2015 Delaware Talent Practices Report

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

FINAL REPORT

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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, particularly in math, science, and special education. 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 and school needs. 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 and charter schools in December 2015. 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. This survey data was supplemented by analysis from three case study districts – referred to as District A, District B, and District C – which varied in size and location across the state.

✔ Policies & Systems: Research demonstrates that the most qualified teacher candidates are more likely to be hired early. Therefore, districts with streamlined, 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.

✔ 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.

✔ 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.

✔ 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.

Methodology

This evaluation utilized mixed methods to explore talent practices in districts and charter schools in Delaware. Quantitative data provided aggregate information on talent practices among Delaware’s district and charter schools, while qualitative data more thoroughly explored the best practices and challenges faced by individual districts. Additional information on the measures and analytic methods is included below.

Quantitative Data Collection

We worked with DDOE Leadership to administer a Talent Practices Survey to human resources directors in each district and charter school in the state. Survey respondents were asked questions about the following topics relating to the 2015 hiring season (February 2015 to October 2015):

- **Teacher recruitment strategies** – recruitment budget, recruitment staffing structure, most frequently used – and most effective – recruitment strategies, recruitment messages, most commonly used applicant pools, high-need and diversity hiring practices

- **Teacher hiring policies** – target hiring dates and timelines, notification and resignation processes, communication frequency with applicants and schools, areas with the most high-potential and fewest high-potential applicants

- **Teacher selection processes** – list of educator professional competencies, top professional qualifications, most frequently used selection activities, level of principal autonomy, staff involvement in the interview process for new teaching candidates

- **Teacher evaluation, compensation, and retention practices** – processes for identifying highly effective teachers, financial and non-financial incentives for recruiting and retaining teachers

- **School leaders’ recruitment and selection practices** – strategies for school leaders’ recruitment and selection processes

All 19 of Delaware’s traditional public school districts responded to the Talent Practices Survey, as well as 17 of the state’s 25 charter schools. Throughout the report, we compare results from our survey to prior years’ data.

Qualitative Data Collection

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 across the state. This qualitative data collection was used to provide a more in-depth profile of districts’ talent practices.

- **HR Director interviews** – we interviewed HR directors in each of the of the three case study districts. These interviews helped us build a better understanding of best practices and challenges related to talent recruitment, hiring, selection, and retention in local districts.

- **Principal interviews and teacher focus group** – in District B, we also interviewed two principals, as well as a focus group of new hires, to gather information on principals’ and teachers’ perceptions of the recruitment, hiring, and selection process.

Results from these case studies were used to supplement findings from the survey and have been noted in call-out boxes throughout the report.
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.

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

State Landscape: Hiring Timelines

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 (SB 16), which required the DDOE to estimate each district’s enrollment by April 15th of the preceding school year. The law, made permanent by House Bill 259 (HB 259) in 2014, guarantees that districts will receive at least 98% of the funding justified by the enrollment estimate. Before SB 16, districts waited until September 30th to learn the level of state funding they would receive, which created significant budget uncertainty for the districts and led to many teachers being hired after the school year had already begun.

- 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 (the year prior to the law) to 51.4% in 2011-2012 (the year after the law was passed), as illustrated below.
- After two years of lower totals in 2013-2014 and 2014-2015, the number of teachers hired by August 1st increased this school year, to 50.5%.
Notably, the 98% guarantee only applies to the state’s portion of each teaching unit. State funding provides for approximately 70% of educator salaries, with districts funding the remainder.\(^3\) As a result, despite the 98% guarantee of state funding, districts still maintain some level of financial uncertainty until the final unit count is provided on September 30\(^{th}\). In previous surveys, districts indicated that one reason for hiring teachers after August 1\(^{st}\) was concern about having to use local funds to pay for additional teachers.\(^4\) Though SB 16 and HB 259 reduced some of the causes of that concern, they did not eliminate them altogether.

While the decrease in teachers hired in August or later is important, research suggests that teachers should be hired considerably earlier than August 1\(^{st}\). Specifically, research recommends that districts aim to complete hiring by May 1\(^{st}\).

Districts that wait to hire until mid-to-late summer lose significant numbers of applicants; one study found that teaching applicants begin to withdraw from the hiring process in May, and 40% withdraw by the end of June. Moreover, more-qualified applicants are disproportionately likely to withdraw during an extended hiring process and take jobs with districts or schools that make offers earlier.\(^5\) As a result, districts that wait until the end of the summer to hire teachers are less able to choose from a deep pool of well-qualified applicants.

