

**Certify, blink, hire: An examination of the process and tools of teacher selection**

Stacey A. Rutledge  
Douglas N. Harris  
with Cynthia Thompson and W. Kyle Ingle

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**Abstract**

While much is written about the process of employee selection in other occupations, there has been little discussion on the process and tools of teacher selection and why it occurs as it does. To understand this question, we conduct an extensive literature review in which we compare teacher hiring with hiring in other occupations. We also present new findings from interviews with school principals and district administrators in a mid-sized Florida school district. Our results suggest that the screening and selection process in teaching is not much different from occupations with similar levels of complexity. A theory emerges from the review and analysis that explains the choice of process and reliance on certain tools in teacher hiring. The theory focuses especially on the costs of various tools and processes, the types and quality of information that come from them,

and the distinctive features of nature of teaching as an occupation and schools as organizations.

## **Introduction**

Recently there has been increased interest in the relationship between teacher quality and administrators' hiring practices. With evidence that variation in teacher quality affects student achievement (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005; Sanders & Horn, 1998), the ways in which teachers are screened and selected is of increasing importance, potentially resulting in long-term gains in student outcomes. Yet the hiring process has been criticized as “bureaucratic” and “inefficient” (DeArmond & Goldhaber, 2005) as well as “late, rushed and information poor” (Liu and Johnson, 2006). Further, researchers have found that the most academically strong teachers are systematically being overlooked (Baker & Cooper, 2005; Ballou, 1996). If hiring is as problematic as this suggests, then improving the tools and processes of hiring has the potential to improve the quality of teaching and school performance.

While there is much criticism teacher hiring, there has been little discussion of why the process works the way it does. Studies on teacher hiring have sought to understand how hiring is organized, the characteristics that administrators prefer, and how the external environment shapes the process. Together, these studies reveal that administrators state different preferences in teacher characteristics and the locus of control and market conditions vary across districts. Yet studies also find that district and school administrators rely on common screening and selection processes and tools to evaluate candidates. These processes represent common occupational norms of practice, such as summer hiring and a reliance on interviews to determine whether a candidate will make a good teacher. While studies have sought to describe these processes (Balter & Duncombe, 2005; Strauss, Bowes, Marks & Plesko, 2000) and whether they result in

good matches between the applicant and the position (Liu & Johnson, 2006), questions remain about why hiring is organized in the way that it is and whether it results in the hiring of the strongest candidates.

To understand the reasons for the organization of hiring and the related implications on who gets hired, we draw on occupational research on hiring in other occupations as well as in teaching. We then turn to our mixed methods study in which we identify hiring processes, tools and norms of practices used by our case study district. From this research, we develop a theory of teacher hiring that accounts for 1) how the process is organized; and 2) why certain tools and practices are used over others. In this, we seek not to justify that process, as several of the explanations are arguably based on poor organizational practices, but to understand the underlying causes and identify more effective practices.

In our comparison, we consider the following questions related to the screening and selection of teachers. What are the different ways that hiring is understood in the occupational literature? What screening and selection processes and tools are used in other occupations and how does this compare with teaching? What are the distinctive features of teaching and how do screening and selection practices reflect this? Finally, based on the findings from this study, we ask if there are ways to improve teacher hiring to yield quality teachers who will stay in the profession.

### **Screening and selection: A review of the occupational research**

In the occupational research, hiring is comprised of four distinct steps: recruitment, screening, selection, and job offer (Kogan, Wolff, & Russell, 1995). In our

study, we focus on two of these steps, screening and selection.<sup>1</sup> Screening is the process of filtering the general pool of applicants for a position to eliminate those who may not meet the requirements for the job. Selection is the subsequent step in which screened applicants are further evaluated using more in depth tools, such as the interview, before a job offer is made.<sup>2</sup>

Employers use a mixture of screening and selection methods that help them identify workers who are the best for their organizations (Kogan, Wolff & Russell, 1995). As Gatewood and Field (2001) point out “the crucial issue...is not whether an organization can collect information from applicants then decide which are to be given employment offers...the issue is whether the organization can collect information from applicants about individual characteristics that are closely related to job performance and effectively use these data to identify the best applicants for employment offers” (p. 18). Since each occupation differs in its organization and reliance on certain employee personal and professional attributes over others, employers seek efficient methods that elucidate these attributes. So, while screening and selection involve finding the strongest and most appropriate employee, they also involve identifying methods that are economical and cost-and-time effective (Ryan & Tippins, 2004).

Screening and selection processes also depend on the specific characteristics of the occupation. Below, we discuss two research perspectives on the relevant job characteristics: the first centered on the type of “fit” that employers are looking for with the job and/or organization and the second on factors such as job complexity and compensation levels, which, as we will show, are interrelated with job fit.

There are three type of job fit discussed in the literature (Borman, Hedge, Ferstl, Kaufman, Farmer, Bearden, 2003; Kogan, Wolff & Russell, 1995; Werbel & Johnson, 2001): “Person-job fit” (P-J) focuses on how specific strengths of the worker match job requirements. Employers use this strategy to seek applicants with the knowledge, skills and abilities that are needed to perform a specific job. This type of fit is appropriate in cases where an individual’s job responsibilities are clearly defined and where the employee can work independently (Kristof, 1996; Werbel & Johnson, 2001).

At the other extreme, the “person-organization fit” (P-O) implies that employers seek candidates who are compatible with the culture and values of the organization and are concerned about retention rates and general work attitudes (Werbel & Johnson, 2001). Studies on the P-O fit have found that firms with a distinct organizational culture and lengthy career ladder often seek the P-O fit as job characteristics are likely to change but the personality of the organization changes slowly (Sheridan, 1992; Steward & Carlson, 1997).

