
Comprehensive Recruitment and Selection Guide

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Introduction

In today's economic environment, business and industry must respond to rapidly changing global dynamics with actions and practices that work or risk obsolescence. The educational community finds itself in much the same situation. The fact that students in the United States perform at lower academic levels than their international counterparts is real (Gonzales, et al., 2008) and is an ongoing topic of the media as well as coffee shop and ballpark conversations. The transformation of schools into institutions of deep learning rather than places of compliance, low-level surface learning, and memorization will require a shift in focus for communities, parents, educators, and students.

Recent research has shown that principal leadership is the second most important contributor, after instructional quality, to student learning and achievement in school (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Effective principal leadership, in fact, significantly increases student achievement (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). Because of the impact of principal leadership on student achievement, superintendents and school boards must hire principals who know how to lead schools in which students consistently achieve high academic standards.

However, as superintendents and school boards have experienced, recruiting and hiring effective principals are extraordinarily difficult responsibilities. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2010-2011), new jobs for school principals will continue to increase by approximately ten percent through 2020 as a result of growth in enrollments of school-aged children. At the same time, large numbers of retirements and fewer applicants for these critical and challenging positions are due in part to the increased pressures and complexities of the job (Farkas, Johnson,

Duffett, & Foleno, 2001). These interacting elements combine to result in increased job openings and a shortage of experienced, effective principals.

Another obstacle to hiring effective principals is the lack of useful predictors of principal effectiveness. Customary methods of recruitment, selection, and appointment of principals often do not address past performance in the specific areas that directly impact student achievement. A Wallace Foundation study of 66 principal evaluation instruments found no evaluation of the principal in the area of engagement with the curriculum in 26 of the instruments, and no mention of the quality of the curriculum (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2007). In addition, traditional interview questions are often generic in nature and include little substance about student learning. All of these impediments to the recruitment and selection of principals increase the risk that an ineffective candidate will be selected as the new principal. If the intent is to hire a principal with the capacity to lead students to higher achievement levels, selection criteria and candidate evaluation must be based on research of best leadership practices.

The information in this Comprehensive Recruitment and Selection Guide is taken from data gathered earlier and first published in the journal, *Education* (Ash, Hodge, & Connell, 2013).

Critical Practices of Effective Principals Who Improve Student Learning

Effective principal-leaders strategically demonstrate practices that transform schools into institutions of learning and improved student performance (Waters et al., 2004). Ash and Hodge (2012) identified critical practices demonstrated by effective principal-leaders that transform

schools into institutions of learning and improved student performance. Extensive observations of principals, interviews with principals who have significantly increased student learning in their schools, case studies, and an analysis of research support these critical practices and skills of effective principal leadership to improve student learning. The critical practices are listed below.

1. **Focus on direction**
2. **Build a powerful organization**
3. **Give life to data**
4. **Ensure student-focused vision and action**
5. **Lead learning**

Each of the critical practices is subdivided into standards. These standards further define the practices of effective principals.

Focus on Direction

Principals who consistently practice focusing on direction are expert at creating a culture of caring, communication, and collaboration. A willingness to share, to question their own mental models, and to suggest new alternative strategies foster a clear and focused direction for teaching and learning. Effective principals maintain high-performance expectations for everyone and consistently model ethical actions. They also use the school's vision and mission to direct decisions and determine actions, which in turn build support for the purposeful direction of the school.

Build a Powerful Organization

The driving ethic for any educational institution answers the question: *What is best for students?* Answering this question binds the various elements of effective principalship into a working model. A powerful educational organization requires a climate that provides a sense of order and safety for engaging in the teaching and learning processes. Effective leaders create an environment that supports the freedom to take risks, which leads to engagement beyond the ordinary and familiar for teachers and students.

Listening is a powerful tool for principals to initiate improvement, stimulate growth, and create change within a school. Listening includes paying attention to the nuances of talents, skills, and levels of motivation of all stakeholders and leads to organizational agility and flexibility. A flexible organizational structure enables principals to individualize expectations and generate internal and external partnerships and alliances.

Principals of high-performing schools ensure continuous improvement of programs, processes, and performances. They routinely lead systematic and focused analyses of schools processes and procedures to measure effectiveness and efficiency. Additionally, principals of high-performing schools collaborate with staff on next steps to meet difficult objectives that will improve student learning and satisfy stakeholders.