Significant discrepancies exist between Delaware’s districts and charter schools in the extent to which they hire teachers both by May 1\(^{st}\) and by August 1\(^{st}\).

- In 2015-2016, only 7% of teacher hires in Delaware districts occurred by May 1\(^{st}\), and only an additional 6% of teachers were hired in May. Almost 50% of hires occurred after August 1\(^{st}\).

- Conversely, charter schools had hired 18% of teachers by May 1\(^{st}\) and an additional 21% of teachers by the end of May. Only 14% of hires occurred after August 1\(^{st}\).

This finding is significant, as it indicates that Delaware’s school districts are at a disadvantage in competing with Delaware charter schools for high-quality applicants. Half of all hiring by districts occurs after August 1\(^{st}\), when charter schools have mostly completed their hiring.

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State Landscape: Teacher Recruitment

Research has demonstrated that new teachers tend to seek employment near where they grew up or went to college.\(^6\) For example, one study in New York found that 61% of teachers entering the profession started teaching within 15 miles of their hometowns, and 85% entered teaching within 40 miles of their hometowns. In addition, 37% entered teaching within 15 miles of the college from which they received their most recent degree.\(^7\) This pattern holds in Delaware; DDOE data indicates that of teachers in Delaware with five or fewer years of education experience in 2012-2013, 59% received their bachelor’s degrees in Delaware.\(^8\) Moreover, the Delaware Aspiring Educator Survey of 348 early-career teachers indicated that 79% of the teachers who grew up in Delaware rated Delaware as their first-choice teaching destination, and 56% of the teachers who attended college in Delaware rated staying in Delaware as their top choice. Teachers who did not grow up in Delaware or did not attend college in Delaware were much less likely to rate Delaware as their preferred place to teach.\(^9\)

These findings have significant implications for teacher recruitment in Delaware. Most notably, they underscore the importance of developing teacher pipelines from Delaware’s communities to Delaware’s public schools. The new teachers most likely to teach in Delaware school districts are the ones that grew up or went to college in Delaware. Thus, the most impactful statewide talent recruitment practices are likely to be those that prioritize the development and recruitment of teacher candidates with Delaware ties.

The state has recently made an effort to improve its talent pipelines. In 2013, Gov. Markell signed Senate Bill 51, which was designed to increase the rigor of the state’s teacher preparation process. The law’s changes included establishing more rigorous admissions criteria for teacher preparation programs, instituting a test of content knowledge and teaching practice that candidates must pass before receiving a teaching license, requiring teacher preparation programs to evaluate candidates using a system aligned to the state’s teacher-evaluation system, and creating a system of accountability that links teachers’ performance to the preparation programs where they were trained.\(^10\)

As a small state in a densely populated region, Delaware faces significant competition from surrounding states in recruiting teachers. Maryland, for example, is an “import” state, with fewer newly certified teachers than teaching vacancies each year. In 2013, 41% of new hires in Maryland schools were beginning teachers who trained out of state, while only 22% were beginning teachers who trained in Maryland.\(^11\)

Through state efforts like Senate Bill 16 and Senate Bill 51, Delaware has made noteworthy progress in supporting school districts’ efforts to hire high-quality teachers. More work remains, however, to ensure Delaware’s schools maximize their ability to hire and retain excellent teachers. This report will explore key trends in talent practices and variation at the district-level in the following elements of the talent pipeline:

- Policies and systems
- Identification and recruitment
- Hiring and selection
- Evaluation, compensation, and retention

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\(^11\) Division of Educator Effectiveness, Maryland State Department of Education. Teacher Supply Dashboards: New Hires Trends.
Policies & Systems

☑ Establish Policies that Promote Early Hiring

As noted above, research recommends that districts and schools hire the vast majority of new candidates by May 1st. This allows them to compete with other districts and schools in the region that have more accelerated hiring timelines. Hiring early also maximizes the chances of maintaining a deep pool of high-quality applicants, as more-qualified applicants are disproportionately likely to withdraw from a lengthy hiring process and accept offers from other schools. Finally, hiring before the end of the preceding school year allows schools and districts to conduct a more thorough selection process. For instance, it gives schools the opportunity to ask candidates to teach a sample lesson to a group of students and provides candidates with the opportunity to see the school in action and determine if they are a strong fit. Indeed, one study found that new teachers hired late in the summer were almost twice as likely as new teachers hired earlier to leave their school after one year. To maximize the chances of hiring high-quality applicants, it is critical that districts establish policies that promote early hiring.

