

CREATING A PIPELINE OF K-12 TEACHERS FROM EXISTING PARAEDUCATORS

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ABSTRACT

The pupil/teacher ratio in US elementary and secondary schools fell from 15.7 in 2003 to 15.4 in 2016 according to the National Center for Education Statistics (Kena et al., 2016). The number of teachers leaving the profession exploded during the pandemic. Public school teachers earn 20 percent less in weekly wages than non-teacher college graduates. In a majority of states, teachers who are the sole earners in their household qualify for two or more government assistance programs. There are five strategies used to address teacher shortages: alternative certification, financial incentives, induction and mentorship, evaluation and feedback and teacher leadership. This study focuses on the induction and mentorship of employees working in teaching adjacent roles, such as teaching aids, yard supervisors and behavior-based interventionists. These roles come with even lower compensation than teaching positions which typically have greater permanence and benefits. How can schools better target these potential teachers familiar with the K-12 environment as future teachers to address the shortage of teachers? The study contributes to the field of educational leadership with implications for selection, attraction and development attraction of talent.

This session describes our experience building a pipeline of K-12 teaching professionals from lower-paid, lesser skilled jobs. This approach can be reproduced by others in industries facing skill shortages.

Keywords: educational leadership, selection, development, and attraction

Overview

This paper shares the experience of a staffing company in Los Angeles that sources educational professionals to public, charter, and private school districts. The unique approach of their leader is to spend significant time and resources on the Induction and mentorship of employees working in teaching adjacent roles, such as teaching aids, yard supervisors, and behavior-based interventionists. Very often these individuals leave employment with the staffing company as they improve their skills and obtain a permanent position at a school district in a higher-level position.

Creating the Pipeline

This company has recruited and retained entry-level employees such as teacher assistants or clerks to work in schools located in low socio-economic communities. Some of the positions they have successfully

placed at the schools are teacher assistants and substitute teachers. Very often after a few months of working at a school and several conversations later, these employees learn to enjoy the work they are assigned to do and express interest in the teaching profession creating a solid pipeline addressing part of the teacher shortage.

This company has recruited from a variety of candidates with other work experience, such as coffee shop workers, tutors, babysitters, who had not thought about entering public education because of their own negative ideas of being a teacher. One of the reasons the teaching profession has a negative reputation is because it's not viewed as an exciting and fun job. Instead, most of these workers remember tough situations that their teacher might have faced. They remember a past teacher had to deal with other demanding fellow teachers, or they remember a previous teacher who did not connect well with his or her students and left them scared with a bad experience. Many of the employees who have been ultimately hired to work directly at the schools did not have a strong desire to work at a school initially. However, after being exposed to work at a school they learn to love and admire the work of a classroom teacher.

Creating Partnerships with Schools

In seeking to increase the teacher pipeline, it is equally important to create a solid relationship with the school where candidates will be placed. School administrators are invariably quite busy running their day-to-day operations. Principals deal with a variety of urgent matters. Yet recruitment is another area of extreme importance, as such through a relationship built with trust and careful placement, schools are willing to open their doors and accept a teacher who may not have enough experience, yet they definitely have the desire to work hard and deliver as any other newly credentialed teacher. University units are needed in order to obtain and renew their teaching permits for many jobs while working as a teacher with a permit whereas permanent position typically require an actual teaching credential and/or degrees.

Careful Selection- Grit, Humility and Respect

In order to continue building trust with schools and continue to give inexperienced candidates the opportunity to begin their teaching career, the candidates who are chosen must be carefully selected and possess grit, humility, respect for the teaching profession, and very clear expectations of the position. Grit is important because as with any other job, there will be weeks when the teaching is challenging not because of their own lack of experience but because of several other factors such as issues with parents, issues with students' behavior or issues or misunderstandings with another fellow teacher. It is grit that keeps such new teachers coming back to work and not succumbing to several small circumstances that may discourage anyone for staying with the job. For a new school employee, it may seem a bigger problem because they also have to deal with their own insecurities. Furthermore, they must continue to attend school at night or weekends in order to obtain their valid teaching credential.

Humility is important because due to their inexperience, these new entrants into the teaching profession will be carefully watched by others so they must be open to constant feedback by others. Many times these individuals have not had the best delivery. By having worked at a school previously, such candidates will gain experience working in a school environment and their expectations of a career will become more realistic. These temporary employees now know days can be dull and tough, and they'll understand some students are very difficult to deal with at times. However, each week has a Monday so they can start fresh while knowing they must continue to show up to work the rest of the week.

Credentialing and Permits

In California, a teacher must have a credential or a permit. The candidates without a credential must apply for a teaching permit which requires that the candidates at minimum possess a bachelor's degree and pass a basic skills test (CBEST exam). Most HR departments, as with most public offices, are understaffed and overwhelmed with work so they tend to overlook candidates who do not apply to work with all the necessary required documents for teaching positions. Yet, for some schools, candidates previously described are a goldmine for the schools because they are generally thankful for the opportunity to start their careers in such established organizations, and they possess the characteristic of a great employee.

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