



Excellent Educators Hiring Practices

Final Report

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Table of Contents

1. Background

1.1 Context	7
1.2 Research Overview	7
1.3 The State of Teacher Hiring	8
1.4 Report Overview.....	9

2. Methodology

2.1 Quantitative Data Collection: Survey.....	10
2.2 Qualitative Data Collection: Focus Groups.....	10

3. Hiring Outcomes

3.1 Total Number of Hires	11
3.2 Educator Hiring Timeline.....	11
3.3 Leadership Hiring Timeline.....	13
3.4 Hardest and Easiest to Staff Positions	14

4. Recruitment & Hiring

4.1 Recruiting Context.....	17
4.2 Recruiting Sources	17
4.2.1 Educators	17
4.2.2 School Leaders.....	19
4.3 Director’s Hiring Priorities.....	21
4.4 Hiring Budgets and Incentives	23
4.5 Challenges to Recruitment and Hiring	24
4.5.1 Challenges for Directors in Recruitment and Hiring	24
4.5.2 Barriers for Would-Be Delaware Teaching Candidates	26
4.6 Strategies for Successful Recruitment and Hiring.....	27
4.6.1 Prioritizing Grow Your Own Programs.....	27

4.6.2 Offering Non-Monetary Incentives.....	28
4.6.3 Offering Monetary Incentives	29

5. Selection & Effectiveness

5.1 Educator Selection.....	30
5.2 School Leaders Selection.....	31
5.3 Educator Effectiveness.....	32
5.4 Leader Effectiveness	32

6. Recommendations

6.1 To Improve Excellent Educator Hiring Practices.....	34
Short Term (within the next year).....	34
Medium Term (2 – 4 years).....	34
Long Term (within the next 5+ years).....	35
6.2 Recommendations for Future Research.....	35

Executive Summary

Research demonstrates that educator effectiveness is the most important in-school factor influencing the rate of student learning. To hire top talent, studies suggest that districts should aim to hire educators in the spring and that districts that wait to hire until mid-to-late summer lose significant numbers of high-quality applicants. As a small state in a densely populated region, Delaware faces significant competition from surrounding states in recruiting and hiring excellent educators. In recent years, the state of Delaware has demonstrated its commitment to recruiting and hiring excellent educators through Senate Bills 16 and 51, which promote early hiring by projecting enrollment earlier and increase the rigor of educator preparation, respectively.

Data from the 2017 hiring season revealed that the percentage of educators hired before August 1st has decreased, and that districts hired fewer educators between May and August, compared to the last few years. Certain positions such as high school math and science, foreign language, speech therapists, psychologists, and nurses remain challenging for districts to staff. For the purposes of this report, the 2016 hiring season refers to hiring conducted for the 2016 – 2017 school year, and the 2017 hiring season refers to the hiring conducted for the 2017 – 2018 school year.

ImpactED at the University of Pennsylvania was commissioned by the DDOE (Delaware Department of Education) to gather information on the 2017 recruitment, hiring, and selection practices that led to these outcomes.

This report shares key findings and takeaways for the following areas:

Hiring Outcomes

- ✔ **Fewer directors indicated having a set target date by which it aims to fill the majority of instructional positions in 2017 as compared to 2016.** In 2017, 17 directors reported having a target date by which they aim to fill all positions, while in 2016, only 15 directors reported having such a date. Also, more directors in 2017 (7 directors) reported having target dates on or after August 1st, compared to only four directors in 2016. Many directors attributed not having a target date or having a later target date due to uncertainty in the state legislature surrounding the budget.
- ✔ **School leaders were hired earlier than educators.** In 2017, 73% of leaders were hired before August 1st, as compared to only 49% of educators.
- ✔ **In both 2017 and 2016, directors reported that High School Math, Foreign Language, and High School Science were the hardest instructional positions to staff and Elementary, Physical Education, and Social Science were the easiest instructional positions to staff.** In 2017, an additional question was added to assess which subjects had been most chronically difficult to staff over the past three hiring seasons; districts most frequently reported High School Math and Foreign Languages as the most chronically hard to staff.

Recruiting and Hiring

Recruiting Strategies

- ✔ **Directors reported most frequently recruiting from Wilmington University, the University of Delaware, and the University of Delaware’s alternative route to certification (ARTC) program.** In 2017, an additional question was added to assess which subjects had been most chronically difficult to staff over the past three hiring seasons; directors reported high school math and foreign languages as the most chronically hard to staff. These findings from Delaware mirror national trends where directors have reported challenges with hiring in high-needs areas like math, science, and special education.
- ✔ **Directors recruited school leaders most often from within their own district.** Overwhelmingly, directors reported that they recruited from educators and administrators from within their own school districts for school leadership positions. None of the directors reported recruiting from Universities in NJ, HBCUs or Wesley College.

Hiring Priorities

- ✔ **Directors have reported that “Filling all positions” has been the top priority for the past two years.** Six directors in 2016 and nine in 2017 reported that “filling all positions” was a top priority in their district, “given the current circumstances.” Directors also reported "hiring experienced teachers" and "hiring early" as priorities in 2017. Two directors reported having other priorities when it came to hiring. Directors who indicated “other” as the top hiring priority indicated finding the best fitting candidates for the positions.

Challenges & Barriers in Recruitment and Hiring

- ✔ **Budget cuts and lack of funds.** All directors attributed hiring challenges for the 2017-2018 year to state budget uncertainty and ultimately budget cuts. Directors reported that initial uncertainty in the state legislature made it so directors were unsure how many teachers they would be able to hire, and ultimately led to delayed recruiting and hiring. Directors described referendums put in place to increase taxes and being forced to hire fewer positions and lay off administrators and educators. Several directors reported that money was taken away from their districts.
- ✔ **Challenging and costly state examinations for teaching.** The most common barrier directors perceived for potential candidates was the many challenging and expensive state examinations required to become a certified educator in Delaware. They saw this as a deterrent for many potential educators, both in and out of state. This sentiment emerged despite the passage of Delaware House Bill 143, a bill that removed a performance assessment requirement for new educators that is limiting Delaware schools' ability to recruit new educators from other jurisdictions that do not have this requirement. They indicated that the cost of taking the tests was a significant financial burden for many potential candidates and may have kept them from attempting the exams. This opinion remained prevalent despite a DDOE program in place to assist with offsetting the cost of

examination fees. Of note, some directors perceived that the testing sequence was a larger barrier for minority candidates, who they believed to have greater fears of standardized testing, or hold beliefs that they would not be able to do well on the test.

- ✔ **Lack of reciprocity and lower pay for beginning teachers.** Delaware does not have reciprocity in teaching certifications with neighboring states for all school positions and in many cases is lower paying, particularly for beginning teachers. Directors felt that this keeps educators certified in other states from even considering job opportunities in Delaware though their credentials may be eligible for reciprocity. While this created a barrier for all out-of-state educators, this was exacerbated for diverse candidates who are in high demand everywhere.

Strategies for Success

- ✔ **Prioritizing Grow Your Own Programs.** Grow Your Own programs have consistently been identified as the most successful strategy for recruiting candidates – **and particularly minority candidates.**
- ✔ **Promoting and maintaining a positive school culture.** Several of the directors expressed that the reputation and climate of their schools was a significant asset and motivator for candidates. Directors shared that they felt educators were motivated to accept positions and remain in schools with known positive school culture.
- ✔ **Offering competitive salaries.** Directors indicated that salary was a very powerful incentive tool (potentially the most powerful to recruit high quality candidates, and particularly the highly sought after diverse candidates. They explained how each district had different salary schedules, and that most candidates and existing educators just wanted to be in the district where they could get the most money, both in the short-term to pay for life expenses and in the long-term to increase their pensions. Directors named the districts with the highest salaries, where new educators wanted to be placed and experienced educators wanted to transfer to (particularly when they needed to send their children to college or were getting ready to retire).

Selection & Effectiveness

Selection Strategies

- ✔ **District reported that leadership experience, instructional knowledge, and experience working in similar communities/with similar students were the top three most important professional qualifications.** Of note, none of the districts considered advanced degrees important in making a job offer to a school leader candidate.

Evaluation Strategies

- ✔ **Districts in both 2016 and 2017 reported that student growth data was the most frequently used method for identifying impactful educators.** 14 out of 19 Districts indicated that they frequently used student growth data to identify impactful teachers in 2017 and 15 did in 2016.

1. Background

1.1 Context

Delaware is home to nineteen school districts and twenty-five charter schools as of the 2017 – 2018 school year. In the 2017-2018 school year, Delaware enrolled over 138,000 students in its public schools and employed just fewer than 20,000 staff. Nationally, Delaware is ranked 18th overall in education according to the US News & World Report.

Delaware is also home to nine colleges and universities: Delaware College of Art and Design, Delaware State University, Delaware Technical Community College, Goldley-Beacom College, University of Delaware, Wesley College, Widener University Delaware Law School, and Willington University. Of these only four offer education programs at the undergraduate level: Delaware State University, University of Delaware, Wesley College, and Willington University. In recent years, some universities, such as Delaware State University, have grappled with low-enrollment in some education programs, resulting in the “deactivation” of education majors.

Delaware Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity SY 2017-18	
White	44.10%
African-American	30.40%
Hispanic/Latino	17.40%
Asian	3.80%
Multi-Racial	3.70%
American-Indian	0.40%
Hawaiian	0.10%

1.2 Research Overview

Research demonstrates that educator effectiveness is the most important in-school factor influencing the rate of student learning. To hire top talent, studies suggest that districts should aim to hire educators in the spring and that districts that wait to hire until mid-to-late summer lose significant numbers of high-quality applicants. Across the country, districts have reported challenges with early hiring, particularly in certain high needs areas.¹ As a small state in a densely populated region, Delaware faces significant competition from surrounding states in recruiting and hiring excellent educators.

In recent years, the state of Delaware has placed an emphasis on educator and leadership hiring. In 2011, the state legislature enacted a pilot program per Senate Bill 16 (SB 16), which required the Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) to estimate each district’s enrollment by April 15 the preceding school year. The pilot program was successful in that it allowed Delaware school districts to better compete with surrounding states for new teachers and adequately train those new teachers before the start of the school year. In 2014, House Bill 259 made permanent the pilot program originally created in 2011.² Beyond requiring the DDOE to estimate district enrollment by April 15, HB 259 also required the DDOE to guarantee state funds to each district sufficient to cover 98% of the state’s share of hiring the teachers

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

² <https://news.delaware.gov/2014/03/20/proposal-to-make-early-teacher-hiring-permanent/>

justified by that enrollment estimate – this is commonly known as the “98% guarantee.” Before this legislation, school districts were losing teaching candidates to other states because districts could not risk getting less state money than expected and the state did not previously guarantee any funds until September 30, when students have been counted in the unit-based funding process. Under the pilot program, the state saw a 44% increase in the proportion of teachers hired before August.³ Another relevant piece of legislation from this time period was Senate Bill 51, passed in 2013. This bill was designed to increase the rigor of the state’s educator preparation process. Together, these policies demonstrate the state’s commitment to recruiting and hiring excellent educators.

