

# BUILDING THE TALENT PIPELINE: Three Steps to Attract and Retain Educators



**Battelle** *for Kids*

*The following is an excerpt from Battelle for Kids's new whitepaper, **Building the Talent Pipeline: Three Steps to Attract and Retain Educators**. Download the full paper at <http://bit.ly/2dMpRap> to explore more examples, critical questions, and promising strategies that you can personalize to build the talent pipeline in your district.*

There is no profession more important to the success of our country than teaching. Behind every great entrepreneur, scientist, or civic leader is a teacher who engages, motivates, and instills a belief in students that they can reach their goals. However, at a time when talented educators are needed more than ever, fewer young people are pursuing a career in education, and many school districts are struggling to attract and retain teachers.

How can districts address educator shortages?

To ensure a high-quality teacher in every classroom, the time is ripe for more districts to develop human capital management systems (HCMS) that are equipped not only to navigate current staffing challenges—including providing equitable access to excellent educators for all students—but also to ensure workforce stability well into the future. While human resources (HR) has traditionally been viewed in many fields as a transactional body responsible for recordkeeping, compliance, and payroll, a number of innovative districts are establishing a HCMS in which school and district leaders employ strategic HR practices proven to help build strong talent pipelines in the education sector and beyond.

Based on research and lessons learned through Battelle for Kids's partnerships with districts over the past 15 years, we outline three essential steps for building the educator talent pipeline.

### **Step 1: Use data to assess strengths, needs, and challenges.**

Districts must have systems in place to identify shortage areas, uncover potential causes of these shortages, and determine how to leverage organizational strengths and navigate identified challenges to strengthen its talent pipeline. Essential to the effectiveness of these systems is access to timely and high-quality HR data.

Faced with challenges of a growing student population, a shortage of teachers across Oklahoma, and a limited budget and resources, Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) uses data to uncover staffing needs, the sources of the district's highest-performing teachers, and the effectiveness of various recruitment efforts. In particular, data revealed that social media was one of the district's most effective recruitment channels, so it now prioritizes online recruiting. These efforts helped TPS hire nearly 500 individuals in certified teaching positions and fill every teacher vacancy in preparation for the 2015-2016 school year—despite a statewide teacher shortage—ensuring that every classroom is led by a certified teacher.

### **Step 2: Develop a plan to attract and retain educators.**

Data serve as the common thread between well-structured human capital management systems, but the strategies districts employ based on their data vary greatly. This diversity is reflected in the following locally developed practices districts across the country are using to attract and retain teachers.

#### **Attract**

Given districts' limited budgets, it is essential that recruitment practices are grounded in a clear understanding of local shortage areas to ensure resources are allocated strategically.

South Central Local Schools in northeast Ohio partnered with Battelle for Kids to redesign its organizational brand and help increase the size of its applicant pool, particularly for positions facing shortages, such as speech and language pathology. A major priority for the rebranding campaign was to tell the district's story from the perspective of its stu-

dents and staff. Through focus groups and interviews, SCLS collected testimonials from individuals at each school, and then used them to create posters and other recruitment materials featuring local students and staff. Following the launch of its new branding and recruitment effort, SCLS received numerous applications that met preferred qualifications for speech and language pathologist positions. Additionally, SCLS began to receive applications from individuals living in towns from which the district had never before received interest.

#### **Select**

Based on studies showing links between employee-organization fit and retention (Baharom, Memon, and Salleh, 2014), hiring can be viewed as an opportunity to reduce turnover by ensuring the right people are selected to fill vacant positions. At the same time, hiring processes that take too long to identify the best candidates can put districts at risk for missing out on many highly qualified teachers (Levin and Quinn, 2003).

Des Moines Public Schools (DMPS), with support from Battelle for Kids, has developed a multiple-data-point approach to identify candidates who have the highest potential for success within the district. "We have changed the way we recruit, interview, and hire teachers. We are far more focused on the skills, abilities, and knowledge potential teachers possess that align with what our data and demographics are telling us we need to serve our students," explained Dr. Anne Sullivan, Chief Human Resources Officer at DMPS.

#### **Engage**

One of the most promising opportunities for attracting, motivating, and retaining educators is centered on the principles of positive psychology. These include helping employees do what they do best through understanding and utilizing their strengths (Rath, 2007), improving employee engagement (Gallup, 2013), fostering passion and perseverance, or "grit" (Duckworth, 2016), and creating a happier and more positive mind-set (Achor, 2010). Organizations with strong cultures spark more creativity, productivity, better work-life balance, and higher employee satisfaction. School leaders who promote a positive culture are likely to have an edge in addressing issues related to teacher shortages.

California's Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) uses professional development, support, and leadership opportunities to engage teachers at each stage of their career. The district works closely with nearby institutions of higher education to build a locally based pipeline of teachers who have had extensive exposure to Long Beach schools before becoming new employees (Battelle for Kids, 2012). New LBUSD teachers also complete a two-year induction program, in which they develop individualized growth plans, receive formative evaluations and guidance from experienced support providers, engage in ongoing dialogue with other teachers in their cohort, and participate in a variety of professional development opportunities. LBUSD's annual attrition rate of seven percent is nearly two-thirds lower than the national average for urban districts (Aldeman, Chuong, Mead, and Obbard, 2015), an accomplishment that has been attributed in large part to its strong teacher pipeline and professional development system.

#### **Recognize**

A number of school districts across the country are looking at ways to recognize teachers. Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS) prioritizes teacher recognition by regularly involving teachers in the development of programs and policies. For instance, the district—in collaboration with the

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Pittsburgh Federation of Teachers (PFT), more than 400 educators and community stakeholders, and Battelle for Kids—spent five years developing its professional learning and growth system. The district continues to work with teachers to make adjustments to the system based on new research and input from stakeholders (Pittsburgh Public Schools, 2016). PPS also engages the Pittsburgh community in celebrating and supporting teachers through its Teachers Matter campaign (Battelle for Kids, 2014).

### Step 3: Implement and continuously improve.

Upon developing a plan for attracting and retaining teachers, districts should consider their readiness to implement those plans, including:

- alignment of HCMS functions with organizational priorities and practices;
- high levels of knowledge, skills, and training for individuals involved in managing the HCMS; and
- the ability to monitor progress and drive ongoing improvement and sustainability.

Even the best ideas for improving human capital practices can fail if they are carried out in isolation. As such, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in Maryland emphasized strategic alignment when

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making an organizational commitment to “recruit, retain, and develop the best employees in public education.” The district identified human capital management as one of five priorities in its strategic plan, with a focus on increasing the diversity of its teacher workforce and working with MCPS employee associations to foster continuous improvement and provide pathways for the growth and advancement of all staff. The district regularly tracks progress toward each goal outlined in its strategic plan. (Montgomery County Public Schools, 2016).

### In Summary

The astronaut and teacher, Christa McAuliffe, said, “I touch the future. I teach.” The impact of a teacher starts with a student and reverberates through the classroom, the school, and the community. While teacher shortages continue to be a challenge across the country, many districts are making promising strides in employing strategic HR practices to build strong talent pipelines. Doing so is crucial not only to fill needed positions in the short term, but also to elevate the profession in ways that recognize how important teachers are to the success of our students, communities, and the nation.

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