



2015 Delaware Talent Practices Report

An analysis of educator recruitment, hiring,
and retention in Delaware schools

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Claire Robertson-Kraft & Joe Hejlek

Operation Public Education

University of Pennsylvania

April 2016

Overview

Over the past decade, a growing body of research has demonstrated that teacher and leader effectiveness are the most important in-school factors influencing the rate of student learning. Given their critical role, it is essential that all students have access to great teachers and leaders. Across the country, districts have reported challenges with shortages of teachers.¹ However, recent research suggests that recruitment efforts should be less focused on shortages more generally and instead, targeted towards recruiting and retaining the right teachers to meet specific district needs.² Indeed, it is critical that districts develop a comprehensive strategy for recruiting, hiring, and retaining high-quality educators.

Operation Public Education (OPE) at the University of Pennsylvania was commissioned by the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) to gather information on talent practices across the state. This report is based on the Talent Practices Survey, which was administered to all Delaware school districts in December 2015. Survey respondents were asked about the 2015 hiring season (February 2015 to October 2015). All 19 of Delaware's traditional public school districts responded to the survey, as well as 17 charter school districts.

Human resources managers responded to questions regarding key elements of the talent pipeline noted below, including policies and systems, recruitment strategies, hiring and selection processes, as well as evaluation, compensation and retention practices. We used longitudinal survey data, along with conversations with DDOE Leadership, to identify three case study districts – referred to as District A, District B, and District C – which varied in size and location. Case study results were used to supplement survey findings and have been noted in call-out boxes throughout the report.



✓ **Policies & Systems:** Research demonstrates that the most qualified teacher candidates are more likely to be hired early, therefore districts with efficient systems have an advantage in hiring high-quality candidates leaving less qualified candidates available for districts with late hiring. This section explores relevant human resources policies and systems in Delaware districts.

✓ **Identification & Recruitment:** Research suggests that effective districts use a variety of recruitment tactics to source talent for their districts. This section explores the most common applicant pools and recruitment tactics in Delaware districts.

✓ **Hiring & Selection:** Research finds that recruitment challenges often result from district hiring and selection practices rather than from a shortage of qualified candidates. In particular, several studies note that school-level autonomy in hiring is a critical best practice. This section explores hiring and selection processes in Delaware districts.

✓ **Evaluation, Compensation & Retention:** Research suggests that financial and non-financial (e.g., working conditions) incentives can be effective ways to recruit and retain teachers in high-needs schools. This section explores evaluation, compensation, and retention practices in Delaware districts.

¹ Teacher-recruitment challenges: A special report. (2016, January 25). *Education Week*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/collections/teacher-recruitment-challenges-2016/>

² Aragon, S. (2016). *Teacher shortages: what we know*. Education Commission of the States. Retrieved from <http://www.ecs.org/ec-content/uploads/Teacher-Shortages-What-We-Know.pdf>

Talent Practices Landscape

Staffing Overview

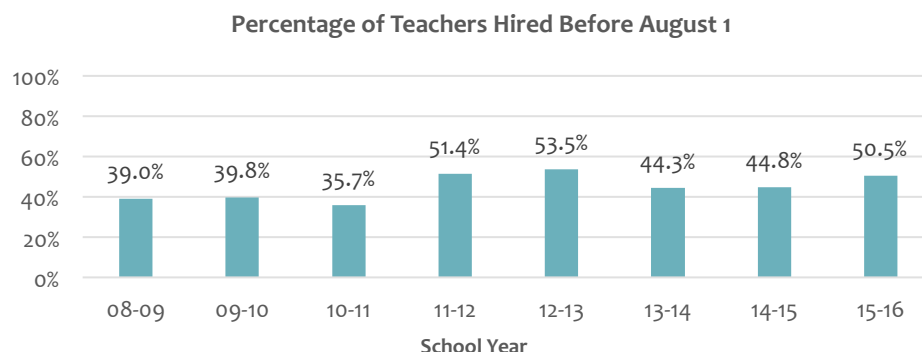
In the 2015 hiring season, 964 teachers were hired to teach in the state of Delaware. This represents an increase from the 862 teachers during the 2014 hiring season. Compared with prior years, similar positions continued to be the most difficult to staff in the state of Delaware.

- Foreign Language, High School Math and Science, Psychologists, and Speech Therapist positions received the fewest high-quality potential applicants.
- Conversely, Elementary, Social Science, and Counselor positions received the most high-quality potential applicants.

