

# Minnesota Principals Academy -Action Learning Project

Bradley D. Bergstrom

## Hiring Practice:

The Restructure of Austin Public Schools Hiring Process and Protocols

### Abstract

This Action Learning Project used several methods to evaluate and develop a hiring process that aligned with the needs of a larger school district in outstate Minnesota. The previous hiring process was based on a practice that had been in place for a number of years and was largely run independently by principals in each of the districts nine buildings. The hiring of teachers was based upon what principals in those buildings wanted and there was no information to support what the students, staff, the district or community wanted in a teacher. In addition, there were no criteria to share with newly hired teachers in terms of what the district and community was looking for from a teacher. This project evaluated what the key stakeholders in the community thought about a list of 14 characteristics that effective teachers demonstrated based upon a review of the literature. Stakeholders were also given an opportunity to share additional characteristics that they felt were important. These stakeholders included parents of current students in the school district and students from grades 3 – 12, teachers, paraprofessionals, and administration. The information gained from the feedback was then used to develop a set of interview questions for the PK – elementary level and a separate set of questions for the secondary level. Each level of questions would align with the characteristics that were identified as being important in teachers in the district by the stakeholders and principals.

While more feedback will need to be gathered, initial feedback gained from principals during the 2014 – 2015 interview “season” indicated that they felt the process and newly developed questions allowed them and their interview teams to gain a deeper understanding of the potential candidates. They believed that this will lead to better candidates being selected for the open positions in the district being selected when compared with the candidates that were hired the previous years.

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**Vision:** Hire the best teachers in Austin Public Schools

**Background/Context:** The hiring process in Austin Public Schools had been in place with Austin Public Schools for at least 12 years. There was no criteria that the identified what the district was looking for in a newly hired teacher. Individual principals decided what was important for their buildings and hired according to their views. None of this was written down anywhere and was based solely on their views of what a quality teacher needed to exhibit – this varied greatly from building to building across the district. In addition, the district was not able to share with new staff what characteristics they were looking for from teachers.

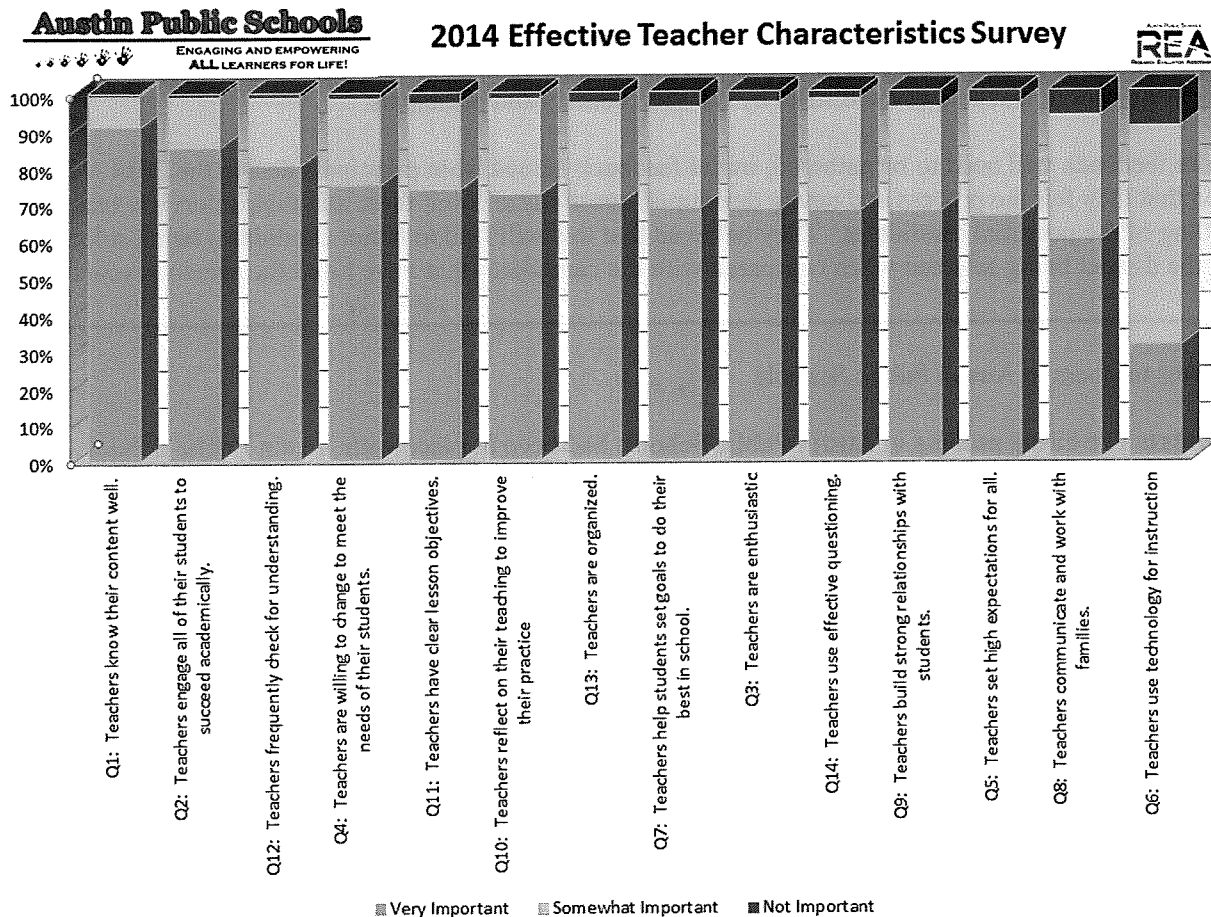
**Why a change?** The single most influential school-based factor that contributes to school improvement and student achievement is the teacher (Stronge and Hindman, 2003). Test scores for students in Austin Public Schools were not showing growth and in some cases, were actually going down. Without a purposeful look at what skills were needed in teachers being hired, the district would see isolated student improvement at best. Ultimately, key stakeholders in the district, including students, were not being listened to in terms of what characteristics of teachers they felt were important.

