

# FROM CANDIDATE TO CLASSROOM: RESEARCH-BASED PRACTICES FOR RECRUITING AND HIRING HIGHLY- EFFECTIVE TEACHERS

John Papay, Emily Kalejs Qazilbash, & Christina Claiborne |  
The Annenberg Institute at Brown University

*We gratefully acknowledge the EdResearch for Action Advisory Board members—Carol Kelley, Corey Jackson, Jeremy Jones, Kari Kraichely, and Reyna Sotelo—whose expertise as education leaders brought critical, practice-driven insights to guide this brief.*

**Overview  
Brief**



[The EdResearch for Action Overview Series](#) summarizes the research on key topics to provide K-12 education decision makers and advocates with an evidence base to ground discussions about how to best serve students. Authors – leading experts from across the field of education research – are charged with highlighting key findings from research that provide concrete, strategic insight on persistent challenges sourced from district and state leaders.

## KEY INSIGHTS

### EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

#### District Hiring Policies

- Positions that are posted early—March or April—are more likely to attract more applicants and are more likely to be filled.
- Teachers hired from positions posted between March and June are more effective and more likely to stay at their school than teachers hired in late summer or fall.
- Open hiring processes that enable schools to choose candidates without any constraints from district transfer processes ensure teachers and schools are better matched, resulting in higher retention, greater diversity, and improved student achievement.

#### Recruitment

- Schools that partner with strong student teaching programs can hire teachers already familiar with their culture and expectations, improving teacher retention and effectiveness while minimizing hiring risks.
- Recruiting paraeducators and substitute teachers to enter a teacher preparation program and transition into teaching roles leverages their classroom experience and community ties and increases teacher diversity.
- Schools that actively recruit year-round and continually engage candidates throughout the hiring process are more likely to secure high-quality candidates.
- There is promising but not definitive evidence that financial incentives can be effective at attracting teachers into hard-to-staff subjects or schools, but they have limited impact on retention.

#### The Screening and Interview Process

- Standard measures, such as academic preparation and references from those who have observed a candidate teach, provide insight into a teacher's potential effectiveness. They serve as a good starting point but are not enough to provide a comprehensive view of the candidate's abilities.
- Structured interviews and demonstration lessons reflect a teaching candidate's future performance by assessing their teaching style, classroom management, and alignment with the school's culture.
- Clear job descriptions and multiple interactions with students and teachers during the hiring process help ensure candidates have realistic expectations. This improves the chances of a strong match and higher teacher retention.

## CENTRAL QUESTION: How can school and district leaders implement evidence-based recruitment and hiring practices to attract and select highly-effective teachers?

### BREAKING DOWN THE ISSUE

While staffing all classrooms with qualified teachers is essential for both school and student success, many districts face persistent challenges in recruiting and hiring them. Teacher shortages, particularly in critical subjects and high-need schools, have become widespread, with [86 percent of U.S. public schools reporting challenges hiring teachers](#) for the 2023-24 school year. Declining enrollment in teacher preparation programs and increasing professional demands on educators add pressure on school leaders to create effective hiring processes that attract talent and lead to strategic staffing decisions.

While factors like regional talent availability and economic conditions are beyond a district's control, districts still hold significant power to shape their recruitment success through strategic policies and practices. Early and open processes create larger applicant pools and enable successful hiring. Additionally, teacher hiring isn't just a competition between schools for limited candidates; [teacher effectiveness improves significantly when there's a strong "match"](#) between a teacher's skills, preferences, and the school's needs and culture. Teachers who feel well-aligned with their school environment are more likely to thrive, which [boosts student outcomes](#).

**Many districts hire late – in urban districts, up to [20% of teachers](#) are hired after the school year starts – reducing student achievement and teacher effectiveness.**

- In 2024, [82% of public schools](#) in the country reported needing to fill two or more teaching vacancies in late summer.
- Nationally, pre-pandemic estimates suggest that anywhere from [11 to 30 percent](#) of newly hired teachers were brought on after the school year had already begun. Schools that serve large proportions of low-income and low-performing students [are more likely to hire teachers after the school year has started](#), exacerbating existing educational inequities.
- Similarly, a study of a large urban school district over 10 years (1999–2010) found that an [average of 18 percent of new teachers](#) who start in the fall are hired after the school year begins. For example, in 2010, 110 teachers in this district were hired late, meaning thousands of students did not have their teacher on the first day of school.
- A 2016 study found that being assigned to a teacher hired after the start of the school year reduced student learning by three to five weeks ([0.03 to 0.04 standard deviations](#)). While late hires are somewhat less effective than peers hired on time, much of this negative effect comes from temporary disruptions such as a lack of time to prepare, inadequate induction, and challenges in building classroom culture after the school year has begun.