Kristof (1996) explains that the P-O fit can be understood as either supplementary or complementary (Borman, Ferstl, Kaufman, Farmer, & Bearden, 2003). It is supplementary when a newcomer’s qualities match that of existing employees in an organization, but complementary when the newcomer brings other distinctive characteristics or qualities that support the organization.

Person-group (P-G) P-G fit is a variation on the P-O theme, focusing not on the fit with the organization, but with the smaller group of workers with which the employee will most closely interact. Supplementary and complementary fit can also be applied to the P-G fit (Werbel & Johnson, 2001). With the growth in use of work teams, it is not

surprising that hiring is also being conducted more often by teams of employees, rather than individual managers or disconnected human resource staff (Gatewood & Field, 2001; Kogan, Wolff & Russell, 1995).

These descriptions of P-J, P-G and P-O fit models represent not only different ways of thinking about work, but ways of distinguishing different types of jobs and therefore of different approaches to hiring. The P-J model is more appropriate for jobs that involve relative independence from other workers or that involve a level of specialized technical knowledge and skill so that organizational considerations become secondary. Conversely, the J-O and J-G fit models apply better to jobs that require considerable coordination and/or particular values and attitudes to facilitate that interaction.

Studies also focus on work characteristics such as level of complexity, pay and the nature of knowledge to understand what kinds of practices are used. Wilk and Cappelli (2003), for example, hypothesize that “work characteristics tell us something about the content of the work and, thus, about the complexity of the job” (p. 105). Using data from 3,000 employers, mostly in the manufacturing sector, who had participated in the Educational Quality of Work force survey conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Census, Wilk and Cappelli examine three characteristics of work—skill requirement, level of formal training and pay—and find that the three measures influenced selection practices used by employers. They found that as work demands increase, organizations consistently rely on testing methods in the selection process. When wages increased, firms relied most on information regarding work experience and test performance. The

selection process became more extensive---with more selection tools utilized—when applicants were being selected for high paying positions.

In an increasingly dynamic economy, changes in job tasks are becoming more common and adaptability and learning ability represent forms of job complexity. Kogan, Wolff, & Russell (1995) examine how technological advances in the work environment affect how employers hire. They argue that in some jobs the knowledge terrain is continuously shifting, making it no longer necessary for some firms to write specific job positions. In many firms, employers now seek individuals who have the basic knowledge and skills for the job as well as who demonstrate willingness to adjust and learn on the job. In screening and selecting for such posts then, firms look for those applicants who demonstrate flexibility, versatility and the ability to learn on the job. In turn, they use processes and tools that help them to identify those characteristics.

Below, we look in more detail at specific processes and tools of hiring and especially how their use is related to occupational and organizational characteristics. The remainder of the review also raises issues that we return to subsequently in the discussion of teacher hiring.

### *Screening: Processes and Tools*

Screening serves the general purpose of filtering the initial pool of applicants, eliminating those who do not meet set requirements. Screening is important not only as a sorting process, but it serves the important purpose of reducing costs. Firms that screen as part of the recruitment process often use targeted recruitment methods such as networking and sourcing, which provide a pool of pre-screened applicants. Candidates

who are recruited from within a firm or from targeted sources generally bypass parts of the screening process (Kogan, Wolff & Russell, 1995), presumably because they have already been screened indirectly through their initial positions and word-of-mouth that led them to arise as candidates.

Applications from the general pool are screened using a variety of screening tools. These include telephone screening, testing, resume scanning, and assessment of broad or specific skills or attributes (Kogan, Wolff, & Russell, 1995). Other selection devices such as references, background and security checks are also used to screen applicants for the job (Terpstra, Kethley, Foley & Limpaphayo, 2000). The combination of screening tools used depends on the job as well as the needs and characteristics of the organization.

Kogan, Wolff and Russell (1995) find that employers used telephone screening to verify or gather additional information from applicants or to assess attributes or skills such as applicants' honesty, self motivation, communication skills that paper applications may not be able to provide. Employers also used different types of tests to ascertain whether applicants had the general or specific skills to perform the job, to assess personality, attitude and competency or to predict employee productivity. One third of the respondents in the study indicated that they required skills test as part of the screening process. Where firms required specific characteristics and attitudes in an employee, firms turned to personality or character tests.

Employers may use tests to determine whether applicants possess specific skills to perform a job, but these tests may not provide information about the individual's work ethic and work habits. Therefore, some firms use other forms of testing including those that assess personality, attitude and competency, or those that predict employee

productivity. However, personality and other such tests can be controversial so firms use these cautiously to avoid charges of discrimination.

Kogan, Wolff & Russell (1995) also find that large firms tend to use automated screening devices but they were more likely to contract the service out or to use targeted recruitment because the number of employees and cost did not justify introducing automated screening systems in the business. Some employers also turn to assessment centers that provide services to assess applicants in simulated work environment. This can be assessment of broad skills or more specific skills

### *Selection Process and Tools*

While screening is important in winnowing down a pool of applicants, the success of an organization depends on its effectiveness in selecting the individual who will become the most effective employee (Wilk & Cappelli, 2003). The selection process uses some of the same tools as the initial screening, but often adds one or more of the following: objective production data (e.g. physical measures of work), personnel data (e.g. absenteeism, tardiness, and accident rates), judgmental data (e.g. performance appraisals), job or work sample data, and training proficiency data (e.g. how well employees respond to training, and error rates on the job).

