

THE BOARD'S ROLE IN TEACHER EMPLOYMENT

A school's reputation is built upon the quality of its teachers. Since every superintendent and school board want to find and hire the "best teacher or principal," we need to be clear about the role of the local school board and conference office of education in this most important process.

Who has the official authority to hire and fire certificated teachers in the Seventh-day Adventist school system? (See the box on page 18.) According to the North American Division Working Policy (and the individual union education codes as well): "The employment, assignment, transfer, retirement, non-renewal of contract or dismissal shall be by the authority of the Conference K-12 Board of Education."

This means that teachers are employed by the conference, not the local school. There are a variety of legal and professional reasons for this. Teachers and administrators need the assurance of professional treatment in harmony with fair employment standards and practices, uniform salary and benefits packages, retirement service credit, medical coverage, educational allowances, and professional development opportunities. The local school does not have the legal authority to employ education professionals and often lacks the professional expertise to do so.

Although the conference office of education is the official authority for teacher employment, it still

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works closely with the local school boards in hiring and placing teachers. To ensure a good working relationship, it is essential that the office of education or conference K-12 board not place, assign, or reassign teachers without first consulting with the local school boards involved. It is also important for local school boards to understand that, while they have substantial opportunity to participate in the decision-making, they do not have the legal authority to make binding commitments with or to terminate certificated educational

personnel without the approval of the conference office of education. However, the local school board can make recommendations about such employees to the office of education and the conference K-12 board of education through official board actions.

Of course, it is in the best interest of both the conference office of education and the local school boards to cooperate in teacher recruitment and placement. In order to accomplish this, many educational professionals have found the following information helpful. It covers the general policies and guidelines that define the appropriate balance between the needs and interests of the local school board and the interests of the conference as it seeks to coordinate the total personnel structure of the schools.

The Dynamics of Teacher Placement

Teacher hiring, placement, transfers, and requested changes involve

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sensitive personnel issues and generally cause at least some stress for everyone involved. This article will focus specifically on issues pertaining to teachers, local school boards, and office of education personnel. Though the issues may be slightly different for each group, all three will be affected by the dynamics of the process.

The Teacher's Perspective

When a teacher's contract is not renewed or he or she is asked by the school board to transfer (as agreed upon and arranged by the conference office of education), the teacher may experience a variety of frustrating and sometimes conflicting emotions. These may include a sense of loss, grief, upheaval, anger, separation, and anxiety. Some may even perceive the request as an attack on their self-esteem, professionalism, and the value of their teaching ministry. The teacher's family may also feel disconnected, lonely, worried,

or even angry at the prospect of moving.

Even teachers who have requested a transfer may experience some of these emotions, although they are likely to feel a sense of anticipation and excitement in looking forward to new challenges. Teachers seeking new positions may have difficulty adapting to a changing placement system where they must "sell" themselves through an interview process in order to be considered for another position.

It is important for school boards to keep these things in mind as they work with the conference office of education to deal with sensitive personnel issues that affect a teacher's employment status.

The School Board and Teacher Selection

The local school board plays a vital role in teacher selection. While the conference K-12 board of education actually employs the teacher, it is important for the local school board to feel comfortable with the person selected. The office of education personnel will identify candidates they perceive to be an appropriate fit for the school and arrange for one or more interviews with potential candidates.

The Dual Role of the Office of Education

The conference office of education personnel usually must perform a dual role. Superintendents work on behalf of both the local school board and the candidates during the placement process. Balancing local school board desires with the needs of prospective teachers is often a difficult and delicate process. In addition, the office of education must coordinate personnel changes with its master plan for the conference teaching staff, which includes previous commitments, appropriate placement, and available funding. It also needs to ensure opportunities for teachers who have gained experience but not name recognition to be considered for openings within the conference school system.

With this in mind, the office of education personnel work closely with local

CATEGORIES OF EDUCATIONAL PERSONNEL

Credentialed or Certificated Employees

- Employees who are required by the conference and/or state to hold teaching credentials—includes teachers and most administrators.
- Under contract with the conference.
- Local boards recommend their hiring and termination to the conference.
- Conference K-12 board has final word in their employment.
- Salary and benefits determined by the union educational code.
- Conference does reference and criminal background checks.

