

# Can Students Search for New Staff?

**W**ith guidance, elementary students can help make major decisions about the future of their school—specifically, hiring new staff. At Fletcher Elementary School, sixth-grade students are deeply involved in the process of hiring new staff. They conduct every aspect of the job searches, from crafting the job postings and reviewing applications to writing questions and conducting interviews. Their work isn't complete until they've made a hiring recommendation to the superintendent.

This is one of many efforts we make to promote student leadership and engagement at the sixth-grade level. We emphasize strong communication and collaboration throughout our curriculum, and students practice these skills during events such as classroom meetings and debates. Over time, students assume more responsibility for their own learning. When a technology support position opened at the school midyear, it seemed only fitting that students should participate in the search process.

## Responsibilities and Tasks

With adult support and guidance, students studied the job description, wrote questions, and joined hiring committees that met with candidates. This opportunity was open to any sixth grader, and over half of them opted to participate. For many students, this was the first time they'd seen a cover letter or resume. Following the interviews, the students discussed their perceptions of the candidates' strengths and challenges before making a recommendation.

We successfully found a technology support specialist, Connor Allen, who says the process was positive for him. "Having students interview me made me think more about the type of users I would be servicing and the kinds of interactions I would have, not only with teachers, but also with the students," he says.

With one successful hiring round complete, students took on even more responsibility when vacancies for

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music and special education teachers opened. They crafted job ads that were posted electronically. Students scrutinized all 12 sections of each applicant's online application, including their cover letter, resume, background questions, transcripts, test scores, references, licensure status, extracurricular interests, and the required application essay questions.

In preparing for interviews, students were expected to adhere to the same search committee etiquette as adults. This included having a thorough understanding of the hiring process, the role of the committee, expectations for confidentiality, consistency, being a committed member of the group, keeping an open mind, and being professional and courteous. Students were also expected to dress the part.

Ultimately, students spent about two hours preparing for each set of interviews. As they spoke with candidates, the principal and at least one teacher observed from afar and provided support as necessary (which was minimal).

## Lessons for Students and Staff

Helping with interviews and hiring processes gives students a taste of the professional world and gives them a voice in school decisions.

"These student leadership opportunities let students know that they are important and that they don't have to wait to be grown-ups before they can do meaningful work," says Sandi Simmons, our school counselor who participated in the special education interviews. "They also learn what it means to be professional and confidential."

Here are a few testimonials from a few of our sixth graders:

- "I realize now that there is a lot more to the process than just showing up for an interview. You have to prepare an application that is neat and looks as professional as you can make it look."—Matthew
- "I learned that in order to really know somebody you can't just look at a paper and what they wrote. You have to talk to them, and you have to see how they interact and their social skills."—Sirena
- "When I have to interview somewhere, I will have this experience. Now I know how an interview goes. I know what questions are asked by the group and get asked by the candidate. I learned that there are times when you really have to be professional and mature if you want to be taken seriously."—Brianna
- "I was responsible for a major decision, and I took that very seriously. I helped my school, and I helped myself at the same time."—Ashley

Ultimately, students aren't the only learners in this model. Our staff has learned the value of giving students authentic leadership opportunities. Our students are capable of anything as long as we give them support, feedback, and practice. □

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