## Policy constraints, disorganized HR processes, and delays aimed at attracting better-qualified candidates often lead to late hiring.

- Budget approvals, especially in large urban districts, [often occur later in the year](#) due to reliance on state funding and complex political processes. This delays districts' hiring timelines and creates additional vacancies to fill as some teachers who would be rehired are [displaced and leave](#).
- Schools with more mobile populations and higher proportions of immigrant students face greater uncertainty in student enrollment, [making it difficult to accurately predict staffing needs](#). This often leads to delayed hiring decisions and last-minute staffing adjustments.
- Many district policies allow teachers to announce their resignations or retirements late, creating [unexpected staffing gaps and making it difficult for schools to plan effectively](#) for the upcoming year. In fact, [fewer than 10% of large districts across the country require teachers to give more than three months' notice](#) before resigning or retiring.
- District policies and collective bargaining agreements that require schools to prioritize internal candidates for open positions are [widespread](#). [Many schools need to](#) hire voluntary transfers (teachers seeking to move to a different school within the same district) or excessed teachers (those displaced from their school) without considering whether these teachers are a good fit. Although teachers' unions are often blamed for these practices, districts in states without collective bargaining tend to have similar policies.
- In some cases, even when the policies allow for early hiring, inefficient HR practices lead districts to post vacancies [later than necessary](#).
- Due to a shortage of qualified candidates, districts sometimes delay hiring in the hope of attracting better applicants. However, they often [end up hiring less qualified or emergency-certified teachers](#) later in the process.

## Even when schools have access to larger applicant pools, they often do not select the most effective teachers.

- A 2023 study found that schools with larger applicant pools do not, on average, [hire new teachers who are more qualified](#), effective, or likely to stay than teachers hired by schools with smaller applicant pools.
- A study on [teacher hiring in the Washington D.C. Public Schools](#) found that although academic background and screening scores (such as interviews and sample lessons) are strong predictors of teacher performance, principals did not consistently prioritize applicants with higher scores.
- Many hiring processes only rely on easily observable characteristics, such as certifications, and static applications, such as resumes, certifications, and written forms. While this information predicts effectiveness, it does so [only weakly](#) and does not provide a complete picture of a teacher's potential.

## Many hiring processes offer minimal interactions beyond an interview, preventing candidates from assessing their fit with the school and resulting in misaligned placements, higher teacher turnover, and lower job satisfaction.

- Research in California, Florida, Massachusetts, and Michigan found that new teachers often experience ["information-poor"](#) hiring, involving minimal interaction beyond a single interview and no opportunities for classroom observation or meeting staff. More recent studies have confirmed these patterns.
- Few districts use [performance-based evaluations](#), such as demonstration lessons or multi-step interviews, that provide candidates a [strong preview of the job](#) and give hiring committees more information about a candidate's potential and [match with the school](#).

# EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES

## District Hiring Policies

### Positions that are posted early—March or April—are more likely to attract more applicants and are more likely to be filled.

- Early-posted positions attract more applicants. One [study](#) in Boston Public Schools found that positions posted early received seven more applications, on average, than those posted after July 1.
- Early posted positions are also more likely to be filled. In Boston, positions posted in March were 8 percentage points more likely to be filled than those posted in July. Over the past few years in [Providence Public School District](#), 91% of positions posted in March were filled by the start of school, compared to just 57% for positions posted after June 1.

### Teachers hired from positions posted between March and June are more effective and more likely to stay at their school than teachers hired in late summer or fall.

- A 2016 study showed that teachers who are hired early have [higher retention rates and better student achievement outcomes](#) than those hired in late summer or fall. A 2023 study in Boston [confirmed these patterns](#).
- Earlier hiring can increase the diversity of new hires and retention of new hires. Mutual consent hiring reforms in Boston, which included early and open hiring, [increased the number of teachers of color by 27%](#). These hiring reforms decreased the number of new teachers who left their schools after their first year by 9.8% and by an additional 8.4% in their second year. The hiring reforms also increased student achievement by 0.09 standard deviations in math and 0.07 standard deviations in ELA, which are larger than the average effects of many education interventions.