1.3 The State of Teacher Hiring

There are two divergent narratives about teacher recruitment in the United States. Nationally, the narrative about teacher shortages is they do not exist.⁴ In fact, a report published in August of 2017 from the US Department of Education found that the teacher population is rising at a faster rate than the student population. The report states that the number of teachers in the US has increased by 13 percent in four years compared to the 2 percent increase in student enrollment during the same period.⁵ Even though the number of teachers in the United States continues to grow each year, there have been reports of teacher shortages regionally and in particular subject areas like Special Education and Foreign Languages.⁶

1.3.1 Subject Area Shortages

An analysis of federal data found that all 50 states reported statewide shortages in at least one teaching area in the 2016-2017 school year, and some states reported multiple shortage areas. Along with Special Education and Foreign Languages, states also struggled to find teachers in Math, Science, and English as a Second Language.⁷ This national data certainly played out in Delaware, where Districts reported that High School Math teachers and Foreign Language teachers have been challenging to staff over the past three hiring seasons⁸.

1.3.2 Declining Teacher Education Enrollment

Nationally, a similar trend has emerged. A report by the nonprofit Learning Policy Institute found that teacher education enrollment dropped from 691,000 to 451,000, a 35 percent reduction, between 2009 and 2014 — and nearly 8 percent of the teaching workforce is leaving every year, the majority before retirement age.⁹ Looking at data from Pennsylvania, Delaware’s neighbor to the North, statistics from the state

³ <https://news.delaware.gov/2014/03/20/proposal-to-make-early-teacher-hiring-permanent/>

⁴ <http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/research/overview-teacher-shortages-glance>

⁵ <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017072.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2018/01/24/teaching-shortages-many-answers-for-a-complex.html?cmp=e-ml-contshr-shr&print=1>

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Robertson-Kraft, C., & Hejlek. (2016). 2015 Delaware talent practices report. Philadelphia, PA: Operation Public Education, University of Pennsylvania. Retrieved from <http://www.doe.k12.de.us/cms/lib09/DE01922744/Centricity/Domain/355/2015%20Delaware%20Talent%20Practices%20Report%20.pdf>
Robertson-Kraft, C., Hoe, N. & Sagentino, S. (2017). 2016 Delaware excellent educator hiring practices report. Philadelphia, PA: Fels ImpactED, University of Pennsylvania.

⁹ <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/coming-crisis-teaching>

Department of Education tell a concerning story about the number of teaching certificates issued in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania compared to previous years. In 2013, a 15-year high of 18,590 certificates were issued across the state to graduates from education programs. In 2016, only 7,280 certificates were issued.¹⁰ The fact that fewer college students are choosing to pursue careers as teachers has implications for urban and rural school districts, which typically struggle to keep schools staffed throughout the year.

1.3.3 Shortages Among Teachers of Color

Another problem nationally is that districts, especially those with high populations of Black and Latino students, are having difficulty recruiting and hiring teachers of color.¹¹ This is problematic because students of color need teachers who not only set rigorous standards for them but also serve as models of professional success. Research has shown that teachers of color have had success in raising academic achievement of students of similar backgrounds.¹²

This report explores how trends observed regionally and nationally play out in the State of Delaware.

1.4 Report Overview

ImpactED at the University of Pennsylvania was commissioned by the DDOE to gather information on district's recruitment, hiring, and selection practices across the state in the 2017 hiring season (February – October 2017). This report is based on the Excellent Educators Survey, which was administered to HR directors in the 19 Delaware school districts¹³ in Winter 2017. This survey data was supplemented by analysis from two focus groups. For the purposes of this report, the 2016 hiring season refers to hiring conducted for the 2016 – 2017 school year, and the 2017 hiring season refers to the hiring conducted for the 2017 – 2018 school year. This report builds on the 2016 Excellent Educators Report and is organized in the following sections:

- ✔ **Methodology.** This section describes the approach to quantitative and qualitative data collection, which included an annual survey of HR directors and in-depth focus groups.
- ✔ **Hiring Outcomes.** This section provides an overview of key hiring outcomes in districts and compares district outcomes to prior years where relevant.
- ✔ **Recruiting and Hiring.** This section provides an overview of the challenges and barriers to hiring and recruiting, as well as the strategies that directors identified as successful.
- ✔ **Selection.** This section provides an overview of key attributes directors look for when hiring educators and leaders.
- ✔ **Effectiveness.** This section provides an overview of processes to identify effective educators.
- ✔ **Recommendations.** This section provides an overview of key recommendations, including existing strategies to support and scale, as well as modifications or suggestions for improvement.

¹⁰ <http://triblive.com/state/pennsylvania/10844262-74/education-students-enrollment>

¹¹ Ibid

¹² <https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/TeachersOfColor-report.pdf>

¹³ We attempted to collect data from the 25 charter schools, however only 5 completed the survey and 1 participated in the focus groups. Because of the low response rate, we do not include charter data in this report.

2. Methodology

We used a mixed methods approach to explore recruitment, hiring, selection and effectiveness practices of excellent educators in districts in Delaware. Quantitative data provided aggregate information on these practices among Delaware’s district, while qualitative data more thoroughly explored relevant challenges, strategies and opportunities. Additional information on the measures and analytic methods is included below.

2.1 Quantitative Data Collection: Survey

ImpactED worked with DDOE Leadership to develop and administer a survey to human resources directors in each district in the state. This survey captured critical information on educator recruitment, hiring, selection, and evaluation practices during the 2017 hiring season (February – October 2017). All 19 of Delaware’s traditional public-school districts responded to the Excellent Educators Survey. Throughout the report, we compare results from the survey to prior years’ data for the districts. Due to variation in charter school participation over the past three years and with low charter school response this year, this report focuses on districts only. In addition, questions focused on school leaders were added in 2017 and thus, comparisons with 2016 related to school leaders are not possible. Descriptive analysis was used to identify key findings and explore district trends over time.

2.2 Qualitative Data Collection: Focus Groups

In January and February of 2018, ImpactED conducted two focus groups with directors of Human Resources in the state of Delaware. The focus groups were held at POLYTECH Adult Education Center and followed the DAPSA meetings. The focus groups lasted approximately one hour. In total, 13 HR directors participated in the focus groups – 12 of 19 district HR directors and 1 of 25 charter HR directors. Participation in the focus group was voluntary, and the directors were eager to share their feedback on recruitment and hiring practices.

The focus group was guided by three main questions:

1. What are the **challenges** in recruitment and hiring for HR directors in Delaware (particularly with respect to early hiring and diversity hiring)?
2. Which **strategies** have HR directors used to achieve success in their recruitment and hiring goals (particularly with respect to early hiring and diversity hiring)?
3. What **opportunities** exist at the school, district, and state level to improve recruitment and hiring outcomes?

The focus groups were recorded and transcribed and coded for themes using Dedoose – a qualitative data analysis software.

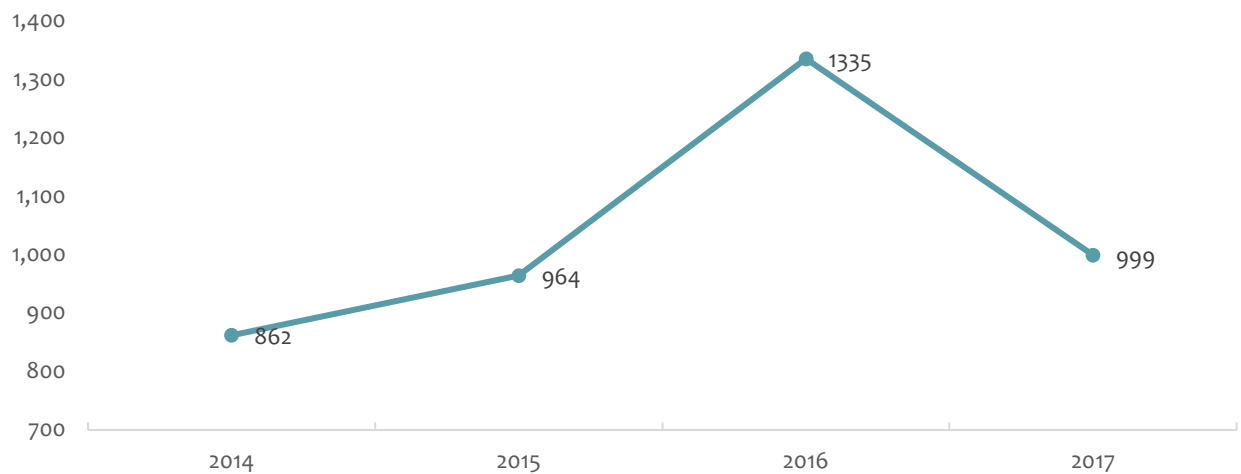
3. Hiring Outcomes

3.1 Total Number of Hires

✔ Fewer educators were hired in 2017 as compared to 2016.

In the 2017 hiring season, 999 educators were hired to teach in the state of Delaware. This represents the first decrease in the multi-year trend of increases; there were 1,335 educators hired in 2016, which increased from the 964 educators during the 2015 hiring season and 862 in the 2014 hiring season.

Figure 1. Number of Educators Hired Each School Year

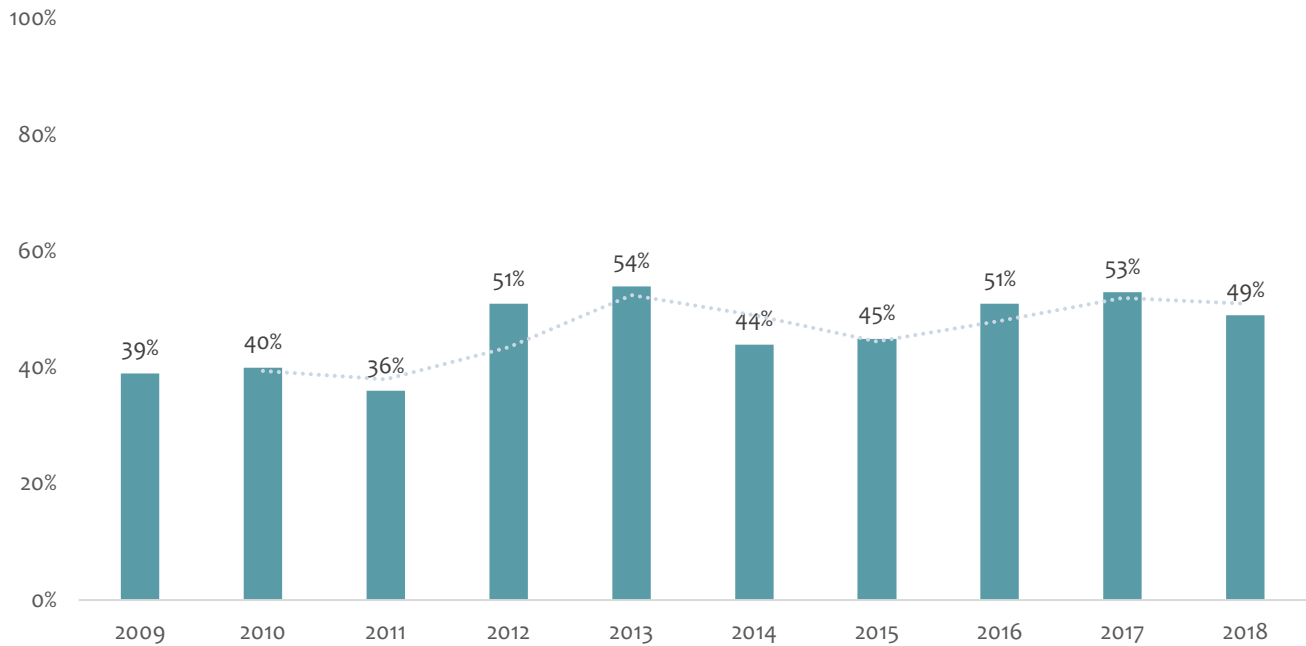


3.2 Educator Hiring Timeline

✔ The percentage of educators hired before August 1st declined in 2017.

