

Strategies for Accelerating the Hiring Process

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RTTT Human Resource Pilot Project

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The Problem

In Brockton, like in many other large urban districts, late hiring has become a growing problem. It appears that there are three policy barriers that are mainly outside the control of human resource departments at the core of the late hiring cycles that cause urban districts to lose the strongest candidates:

- *Vacancy notification requirements*
- *Teachers union transfer requirements*
- *Budget timelines and enrollment uncertainties*

In many districts, determining vacancies in a timely way can be challenging because teachers planning to resign, retire, or take a maternity leave do not declare their plans until very late in the school year. Although many districts have notification deadlines, these deadlines are often too late to facilitate early hiring and not enforced. At times, departing teachers may lose opportunities for summer teaching and therefore will wait to announce their retirement or resignation until after these assignments are finalized.

Secondly, once school vacancies are identified, teacher transfer requirements further prevent timely new teacher hiring. Many teacher contracts give teachers who want to leave their school or whose positions have been eliminated first choice on positions in other schools. This time-consuming process often creates a late timeline for principals to offer contracts to new teachers.

Even after the transfer process is complete, late budget timelines and chronic budget uncertainties contribute to districts' delay in school-level job placements to avoid the risk of over-hiring. Many large urban districts may receive 50% or more of their budget from the state, putting them at a disadvantage to wealthier districts that have more local budget and therefore can offer more contracts prior to the approval.

Strategies to Accelerate the Hiring Process

- **Presentation to the school committee**
- **Changes to the contractual language**
- **Identify and offer contracts to outstanding candidates**
- **Critical needs areas**
- **Commitment to diversify staff**
- **HR changes**

Presentation to the school committee

It is important that the superintendent make a presentation to the school committee about why the hiring process needs to be accelerated. Since they have the ability to authorize changes, they must understand the importance of restructuring this process. It is important to get a commitment from the school committee regarding the importance of accelerating the hiring process. One way to do so is offering to start with hiring just a few teachers in high needs areas and building that number as confidence grows within the committee. The following are two suggestions for presentations:

- Collect data from past hires and compare early and late hires and the quality of the candidates based on evaluations. The data would most likely show that early hires are higher quality candidates.
- Present vignettes of quality candidates, often in areas of high needs, that were lost due to late hiring.

Changes to the contractual language

Issues with contractual language can contribute to challenges with hiring timelines. It is important to make changes to this language to accelerate the hiring process. If the district is in the middle of a contract and is not able to make immediate changes to this language, a letter of agreement can provide these necessary changes until the contract is up for renewal.

- Early notification: Contract language must be written so that teachers retiring, taking a leave of absence, or returning from a leave of absence must notify the district no later than March 1st.
- Incentive for early notification: Teachers can receive a cash incentive for notifying the district of their intention to retire early and staying until the end of the school year.
- Hiring authority of principals: When principals have openings at schools, current teachers wishing to transfer should not get first choice based on seniority. Principals should be able to consider external and internal candidates equally and hire the best person for the job.
- Credit for qualified candidates: Contract language should allow for principals to be able to offer teachers in high needs positions credit for life experience. Principals should also be able to offer outstanding teachers in high needs areas salaries that actually match their years of experience instead of a district-determined maximum number of years of experience.

Identify and offer contracts to outstanding candidates

- Give schools and departments the flexibility to make early commitments by identifying early retirements and leaves.
- Make plans to attend job fairs at local universities to attract talented new teachers to apply for positions within the district. Invite candidates for interviews quickly after the job fair.
- Interview outstanding student teachers in the district and identify where they are and what skills they offer. The district should reach out and offer to set up interviews with promising student teachers. Encourage principals to observe one of their lessons and talk to their cooperating teachers.
- Complete the vast majority of new teacher hiring before May 1st in order to be competitive. During the phase-in of this goal, commit to hiring at least 30 percent to 40 percent of new teachers by May 1st and the remainder by June 1st.
- Open contracts are better than no contracts. Nevertheless, quality candidates in urban districts want to make a commitment to a specific school. Giving them early school placements is ultimately the best option for hiring them. Open contracts have been more successful in more affluent districts where school

- demographics are not so varied.
- Even in light of uncertainty, begin hiring the high-quality candidates in greatest demand.

Hiring teachers for critical needs areas

- Examine hiring history: Look at the previous five years to determine the average number of teachers replaced each year because of maternity leaves or retirement.
- Offer contracts: If a district typically hires 50 new teachers, give contracts to 25 teachers in high needs areas.
- Small commitment: Start with a small commitment for the positions that have historically been the most difficult to fill.
- Attend job fairs: Identify a conservative number of positions that will be available based on hiring history and attend job fairs with the intent to quickly follow up with outstanding candidates in areas of high needs for in-district interviews and possible contract offers. Be prepared to lock in the candidate and confirm the school later.

Commitment to diversify staff

- In order to diversify your staff, make a commitment to attend minority job fairs prepared to offer outstanding candidates in-district interviews and possibly contracts. Minority job fairs are held by the following groups:
 - National Minority Education Network
 - Massachusetts Partner for Diversity in Education
- Allow principals to be able to identify outstanding candidates so they can connect with candidates and encourage them to become part of their staff.

HR changes

- Revamp HR departments' practices to increase the hiring role of schools and to create efficient and effective HR systems for receiving, processing, tracking, and placing applicants.
- Applicants should be able to apply centrally or to specific schools.
- HR should facilitate early school involvement by creating a database of pre-screened candidates with their resumes. This database could be searched by principals who could then contact individual applicants for an interview.
- Principals and other school staff should be allowed to actively recruit and solicit applications from prospective teachers, arrange interviews, and offer jobs themselves.