Different types of formal tests—aptitude or ability, achievement, and personality tests—are also used as predictors of an applicant’s future performance on the job. In their review of the research of tools found to be the most effective in employee selection, Ryan and Tippins (2004) report that work samples, cognitive ability tests, structured interviews, job knowledge tests, and integrity tests were among the tools found “have

good validity for predicting work outcomes such as job performance, turnover and absenteeism” (p. 308).

The interview, however, is considered to be the most important and common tool in the selection process. In their study, Kogan, Wolff & Russell (1995) found the interview to be “the primary form of final screening and the major assessment tool in hiring new employees” (p.11-41). Although the structured interview has been found to be the most effective of the two forms of interview (Kogan, Wolff & Russell, 1995), research has shown greater use of the unstructured interview. Candidates can be interviewed in a number of ways. The research on interviews discusses both one-on-one interviews as well as team or group interviews. Often the team interview technique is used in the final interviewing of applicants for a post (Kogan et al, 1995).

Despite the breadth of tools available to employers in the screening and selection process, many employers do not choose to use them. Terpstra and Rozell (1997) sought to understand why firms were not using human resource practices that were found to increase profitability. They found that firms did not make significant use of structured interviews, cognitive tests, or other tools.<sup>3</sup> Respondents from 201 firms cited lack of time, beliefs about the usefulness of the selection tool, legal concerns, resource constraints and lack of familiarity as primary reasons for not using the selection tools. While respondents from manufacturing firms cited beliefs about the usefulness of the selection tools as the reason for not using them, those from the service industry and smaller firms cited lack of resources as their constraint.

Terpstra and Rozell further examined the role of these three work characteristics on the use of three selection tools—work experience, academic achievement and test

performance. Where the job demanded increased skill requirement, firms relied more on testing as a method of selecting employees. Where greater formal training was required, firms focused on academics and test performance; and when wages increased, firms relied most on information regarding work experience and test performance. The selection process became more extensive—with more selection tools utilized—when applicants were being selected for high paying positions.

While both screening and selection processes involve standardized assessments and evaluation tools, researchers have found that employers often rely on instinct and gut feelings when making a hiring decision. Nowicki and Rosse (2002) asked 166 business people who made the hiring decisions in their firms to describe a strong hire. They found that the managers reported “when the hiring managers attributed successful hiring decisions to their own actions, the most common explanations had to do with intuition, instinct, gut feelings, luck, or chance.” (p. 163). However, the managers also conceded that applicants’ personality or other specific characteristics were key factors in successful hiring decisions.

This research on hiring in other occupations suggests that screening and selection is determined by the costs of the associated tools and process, as well as the specific characteristics of the occupation involved. The importance of the norms and values of the organization and team, as well as the complexity of work and need for specialized technical knowledge, are the factors mentioned most often and these same factors also appear to explain hiring in teaching. We therefore now turn to a review of research on teacher hiring and show how the characteristics of the teaching may influence hiring.

## **The Screening and Selection of Teachers<sup>4</sup>**

In this section, we begin by summarizing research on the process of hiring, especially the key actors and their roles. This is followed by a discussion of the tools that these actors use in screening and selection.

### *The Process*

Studies on the process of hiring find that district and school processes differ across sites, although the larger the district and its fiscal capacity, the more involved the hiring process (Balter & Duncombe, 2005; Strauss, Bowes, Marks, & Plesko, 2000).<sup>5</sup> While there is variation in the organization of the hiring process, the principal has been found to be involved approximately 75 percent of the time (Liu, 2002; Strauss, Bowes, Marks & Plesko, 2000) compared with 34 percent and 11 percent for teachers and school board members, respectively (Strauss, Bowes, Marks, & Plesko, 2000).

Liu and Johnson (2006) identify three approaches to hiring: a highly decentralized, highly centralized, and a moderately-centralized/moderately decentralized process. In highly decentralized hiring, applicants apply and are hired directly by a school. In highly centralized hiring, the district oversees the screening, selection and assignment process. In the moderate category, districts screen applicants and schools select them. In New Jersey, Liu (2002) finds an equal representation of the three approaches, but in a later study of four states (California, Florida, Massachusetts, and Michigan) finds that a majority of new teachers were hired through a decentralized, school-based process (Liu & Johnson, 2006). Liu and Johnson also find that one-third of

new teachers in the states of California and Florida are hired after the school year has already started.

Liu and Johnson (2006) argue that the hiring process is “information poor” (p. 324), allowing for only a moderate-to-good fit between new teacher skills, interests, and values with their teaching positions and schools. Relatively few new teachers in their study of teacher candidates reported interviews with teachers, department chairs, students, or parents at the school. Further, they find that the hiring process was characterized by a reliance on paper credentials and interviews, with little use of observational data such as demonstration lessons or videos of instruction.

These studies on the hiring process raise important questions about how effective schools are at making the best match between new teachers and schools. They also suggest that hiring is often done at the last minute. While local conditions dictate the screening and selection process, principals remain the primary gatekeepers. These studies conclude that efforts to improve teacher quality should be directed at improving the screening and selection processes and resources for the school principal.

### *Tools*

In our review of the literature of the teacher selection process, we identified eight studies that provided data that was relevant to our study. Seven of the studies obtained data from surveys of principals and school administrators who had responsibility for teacher hiring in their districts. One study compared the responses of undergraduate students, teacher educators and principals. The surveys sought respondents views about the relative importance of certain characteristics and other attributes desired in an

applicant. Interestingly, none of the studies focused specifically on screening or selection tools. Instead, the researchers included a mix of characteristics and tools in the surveys. For this paper, we therefore draw only on the information related to our discussion of selection tools.

