

TEACHER RECRUITING

Research and Best Practices for Recruiting and Hiring Excellent Teachers



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Recruiting for Excellence

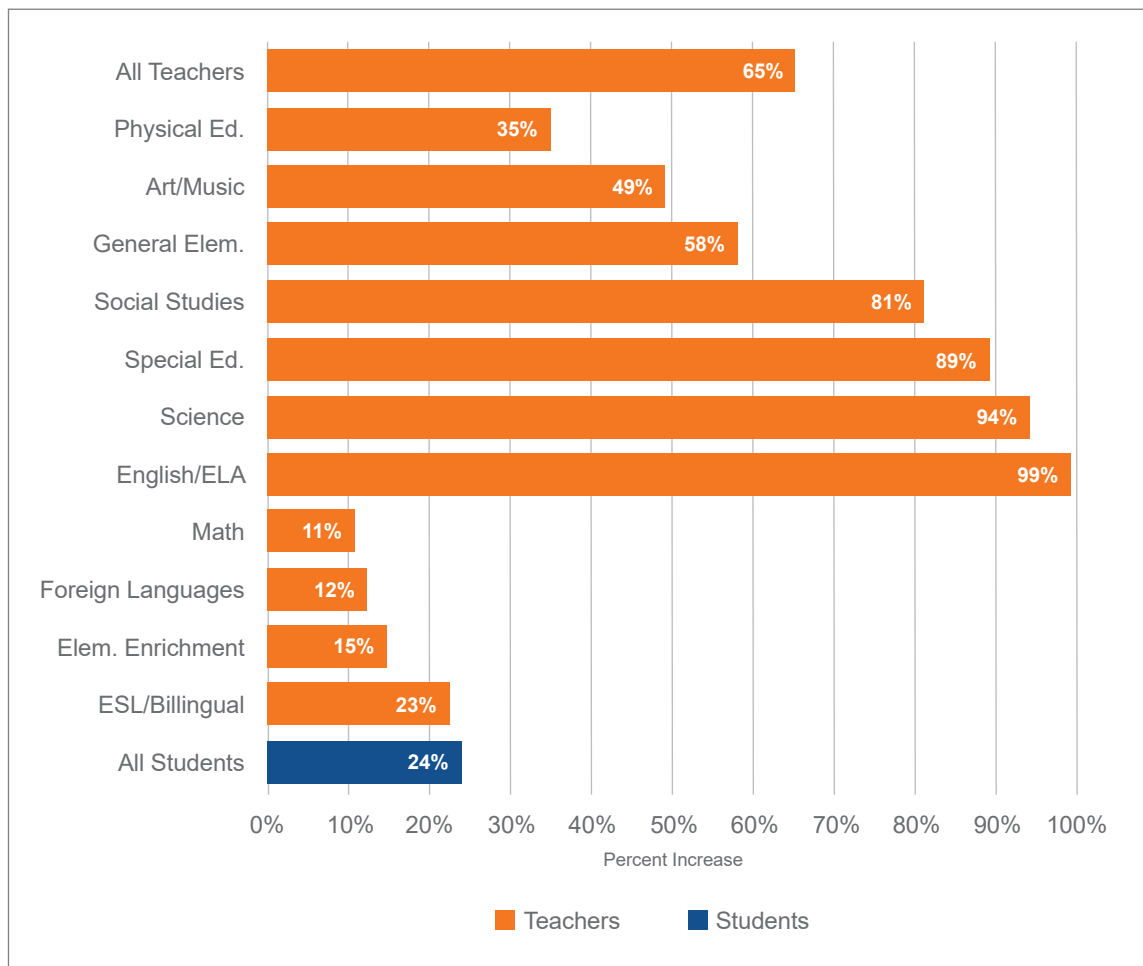
Today, there are more public-school teachers than ever, yet all 50 states and over half of public-school districts report teacher shortages in at least some grades, subjects, or regions.¹ Hiring teachers is hard and getting harder every year as unemployment drops, alternative job options proliferate, and teaching becomes ever more challenging. Hiring for hard-to-fill roles such as math, science, and STEM teachers, special educators, behaviorists and paraprofessionals, and foreign language teachers poses a special challenge; districts located in remote areas or with high proportions of low-income or minority students have difficulty attracting enough educators across all subjects.

But, as challenging as it can be, hiring a sufficient number of teachers is not the goal: the goal is to hire great teachers. A systematic focus on the recruiting process can improve student outcomes and enhance equity. To ensure all students have access to capable, high-quality teachers, districts must both reduce turnover and win the competition for top talent.

The Teaching Force Today

The number of public school teachers grew about 2.5x faster than K-12 student enrollment over the past 30 years, up 65% from SY 1987-88 to SY 2015-16; by comparison, the number of public school students rose 24%.² Growth in the teaching force over the past three decades has been driven by declining student-teacher ratios and exploding demand in certain fields, leading to skyrocketing numbers of science, math, special education, ESL/bilingual, foreign language, reading, and elementary enrichment educators. On average, teachers are now older, but less experienced, and the proportion of teachers who are women has grown, as has teacher diversity by race and ethnicity.

Percent Increase in Public School Teachers, by Field, and Students, SY 1987-88 to SY 2015-16



Source: Richard M. Ingersoll, Elizabeth Merrill, Daniel Stuckey, and Gregory Collins, "Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force, updated October 2018," Research Report (#RR 2018-2), Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania, update to report previously published April 2014, https://repository.upenn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1109&context=cpre_researchreports.

