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Brief

# Cultivating Relationships With Potential New Hires

## Cultivating Relationships With Potential New Hires

Mark is looking to secure his first teaching job. At a recent job fair at his university, several districts shared flyers with information on job openings and the application process. Two districts stood out to Mark. He really liked District A because it is close to where he lives and is one of the highest paying in the area. He spent some time reviewing both districts' websites. District B included many interesting videos featuring current teachers. After the job fair, Mark received a follow-up email from District B inviting him for a school visit. An administrator whom he met also called to see if they could answer any questions he had about the school. Mark appreciated this and felt connected to the district. Mark had not had any follow-up communication from District A since the job fair. He decided to apply to District B instead of District A.

### Which district are you in this scenario?

Chances are your district could be somewhere in between the two with your current recruitment approach. However, it is still more common for a district's recruitment efforts to be more like District A, relying on traditional strategies to attract candidates. Given that districts are often competing with each other and other higher-paying professions for new hires, it is imperative to consider ways to better engage and appeal to candidates. Consider your recruitment process from a potential new hire's viewpoint. Imagine how different the application process would be if it began with several opportunities for meaningful, personal interactions with district staff. For human resource (HR) professionals and administrators to improve their efforts, they need to know how to cultivate effective relationships with potential new hires. So, what does this look like in practice?

### What Is Relationship-Based Recruitment, and Why Is It Important?

Relationship-based recruitment provides for more connection with a candidate than the typical application and interview process of recruiting and hiring. Through this "high-touch" recruitment process, districts build relationships with candidates before a job is posted so candidates can learn more about a district or particular school prior to applying. By establishing a relationship with potential applicants early in the recruitment process, district administrators and teachers also learn about the possible fit of the candidate.

Given that relationship-based recruitment often requires more effort, districts may differentiate their efforts based on their hiring needs so that not all candidates receive the same level of communication and support. For example, when a district identifies the need to hire a teacher for a specific subject or area, (e.g., math, special education, or physics), more time and attention may be needed to build strong relationships with potential teachers. The strategy may also be used with an exceptional candidate who would be recruited by many districts — developing the relationship early may make the difference in your district hiring the teacher.



## Strategies for Ongoing Relationship-Based Recruitment

*Make it personal and appealing: Revise your marketing plan and materials*

Do not underestimate the power of a strong marketing plan to make your district appealing to high-quality candidates. Review your current marketing materials and determine how easy it is for potential candidates to learn detailed information about the position and your district. Ensure your marketing plan is engaging; builds excitement about the position; and shares information about your district's unique programs, strengths, and community. Also include your vision for effective teaching and expectations as well as information to highlight your school culture and philosophy (TNTP, 2020). Your goal should be to ensure you make a good first impression on candidates in new and creative ways, beyond just the standard impersonal application process.

In addition, consider new ways to share your marketing materials. For example, Indianapolis Public Schools' (IPS) website invites candidates to join TeamIPS. They feature a [link](#) to a new recruitment initiative, *Proving What's Possible with TeamIPS*. Whether you are an aspiring or already-licensed teacher, IPS provides detailed information on how to become part of their teaching team. In addition to general recruitment information, IPS highlights appealing marketing information for how a teacher can make a difference, grow their career, earn a good living, and put equity into action by teaching in their district. To innovate further, IPS created videos featuring teachers sharing their thoughts regarding what they liked best about working in the district.

*Expand relationships within your community: Connect with a broader pool of potential teachers*

Most recruitment efforts focus on those who already know they want to be teachers (Herrmann, 2018). Consider how to forge relationships with individuals in your schools and community who are great potential candidates. Help them see the connections between their current interests and skills and the opportunities that exist for teaching in your district. One way to do this is to utilize Grow Your Own (GYO) programs. These programs can be especially important in recruitment efforts in rural and high-poverty schools. Districts can partner with other organizations such as educator preparation programs to create GYO programs to attract and develop relationships with people who are connected and committed to the community (Darling-Hammond et al., 2022). The Goshen College Teach Elkhart County GYO project recruits racially/ethnically diverse students from Elkhart County and prepares, places, and supports them through completing a bachelor's degree and into their first year of teaching in a partner school. Also look within your buildings to build relationships and support systems for individuals, such as paraprofessionals, who show promise to become teachers. Bartholomew Consolidated School Corporation focuses on efforts to bring paraprofessionals into teaching by building relationships and providing support for these candidates to participate in their new paraeducator-to-teacher preparation program.

