AASPA perspective

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EMERGING PRACTICES FOR EMPLOYEE SELECTION IN SCHOOLS

By Emily Douglas and Naima Khandaker

As Douglas Bray, director of the AT&T Management Progress Study, once said, "If you have only one dollar to spend on either improving the way you develop people or improving your selection and hiring processes, pick the latter." Employers often find that certain characteristics—such as judgment—are difficult to develop, and that identifying these traits during the selection process can offer increased productivity as well as substantial time and cost savings. Yet, studies suggest many school systems do not use purposeful, comprehensive hiring practices to select teachers, and fail to identify and hire qualified applicants. Ineffective selection practices can lead to poor work performance, employee turnover, and, in some cases, lawsuits. These outcomes can negatively impact an organization's culture and brand, which could potentially hurt its chances of attracting high-quality applicants in the future.

Fortunately, recent trends in teacher hiring indicate that the days of poorly designed selection systems are numbered in many districts. Districts, such as Denver Public Schools, Pittsburgh Public Schools, Tulsa Public Schools, and District of Columbia Public Schools, have redesigned their hiring systems to place a greater focus on well-informed decision-making using multiple data points. Pennsylvania-based Quaker Valley School District, which has received numerous accolades for its exceptional teaching staff and overall educational excellence, employs a comprehensive hiring strategy involving candidate screenings, multiple interviews, and demonstration lessons. Aspire Public Schools, a high-performing charter school organization in California, requires teacher candidates to participate in a multi-stage hiring process involving a résumé screening, panel interview, writing sample, demonstration lesson, and reference checks.

These methods are similar to hiring systems in top private sector companies. Google, for instance, selects candidates using a multi-step hiring process designed to deliver an in-depth portrait of each applicant's personality, abilities, and organizational fit. This process involves multiple interviews, opportunities to speak with potential colleagues, and an activity asking applicants to solve problems related to their area of interest. At Deloitte, entry-level candidates submit résumés and transcripts and participate in several interviews.

What do these organizations have in common? Following are seven emerging best practices around hiring and selection for schools:

1. Think strategically about selection criteria.
Every hiring decision should keep organizational goals and job-specific factors in mind. Many organizations elect to ground selection processes in sets of core competencies that provide clear direction about what to look for in candidates. Core competencies can be used to write job descriptions and develop selection rubrics and interview questions. These competencies should reflect the skills, knowledge, abilities, and experiences essential for employees who work in a specific role.

2. Use quality, multiple measures.
Measuring human behavior—meaning, distilling something as varied as the actions, dispositions, and contributions of human beings to a particular endeavor—is difficult. This is especially true considering that even the highest-quality measures are susceptible to error. Add to that the highly subjective nature of typical hiring processes, and the odds of making accurate selection decisions become slim. We need to design systems that reduce error by gathering multiple data points. These can include structured interviews, talent-based screening tools, and performance interviews that ask candidates to engage in a job-specific task, such as deliver a sample lesson or lead a staff meeting. The more accurate, job-related data gathered about an individual, the higher the probability that the data accurately reflect reality.

