known for being a good leader, supporting teachers, and keeping the school well-organized, you will attract good candidates.
- **Job ads/postings.** The language you use in your job ads and postings can be a great recruiting tool. Be sure to include positive, action-oriented language. For example, sharing that a middle school math teaching position will offer candidates an opportunity to work on a “collaborative and innovative team of professionals making a difference in the success of students” is much more attractive than simply describing the available job as “a middle school math position.”
- **Networking.** Many schools and principals use meetings and professional development sessions as

a means of recruiting. When you or your teachers attend these sessions, be on the lookout for good teacher candidates. Volunteering to present at university classes in teacher development or administrative preparation is another way to meet great candidates.

Hiring

Finding the right match between teacher candidates and the needs of your school is crucial. An outstanding teacher whose skills don't match the needs of the school will have a difficult time being successful. Keep these elements in mind during the hiring process:

- **Clear expectations.** By setting clear criteria for open positions, you increase the chance that those you interview possess the desired skills and competencies. In our book, *Working With and Evaluating Difficult School Employees*, we discuss the concept of base and surface competencies. The term "base competencies" refers to the skill set the candidate brings with them to the job. "Surface competencies" refers to the set of skills that can be developed on the job through professional development. While both are important, most people run into difficulties because of poor base competencies. Be sure your process includes an

identification of the important base and surface competencies to be successful.

- **Measurement/data.** Human resource research shows that the general interview has the least reliability in predicting future job success. One of the most reliable measures for employee selection is viewing job performance. Since you may not be able to go into each candidate's classroom and see them teach, you may need to do the next-best thing—ask them to conduct a teaching segment with a group of students at your school. We have found great insight into candidates by watching them teach a short segment to a group of students.
- **Stakeholder involvement.** The more stakeholder involvement you can have in the interview process, the wider the "lens" to view candidates. A teacher group interacting with a candidate may see different things than you. By charging stakeholder groups with certain responsibilities during the interview process, you capitalize on their unique views. Consider asking a parent group to report out how they think a potential candidate may interact with and relate to parents.

Retaining

Research tells us that one important factor related to teacher retention is the support they perceive from their principal. Also, the level of support teachers receive from their colleagues can impact their desire to stay at your school. Here are several strategies that can impact teachers' desire to stay at your school:

- **Induction/mentoring.** A structured induction/mentoring program will help new teachers acclimate to your school. In general, induction helps teachers learn how the school operates and how their skill set can fit into the operation. Mentoring refers to the

kind of support teachers receive from colleagues to help them acclimate to the school.

- **Your interest in their success.** Checking in to see how things are going, helping them to connect with other colleagues, and being a good listener are all behaviors that help teachers see that you are interested in them and their success at your school.
- **Professional development and growth opportunities.** People like to know that they have opportunities to grow and improve at their workplace. In his book *Drive*, author Daniel Pink says the opportunity to grow and learn is one of the most powerful motivators in the workplace. By offering teachers focused, purposeful, and embedded professional development opportunities, you show them you are interested in their growth.
- **A sense of purpose.** Many educators today talk about the importance of having a sense of purpose. In their book *The Leadership Challenge*, Barry Posner and James Kouzes discuss the element of purpose and the power of helping people see themselves as "owners" (rather than employees) in an organization. We've seen teachers work hard despite difficult situations and low pay because they felt a sense of purpose.

Teacher recruitment, hiring, and retention are crucial factors to help a school positively impact the lives of its students. In this article, we've touched on a few factors to keep in mind as you work to get the best teachers at your school. 

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Recommended Reading

Working With and Evaluating Difficult School Employees by John F. Eller and Sheila A. Eller

Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us by Daniel Pink

The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations by Barry Posner and James Kouzes