Principals and administrators show preference for the resume as a screening tool more than as a selection tool since resumes provide information about applicants' background, education and experience. While principals rely on recommendations from former administrators to attest to the competence of more experienced teachers, they turned more to cooperating teachers' recommendations and internship reports than on evaluations of university supervisors for information on recent graduates (Abernathy, Forsyth & Mitchell, 2001; Braun et al. 1997; Cain-Caston, 1999; Ralph et al., 1998).

A candidate's successful teaching experience is another tool that principals use in hiring decisions. Principal ranked this tool highest in the studies by Abernathy, Forsyth and Mitchell (2001) and Theel and Tallerico (2004). In three other studies principals ranked experience second (Authors, Broberg, 1987; Braun et al., 1987; and Dunton, 2001).

In addition to the above tools, there are commercially available instruments used to either structure the interview or to provide information about the aptitude of candidates for teaching. Of particular interest here are two instruments licensed by the Gallup Organization—the TeacherInsight and Teacher Perceiver (TPI). TeacherInsight is a web-based protocol that requires applicants to respond to multiple choice items and open-ended questions. The test is scored automatically on a 0 to 100 scale that is designed to predict an applicant's potential for teaching success. The TPI is a scripted interview

protocol that measures “social intelligence” or social skills. It is published in two formats, a standard version which contains 60 questions and an abbreviated version which includes 22 questions. Questions in both formats are open-ended and are designed to get interviewees to express themselves on job-related issues (Young & Delli, 2002). The standard or long format addresses twelve themes, while in the abbreviated version two of the twelve themes are excluded-- listening and focus. The twelve themes are grouped in three sub-scales: *intrapersonal* (mission, investment and focus); *interpersonal* (empathy, rapport drive, listening and objectivity); and *extrapersonal* (individualized perception, input drive, activation, innovation and gestalt).

Theel and Tallerico (2004) conducted a case study of a midsized urban school district to explore the use of portfolios. They found that portfolios were not a major factor in principals’ decision making process because there were no standard forms of assessment and because portfolios “did not provide credible evidence of candidates’ teaching abilities or ‘people skills’” (p. 29).

Interviews were included as an integral component of the employment process rather than one tool of many used by principals to assess the characteristics of a candidate. As a consequence, there are specific discussion in the research on the role of the interview in the hiring process. Braun et al. (1987) and Ralph et al. (1998) found that principals gave highest ranking to honesty of response or quality of performance during an interview. In the only qualitative study, Theel and Tallerico (2004) found “substance of response” and “chemistry during interview” (p. 29) to be the qualities principals value most highly.

Overall, the results suggest that the interview, outside evaluations, and letters of recommendation are more important than the resume and college coursework in the selection process. Not a single study found that any aspect of the resume or coursework was among the most important tools used by principals. Therefore, while there is somewhat more consistency across studies in the specific tools considered, the patterns observed here should still be interpreted with some caution.

The type of selection tools are consistent with the qualities principals seem to prefer. Enthusiasm, strong communication skills, and ability to work with others appear to be the most important teacher characteristics that principals look for (Braun et al., 1987; Broberg, 1987; Cain-Caston, 1989; Dunton, 2001; Ralph et al., 1998). All of these are characteristics that can be identified in the interview. The use of recommendations and evaluations are somewhat less clear because the studies do not indicate what kinds of information principals derive from them. In our analysis, we attempt to better understand how principals view these various tools.

Most notable about the tools used by principals is their focus on those that provide information about teachers' personal qualities. While there appears to be no evidence on how much weight principals give to the results, the use of these instruments is widespread. Delli and Vera (2002) report that more than 1,200 public school districts use the TPI. It may be that the emphasis on personal qualities may be because of the nature of the profession where teachers are required to maintain and manage an emotional relationship with students (Labaree, 2000). It is therefore important that principals select teachers who have certain personal attributes.

In both teaching and other occupations, the interview seems to be an important tool in the selection process with a team approach used in the interview process. In other occupations, the change in the nature of work suggests the need for its importance. However, in teaching, while it is important, it is not the only tool. Districts and school rely on multiple tools to assess the qualities of applicants, reflecting the complexity of the work in which teachers are expected to perform both in the classroom and as members of faculties. We discuss these dual expectations and its affect on teaching in our findings.

### **Data and Methods**

To understand the hiring processes and choice of screening and selection tools that principals use, we designed a case study that allowed us to explore the choices, meaning and context of principals' hiring decisions in one school district (Yin, 2003). We draw our data from interviews with principals and district officials conducted over a two year period. The first interview protocol included an open-ended question about principals' preferred tools, an activity in which principals ranked specified teacher selection tools, and a follow-up question clarifying the principals' rationale for the decision-making activity. We identified our lists of tools for the ranking activity from past hiring studies and from studies of teacher effectiveness, reflecting our focus on comparing the tools that principals prefer with those that researchers find to be associated with effective teaching. In the second interview we asked principals to elaborate on their choice of some tools in the screening and selection process.

This mixed-methods approach allowed us to collect data from complementary sources and to identify and analyze principals' preferred choices in the selection process

and the tools they utilize while also exploring the connotation and context of these choices (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). While not generalizable to all hiring, our findings offer important insight into the complex nature of hiring. Compared with other studies of hiring, ours offers a multi-dimensional perspective on the hiring process. Below, we summarize the relevant characteristics of the district and the principals, though some details are omitted to protect their identities.