### **What is a GYO program?**

GYO programs recruit teacher candidates from nontraditional populations who are more likely to reflect local diversity and continue to teach in their communities. These candidates include high school students, paraprofessionals, after-school program staff, and other community members (Carver-Thomas, 2018). Indiana has developed a GYO playbook to support this kind of recruitment effort.

You can also utilize contacts within community organizations and networks to continue building relationships. Encourage district staff to share marketing materials with those they know who may want to become a teacher or could be a good fit for the school. Further personalize recruitment efforts by finding ways for current teachers

and administrators to meet and share information with candidates, such as hosting events at community centers or local restaurants or attending events at local churches or area parks (Hill-Jackson, 2020).

*Leverage partnerships with local colleges and universities: Build ongoing relationships*

Begin an ongoing relationship-building strategy with potential candidates at local colleges and universities early in your recruitment process. This can take place in a variety of ways, such as on-campus visits and alumni calls to students with the goal of cultivating relationships with candidates even before they have decided to engage in the hiring process (Motamedi & Stevens, 2018). Also reconsider how you interact and build relationships during university job fairs and campus visits. While it is important to connect with teacher candidates in education preparation programs, also consider other university programs aligned to your hiring needs. Host targeted events, and focus efforts on building relationships with these students. This could include content area programs, military organizations, student special interest clubs, or sororities and fraternities. This targeted relationship-building can help fill your recruitment needs efficiently by attracting the right teachers for the right positions.

By leveraging partnerships with educator preparation programs, districts can also deepen personal relationships with student teachers through more thoughtful student teaching placements and candidate vetting prior to graduation. California’s Long Beach Unified School District utilizes this strategy so that student teachers can more deeply understand what it is like to be employed in the district through an understanding of their vision, expectations, and culture. In turn, the district can select strong candidates who are well aligned to the hiring needs and encourage them to apply for positions (Podolsky et al., 2016).

*Deepen and cultivate relationships: Create connection to your district and schools*

Review how you can use high-touch, personalized communication throughout the hiring process. This will help cultivate a more personal relationship through meaningful and targeted contact with candidates before and during the hiring process. After building relationships with a pool of potential candidates, continue to initiate personal contact to express your interest and desire to have them apply once positions are posted. You can deepen these relationships during the hiring processes with frequent, short connections. Send personalized emails, text messages, or phone call follow-ups to ensure candidates feel valued and connected to your district. You may even leverage social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, for additional opportunities to connect with candidates (Konoske-Graf et al., 2016). Mastery Charter Schools utilizes high-touch strategies to cultivate relationships during recruitment. They take an active approach to following up with potential candidates using personal communications to encourage them to apply. During the application process, they help candidates stay invested through text message touchpoints and send “nurture emails” to highlight how the district lives out its values and priorities for candidates (Matlach, n.d.).

Create opportunities for promising candidates to visit your schools to build a sense of connection to your district. You can host open house events or invite candidates to existing school events in which they will get to interact with current staff and students. These visits not only strengthen candidates’ connections to your schools but also give you a chance to see them interact in your environment. You can send personalized invitations to potential candidates, providing additional information about the district as well as potential times for a visit.

Also consider the role of current staff to help engage and build connections. Identify “strong ambassadors” for your district who can craft specific interactions with candidates to share a more personal experience in the school (Motamedi & Stevens, 2018). Marion County School District in South Carolina sends auto-generated email responses to applicants to invite them to connect with teachers and principals. Applicants are



automatically invited to teacher recruitment meet and greet events where they can hear from educators about their experiences regarding support, career ladder opportunities, and professional growth (Nyhus & Culbertson, 2020).

## Cultivating Relationships With Potential New Hires to Diversify the Workforce



Districts administrators and HR professionals who seek to diversify their teacher workforce can utilize these ongoing, relationship-based recruitment strategies to effectively recruit teachers of color. Research suggests that, in addition, districts often find success at attracting and recruiting teachers of color by leveraging informal “connectors,” such as teachers of color, paraeducators, or other community members who can use their existing relationships and networks to help district administrators build relationships with potential candidates who are beyond their current network. These connectors can be incorporated into school tours and events that the district hosts for potential candidates. Connectors can also share marketing materials in their networks to help build relationships (Carver-Thomas, 2018).

### Questions and Resources for Reflection and Discussion

Have you assessed your current level of relationship-based recruitment? If not, that is a place to good start. Below are reflection questions to help you consider how to take a more relationship-based approach to your teacher recruitment.