The Need for New Teachers

While the number of teachers has grown, districts constantly struggle to fill the number of openings each year. The number of people completing teacher prep programs has declined 23% over the past decade, and rates of attrition and turnover, especially among new teachers, are devastating.³ Each year, one out of six teachers leaves their current job, either to teach at another school or exit the profession entirely. Only about one-third are retirements or involuntarily turnover; the bulk—about two-thirds—voluntarily elect to depart or change schools.⁴

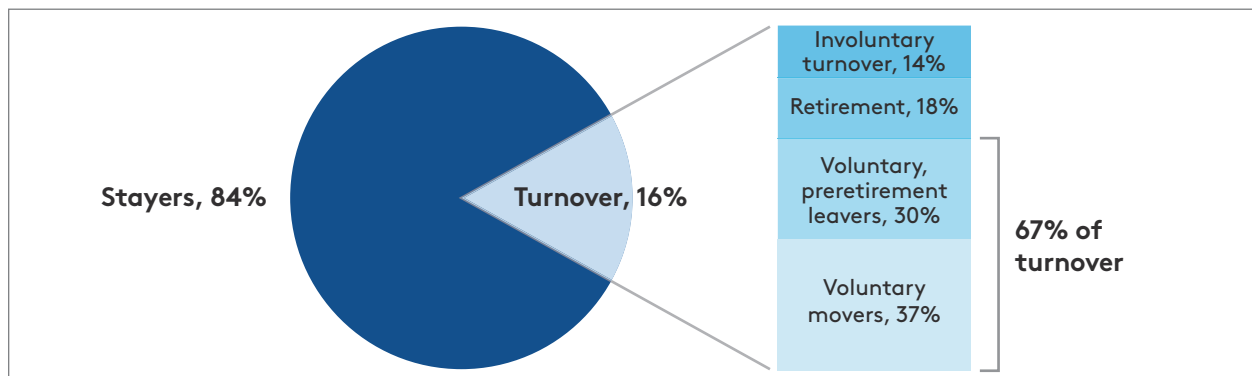
Decreasing turnover can save districts separation, recruitment, hiring, and training costs for each position, which in some areas can cost upward of \$20,000—even with smooth departures.⁵ Ensuring that strong performers are hired in the first place is key to reducing turnover and containing costs. Trying to actively remove teachers, especially tenured teachers, is costly and time consuming.⁶ “When a teacher is hired, districts are making what may turn out to be a large, long-term financial commitment; it is sensible to make sure that the recruitment and selection process works well,” wrote one team of education researchers.⁷



Teacher Turnover Facts and Figures

- **9% of new teachers** do not return for a second year.⁸
- Within five years of starting, **44.6%** of new teachers leave teaching.
- **Title I schools** have turnover rates averaging **50%** annually.
- Generally, teachers who change schools relocate from relatively poorer to wealthier schools, **from urban to suburban schools**, and from high-minority to low-minority schools, even within the same district.
- Teacher turnover costs **over \$2 billion** per year nationwide.⁹

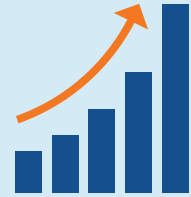
Sources of Teacher Turnover, SY 2011-12 to SY 2012-13



Source: National Center for Education Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey, 2011-2012 and Teacher Follow-Up Survey, 2012-2013 cited in Desiree Carver-Thomas and Linda Darling-Hammond, “Teacher Turnover: Why It Matters and What We Can Do About It,” (Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, August 2017).

Teacher Workforce Trends

The public-school teacher force has grown nearly three times faster than the student population over the past 30 years. Researchers Richard M. Ingersoll, Elizabeth Merrill, Daniel Stuckey, and Gregory Collins of the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE), a network of top U.S. education researchers, identify seven trends characteristic of the teaching force today:



1. **Larger:** There are more teachers.

- The number of public-school teachers has risen by 65% since SY 1987-88, compared to a 24% jump in the student population.

2. **Grayer:** Teachers are older, on average.

- The modal, or most common, age used to be 41, rose to 55 by SY 2007-08, and is now spread out—with the modal age ranging from the mid-30s to the mid-40s.

3. **Greener:** Teachers are less experienced, on average.

- In the 1980s, the most common level of teaching experience was 15 years in the classroom; in SY 2015-2016, it was 5 years.
- Around 4 out of 10 new teachers are at least 29 years old when they start teaching, many of them mid-career switchers coming from other professions.

4. **More Female:** The teaching force is more tilted toward women.

- The proportion of women in the teaching force has risen from nearly 67% at the start of the 1980s to 76.6% in SY 2015-2016.
- The number of male teachers has increased 31% during the same span, but the number of women teachers has grown even more—at 79%!

5. **More Diverse, by Race-Ethnicity:** While more diverse than ever before, the teaching force still does not mirror the diversity of the student population.

- Since 1987-1988, the number of minority teachers has gone up 162%, compared to 51% growth among white/non-Hispanic teachers.
- 39% of the overall U.S. population belongs to a minority group, and 51% of public-school K-12 students, yet just 20% of teachers do.

6. **Consistent in Academic Ability:** The teaching force continues to struggle as a profession to attract top students.

- For decades, the standardized test scores of college graduates who become teachers have on average lagged those of all college graduates, including peers in the same fields and majors who went on to other professions.
- However, standardized test scores and teachers' academic performance in college are imperfect proxies, at best, for teaching ability.

