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Brief

Revisiting Your Hiring Timeline: The Benefits of Early Hiring



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In a recent meeting at the end of June, the HR director met with school principals to review teaching vacancies that need to be filled before the end of August. Staring down the list of soon-to-be classrooms without teachers, their discussion settles on what else they can do to fill these vacancies. The HR director said they are still scrambling to fill these positions—let alone with qualified candidates. She noted, “I wish I knew how we could get ahead of this each year.”

Have you ever asked yourself this question?

Many districts have been in this position, struggling to fill teaching vacancies, particularly given the pervasive problem of teacher shortages. In many cases, districts are not able to hire teachers with full teaching credentials for their specific grade level or subject needs, especially for hard-to-staff subjects such as mathematics, science, and special education (Papay & Kraft, 2016). This results in many schools filling the vacancies with candidates that are not optimal or starting the school year without a teacher in every classroom (Podolsky & Sutcher, 2016; Papay & Kraft, 2016). This is especially true for high-poverty districts, which are twice as likely to fill positions with teachers with lower credentials or to use substitutes (Podolsky & Sutcher, 2016). While teacher recruitment is a multifaceted issue, district hiring timelines can contribute to and have implications for the ability to adequately staff positions and hire effective teachers (Kraft et al., 2020; Podolsky et al., 2016).

Hiring Timelines Matter

There is a general seasonality to teacher hiring. Though some principals may work on teacher hiring year-round, most teaching vacancies are posted in spring with the interview and selection process happening later in the summer (Perrone & Meyers, 2021). In a typical hiring season, there is competition among and within districts who are searching for teachers within a fixed pool of candidates at the same time of year (Papay & Kraft, 2016). As the hiring season progresses, many districts rush to fill positions. Research has found on average districts hire 45% of their new teachers late in the season, at the end of summer or later (Engel, 2012). Additionally, it is estimated that between 11% and 30% of hiring happens after the school year has started (Podolsky et al., 2016). Late hiring is more frequently reported for schools with higher percentages of students from low-income backgrounds and students from minority backgrounds as well as urban and rural districts (Perrone & Meyers, 2021; Podolsky & Sutcher, 2016). An effective teacher recruitment strategy must include a focus on the timing of hiring since this is just as important as the quality of the pool of teacher applicants (Lee, 2020). It is beneficial for districts to start their hiring season as early as possible. This means beginning before what has become the “typical” season for hiring, instead starting as early as winter or spring before the next school year, to ensure the most success in attracting and retaining qualified candidates. The benefits of early hiring are underscored by the potential negative impacts if districts wait until much later in the school year to begin filling vacancies.

Tool to Support Hiring in Indiana

The Indiana Department of Education has recently launched a statewide [educator supply and demand marketplace](#). The first phase of this work focuses on the demand side of the educator pipeline. It includes a platform that any district in the state can use to post job openings at no cost to the district. This tool provides real-time data that districts and the state can use to strengthen the educator pipeline. Indiana districts can take advantage of this tool for recruitment by posting their open positions early to attract and engage with a large and diverse pool of qualified candidates.

Benefits of Early Hiring

The ideal hiring timeline begins in late winter or early spring with the goal of completion by early summer. The best time to start may be based on several considerations such as after budgets are finalized and teacher evaluations are completed, and before teacher candidates graduate from educator preparation programs. Completing the hiring process earlier than by the end of summer—including posting positions, conducting interviews, extending job offers, and receiving job acceptance—can have several benefits beyond just ensuring all vacancies are filled. These include recruiting qualified candidates for the open positions, decreased teacher attrition, and improvements in teacher quality and student achievement.

