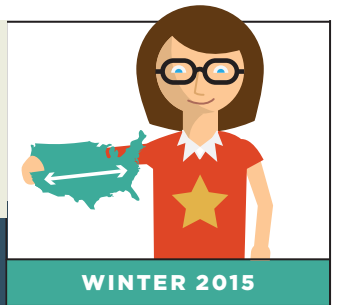


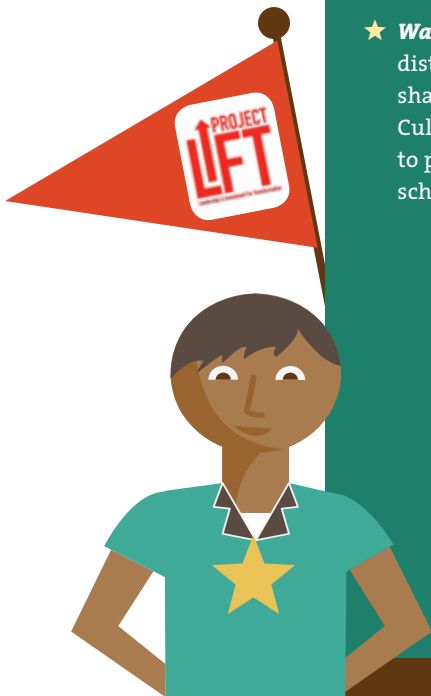
RECRUITING IN AN OPPORTUNITY CULTURE

LESSONS LEARNED

AN OPPORTUNITY CULTURE VIGNETTE



WINTER 2015



★ **Watch:** In this **brief video**, district leaders and principals share how an Opportunity Culture is attracting teachers to previously hard-to-staff schools.

Lessons Learned:

- ★ **Recruit Early:** Start by March, at least
- ★ **Clearly Communicate the Advantages of an Opportunity Culture:**
 - ✓ Helping more students
 - ✓ Career advancement and leadership while staying in the classroom
 - ✓ High levels of team collaboration
 - ✓ Daily on-the-job learning and feedback
 - ✓ Higher pay
- ★ **Ask teachers to share the Opportunity Culture concepts:** As word spreads, great teachers attract more great teachers
- ★ **Repeat, repeat:** You can't overcommunicate. Use social media, webinars, videos, partner organizations to spread the word, and invest plenty of leadership time to recruit throughout the U.S.

When districts get ready to recruit excellent teachers for the career possibilities that Opportunity Culture roles offer, success may come down to two actions: Start early, and communicate constantly, say recruiters in Charlotte-Mecklenburg's Project L.I.F.T. schools.

Project L.I.F.T. is a public-private partnership to improve academics at historically low-performing, high-need schools in western Charlotte, N.C. In 2013, its first year of Opportunity Culture implementation at four schools, L.I.F.T. received a remarkable 708 applications for just 19 Opportunity Culture teaching jobs. In prior years, some L.I.F.T. schools saw many positions go unfilled.

But better yet, said Dan Swartz, L.I.F.T.'s human capital strategies specialist, were the second-year results. In 2014, not only did he get more than 800 applications for 27 new Opportunity Culture positions, but the quality of those applicants also soared.

In 2013, of the 708 applications, only 80 candidates made it past the initial phase of a stringent four-part screening process. But in spring 2014, of the 800-plus applications, 145 passed the first phase—roughly a 50 percent increase in quality candidates, Swartz said.

"The candidates we had to choose from when we were hiring—the caliber of those candidates was so much higher than you would typically see," said Katherine Bonasera, principal of Allenbrook Elementary School.

Recruitment worked so well, L.I.F.T.'s leaders say, because they had a great, complete Opportunity Culture package to offer: career advancement opportunities without leaving teaching, higher pay, and meaningful professional development specific to each teacher's role. (See "What Teachers Get in an Opportunity Culture," page 2.)



Denise Watts, superintendent of the Project L.I.F.T. Learning Community, says strong recruiting efforts created a bonus pipeline of teachers eager for the next Opportunity Culture opening.

“Opportunity Culture provides this hybrid position where teachers can have student impact and move the profession in a new and better way with teachers like them, and the teachers they’re coaching as well. When you put all that together, this creates an ideal position,” said Denise Watts, superintendent of the Project L.I.F.T. Learning Community. “Teachers know what they want, but they never saw it all packaged before. Opportunity Culture gave them the words to describe what they wanted, and no one in the nation was doing that.”

With such great jobs to offer, Watts was not surprised by the interest teachers showed in the new roles, but she was surprised by the volume of applications. “I was very pleased,” she said. “I was certain teachers would flock to this...because the entire teaching profession is hungry for different pathways and opportunities to stay in the field without leaving the classroom.”

Additionally, by the end of the screening process, Swartz had 65 very strong candidates for those 27 new positions—creating a pipeline of teachers to fill non-Opportunity Culture roles as well. About 10 teachers were willing to take those jobs, he said, because they wanted to get a foot in the door to an Opportunity Culture position.