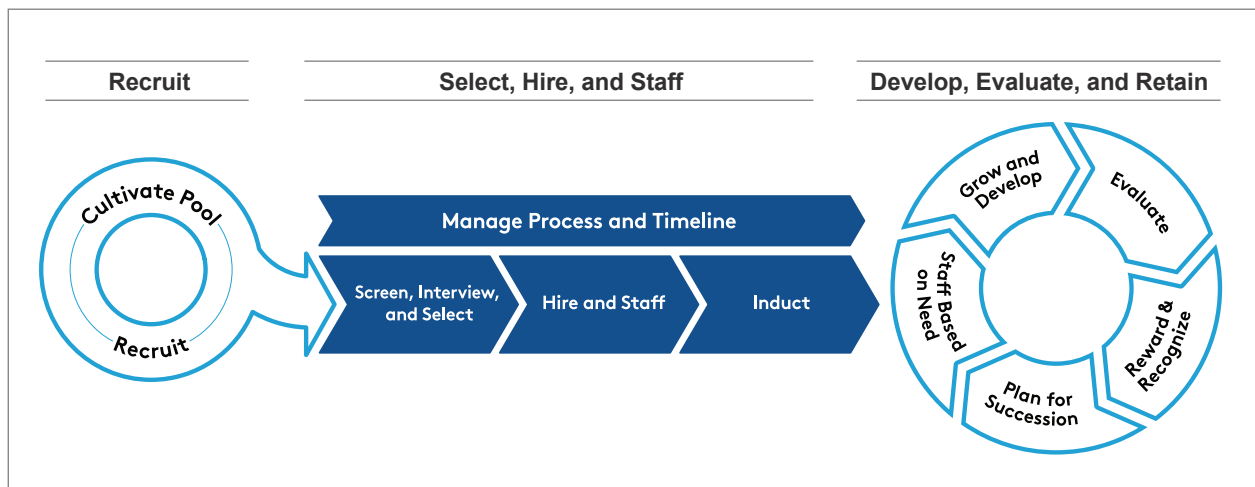
7. **Unstable:** New teachers leave the profession at high rates.

- About one in three new teachers exit teaching within three years.

Win the Competition for Top Talent: Strengthen the Recruiting Process

A strong recruiting strategy aligns human resources (HR) activities with the district’s organizational strategy, district strategy, and theory of action. Recruitment typically encompasses cultivating a robust pool of candidates, recruiting candidates to attract them to apply, screening and assessing candidates, and finally selecting and hiring the new teachers. The below framework displays recruitment activities in the context of an overall district human capital process.

DMGroup Human Capital Framework



Source: DMGroup.

District Human Resources Function: A Vital Recruiting Role

The average public school district devotes the equivalent of just 1.8 employees to recruitment (by comparison, some charter networks recommend as many as one fulltime recruiter per 25 positions recruited).¹⁰ While principals often make final teacher hiring decisions, the district HR function plays a vital role by coordinating with schools to organize the overall recruiting process and make it more manageable for principals. To do so, among central office’s most important functions are to set out the overall recruiting calendar, cultivate and

screen a robust pool of candidates, communicate with schools to understand their needs, and create and maintain systems for application management, pre-screening, interviewing, extending offers, contracting and staffing, and onboarding.

“HR—like a lot of central office functions—is best thought of as a service to the schools,” said Dr. Jack Dale, DMGroup Senior Advisor, “central office folks ought to be thinking about how to be responsive to principals’ needs.”

Cultivate the Pool

More Accurately Projecting How Many Teachers We Need

Cultivating the pool means ensuring the district has access to sufficient high-quality teacher candidates. To do so, districts need a thorough understanding of expected vacancies for the coming year. “We all want to hire the very best teachers, but what really drives recruitment is the number of vacancies that you have. You need a teacher in every classroom on the first day of school,” said DMGroup Senior Advisor Dr. Abelardo Saavedra.

Coordination with principals is crucial. Beginning in November, with a second push around February, central office should collect from principals vacancy projections for the coming academic year to prepare for the recruitment season by assessing known departures, retirements, and staff intent to return. In addition, data analysis of past years’ departure and teacher-movement patterns can help districts augment principal vacancy projections by anticipating the number of expected openings across the district, by school and position. Using data to project vacancies allows districts to engage in a systematic, year-round effort to pursue high-quality prospective teachers, rather than reactively waiting for a vacancy to open or guessing about how many and which teachers might retire the coming summer.

Teacher Sources: Where Do We Successfully Hire Teachers?

Districts do well to track their largest current sources of candidates and track the hire rate from each source. Qualitative information about different sources is critical because candidates from different programs and backgrounds have distinct characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses. For example, Dr. Saavedra recalled that, when he was superintendent of Houston ISD (TX), the district recruited teachers most successfully from schools of education that emphasized equity and equality. Graduates from nearby programs that emphasized the needs of low-income and minority students tended to be more receptive to—and successful in—Houston’s urban schools. “We recruited at 12 or 15 universities, mostly in the state of Texas. The schools that best matched our philosophy and focus on low-income kids were Texas A&M College Station, UT Austin, and the University of Houston,” Saavedra said. “There is a crop of teachers at those schools, and also from Teach for America, who want to teach in low-income, hard-to-teach areas.”

Where Does Your District Post Job Openings? Are You Missing Opportunities?

Most districts post teaching job openings on their district websites while neglecting other potential sources of high-quality teachers.¹¹

- **Schools of Education:** While about two-thirds of districts post on the job boards of in-state schools of education, fewer than one in three districts seek to recruit teachers from schools outside the state.
- **Job Fairs:** Less than half of districts recruit at college job fairs or other large recruiting events.
- **Alternative Certifications:** Just one in five districts advertises on job boards of alternative certification programs, despite the fact that 20% of new teachers come out of such programs.
- **Social Media:** Under 33% of districts advertise teaching jobs on social media sites.

