

What's your school district's HR brand?



How to attract, hire and retain the best teachers

Battelle for Kids

We know good teachers matter. In fact, research suggests that teachers matter more to student achievement than any other aspect of schooling, according to a 2012 RAND Education study.

In most areas of the U.S., however, low-income, minority and students living in rural areas are the least likely to have access to the resources that matter most.

The Aspen Institute's Commission on the No Child Left

Behind Act discovered in 2010 that teacher quality is inequitably distributed in schools. Typically, students with the greatest needs find themselves in classrooms with the least-qualified and least-effective teachers. A 2008 study by The Education Trust found students in high-poverty schools are 50% more likely to have teachers who do not hold certification or academic majors in their fields when compared to students in more affluent schools. And, according to the paper "Recruiting and Retaining High-Quality Teachers in Rural Areas," by **David Monk**, dean of

Pennsylvania State University's College of Education, "rural schools have a below-average share of highly trained teachers."

So how do we find, grow and retain great teachers — especially in areas where students need the most support?

Districts across the country are re-imagining their recruitment and hiring practices, and in the process examining their human resources (HR) brand.

For the districts profiled in this article, the approach to HR branding and recruiting is not solely about creating awareness of open positions — it's centered on reaching talented educators interested in beginning their careers and/or growing professionally and making an impact on students' lives.



Case in point: Tulsa Public Schools, Oklahoma

As the second largest district in Oklahoma, Tulsa Public Schools (TPS) employs more than 7,000 staff across 88 campuses. Nearly 34,500 (or 84%) of the district's 41,000 students qualified for free or reduced-priced lunch as of 2012.

During the 2012–2014 school years, TPS developed a multiyear recruitment campaign to build its brand, showcase the great things happening in the district and find qualified candidates to serve in a growing number of classrooms by:

- creating awareness of career opportunities among pre-service and practicing teachers, associations and partner organizations that recommend candidates;
- building a network of candidates within Oklahoma and surrounding states;
- fostering relationships with student teachers;
- telling TPS' story as the district of choice in Oklahoma, including the advantages of building a life in the greater

Tulsa area;

- building current instructional and noninstructional staff's ability to reinforce this messaging and serve as district ambassadors;
- promoting clear job descriptions and simplifying the online application process;
- streamlining human resources systems and introducing an intentional selection process, including candidate screening, interviewing, evaluating/scoring, hiring, onboarding and retention.

As part of the campaign, TPS created a suite of materials to showcase the district and Tulsa community in a positive light, including:

- a brochure to share with potential teacher candidates, parents, community leaders and foundation representatives (<http://bit.ly/1pla3bj>);
- a poster series to place in education colleges across Oklahoma and surrounding states to attract pre-service teachers considering employment opportunities (<http://bit.ly/1hqkthq>) (<http://bit.ly/potesh>);
- an enhanced careers website with improved functionality and design that builds the case for why educators should consider a career at TPS (the site feeds into the online application process);
- recruitment event materials — traveling banners, signs, promotional pieces and others — that appeal to recent graduates who are passionate about improving student outcomes;
- advertising in local, regional and national education and business publications to reach target candidates and put the district on the map.

These efforts have helped the district introduce a process, be intentional about its efforts and establish a brand, clear voice and cohesive presentation across all recruitment platforms. The recruitment campaign has helped the district:

- build internal morale and pride, and reinforce its commitment to excellence and supporting teachers by displaying recruitment materials featuring TPS educators in every district building;
- establish relationships with 19 colleges and universities in Oklahoma and surrounding states from which TPS' most effective teachers are recruited;
- strengthen existing relationships with four in-state universities that provide student teachers;
- participate in 23 recruitment events during the 2013–14 school year;
- receive 952 applications and hire 420 teachers from September 2012 through August 2013.

In 2014, Battelle for Kids earned awards on Tulsa Public Schools' behalf for the recruiting brochure and marketing campaign from the Academy of Interactive and Visual Arts and Ohio School Public Relations Association.

Case in point: South Central Local School District, Ohio

The **South Central Local (Huron)** School District recently redesigned its brand to attract new hires, put a “face” on the district and create a recruiting and hiring system that is easy to use and helps determine the best candidates for open positions. Perhaps Ohio’s best kept secret, South Central is a small, rural district serving 825 students across 86 square miles. The district is nestled in the countryside surrounded primarily by family farms and light industry. South Central’s diverse course offerings, college credit courses and quality programs match those of much larger districts, while its small size ensures educational opportunities are offered to meet each student’s needs.

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The district currently is engaged in a transformation process to expand curriculum offerings and recruit new administrators and teachers to replace those retiring or looking for new opportunities. South Central also is ramping up its efforts to attract, recruit and hire graduating and practicing educators interested in growing and improving student outcomes.

Understanding the need to increase awareness among stakeholder groups — especially potential employees — South Central began designing a campaign focused on:

- positioning the district as a place where educators can have a big impact on student success because of its size and culture;
- creating awareness of the district’s diverse, evolving curriculum that prepares students for career, college and life;
- highlighting South Central’s student-focused, close-knit family culture;
- presenting the district as a desirable place to work and live.

South Central’s recruitment system overhaul and communications campaign, which will fully launch in fall 2014:

- provides the district with an online tool designed to improve selection processes for instructional and noninstructional staff using a multiple-data-point approach, including candidate screening, interviewing, evaluating and scoring, and hiring;
- builds awareness of South Central career opportunities among administrators and pre-service and practicing teachers, associations and partner organizations that can

recommend and inform candidates;

- forms a strong network of candidates within Ohio;
- leverages relationships with student teachers who would be interested in careers at South Central;
- uses a testimonial approach featuring staff and students to position South Central as the district of choice in Huron County;
- encourages current instructional and noninstructional staff to reinforce key messaging and serve as district ambassadors.

Sound advice from districts across the country

From these two examples and many others, the results are clear: Being strategic about recruitment communications helps districts set clear expectations and goals, broaden their reach and find the best candidates — which ultimately propels the district forward on its path toward excellence. It’s important to:

- Set clear goals from the beginning. We all need to know what we’re working toward. Decide what you want to accomplish through your re-branding and recruitment efforts so that you can establish goals. Setting clear goals from the beginning will help you create a plan and identify your next steps and time line.
- Create a plan — and stick to it. Have planning conversations with key stakeholders early on to inform the development of your plan. Outline what you need to do, when you need to do it and who is responsible. This will help you get started and stay on track.
- Be aware that if you’re trying to attract teachers, you must partner with them every step of the way. The best way to ensure your materials are well designed, informative, compelling and resonate with your core audience is to include your audience in every step of the process. In this case, engage current teachers from your district (along with other key stakeholders) in planning conversations and share drafts of your materials with them. Teachers’ input and feedback are key.
- Remember that it’s about so much more than the job. People are looking for more than a paycheck. They want to find a sense of community, supportive colleagues, opportunities to network and grow, and a great place to live. Focusing on lifestyle in your materials will boost your recruitment efforts as a whole.
- Decide what makes you unique, and tell that story. We’re all different. Each district must think about what sets it apart and what makes it appealing to prospective candidates. Focus on what you do well and tell that story through your campaign. ■

Editor’s note: Battelle for Kids is an Ohio-based, national, not-for-profit organization that provides counsel and solutions to advance the development of human capital systems, the use of strategic measures, practices for improving educator effectiveness and communication with all stakeholders. For more information, visit www.BattelleforKids.org.