### *Sample and Data Collection*

The subjects of the study were 39 principals<sup>6</sup> who are responsible for screening and selection of teachers in a single midsized school district in the state of Florida, as well as three district officials involved in hiring. Of the 35 schools in the sample, 20 were elementary or K-8 schools, eight were middle schools, four were high schools, and three were special population schools.<sup>7</sup> While the racial distribution is almost identical to the national average (sample district: 78 percent White; national: 82 percent White), there are differences regarding gender and education. The percentage female is somewhat larger (sample district: 63 percent; national: 44 percent) and the percentage with at least a master's degree is substantially larger (sample district: 100 percent; national: 54 percent).<sup>8</sup>

Table 1 provides information regarding the principals and their schools. In addition to demographic information, the table describes the grade level, Title I status, and school grades assigned through Florida's *A-Plus* program. These grades—from a high of “A” to a low of “F”—are based primarily on student scores on math, reading, and writing on the state's standardized test, the Florida Comprehensive Assessments Test

(FCAT). In addition to providing information to parents and voters, the grades are used as the basis for a formal structure of punishments and rewards administered by the state government. While we do not explicitly consider other parts of the state’s accountability system, it is noteworthy that Florida is considered to have one of the most aggressive systems in the country (Carnoy & Loeb, 2003; Authors). As we will show, there is some evidence that both the school grades and the larger climate of accountability influence principals’ hiring decisions.

[TABLE 1]

Free/reduced lunch participation in sample schools ranged from as low as five percent to as high as 90 percent. Of the 35 schools represented in the sample, 11 were eligible for Federal Title I funds in the 2004-2005 academic year (eight elementary schools and three middle school).

The district was chosen purposefully because the organization of hiring reflected the approximately 70 percent of districts where the principal is at the center of the hiring process—what Liu and Johnson (2006) call “decentralized or moderately decentralized hiring.”<sup>9</sup> Applicants submitted their materials to an online database overseen by the district. Principals screened applicants to interview from this database once the application was complete.<sup>10</sup> Principals had considerable discretion over the various aspects of the selection process: they chose their own processes and tools; they exercised discretion over which teachers and other stakeholders were included in screening and selection; they determined the number of interviews to conduct; and they made final

decision on whom to select. We will explore the influence of some district policies related to hiring although, while these may affect the hiring process, we find little evidence that these, or any other district practices or policies, influence principals' reported hiring preferences for teachers. The same cannot be said of state and federal policies related to accountability and certification, which play a prominent role in principals' responses. The district hiring process is summarized in Figure 1.

The district includes numerous institutions of higher learning that provide a larger-than-average supply of qualified teacher candidates. This means that principals generally have a substantial number of candidates to choose from and are therefore less likely to have their stated preferences influenced by compromises they would have to make if there were fewer candidates.<sup>11</sup> The district also has a diverse population of students, teachers, and principals making it a good location for comparing principals' choices of screening and selection processes and tools.

We conducted the primary interviews, lasting 1.5-2 hours each, during the summer of 2005. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. As indicated earlier, there are four sections of the interview that are most relevant to the present study: questions about the organization of the hiring process, an open-ended question about selection tools, a ranking activity, and a follow-up question clarifying the responses to the other two items. We also conducted a follow up interview during the summer of 2006.

We piloted the interview protocol with four principals outside the sample and made minor adjustments based on the results. The pilot interviews supported the initial list of tools in that the open-ended responses given by principals closely matched those we listed. We also interviewed district administrators as part of the piloting process to

learn about both the school and district roles in the hiring process.<sup>12</sup> The authors attended the hiring fairs during the summers of 2005 and 2006 (in advance of the respective interviews) and observed the initial interview process and, in some cases, actual hiring decisions. We also spoke to applicants, principals and teachers involved in the hiring process, and district personnel organizing the event.

### *Coding and Data Analysis*

We used the qualitative software program N\*Vivo in our coding process. We developed 208 codes drawing from both the research on hiring and teacher effectiveness as well as our own iterative and inductive process in which themes emerged. We used an iterative memo writing process. From the codes, we identified topics for memo writing and wrote 12 memos focusing on principals' choice of the different tools, including interviews, demonstration lessons, video of instruction, the context and process of hiring. We wrote 16 additional memos on topics such as supply and demand in the district, the role of the hiring fair, the policy context and the philosophy of the school. As a group, we met to discuss the content of the memos and whether further analysis was needed. Often, these memos were written several times until we had achieved theoretical and empirical saturation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

We also presented our preliminary results to the school district superintendent and, subsequently, to the principals themselves at a monthly district meeting of administrators. Five principals and district administrators, commenting on our initial draft of this study and/or our presentation of the initial results, indicated that it was a valid depiction of the district's hiring process and of how principals consider the various

characteristics and tools. No principals or administrators indicated any disagreement. We describe our findings below.

## **Findings**

In this section we turn to our findings on the process and tools used in screening and selection in Hillyer county. We first discuss the screening and selection process in Hillyer county, providing an overview of the processes and tools used. Then we turn to our quantitative analysis of tools, going into more depth about principals' choices.

As we discussed earlier, hiring in Hillyer County can be categorized as moderately decentralized. The district controlled the selection of the screening tools and served as a gatekeeper of applicant's folders, releasing them only when complete. It also organized the annual hiring day and implemented policies in efforts to funnel high quality teachers to Title I schools. Principals, in turn, engaged in both screening and selection of teachers at the hiring fair and at other times of the year, exercising a large degree of discretion on who was hired. Here, we discuss the process and tools used in Hillyer County.

### *Screening and Selection in Hillyer County*

The hiring process for a position in Hillyer County began when the principal requested that the district advertise for an opening. After giving its approval, the district office posted and advertised the position on its website for a minimum of seven days. Prospective applicants applied to the district online through a web-based system that maintained a central database of all applicants. Applicants completed the standardized

electronic application form, which required applicants to list current bibliographic information as well as past work experience. They also were required to complete the standardized TeacherInsight instrument online. Applicants also uploaded their curriculum vita, references and certification information. The district made completed applications including the TeacherInsight score available to principals online. As principals could not gain access to an applicant’s folder unless “electronically signed” and submitted for approval, the first screening of applicants was done at the district level through a “built in” feature of the electronic application system.