Partnering with Teacher Prep Programs

Partnerships between districts and teacher prep programs can be mutually beneficial. For example, districts are wise to coordinate with nearby schools of education to cultivate teachers in the district's most-needed fields and subjects, perhaps even working together to train teachers in specific curricula or methods the district employs. Depending on state and local requirements, some districts go further by establishing professional development schools—"spaces where prospective teacher and mentor teacher learning becomes 1) experimental, 2) grounded in teacher questions, 3) collaborative, 4) connected to and derived from teachers' work with their students, and 5) sustained, intensive, and connected to other aspects of school change."¹² There are more than 1,000 partnerships nationally between schools, districts, and colleges that call themselves professional development schools and allow teachers to gain field and internship experiences while simultaneously giving districts early access to get to know and assess soon-to-be-teachers.

For example, Duval County Public Schools (FL) partnered with the University of North Florida in Jacksonville to designate a number of elementary,

middle, and high schools—all low performing—as professional development schools. A significant number of student teachers from UNF Jacksonville spent one semester as a part of their certification gaining "rich, clinical practice experiences."¹³ The district and the university shared the cost of faculty to offer intensive coaching and feedback to candidates, who also attended on-site methods courses that "provide opportunities to work directly with elementary and middle school students through tutoring in both reading and math, with a focus on impacting student learning." Upon certification, many participants went to work in the same schools, or elsewhere in the district. The program created some extra work for the principals of the professional development schools to manage around 10-12 student-teachers each semester, but those principals also benefitted from a semester-long trial period, after which they had first rights in the district to hire the graduates.

Research on teachers who went through professional development school programs indicates they are more likely to stay in the teaching professions and may, on average, perform better, as well.¹⁴



Central office folks ought to be thinking about how to be responsive to principals' needs.

Dr. Jack Dale

DMGroup Senior Advisor



Alternative Certification Programs

About 30% of the nation's more than 26,000 teacher preparation programs are alternative-route programs, including programs within and outside of institutions of higher education.¹⁵ Alternative-route certification programs are commonly available online and offer greater flexibility for potential teachers that need to work while becoming certified or have other constraints. In general, alternative-route teacher preparation programs were more racially diverse, with blacks comprising 16-18% of alternative-route enrollees and Hispanics 18%, versus 9% black enrollment and 11% Hispanic enrollment in traditional programs.

At Duval County Public Schools (FL), former-Superintendent Dr. Ed Pratt-Danals, now a DMGroup Senior Advisor, partnered with local universities to increase the pathways to teaching certification. For example, "We worked with the university to offer a minor in education for undergraduates, which they previously didn't have," he said. "That way, a biology or chemistry or humanities major could get an education minor and be on the path to certification without needing to enroll for an extra one or two years in a teaching program." Pratt-Danals also worked to find certification avenues to take advantage of the large number of Navy veterans and retirees in their mid-40s in the Jacksonville, FL, area, many of whom were well-versed in math, science, and technology subjects needed in the schools. "We told people to try out teaching: you know the subject, try being a teacher and see if it's for you. You can always move on if you change your mind." For those who took to the vocation, Duval County Public Schools counseled the best of several state-approved certification programs designed specifically for mid-career entrants into teaching.

A Clear and Compelling District Brand

Districts often compete with neighboring districts for in-demand teachers, and presenting the district as an appealing and exciting place to work is an essential element of attracting top candidates. For example, Houston ISD routinely competed for teachers with nearby suburban districts. "Urban districts can't just match suburban districts on salary to attract great teachers. Cities are more expensive and less convenient, neighborhood dynamics are different, and so is the type of student," Dr. Saavedra said. Districts that brand themselves effectively elevate the teaching profession and offer unique, exciting opportunities to attract high quality talent. Rare is the district that integrates its district PR activities into its recruiting efforts; those that do, like Bibb County School District (GA), "synchronize both intermittent and year-round promotional campaigns for maximum exposure."¹⁶



Rare is the district that integrates its district PR activities into its recruiting efforts.



Bibb County School District (GA) initiated focus groups and a "secret shopper" program to understand how candidates experience the recruitment and selection process. Secret shoppers evaluated everything from the presentation and cleanliness of the district's parking lots, building lobbies, and school common areas to the attractiveness of the tour it gave potential employees. The district also considered its online image, ensuring its websites and electronic communications were accurate, timely, and consistent.