State Landscape: District & Charter Hiring Patterns

Over the past several years, the state of Delaware has placed an emphasis on early hiring. In 2011, the state legislature enacted Senate Bill 16, which required the DDOE to complete an estimate of each district's enrollment by April 15th of the preceding school year (compared to September 30th in prior years). Under the law, districts are guaranteed to receive at least 98% of the funding estimated by the April 15th count.

- The passage of the law led to a significant increase in the number of teachers hired by August 1st, from 35.7% in 2010-2011 to 51.4% in 2011-2012, as illustrated below. After two years of lower totals, the number of teachers hired by August 1st increased this school year, to 50.5%.



While the decrease in teachers hired in August or later is important, research recommends aiming to hire the vast majority of new teachers by May 1st. Teaching applicants begin to withdraw from the hiring process in May and 40% withdraw by the end of June. These trends are particularly important, as the teachers who withdraw during the hiring process in the early months are disproportionately more-qualified applicants.³

- In 2015-2016, only 7% of teacher hires in Delaware districts occurred by May 1st, and only an additional 6% of teachers were hired in May.
- Conversely, charter schools had hired 18% of teachers by May 1st and an additional 21% of teachers by the end of May.

³ Levin, J., & Quinn, M. (2003). *Missed opportunities: How we keep high-quality teachers out of urban classrooms*. NY, NY: The New Teacher Project.

Policies & Systems

✓ Promote Early Hiring

Hiring teachers early ensures a higher proportion of quality applicants in the applicant pool and allows schools to conduct a more rigorous selection process, among other benefits. Setting May 1st as the target date for hiring completion and enacting policies to promote early spring notification from teachers who intend to leave at the end of the year are research-supported practices to achieve early hiring.⁴

- Of the 19 districts, 16 reported having a target date by which they aim to fill the majority of instructional positions. Of these target dates, one is in May, five are in June, four are in July, and six are in August.
- Five districts reported offering bonuses to teachers who notify the district of their intent to retire. All five have notification deadlines between December 31st and March 1st. Eight districts reported having policies that require teachers who intend to retire to notify the district by a certain date, though the date was not specified on the survey.

✓ Allocate Staffing Capacity

Research recommends that districts allocate staff strategically to teacher recruitment. Additional staffing capacity ensures that districts are able to cast a broader net of potential applicants.

✓ Streamline Systems of Communication

Most Delaware districts reported regular communication both with schools, to determine staffing needs, as well as with individual applicants, to facilitate the hiring process.

- Twelve districts reported communicating six or more times with individual schools regarding hiring needs during a typical hiring season. Some noted formal structures of regularly scheduled meetings with schools to plan for hiring needs, while others have more informal processes in which principals communicate with district staff as staffing needs arise.
- Eight districts reported communicating with a typical teaching candidate 4-5 times or more as the candidate progresses through the hiring process. Ten of the remaining 11 districts reported communicating 2-3 times with a typical applicant.

➤ Best Practices: District A

Only one district in the state (District A) reported having a dedicated staff position primarily focused on teacher recruitment. This strategic hire has provided significant benefits in recruitment, as outlined by the district's HR director:

"Two years ago we hired a district recruiter and new teacher mentor who assists me ... We really wanted to do the best we could with trying to attract the best teachers and one of my goals is to increase minority hires in the district, so I wanted someone who could really have the time to partner with local colleges in the region and do the recruiting efforts. Her first year she was primarily recruiting. This year she's recruiting plus new teacher mentoring, which we see as a nice follow through ... She also places students in practicums for local colleges and universities, student teaching placements, so we really feel like we get a good look at someone from higher ed. all the way through an employee." (District A HR Director)

⁴ Engel, M., & Finch, M. A. (2015). Staffing the classroom: How urban principals find teachers and make hiring decisions. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 14(1), 12-41. Levin, J., & Quinn, M. (2003). *Missed opportunities: How we keep high-quality teachers out of urban classrooms*. NY, NY: The New Teacher Project.

Identification & Recruitment

✓ Strategically Use Recruitment Resources

Successful teacher recruitment involves using a variety of different strategies, tracking the effectiveness of those strategies, and focusing resources on those strategies that data demonstrates yield the best results.

- Districts identified several strategies as their most effective recruitment tactics: posting on the district’s website, Project Search at the University of Delaware, hiring student teachers in the district, and Join Delaware Schools.
- 13 districts reported that they consider the effectiveness of their recruitment sources when making decisions about future policies.

Most Effective Recruitment Strategies



✓ Partner with Local Universities

Research notes that most teachers seek initial employment near where they grew up or went to college.⁵ Indeed, DDOE data indicates that of teachers in Delaware with five or fewer years of education experience, 59% received their bachelor’s degrees in Delaware.⁶ As a result, many Delaware districts have focused on partnering with universities and several are developing their own talent to ensure a supply of high-quality teacher applicants.