As mentioned, the district also organized the district hiring fair, held the week after the end of the school year. According to a district official, the hiring fair accounted for approximately 60 percent of all hiring in the district. In this capacity, the district exerted additional control over the screening and selection of teachers in the district. The year of our study, the district organized the hiring fair into two parts. Internal transfers were given the opportunity to interview with schools for an hour. Then the fair opened to new applicants. Union regulations restricted schools from employing new hires until all internal transfers were placed.

In line with district policy, only applicants with complete applications were invited to the district’s annual hiring fair. Teachers who were already employed by the district and who requested a transfer or were identified for involuntarily transfer, were also invited to the district’s annual hiring fair. However, new applicants and transfers could also choose not to attend the fair and instead to make direct contact with schools. See Figure 1 for a diagram and summary of the hiring process.

At the hiring fair, applicants chose four schools with which to interview. They attended 20-minute interviews with these schools. Once all slots were taken for a particular school, organizers announced that interviews for that school were closed. If any school had open slots and applicants had time, applicants were able to get additional time slots from the organizers. Schools and applicants were alerted through a public announcement system when the twenty minutes ended.

While the hiring fair was open to all schools, the district made an effort to address federal regulations regarding the hiring of highly qualified teachers in Title I schools. To help channel teachers to Title I schools, the district implemented a policy in 2004 giving Title I schools preferential hiring. Under the policy, Title I schools were given a ten-day window starting on the date of the hiring fair to hire teachers. Title I schools were given the option of hiring on the spot at the hiring fair. Non-Title I schools were not allowed to hire during this time period. Further, applicants who were offered a job at a Title I school and turned it down were prohibited from being employed in the district for a year. However, positions identified by the district as a critical shortage area, were open to all schools regardless of Title I status.

At the fair, we found that interviews were conducted by interview teams and we observed four teaming approaches: convenience/availability teaming—in which a school principal utilized whoever was available when the event was scheduled; spectrum teaming—in which a principal purposefully selected representatives from across various categories of faculty and staff (i.e. assistant principal(s), reading representative, guidance counselors, etc...); grade-level teaming—in which the principal purposefully selected representatives from a specific grade level (i.e. 1st grade teacher(s) interviewed 1st grade

position applicants); and lastly, department teaming—in which the principal purposefully selected representatives from a specific academic department (i.e. Social Studies teachers conducted interviews for a 10th grade social studies position.). Some principals formed part of the teams, or they observed the process.

The district also provided schools and teams the proprietary interview protocol Teacher Perceiver developed by Gallup which principals reported using as a starting point for the questions. However, many principals also explained that they used their own protocols that was a modified version of the district protocol.

While some schools used the fair for selection purposes, others used it as to screen applicants who they later invited for follow up interviews at the school site. Schools that screened at the hiring fair were generally those that had a larger number of applicants vying for a position, or those that did initial screening using a team of teachers and required the principal to make a final decision. Others—mainly Title 1 schools, schools with critical shortage areas and schools accepting transfers—hired at the fair. The district had personnel available to facilitate the signing of contracts for those who accepted job offers made at the fair.

Outside of the hiring fair, schools conducted interviews at the school site. The various teaming approaches used in the hiring fair also applied in the follow up interviews (when applicable) after the fair. For example, fifteen of the principals reported putting together teams during the summer to interview candidates. Principals that reported pre-interview screening alone typically reported the use of some sort of teaming approach in the non-hiring fair interviews.

Principals who reported that others screened the applicants, typically interviewed the final 2 to 5 applicants, selected one, and made the hiring recommendation to the district. The use of follow up interviews was largely dependent on the amount of time, number of qualified applicants, and urgency of the hire. For example, principals had second interviews for hard-to-staff positions due to the inherently small number of applicants and high demand across the district(s). As one principal<sup>13</sup> put it:

If I need a calculus teacher, there maybe two [applicants] and five districts after them...So I have to do what I have to do. I have to work a little magic in a twenty minute interview...And you get burned from that occasionally, you know, but that is just the reality of the world we live in. I can't spend two hours interviewing each candidate and spend weeks checking everything in the world out there on them, they'll be gone. They will be picked up by somebody else... (Principal I)

The urgency of the hire depended on the difficulties faced in hiring at the school or for a particular position, although in Hillyer, certain schools faced more challenges in hiring than others.

#### *“End Runs” Around Policies*

As we have noted earlier, there were two administrative hurdles and policy constraints in the hiring process that principals had to navigate: the ten day hiring window for Title 1 schools and the use of the structured interview protocol. However, we found that principals and applicants both found ways to avoid compliance with these district policies. The “end runs” ranged from minor diversions to blatant disregard. For example, twenty-six principals described how they worked with their hiring teams to select questions from district-issued interview protocols they would use in the interviews, and/or giving hiring teams the prerogative for adaptation based on the interview situation. Only two principals (AA, CC) described using the questions provided by the district verbatim. Interestingly, one of these (AA) allowed students to ask questions of

applicants. Another principal (BB) described using a previously issued interview protocol made available by the district office.

In terms of the hiring window, we found that principals and applicants found ways around the policy. While most principals reported adhering to the policy, six principals[A, D, I, O, R, W]. acknowledged “end-runs” around the Title I hiring window.