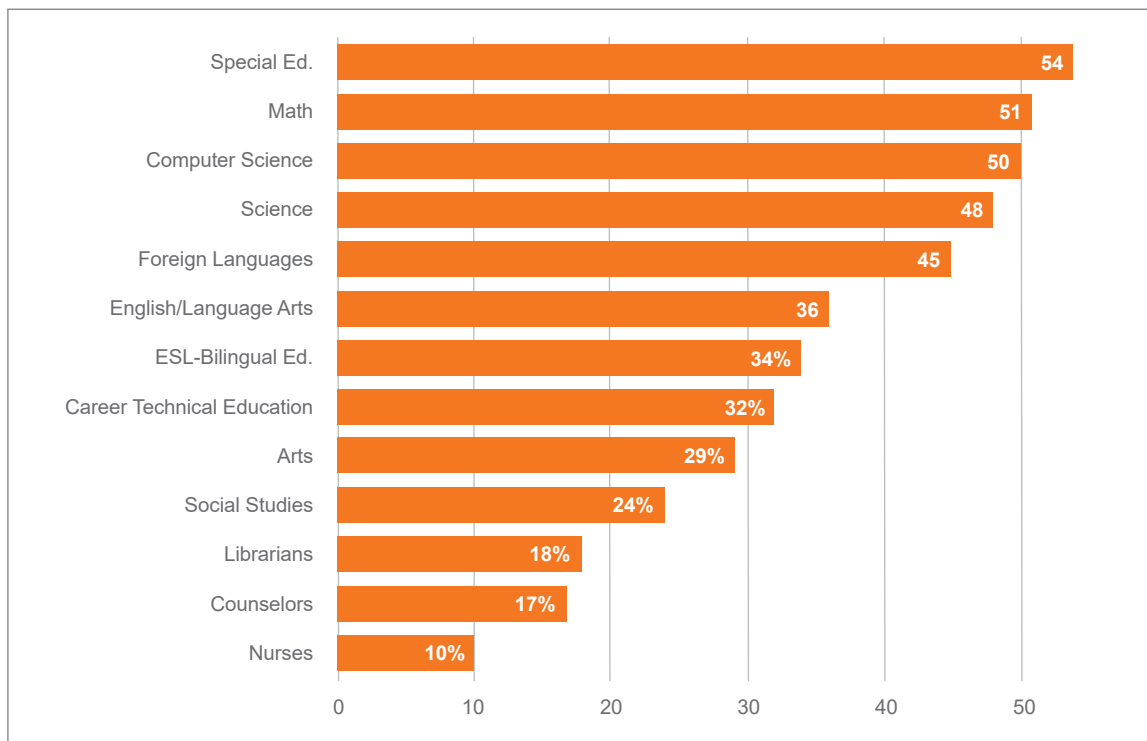
Hard-to-Fill Positions

When recruiting for hard-to-fill positions, or for districts that face challenges attracting and keeping teachers such as those in remote locations or with high proportions of minority and low-income students, districts can turn challenges into features. For example, in remote Pasco, WA—population 70,000 and two hours' drive from the closest big city—78% of 2,250 high school students are Latino, 80% qualify for FRPL, 35% are ELL, and 10% use or are eligible for special education services. When recruiting, though, Principal Raúl Sital frames those daunting statistics as an opportunity for talented and passionate teachers. “I tell them, ‘If you really want to make a difference, come here,’” he said, emphasizing the value of teachers who “understand the student population, believe in their students' ability to be successful, and purposefully decide to work in a high-poverty, majority-minority context.”¹⁷

Similarly, Pratt-Danals said, “We made it clear to teachers that we’re not paying you to just be there, we’re paying you to make a difference. You’re the best, and we need you.”

In a further effort to enhance the district’s desirability, Bibb County School District established a speakers’ bureau—a platform for teachers to share their subject expertise about other cultures, plant sciences, auto mechanics, local history of interest to community groups and civic organizations. The district also sought to “Develop and consistently reinforce positive ‘image cues’ that are appropriate such as ‘technology-rich,’ ‘innovative instruction,’ ‘student-focused’ or ‘a tradition of excellence’ when developing promotional materials.”

Number of U.S. States/Territories Reporting Statewide Teacher Shortages, by Specialty, SY 2016-2018



Source: U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education cited in Debra Viadero, “Teacher Recruitment and Retention: It’s Complicated,” Education Week, January 23, 2018, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/01/24/teaching-shortages-many-answers-for-a-complex.html>.

Recruit, Screen, Interview, & Select

Leveraging Principals as Recruiters Can Be a Win-Win

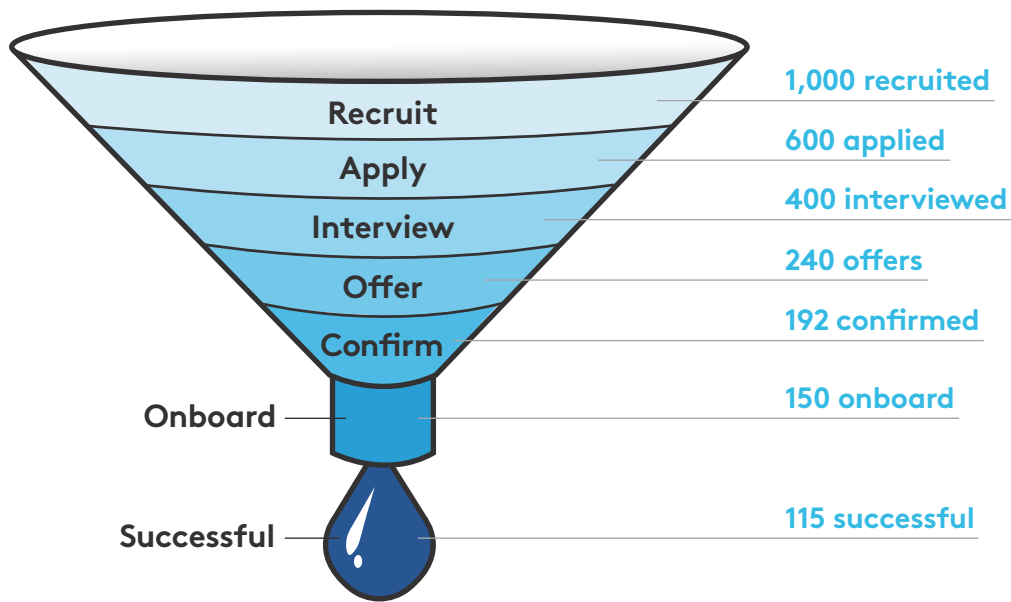
As superintendent, Dr. Pratt-Danals used his most charismatic and enthusiastic principals—who had reputations for making great hires and getting people to stay at their own schools—as recruiting agents on behalf of the entire district. “We had a rotation of five to ten principals who went on the road and weren’t just recruiting for their individual schools, they were representing the district as a whole. We sent principals who were enthusiastic, who could represent our vision well, and who could talk about the great experiences our teachers had.” Although it cost time and energy, principals were frequently willing to make the effort out of a sense of commitment to other schools across the district, and as an opportunity to get a “sneak peak” at the best potential candidates ahead of central office and other schools, perhaps gaining an advantage in hiring for their own school.