The percentage of educators hired by August 1st had been increasing steadily since 2013 and was up to 53% for the 2016 hiring season. In the 2017 hiring season, this number decreased slightly to 49%.

Figure 2. Percentage of Educators Hired Before August 1



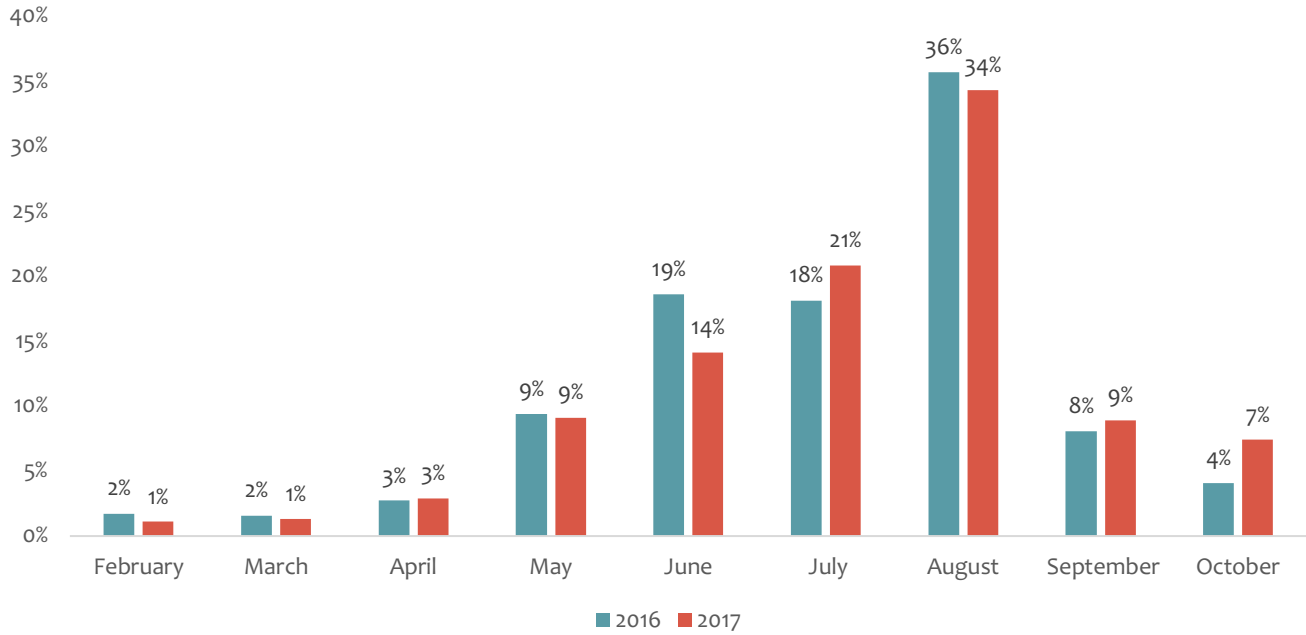
- ✔ **Fewer directors indicated having a set target date by which it aims to fill the majority of instructional positions in 2017 as compared to 2016.**

In 2017, 17 directors reported having a target date by which they aim to fill all positions, while in 2016, only 15 directors reported having such a date. Also, more directors in 2017 (7 directors) reported having target dates on or after August 1st, compared to only four directors in 2016. Many directors attributed not having a target date or having a later target date due to uncertainty in the state legislature surrounding the budget.

- ✔ **Directors hired slightly fewer educators in May through August as compared to the prior hiring season.**

In the 2017 hiring season, directors hired a smaller proportion of educators in May through August compared to 2016. In 2017, 78% of educators were hired between May 1st and August 31st compared to 82% in 2016 and 16% of educators were hired in 2017 after the school year began compared to 12% in 2016. The challenges to early hiring are described in greater detail in the following sections.

Figure 3. Percentage of Total New Hires in Directors Year-to-Year, by Month



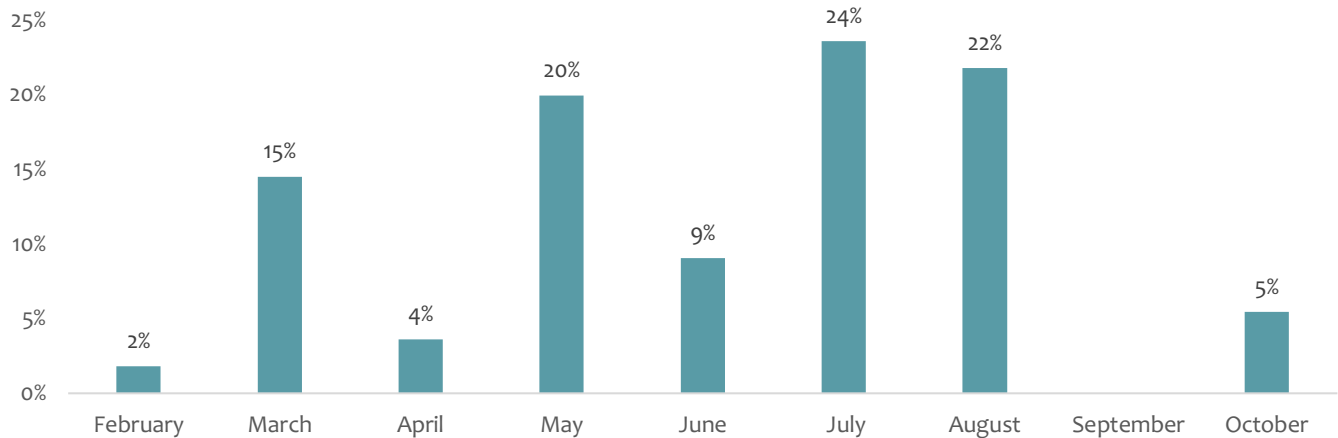
3.3 Leadership Hiring Timeline

In the 2017 hiring season, 26 principals and 37 assistant principals were hired in the state of Delaware. As stated in the methodology section, questions focused on school leaders were added in 2017; thus, comparisons with 2016 are not possible.

✔ School Leaders were hired earlier than educators.

In 2017, 73% of leaders were hired before August 1st, as compared to only 49% of educators.

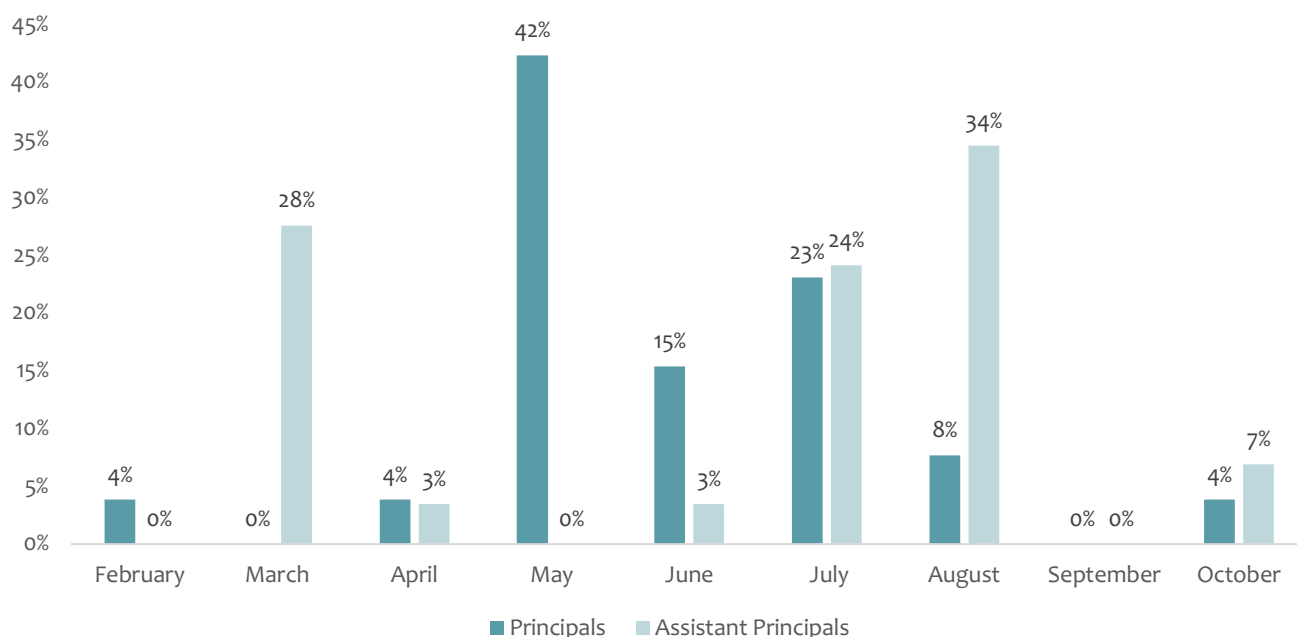
Figure 4. Percentage of School Leaders Hired by Month



✔ **Principals were hired earlier than assistant principals.**

In 2017, 88% of principals were hired before August 1st, whereas only 59% of assistant principals were hired before this date.

Figure 5. Percentage of Total New Hires in Directors Year-to-Year, by Month



3.4 Hardest and Easiest to Staff Positions

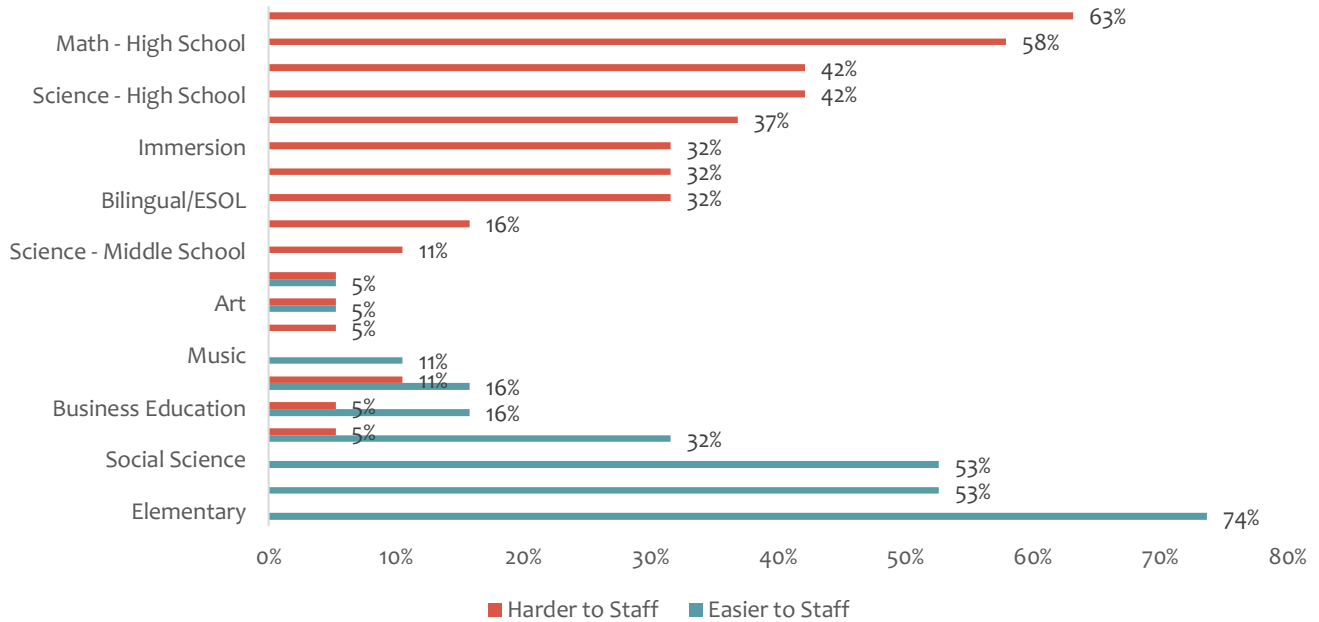
✔ **In both 2017 and 2016, directors reported that High School Math, Foreign Language, and High School Science were the hardest instructional positions to staff and Elementary, Physical Education, and Social Science were the easiest instructional positions to staff.**

In 2017, an additional question was added to assess which subjects had been most chronically difficult to staff over the past three hiring seasons; directors reported high school math and foreign languages as the most chronically hard to staff. These findings from Delaware mirror national trends where directors have reported challenges with hiring in high-needs areas like math, science, and special education.¹⁴

Figure 6 shows the proportion of directors that indicated specific positions as being the hardest and easiest to staff.

