

TEACHER HIRING PRACTICES

IN NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL DISTRICTS

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January 2005

Note: The formatting of this report is different from that printed and distributed by the Education Finance Research Consortium and available on their website: <http://www.albany.edu/edfin>.

Acknowledgements: This project would not have been possible without significant help from a number of individuals. Tom Rogers at NYSCOSS graciously sponsored the survey. We want to especially thank Briggs McAndrews at NYSCOSS, who provided significant help with all aspects of the survey. Several superintendents and district administrators provided valuable advice on survey design including Marilyn Dominick, Superintendent at Jordan Elbridge School District; Martin Swenson, Superintendent at Fabius-Pompey School District; Yvonne Young, Associate Superintendent for Support Services at Syracuse City School District; Rudy Rubeis, Superintendent at West Genesee School District; Joe Proscia, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction at West Genesee School District; and Sally Romano, Director of Personnel at West Genesee School District. Deborah Cunningham, Charles Szuberla, Johanna Duncan-Poitier, Nancy Willie-Schiff, and Joe Porter of the New York State Education Department reviewed the survey and provided helpful comments. Dan Goldhaber and Michael DeArmond of the University of Washington had a number of valuable suggestions on both the content and design of the survey. Willow Jacobson at the University of North Carolina, Pat Ingraham at Syracuse University, and Mark Robbins and Bill Simonsen, at the University of Connecticut, critiqued the survey instrument, and proposed a number of revisions to reduce length and improve clarity. We also want to thank Jeff McLellan, Kim Kirsch, and Bob Bifulco for their comments on preliminary draft of the report. We appreciate the willingness of Robert Strauss of Carnegie Mellon University to allow us to borrow from his survey on teacher hiring practices in Pennsylvania. Errors and omissions are, of course, solely the responsibility of the authors.

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Executive Summary

Decades of research on the determinants of student achievement make it clear that high quality teachers matter for student success, but measuring teacher quality can be difficult. With states under pressure to raise teacher quality to comply with NCLB and with a significant increase in demand for teachers projected for the next decade, school districts may face significant teacher recruitment challenges. Recruiting high quality teachers is likely to be all the more difficult in high poverty districts (Loeb, 2000).

Despite the recent focus on teacher quality, relatively little research exists on district practices to recruit, screen and select teachers. This study takes a first step in filling this gap by documenting teacher hiring practices in New York State. To collect information on these practices, we designed a mail (and online) survey that was sent to 684 superintendents in the state. Thanks to significant support we received from the New York State Council of School Superintendents (NYSCOSS) and the New York State Education Department (SED) we were able to obtain a very high response rate (71%) to the survey. We greatly appreciate the willingness of superintendents to carefully complete the survey. The survey respondents are very representative of the whole state. The heart of this report is summarizing the results of the survey of teacher hiring practices. The survey was divided roughly into three sections: recruitment, screening and selection, and resource needs and comments.

Summary of Survey Results

From the responses to recruitment questions, we can draw several important conclusions about the use of more and less traditional practices to expand the supply of teachers and increase applicants.

- Subjects for which districts have the most difficulty recruiting teachers are mathematics, science, foreign language, vocational education, and ESL. Low enrollment districts have greater difficulty recruiting math, special education, music/art, vocational, and ESL teachers than high enrollment districts, and high need urban districts have more difficulty recruiting math, science, and foreign language teachers than low need districts.
- Most districts appear to use a shared process for recruitment. In small districts, superintendents, principals and teachers are most involved. As the district gets larger, human resource directors, assistant principals, and school department heads take over a part of the recruitment responsibility.