3. Consider customer service.
Hiring is not a one-way street. Not only are organizations trying to find great candidates, but the candidates are hoping to find great organizations. Having customer- or candidate-focused hiring practices communicate that an
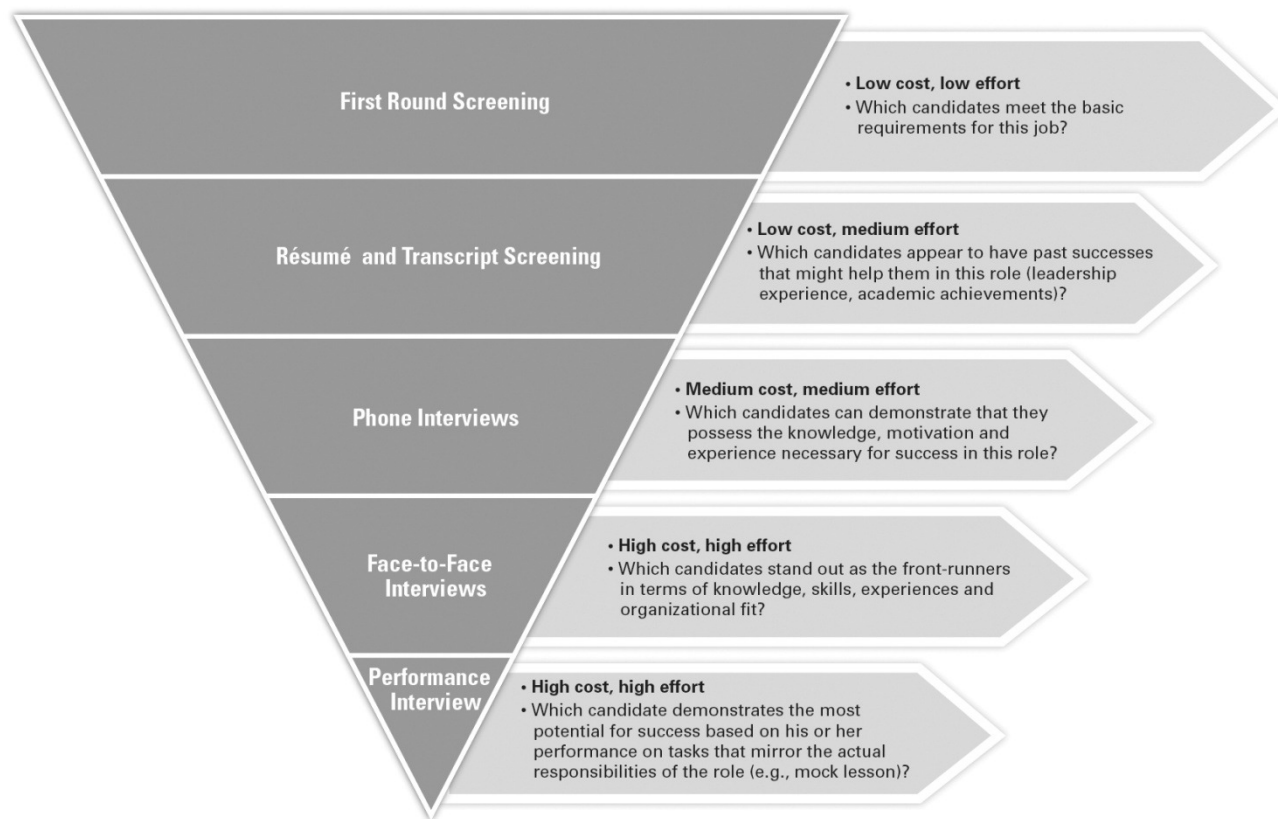
organization cares. This means respecting people's time, being considerate, making candidates comfortable, communicating effectively, maintaining confidentiality, and looking for ways continuously improve.

4. Understand the right ways to use social media.

Posting job openings on a social media site is very different than looking up possible candidates on Facebook. Between December 2010 and February 2011, the Society for Human Resource Management conducted a survey of HR professionals in various industries on social media and staffing. The survey showed that 68 percent of respondents said they do not look at social media or social networking profiles in hiring. Why? Four arguments emerged: legal concerns around protected information (race, color, religion, gender, etc.); the inability to verify information with confidence; information is not relevant to a candidate's performance or work-related potential; and not everyone uses social media. While using social media is extremely popular, such information should serve as a warning to those involved in the hiring process.

5. Maximize time and resources.

While having multiple data points is invaluable to achieve accuracy in selecting talent, it's important to ensure that the collection process isn't too cumbersome to implement. To keep selection processes manageable, many organizations practice funneling. Funneling is grounded in the idea that districts should use low-cost selection tools that require the least amount of effort to narrow the applicant pool. Then, districts can focus their time and high-cost resources to gather data from high-potential candidates. Following is an illustration of this concept:

First Round Screening
- Low cost, low effort
- Which candidates meet the basic requirements for this job?