¹⁴ Educator-recruitment challenges: A special report. (2016, January 25). *Education Week*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/collections/educator-recruitment-challenges-2016/>

Figure 6. Harder and Easier to Staff Instructional Positions



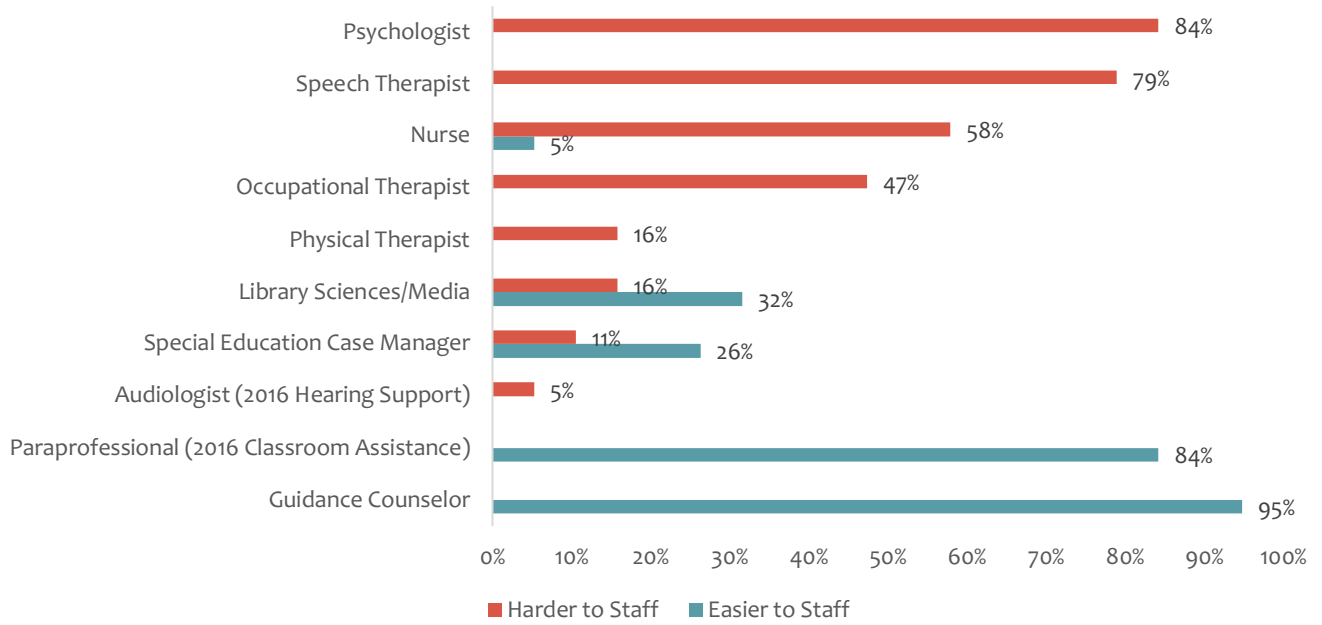
- ✔ Directors reported that **Speech Therapist, Psychologist, and Nurse** were the **hardest non-instructional positions to staff** and **Guidance Counselors and Paraprofessionals (referred to as Classroom Assistants in 2016)** were the **easiest non-instructional positions to staff**.

While in 2017, directors reported having the hardest time hiring for speech therapist, psychologist, and nurse, chronically, they said speech therapist, psychologist, and occupational therapist were hardest to staff.

“For the same reason - nurses make a lot on the outside.” –HR Director

Directors surmised that because these positions command a higher salary outside of schools, individuals were selecting non school-based options for employment.

Figure 7. Harder and Easier to Staff Non-Instructional Positions



4. Recruitment & Hiring

4.1 Recruiting Context

Framing discussion about recruiting and hiring in Delaware, the directors shared one main concern about the current state of hiring in.

- ✔ **Small (and declining) candidate pool.** The most pervasive topic in the focus groups was the limited and declining applicant pool. Directors explained that the state of Delaware has put so many barriers in place for potential educators that the candidate pool has declined dramatically. One director shared her perspective that Delaware has “rigored” its way into hiring shortage. Directors cited evidence of this where teaching fairs that used to be full days are now half days, and at a recent fair there was concern that there would be more directors than candidates. In fact, preliminary data from the Delaware Department of Education shows the number of candidates prepared in Delaware educator preparation programs fell from 1,368 in 2013 to 672 in 2016 (and is estimated to be slightly lower in 2017).

4.2 Recruiting Sources

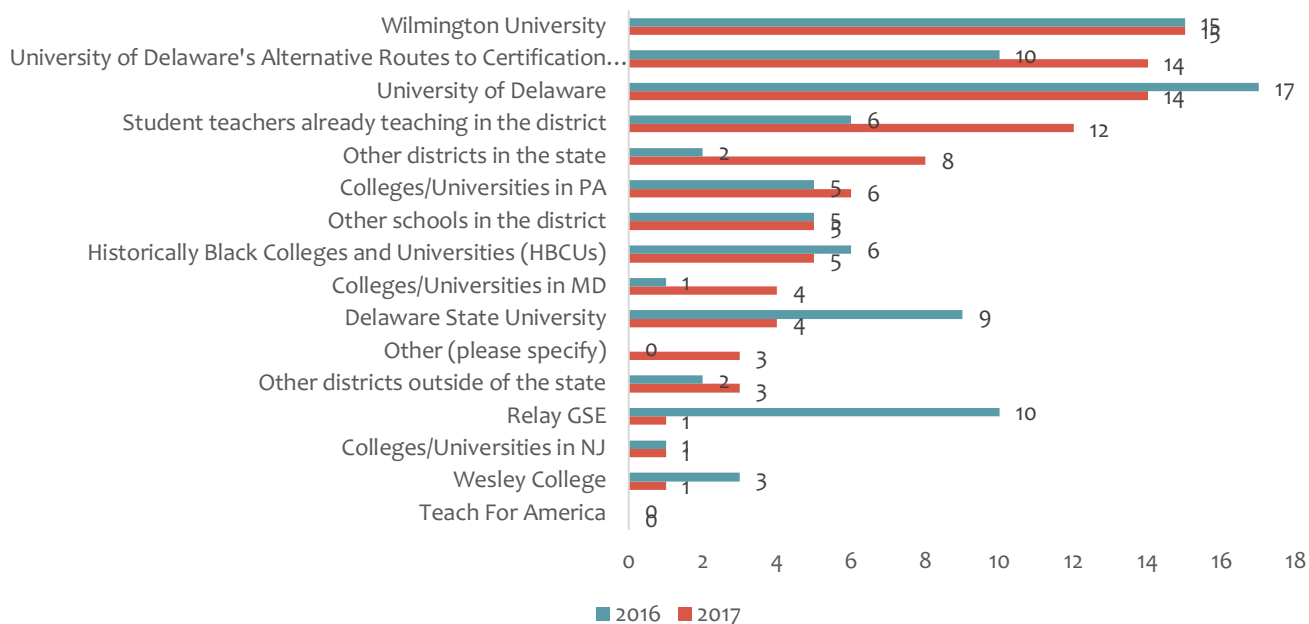
4.2.1 Educators

- ✔ **Directors reported most frequently recruiting educators from Wilmington University, the University of Delaware, and the University of Delaware’s alternative route to certification (ARTC) program.**

These findings generally match the 2016 hiring season; however, it is worth noting that more directors are recruiting from the alternative certification program. In 2017, 14 directors reported that they frequently recruited from this program, compared to only 10 directors in 2016.

“We hire a lot of ARTC candidates... I think, they’re a little more solid in their commitment to what they have signed up to do. –

Figure 8. Educator Recruitment Pools Used "Frequently"

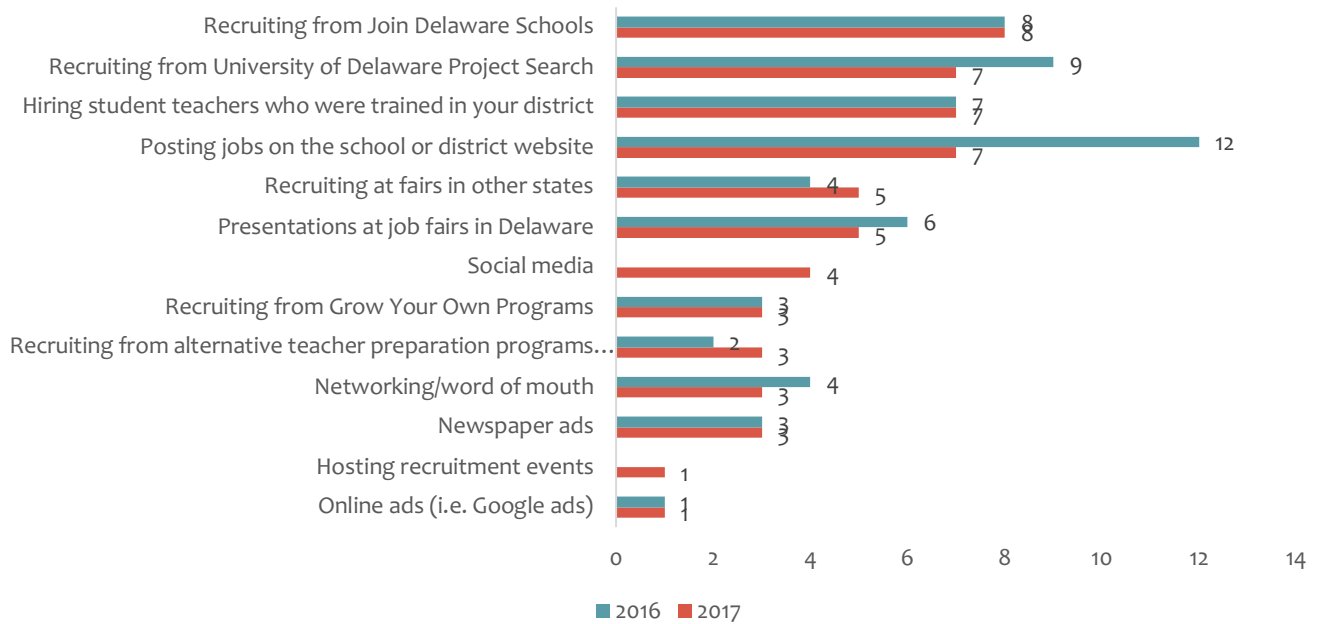


✔ Successful recruiting strategies in 2017 were similar to those in 2016.

As recorded on the survey, educator recruiting strategies indicated as the most successful in 2017 were similar to those in 2016. The most utilized recruiting strategy of 2017, Join Delaware Schools, was utilized frequently by the same number of directors in 2016. Directors also reported recruiting from the University of Delaware Project Search and other Delaware job fairs at similar rates to 2016. However, in 2017, four directors report success with social media as compared to none in 2016. In 2017, directors reported less success recruiting on their own websites. In the focus groups, directors spoke strongly about the importance Grow Your Own programs as well as employee-to-employee recruiting, which may be capture as “networking/word of mouth.”