- Local newspapers remain the major form of advertising, especially in small districts. High need urban districts appear to advertise less frequently than other districts, particularly in newspapers.
- Most districts work with local colleges by supervising student teachers, posting job notices at the colleges, and contacting college faculty. Except for posting job notices in non-local New York colleges, school districts generally do not work with non-local colleges on recruitment.
- The typical district attends one job fair, and 37% of districts attend no job fairs. Attendance at job fairs goes up significantly with enrollment and use of BOCES recruitment fair services.
- The internet should be an ideal medium for teacher recruitment because, for relatively little cost, a district can have access to a national market of teachers. Approximately three-quarters of districts use the internet, primarily to post job notices on the school district websites and other recruitment websites. A much smaller share use the internet to search for job candidates. Large districts and those using BOCES online services are more likely to use the internet.
- Of the districts completing the survey, approximately half the districts use hiring services provided by BOCES, particularly for online applications, online vacancy notices, advertising and recruitment fairs. The BOCES providing the broadest range of services and serving the most districts is the Putnam-Westchester BOCES. This BOCES also operates an online application system (OLAS) used by 150 school districts.
- Most districts use compensation for extracurricular activities and crediting teachers for teaching experience outside the district as teacher recruitment incentives. A much smaller set of districts provide additional compensation for National Board Certification (NBC), subsidized tuition at local colleges, and credit for work experience outside of teaching. Teacher contract negotiations are probably a major constraint on the wider use of recruitment incentives.
- Almost 90% of districts use some strategy to increase the local supply of teachers. The main strategies are recruiting substitute teachers, alternatively certified teachers, and retired teachers as well as providing assistance for paraprofessionals to become teachers.
- Districts with more difficulty recruiting teachers are more apt to use all of the strategies to increase the local supply of teachers and to use recruiting incentives, such as compensation for extra-curricular activities, credit for non-district or non-teaching experience, and subsidized tuition for college. However, they are not more likely to use incentives such as signing bonuses, help with the purchase of a home, or compensation for National Board Certification.

Districts conduct very involved screening and selection processes. As expected, the larger the district and the higher fiscal capacity of the district the more involved the process, particularly with regard to interviewing. Some of the key findings are:

- Almost all districts require applicants to submit application forms, college transcripts, letters of recommendation, letters of interest, resumes, and proof of certification. A

majority require certification exam scores and writing samples, but only 30% require teaching portfolios.

- In choosing candidates to interview, districts most often consider certification in the subject to be taught, major in the subject to be taught, and references/recommendations as important criteria. A much smaller share consider measures of a candidate's academic success including certification exam scores, grade point average, caliber of the certifying institution, and quality of the teaching portfolio. High need urban districts consider similar criteria in screening as other districts, but do put more emphasis on residence in the district and pre-screening tests. Districts with human resource managers are more likely to ask candidates to submit writing samples and to consider the caliber of certifying institutions in the screening process.
- The typical school district conducts between two and three interviews of 30 to 40 minutes each with a candidate before deciding whether to make an offer of employment. This number of interviews increases with enrollment and with the fiscal capacity of the district. New York districts appear to have, on average, one more interview per position than districts in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, based on recent studies. Small districts are more apt to involve the superintendent and teachers in the interview process and less likely to include HR managers, assistant principals, and school department heads. Low need districts are much more likely to involve parents and community members.
- The vast majority of districts discuss each of the interview topics listed in the survey, with two exceptions. Only 64% discuss issues of diversity and just 50% require candidates to teach sample lessons. Principals and teachers are most apt to observe sample lessons followed by school department heads and assistant principals, if the district has these positions.
- In districts that conduct only one interview, school level personnel participate in a large majority of interviews while district level personnel participate approximately half the time. In two interview districts, the first interview tends to be dominated by school personnel and the second by district personnel. In three interview districts, the first interview tends to be dominated by school personnel and the third by district personnel, while the second is mixed. As the number of interviews a district conducts increases, so does the likelihood that it requires a sample lesson.
- Superintendents, followed by principals, are highly involved in the selection of candidates in all districts. The most important criteria in selecting candidates are certification in the subject to be taught, major in the subject to be taught, references/recommendations, and subject knowledge demonstrated in the interviews. Similar to Strauss et al. (1998), we found that academic criteria (certification exam scores, quality of the certifying institution, quality of teaching portfolios, and MA degrees) are less frequently cited as important in teacher selection than willingness to participate in extra-curricular activities.
- Districts with difficulty recruiting teachers use a very similar screening and selection process as districts that do not have difficulty.

We asked several questions about the present use of services from SED, and the training topics and support services districts are interested in receiving.