Résumé and Transcript Screening
- Low cost, medium effort
- Which candidates appear to have past successes that might help them in this role (leadership experience, academic achievements)?

Phone Interviews
- Medium cost, medium effort
- Which candidates can demonstrate that they possess the knowledge, motivation and experience necessary for success in this role?

Face-to-Face Interviews
- High cost, high effort
- Which candidates stand out as the front-runners in terms of knowledge, skills, experiences and organizational fit?

Performance Interview
- High cost, high effort
- Which candidate demonstrates the most potential for success based on his or her performance on tasks that mirror the actual responsibilities of the role (e.g., mock lesson)?

6. Prioritize legal compliance.

Another important consideration for selection is compliance with equal employment laws and guidelines. Federal legislation, particularly anti-discrimination laws put forth by the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, has played a significant role in establishing guidelines for accepted practice in employee selection. Even unintentional noncompliance with these guidelines can not only infringe upon individuals' rights, but also damage an organization's reputation and result in serious financial repercussions. Organizations can become particularly susceptible when developing selection tools. Even if a tool appears to be unbiased and job-related, it may negatively impact select groups of applicants. Some organizations choose to purchase, rather than develop tools like online, talent-based screeners. If purchasing tools, districts should seek documentation from vendors

confirming that the tools have been appropriately vetted and do not discriminate. When rolling out a new selection system or tool, organizations should seek appropriate legal counsel and review.

7. Have and practice a repeatable and reliable process.
It has been said that, "the only problem with creating human capital systems is that they involve humans." For any kind of program—whether it's teacher and principal evaluation or selection for career pathway positions—training and retaining the individuals involved is not just good practice, but completely necessary for ensuring reliability of the tools. Having an established, repeatable process allows organizations to measure inputs, process steps, and results.

Organizations, from districts to private-sector companies, are changing the way they select employees. The examples in this article only skim the surface when it comes to innovative practices in this area. By thinking strategically about hiring and selection, districts can be proactive in systematically placing high-quality employees in schools.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

American Association of School Personnel Administrators
AASPA's 74th Annual Conference
October 31 - November 3, 2012
Palmer House Hotel
Chicago, IL - *www.aaspa.org*

New York State Association of School Personnel Administrators
NYSASPA Annual Conference
October 14-17, 2012
Otesaga Resort Hotel
Cooperstown, NY - *www.nysaspa.org*

Georgia Association of School Personnel Administrators
GASPA Fall Conference
November 28-30, 2012
King and Prince Resort
St. Simons Island, GA - *www.gaspanet.org*

Ohio Association of School Personnel Administrators
OASPA - OAEE Fall Conference
September 27-28, 2012
Embassy Suites Hotel
Dublin, OH - *www.oaspa-oaee.org*

Florida Association of School Personnel Administrators
FASPA Fall Conference
October 25-26, 2012
Embassy Suites Hotel
Tampa, FL - *www.faspa.net*

Assocation of California School Administrators
ACSA Personnel Institute
September 19-21, 2012
Hilton Hotel
Costa Mesa, CA - *www.acsa.org*

Texas Association of School Personnel Administrators
Fall Support Staff Conference
September 16-17, 2012
Sheraton Austin at the Capitol
Costa Mesa, CA - *www.acsa.org*

Arizona School Personnel Administrators Association
ASPAA Fall Conference
November 14-16, 2012
Prescott Resort & Conference Center
Prescott, AZ - *www.aspaa.org*

Wisconsin Association of School Personnel Administrators
WASPA Fall Conference
November 8-9, 2012
The Osthoff Resort
Elkhart Lake, WI - *www.waspa.org*