“We did some surveying with our new hires that came in this year and the data showed that many, probably the majority of them, had actually been recruited by current employees within the district. So, they were coming in because of relationships that they had. Either with current employees within our district or because of familiarity... That actually surprised me. Clearly our employees are some of our best ambassadors. –HR Director

Figure 9. Educator Recruitment Strategies that Yielded the Greatest Number of High-Potential Teaching Applicants



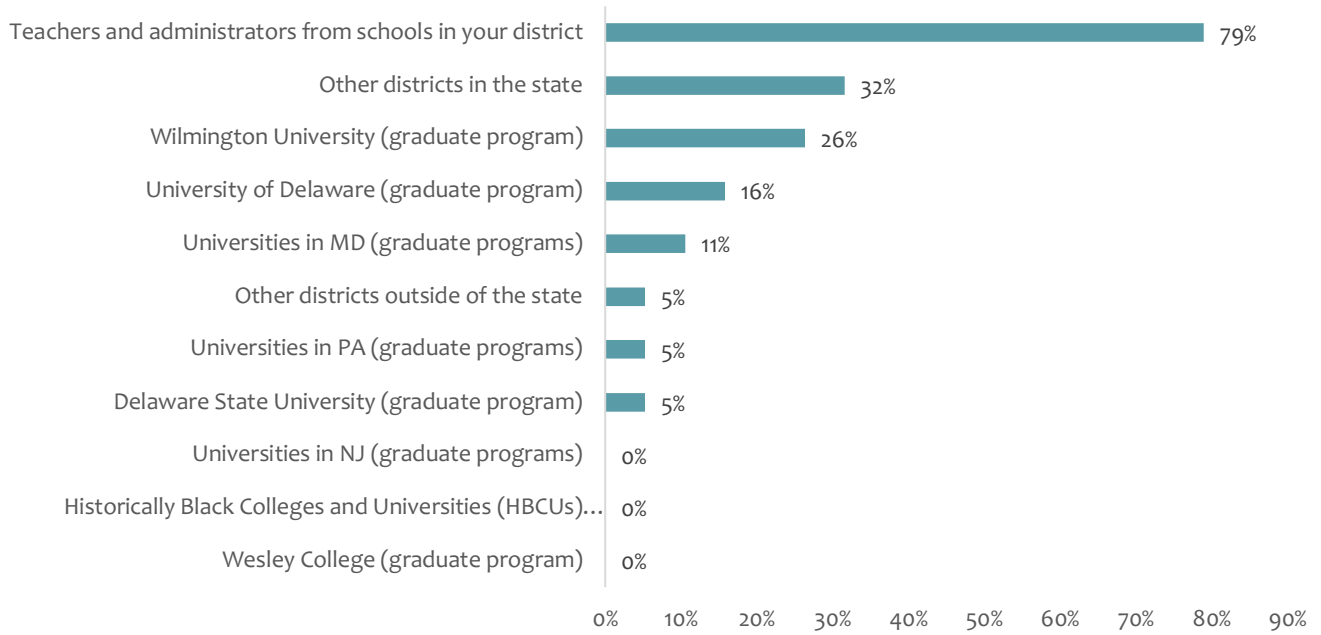
4.2.2 School Leaders

Directors were asked to indicate the frequency with which they recruited school leaders from different applicant pools and the frequency they used different outreach strategies.

- ✔ **Directors recruited school leaders most often from within their own districts.**

Overwhelmingly, directors reported that they recruited from educators and administrators from within their own school districts for school leadership positions. None of the directors reported recruiting from Universities in NJ, HBCUs or Wesley College.

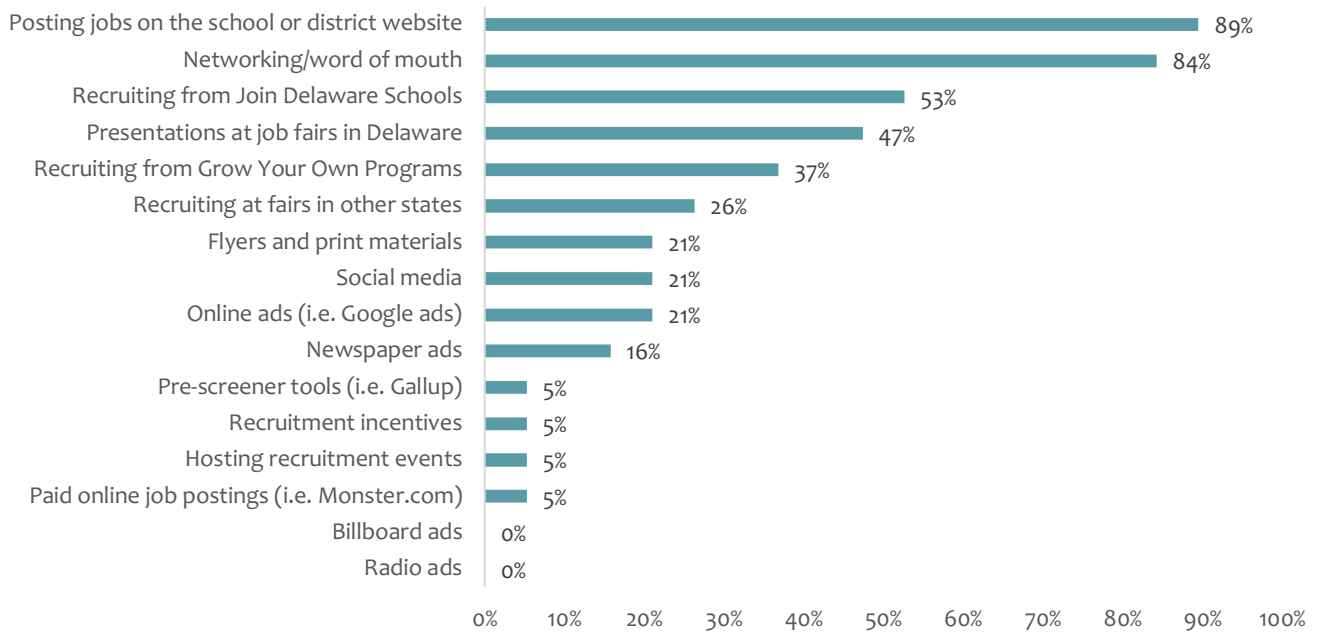
Figure 10. School Leader Recruitment Pools Used "Frequently"



- ✔ **Directors relied on posting jobs on their school or district website and networking/word of mouth most frequently for recruiting school leaders.**

Overwhelmingly, directors reported using their school or district website and networking/word of mouth to recruit candidates for school leader positions. None of the directors reported using radio ads or billboards.

Figure 11. School Leader Recruitment Strategies Used "Frequently"



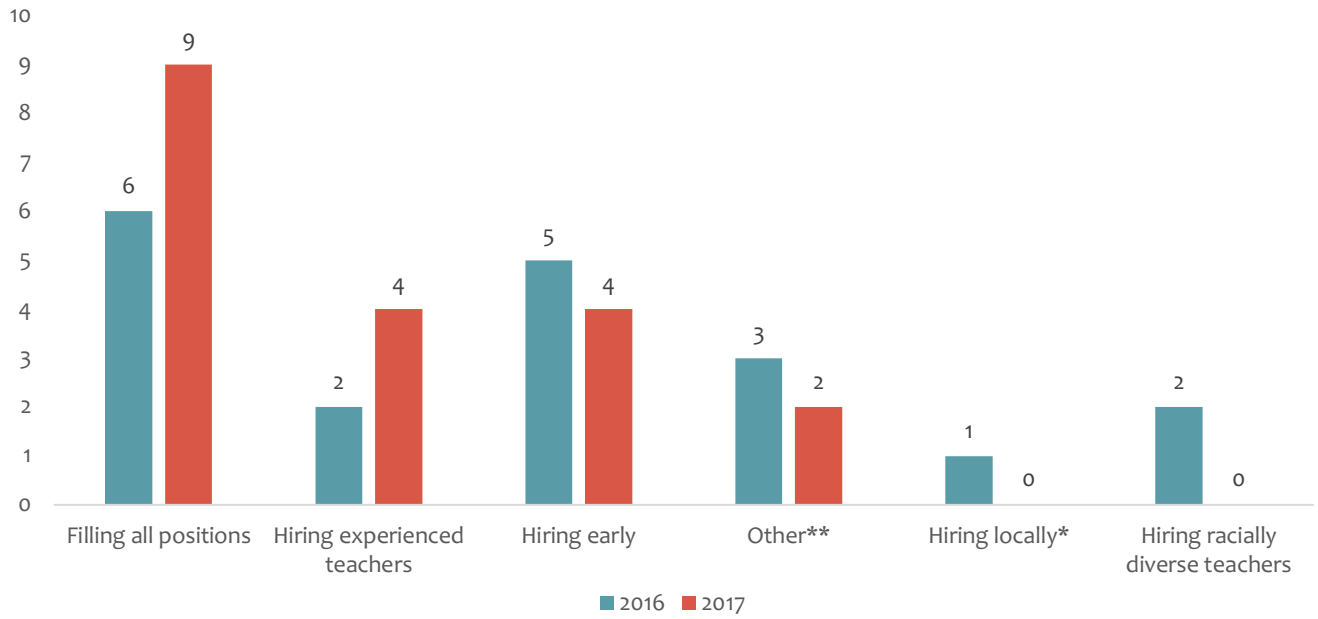
4.3 Director’s Hiring Priorities

Each hiring season, directors make decisions about their hiring priorities. This section reports on the director’s stated hiring priorities and the hiring outcomes they reported to be the most important in 2016 and 2017.

- ✔ **Directors have reported that “Filling all positions” has been the top priority for the past two years.**

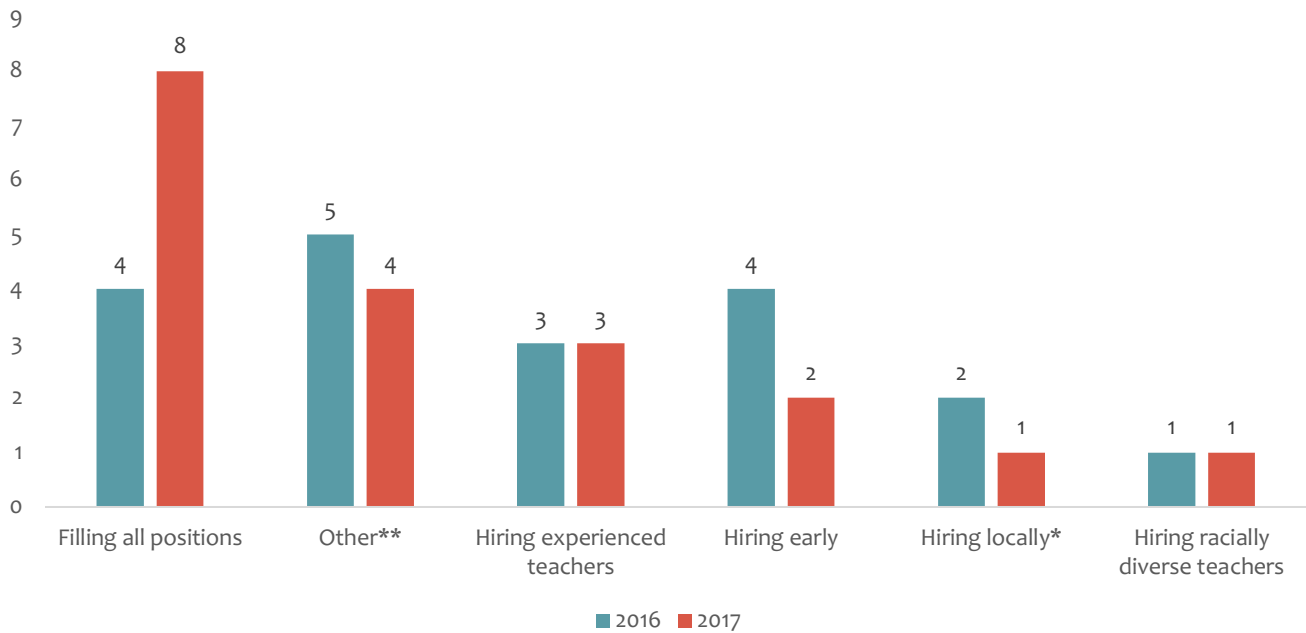
Six directors in 2016 and nine in 2017 reported that “filling all positions” was a top priority in their district, “given the current circumstances.” Directors also reported "hiring experienced teachers" and "hiring early" as priorities in 2017. Two directors reported having “other” as the top priority when it came to hiring, which was described as finding the best fitting candidates for the positions. The chart below shows the top hiring priorities for directors over the past two years.

