

Hiring Process

By Dr. Edward J. Smith



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Improving Best Practices

Principals have the challenging task of hiring teachers to promote a positive school climate, provide instruction and serve the school's mission. As a result of a lack of robust human resource departments, hiring training, and varying hiring practices, principals can miss the mark in selecting quality teachers (Kimbrel, 2019). The current teacher shortages will only add to the challenge principals will face in hiring quality teachers. According to Sutchter et al. (2019; 2016), district leaders must understand the qualities contributing to teacher effectiveness. The weight of accountability and teacher effectiveness have raised the stakes of the quality of education provided to students. Much attention has been paid to improving teaching quality in the United States (Atteberry et al., 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Jackson et al., 2014).

Furthermore, Klassen (2019) states that effective teaching has become a national education priority. Still, there is little systematic attention to how administrators select prospective teachers for the classroom, whether candidates already hired within a school district or new hires. Several strategies and initiatives have been employed across the nation to close the achievement gap and reverse the declining achievement of American students compared to their global peers. There have been several initiatives, including implementing systems that increase school district accountability for student learning, improving university academic standards, and requiring school districts across the nation to employ highly qualified teachers (Ransdell, 2017).

Despite various instructional approaches to decrease the achievement gap of students and increase academic standards, there remains a challenge regarding school district administrators hiring effective teachers.

Many school districts have used their systems for selecting, interviewing and hiring teachers, while others rely on commercial products to assist in recruiting teachers to their districts. This article investigates a different approach to the hiring process of many districts to assess teacher candidates' professional dispositions, interpersonal skills, content knowledge and ability to establish themselves with existing staff.

As most educators know, the topic of dispositions is central to teacher education and educators. Dispositions have been defined as individuals' personal qualities or characteristics, "including attitudes, beliefs, interests, appreciations, values and modes of adjustments" (Taylor & Wasicsko, 2000, p. 5). The following descriptors and terms encompass the concept of dispositions: "adopts, appreciates, believes, is committed to, has enthusiasm, persists, realizes, recognizes, responds, seeks, is sensitive to, understands and values" (Johnston et al., 2018, p. 3). These attributes represent dispositions, and individuals behave based on these attributes.

How to conduct the interview process both efficiently and effectively has been the subject of considerable research that has examined such factors as the interview process, prior experience of candidates, formal and informal testing, observation, teacher artifacts and administrator perceptions and observations (Harris et al., 2014). Most, if not all, building and district administrators spend many hours developing an interview process that they feel will yield the best teachers to hire, and this is a crucial role for educational leaders. Additionally,



many think that an essential task of a principal is to hire highly qualified, exceptional staff. Hiring effective educators can increase students' academic growth and accelerate change in the culture and dynamics of a school. A poor hiring decision can result in declining school culture and problems for years to come. In other words, principals must make hiring decisions for teachers one of their top priorities. In addition, much of the current research demonstrates that principals' leadership style and skills impact how they decide which teachers to hire. By way of contrast, research suggests that throughout the hiring process, principals focus heavily on personality and behaviors when selecting teachers and want teachers who are caring, enthusiastic, motivated, honest and emotionally stable (Cannata & Engel, 2012; Harris & Rutledge, 2010). Consequently, most principals engage individually developed interview styles that can be based on how administrators were originally hired years earlier. In short, the screening of applicants and the interviewing process are the most important elements of pre-employment decision-making that occur in the hiring process (Lyng, 2009).

I contend that school districts looking to improve their hiring practices should begin by refocusing their efforts on the overall interview process, which could increase the likelihood of improving the effectiveness of the overall teaching staff of a school or district. In May 2022, our school district posted potential openings for elementary positions for the 2022-2023 school year, and we had over 230 applicants. Many schools, including those in some large urban districts, receive more applications for open teaching positions than they have vacancies. Principals no longer have the luxury of consulting a list of applications and choosing a teacher by reviewing paper applications, conducting an interview and recommending a hire. Instead, principals should review pre-hire teacher characteristics, including performance in the job interview or during a demonstration lesson, and adopt related screening tools to inform their selection and hiring decisions (Bruno & Strunk, 2019). Cannata et al. (2017) indicated that many districts had adopted screening tools that are intended to be rigorous, such as structured interview protocols or standardized batteries of assessments that provide principals with measures to justify their hiring decisions. At times, principals seek assistance in the teacher selection process, and several commercially created interview tools to assess teacher quality have been available for purchase. A few nationally recognized companies provide school districts the

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opportunity to purchase their screening protocols and contract for services their companies offer. Humanex Ventures for Excellence, Gallup Teacher Perceiver, Teacher Quality Index (TQI©), Haberman Star Teacher Pre-screener and TeacherInsight (™) are widely recognized in school settings.

Throughout the current “hiring season,” our elementary principal team utilized the services of the Haberman Star Teacher Pre-screener as the first step in our hiring process. We determined the Haberman Star Teacher pre-screener provided us with the dispositional information we felt were key indicators of potential success as a teacher. For example, we reviewed each candidate's strengths in the following areas: Persistence, organization and planning, valuing student learning, theory to practice, at-risk students, approach to students, survivability of school bureaucracy, explaining teacher success, explaining student

success and fallibility. The candidate attains a particular score in each category, which is tallied for an overall score. We utilized the candidates who scored the highest and invited them to the next phase of the interview process.

The next phase of the interview process involved inviting the top 75 candidates to a Zoom pre-screener interview. The interview consisted of four main questions: **1)** “Tell us something you recently learned to do outside of teaching children?” **2)** “What is the biggest challenge you've faced in your current position, previous role or during student teaching? How did you overcome this challenge?” **3)** “What makes teaching enjoyable and motivating for you?” **4)** “Are you willing to consider

a long-term substitute position or a building substitute role.” Once again, these questions gave the team insights into the candidate's disposition. The team reviewed our data collection and invited the successful candidates for a structured 20-minute interview. The traditional structured interview provided the team the data needed to determine the candidate's ability to communicate clearly, knowledge of content, curriculum, planning, situational scenarios and relationship building with all stakeholders. Next, the successful candidates were invited to conduct demonstration lessons with age/grade-level-appropriate students. These demonstration lessons provided the team with clear evidence of a candidate's abilities to form quick relationships with students, content knowledge, lesson planning, communication and how they react to student performance.

The final phase of the interview involves the entire principal team discussing their building needs and which candidate is the best match for the building's needs. The successful candidate is then invited to interview with a central office administrator to ensure the candidate is the right match for