## **Open hiring processes that enable schools to choose candidates without any constraints from district transfer processes ensure teachers and schools are better matched, resulting in higher retention, greater diversity, and improved student achievement.**

- In an open, mutual consent hiring process, internal candidates do not have priority in hiring. Instead, they must interview and be selected by principals, like other candidates. When [New York City implemented a new mutual consent policy](#), teachers had an equal likelihood of being selected for new positions, regardless of whether they were transfers or excessed teachers. 90% of transfer teachers and 80% of excessed teachers reported being satisfied with their new roles. Many teachers stated that the process helped them find schools aligned with their teaching philosophy and work environment.
- In 2014, [Boston Public Schools moved to a full open hiring policy district-wide](#). This significantly accelerated hiring timelines, cutting late hiring by nearly 50%. It also resulted in positive outcomes for teachers and students, including lower turnover among new hires, greater diversity in hiring, and improved student achievement.

## **Recruitment**

### **Schools that partner with strong student teaching programs can hire teachers already familiar with their culture and expectations, improving teacher retention and effectiveness while minimizing hiring risks.**

- Although hosting student teachers requires effort from districts, it provides significant benefits by creating a pipeline for qualified teachers. New teachers are [ten times more likely to take a first job near where they student taught](#). In [Chicago Public Schools](#), 30% of student teachers in 2014-15 became teachers-of-record in CPS in 2015-16, and research generally shows that teachers who are hired at the same school where they student taught are [more likely to stay employed](#) there.
- When schools host student teachers, school administrators have opportunities to observe their teaching skills in real classroom environments, and performance during student teaching is [strongly related to their future classroom effectiveness](#). An evaluation of student teachers in Chicago Public Schools found that mentor teachers' evaluations of student teachers' instructional abilities were [positively related](#) to their first-year observation ratings.
- Districts are sometimes hesitant to bring on student teachers out of fear that they will be ineffective. However, [consistent evidence across studies](#) shows student teachers do not negatively impact student learning and can provide benefits like [increased student engagement](#).

### **Recruiting paraeducators and substitute teachers to enter a teacher preparation program and transition into teaching roles leverages their classroom experience and community ties and increases teacher diversity.**

- Florida [has provided tuition support to over 200 paraprofessionals](#) working with students with disabilities since 2009. Most participants completed their degrees and received certification, with high retention rates after they started teaching.

- A causal study in Mississippi evaluated the impact of [promoting experienced school staff, like paraprofessionals, to teaching roles without passing traditional licensure exams](#). These teachers performed as well as their licensed peers, particularly in math, were more likely to stay, and better reflected their students' racial demographics.
- A recent study found that paraeducators who transitioned to certified teachers were as [effective as teachers](#) without paraeducator experience. Paraeducators are also more racially and ethnically diverse, so targeting this group for teacher preparation could increase teacher diversity, benefiting student outcomes, particularly for students of color.
- Substitute teachers are a significant source of new teachers, transitioning to permanent roles at [seven times the rate of](#) paraeducators. Unlike paraeducators, most substitutes already have a bachelor's degree, which reduces barriers to entering teaching roles. Substitutes are also more racially and ethnically diverse than the current teacher workforce on average.
- There is limited research on the effectiveness of substitute teachers once they become permanent teachers, but [one study found that they received higher evaluation scores](#) from their principals than other novice teachers, on average.

### **Schools that actively recruit year-round and continually engage candidates throughout the hiring process are more likely to secure high-quality candidates.**

- Rather than waiting for vacancies to arise, districts can actively develop a pool of candidates throughout the year. [Continuous recruitment helps ensure districts are prepared](#) with high-quality candidates whenever positions open, [reducing reliance on rushed hiring processes](#) that may lead to poor fit and higher turnover.
- By fostering excitement and involving candidates in meaningful ways—such as hosting school visits or facilitating conversations with staff—[schools can create a sense of connection and enthusiasm](#) that encourages candidates to join their team.

