

Staffing and Retention Key to School District's Success

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ABSTRACT

School districts like private industry are struggling with a shortage of qualified employees. In addition to hiring challenges school districts are under the constant pressure of state and national accountability adding additional importance to finding and hiring the right teachers. Not making things better is the fact that Baby Boomers are retiring by the thousands and school districts have to compete with companies who are able to pay higher wages making it more difficult to employ and retain the best and the brightest teachers. Where does all this leave school districts and educators in their never-ending challenge to provide the best education?

Recruiting Teachers: Education's Challenge

Student enrollment continues to increase rapidly at the same time a large number of veteran teachers are nearing retirement. Experts predict that overall we will need more than 2 million new teachers in the next decade (National Education Association, 2006). Most experts would agree that recruiting teachers is especially acute in urban and rural districts and that subject areas such as special education, mathematics, and science continue to be the most difficult to fill. But the challenge is not just a math and science problem.

- Forty-two states issue emergency credentials to people who have taken no education courses and have never taught. Many teachers are hired based solely on their experience leading church or camping groups.
- One-fourth of new teachers -- if they are licensed -- are not licensed to teach in the field they are teaching.
- Twenty percent of new teachers leave within the first three years; most likely to leave are those with the highest college-entrance exam scores. A whopping 49 percent of those who leave do so because of job dissatisfaction or to pursue another career (Chaika, 2006).

Districts Take a New Approach

From the perspective of the campus and district administrators this creates new dynamics to staffing which in turn has created new strategies in an effort to yield more success in recruiting and retaining new teachers to the profession. Many districts have increased their efforts by becoming more strategic with their recruiting plans. Districts are working diligently to find effective ways to attract teachers to their districts and are becoming increasingly more strategic with their recruitment plans. Author Nedra Atwell (2006) suggests that a successful recruitment plan does the following:

- Requires a recruitment strategic planning team,
- Develops marketing and outreach strategies,
- Forms partnerships with traditional teacher education institutions and alternative licensure programs,
- Evaluates the hiring process, and
- Provides financial incentives.

Recognizing that incentives are needed to get teachers to relocate—across town or across the country—school districts are experimenting with a range of incentives to entice teachers to their hard-to-staff schools (American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO (2007). Some of these incentives are:

- Pay differentials and signing bonuses,
- Scholarships and loan forgiveness,
- Teacher support and development,
- Housing assistance and moving expenses,
- Free utility hook-ups, and
- Tuition reimbursement.

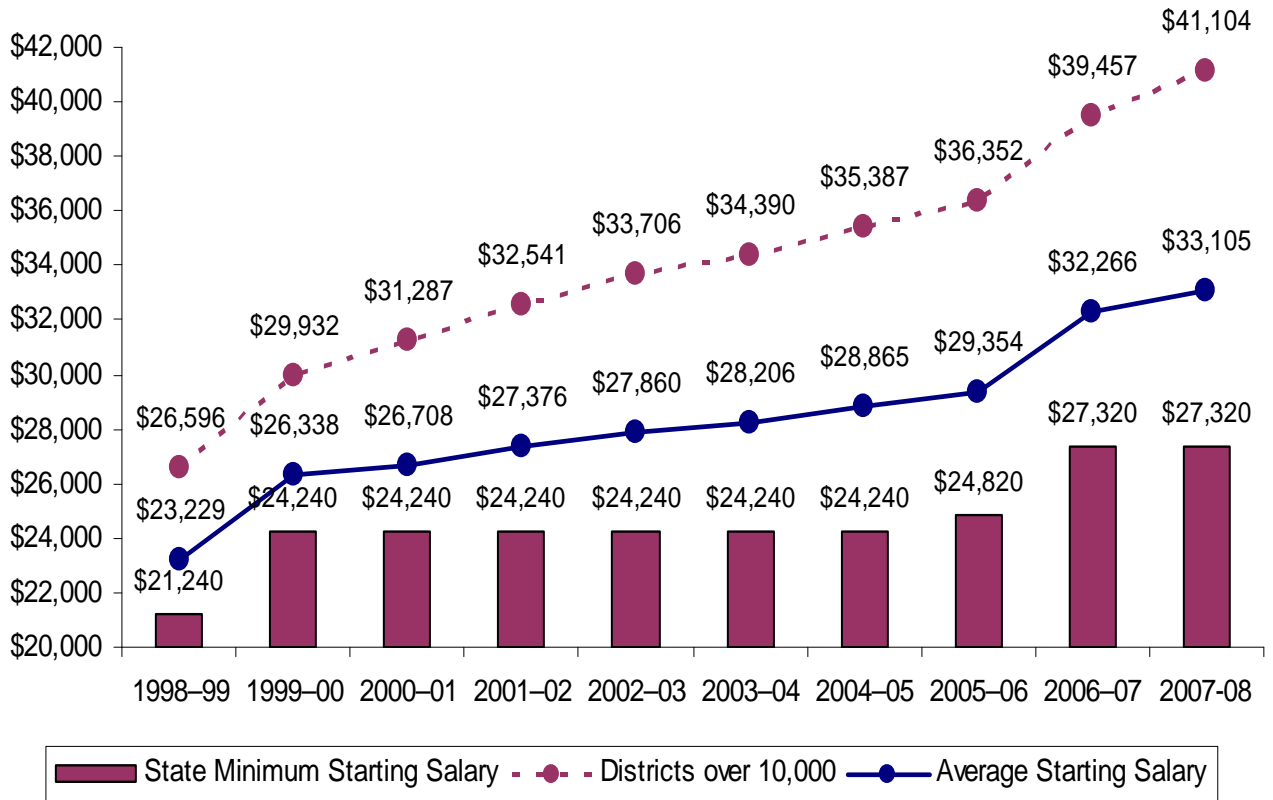
The most aggressive districts have focused on raising salaries and establishing financial incentives such as signing bonuses to attract the number of teachers a district hires for the school year. Math and science bonuses have continued to rise and other areas

