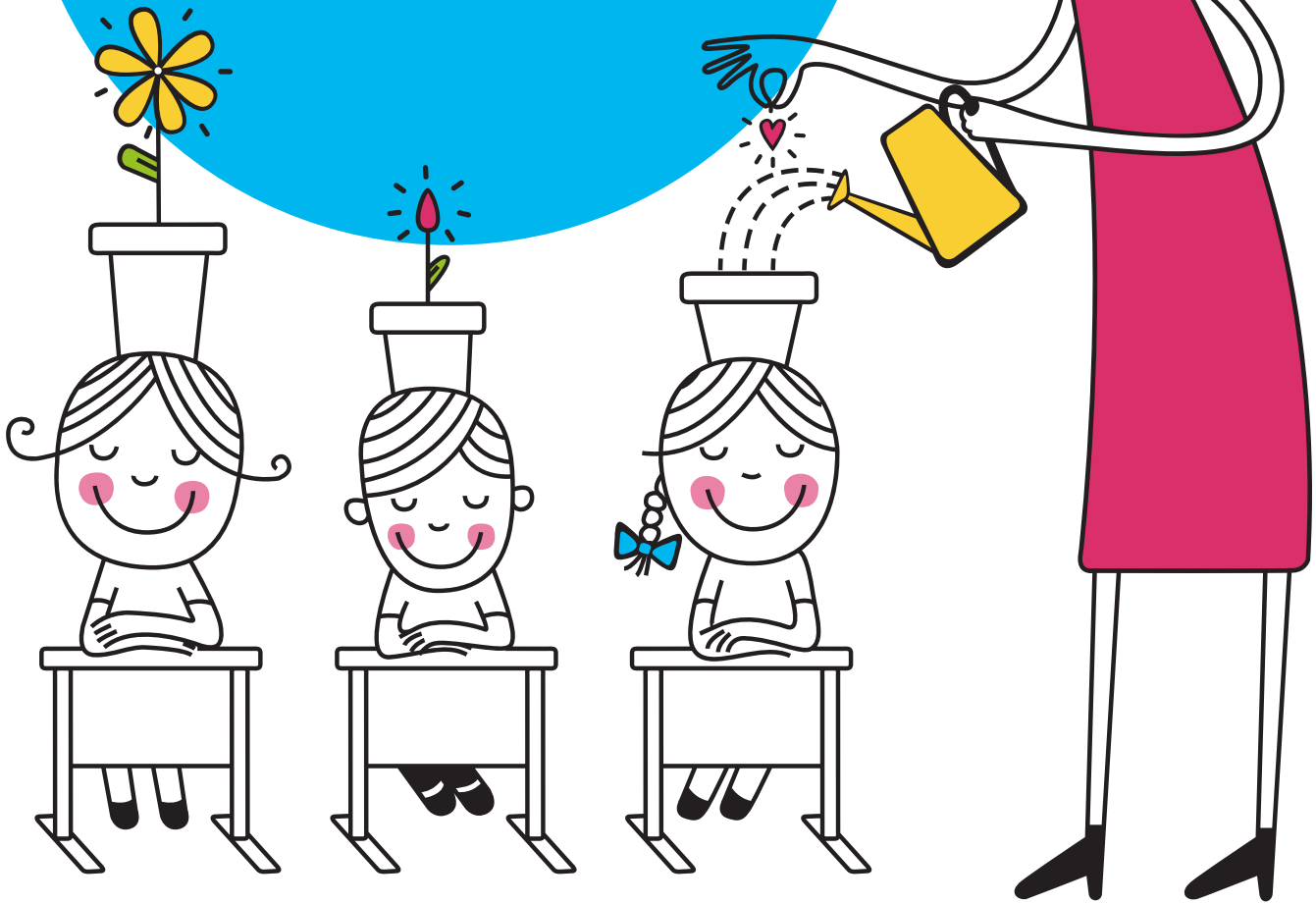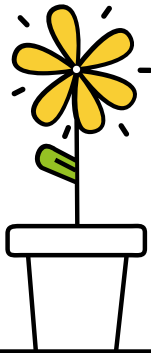# 5 tips to fill your classrooms with the best teachers and boost student achievement, **every day**

More than a dozen K-12 leaders share how to identify, hire, develop and support quality educators

PowerSchool

The end goal for every person working in a school — whether it's a custodian, a superintendent, or a teacher — is improved student achievement.

A recent survey of K-12 human resources professionals found that 34 percent believe student achievement is the factor that most influences their district's academic and administrative operations.[1] And for these talent management teams, ensuring students receive quality instruction inside the classroom means surrounding them with exceptional teachers.