### **There is promising but not definitive evidence that financial incentives can be effective at attracting teachers into hard-to-staff subjects or schools, but they have limited impact on retention.**

- In a recent EdWeek poll, [60% of teachers](#) said that they would be much more likely to take a job if a district or school offered a bonus. Hawaii [offered \\$10,000 bonuses for special education teachers](#), reducing special education vacancies by one-third.
- Several studies have found that bonuses improve [recruitment but not retention](#). Research on [signing bonuses across industries suggests their impact is short-term](#).
- A 2013 study in San Francisco gave targeted teachers a 6% or higher salary increase, increasing the share of [targeted applicants from 27% to 37%](#). However, offering a one-time \$2,500 retention bonus after the 4th year of teaching had no impact on teacher retention.
- Oklahoma's signing bonus program, offering \$15,000 to \$50,000 to certified early childhood and special education teachers in 2023, [successfully recruited 533 educators, including 74 from out of state](#), to address critical shortages in high-need schools. Funded by \$16 million in federal COVID-19 relief funds, the program required a five-year teaching commitment, though its legality and sustainability remain under review.

## The Screening and Interview Process

**Standard measures, such as academic preparation and references from those who have observed a candidate teach, provide insight into a teacher's potential effectiveness. They serve as a good starting point but are not enough to provide a comprehensive view of the candidate's abilities.**

- [A study in Los Angeles](#) found that professional references, GPAs, and subject matter knowledge scores all predict teachers' later evaluation outcomes and their attendance.
- References from individuals with [direct knowledge of an applicant's teaching abilities](#), such as supervisors or colleagues, strongly predict teacher performance, yet [hiring managers often do not use them to make decisions](#). Ratings from other reference types, like friends or unrelated professionals, are not good predictors of teacher performance.

**Structured interviews and demonstration lessons reflect a teaching candidate's future performance by assessing their teaching style, classroom management, and alignment with the school's culture.**

- Teachers who perform well in [demonstration lessons](#) tend to have higher student achievement and better classroom evaluation ratings later. Following the demonstration lesson, a debrief with administrators provides further insight into how candidates reflect on their teaching and respond to feedback.
- [Structured interviews](#) with pre-selected questions and rubrics provide valuable assessments of candidates, helping predict teacher performance and ensuring fair comparisons across applicants.
- Effective schools design interview questions to gauge [candidates' alignment with the school's mission, values, and instructional priorities](#). Effective interviews also assess how candidates reflect on their teaching practices and adapt to feedback. These traits indicate a candidate's ability to grow and succeed in a collaborative school environment.

**Clear job descriptions and multiple interactions with students and teachers during the hiring process help ensure candidates have realistic expectations. This improves the chances of a strong match and higher teacher retention.**

- Teachers who are hired through a process that provides a realistic preview of the job report they are [more satisfied with their school than those who are not](#).
- Opportunities to observe classrooms, meet students, and experience the school environment enable candidates to better understand the school's expectations, values, and culture. With this information, they are more likely to make decisions that result in a [better organizational fit](#) and [adjust better to their roles](#).
- When teachers, administrators, and other staff are engaged in the interview process, they can offer diverse perspectives and [foster better alignment between candidates and the school's needs and goals](#).



# PRACTICES TO AVOID

Schools and districts should avoid the problematic standard hiring practices described above. Below are two additional practices that may arise as districts work to improve hiring.

## **Simply expanding applicant pools through early hiring will not automatically result in better hires.**

- While recruiting teachers early in the hiring cycle gives districts a better chance to attract a larger and potentially stronger pool of candidates, early hiring is only part of the solution. Without proper screening processes in place, [districts often do not identify the best candidates from this pool](#). To maximize hiring outcomes, districts must combine early hiring with robust screening tools, such as structured interviews and demonstration lessons, that assess candidates' fit, effectiveness, and long-term commitment.

## **When hiring processes lack multiple agreed-upon data points, such as rubrics and screening tools, decision-makers often rely on "gut" feelings to assess candidate fit, which can lead to implicit bias and undermine efforts to increase diversity.**

- Many studies have documented that [implicit bias is common throughout the hiring process across industries](#). Non-standardized interviews lack consistency, which gives candidates different opportunities to showcase their qualifications and increases the risk of implicit bias. Standardized interviews, where all candidates answer the same questions in the same order, [help reduce bias by focusing on job-related factors](#). Incorporating multiple interviewers also helps to ensure a more balanced evaluation.

This EdResearch for Action brief is a collaboration between:



Annenberg Institute  
BROWN UNIVERSITY