- 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.
- Fourteen charter schools reported having a target date for hiring completion. Of these, seven had a target date on or before June 1st, and 13 had a target date on or before July 15th.

One important way for districts and schools to promote early hiring is to institute policies that incentivize teachers who intend to retire or resign at the end of the year to notify the school as early as possible. This allows schools and districts to begin recruiting for specific positions by the spring.

- 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. Two of those districts stated that they offer $600 to teachers for early retirement notification, and one offers $500. The other two did not list an amount.
- 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.

As noted earlier, approximately 50% of district teacher hires in 2015-2016 occurred by August 1st. This figure, however, masks significant variation in districts’ hiring timelines. The chart below shows the percentages of teachers hired by June 1st and August 1st in six districts.

- The top three districts hired between 70-80% of teachers by August 1st and between 30-40% by June 1st
- The bottom three districts hired between 10-20% of teachers by August 1st and between 0-15% by June 1st

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Districts 4-6 are larger than districts 1-3, suggesting that the size of the district could be associated with early hiring patterns. However, when looking at all 19 districts, there was not a significant relationship between size and hiring completion. The discrepancies between districts’ early hiring results may also be influenced by teacher transfer policies. In some districts’ collective bargaining agreements, teachers who wish to transfer from one school in the district to another receive priority over external candidates for vacant positions. In most of these cases, teachers have until April or May to request an intra-district transfer, meaning that principals and district staff must wait until all transfer requests have been submitted to begin hiring external candidates. One principal in District B, one of the districts with priority given to intra-district transfers, described having to wait until the end of April for the transfer window to end before looking to hire external candidates.

- “[Voluntary transfer] now is done by the end of April so that the beginning of May in theory we should be ready to roll and hire fresh folks from outside the district. Our hands are tied and we really can’t look outside the district during that voluntary transfer window.” (District B Principal)

As documented earlier, waiting until May to begin interviewing external applicants places schools and districts at a disadvantage in competing for high-quality candidates.

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 for potential applicants and allows for more careful screening of applicants.

By hiring a staff member to lead teacher recruitment, District A has been able to recruit more widely across the region, prioritize recruitment of teachers of color, build stronger partnerships with local colleges and universities, and more closely evaluate student teachers in the district. In addition to recruitment, this staff member also leads new teacher mentoring, creating a more seamless transition for new teachers from recruitment through the induction process.

Through all of these efforts, District A has strengthened its talent pipeline and deepened its pool of high-quality teaching applicants. Although other districts may not be able to hire a full-time staff member for recruitment and induction, they should consider how to strategically allocate recruitment resources to maximize the breadth and depth of their pools of teaching applicants.

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)
Streamline Systems of Communication

Effective talent practices rely on strong communication in two primary ways. First, open and ongoing communication between central office staff and individual principals regarding staffing needs allows central office staff to recruit strategically for specific vacancies. In addition, understanding individual schools’ needs helps central office staff to effectively direct teaching applicants to the schools where they would be the best fit. Second, effective communication between school or district staff and individual teaching applicants can help prevent applicants from withdrawing from the hiring process. Ongoing communication ensures responsiveness to applicants and allows the principal or district staff to communicate expectations regarding the different stages of the hiring process.

Most Delaware districts reported regular communication with both individual schools and individual applicants.

- 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.

Both principals and district staff emphasized the value of ongoing communication between the school and central office to determine staffing needs. The District A HR director reported working with schools to determine staffing priorities and ensure that candidates interviewed at schools where they would be a good fit. District B also had a collaborative process and district leaders worked closely with school-level leaders throughout the process. The District C HR director went as far as to suggest that collaboration with principals was the most effective tool to promote the hiring of high-quality teachers.

Best Practices: District A

The HR director of District A described her district’s processes of communication with schools regarding their anticipated hiring needs. This communication, as well as her knowledge of the individual schools that she works with, then allows her to direct specific applicants to schools where she believes they would fit well.