- Seventeen districts reported recruiting frequently from the University of Delaware, and 13 recruit frequently from Wilmington University. Twelve reported frequently recruiting student teachers already working in the district. Additionally, two districts reported using “Grow Your Own” programs that encourage paraprofessionals working in the district to pursue teaching certifications.

✓ Differentiate Strategies for High-Need Schools and Diverse Candidates

In some districts, “Grow Your Own” programs like those mentioned above have been particularly effective for recruiting teachers of color. To be most effective, districts must prioritize – and develop specific strategies to improve – recruitment of diverse teachers and teachers for high-need schools.

- Word of mouth seems to be an especially important strategy for districts in hiring diverse candidates. While four districts reported that word of mouth was one of their most effective recruitment strategies overall, nine districts said that it was one of their most effective for recruiting diverse candidates.

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, International Affairs Office. National Council on Teacher Quality. (2004, October). *Attracting, developing and retaining effective teachers: Background report for the United States*. Washington, DC: Author.

⁶ “The Set”: Where are Delaware’s Teachers Prepared for the Profession? March 2013. Retrieved from http://www.doe.k12.de.us/cms/lib09/DE01922744/Centricity/Domain/398/ED_PREP_SUMMARY_TABLE_LAND.pdf

Hiring & Selection

✓ Gather Comprehensive Information on Candidates

To ensure high-quality candidates, districts should employ a thorough hiring process that involves collecting a wide range of information about each candidate under consideration. Districts that gather relevant and timely information on a candidate's likelihood of success in the classroom are more likely to make strategic hires.⁷

- In assessing candidates, nearly all districts reported frequently reviewing resumes, conducting face-to-face interviews, and contacting references. Several districts have also begun to pilot approaches to early screening, such as questionnaires and use of DPAS-II results.
- However, in terms of gathering applied information, only four districts reported frequently using performance-based tasks and sample lessons and three reported frequently using writing samples. Several districts reported only using these types of activities occasionally given challenges with the hiring timeline going into the late summer.

✓ Ensure Principal Autonomy

Principals can use hiring autonomy to ensure candidates fit with the needs of their school context.

If districts provide principals with autonomy in the hiring and selection process, it is critical to have strong systems in place for recruiting and selecting leaders.

- Sixteen districts reported frequently recruiting principals through networking/word of mouth and 11 shared that leadership experience was the most important qualification.
- Sixteen districts used scenario-based questions and ten used writing samples during the school leader selection process.

> Best Practices: District B

District B prioritizes principal autonomy to ensure teachers are a strong fit for the needs of local campuses.

"Because we've got quite a distinction of schools with schools that are affluent and schools with high needs... that autonomy is important because I'm in charge of creating the culture and climate in the building so I want to create the culture and climate in the interview that's going to portray, you know, one of the things we always take a moment in the interview is to talk about the school. I let them know, you're shopping me and I'm shopping you and so I want to let you know what we're all about to make sure you're ready to sign up for it."
(District B Principal)

✓ Involve Staff in Selection Efforts

Having a teaching candidate interview with a team of school staff members, rather than only the principal, is another way to maximize the chances that a teaching applicant will be a good fit with the school's culture.

- Sixteen districts reported frequently using teams of staff members to interview teaching candidates.

⁷ Walsh, K., Putman, H., & Lewis, A. (2015). Attracting the best teachers to schools who need them most. *State Education Standard*, 15(2), 25-31.

Evaluation, Compensation & Retention

✓ Use Detailed Recruitment Message

Considerable research has focused on realistic job previews, which provide applicants with accurate descriptions including both positive and negative aspects of a role. This research suggests that ensuring employees have a realistic understanding of their job can lead to improved satisfaction and retention over the long-term.⁸

- Ten districts reported having a recruitment message that is tailored to the districts' context, although it's not clear from our research the extent to which these messages provide an accurate picture of the teaching experience in the district.

