

10 Improving Hiring, Induction, and Tenure Decisions

Personnel decisions are a good place to look for and change conditions that undermine learning. Schools and school districts need teachers who can deliver engaging, rigorous lessons and reach out to learners with a wide variety of backgrounds, knowledge, and skills. They also need individuals who show the promise to become strong collaborators and to make valuable contributions to Accountable Communities. In this chapter we consider three phases of personnel decision making that are critical to getting students the best possible teachers and specialists: hiring the right people, building strong induction programs to support and retain excellent teachers, and making the tenure decision.

Hiring

The ability to hire and retain the right people is a key characteristic of a high-performing organization. The need for excellent teachers has never been greater as escalating demands are placed on schools to reform their structures and practices, improve student achievement, and narrow the achievement gaps between white and non-white students. Yet research and models of outstanding teacher selection systems remain relatively scarce (Peterson). Hiring is frequently rushed, competing with end-of-the-school-year activities or summer vacation plans. There are costs associated with poor hiring decisions and the mediocre learning that ensues. Bolton notes, “The cost of hiring the wrong candidate can be higher in terms of supplementary training, wasted salary, adverse public relations, and lost productivity than the cost of more extensive recruitment” (10).¹ Clear standards and procedures must be set for recruiting and hiring promising new teach-

¹See also Darling-Hammond and Berry (2006 19): “A recent study estimated the cost of replacing new teachers who leave at between \$8000 and \$48,000 each, depending on whether we consider student learning costs (Benner 2000).”

ers if we are to build and sustain cultures of excellence. As you read the following cases, look for the missed opportunities to make better hiring decisions.

CASE 10.1 Alicia Nativeson

Bill Wills, chair of the English department at Midtown High School, has a position to fill. While there are numerous applicants, Bill has top-listed Alicia Nativeson who is a graduate of Midtown High. Nearly 60 percent of the teachers attended Midtown as students. Alicia was very popular as a student, performing in many of the school musicals and serving on the varsity cheerleading squad. Her father, a long-time middle school guidance counselor in the district, is Bill's good friend. Alicia also did her student teaching at Midtown. Vivacious and sociable, she quickly became popular with teachers in the department and formed close, peer-like relationships with many of her students. While not a strong student, her letters of recommendation from several of her college professors highlight her interpersonal skills and dynamic personality.

Shortly after the new school year begins, the principal expresses some concerns. "You know Bill, I've been by Alicia's room a few times, including one formal observation. She is great with kids, but I don't see rigor. The content seems a long way from the challenge we need for our kids." Bill reassured the principal that she would grow into her role as a teacher as she "becomes more familiar and comfortable" with the curriculum.

CASE 10.2 Margaret Reader

It is early June, and Principal Russell Lowell at the Wilson Street Elementary School has a very busy Thursday ahead. He has a meeting at the superintendent's office in the morning, and the 6th grade awards ceremony is scheduled for later in the afternoon. In addition, he will also sit in on a grade 3 meeting to facilitate looking at student work. Despite nearly an entire school year of common planning time and training, the four grade 3 teachers just cannot work productively together. Lowell sees one particularly resistant teacher as the problem but is relieved that she will be retiring at the end of the school year. In fact, interviews have been scheduled early that afternoon for two candidates whose resumes were sent down from the Central Office. Lowell reviews the resumes while having a quick sandwich. By midafternoon, Lowell has completed the interviews and there is little doubt in his mind whom he wants. One of the candidates, Margaret Reader, interviewed extremely well. An articulate, poised young woman, she graduated from a nearby private university and appears to be an avid reader of journals and books on education. Just what

that grade level team will need to give them a shot in the arm, thinks Lowell, as he lifts the phone to make a reference call to her faculty advisor. The advisor is effusive about what a solid student Margaret has been and how she will no doubt be an outstanding teacher despite her bumpy experience at student teaching. Inquiring about the bumps, Lowell is told that the supervising teacher was a poor match for Margaret's energy and intellect. Looking at his watch and remembering the awards ceremony, Lowell thanks the reference and heads to the gymnasium.

Two months into the following school year, the grade 3 teachers are still struggling to collaborate, and now several of the teachers refuse to meet with Margaret. Comments such as "Who does Ms. Reader think she is?" and "Where does she get off telling us what we should or shouldn't be doing!" are beginning to surface in hall conversations around the building.

CASE 10.3 **Larry L. Day**

The new school year begins next week, and Andrea McDuel, principal of Pacifico East Middle School, is anxious to fill a special education position created by the incumbent teacher's decision to move to another city over the summer. Certified special educators are scarce, and her school is moving to full inclusion. Shortly after advertising the position, she is relieved to find a resume in the mail from a certain Larry Labor Day, who has three years of experience as a special education teacher at an elementary school. He was laid off at his previous school due to a budget-driven reduction in staff (a more senior classroom teacher with special education certification "bumped" him). In that school, Larry ran a self-contained resource room with a caseload of ten behaviorally challenged students. Pleased to have a candidate with the appropriate certification, Andrea schedules an interview with Larry for the next day. They talk about special education in general terms, and Larry impresses Andrea with his knowledge of special education law and procedures. After the interview, Andrea quickly calls Larry's former principal and is told in a short conversation that while Larry was "a bit of a loner," he did a "nice job of keeping a handle on the kids." Thanking the principal for his time, Andrea promptly offers Larry the position.

As the school year begins, it becomes clear by October that Larry was more comfortable in the isolated pull-out class than in the collaborative inclusion setting. The principal had hoped that Larry would become an inclusion leader, but instead he assumed more of a teaching assistant role.

Perhaps one or more of these scenarios is familiar. Viewed from afar, it is tempting to troubleshoot each case with a quick suggestion: to clarify the

criteria for the position, to use more data in making a hiring decision, or perhaps to invest more time in the process through an advisory committee with teacher input. Rushing to fix the problem, however, may miss an opportunity to build the 3 C's (Conviction, Competence, and Control). Putting effective systems in place will require re-thinking existing beliefs, skills, and practices. Three questions organize the work of this chapter.

- What beliefs drive the actions we take in recruiting, hiring, and supporting new teachers? (Conviction)
- What can we do to build our competence to recruit, hire, and retain the very best possible people? (Competence)
- What institutional deficiencies—systems policies and practices—must be confronted and replaced in order to improve the selection of promising new teachers? (Control)

Conviction in Recruitment and Hiring

Beliefs strongly influence the decisions that leaders make and the actions they take, but how frequently do we examine them? Leaders can begin the process of building an effective system for hiring new teachers by challenging debilitating beliefs that lead to poor hiring decisions and replacing them with beliefs that drive excellence and lead to good hiring decisions.

LEADER ALERT

Where are Your Biases?

- A solid interview performance?
 - A glowing recommendation?
 - A known quantity, the inside candidate?
 - A high grade point average?
 - A candidate with a parent, relative or spouse in the district?
 - A coaching background or other co-curricular strength?
 - A transcript from a prestigious college?
 - Appropriate certification, particularly in a high-needs area?
-

Debilitating Belief 1

“I base hiring decisions on quick impressions and pretty much know a good teacher when I see one.”

Consider the three previous case studies. Each principal locked into quick favorable impressions based on limited data. Hiring on a hunch, going with the known entity, or hiring a certified body to quickly fill a vacancy led to poor hiring decisions. Rarely are one or two sources of data sufficient to make a decision to ensure that each student will receive expert instruction or that professional community will be strengthened and expanded.