"[To project vacancies,] We actually started in February, three weeks ago we started with principals. Our assistant superintendent and I either meet in person or do conference calls with the principals, starting in February. One thing we did differently this year actually, we did it Monday and Tuesday of this week, whole cabinet, superintendent, assistant superintendent, all the directors. We met as a group and we had every principal come in and kind of explain what they needed, why they needed it and we actually as a group are looking at district resources. We recognize, for example, School A in our northern part of our district next year projecting 862 students, 561 of them are ELL. So that’s a huge need. So then we look at how we distribute resources. We continue to do that every two weeks or so through May." (District A HR Director)
Identification & Recruitment

✔️ Strategically Use Recruitment Resources

Ten of 19 districts reported having a recruitment budget, with amounts ranging from $2,000 to $30,000. In an environment in which districts and schools have limited resources to use for teacher recruitment, it is essential that they use these recruitment resources strategically. Research recommends that HR departments develop data-driven recruitment plans tailored to the district’s hiring needs. These plans should prioritize recruiting from the applicant sources that produce the most high-caliber teaching candidates and use a variety of techniques to communicate recruitment messages to potential applicants.¹⁴

LEAs answered two related questions: which recruitment strategies they found most effective, and which recruitment strategies they used most frequently. Districts’ answers revealed that the strategies they identified as most effective were not necessarily the strategies they used most frequently.

- In addition to posting vacant positions on the district’s website, Delaware districts identified several strategies as their most effective recruitment tactics: Project Search at the University of Delaware, hiring student teachers already teaching in the district, and Join Delaware Schools.

- However, the strategies districts reported using most frequently were posting jobs on the district’s website, attending job fairs, word of mouth, and Project Search at the University of Delaware.

- Noteworthy gaps existed in several categories. Seventeen districts frequently recruit at job fairs in Delaware, but only three reported that as one of their most effective strategies. Fifteen districts frequently rely on word of mouth, but only four rated it as a most effective strategy. Nine districts use print ads, but only two ranked print ads as most effective. Seven districts frequently hold informational sessions at Delaware colleges, but none of those seven ranked that as one of their top strategies.

This finding indicates that the recruitment strategies that districts use most frequently are not always the strategies that they find most effective. Given the necessity of strategically targeting recruitment resources, districts should ensure that investing resources in print ads, for example, does not deprive them of resources that could be used in a more impactful way.

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One strategy that we asked about specifically was the use of recruitment incentives, which can be another useful tool for districts as part of a more comprehensive plan for recruiting high-quality candidates.

- Four districts reported offering recruitment incentives to teacher candidates. One offers a signing bonus and a three-year incentive to remain in the district, one offers a relocation loan (in 2013, two districts reported having relocation assistance), one hosts periodic recruitment dinners, and the other did not specify its incentive.

In addition to recruiting strategically, research also recommends using data to target recruitment resources most effectively. Reports from several urban districts that have recently improved their talent practices indicate several potential uses of data in the recruitment process.

- In Hillsborough County, Florida, for example, district staff track the teacher evaluation results of teachers from different recruitment sources over several years, and then use that data to prioritize recruitment at certain career fairs while avoiding those that traditionally produced weaker applicants.

- In Deerfield Public Schools District, Illinois, the district uses pre-screening tools to assign candidates an initial score and then spends the next two years evaluating the extent to which each new teacher’s performance matches the score he or she received on the initial screening.\(^{15}\)

Many of Delaware’s LEAs reported using data in a variety of ways to inform their talent practices.

- Thirteen districts reported tracking the percentage of applicants from different recruitment sources that are hired.
- Nine districts reported tracking on-the-job performance of teachers from different recruitment sources.
- Of the 17 charter schools surveyed, six reported tracking the percentage of applicants from different recruitment sources that are hired, and four reported tracking on-the-job performance of teachers from different recruitment sources.

These practices can be important tools for districts and schools in focusing recruitment resources on the most impactful strategies.

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Partner with Local Universities

As noted earlier, most new teachers seek jobs near where they grew up or went to college. This is true in Delaware: of teachers in Delaware with five or fewer years of education experience, about 60% received their bachelor’s degrees in Delaware.\textsuperscript{16} As a result, many Delaware districts have focused on recruiting from local universities, and several are developing their own talent pipelines to ensure a supply of high-quality teacher applicants.

- When asked to indicate where they focus their recruitment efforts, 17 districts reported recruiting frequently from the University of Delaware, and 13 recruit frequently from Wilmington University. Twelve frequently recruit student teachers already working in the district.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{chart.png}
\caption{Number of Districts Frequently Recruiting from Various Applicant Pools}
\end{figure}

This finding illustrates the importance of local universities in talent practices across the state, as five of the top six frequently-used applicant pools involve Delaware universities. Several districts have developed formal partnerships with local universities to host student teachers each year. These partnerships provide an important source of potential teaching recruits for local school districts, but they also make districts reliant on a small number of teaching preparation programs for significant portions of their applicant pools.