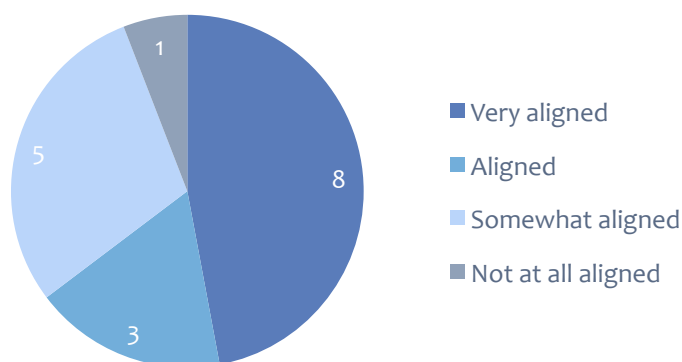
➤ Best Practices: District C

The recruitment message: "District C is a progressive school system. The location of the district provides easy access to beaches in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia and is only a short commute to New York City and Washington D.C. The district offers professional learning communities and is known for its team-oriented work environment. We provide opportunities for teacher leadership and reimburse for advanced degrees. In addition, District C offers excellent benefits and competitive salaries. With a student body over XX and with over XX employees, the district offers the best of small town America in an exciting and supportive professional environment. If you're looking for a career in an extraordinary district, District C is the place for you!"

✓ Align Educator Evaluation with Selection Efforts

- Fourteen of the 19 districts reported having a clear process for identifying the most impactful teachers. Principal recommendation and various educator evaluation measures were the main sources districts used for this identification process.
- Eleven out of the 19 districts reported that their teacher selection criteria are "aligned" or "very aligned" with the educator evaluation system. Nine districts reported that they use prior performance as one of the top three qualifications among new applicants, and several principals reported using DPAS-II results in early screening. Additionally, nine districts reported tracking teachers' performance from various recruitment sources.

Alignment of Teacher selection criteria with DPAS-II



✓ Recognize and Reward Talent

- The majority of districts and charters reported using non-financial incentives (e.g., teacher leadership, conference attendance) to reward educators. However, charters appear to be considerably more likely than districts to use pay incentives to reward, recruit or retain teachers. For instance, nine out of the 17 charters employ financial incentives to reward teachers who demonstrate significant student growth as opposed to just one out of the 19 districts.

⁸ Liu, E., & Johnson, S. M. (2006). New teachers' experiences of hiring: Late, rushed, and information-poor. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 42(3), 324-360.

Recommendations

This report provides an overview of the critical levers for ensuring all students have access to great teachers and leaders. Overall, our findings reveal that while some Delaware districts are making progress in implementing these best practices, there is still much room for improvement in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers and leaders across the state. Perhaps most importantly, state and district stakeholders should work together to ensure that the vast majority of new teachers are hired early (ideally by May) each year. Given the substantial shift this would require for many districts, we would suggest a phase-in period where the goal is to increase the percentage of teachers hired by May 1st each year and set an early summer target hiring date. The following recommendations draw from the research to provide districts with concrete suggestions for improving their talent practices:

Policies & Systems

- Develop budgets in late winter or early spring so that vacancies can be determined in the spring
- Establish an early spring deadline and provide a monetary incentive for teachers to provide notification of planned retirement or resignation
- Set a target date in May/early Summer for hiring completion
- Reallocate staffing to ensure sufficient capacity to undertake robust recruitment efforts
- Streamline the hiring process by developing centralized online systems for efficiently receiving, processing, tracking, and placing applicants

Identification & Recruitment

- Develop a clear recruitment message that is tailored to the needs of the district
- Track the success rate of various recruitment strategies and graduates from teacher preparation programs and strategically adjust practice accordingly
- Build partnerships and specific programs (e.g., student teaching, ESOL) with local universities to develop strong teacher pipelines from Delaware's teacher preparation programs to Delaware school districts
- Create programs that promote the profession to high school and college students or community members, including grow-your-own programs
- Prioritize – and develop a differentiated approach – for diversity recruitment

Hiring & Selection

- Develop selection criteria that clearly establishes the district's ideal teacher
- Align these selection criteria throughout all steps of the application process
- Invest in early screening processes (e.g., pre-screeners) to accelerate the hiring timeline
- Gather applied information during selection through sample lessons and scenario-based questions
- Ensure that principals have the autonomy to determine candidates' fit for the school
- Involve a team of school staff in the selection process

Evaluation, Compensation, & Retention

- Ensure recruitment messages provide applicants with a realistic set of expectations
- Align selection criteria with the district's process for evaluating impactful teachers
- Develop a variety of types of incentives to retain the most impactful staff members
- Use data on teacher retention and teacher effectiveness to inform the recruitment and selection processes

As districts and charter schools in Delaware grapple with how best to attract and retain talent, it is important that they utilize the best practices above. The case studies profiled in this report provide rich examples of how to put many of these practices into action across the state. While this report offers concrete examples of practices within Delaware, we recommend more extensively examining how other states in the region approach recruitment, hiring, and selection efforts in the 2016 Talent Practices Report.