<i>Increase in qualified candidates</i>
<p>Districts that have earlier hiring timelines have access to a larger pool of qualified candidates from which to hire. Considering the competition among districts for qualified teachers, those that hire later in the year may find that pool contains less qualified teachers because the more qualified teachers have already accepted job offers (Papay & Kraft, 2016; Perrone & Meyers, 2021; James et al., 2022). In addition, late hiring practices can lead to applicants backing out or withdrawing their applications for other opportunities, leaving positions unfilled despite an initially strong candidate pool. Research has found that in some urban districts between 31% and 58% of applicants withdrew their applications, with more than half of these applicants noting the reason they withdrew and accepted another job offer was due to the late hiring timeline of the district (Levin & Quinn, 2003). Not only does hiring earlier impact the quality of candidates, but there are also potential implications for diversifying the teacher workforce. Research shows that hiring earlier in the year is related to a greater chance of hiring teachers of color (Kraft et al., 2020).</p>
<i>Lower teacher attrition</i>
<p>Earlier hiring can also support the retention of newly hired teachers within a school or district. Late hiring often forces districts to focus on filling the position rather than finding the best candidate or fit for the job, which has been referred to as triage hiring or transactional hiring (Castro, 2020). This late hiring can lead to poor job matches that may in turn increase teacher turnover as those hired late eventually leave their school or district to find a better fit at a greater rate than their peer teachers who were hired earlier (Papay & Kraft, 2016; Podolsky & Sutchter, 2016). In addition to the increased instability of staffing, this teacher turnover can also result in financial fallout for a school (Papay & Kraft, 2016).</p>
<i>Teacher quality and student achievement</i>
<p>The timing of teacher hiring is also related to teacher performance and student outcomes. Research suggests teachers are generally less effective if hired after the start of the school year. This is particularly true for math teachers hired late, who have been found to be less effective. If hired after the start of the school year, there is less time to plan and learn about the school and curriculum. Rather, late hires need to balance these activities while also teaching and managing a classroom (Papay & Kraft, 2016). One study found that teachers hired after the school year started were generally weaker, negatively impacting middle school student achievement in both math and reading. The reduction in student achievement was equivalent to approximately two months of instruction (Papay & Kraft, 2016). This study noted some of this impact on students may be because of disruption effects due to the instability students face in the beginning of the year without a permanent teacher of record in their classroom. Districts that hire teachers earlier ensure teachers have adequate planning time and professional learning to prepare for students (Papay & Kraft, 2016).</p>

Barriers to Early Hiring

Often there are structural or policy barriers that may prevent or constrict a district or school administrator's ability to hire teachers as early as desired.

- **Delayed budgets:** Slow or delayed school budget timelines can affect the timing of teacher hiring. For larger urban districts, which rely on higher levels federal and state funding, a slower budget process can delay or lengthen their hiring timelines compared to other close-by suburban schools (Papay & Kraft, 2016), reducing the number and quality of teachers in the candidate pool (Perrone & Meyers, 2021).
- **Processes for teacher transfers:** Formal negotiated processes for internal teacher transfers allow teachers to move from one position to another within a district ahead of external hiring processes (Papay & Kraft, 2016). Associated collective bargaining agreements that outline the rules for these transfers have been attributed to delaying the hiring process (Perrone & Meyers, 2021). The elimination of some of these policies can result in a rise in earlier hiring as well as greater diversity and retention among new hires (Kraft et al., 2020).
- **Processes for teacher retirees:** If large numbers of teachers announce retirements late in the school year or after the school year has ended, it can be challenging to fill those vacancies by the start of the school year.
- **Variable student enrollment:** For districts that have a more transient student population, it can be challenging to accurately predict student enrollment and the number of teacher positions needed before the start of the school year. This can lead to hiring delays that are not within the control of the principal's normal hiring processes (Papay & Kraft, 2016).

Recommendations and Strategies for Revising Hiring Timelines

Districts have many things to contend with to revise their hiring timelines. Though it may take time and coordinated effort to resolve barriers, the investments will pay off for the district, teachers, and students. There are several strategies districts can implement (Papay & Qazilbash, 2021; Podolsky et al., 2016):

- **Revise policies related to teachers requesting transfers within the district:** Work with relevant parties in HR and teachers' unions to revise policies or collective bargaining agreements related to seniority-based voluntary transfer processes that impact the district's ability to hire external candidates in a timely manner. This may include shifting the timeline in which teachers in the district can announce their plans to transfer schools to much earlier in the school year, allowing for earlier job posting, application, and hiring processes for external candidates.
- **Create incentives related to teachers' notifications for intent to leave or retire:** To better project the number of vacancies to be filled in the coming school year, districts can create incentives for teachers to submit their intent to resign or retire earlier in the year to allow the hiring process to begin even earlier.
- **Post earlier and for a longer period:** Consider posting job positions even earlier than the typical "season" of teacher hiring, such as in February or March, and extending the length of time of the job posting. Given the often fixed-nature of a local teacher applicant pool, this will help to create a more robust pool to select from before the more qualified candidates take jobs at other districts.
- **Complete budget and enrollment projections earlier:** Districts can work to ensure their budgets are on time, and that they are able to determine student enrollment projections as early as possible. Districts can also work with the Indiana Department of Education to better understand projected federal funding for the upcoming year.