- How well do you market your district, and how do you utilize these materials?
- What messages are you conveying to potential new hires about what it is like to work in your schools?
- How easy is it for the public to access job information?
- How do you amplify the voice of current teachers to assist in relationship-based recruiting?
- Where can you make more connections in your community with potential candidates?
- How can you personalize your communication throughout the recruitment and hiring process?

Want more support on how to further market and cultivate a relationship-based recruitment strategy? The following resources can be helpful for your district as you identify specific ways in which to build relationships during your recruitment and hiring processes.

- [\*How to Market your School and Cultivate Candidates\*](#) — This guide helps school leaders develop marketing pitches for their schools and identify strategies to cultivate candidates.
- [\*Candidate Cultivation Workplan\*](#) — This workplan provides effective cultivation strategies and associated tasks, guidance for prioritizing these actions across different groups of candidates, and a calendar of when to employ these strategies.
- [\*Candidate Cultivation Outreach Tracker\*](#) — This example spreadsheet tracker allows district teams to collect contact information, application status, and next steps for follow-ups with potential candidates. It is also useful for monitoring the effectiveness of recruitment events.
- [\*Teacher Recruitment & Retention: Attract and Keep Your Most Effective Educators\*](#) — This playbook is a collection of some effective strategies and tactics that are working to attract, screen, hire, and retain the teachers that districts need most. Chapter 3 in the playbook, “Attract the Candidates You Need: How to Build a Successful Recruitment Campaign,” provides specific examples of how to build a more relationship-based recruitment effort with several district examples.



## Spotlight on MSD of Decatur Township

Chris Gearlds, former human resource director, transitioned from principal to HR director on March 13, 2020 — at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Right away, he and his team needed to pivot and think creatively about recruiting educators to the district.

The focus of the district’s multipronged approach to recruitment is both broad and narrow. They researched and applied commonly used hashtags, such as #teaching, #teachereducation, and #hiringforit, in social media posts. They also directly tagged universities in posts, which helped increase visibility. The district created TikTok videos, which many potential hires noted during interviews that they saw and that these videos caught their eye. During the pandemic, MSD of Decatur implemented virtual coffee chats, which helped the district develop relationships with potential hires. Through these chats, potential hires met the superintendent, learned about first-year teacher support systems, heard from principals about their school meetings, and even talked to realtors about the cost of living and the housing market. The district monitored who attended, and if people tuned in week after week, they reached out to actively recruit them for positions. All sessions were recorded and shared with universities so local college students could watch if they missed them. Although the district did not quantify the number of new hires from this approach, Gearlds noted that many mentioned the coffee chats during their interviews.

Virtual recruitment reaches a wide audience, but MSD of Decatur also focuses on the local community as a source of potential hires. In weekly school and district newsletters, the district posts updates on hirings and openings. These documents include QR codes so those who may be interested can quickly access the application. The district also hosts hiring fairs during school events. For example, to increase foot traffic, the district held a hiring fair on a night when multiple sporting events were occurring. Their summer hiring fair led to 25 hires, and the fall hiring fair led to 10 hires.

MSD of Decatur received a Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program grant in September 2021. Its grant, Empowering Educators to Excel (E3), partners MSD of Decatur with seven other districts throughout the nation to create a Networked Improvement Community (NIC) with a key focus on improving the recruitment, retention, and promotion of educators of color. As Gearlds explains, “We want to see educators who look and talk like our students. Right now in education, we are a predominantly middle-aged, white community of educators. As our demographics continue to change, how do we become more diverse?” Already, Gearlds sees the benefits of the NIC. He meets monthly with other districts and can visit other states, see NICs in action, and then bring those practices back to MSD of Decatur.

When asked about a change made because of the E3 grant, Gearlds noted a mindset shift. “In HR, we often hear, ‘The hiring season is coming up.’ If you have that mindset, you are behind the eight ball. You are always recruiting.” He also noted the important relationship between recruitment and retention. “If we are being proactive in retaining high-quality staff, that is the best recruiter. It will keep our staff here and get the word out. Candidates will want to come because of how we treat our staff on a professional and personal level.”

### ***Want to know more about MSD of Decatur?***

- *Recruitment and Retention in a Global Pandemic:*  
<https://www.insightadvance.com/blog/recruitment-and-retention-in-a-global-pandemic>
- Follow @MSDDecaturHR and @MSDDecatur on Twitter!



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