



Involving Staff in Teacher Hiring

When a relatively young, newly appointed principal inherits a veteran teaching force, the first year together is likely to be challenging for all. The principal wonders if senior staff will ever embrace new visions and teachers wonder if things will ever be the same. The teacher hiring process can serve as a turning point in this relationship, providing an opportunity to enhance the school's future as both the principal and faculty enjoy the invigoration resulting from the addition of high-quality teachers to the staff.

As an education leader who has been a principal for 25 years in three different schools, I regularly experienced the magic of adding talented, energetic, new teachers to the faculty. Sometimes the new teachers replaced retiring staff or teachers who were counseled out of the profession; sometimes they were needed because the schools were simply growing. Hiring new teachers was often a demanding experience, but the inclusion of faculty and parents in a screening committee made the process meaningful for all.

As I observed my protégé, Bruce Blau, preparing to hire new teachers, we discussed at length his goals for his school's programs. Bruce reflected on his vision, talking about the qualities he valued in his present teaching staff and what he envisioned for the future. As a mentor who received training through NAESP's Peer Assisted Leadership Service program (PALS), I listened carefully and asked Bruce about the hiring process he planned to use. He knew that I used screening committees to hire staff and asked me to share that process with him.

I explained the preliminary training I used to acquaint select staff and parents with the screening process, providing clear parameters regarding what is and is not the job of the screening committee. The real value of the process is that it allows the principal and the screening group to discuss the mission of the school, desirable attributes of staff members, qualities and skills that need to be added to strengthen the faculty, and which school traditions are most important to maintain. The actual selection rests with the principal after the screening committee selects finalists from the available candidates.

—Kathleen Sciarappa

New to *Principal*. This new column features the perspectives of two principals—a mentor and a protégé—as they reflect on how they approached a single school leadership issue.

The hiring process is one of the most exciting aspects of this profession because of the tremendous impact that one teacher can potentially have on the lives of hundreds of students. However, determining from an hour of discussion whether someone will be the perfect fit for a position is a huge challenge, especially if you want to harness the opinions of others in making the decision.

In our initial work on hiring, Kathleen shared a format for structuring a collaborative selection process, one that perfectly complemented my interest in drawing upon the involvement of a diverse group of stakeholders. Kathleen's approach was distinctive because the process began with a discussion: What are we looking for in a great candidate for *this* position at *this* school?

The discussion brought me well beyond the traditional list of questions generally asked of candidates. I learned that hiring is the responsibility of everyone who has a stake in children and was reminded of the enormous impact that teachers have on children. The idea that we need to become advocates and informal mentors for the teachers we select was a major premise of the hiring process.

The best part of the hiring experience was the ongoing dialogue that my mentor and I shared beyond that first discussion about structuring a collaborative process. I went on to tweak the process, making it my own in ways that reflected my individual leadership style. I used input from my hiring committee to create a list of qualities we most valued in a candidate. That list kept our team focused as we moved away from interviews that were dependent on a list of questions toward more natural discussions. This interview style later included demonstration lessons in which finalists showcased their skills in working with children.

As the new school year began, the positive response of students, staff, and parents to the new faculty members was staggering. The hiring process had a happy ending and I think of Kathleen each time I plan for another round of interviews.

—Bruce Blau

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Kathleen Sciarappa and Bruce Blau are mentor and protégé in the Peer Assisted Leadership Service program (PALS)—where experienced school leaders mentor new and aspiring principals. For more information, visit www.naesp.org.