

Great candidates have choices: Follow these steps to help them choose you

By Mark Frost, Ed.D.
Regional strategic advisor at TalentEd
and former assistant superintendent of HR at
Park Hill School District in Greater Kansas City



TALENTED

Empower talent. Elevate education.





Back in the early 1980s when I began teaching, there was tremendous competition for each teaching position. Districts had multiple candidates to choose from, and teachers would go anywhere and coach or sponsor anything to get a position.

“Get your foot in the door,” was the mantra. “Get some experience and move up.”

Over the years, I noticed our ability to attract and hire the most talented candidates waned and competition stiffened for the best candidates. Colleges and universities began cutting programs such as industrial technology and family and consumer studies. At the same time, other departments recruited teaching candidates to pursue other majors with the promise of better pay and upward mobility. States began collecting information on the degree of shortages by area of teaching certification. The trend of teacher shortages for top talent had begun and has only worsened over the past 20 years.

In 1996, after suffering through about three years of frustrating staffing scenarios, I made the decision that the era of the buggy whip was over — I had to change to meet the changing market where great teacher candidates were scarce.

I had to do something that was somewhat foreign in the realm of recruiting teachers: I had to start thinking proactively about how I could attract and hire great candidates at my school district.

Recognizing that I had little control over the growing national teacher shortage, I focused on what I could control: minimizing the teacher shortage for my school district. Thus began a decade of trial and error and moving toward proactive recruiting that allowed us to source the best candidates.

The strategies that worked for decades in my Missouri school district can be replicated and scaled for any school system.

Here are a few things that work:



1 Recognize that great candidates have choices, and show what makes your district a great place to work and learn.

Work with your principals to identify the key strengths of your schools and district, then ensure that the talking points are known and articulated consistently across the organization. Great candidates want to work in collaborative environments with autonomy, support for professional development, and upward mobility. Include those details in your talking points.

2 Develop marketing materials that provide a clear message on the strengths and values of the district.

Keep everything simple, clean and professional. Use the district's website and social networking avenues to share events, fliers, infographics and other marketing materials. Remember that you and your team are the best marketing platform when meeting candidates. Dress and communicate professionally. Truly listen and strive to understand your candidates' hopes, dreams and desires. Connect with them on a personal level.

3 Communicate early and often.

We have all experienced the deafening silence that occurs after the application process or the first interview. In the minds of candidates, that silence translates to "I must not be a good fit for them." Communicate constantly with great candidates to inform them of your process, timeline and possible job opportunities. Ask them to contact you if they receive another job offer before you make a decision. Timeliness, decisiveness and great communication carry high rewards.

4 Set clear expectations among your hiring managers.

Train your principals and hiring managers on what good recruiting looks like and enforce those expectations. Great candidates have choices, and most place a heavy emphasis on how they feel about the district office administration, principals, teachers and other staff they'll work alongside. Recruiters are evaluated to the same degree that we are attempting to evaluate candidates. Aligned and well-executed communication and processes highlight a well-run district.

5 Encourage principals and human resources to work together.

Working as a team is always better than principals working in isolation. Human resources departments should serve as the coach who leads the team down the field together. This requires training, communication and enforcement of processes. Know which candidates are in your district at any given moment and which principal or administrator they are meeting. The job of HR is to get the best candidates on your team and place them where they will meet the district's strategic plan. This requires management. Don't let a principal work in a silo to recruit and hire just for his or her school.

6 Partner with colleges and universities.

Building relationships with select colleges and universities is one of the most missed opportunities in K-12 recruiting. Aside from the standard process of serving as a partner district for pre-service teachers, I organized a team of first-year teachers from each university, principals and myself who served as guest presenters for evening classes. We conducted mock interviews and provided honest feedback, offered job search tricks and shared first-year preparation tips. We ended the night with a survey to gain feedback on the value we provided and showed a short marketing video about our district, then invited candidates to apply to our open positions. Students who liked the people standing in front of them and the information they shared wanted to be a part of that winning team!

7 Target college career fairs.

Career fairs on college and university campuses provide a rich talent pool for assessment and recruiting. Analyze where your effective teachers are coming from — look at different colleges, majors, clubs and athletic groups — and work

with the career office to meet candidates before other districts. In addition, I identified large career fairs in select locations of the country that were underrepresented by school districts. I kept those secrets to myself and provided resources to support top candidates' travel to my district. If you live in the Midwest and want to fish for salmon, you have to go where the salmon swim.

8 Make decisions quickly.

Time is not your friend during a teacher shortage. Great candidates often have many choices. Ensure that your hiring team understands that long hours and working weekends is essential to moving candidates through your process and making a job offer. I learned long ago that the key to K-12 success is finding and hiring great teachers, period! If a candidate is predicted to be a strong to outstanding teacher, don't wait weeks or months to see if someone better comes along. Take great candidates off the market as quickly as you find them or you'll risk another district hiring them. Know what you are looking for and be decisive.



9 Carefully select student teachers.

Training our next generation of teachers is an obligation that I accepted with vigor. However, we screened student teachers rigorously to ensure we knew whom we were putting in front of our students and to determine if they would be great candidates for the district. Student teachers were then provided additional training and advanced communication and interaction with human resources. I recommend monitoring student teachers' successes early and offering them teaching positions early to remove them from other district's pipelines. Moving to a more proactive student teacher selection process allowed us to hire over 50 percent of our student teachers instead of 5 percent. The upfront time and effort is an easy win.

Recruiting and hiring is hard work for all districts, but it's harder for some because of their geography, resources, facilities, low student achievement, etc. The strategies above can assist in developing your candidate pool and hiring excellent teachers.



By Mark Frost, Ed.D.

Regional strategic advisor at TalentEd
and former assistant superintendent of HR at
Park Hill School District in Greater Kansas City

10 Whenever possible, automate processes.

Applicant tracking systems that allow for ease of application, managing processes, pre-screeners, analytics, social networking, effective communication, job requisitions, recommendations to hire and marketing are essential. Use your system to the fullest. If it doesn't advance your ability to quickly identify and move teachers through the hiring process, go to market and review other technology solutions.