**What we did:** After reviewing the literature on key characteristics of effective teachers, a survey of key stakeholders was delivered. The surveys also gave stakeholders the opportunity to provide any other characteristics they felt were important. Once the feedback was received from the stakeholders, this information was used to develop teacher interview questions that addressed those key areas. Unlike the questions used in the past, the new set of questions also included “look fors” so that staff interviewing the candidates knew what to be looking for with the questions being asked. Initial feedback from principals who used the new process and questions was positive. A more detailed analysis will need to be completed in the late fall of the next school year in order to determine if the process enabled the district to hire more effective teachers.

### What we found out:

1. Key takeaways from the survey included the following:
  - a. Each of the characteristics mentioned were found to be rated higher with very important compared to somewhat important except for “Teachers using technology for instruction.”
  - b. Teacher knowledge of their content area is important for all groups surveyed.
  - c. Students saw “teacher enthusiasm” as one of the lower characteristics of importance while adults saw this as one of their lowest as well but significantly higher in importance compared to the students.

- d. Adults and students rated “Teachers using technology.” equally low. Administrators rated this characteristic the highest of any group.
  - e. Teacher communication with families was important for parents, teachers, and paraprofessionals but not for administrators. As students get older, the amount of importance in this area becomes less important.
  - f. Clear lesson plans and checking for understanding were consistently rated equally by all groups.
  - g. Top Five characteristics overall
    - i. Teachers know their content.
    - ii. Teachers engage all of their students to succeed academically.
    - iii. Teachers frequently check for student understanding.
    - iv. Teachers willing to change to meet the needs of their students.
    - v. Teachers have clear lesson objectives.
2. At least 90% of the stakeholders that were surveyed said each of the 14 pre-identified effective teachers characteristics were very important/somewhat important to them.



### Implications for practice:

1. Interview teams began asking a question prior to the interview: “What are we looking for in the next person to fill this position?”
  - a. Not just another person.
  - b. Being “just like them” might not be the best candidate
2. Interview teams understood what to be looking for in potential answers to interview questions.
  - a. Understood what the purposes of the questions in the interview guide were.
3. Newly hired staff will now understand what the district is looking for in a teacher.
  - a. This will be shared with new teachers at New Teacher Workshop by the Human Resources the department.
4. The district has worked to develop a more comprehensive communication protocol with new staff to the district.
  - a. Not just from the principal but include others like Central Office staff, coaches, and teachers.
5. The district will be looking to develop a comprehensive new teacher mentorship program.