Classified Employees

- School employees who are not required to hold teaching credentials, such as secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, instructional aides, and some substitute teachers.
- Under contract with the local school.
- Salary and benefits set by the local school according to union guidelines.
- Employment policies found in union educational code.
- Local school does reference checks and criminal background checks; although in some cases, conference may do criminal checks.

Volunteers

- Parents or friends of the school who work without pay as instructional aides or supervisors on field trips.
- Standards of conduct that apply to classified employees are usually enforced.
- Local school does reference checks and criminal background checks; although in some cases, conference may do criminal checks.

school boards to strike the appropriate balance between the needs of the school and those of the teaching candidate. The office of education facilitates the reference research on each candidate and collaborates with the local school board on the logistics of the interview.

Teacher Selection Overview

When a local school board anticipates that a certificated teacher will need to be added or replaced, the following steps should be taken:

1. The principal or board chair should contact the conference office of education to begin the selection process.

2. The school board should determine the qualities and qualifications they are looking for in the prospective candidate. Since the “perfect” teacher may be hard to find, the board should try to agree on more realistic expectations. The board must consider the school’s “personality”—its unique needs, assets, and liabilities. They should already have set short- and long-term goals and generated a vision statement for the school. This will make it easier to decide what talents and qualifications the new teacher needs to possess. It will be helpful to the conference office of education if the board provides a profile of the attributes they desire in each teacher candidate.

3. After the superintendent reviews the names of potential candidates, they are presented to the school’s personnel committee for evaluation. Then an interview with one or more prospective candidates is scheduled. This interview may involve the school board’s personnel committee or available members of the entire board.

4. The school board (or its personnel committee) conducts an interview with the candidate or candidates (see information below). A representative of the conference office of education should be present unless other arrangements have been made.

5. Within a specified time after the interview and upon the recommendation of its personnel committee, the local school board makes a recommendation to the office of education about the acceptability of the candidate. Hence, the final decision is made by the office of education upon the recommendation of the local school board. The selected candidate then will be granted a specified time period to decide whether to accept or decline the invitation. The office of education should inform the board chair and/or principal of the candidate’s decision as quickly as possible.

6. If the candidate accepts the position, his or her employment must be af-

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firmed by the conference office of education and voted by the conference K-12 board of education at its next regularly scheduled meeting. (K-12 boards generally empower the superintendent to proceed with contracts between official board meetings.) An employment packet is sent to the teacher so that he

or she can begin the process of transition.

Preparing for the Interview

1. In coordination with the office of education, the board should determine the best date and time for the interview. They should choose a time when as

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many members as possible of the school board or personnel committee can attend. Early evening is usually a good time.

2. Before the interview, copies of the candidate's résumé should be given to the school board chairperson and/or the principal.

3. The board members should prepare questions in advance that they would like to ask the candidate(s). It is a good idea to ask the same basic questions of each candidate. The school board may want to divide up the questions so no one dominates the interview.

4. Before or immediately after the conclusion of the interview, the board chair should ask for the report on the candidate's references and background check that has been done by the conference office of education.

The Interview Format

It is recommended that the interview proceed as follows:

- The superintendent or associate superintendent of education introduces the candidate to the school board members.
- The school board members introduce themselves to the candidate.
- The school board chairperson and/or the office of education representative leads out in the interview process and opens the floor for questions.
- The candidate responds to the questions and is allowed to ask ques-

tions of the school board.

- After the question-and-answer session, the candidate should be given further opportunity, if desired, to talk about his or her personal philosophy, interests, and/or concerns before leaving the interview room.

- If he or she has not already done so, the office of education representative provides the reference research findings to the school board.

Appropriate Questions for the Interview

The interview may involve questions relating to:

- philosophy of education
- work experience
- educational attainments
- professional certification
- teaching style
- organizational skills
- innovative practices
- computer literacy
- communication skills
- interpersonal skills
- curriculum
- classroom management, climate
- grading policies
- field trips
- personal talents, hobbies
- professional goals
- spiritual life
- church involvement

Inappropriate Questions or Comments

The interview should not include inappropriate or illegal questions (age, marital status, financial condition, medical history, race, mutual acquaintances, or family background). The board should not make any premature commitments or promises to candidates; their recommendation must first be reviewed by the conference office of education.