Centralized Screening

Districts—and especially principals—can be overwhelmed when faced with openings to fill and pools of hundreds or thousands of unknown candidates. A centralized screening process helps winnow the number of candidates to a more manageable and targeted group, filtering out candidates who are not certified or do not fit district needs.

For many districts, it can be helpful to conceptualize the teacher-recruiting process as a funnel. At the top of the funnel, the district makes contact with a wide variety of prospective teachers through referrals, job postings, advertisements, job fairs, and other prospecting efforts. From there, a certain number of prospects apply, go through evaluations and interviews, and are offered a position. At each stage, the funnel narrows as the district identifies and pursues the individuals who will make the best teachers and best fit the district’s needs, while winnowing out the rest in a systematic fashion.

Recruiting Funnel



Districts can collect and analyze data on the recruitment funnel to understand where there are holes or shortages as prospective teachers advance from step to step through the process. Where are the most successful teachers first making contact with the district? Does the district need to increase the pool of prospects entering at the top of the funnel? Is a poorly designed application process or interview experience causing potentially good hires to drop out of the process? Is a better offer or the promise of new-teacher supports and perks luring candidates to take offers from the district next door?

Hiring Criteria: Defining Teacher Skills, Traits, and Qualities

To establish an effective pre-screening process, districts must ask: what qualities are we looking for, and how well do those qualities predict future success? Identifying roles and key characteristics of each role so that hiring and teacher evaluation criteria are aligned increases the ability to hire teachers who go on to thrive in the district and reduces the effects of variation from principal to principal and unconscious bias, which often drive much of the selection process. Key questions for districts to include:

- What skills, traits, or qualities matter most for each position?
- How can we assess these during the recruitment process?
- Are these criteria aligned with our district's teacher evaluation and development criteria?

Utilizing Traditional and Non-Traditional Information for Screening

Districts that collect and analyze both traditional and non-traditional application information to screen and evaluate teacher candidates are better able to predict teacher effectiveness. Traditional information includes educational history and attainment, licensure, employment experience, etc. Non-traditional data may include written assessments of content knowledge, instructional practice, performance tasks, psychological assessments of traits such as conscientiousness or extroversion, and more. Analysis has shown that using both traditional and non-traditional information can improve districts' ability to predict a candidate's potential contribution to student achievement (value-added contributions to student learning), whether the teacher will reliably come to work, and whether the teacher is likely to stay in the job.¹⁸ However, predicting teacher performance remains a significant challenge even when non-traditional information is factored into the evaluation.

Traditional Screening Information

- Academic record (e.g., undergraduate major, GPA)
- Prior teaching and/or professional experience
- Quality of recommendation, résumé, and cover letter

Non-traditional Screening Information

- Personality or psychographic data, e.g., Big Five or Myers-Briggs indicators
- Student performance data/student growth scores from previous teaching experience
- Performance task, e.g., teaching a real or model lesson

Managing the Applicant Pool: Two Examples of Centralized Screening



Two-Tiered Teacher Applicant Screening in Spokane Public Schools (WA)

Spokane Public Schools (WA) developed candidate screening measures that were associated with statistically significant increases in student achievement and decreases in attrition.¹⁹ The district prescreened all applicants using a 21-point scoring rubric that, while not specific to any particular job in the district, attempted to rate prospective teachers on:

- Experience: years teaching, type of school/district, subjects taught, gaps in experience.
- Depth of skills: undergraduate major, internships, trainings, relevant work experience, strong content knowledge, classroom management, differentiated instruction, experience with diverse student populations, ability to make learning relevant and engage students.
- Quality of recommendation: strength of recommendation, personal or professional recommendation, does the writer regularly evaluate teachers (preference of letter from principal, assistant principal, instructional coach, superintendent).

The purpose of SPS's prescreening "is to narrow the applicant pool to a manageable size before the second stage of screening, which is conducted at the school level and led by school principals." Central office forwards suitable applicants to principals, who often request candidates who scored above a certain cutoff on the 21-point scale. Principals decide whom to invite for an interview based in part on applicants' scores on a second, 60-point evaluation along criteria including experience, flexibility, instructional skills, interpersonal skills, cultural competency, and preferred qualifications.



Centralized Teacher Application Screening in Washington, D.C.

District of Columbia Public Schools (Washington, D.C.) transitioned to a centralized applicant-screening process in 2009 to better manage the roughly 3,500 applications it handled annually. The "TeachDC" selection process asks applicants to fill out a written assessment to gauge their understanding of subject-specific content and instructional practice. District staff then conduct a 30-minute formal interview with applicants and evaluate a brief sample lesson.

Research on the DCPS screening system found that the written assessment, interview, and "audition" scores, when combined with traditional information, "strongly predict an individual's performance on the district's teacher evaluation system. Indeed, candidates in the top quartile of applicant quality score 0.6 standard deviations above applicants in the bottom quartile, a difference that is equivalent to the improvement that an average teacher makes between her first and third year on the job."²⁰ Candidates' GPA and the selectivity of the college they attended also positively correlated with later performance on teacher evaluation metrics.