As the deputy superintendent in District B noted, this reliance can mean an oversupply of teachers in certain areas and gaps in another. It can also present challenges in recruiting a diverse pool of applicants if the teacher preparation programs are not diverse.

"We have a very large pool of elementary candidates available to us. Both University of Delaware and Wilmington [University] have strong elementary programs. So we struggle with some of the secondary positions and math/science/technology, those types of positions."

This finding about the importance of local universities corresponds well with the intent behind Senate Bill 51 in 2013, which raised the standards for teacher preparation programs in Delaware. Delaware's schools rely heavily on Delaware's teacher preparation programs for teaching applicants, which reinforces the importance of ensuring that those programs prepare teachers effectively.

Differentiate Strategies for High-Need Schools and Diverse Candidates

Research supports the importance of recruiting a diverse teaching staff to provide role models for an increasingly diverse student population, among other benefits.\(^{17}\) To be most effective, districts must prioritize – and develop specific strategies to improve – recruitment of diverse teachers and teachers for high-need schools. In some districts, a targeted strategy and “Grow Your Own” programs like those mentioned above have been important sources of teachers of color and teachers for high-need schools.\(^{18}\) Delaware’s school districts do seem to use several differentiated practices for recruiting diverse teachers and teachers for high-need schools.

- Word of mouth appears to be an especially important strategy for districts in hiring diverse and high-needs 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.

- One district described placing a higher priority on the hiring of teachers of color in their survey response: “We have started a committee that we meet with to discuss diversity hiring. We have initiated an interview process that requires us to contact and bring in immediately any qualified minority that we see. This resulted in the hiring of four minority teachers in one month last summer.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most Successful Recruitment Strategies for Diverse Applicants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Post jobs on the district’s website</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Delaware Project Search</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hiring teachers after their time student teaching in the district</td>
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<tr>
<td>Join Delaware Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment trips/fairs in other states</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentations at job fairs in Delaware</td>
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<tr>
<td>Print advertisements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Recruitment at HBCUs or HSIs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post jobs on the school’s website</td>
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<tr>
<td>Information sessions and other recruitment on college campuses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alternative teacher preparation programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Best Practices: District C

District C has been able to use its Grow Your Own program and targeted recruitment at HBCUs (historically black colleges and universities) to hire increased numbers of teachers of color:

"Certainly we have had success with paraprofessionals transitioning into the classroom. We have allowed them flexibility with their assignments to complete necessary teacher certification requirements."

District C HR Director


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.19

- 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 the state’s teacher evaluation system (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. All three case study districts shared that this applied information was the most useful information collected during the selection process because it provided them with a better understanding of the teaching candidate’s likelihood of success in the classroom.

- District and school leaders shared that the hiring timeline constrained their ability to gather this type of applied information more systematically. When teachers were hired over the summer, it was much more challenging to set up sample lessons. The HR Director in District C identified a relationship between the hiring timeline and selection process:

  “The challenge is time for our building levels administrators to conduct interviews during the school day when students are in session. There are many school related activities at the end of the school year that make it difficult to conduct school level interviews.” (District C HR Director)

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities Frequently Used by Districts in the Teacher Selection Process</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review of resume</td>
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<tr>
<td>Face-to-face interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review of completed job application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact references</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview team of teachers and administrators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letter of interest/cover letter review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of selection/hiring rubric</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstration or sample lesson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Performance-based task</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review of application essay or writing sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of teaching portfolio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review of scores on pedagogical content-knowledge tests</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nine districts reported having a list of professional competencies to evaluate their teaching staff which were aligned to applied information about candidate’s teaching expertise. However, when asked to choose the three most important professional qualifications in making a job offer to a teacher candidate, a majority of districts (16) selected “certification in subject to be taught” among their top three, which does not necessarily provide evidence of classroom expertise. This was followed by “track record of performance” and “academic content knowledge,” which are more applied qualifications. This finding was consistent with past years of the Talent Practices Report.

Best Practices: District B

District B requires the use of a pre-screener for teaching candidates. This pre-screener, which is still in the pilot phase, was developed in partnership with a research organization to capture information on teachers’ credentials, philosophy of teaching, and behavioral dispositions. District B leadership reported that early hiring was ideal, but believed that the pre-screener tool could support principals if the process was delayed:

"So what we want to do with Paragon and the behavioral questions is try to make it as streamlined as possible so if you are stuck in August trying to hire someone you can still get the same results as in May." (District B HR Director).

