

Strategic Talent Management: Hiring the Right Teachers

Hiring effective teachers requires more than a generic job description.

By Michael V. Pregot, Ed.D.



In many workplaces, human resource personnel are called “talent seekers” and “talent managers.” Their job is to ensure that the knowledge and skill set for each job in the organization are clearly defined, and that the people hired to fill those positions meet the requirements—have the talent.

Effective teachers are at the heart of any successful school system. Talent seekers and managers look for candidates with superior teaching skills, of course, but too often they focus on the candidates’ experience and credentials and are somewhat dismissive of the

importance of other site-specific variables, such as student demographics, results of the school’s annual review, or faculty dynamics.

In his book *Strategic Management of Human Capital in Education*, Allan Odden (2011) says, “The strategic needs for acquiring, developing, and retaining talent should flow from the education system’s improvement strategy.” Following that logic, school district leaders should require principals to prepare a unique job description for each teaching position. Typically, job specifications include such traditional elements as

Table 1. Building Enhanced Strategic Considerations into a Teacher Search

Possible Dimension	Question(s) to Ask	What If . . . ?	Example of Job Objective	Beneficial Skill Set(s) and Knowledge
Current documented academic status of the school	What are the critical goals for this particular teacher?	School has a below-average graduation and grade promotion rate.	Ability to instill a love for learning in each child	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differentiated instruction knowledge Structured student engagement tactics
Analysis of demographic variables	What are some prevailing characteristics of the student-learning process?	School has many ethnicities and non-English-dominant home languages.	Understanding of the principles of celebrating multicultural diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Skill in ESL instruction Expertise in value clarification training
Professional team instructional style	What planning style does the grade/content teaching team use?	Teachers work closely in teams with joint consensus in seeking next steps.	Advocacy for peer collegial input into instructional practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Team planning techniques Consensus-building approaches
Annual district and school goals	What are the accepted annual goals of the school?	School morale seems to be waning among all constituent parties.	Application of concepts of developing interpersonal relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of higher-level social interactions Inclusionary planning practices
Level of parental engagement desired	How does the school prefer to interact with parental values?	Parents, as a rule, tend to refrain from engagement unless asked for help.	Use of interactive parent-friendly materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concepts of adult-learning theory Shared goal setting
Evaluation of student data	What are some implications of current test scores, student behaviors, and attendance?	Only 2 out of 3 students pass annual state competency tests.	Competency in knowledge and instruction of curricular core standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum alignment to assessment design Remedial student services

Note: ESL = English as a second language.

academic degrees earned, grade point average achieved, and previous instructional experiences. Additional factors specific to the needs of the school may include experience working with various student ethnicities, experience planning curriculum using a team-based approach, and proficiency in aligning curriculum and instruction to a school’s mission. Skills in instruction as well as those other capabilities should intertwine to define each candidate (Elmore and Burney 1999).

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In essence, hiring and retaining exceptional instructors requires schools and school districts to attend to the initial selection, mentoring, and long-range professional development of the teachers. Schools and districts should then create an atmosphere that embraces those new hires and leverages their strengths with other school and district needs. If those two strategic functions can be blended successfully, newly hired instructors can thrive and grow.

Defining Characteristics

A typical job description for a high school foreign-language teacher might read as follows:

Duties to include:

- Demonstrate varied levels of instruction of the French language, from elementary to advanced.
- Demonstrate proper intonation and phrasing to simulate native French fluency.
- Prepare students for competency tests.
- Understand French culture and the history of the French people.
- Work in cross-disciplinary academic units stressing an appreciation for world literature.

Required skills/qualifications: An undergraduate degree in French, state-level teacher certification in French, oral competency in oral/aural French expression, knowledge of popular and traditional French literature, and proven ability to prepare students for foreign-language tests.

The education leader may then consider the unique needs and characteristics of the school, for example, an influx of Creole-speaking students, declining enrollment in foreign-language classes, or a school goal of increasing the number of college-bound students. Such needs

and characteristics may prompt the education leader to add four more qualifications and job duties for that particular position:

- Possess the knowledge and skills to speak various derivatives of French, including Creole.
- Promote student appreciation of different cultural groups.
- Implement strategies to attract and retain new students into language-based academic electives.
- Prepare students for Advanced Placement language tests.

An enhanced job description promotes talent management and school and school district success in three ways:

- It guides the search committee by highlighting the desirable traits for each particular position.
- It can be used as a benchmark for a search committee as it moves to the final stages of selection and induction.
- The identified characteristics could be incorporated into an annual evaluation system to measure the tightness of fit between the desired skills set cited in the job description and the annual performance of the newly hired staff member.

Table 1 illustrates how the school and district mission can be woven into the teacher candidate search.

Not only should a basic job description be developed for every teaching position, it should be refined to include the basic instructional skills required for that position, as well as other attributes that would promote the school's needs. Moreover, individual candidates can now reflect on those comprehensive expectations to see if indeed they possess the required "talents" for the job.

References

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