Administering and scoring the interviews and audition lessons take about two hours of staff time plus the overhead costs of managing the entire process. The "total cost of the additional screening is no more than \$500 per hire," research found. However, despite improving the district's ability to predict which candidates would make better teachers, only 30% of top-scoring applicants took a job with DCPS—just 13-14% of all applicants. Of those prospects recommended to principals after undergoing the TeachDC process, 50% were hired.

Interviews and Performance Tasks

Almost three out of four principals are not trained in best practices—or even the legal requirements—to effectively screen and interview candidates.²¹

“Just a few hours of training can make a hiring team far more effective,” stated one report, whose authors lamented that “many principals never get even that much help.” Interview best practices for principals and interviewers at central office include asking the right type of question. Research shows that questions about actual past experiences are better predictors of future success than general “fit” questions.

Interviewing: the Boston Public Schools (MA) way

Instead of asking general questions (“Can you tell me a little about yourself? Why do you want this position? What are your greatest strengths/weaknesses?”), Boston Public Schools tries to probe candidates about their past behavior or performance with questions like:

- Tell me about a time you had a student that wasn’t making much growth in reading. What did you do? How did it turn out?
- What strategies have you used to meet the needs of inclusion students in your class? How effective were they?
- What data can you share about how your students have performed in the past?

An array of performance tasks and non-traditional interview formats can also yield even more predictive insight into a candidate’s ability than rote interviews, which candidates often use as opportunities to merely recite their résumés aloud. Such tasks and formats might include asking candidates to teach a

model or real lesson, write a lesson plan on the spot, analyze student achievement data, respond to a case study, or engage in a role-playing exercise. Non-traditional indicators like a personality profile or student growth scores from previous teaching experience can also be helpful. Including performance tasks in the hiring process:

- Helps assess teaching style, management techniques, and motivational and cultural fit;
- Presents candidates with real-life teaching scenarios;
- Allows district to see how candidates handle typical or specific scenarios;
- Provides a way to quantifiably assess candidates, removing subjective notions of what makes a good teacher;
- Considers more than education, experience, and certifications;

Atlanta Public Schools (GA) evaluates candidate’s “soft” skills, such as teaching style, by framing interview questions around the candidate’s instructional abilities (e.g., by asking “How do you teach the slow learner and the fast learner all in one room?”), belief systems (e.g., “Do you believe all students can be successful?”), and classroom management abilities (e.g., by asking candidates how they would respond to a specific scenario presented as a video, for example, depicting a teacher having difficulty calming a rowdy classroom). The district evaluates “hard” skills, like math and writing, through skill challenges. For example, a writing sample such as a mock letter to a parent for a student who has been misbehaving or a case study, where candidates read and present their analysis of a data-filled report or scenario description.

Making an Attractive Offer

A powerful tool for districts to attract more of the teachers they screen and want to hire—when targeted and politically acceptable—is offering differentiated pay for hard-to-fill positions. As few as 13% of districts use incentives to recruit or retain teachers in positions and fields with short-ages, and 6% to recruit or retain teachers in less desirable locations.²²

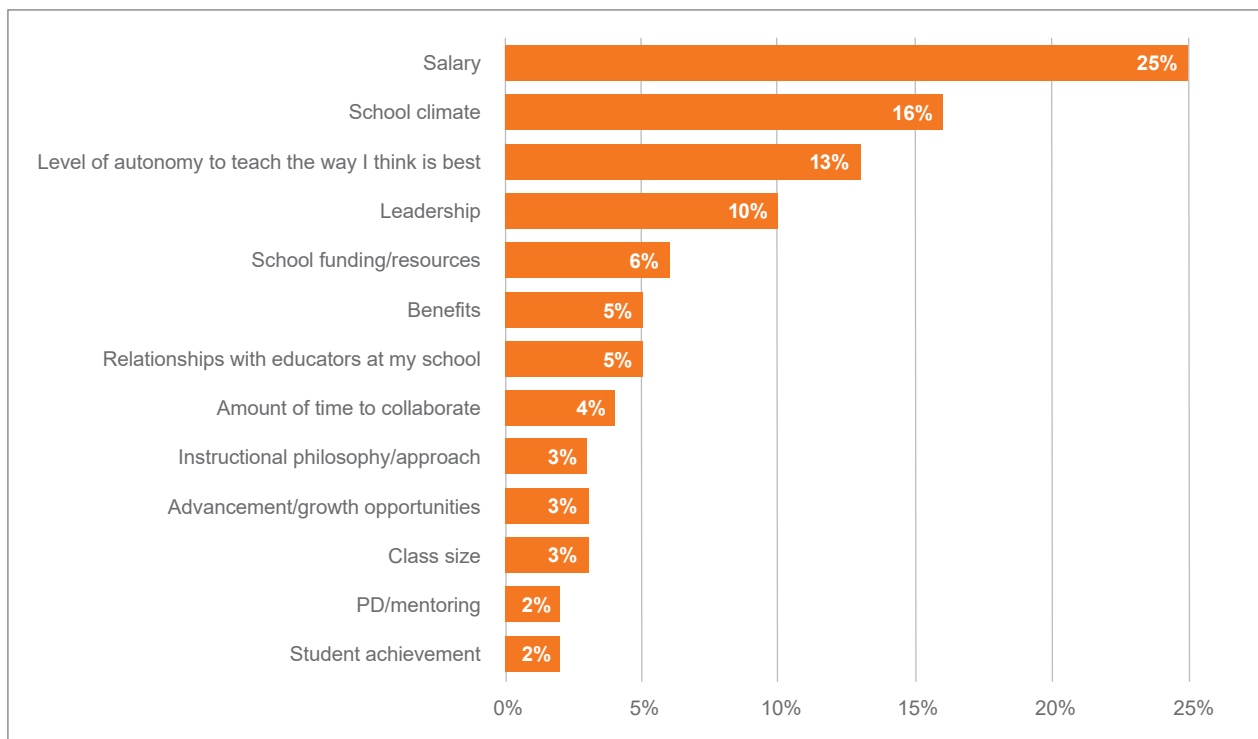
It should be noted that, along with non-wage financial incentives and higher pay, teachers value a number of factors in the workplace, including a positive school culture, strong principal leadership, and healthy relationships with their peers.