Figure 12. Top Hiring Priorities in 2016 and 2017



Directors were also asked to indicate what they thought would be the most important hiring outcome under ideal circumstances. The chart below shows the survey results in 2016 and 2017. In 2017, directors felt filling all positions was most important.

Figure 13. Most Important Hiring Priorities Under Ideal Circumstances



✔ Directors reported early hiring as less of a priority in 2017 as compared to 2016.

In 2016, five directors reported hiring early to be the top priority on the survey, and only four did in 2017. In 2016, four directors reported that this was the most important outcome under ideal circumstances, while only two did in 2017. In the focus groups, directors explained that hiring early was seen as less of a priority because it was *less of a possibility*, for two reasons which are explained in greater detail in the following sections. In summary, directors felt that even when they did hire early, the “one-way” contracting system made it possible for these educators to accept other positions later on in the hiring season, negating the director’s hard “early” work. In addition, the state budget crisis in 2017 created uncertainty about how many hires directors would be able to make and delayed the hiring process altogether.

“The hard part is that even if they call you and say yes, the next day they can call you back and say I’m going anyway. That drives me crazy.”—HR Director

✔ Hiring racially diverse candidates was not reported as a top priority given the limited diversity in the existing candidate pool.

Similar to reports that hiring early was less of a possibility, directors also reported that hiring diverse candidates was *nearly impossible*. Directors unanimously reported that the biggest challenge to diversity recruitment and hiring was the lack of diverse potential candidates. They felt that given this lack of candidates, diversity hiring “is unattainable!” Directors reported going to job fairs with only one or two diverse (or male) candidates that every district was chasing down, and that there were very few candidates coming out of HBCUs in the region. While directors expressed a desire to employ diverse educators and those that were the best fit for the school and the students, the reality of the candidate shortage changed their priorities.

“You go on a recruitment trip and you get there and there’s four minority candidates in the whole thing. And then when they can go other places and get incentives, bonuses, all kinds of stuff, what do you think they’re going to do?” –HR Director

4.4 Hiring Budgets and Incentives

In both 2016 and 2017, directors were asked to report both their recruitment budget and their offering of recruitment incentives.

- ✔ **Fewer directors reported having a recruitment budget than the prior hiring season.** As indicated on the survey, in 2017, 13 directors stated that they had a recruitment budget, whereas in the 2016 hiring season, 15 directors reported having a recruitment budget.
- ✔ **More directors offered recruitment incentives than the prior hiring season.** In 2017, 7 directors stated that they offered recruitment incentives, whereas in the 2016 hiring season, only 3 directors reported offering them.

4.5 Challenges to Recruitment and Hiring

In the focus groups, directors identified several challenges they felt served as significant barriers to hiring – and specifically hiring early and hiring diverse candidates. Directors described challenges they faced related to state politics and legislation, as well as barriers to would-be Delaware teaching candidates, and the implications of these issues on the state recruiting and hiring climate and the candidate pool as a whole.

4.5.1 Challenges for Directors in Recruitment and Hiring

Directors described current conditions in Delaware that have posed significant challenges in the recruitment and hiring process: the political climate, the legal system and the changing demographics and characteristics of students and educators.

- ✔ **Budget cuts and lack of funds.** All directors attributed hiring challenges for the 2017-2018 year to state budget uncertainty and ultimately budget cuts. Directors reported that initial uncertainty in the state legislature made it so directors were unsure how many teachers they would be able to hire, and ultimately led to delayed recruiting and hiring. Directors described referendums put in place to increase taxes and being forced to hire fewer positions and lay off administrators and educators. Several directors reported that money was taken away from their districts.

“This year was a one-off year because of the uncertainty of the state budget... we held a lot of positions until we knew what was coming out of Dover which didn’t come out until the 4th of July.” –HR Director

- ✔ **Uncertainty about filled positions.** Directors reported that several laws and practices within the Delaware education system led to uncertainty about filled positions. First, the May 15th deadline requires that directors notify educators of their termination before May 15th or else they are guaranteed jobs for the coming academic year. However, educators may terminate their own contracts (or resign) at any time. Directors reported that this allows educators to continue searching for more favorable positions indefinitely, after having signed a contract for a particular position. Several directors shared stories about educators accepting new positions weeks or days before the school year begins, leaving directors scrambling to find replacements. This often leads to a cascade effect where when a vacant spot becomes open, an educator from another district may want to fill it – leaving behind another vacancy elsewhere. Several directors reported having a voluntary transfer period as part of their negotiated agreement with educators. Many of these agreements state that internal candidates have to be interviewed before a position can be posted externally creating a lag in when a position is available and when it can be widely shared. Additionally, if an internal candidate is selected for the voluntary transfer, this creates another

“So that gives them the assurance of knowing they have a job. What I find is if they are thinking of moving, leaving the district, they can interview all summer long to other districts and if they find another job... many teachers leave me to go up to northern districts for five, six, thousand dollars more per year and they will do that a day before the kids come.” –HR Director

internal vacancy. Directors compared this to Maryland, which has incentivized educators to honor their contracts by revoking their license if they fail to give notice of resignation or retirement prior to July 15th.

- ✔ **Unit counts.** Delaware’s school funding system allocates funding to districts and schools in the form of units, which are commitments by the state to pay for specified expenses, such as administrator, teacher, or staffing positions, and operating costs. There are three steps involved in the funding system: counting students, translating the counts into units, and providing the district with allocations based on units. Counts are to be completed by districts by September 30th of each year, during a ten-day window. Directors reported that the timing of the unit count hinders early hiring. Due to uncertainty around resource allocation, some directors cannot hire for all positions until after September 30th, which is what the 98% guarantee was supposed to address. At this time, quality candidates are much harder to find than during spring and summer recruiting. In addition, directors shared that often their counts increase between October and December, so that by January, the need for staff may be increased but they are prohibited from hiring.

“Because of the unit count occurring in the fall of each year, you’re nervous about your numbers because your actual teacher ability for hiring is based on something that happens way out into the future.” – HR Director

- ✔ **Collective bargaining agreements.** Because of collective bargaining agreements, many directors shared that they were unable to offer monetary incentives to highly desired candidates. They were unable to offer higher salaries or signing bonuses to incentivize teachers to their districts – and often lost those teachers to districts with higher salaries.
- ✔ **Increased need for specialty educators.** Directors reported that the demographics and needs of the student population have also changed in Delaware over the last few years. In particular, they reported a growing need for Spanish language educators to staff immersion programs as well Spanish speaking students, and increased demand for special education educators – which requires an additional certification. These student needs create additional challenges for directors, who in many cases still struggle to fill the more traditional harder-to-staff positions such as high school math and science.

- ✔ **New generation of hires.** Many of the directors shared that the new generation of hires were substantively different from prior cohorts of recent college graduates. They cited “generational issues,” and shared that in the past, candidates thought about teaching as a career – whereas now, teaching is considered to be a job that one might have for only a few years, or a job that one can have in many different locations throughout their career.

“They’re not looking for careers, they’re looking for jobs. And you can have multiple jobs over the course of your lifetime. They’re coming into education but not necessarily seeing education as a lifelong career.” –HR Director

- ✔ **Competition amongst the 19 districts.** Directors reported that because of the one-way contract policy, voluntary transfers, and the differing salary schedules offered throughout the state, districts

are constantly in competition with one another. One district director in particular was adamant that Delaware needs to stop negotiating separate collective bargaining agreements for each district. He argued that all educators should be paid the same statewide, and that not doing so was hurting everyone.

4.5.2 Barriers for Would-Be Delaware Teaching Candidates

In addition to the challenges directly faced by directors, they reported several conditions in Delaware that deter potential candidates from considering and/or accepting positions within the state.

- ✔ **Lack of reciprocity and perceived lower pay.** Delaware does not have reciprocity in teaching certifications with neighboring states and directors perceived that Delaware has is substantially lower paying as well. Directors felt that this keeps educators certified in other states from even considering job opportunities in Delaware. While this created a barrier for all out-of- state educators, this was exacerbated for diverse candidates who are in high demand everywhere.

“We do a lot for recruiting out of state and one of the big challenges is convincing kids to come from other states to Delaware where the requirements for certification is harder.” –HR Director

- ✔ **Lack of undergrad programs for secondary education and non-instructional specialists in-state.** At the present time, Delaware State University does not have a secondary education program¹⁵, which directors saw as a deficit in the state higher education system. As well, directors reported that there are many non-instructional positions for which there are no in-state education or training programs, such as psychologists and speech therapists, in the state of Delaware. This, combined with an increase in student need makes filling these positions a chronic challenge.

- ✔ **Unappealing rural placements.** Directors reported that many rural schools in Delaware have a very hard time recruiting both within and out of state. They felt recruiting young people from other areas to live in remote places, without an urban center or community, is very challenging. This is why directors emphasized the importance of the Grow Your Own programs that recruit from a pool of students with a connection to - and familiarity with - the area.

“Unless you have some kind of family connection there or you live locally, it’s hard to keep and retain people when surrounding districts have a greater local salary and better structures.” –HR Director

¹⁵ <https://www.desu.edu/academics/majors-programs>

- ❖ **Challenging and costly state examinations for teaching.** Directors perceived that the most common barrier for potential candidates was the many challenging and expensive state examinations required to become a certified educator in Delaware. They saw this as a deterrent for many potential educators, both in and out of state. They indicated that the cost of taking the tests was a significant financial burden for many potential candidates and may have kept them from attempting the exams. Of note, some directors perceived that the testing sequence was a larger barrier for minority candidates, who they believed to have greater fears of standardized testing, or hold beliefs that they would not be able to do well on the test.

“When you hear ... there’s a performance test or some test that you have to take and some folks don’t believe that they’re good test takers and that just shrinks the pool as well.” –HR Director

- ❖ **Ineffective retirement notification incentives.** In the survey, 17 of the 19 directors reported having policies or incentives that required or encouraged teachers who intended to retire to notify the school by a certain date. Despite this, in the focus groups, directors reported that in many cases these requirements or encouragements were ineffective as many educators believed that if they announced a desired transfer or a retirement that they would not receive their benefits over the summer – which is not accurate.