As Principal R stated:

The one young man that I hired said ‘if you’re really interested in hiring me, when will you call me?’ I said I will call you at 12:01 if that’s what you want me to do. And I called him at 12:05 on Saturday night. He was waiting on the call. I mean, you know, you can’t tell him you’re going to hire him, but, you know, he knew from my -- what I was expressing to him that certainly, we were interested in hiring him. And the other candidates I called, and I had made the same comments that let them know yes, we’re very interested, and I’ll be expecting a phone call on Saturday morning around nine o’clock.

Another principal (P) explained:

We were able to call that night and say it is our intent to offer you a job in a week from now—once the Title I schools have filled what they need. We are not playing games. That’s legal. We just want to let them know that we want you, but if you are offered a job at a Title I school you have got to take it.

We also observed several cases during the hiring fair where schools asked a district administrator for waiver to this policy to hire a particular applicant. Further, an exception was granted to one school at the request of its principal, citing an inordinately large number of openings, its rural location, and long travel distance, which made it difficult to attract applicants.

We also found that applicants knew of the policy and some were not interviewing with Title I schools if they hoped to be hired by a non-Title I school. This created two candidate pools: those willing to work in any school and/or a Title I school and those who wanted to work in a non-Title I school. At the fair, we talked to candidates who had

chosen not to put their names on the list for Title I schools out of the concern that they would be offered a job. Instead these applicants chose to only interview with the more affluent schools in the district. When asked of this policy and whether she thought the applicants were “working the system”, a principal stated, “they didn’t go interview with any of those [Title I] schools, and I sat right there interviewing five teachers every few minutes—quality people for the most part, and Title I schools sat right across the aisle from me interviewing nobody.”

Before turning to tools, we focus on the issue of time in the hiring process. We look at time in two ways, the time of year in which hiring occurs and second, the length of time that a principal reported it took him/her to decide to hire or not to hire a given applicant. While late summer hiring has been criticized in the research (Liu & Johnson, 2006), the length of time of screening and selection has not been examined.

Our findings suggest that timing plays an important role in the hiring process, revealing both the external constraints faced by schools and the internal assumptions made by administrators as they seek the best applicants for their positions. In general, summer is seen as the primary hiring time for schools, although hiring in June often looks different than hiring in August in terms of number of applicants and the time to conduct thorough interviews. In early summer, principals focus on getting the strongest applicant; however, in late summer, hiring is often done quickly to fill positions before school starts. In our study, the district’s annual hiring fair was held the first week of summer break giving administrators the opportunity to staff their schools early.

The hiring process is also constrained by other time considerations—some are dependent upon state policies and other dependent upon district policies. After approval

of a position by the central office, as discussed earlier, the position is posted online via an online application platform for at least seven days. As Principal A put it, “you have to wait for that week of advertisement and then doing the interview, so it’s got to be about a three-week process.”

Time constraints were also a factor at the hiring fair. Each applicant was given a twenty-minute time slot to interview with a school. When asked about the efficacy of twenty minutes to interview applicants, nine principals [A, D, DD, F, G, O, Q, T, Z] expressed satisfaction with the amount of time allotted. For example, Principal Q explained:

Twenty minutes is a long time. And if you’re dialoging with someone, you’re talking and asking specific questions. You can find out quite a bit about an individual. And from my experience—I don’t have, you know, many years in administration—it has proven to be pretty accurate. The people that I have hired during interview day have worked out extremely well here, Extremely well. They all come with different ways to show that they are an effective teacher, and, you know, some have elaborate portfolios to share, so it’s a lot...Twenty minutes may seem short, but it gives you quite a bit of information about a person, because you’re looking at body language and listening to the way they communicate. You’re looking -- you’re listening to how enthusiastic they are...The questions that I ask can elicit some pretty in-depth conversations.

Similarly, central office administrators expressed that the format was more than adequate to identify a quality teacher. One central office administrator argued that twenty minutes was adequate considering that principals have all the information about applicants available via the online application platform.

Four principals [B, G, I, N] expressed concerns over competition for the most qualified applicants, and alludes to other concerns—brevity of time and access to applicants. Principal B of a Title I school provided a vignette of hiring a teacher at the hiring fair:

I hired her that day because I didn't want her to go to another interview and be offered a position...Sometimes I think that, if you wait maybe someone else may come along and could be maybe a little better...but you never know.

Similarly Principal I stated:

I have to work a little magic in a twenty minute interview, and you get burned from that occasionally, but that is just the reality of the world we live in. I can't spend two hours interviewing each candidate and spend weeks checking everything in the world out there on them, they'll be gone.

For Principal N, the twenty minutes was adequate in some ways and not in others.

“Some folks you need to hire right there on the spot because there are four or five other schools that are going to if you don't.” Principal C argued that, “A lot of times from interview day we'll call people back for a second interview because[interviews at] interview day is only 20 minutes, you know, so quick, so brief...most of the time [they are not hired] until I've called their former principal and former colleagues.”

We also asked principals at what point in the hiring process they knew whether the applicant who is offered a post is a good fit for their schools. Five principals [A, DD, H, O, T] expressed that the first five minutes into the interview is adequate to identify whether an applicant is suited for a teaching position. These five made common were statements such as this:

I can tell within the first five minutes whether that person's going to be a good person or not...You can't quantify it...The ones that can teach rise to the top. That's all I can tell you. And you know immediately who they are, and you know who the others are too that can't do it.

Another said, “To be truthful I can tell you within five minutes, from the time they sit down with me.” [Principal T]

For other principals, knowing who was the best for the position in their schools took a while longer. Ten [B, CC, F, G, H, I, L, Q, V, X] principals responded that they

knew after the interview was completed. Another nine principals [AA, C, D, E, J, M, P, R, U] indicated that they knew only after the whole process was completed. For example, Principal J stated that he knew:

Usually toward the end of the process. It is not when they first walk into the door. It takes a while to go through it and you feel like toward the end you start getting the feeling. Then you want to reinforce your feeling with your administrative team members and see how they feel—try to talk about positives and negatives.