When considering offering differentiated pay, districts ought to respect the existing salary matrix, perhaps by starting hard-to-staff new

hires in Lane 2 or higher. For example, in the state of Georgia, new math and science teachers are allowed to start at the pay grade equivalent of five years of experience; however, “the differential declines over time and is eliminated at the end of five years.”²³ Likewise, Holly Area Schools’ (MI) teacher union contract allows the district to start first-year teachers in hard-to-fill positions at the second level of the seniority-based pay scale.

In addition to differentiated pay, research suggests that certain non-wage financial incentives, such as one-time bonuses or loan-forgiveness programs, can be effective to attract and retain higher-quality teachers in hard-to-staff roles. In 2018, NYC launched the “Bronx Plan,” a program designed to pay teachers \$5,000 to \$8,000 annual bonuses to teach in hard-to-staff schools that did not depend

Percentage of Teachers Reporting What Would Make Them Remain in Their Current Jobs, 2017



Results based on Education Week Research Center September 2017 online survey of a nationally representative sample of more than 500 K-12 teachers. The margin of error is plus or minus 4%; data does not add to 100%; respondents were asked to select all answers that applied.

Source: U.S. Department of Education Office of Postsecondary Education cited in Debra Viadero, “Teacher Recruitment and Retention: It’s Complicated,” Education Week, January 23, 2018, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/01/24/teaching-shortages-many-answers-for-a-complex.html>.

on student achievement or any other outcome. The bonuses were part of NYC's new \$2.1 billion labor contract that includes raises for all teachers of 2-3% per year for the next three years.²⁴

At least 40 states have set up service scholarship or loan forgiveness programs that subsidize the cost of teacher preparation programs for individuals who agree to serve as a teacher for around three to five years.²⁵ One study found that a loan forgiveness program in Florida, which has been running for 20 years, helped bring down attrition among middle school math and science teachers by 10.4%, with an 8.9% improvement in high schools. In addition, the study found that one-time bonuses could reduce “the likelihood of teachers’ exit by as much as 32 percent in the short run.” Around 25% of public school teachers who leave the profession claim that they might be motivated to come back to teaching if there were more of an emphasis on loan forgiveness in the profession. With any loan-forgiveness or repayment-support program, it is essential to cover a sufficiently large portion of tuition and costs to incentivize people at the margins to take part while balancing with a penalty to deter individuals from subsequently leaving the profession (“but not so punitive that they avoid the scholarship entirely”).²⁶

Open Contracts

When Atlanta Public Schools (GA) identified a candidate it liked, it offered that candidate an

“open contract” as soon as possible. The candidate signed a contract with the district with the understanding that they would not be given a specific assignment until later, securing the best teachers or the district earlier in the recruiting cycle and offering candidates peace-of-mind. In 2017, Atlanta Public Schools built a pipeline of the top 2% of teachers, filled 100% of their vacancies before the first day of school, and saved over \$200,000 in travel costs.

Dr. Pratt-Danals empowered his principal-recruiters in the same way. Principals who went on recruiting trips for Duval County Public Schools (FL) were empowered to extend job offers on the spot, without waiting for the typical central-office screening process. “Principals had authority to do contract on the spot. The teacher wouldn’t know which school they were going to, but they had a job,” Dr. Pratt-Danals said. These “open contracts” guaranteed the candidate a job somewhere in the district, even if the specific school or position had to be finalized later. In this way, the district was able to lock in commitments from strong candidates identified by principals with track records of effectively spotting such candidates, while teachers benefitted from the assurance that they would have a job at a district they desired upon completion of their certification. As with all phases of the recruitment process, Dr. Pratt-Danals collected data and feedback from principals on how well the open-contract hires worked out and the quality of the process.



The study found that one-time bonuses could reduce “the likelihood of teachers’ exit by as much as 32 percent in the short run.”



Conclusion: Strategic Teacher Recruiting

When it comes to student learning and achievement, no school-based factor matters more than having great teachers. Strategically recruiting and hiring high-quality teachers is a defining feature of high-performing districts. At a time when the profile of the teaching force is changing and teacher shortages are widespread in many fields and geographies, it is vital that districts take a strategic approach to refining their teacher recruitment efforts.

A systematic focus on the recruiting process gives districts a better understanding of the needs of schools and allows for the cultivation of a robust pool of potential teacher candidates to meet those needs. Districts that optimize their teacher recruiting processes:

- Use data to more accurately project vacancies and recruitment needs targeted by school and subject;
- Understand and partner with the district's most valuable sources of teachers to encourage a better fit between district needs and new teachers;
- Screen candidates to increase the quality of the applicant pool and make it more manageable;
- Use different types of available information to ensure new teachers possess the skills, traits, and qualities to excel as a teacher in the district; and
- Facilitate a smooth application, interviewing, and hiring process to improve the recruiting process for teachers, schools, and central office.

With a robust and well-structured recruiting process, districts maximize their ability to attract great teachers and improve student outcomes.

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