such as special education and career and technical education have gone on the list for signing bonuses. According to the Teacher Salary Survey released by TASB in 2007, the average starting salary for a new teacher is \$32,266, a 10-percent increase from the 2005–06 average of \$29,354. This year’s average starting salary is 18 percent higher than the state minimum starting salary of \$27,320. The average starting salary in districts with more than 10,000 students is \$39,457, an 8.5-percent increase from last year. The following TASB data would seem to suggest that large districts are leading the way with higher salaries.

- Seventy-three responding districts (10 percent) have an entry-level salary of \$40,000 or greater. Forty-five percent of teachers (130,644) in the sample work in these districts.
- The average starting salary in districts with more than 50,000 students is \$41,025.
- Eighty-seven districts (12 percent) pay teachers on the state minimum teacher salary schedule. These districts employ only 1.5 percent of teachers (4,313) in the sample. The average highest salary paid in districts to 10-month teachers with a bachelor’s degree is \$51,349. The average highest salary paid in districts with more than 10,000 students is \$62,551. Districts with more than 50,000 students have the highest top salaries paid at \$65,875 on average.

TASB Chart Data for History of State Salaries for Texas Teachers
07-08

Year	State Minimum Starting Salary	Average Starting Salary	Districts over 10,000
1998–99	\$21,240	\$23,229	\$26,596
1999–00	\$24,240	\$26,338	\$29,932
2000–01	\$24,240	\$26,708	\$31,287
2001–02	\$24,240	\$27,376	\$32,541
2002–03	\$24,240	\$27,860	\$33,706
2003–04	\$24,240	\$28,206	\$34,390
2004–05	\$24,240	\$28,865	\$35,387
2005–06	\$24,820	\$29,354	\$36,352
2006–07	\$27,320	\$32,266	\$39,457
2007-08	\$27,320	\$33,105	\$41,104



In addition districts are increasing their recruitment budgets and expanding the number of recruiters to include teams of school-based and central office personnel such as principals, teachers, coordinators, and directors. Recruiting has gone beyond the human resource department and districts that are being successful know that involving all stakeholders in the process gives everyone greater ownership of the process and can make it much more effective.

Retaining Teachers Essential to District’s Success

Effective leaders know that not supporting teachers is a receipt for disaster for both the teacher and students. Creating the right conditions for teachers is at the foundation for everyone’s success. Addressing the following areas significantly impacts the retention of teachers:

- Providing an induction program for novice teachers that has short and long term goals,
- Establish teams of similar interest to create collegial relationships,
- Establish strong professional develop opportunities,

- Establish professional development related to student classroom management and discipline, and
- Establish a mentor program.

Most educators would agree that teacher retention begins with early intervention. Establishing an effective teacher mentor program is critical to this process. To ensure the success of this program districts must go beyond the idea that introducing experienced staff to non-experienced staff fulfills this need. Districts are more likely to get the right personnel participant and better results if they provide the following assistance to the process:

- Release time for mentoring, observation, in-class support, joint planning and teaching; additional compensatory personal time,
- Stipends paid directly to mentors,
- Training workshops and conferences,
- Allocations of funds to schools and districts to support associated implementation costs such as mentor release time, substitutes and travel between schools or even percentages of augmented mentor salaries,
- Additional classroom assistance and support for teaching and non-teaching responsibilities, and
- Financial support and priority access to professional development in the form of university courses.

