

Recruiting and Retaining Educators in Public Education

by Chris Picha, Director of Human Resources

Educators play a vital role in shaping the lives of the people in their communities. The demand for services provided by these professionals is increasing due to society's expectations of ensuring our students are college or career and life ready. Practices such as an effective recruiting strategy, positive culture, mentoring and induction programs for newly hired staff, guided career pathways, and adoption of Grow Your Own and internship programs can help meet the demand to fill a variety of positions.

A school district's retention of an educator begins day one of contact. What today's educators want in the recruitment process that directly links to retention is timely communication and an information-rich process to determine the right placement for them. We share our district high points and challenges early in the recruiting process. We provide interviews with our administrators, educators, parents, and students; give tours of our buildings; and share an overview of the Owatonna community. When educators accept a job at Owatonna Public Schools, they understand the district's mission and vision and their role in inspiring excellence, every learner, every day.

Our district has taken action to help us not only recruit and retain strong, effective educators during this national staffing crisis, but also support and strengthen our workforce long term. First, positive school culture is a motivation for both existing and aspiring teachers. The work the district has done focuses on building relationships, equity and a positive culture, and it is second to none. We want our educators to feel valued and supported and experience joy in their work. We also provide multiple pathways to educator leadership positions. Educators are motivated to work in the best environments, and the promotion of positive school culture is a practice that attracts and retains more teachers.

Second, novice educators desire high-quality induction and mentoring to assist them in becoming a confident and effective educator who makes a difference in students' lives. Our three-year mentorship program is one of only a handful in the state, and it creates a positive climate of support and development for our new teachers. Mentored educators know what is expected of them and build valuable skills to contribute to building positive connections with students, providing job satisfaction.

Third, adoption of partnership programs to build robust educator pipelines is a crucial strategy for student success. Our district along with partner districts have leveraged our strong

partnership with Minnesota State University (MSU)-Mankato to implement a Grow Your Own (GYO) program to encourage local students, particularly students of color, to enter a teaching program. The idea behind GYO programs is to recruit local students with the expectation they stay rooted in their home communities.

Lastly, another successful strategy is the creation of our teacher internship program. MSU-Mankato provides interns, licensed teachers beginning a master's program, for a semester-long program under the guidance of our expert mentorship coordinator. The interns substitute daily and complete integrated coursework and professional development. Our interns receive a great start to their learning to be an effective teacher, and the district receives trained recruits who may add to our current strong teacher workforce.

Overall, the increased demand for educators emphasizes the need to create strategies and practices to help attract and retain educators. The practices outlined here are important in preparing, supporting and retaining a strong and diverse educator workforce that our students need and deserve.