"Teachers are the most critical unit in a school district," said **Chris Tatum**, director of secondary personnel at Amarillo Independent School District (AISD). "Our kids deserve amazing teachers, and that's what we need to give them."

Here are 5 ways you can support student achievement by identifying, hiring, developing and supporting your district's educators.

1

Develop a teacher candidate pool

Developing a pool of qualified teacher candidates can help districts quickly fill key positions, but in many regions, it's no easy task.

"Fewer and fewer people are enrolling in teacher education programs," said **Meg Nigro**, executive director for recruitment and development at Clark County School District. "We are in a huge crisis in Las Vegas."

But it's not just a Las Vegas problem.

The number of teacher applications received for each job posting decreased by 20 percent from 2014 to 2016 — shrinking faster than any other position type. This means that the number of teachers applying for positions isn't keeping up with the growing number of job postings, a phenomenon many refer to as the teacher shortage.[1]

"We've struggled to find special education teachers, we've struggled to find teachers who have the ability to teach English as a second language, and we've struggled to find bilingual teachers," said **Keith Bryant**, superintendent of Lubbock-Cooper Independent School District (LCISD). "Apparently, it's a problem all over our country."

To combat this challenge and fill classrooms with top educators, Keith and the HR team at LCISD recruit aggressively.

"We invest in recruitment because if everyone is facing the shortage, then everyone is going to be after that same small pool of candidates," Keith said. Keith and other district leaders worked with LCISD's HR team to develop effective recruitment plans, which include regional job fairs, as well as posting positions and searching for applicants on **SchoolSpring.com** — the nation's largest K-12-specific job board.

SchoolSpring is also part of Clark County School District's recruitment strategy. "SchoolSpring is one of the few job boards we still use because of the success we've had finding high-quality candidates and how easy and appealing the platform is for posting jobs and resume mining," Meg said.

Making it easier for active and passive job seekers to find your open postings can also help build a robust candidate pool, according to **Keith Palmer**, associate superintendent of human resources at Pasadena Independent School District. Pasadena ISD increased applicant volume to 81,000 per year by implementing **Hire** — the applicant tracking system from PowerSchool.

"We have a lot more applicants than we did with our old system, which shows applicants are better able to find us," Keith said.

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> Fewer and fewer people are enrolling in teacher education programs.

Meg Nigro
Clark County School District

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Quickly identify and hire quality educators

After developing a pool of teacher candidates, district leaders must quickly identify which candidates are worth pursuing before they accept another position.

"You're competing with a lot of other districts for candidates, so you want to move quickly with high-quality talent," said **Melva Cárdenas**, strategic education advisor at PowerShool and former teacher, principal and HR executive director at Midland Independent School District and Round Rock Independent School District.

Research conducted as part of a continuing partnership between PowerSchool and a consortium including the Northwest Evaluation Association, the University of Chicago, and other highly regarded institutions and experts, shows that if it takes more than 30 days to make an offer to a candidate, the odds of them rejecting that offer go up by 66 percent.

Barbara Burke, director of human resources and staff development at Baton Rouge Parish Schools, uses Hire to speed up her screening processes.

"The applications come in, and as they're submitted, I receive an email notification," she said. "I screen the candidates for our main criteria — such as whether that person has completed the teacher preparation program, has at least a 2.5 GPA, and passed all of their state licensing exams."

But Barbara and other K-12 leaders know preliminary screenings based on credentials only go so far.

"Sometimes we have 10 candidates that all have the same credentials — so what defines them? What tells you which one will be a better teacher?" asked **Sherry Christian**, coordinator of human resources at Niagara Catholic District School Board.

Sherry found her answer in the Teacher Educators Professional Inventory (**Teacher EPI**) — a research-based teacher assessment tool that helps K-12 leaders identify top teacher candidates based on their likely impact on student achievement.

"What better — or faster — way to assess teachers than having a test to determine their likelihood of success?" Sherry asked.

"Anybody can say anything in an interview," she added. "Personal evaluations are only as good as the evaluator. We always try to get the right evaluator — someone with experience interviewing candidates — but you can't always trust that's accurate. The Teacher EPI gives us more information to conduct better evaluations."

Chris of AISD also uses the Teacher EPI to identify which teacher candidates are most likely to improve student achievement.

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>
> **Sherry Christian**
> Niagara Catholic District
> School Board

"The Teacher EPI scores help our principals make more informed hiring decisions," Chris said. "It gives them the best chance to hire somebody that directly affects student learning every day."

