Seven Components of a Portfolio Strategy

Talent-Seeking Strategy

The most important element of education is the people who teach and lead the schools every day. Every city needs smart, compassionate, motivated, creative people working in the schools and district offices. Portfolio districts focus on developing the strong people they have and seeking new talent from the best training programs, districts, charter schools, and other sectors.

The portfolio strategy demands a lot from people in terms of performance. It requires teachers and principals who have the capacity and initiative to drive self-directed school improvement in a strong accountability environment, and a ready pipeline of strong candidates to supply it. It also requires a re-missioned central office, moving away from supporting programs and monitoring compliance to one that exists to serve school leaders and help raise student achievement.

When a district pursues a portfolio strategy, it emphasizes school freedom over hiring: it tries to maximize the quality of choices schools have but doesn’t assign teachers or professional development. To do this, it must be able to negotiate a host of complex relationships and support, monitor, and manage a differentiated system of schools.

Fiscal constraints can force districts to limit their hiring, but strategic districts continue to use every opportunity to attract exceptionally talented people and make them available to struggling schools. In order for the portfolio strategy to work, it is critical that districts identify and develop strong principal and teacher pipelines to supply a growing group of autonomous schools.

EXAMPLE

School District Human Resources Re-Imagined

- **New Orleans RSD** used talent recruitment to re-norm a failing system of schools by finding new talent via outside providers such as Teach For America and the New Teacher Project, requiring existing teachers to pass national skills tests, and recruiting promising school leaders from as far away as Europe.

- **Washington, D.C.** re-envisioned how human resources is managed in the district by assigning a core member of the leadership team the job of managing the talent strategy. The chief talent manager oversees all policies and practices of talent, including: sourcing, development, deployment, performance management, rewards, retention, and splitting transactional (managing payroll and benefits) and strategic (solving problems like recruitment) aspects of HR into two separate offices.

- **Washington, D.C.** changed the culture in the central office through the use of new performance metrics and accountability tools for the central office.

- **New York** increased principal control over teacher hiring by ending the “bumping” of junior teachers out of schools by senior ones, requiring “excessed” teachers to apply for vacancies instead of being assigned to them, and allowing any teacher to transfer without regard for seniority.

- **Denver** revised their principal and teacher compensation systems to include financial rewards for performance.

- **Tennessee ASD** offers financial and career pathway incentives based on performance.
ELEMENTS OF A FULLY DEVELOPED PORTFOLIO IMPLEMENTATION ON TALENT

- Policies in place for using alternative pipelines to find/develop talent
- Recruitment of new principals from proven pipelines
- Recruitment of new teachers from proven pipelines
- Intensive development of strong teachers and leaders
- Performance-based evaluation system in place to recognize or remove teachers and leaders
- Schools free to differentiate teacher pay and factor performance into layoff decisions
- Innovative ways to extend the reach of strong teachers and leaders

METRICS AND PROGRESS INDICATORS FOR DISTRICTS

Is the school is using resources that help it find and attract high-performing teachers and principals?
- Increasing % of new principals hired from proven principal pipelines
- Increasing % of teachers hired from proven teacher pipelines
- Increasing number of applicants per open position (especially in high-needs schools)
- Decreasing variation in the number of applicants across schools

Are high-performance staffing policies better-distributed and retained?
- Declining retention rate of high-performing staff across schools
- More even distribution in high-performing staff across schools
- Increasing % of high-performing staff retained by the district
- Increasing positive correlation between teacher performance and teacher salary