Effective principals build on and develop the leadership capacity of all individuals involved in improving teaching and learning. This type of leadership development creates a partnership of shared responsibility for the common goal of improvement. Including all stakeholders in the

process expands the support of the vision of improved student learning and maintains the visibility of the work of the school community to meet that goal.

Give Life to Data

As outstanding principals lead their schools to world-class achievement, their decisions are based on data that focus on results. Their decision-making processes are highly data driven, including selecting, gathering, analyzing, and managing data and knowledge resources.

Principals who increase student learning use data to provide knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of individual students and schools. The data establish the foundation for rewarding success, acknowledging areas for improvement, and solving the root causes of problems rather than simply considering symptoms. Effective principals often use a defined and structured process such as the Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle (see Appendix) to increase student learning and improve school programs and processes.

Transparent, visible data sets used by faculty and staff to analyze student learning are powerful change agent tools that will improve and sustain increased student achievement. Effective principals structure regular times for teams to assess student work. This structure provides the foundation for a collaborative culture where everyone is responsible for student learning.

Faculties in high-performing schools consistently use the data to change and improve practices in the classroom.

Ensure Student-Focused Vision and Action

A school's vision is a shared image, not of the current reality, but of the hopes of those involved and provides a picture of the best future envisioned for all students. Many schools develop vision statements that focus on student needs, but actions within the schools often are not predicated on their visions. Principals of high-performing schools, however, lead faculties and staffs to base actions on the schools' student-focused visions.

Effective principals lead staffs to establish student-focused visions and actions by providing the necessary instructional leadership and creating a culture fully focused on student learning and student needs. Effective principals demonstrate to faculties and staffs the importance of student achievement by modeling student-focused behaviors and actions. Effective principals serve as models by intentionally designing processes that focus on students rather than on the adults and providing specific, collaboratively developed guidelines and procedures for student-focused classrooms.

To create and sustain a student-focused school culture, principals of high-performing schools prioritize efforts and actions to reflect the vision. Therefore, principals ensure the availability of essential resources for teachers, students, and classrooms so that implementation of learning opportunities is optimized for all students.

Lead Learning

Today's educational environment is continuously changing and expanding. These kinds of adaptive changes often have no obvious answers, thus requiring administrators, faculties, and staffs to continuously learn and expand their own abilities (Heietz & Laurie, 1997). Principals of high-performing schools provide time for reflection as a necessary component of all new learning, create an atmosphere that supports collaboration among teachers, and ensure a setting where learning is an essential part of each day's work. In order to prepare students for success, effective principals consistently share knowledge throughout the school and community.

A primary function of leadership is to produce positive change. For today's schools to thrive rather than just survive, flexibility and openness to change are imperative. Principals of high-performing schools ask the right questions, listen to the answers, and reframe the issues when necessary.

Effective principals place high value on creating capacity and the ability to anticipate, engage in, and benefit from all kinds of situations. Principals of high-performing schools are expert at challenging the status quo and using knowledge to innovate. However, innovative practice does not just happen. It requires creation of a climate of trust, support, and encouragement along with sensitivity to the fact that change is often accompanied by fear. All organizations, and many individuals, resist change. In order to overcome these natural barriers, effective principals must concentrate on creating a culture that reduces the fear of change and failure. Therefore, the creation of a culture of caring, communication, and collaboration found in the first critical practice, Focus on Direction, is critical.

Effective principals engage in breakthrough thinking, often “outside the building” thinking. They use ideas from different fields, finding the intersections between different concepts and using these to engage the collective brainpower of the school in searching for best practices. They provide support and encouragement for faculty and staff innovations, especially for student-focused innovations.

Recruitment and Selection Process

The recruitment and selection of school principals are two of the most important contributions superintendents can make to the well-being and high performance of school districts. School principals are responsible for the security, welfare, and achievement of all persons in schools—students, faculties, and staffs. Hiring new principals is a high-stakes proposition and one in which superintendents need to be thoroughly involved. Successful recruitment and selection of school principals are challenging and time consuming, but an effective process and structured support lead to election of the most qualified candidates and to future principal satisfaction (Normore, 2004).

10 Steps to Effective Recruitment and Hiring

Effective recruitment and hiring generally include the steps listed below, which should be completed by consultants in collaboration with superintendents or by superintendents and their leadership teams. Consultants could be used for all or part of the process. Each step of the process should be documented so that any possible future questions about fairness or bias, for

example, can be answered with documentation. Ideally, the hiring process is implemented over a 12-month period (Clifford, 2012).