Effective Leaders Retain Staff

“Novice teachers...said that what they need and want most from their principals is moral support, corroborating what we already know about teaching - that it is a psychologically demanding job and lonely profession” (Stripling, 2004).

Effective leaders know that establishing the right environment for teachers is a key to retaining staff. Establishing an environment where teachers can teach, feel supported, and have strong leadership are top priorities. According to the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO (AFT) 2007 report the following areas are top priority for teachers surveyed:

- Student discipline problems and personal safety concerns,
- Lack of on-site support and intervention for students experiencing learning difficulties,
- Poor administrative leadership and support,
- Unhealthy physical plant,
- Lack of faculty influence on decisions that affect student learning,
- Inadequate ongoing, job-embedded professional development and other supports,

- Lack of student academic success,
- Inadequate time for planning, preparation, instruction, and
- Excessive classroom intrusions.

Student Discipline

Successful administrators realize that opening the door and saying “They're all yours” and walking away is a concept that has long passed. Administrators must take the time to collaborate and set the right standard and provide the appropriate classroom management professional development. Administrators cannot discourage sending students to the office when the teacher has absolutely followed the established process. Communicating the outcome of office conferences with the teachers in a timely manner is imperative to a continued health working relationship between the teachers and administrators.

In addition to discipline consistency and providing the appropriate training it is recommended that administrators provide discussions regarding the appropriate and most effective methods for communicating with parents. Making sure that teachers take opportunities to communicate with parents regarding the expectations of the classroom and communicating positive information will help ensure more effective communication when the teacher must call regarding discipline or failing grades. Teachers who invest time and energy communicating and developing a relationship with parents will be more likely to gain support during tough times.

Providing Teachers a Voice

Strong administrations know a key to establishing the right school climate is providing collaborative schools where teachers have a voice in matters that impact student learning. Teachers who feel that they are respected and valued as a part of the campus team naturally are more invested in the schools and the education of the students. School leadership needs to be a broad concept that is separated from person, role, and a discrete set of individual behaviors. It needs to be embedded in the school community as a whole (Lambert1998). The following are examples of successful collaboration opportunities:

- Principal coffee talks,
- Teachers providing agenda items to be discussed at faculty meetings,
- Principal’s regular attendance at department meetings, and
- Allow teachers to make recommendations through department or faculty meetings.

Provide Clear Expectations and Goals for Teachers

Providing a clear understanding of the campus administrator's expectations helps prevent miscommunication. Just as personal values influence and guide an individual's behavior, organizational values influence and guide the team's behavior (Maxwell 2001). When all parties involved are clear on goals, time lines, and procedures problems can be avoided thus creating a stable consistent learning environment. Just as students need consistency to feel secure and confident teachers are more effective when given clarity.

Facilities Important to Success

It is important for administrators to not under estimate the need for excellent facilities. In this context new is not necessarily excellent. Teachers and students are both served best when facilities are clean and maintained. Teachers and students who arrive to classrooms that have been swept and dusted will have a much more positive attitude about teaching and learning. In addition taking care of both small and large maintenance issues in a timely manner will create a sense of responsiveness to teachers in turn giving them the necessary optimism to create a positive atmosphere. Maintenance issues can quickly become a safety concern and fuel unnecessary anxiety. Administrators who understand that being non-responsive will create cynicism that can spread quickly and have a long-term negative impact on both staff and students are attentive to facility needs.

Making it Possible to Grow Teachers within the School District

Many states and districts are encouraging paraprofessionals and uncertified teachers who are already in classrooms to become fully licensed teachers by offering them support at work and financial assistance to complete their course work required for certification. For example, the Illinois "Grow Your Own" Teacher Education Initiative funds teacher preparation programs to support Para educators and parents in becoming teachers (Spradlin & Prendergast, 2006). Many school districts are making every effort to remove all obstacles from potential teachers in an effort to increase the number of teachers available. In high need areas such as special education, science, and mathematics, some districts are offering college scholarships and other financial aid to students who major in those identified areas with an agreement to teach in the district or hard-to-staff schools for a specified amount of time once they complete their degree.

Concluding Remarks

Today's school districts face many challenges when hiring and retaining teachers. Leaders who see the big picture and understand the complexities of this challenge have a greater chance for success. These leaders understand the importance of having the right staff leading the process that can articulate the district mission and well represent the vision of learning for all students. Providing the right resources to afford the appropriate salaries, bonuses, teaching materials, equipment, and facilities is important to be competitive with other school districts and private industry. Lastly the fact that Baby Boomers are retiring by the thousands has set a higher expectation for helping teachers be successful and become a part of the total campus insuring teacher retention. School districts are pushing forward to insure a great education for all students. The fact that hiring teachers is a challenge has only made it more important to check every link in the chain ensuring teacher success.

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