- Presently, about half of the districts use SED services, primarily by contacting SED staff members or using the SED website. Very few districts use training materials supplied by

SED. Use of SED services appears to go up with enrollment for all types of services with only one-third of small districts using these services.

- A relatively small share of districts expressed an interest in training and support on teacher hiring practices. The areas of interest identified most frequently include a common statewide teaching application, training materials on selected practices, and a statewide online recruitment website where districts could post job openings and prospective teachers could search for jobs. Districts that are experiencing more recruiting difficulty are more apt to express an interest in a statewide website to post job notices, to disseminate good practices, and provide links to other teacher recruitment websites.

Recommendations

Teacher recruitment is one of the most important activities of a school district given the relative permanence of the appointment and high cost to the district. Most school districts in New York use a range of approaches to attract applicants, and employ involved processes for screening and selecting applicants. However, their search process is generally in the local area, and most districts are not presently using the full potential of the internet in the search process. With the exception of using some BOCES hiring services, most districts tend to organize, advertise, and manage the hiring process by themselves. Assuming that the supply of prospective teachers is not fixed, the sharing of resources and technical expertise across districts could improve the hiring process for all districts. The survey suggests that school districts could benefit from a unified effort by state agencies and associations to expand common resources, provide technical assistance, and increase awareness of available resources and good practices. Specific recommendations include:

- **Increase in staffing within SED to provide technical assistance to school districts on teacher recruitment and selection practices.** Presently, there is no staff person within SED with the principal task of assisting districts with teacher hiring. We recommend that SED hire a dedicated staff person(s) to pull together available information on policies, practices, and resources on teacher recruitment and selection. Besides managing this central data base, this staff person could serve a crucial role in disseminating information, organizing training opportunities, and facilitating communication across organizations. The staff person could also keep track of teacher labor market trends, help inform policymakers about fields and geographic areas where teacher shortages are occurring, and inform school and college personnel on where employment opportunities in teaching may be available. Increased staffing within SED is crucial for the successful implementation of the other recommendations discussed below.
- **Creation of a unified website on teacher hiring practices and policies to be managed by SED.** The website would be hosted by SED and managed with the assistance of an advisory group discussed below, and would pull together information already available from SED and additional resources on teacher hiring. The website should provide information on legal requirements, technical assistance, preferred practices, and available resources. Initially, the website would be for information exchange purposes, but could be expanded to include an online application system and an interactive teacher search engine.

- **Creation of annual training sessions at the NYSCOSS annual conference**, and other venues, which address teacher recruitment and selection practices. These sessions would bring together experts from SED, NYSCOSS, and other relevant organizations to present information on innovative practices, legal changes, and major challenges districts face in hiring teachers.
- **Expansion and coordination of BOCES hiring services.** The heavy use of the OLAS system and other services provided by the Putnam-Westchester BOCES suggest that there is a strong interest in these services. However, small districts are still less apt to use them even though they are likely to benefit the most. In some cases, their BOCES may provide only a limited set of services and they may not be aware of services available from other BOCES.
- **Provision of training for district interview team members.** Since the interview process is particularly important, it would be worthwhile to ensure that district personnel are versed in sound interviewing techniques. BOCES could offer in-district training sessions for designated interview team members.
- **Creation of an advisory council to assist SED in identifying, evaluating, and disseminating promising practices.** The council should include, among others, representatives from NYSCOSS, district human resource managers, human resource professionals in other public or private organizations, and faculty at New York colleges with an expertise in human resource management. Functions of the advisory council could include:
 - Developing training sessions and training materials.
 - Advising SED in the development and maintenance of their recruitment website.
 - Evaluating online recruitment websites and other recruitment resources.
 - Coordinating research on the effectiveness of promising practices, which might evaluate:
 - The impact of online recruitment tools and non-local advertising on increasing the number of strong applicants from teachers living outside the local area.
 - The effectiveness of pre-screening tests in identifying strong teaching candidates.
 - The benefits and costs of the use of sample lessons in the interview process and examples of successful use.
 - The role of HR directors in the hiring process, how they can be used most effectively, and mechanisms for making these services available to small districts.
 - The effectiveness of particular recruitment incentives in attracting high quality candidates to apply and accept positions, particularly in high need districts.