Pre-Screening Process

1. Identify and train community committees that understand the needs of schools. These committees will serve in supportive roles throughout the process and give input and feedback to the superintendents.
2. Identify the required and the preferred qualifications for the principals.
3. Post the vacancies and place announcements on district websites and in other appropriate places. Since the postings will probably increase website traffic, maintain current, accurate, and easily accessible information on websites.
4. Use state, regional, and national networks; graduate leadership programs; and professional associations to spread the word and solicit applications.
5. Keep applications organized. Respond to each letter of interest, and include information about the positions, districts, and communities.

Screening and Interviewing Process

6. Conduct an initial screening of applications, prioritizing candidates based on credentials and experience. Contact references of qualified candidates. Conduct interviews as a second-step screening. Interview candidates using a structured, behavioral, and/or situational interview process, where interviewers ask each candidate to provide details

about specific past experiences or particular hypothetical situations that might arise in the future. Ask all candidates the same questions with probing/follow-up questions as needed. This kind of structured interview format based on actual experience demonstrates a high degree of reliability, validity, and legal defensibility, with better future job performance. Traditional resume-driven interviews are less able to predict successful job performance (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2008).

7. Specific interview questions and an answer guide cover each standard in the Critical Practices Framework (Ash, Hodge, & Connell, 2012). Several examples of questions are listed below.

- If you were principal, how would you use data to improve student learning?
- Share an example of how you have helped develop a vision and use it to make decisions and inform actions.
- Would you describe how you have modeled ethical actions and reinforced ethical actions in others' work?
- How have you instituted or developed a new program that made a positive difference for students and/or stakeholders?

Committees should record responses and independently rate candidates' performances using the answer guide. After discussing candidates' answers and combining ratings, committees identify the top three to five candidates for follow-up interviews and/or on-site visits.

Follow-up and Selection Process

8. If candidates are currently serving in leadership positions, district officials and/or consultants may want to visit their schools to see candidates in action, including such responsibilities as carrying out student data reviews and conducting building walk-throughs, teacher observations, and stakeholder interviews, etc.
9. Next, superintendents or superintendents and their teams should ask any follow-up questions and rank the top candidates.
10. Superintendents and their teams should discuss top candidates and select new principals.

Thank you emails or letters to the other candidates should be sent as soon as possible.

Conclusion

Choosing new leaders is a difficult responsibility for any organization, and the accountability and complexity of schools generate even more challenges for those charged with principal identification and selection. The increased demand for high-quality principals and the shortage of principals who are expert and experienced in increasing student learning requires superintendents and school boards to use a more purposeful and focused selection process than has been used in the past. Candidates' assessments should be based on the critical practices of focusing on direction, building a powerful organization, giving life to data, ensuring student-focused vision and action, and leading learning.

The Principal Interview Guide and Scoring Guide can be found at www.edusolution.net

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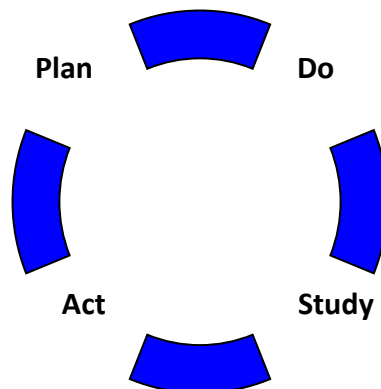
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Appendix: Plan-Do-Study-Act

The plan–do–study–act (PDSA) cycle (Figure A1) is a four-step model used to make positive change. The PDSA cycle was originally created by Walter Shewhart when he developed statistical process control, and Edward Deming further promoted PDSA use through Quality Management Design. It is currently used in the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award for business, healthcare, educational, and non-profit organizations. Using the PDSA Cycle allows organizations to coordinate effectively the improvement efforts and ensures that improvement is continuous.

Figure A1: Plan-Do-Study-Act



Plan-Do-Study-Act Procedure

1. Plan: Identify the need for change, and plan for implementation.
2. Do: Carry out a pilot study to assess the effectiveness of the change.
3. Study: Analyze the results and identify what worked and what did not work
4. Act: Take action based on what you learned in the previous step. If the change was not effective, revise the plan. If the change was effective, use it to make broader systemic changes. Return to the first step to plan new improvements, initiating the cycle again.

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