

Hiring the Best

While new college graduates and career changers worry about failing to find a teaching position, principals face an abundance of underqualified applicants for openings. Stories abound about receiving 600 applicants for one kindergarten opening in a small, rural school or a tenfold increase in applicants.

How should applications be sorted so you hire the best candidate? Which strategies net the most highly qualified applicants? Can something be done to limit applications and still maintain a strong pool of potential new hires?

The Market

Awareness of the national and regional job markets will help you to gauge how much advertising to do. For trends in the supply and demand of teachers, see the 2012 *Job Search Handbook for Educators*, published by the American Association for Employment in Education.

When an opening occurs, envision the position as you truly want it. Then, describe in writing the specifications for the certification, experience, and skills required of the job. Posting one line on a national or state website that lists your need for an elementary teacher for grades 1-5 will net hundreds, or perhaps thousands, of applicants. Instead, consider the following:

Appleton District seeks two fully certified elementary teachers with type 11 licenses for grades K-5. Preference given to those with special education or reading endorsements and experience teaching grades 3 or 4 within the past three years. Class size will range from 20 to 26, with special needs students representing 25 percent of each class.

The ad continues by specifying how to apply, the deadline, dates and locations for job fair screening interviews, and requirements for on-site interviews and teaching a sample lesson.

A specific job advertisement makes sorting easier because a criteria checklist, or rubric, can be created for an administrative assistant to rate

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the applicants' paperwork. After the initial sort, the quantity of applicants can be narrowed by as much as 50 percent. The next sort is to review those candidates who appear at one of the two job fairs. Now, a principal can review the paperwork of those candidates who made the cut at two different levels—paperwork and job fair—and look for outstanding resumes, letters of recommendation, grades, and teaching experience. Telephone or online interviews may be needed to further narrow the field to those invited for on-site interviews.

General elementary education positions attract many fully qualified candidates. In narrowing the field, look for:

1. Leadership positions and awards in college or previous jobs;
2. Teaching experiences with populations similar to your district;
3. The candidate's knowledge about and experience in your district;
4. Evidence of raising student achievement;
5. Ongoing professional development;
6. Exceptionally well-written paperwork; and
7. Letters of recommendation that stand out.

Preliminary Interviews

When applicant numbers are high, preliminary interviews are time- and money-savers. Before going to a job fair to conduct preliminary interviews, create a list of questions to ask each candidate with an evaluation scale of numbers or unacceptable, acceptable, and target categories for the answers. Strive to use a behavior-based model. Behavior-based interviewing (BBI) has been used for decades in the business world, and is built on the premise that past behavior is the best predictor of future performance. A few example questions follow:

1. Describe your best teaching experience.
2. Tell me about a classroom management plan that you have used successfully.
3. Describe a lesson that went well and why it succeeded.
4. How have you differentiated a lesson to meet the needs of students?

At job fairs, recruiters often simply take resumes and ask one "sorting" question. That question might be "tell me about a teaching success you have had." Recruiters should use the same sorting question with each candidate. Even with only one question, some candidates do stand out.

Telephone interviews should be conducted after job fairs to further narrow the pool of candidates. Again, write out the questions that will be asked of each candidate, and evaluate each answer.

On-site Interviews

Using the BBI approach, write a list of questions to be asked of each candidate well before the first interview. If a team of teachers interviews the candidates, then each person on the team asks his or her predetermined question from the list that the team has created. All members of the team have the list of questions in front of them, and rate the candidate's answers.

The team should focus the questions on the skills and experiences needed to be successful in the teaching job, including curriculum, planning, teaching methods, classroom management, differentiation, assessment, student development, communication with parents, and professionalism. Your list will include specific questions such as:

1. How have you used student data to diagnose reading issues and improve comprehension?
2. Describe a management or discipline issue you encountered and how you resolved it.
3. Tell about your experiences with team planning, collaboration, or committee work.
4. Describe an activity that would be developmentally appropriate for second grade, but much too advanced for kindergarten.

Teaching Observation

When candidates teach a lesson, you see their natural skills with children. Lessons should be discussed in advance with the final candidates. Because curricula vary widely, it is best to give the candidate a topic that the students are working on, and some guidelines, and then let the candidate design a short lesson.

Those observing the lesson should have a short evaluation form for each candidate. They are watching for a focus or introduction, clear voice and presentation, use of visuals, and a conclusion to the lesson. Consider asking students for their input as well, in the form of a short evaluation with “yes/no” sentences for a response, such as “this teacher was easy to understand” or “this teacher provided interesting information.”

Final Decision

When listening to candidates’ answers, use a mnemonic device to guide your listening. PAR and STAR help to guide

evaluator’s ratings. PAR represents problem, action, and result. If candidates are asked a question about a difficult issue, they should be able to talk about their experience with the problem, the action taken, and what was learned as a result. STAR stands for situation, task, action, and result.

In making the final decision, you do not need to rely on a gut feeling, since you will have objective data from the evaluation forms used in every stage of the hiring process. Principals have long asked themselves, “Would I want this person teaching my child?” The use of a complete job description, early sorting evaluations, and behavior-based interview questions should narrow the candidate pool objectively, providing a highly qualified new hire for your faculty. **P**

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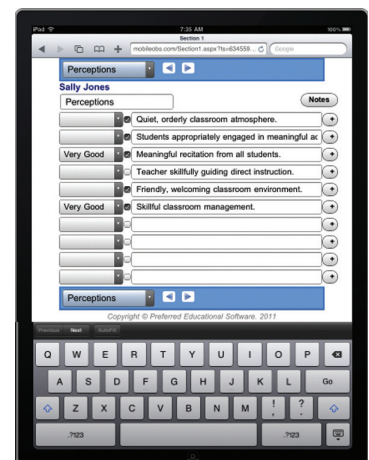
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