“It’s a hard sell when you’re crushing their dreams of this [Opportunity Culture] role, and selling them something that’s a year down the road and not even a guarantee,” he said. But after a year of implementation, prospective candidates—especially new teachers who knew they may not yet be strong enough for Opportunity Culture roles—could fully grasp how good an Opportunity Culture job could be for their future.

WHAT TEACHERS GET IN AN OPPORTUNITY CULTURE

In an Opportunity Culture, schools extend the reach of excellent teachers and their teams to more students, for more pay, within budget. (In L.I.F.T. schools, multi-classroom leaders can earn supplements of \$23,000—50 percent above average teacher pay in North Carolina. Teachers in other advanced roles earn supplements of up to \$9,800, or 21 percent above the average.) Each school creates a design team of teachers and administrators that selects and adapts job models to fit their school best, such as:

★ **Multi-Classroom Leadership:** An excellent teacher—the MCL, or multi-classroom leader—reaches more students by continuing to teach while leading a team of teachers who use the MCL’s methods and tools. Accountable for the learning results of all the students reached by the teaching team, the MCL earns more—through the school’s regular budget, not temporary grants. By co-teaching, co-planning, and coaching, the MCL provides the high level of on-the-job feedback and collaboration teachers consistently report wanting.

“I see it in educators that their energy, what recharges them regularly, are the students, so to get this opportunity where you’re not just dealing with adults but with students, too, gets your batteries recharged,” Dan Swartz said.

★ **Time-Technology Swaps:** Teachers use digital instruction for limited, age-appropriate periods (as little as an hour daily), freeing a teacher’s time while students learn online to teach more students, plan, and collaborate with peers. Some teachers do time swaps without technology—called expanded impact teachers in Charlotte schools—rotating students between personalized, enriched instruction with the teacher and offline skills practice and projects under a paraprofessional’s supervision.

★ **Specialization:** Elementary teachers can specialize in their best subjects or roles, with paraprofessional support saving time for teamwork and reaching more students.

All the roles offer the sort of development teachers want, Denise Watts said.

“What I’ve heard teachers talk about more than anything was the opportunity to be developed in a different way than ever before,” she said. “You will be coached and taught how to coach other teachers. Teacher-leaders need to be developed because the skill set they need is different from another teacher. A blended-learning teacher needs to be developed differently. That differentiated development resonates.”

“A lot of those teachers came not getting the positions they wanted, but knowing they were coming to a place with a position like that down the road,” Watts said, noting that by 2015–16, seven of the nine Project L.I.F.T. schools will be implementing an Opportunity Culture. “This begins to strengthen the general teaching base as well.”

The numbers are especially remarkable, she noted, given that all L.I.F.T. schools were labeled as “hard to staff”: For the two Opportunity Culture years, L.I.F.T. has started the school years with fewer than five vacancies *total*, a number that might previously have been true *per school*.

Recruiting Right: Start Early, Explain Often

“We started recruiting early in the spring for the last two years—that’s an important piece,” Swartz said. “Everything I read said by May 1st, the best teachers will have already secured positions.”

In 2014, Swartz posted positions and began receiving resumes on March 26. And after a year of Opportunity Culture implementation, he could better explain those positions.

“Districts need to start early, and communicate as much detail as possible about the roles,” he said.

And, he said, communicate those details as often as possible through current Opportunity Culture teachers.

Especially when Opportunity Culture positions are new, districts should have teachers from their school design teams explain what they have learned about an Opportunity Culture and why it excites them.

“Teachers can sell people on the job much better than I can or a principal can,” Watts said. “[Swartz] really leveraged teachers to be a mechanism to entice other teachers.”

And districts should use current teachers as sounding boards, explaining the new roles to them and asking what they don’t understand, to refine their messages to prospective applicants.



Dan Swartz, L.I.F.T.’s human capital strategies specialist, recommends enlisting current Opportunity Culture teachers to spread the word about the benefits of their Opportunity Culture roles.

“You have to really try to communicate what teachers would want to know—a lot of times it’s not what’s in the job description,” Swartz said. “It’s explaining it all—the pay, clearly defining what this means for their career, defining what this opportunity is. It seems dumb to say but it’s really important if they don’t understand in what ways it’s an opportunity—because it’s more than just higher pay.”

Swartz used social media, weekly webinars, videos, contacts with L.I.F.T.’s partner organizations, and contacts within schools of education to get the word out about the openings. Districts should set aside plenty of leadership time for this to ensure the ability to recruit through the U.S. “You can’t overcommunicate what this is about, and what the benefits are,” Swartz said.

“If you advertise it the right way and you market it the right way for your school district, you’re going to get great candidates from all over the country that will be interested in it,” said Janette McIver, principal at Thomasboro Academy. “The people who are in schools and are doing the rock-star jobs are the people who are also looking to do something more, all the time...so they’re seeking out opportunities like this.”

And the final benefit for the district? The combination of the great Opportunity Culture roles plus a rigorous selection process led to a statistic Swartz is happy to share: Although the schools rearranged some roles after the first year, only one Opportunity Culture teacher sought another position elsewhere in the district. Three other teachers did not stay in Opportunity Culture roles, but of the teachers L.I.F.T. wanted to retain in Opportunity Culture roles, 95 percent remain.

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