Other General Points to Remember

1. Taking into consideration specified criteria for eligibility, preference should be given to teachers within the conference who have expressed interest in a position that becomes available.

2. When requesting the placement of a teacher with three or more years of satisfactory experience, the school board should recognize that the appointment will be for more than one

year. Even though the *employment contract* is for one year, a teacher on professional status must be given ample opportunity to correct concerns of the local school board or superintendent. While the teacher is subject to annual review, he or she is protected by procedural guidelines and policies. If a change in the teacher's employment status is considered necessary, the procedures outlined in the union education code must be carefully followed.

3. The local school board may not take any action affecting the employment status of certificated educational personnel without a conference office of education representative (the official employer) present.

4. The office of education will usually pay or assist in paying the travel-related expenses for the teacher candidate(s) to be interviewed, providing that proper procedures and processes have been followed and the office of education has arranged or approved the trip.

5. The conference K-12 board of education is the final authority in all teacher hiring, placements, discipline, or firing. The local school board may recommend a change in a teacher's employment status, but the superintendent and K-12 board of education must agree in a formal action. As in the hiring process, the local school board can only *recommend* termination or discipline of a conference employee. This recommendation must then be formally accepted by the superintendent and K-12 board of education. That is the main reason a superintendent should be present at a local school board meeting when such recommendations may be voted. Generally speaking, if the superintendent does not approve the local board's recommendation, neither will the conference K-12 board of education.

Teacher Transitions

Saying Farewell

It is important for members of the school board and school families to say a formal “good-bye” to a teacher and his or her family and to provide recognition for the teacher's efforts and accomplishments in the educational ministry of the school. This is a time to deal

with the emotions that members of these groups and the teacher (as well as his or her family) might have. It is as important to celebrate the past as to look with anticipation to the future.

Be sure to provide as much help as possible with moving and making the transition to the new school.

After Hiring a New Teacher

Now that a new teacher has been hired, here are a few suggestions for the school board greeting and assisting him or her:

1. Write a welcoming letter and send a fruit basket (or floral arrangement) to the teacher and his or her family. It is important from the very beginning for the teacher's family to have a feeling of acceptance and warmth from their new school and church families.

2. Designate a contact person to assist the new teacher in finding housing and becoming acquainted with the community. If possible, arrange a church potluck to introduce the teacher to the church members.

3. Ask the teacher about his or her plans for the classroom (painting, desks, tables, etc.).

4. Make sure the school board and/or administrator is available to help the teacher as much as possible!

5. Provide the new teacher with a church directory so he or she can become acquainted with the church leadership and members.

6. Make sure the teacher is not pressured to accept heavy church responsibilities during the first year.

7. Within the first three months, revisit the school board's expectations of the teacher and the teacher's expectations of the school board. This will help to keep the relationship on track and the school moving in the right direction.

Making the Teacher's Move Easier

The physical process of moving is often stressful. Here are some helpful hints to provide assistance for arriving and departing teachers:

1. Provide moving day meals. A box lunch often works better than a hot meal on moving day. This allows the teacher and his or her family to work, take breaks, and eat on their own

schedule. Include lots of fluids.

2. Offer help in loading or unloading the moving van. Often the teacher is expected to find able-bodied individuals in the new community to assist in this process. Let the teacher know where to look for help so he or she won't waste time calling around for assistance.

3. Remember the teacher's children. The teacher's family is often overlooked in both the arrival and departure process. Childcare on moving day can be a lifesaver. Include the new teacher's children in church and community activities, and introduce them to their peers. Welcome and farewell gifts create warm feelings and good memories.

Summary

The reputations of the conference office of education and local school board are built on the constituency's and teachers' perceptions of how well school personnel are treated. Even though the local school board only recommends to the conference office of ed-

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ucation concerning the hiring, transfers, discipline, or termination of conference employees, their careful attention and professional conduct are an essential part of the process. It is hoped that this article will assist local school boards in clarifying their role and responsibilities in this most important process of hiring teachers and educational administrators. ✍

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