Spotlight on Warsaw Community Schools

Sheila Howe, HR director, noted the district began the 2022–2023 school year “ready to rock on day one,” with all positions filled with qualified teachers. The ability to start the school year in this manner is due in part to Warsaw Community Schools’ strategic recruitment strategies, which place an emphasis on hiring the best candidates as early as possible.

Warsaw’s approach to hiring is start the planning early, utilize incentives and partnerships, and innovate and be creative with their approach. In just the third week of the school year, Sheila noted the time to start planning hiring for next year is now. Early in the fall, Warsaw starts holding regular department cabinet team meetings to identify and review needs for the next school year. This team continues to plan in earnest for teacher recruitment between November and February. The team reviews student enrollment, examining reduction and expansion in grade levels and class sizes, and works closely with their chief financial officer to assess funding needed based on student enrollment projections and teacher needs. In addition, the district strategically plans to share information about their district and hiring needs early and often. In the fall, the recruitment team begins planning for the career and job fairs they will plan to attend for the year, annually attending six to eight fairs. The district uses these events to share information about district salaries and benefits with potential teaching candidates.

Warsaw also implements strategies to estimate the number of vacancies due to retirement that may need to be filled in the coming school year. Sheila noted one way they “get a pulse on retirement” as early as March is to offer retirement and Medicare workshops for teachers. Attendance at these workshops gives the district an idea of how many teachers and in which grades and subjects may be contemplating retirement. Then they factor this data into their plans for hiring. In the past, Warsaw has also been able offer an early retirement incentive for teachers. The district announced this incentive in January, requiring teachers to accept the incentive and announce their retirement by February. This allowed the district to identify retirements earlier so they could start to hire for these positions in the spring, well ahead of the upcoming school year. The district also provides incentives for hard-to-staff roles such as dual language immersion or special education to attract teachers to fill these positions as early as possible.

Another key component of Warsaw’s strategy to hire as early as possible is to employ strong partnerships with universities and colleges. Their partnership with Grace College has been particularly helpful in identifying and building relationships with teacher candidates who are close to completing their certification program. The district often extends job offers early in spring to those candidates who would be highly effective in their district. This past year Warsaw also hosted a spring event at the district for Grace College teaching candidates. Warsaw provided transportation to the district, provided dinner, shared key information on the compensation package, and had four principals and the HR team conduct speed interviews with the candidates. Of the 12 candidates who attended, Warsaw hired 10 teachers by April, even before they knew for sure the total number of teaching positions they would need for the coming school year. Each one of these new hires was used. When asked what advice she has for other districts that seek to revise their hiring timelines and practices, Sheila said, “Be creative and do not be afraid to take a risk. When you have a good candidate in front of you, you have to give them the opportunity to shine for your district.”



Questions and Resources for Reflection and Discussion

It is never too early to start considering how you can revise your hiring timelines to ensure you can fill teaching vacancies early and with qualified candidates. Below are some reflection questions to help start identifying challenges and solutions to hiring teachers earlier.

- In the last several years, when did you start and end your hiring on average? Did you fill all vacancies by the start of the school year?
- What additional data do you need to collect to fully understand the impact of your hiring timeline?
- How does your timeline compare to other districts in your area that are selecting from the same teacher talent pool?
- What are the key factors in your district that impact the timing for hiring (e.g., budget, collective bargaining, student enrollment)? What key partners need to be involved to mitigate these factors?

Want additional resources on how to structure your hiring timeline? Take a look at the following resources that can be helpful for your district as you identify specific ways to modify your hiring processes.

- [*Hiring Timeline Planning Guide*](#): This resource provides a suggested timeline to help school leaders plan for efficient hiring.
- [*Worksheet: Determine Hiring Needs for the Upcoming School Year*](#): Projecting hiring needs is a key first step in building an effective staffing strategy. This resource guides school leaders through the process and includes key reflection questions and data points to consider.
- [*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 4 in the playbook, “From Screening to Hiring: Tools & Best Practices,” provides specific examples and tools for the hiring process.

Developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education through the Office of Program and Grantee Support Services within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, by the Region 8 Comprehensive Center at ICF under Award #S283B190013. This contains resources that are provided for the reader’s convenience. These materials may contain the views and recommendations of various subject matter experts as well as hypertext links, contact addresses, and websites to information created and maintained by other public and private organizations. The U.S. Department of Education does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of any outside information included in these materials. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Education. No official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education of any product, commodity, service, enterprise, curriculum, or program of instruction mentioned in this document is intended or should be inferred.



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