Behind this powerful, data-based assessment tool are decades of education research and data studies of more than 60 diverse school districts.

"Working with the research consortium, we really wanted focus in on the aspects of teaching that matter most. And ultimately, what that comes down to is helping students learn more," said **Nick Montgomery**, chief research officer at PowerSchool. "We conducted research working with districts from 23 states in the U.S., and over 89,000 teachers across all 50 states and Canada have participated in our survey research to help us understand what it is that makes teachers more effective in the classroom."

This research uncovered empirical evidence with high degrees of confidence that determined which teaching skills, cognitive abilities, qualifications and attitudinal factors contribute most to teacher effectiveness.

"The Teacher EPI measures all the different dimensions, not just personality or classroom readiness," Chris said. "We used other assessments in the past — personality surveys and things like that — but they weren't comprehensive."

Chris acknowledged that while finding the best teachers is a high priority, they aren't the only district educators that matter.

"It's really important to have the right principal," he said. "They hire the teachers, they make campus policies and procedures, and they help our teachers with instruction. Our principals are truly district instructional leaders. They're not just staff managers."

Nick agreed about the importance of principal hiring.

"While teachers are the most important components in terms of student performance, research shows that about 25 percent of a school's improvement can be attributed to principals," he explained. "If you hire the wrong principal, you really are missing the cornerstone for school success."

To help district leaders identify the best principal candidates, PowerSchool partnered with the same research consortium behind the Teacher EPI, studying 500 participants — principals, assistant principals and others — and working with 43 school districts across the U.S. and Canada.

Their research led to the development of the **Principal EPI** — a data-based principal candidate assessment tool.

"Just like with the Teacher EPI, the Principal EPI gives our hiring directors and executive team a really strong research-based evaluation that allows them to say, 'This is the type of leader I need at this campus,'" Chris said.

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The Teacher EPI scores help our principals make more informed hiring decisions. It gives them the best chance to hire somebody that directly affects student learning every day.

Chris Tatum
Amarillo Independent
School District

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Strategically onboard new hires

Because many districts are dealing with a teacher shortage, they often focus their efforts on recruiting quality teachers. It's equally important, however, to welcome new teachers with a positive onboarding experience.

"Research tells us that whether candidates are going to stay inside a district or inside a school is often related to the experience that they have from day one," Nick explained.

To ensure a positive first impression, experts suggest eliminating traditional, paper-based onboarding processes in favor of a more modern, streamlined approach.

"There was a time when onboarding was basically orientation. You brought new hires in, you sat them down, they filled out a bunch of paperwork, and they were done. They went off to their employment process," Melva said. "But onboarding is so much more than that."

Jackie Floyd, Ed.D., assistant superintendent at Fort Zumwalt School District, recalled how disorienting new hires found orientation-focused onboarding practices.

"They would get confused," she said. "When they sit down and meet me, they're excited about being hired. Their mind is going a mile a minute. I'm giving them tons of information, and they think they've got it all. But they walk away from me, and they can't remember exactly what they're supposed to do."

Since implementing **Records** — the automated, electronic recordkeeping solution from SchoolSpring — Jackie is able to prevent that confusion. "When we set up their onboarding paperwork in Records, we have an explanation for every item."

Del Mar Union School District also noted significant improvements to their onboarding processes after implementing Records.

"Onboarding and orientation have taken on a whole new light," said **Jason E. Romero**, assistant superintendent of human resources at the district. "We spend the initial contact time during orientation getting new hires familiar with their district, their position and our processes — as opposed to just doing the menial task of checking whether forms were signed correctly."

And new employees have noticed. "We've gotten so much unsolicited positive feedback about how streamlined the process is and how it's easier to follow," Jason said.

That's setting up the district for improved retention, too. According to SHRM, employees who attended a well-structured onboard program are 69 percent more likely to remain with that employer for three years.[2]

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>
> **Jason E. Romero**
> Del Mar Union School District

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Encourage teachers' professional growth

District leaders can encourage teachers to improve classroom instruction by partnering with them to develop personalized professional development plans. Performance evaluations provide the perfect opportunity to begin this process — but they must be handled correctly.

"Teachers want to do well, but when they feel threatened, they get defensive instead of collaborative," said **Lisa Andrejko**, Ed.D., strategic education advisor at PowerSchool and former teacher, principal, director of technology and superintendent at schools and districts across Pennsylvania. "If you remove the threat, they'll be much more willing to get involved in the improvement process."

That means using performance evaluations to develop forward-looking professional development plans, rather than merely reviewing past behavior.