4.6 Strategies for Successful Recruitment and Hiring

Executing a successful hiring season is not easy. Directors reported both in the survey and the focus group that filling all positions is the most salient hiring priority. To this end, directors identified several key strategies that have been useful in addressing the challenges discussed above, including surveying current teachers about their intent, Grow Your Own Programs, recruiting from in-state institutions, both non-monetary and monetary incentives, and working with current staff.

- ❖ **Surveying current staff about intent.** Most directors reported surveying faculty and staff within their districts early in the year to help them better predict vacancies.

4.6.1 Prioritizing Grow Your Own Programs

Grow Your Own programs have consistently been identified as the most successful strategy for recruiting candidates – and **particularly minority candidates**. Using this strategy, directors are able to recruit educators who are familiar with the particular school and/or district context and are likely to want to live there. Directors in rural districts highlighted that GYO programs are particularly helpful, as people who are from rural areas and have family there are more likely to want to live in these locations as compared to outsiders. Directors described a dual approach to “growing their own”, including first, encouraging high school students to enter the teaching profession and second, developing and supporting their existing paraprofessionals to attain certification.

✔ **Recruiting students early.** Directors reported engaging current high school students through the “Educators Rising” program. This program provides students with hands-on teaching experience, sustains their interest in the profession, and helps them cultivate the skills they need to be successful educators. Directors also highlighted the “Educator Academy” program that goes hand in hand with “Educators Rising” and requires students to take relevant coursework and shadow current educators. Through this pathway, students are guaranteed an interview at the school if they graduate college with a degree in education.

“Our other strategy is working with the Educators Rising program... We want to try and talk to students who are interested in education and try to connect with them enough so when they go to college they’ll to come back to us.” –HR Director

✔ **Developing and supporting existing staff.** Directors also reported successful programs to help develop paraprofessionals into educators. One director reported inviting all paraprofessionals to a recruitment social where they received support from within to obtain their certifications. All directors agreed that this strategy is particularly useful for increasing the minority candidate pool, as the paraprofessional staff is generally more diverse than the educator pool.

“One of our strategies is we send an email out to our paras... But one of the ways is home grown. ... We bring them in, have all this information about certification, how they can get certified, what they need. We have 14 people. So that can be pretty significant when we’re trying to increase minority teachers in the district.” –HR Director

4.6.2 Offering Non-Monetary Incentives

Directors identified several non-monetary incentives they used to recruit candidates to their districts and to particular schools. Also, they identified reasons why educators would be motivated to join and remain in their districts. The following non-monetary incentives were reported to be useful in recruiting and hiring desired educators.

- ✔ **Promoting and maintaining a positive school culture.** Several of the directors expressed that the reputation and climate of their schools was a significant asset and motivator for candidates. Directors shared that they felt educators were motivated to accept positions and remain in schools with known positive school culture.
- ✔ **Offering strong mentoring and professional development opportunities.** Directors felt that mentoring programs were very important to help mold new educators. The high-quality mentoring and support provided by DDOE at the local level was critical in getting educators prepared to teach at specific schools. A few directors also described the importance of offering meaningful professional development as an incentive for educators. PD helps staff do their job better, avoid burnout and creates connections with staff to aid in retention.

“We have the luxury of the PD that we do, we try to make sure that we do relevant PD that helps with teachers doing their jobs better.” – HR Director

- ✔ **Promoting the schools' location.** Several directors reported using their schools' locations to recruit possible candidates. The beach, as well as areas of rapid municipal expansion and growth, were seen as strengths that directors emphasized in their recruitment efforts.

"We're closer to the beaches... We try and use that as our hook as we start talking to them. That's our selling point." –HR Director

4.6.3 Offering Monetary Incentives

Directors identified several monetary incentives they used to recruit candidates to their districts. All directors agreed that **salary was a large factor in educator recruitment and sometimes the only factor a candidate considers.**

- ✔ **Offering competitive salaries.** Directors indicated that salary was a very powerful incentive tool (potentially the most powerful to recruit high quality candidates, and particularly the highly sought after diverse candidates. They explained how each district

"They'll go up to [another district] for that last 3 or 4 years because they're going to get 6, 7, 8 thousand dollars more in their paycheck per year. That means when they do their pension calculation, they're getting more when they walk out the door." –HR Director

had different salary schedules, and that most

"When experienced teachers get to a certain level, not retirement, but they're kids are about to go to college, they'll apply to a job in our district to make more money so they can help them pay that expense."

candidates and existing educators just wanted to be in the district where they could get the most money, both in the short-term to pay for life expenses and in the long-term to increase their pensions. Directors named the districts with the highest salaries, where new educators wanted to be placed and experienced educators wanted to transfer to (particularly when they needed to send their children to college or were getting ready to retire).

- ✔ **Offering tuition reimbursement.** Directors shared that being able to offer potential tuition reimbursements for future education was a big selling point. Directors reported large variations in the levels of tuition reimbursement money that could be allocated each year for candidates who wanted to pursue certifications – particularly in critical needs areas such as autism. They reported that these funds, which are a mixture of state and local, had declined in recent years, but they felt they were very important to aid in hiring.

"We're talking about tuition reimbursement. I mean my daughter just graduated and when they get out all the companies are vying against each other and that's a biggie. That's a biggie. Tuition reimbursement for future education." –HR Director

- ✔ **Offering signing, retention and performance-based bonuses to new educators.** As district salaries are fixed, due to collective bargaining rights, in the absence of increased salaries, directors described a variety of different types of bonuses used to recruit educators. Directors reported that in one district, educators were given a \$3,000 signing bonus and \$3,000 for each of the next two years

staying in the district. While this proved successful for recruitment, directors reported the district was having trouble retaining educators after three years. One charter director explained that while charters pay lower salaries, they are able to offer performance-based bonuses to highest performing educators.

5. Selection & Effectiveness

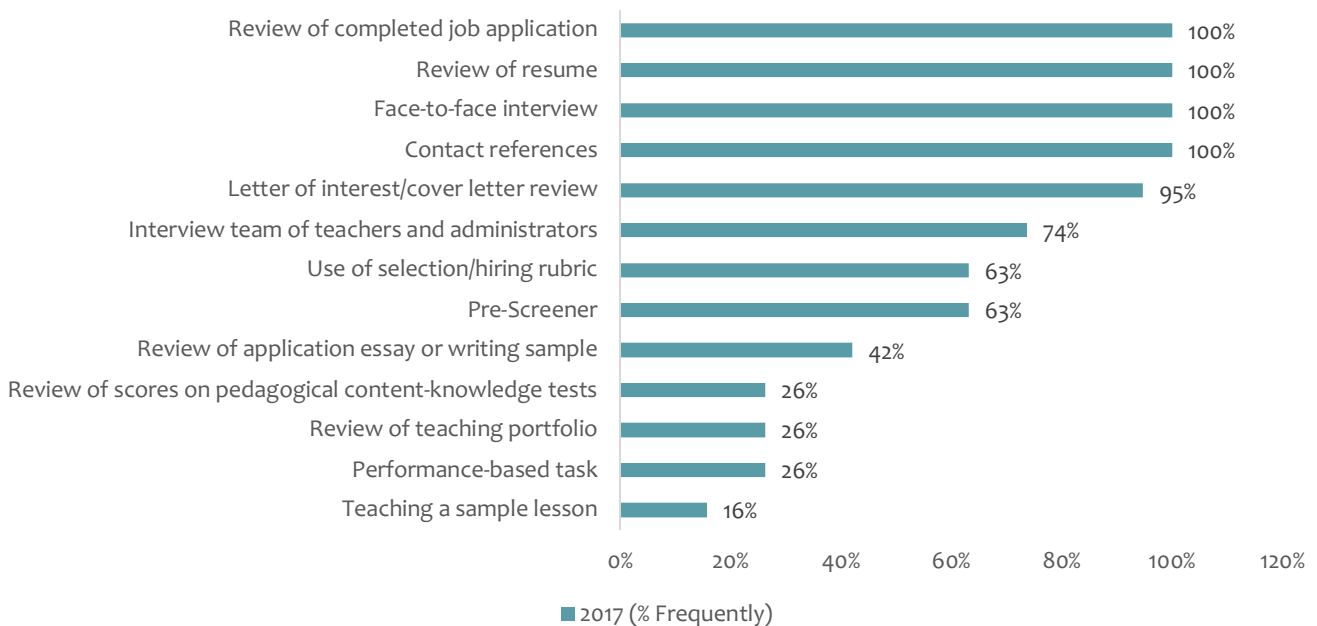
5.1 Educator Selection

Districts were asked to indicate the frequency with which they used various selection activities. The question was worded slightly differently in 2016, so direct comparisons cannot be made.

- ✔ **Directors most commonly reviewed resumes and completed job applications, contacted references, and held face-to-face interviews when recruiting educators.** This held true in both 2016 and 2017 despite different response scales. Teaching a sample lesson, performance-based tasks and review of teaching portfolios were used less often across both years.

Detailed frequency comparisons can be found in Figure 14.

Figure 14. Frequency of Specific Director Educator Selection Activities in 2017



5.2 School Leaders Selection

Directors were asked to rank which professional qualifications were most important in making a job offer to a school leader candidate. They were also asked to indicate the frequency with which various selection activities were used.

- ✔ **Directors reported most frequently that leadership experience, instructional knowledge, and experience working in similar communities/with similar students were the top three most important professional qualifications.** Of note, none of the directors considered advanced degrees important in making a job offer to a school leader candidate.
- ✔ **Directors reported most frequently using the same activities to recruit school leaders as they used for educators: resume and completed job application reviews, reference contacts, and face-to-face interviews.** Other frequently-used activities include using scenario-based questions and an interview team of educators.

Figure 15. Professional Qualifications Most Important in School-Leader Recruitment and Selection