The pre-screener appears to have received mixed reviews among principals at this stage of implementation as they report that it is not always consistent with their judgment of a candidate’s potential. Principals in District B have other approaches to early screening including DPAS-II results and calling unlisted references.
Ensure Fit through Principal Autonomy & Staff Involvement in Selection

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

- Ten districts provide principals with full autonomy during and 16 districts involve staff in the interview 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)

District B also involves staff in the selection effort to increase teachers’ fit. “It’s really valuable for us to have that teacher’s perspective because we’re looking to bring somebody in who’s going to be collaborative and be able to work on the team.” (District B Principal)

Develop Robust Principal Recruitment & Selection Processes

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 selection process.

Frequently Used Activities in the School Leader Selection Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review of completed job application</td>
<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>Review of resume</td>
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<td>Contact references</td>
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<td>Face-to-face interview</td>
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<td>Letter of interest/cover letter review</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scenario-based questions</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview team of teachers and administrators</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of hiring rubric</td>
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<tr>
<td>Behavioral event interview questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use of selection criteria rubric</td>
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<td>Review of application essay or writing sample</td>
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<td>Data analysis activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Observation and delivery of feedback to teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phone interview</td>
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</table>
**Evaluation, Compensation & Retention**

**Provide Realistic Expectations**

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.20

- 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.

- Unlike District C’s recruitment message, many district’s messages were vague stating that the district is the “place to be” or “had the best reputation in the state.” Conversely, District A ensures that teachers’ recruitment and first-year experience is aligned by having their recruitment director also lead mentoring and induction for new staff members. Districts should work to tailor the recruitment message and supports to the specific needs and experiences of educators in the district.

**Best Practices: District C**

District C uses the following 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**

- 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.

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• 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.

![Data sources Used to Identify Impactful Teachers](chart)

### Data sources Used to Identify Impactful Teachers

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Source</th>
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<td>Principal recommendations</td>
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<td>Student Growth Data</td>
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<td>Teacher observation (Components I-IV)</td>
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<tr>
<td>DPAS-II summative ratings</td>
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<td>Other student learning data</td>
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<td>Measure A</td>
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<td>Peer recommendations</td>
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<td>Student surveys</td>
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<td>Parent surveys</td>
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</table>

#### Best Practices: District B

District B has a comprehensive process for identifying its most impactful teachers that involves both district-and school-based staff.

“I think that we’ve done a pretty good job of identifying our low achieving and high achieving teachers. Yes we consider test scores and growth from fall to spring. But it’s also by having had multiple people visit specific classrooms. So we ask our principals, we’re not doing it in every school every year, but we select schools, who’s your top third, who’s your middle third, who’s your bottom third and we have a group of experts, we’re supposed to be experts here at district office, go in and either through a walkthrough or an observation or several visits and then come back and say we agree with your top third, etc. If there’s a difference we have a conversation with the top administrator at the school. What did you see? What did we see? Where do you think we could rank them and then what are we going to with this bottom third. Do you see that they have potential to grow? Or have they just maxed out and take them to the path of nonrenewal. For the middle have the conversation of what we’re going to do to get them to the higher and for the higher level it’s having them go make more personal contact with them, are they interested in being a building leader or more face time, building that relationship so that teacher wants to be there because they know you care and you’re concerned. That’s really what we’ve been doing.” (District B HR Director)
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. It is important to note that districts did not appear to consider their participation in the Delaware Talent Cooperative when answering questions about financial incentives. The Co-Op is a promising state-wide program which offers retention incentives for highly effective educators in high-needs schools.21

Best Practices: District B

District B ensures that educators have a strong understanding of the district’s non-financial incentives throughout the selection process.

“The retention piece is layered. So part of it is me doing a good job of sustaining that culture in the building. So if I’m doing that and creating this culture where people do feel like it’s truly a family, they immediately feel bonded. So I’ve had people that decide to leave but it’s a very difficult decision because they felt so supported. That really big important piece that we can control is that we continue to sustain a culture of collaboration and support. And it definitely exists. Teachers whether they’re first time teachers or whether had experience coming into District B for the first time, they feel tremendous support. So creating that culture, sustaining that culture. That’s what matters most.” (District B Principal).

21 Delaware Talent Cooperative. Retrieved from https://sites.google.com/site/detalentcoop/program-evaluation
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
- Complete internal hiring in the spring by (1) establishing a spring deadline for the voluntary transfer period and (2) providing 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 staff 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/applicant pools and 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 establish 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. Future research should also longitudinally track these indicators and consider how the findings discussed in this report align to other programs targeting talent development in the state.