"Technology now provides us with student data and teacher data, which allows us to be evaluative and self-reflective during professional development planning," Lisa said. "That has made a world of difference for tailoring professional development offerings to meet an individual teacher's needs."

Using **Perform** — PowerSchool's automated performance management solution — **Maj. Jeremy Coombs**, principal of Willamette Leadership Academy (WLA), is implementing a plan to conduct performance evaluations that drive the professional development of teachers.

"The plan is to have myself or one of my other administrators do walkthroughs about five times a month, then do formal observations once a month, and formal evaluations twice a year," he said.

"We'll also have some of our teachers do quick walkthroughs of each other and — at the beginning and end of the year — they'll look at their student learning goals and their performance to see what they need to adjust."

With 18 teachers employed at WLA, Jeremy is committing to an ambitious 90 walkthroughs per month, but he says Perform makes it possible. "I go through with my iPad, and I just use the digital form. It's quick and easy."

While Perform allows school and district leaders to quickly gather meaningful data and information during evaluations, **Thrive** — PowerSchool's professional development management solution — allows them to track teachers' development activities — regardless of where they take place.

"Using Perform, we're able to look at performance data for each individual," said **Marie Kuehler**, director of human resources and customer service at Comal Independent School District. "We use that to drive their professional development activities, which we can easily track and manage in Thrive."

Using Perform and Thrive together, Comal ISD creates professional development plans based on each teacher's needs and track the effectiveness of those plans over time.

"The outcome really is what matters most," Lisa said, adding that school and district leaders must assess whether or not their professional development offerings are —affecting what's happening with kids in the classroom.

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>
> **Lisa Andrejko, Ed.D.**
> PowerSchool

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Prepare for teacher absences to prevent lost learning days

Because many teacher absences are unplanned, developing a strategy to ensure a qualified substitute can fill in on short notice is key.

"It's all about making sure someone's in the classroom with the students," said **Jackie Jones**, substitute coordinator at Grand Island Public Schools. "I was originally a secretary in an elementary school, so I know how critical substitutes can be for those students."

But you can't rely on just any substitute.

"A substitute should not just be a placeholder. Instruction should not stop because a teacher is absent," Melva explained. "A qualified substitute will be prepared to deliver instruction, so the students are not skipping a day of learning. They will actually just continue with the normal flow of instruction and learning as if the teacher were there."

Dana Parker, human resources operator at Clovis Unified School District, relies on **SmartFind** — the absence management solution from PowerSchool — to ensure teacher absences are covered by a substitute who can continue to deliver quality instruction.

"The teachers are putting their jobs in, and we're getting subs hired — and they're good subs, they're not just babysitters," Dana said. "I know that when a teacher has to be away, we're able to continue the learning process for our students. I feel like that's an important part of making sure the kids are still learning."

Dana credits the solution's ease of use with empowering her to put quality substitutes in her classrooms on short notice.
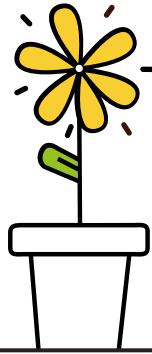
"I can just come into work, log in and see my jobs. I know what's going on," she explained. "Everything's really just a click away. Whether you're running a report, checking on somebody or entering a vacancy, it's much easier."

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A substitute should not just be a placeholder. Instruction should not stop because a teacher is absent.

Melva Cárdenas
PowerSchool

HR's responsibility and role in driving student achievement

Learning is a journey, not a destination, and the critical role K-12 schools play in that journey is guiding students to become lifelong learners, ready and able to chart their own courses for the future.

"I would think that for anybody who works for a school district — no matter what their role — it always comes back to the student, to the child," Dana said.

For K-12 talent management professionals, driving student achievement comes down to hiring and supporting quality educators.

"My philosophy is, we're not teaching seventh graders, you know? We're not teaching algebra. So if we're going to help the mission, what we can do is remove all the obstacles from the teacher's lives so that they can focus on the kids," said **Gabriel Park**, CFO at Equality Charter School.

Jeremy Tabor, SPHR, director of human resources at Burlington Community School District, agreed.

"That's what it's all about," he said. "We want our teachers to be able to do the best they can each and every day — and we want to give them the information, the tools and the resources to do that."

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[1] https://www.talentedk12.com/talentindex/

[2] https://www.shrm.org/foundation/ourwork/initiatives/resources-from-past-initiatives/Documents Onboarding%20New%20Employees.pdf

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[**Learn how**](Learn how) PowerSchool's solutions can help you identify, hire, develop and support quality educators.