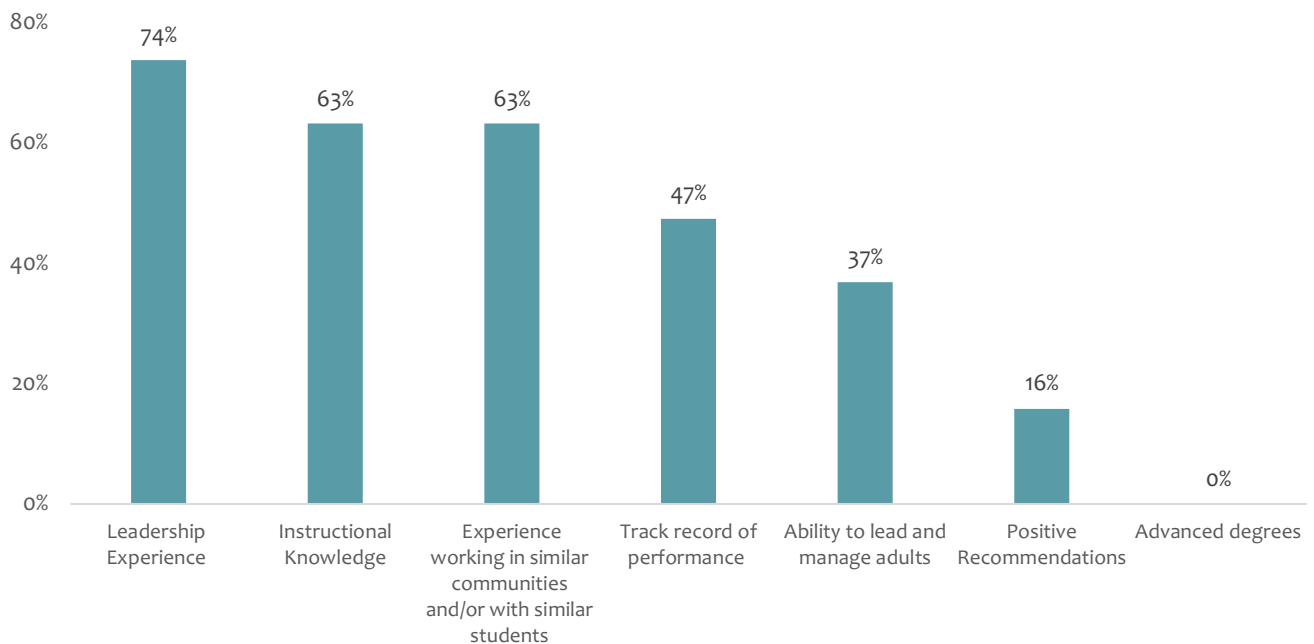
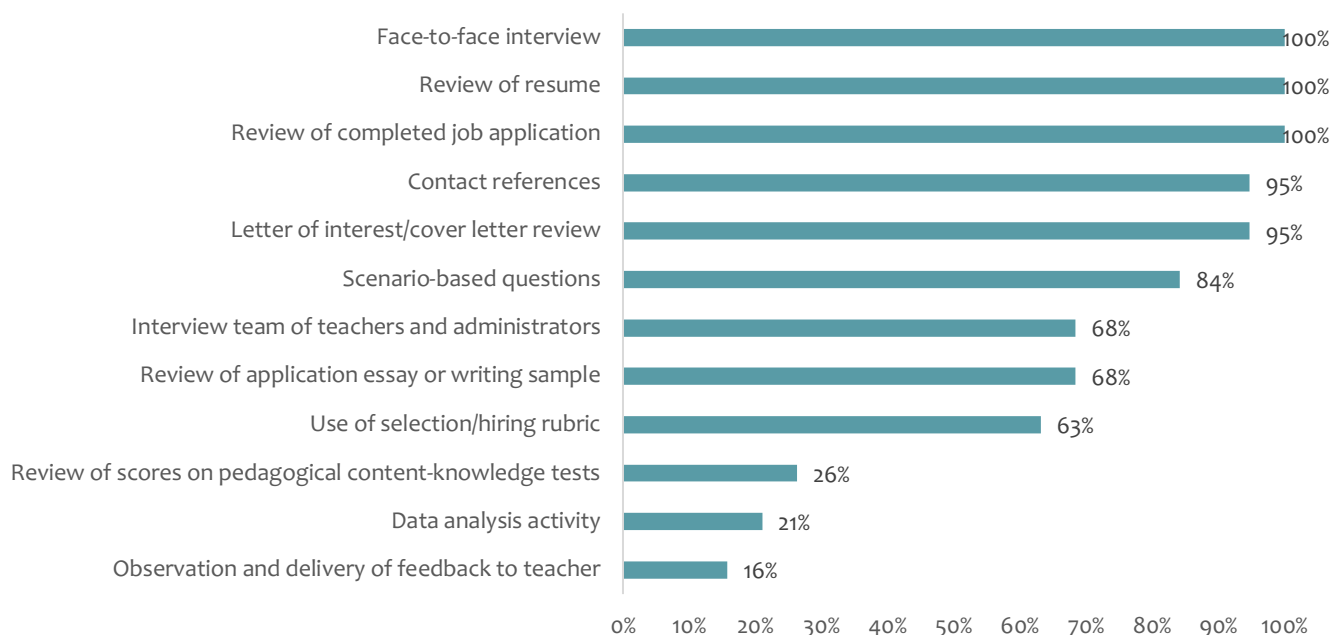


Figure 16. Frequency of Specific Director School Leader Recruitment and Selection Activities in 2017



5.3 Educator Effectiveness

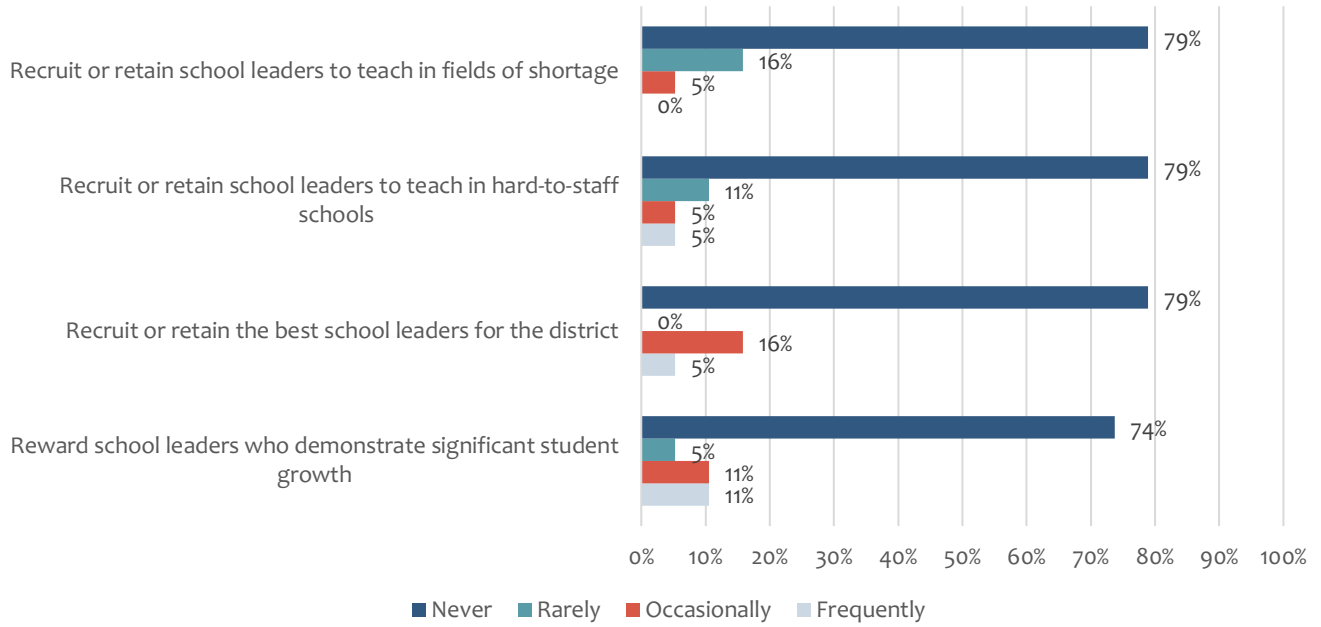
- ✔ **In 2017, fewer directors reported having a process in place for identifying their most impactful educators.** In 2016, all 19 directors indicated that this process was in place. In 2017, only 15 directors indicated as such.
- ✔ **Directors in both 2016 and 2017 reported that student growth data was the most frequently used method for identifying impactful educators.** 14 out of 19 districts indicated as such in 2017, and 15 did in 2016.

5.4 Leader Effectiveness

Directors in 2017 were asked to describe the frequency with which they used compensation incentives (e.g., financial bonuses, salary increases) to recruit and retain effective school leaders.

- ✔ **Most directors never use compensation incentives to recruit and retain effective school leaders.** Directors that use incentives occasionally use them to recruit or retain the best school leaders in the districts, and sometimes use them to reward school leaders who demonstrate significant growth. A full breakdown of usage frequency is included in the Figure 9.

Figure 17. Frequency of District Compensation Incentives for School Leaders in 2017



6. Recommendations

6.1 To Improve Excellent Educator Hiring Practices

Despite many of the challenges and barriers directors described in the hiring process, several potential opportunities emerged from the data. Mainly, opportunities exist to support and promote current best practices and reduce barriers to candidate entry. Here, we share recommendations for the Delaware Department of Education and district HR directors in the short-, medium- and long-terms.

Short Term (within the next year)

- ✔ **Promote aspects of teaching that make it a desirable profession.** Teaching is one of the few remaining professions with a pension and generous benefits. Directors should elevate this aspect of the profession when recruiting. Additionally, many school districts are known for their collaborative environment. Highlighting these two aspects may remind candidates that teaching is a respected profession with excellent benefits.
- ✔ **Increase awareness of opportunities to receive reimbursement for certifications.** Despite viewing certifications as one of the primary barriers to teacher candidacy, Directors did not acknowledge opportunities to receive reimbursements for certifications during the focus groups. Increasing directors' awareness of these opportunities will enable them to share this information with candidates who may be otherwise averse to teaching in Delaware.
- ✔ **Scale Up Grow Your Own Programs.** Directors reported grow your own programs as one of their most successful recruiting strategies, particularly for diverse candidates and some harder-to-fill positions. They should continue to support Educators Rising and Teacher Academy programs to introduce the teaching profession to students while they are still in high school and further promote the profession as respectable. Directors should specifically target Spanish speaking who may later be able fill positions that require Spanish fluency.

Medium Term (2 – 4 years)

- ✔ **Incentivize and educate about early retirement and vacancy notification.** Directors should work with their school districts to implement key changes to collective bargaining agreements that will help plan for projected vacancies. Successful strategies include offering and promoting incentives for early transfer or retirement notifications. Districts should also begin education campaigns to assuage fears of negative impacts to employee benefits over the summer if early notification is given. Finally, more punitive measures for not announcing retirement or resignation early should be considered. Many directors compared Delaware's lack of state-wide policy to Maryland where the state revokes teaching licenses for anyone failing to give retirement or leave notice prior to July 15th.

- ✔ **Reconsider timing of Unit Count.** Delaware should consider adjusting the timing of the Unit Count to be earlier in the fall. This would allow districts to know their hiring capabilities closer to the start of the school year.
- ✔ **Authorize directors to sign contracts at job fairs for more positions.** Districts should consider allowing directors to sign contracts for more positions at job fairs, as it was frequently cited that novice teachers were anxious to secure a position.

Long Term (within the next 5+ years)

- ✔ **Provide testing prep and support programs for candidates.** Credentialing was often cited as one of the biggest barriers for recruiting candidates, especially minority candidates. Providing testing prep and support for candidates may help assuage their fears related to examinations and the credentialing process in Delaware.
- ✔ **Provide financial support for testing for highly desired candidates.** Reducing barriers to candidacy for highly desired teachers is important. Providing financial support highly desirable candidates as they go through testing and credentialing in Delaware may help to increase barriers.
- ✔ **Provide free or subsidized college tuition for committed future educators and/or loan forgiveness.** As Delaware continues to promote teaching as a respected and desirable profession, offering free or subsidized college tuition for committed future educators and/or loan forgiveness to students is a way to signify the priority of teachers and the benefits that came along with it.
- ✔ **Work with in-state higher education institutions to start a secondary education teaching program.** Directors reported having the greatest success with recruiting and retaining individuals who were local to the Delaware region. Creating a secondary education teaching program would widen the pool of individuals familiar with the Delaware region and give local talent a nearby option to pursue their education.

6.2 Recommendations for Future Research

The Delaware Department of Education should consider the following recommendations for future research:

- ✔ **Explore relationships between teacher hiring, retention and effectiveness in DDOE administrative data.** Further analysis to determine which teachers are the most effective and how effectiveness is related to their hiring experiences and overall retention would provide a valuable information for future recruitment strategies.
- ✔ **Strengthen efforts understand teacher retention.** Teachers tend to leave their positions for different reasons depending on their career stage. Targeted interviews with teachers at various career stages would provide valuable insight about retention.
- ✔ **Consider integrating and bolstering the report sections on Selection and Effectiveness.** The current report focuses primarily on recruitment and hiring of educators. Future reports may consider more deeply integrating and connecting the roles of selection and effectiveness to the hiring process.