Five stated [BB, K, N, W, Y] that they really never knew until they were on the job.

In this section, we have discussed the process of hiring in Hillyer county, with specific focus on how the district organized the hiring process and used time. In these findings, we have also mentioned the use of various tools. Now we turn to a more detailed analysis of the tools used in screening and selection.

### *Quantitative Results on Screening and Selection Tools*

In our quantitative analysis we organize the tools under twelve headings and we asked principals to rank them using the methodology discussed previously. We find that principals use a wide selection of tools, including letters of recommendations, writing samples, responses to scenarios to determine the quality of a candidate. But the most commonly used tool is inarguably the interview.

We report the results regarding hiring tools, beginning with the answers to the open ended question<sup>14</sup> and continuing to the ranking activity<sup>15</sup> and regression results. The list of tools in the ranking activity were: applicant’s personal statement of goals; certification; demonstration lesson; experience; interview; name of university from which they graduated; personal knowledge of candidate; portfolio of lesson plans; students’ past work, past activities; recommendations from cooperating teachers; recommendations

from previous employers; university transcript (grades); and video of instruction. In this section we are primarily interested in whether principals used tools that were found to be most effective in selecting candidates.

*Open-ended prompt.* We start the discussion of the tools results again with the responses to an open-ended prompt “Please describe the tools and indicators that you use to best assess the quality of an applicant for the post” The first five responses to the prompt were listed and then coded according to the pre-specified list of tools. A total of 98 responses (of a possible 145) were identified. This is likely due to the dominance of one factor (the interview) over the other tools (see below). We were able to code 65 of the 98 responses, according to our pre-specified list. Without regard to the order of response, the most common (coded) response, by far, focused on the interview (30 responses). This is followed by experience (13), application (12), and recommendations (10). None of the others were mentioned more than four times in total.

After coding all of the responses, we added three additional categories to the initial list of 12: the TeacherInsight instrument, resume, and education. The latter two were excluded deliberately from the pre-specified list because of their vagueness. The resume includes information about experience, college grades, and many other factors. However, principals often responded with general references to the resume rather than specific parts. A similar statement can be made about education; in that case, our pre-specified list breaks this down into grades, university attended, and certification, rather than the more general term “education.” Considering the other aspects of the responses, it appears that references to the resume are mainly referring to information about past teacher experience and, to a much lower extent, on grades and university attended. Only

three of the principals who mentioned experience also mentioned resume. Thus, if we were to group these categories, then the role of experience would be much higher.

Finally, of 30 principals in the first interview, 21 mentioned the TeacherInsight instrument as being a tool available to them. Of these, 6 stated that they had a cut score that they used in reviewing applicants, although no principals said they would not consider teachers below this score.

*Tools ranking activity.* Table 2 summarizes the results regarding the tools principals use. Two tools commonly found in resumes, university grades and university attended, were rated low.

[TABLE 2]

We used multivariate regression analysis to try to explain the variation in principal responses regarding tools. The most important finding is that principal and school characteristics explain a great deal of the variation in the weight given to the interview. Specifically, principals who are African-American, or who serve schools at higher grade levels and with higher accountability grades, give much greater weight to the interview. Conversely, principals with more formal education give less weight to the interview and more to the candidate's experience and portfolio. These results are available from the authors upon request.

*Interpretation.* The meaning of the tools discussed above is generally straightforward. The exception is teacher experience. Because of the importance of experience in the teacher quality research, we included in the interview a series of

questions focused only on experience to better understand how principals viewed this tool. These questions focused both on experience within teaching and experience in other types of work. We also reconsider the issue of certification.

We identified at least four ways in which principals view previous teaching experience. First, three principals stated that a benefit of hiring younger teachers is that they are untenured [D, DD, I].<sup>16</sup> As one principal put it, “if [tenured teachers] don’t do a good job, you’re kind of stuck with them, and you have to do all the procedures to get rid of an ineffective teacher” [D]. Another principal made a similar point when referring to within-district transfers who, in addition to having tenure, may not fit the principals’ perceived needs for the school.

The two other aspects of experience focused more on teachers’ personality—specifically, their enthusiasm and pliability—and the loss of these over time and with experience. Six principals expressed that enthusiasm was a desirable trait and one they particularly prize in younger, recent graduates and often absent in experienced teachers [AA, BB, D, T, V, Y]. Said one principal, “I’ve had experienced people come in, and they’re not motivated, and they’re not enthusiastic” [AA]. Two principals stated that older teachers were less likely to have the trait of pliability [U, Z]. One of these, in discussing more experienced teachers, said that “change comes very hard for them” [Z]. The same principal when talking about younger teachers said that:

In this day and age wherein we have so many things coming down the pike, I think someone that would be a little bit more pliable would be a new person coming in. They’re a little bit more receptive and open to some of the ideas and they’re into change.

A middle school principal stated that “Sometimes those students coming out of college have more experience than some of these other people. They worked with

children’s programs, and they’ve worked in churches or Sunday school, and they’ve actually had experience with children...It doesn’t really have to be teaching experience” [AA]. Nine principals expressed interest in other forms of experience, especially involving working with children, such as experience with a church’s Sunday school, or baby sitting, summer camp [AA, B, I, L, M, N, O, S, T]. As one principal put it, “if you really want to work with kids, you don’t wait until you’re 22-years old to start working with them” [B].

Three principals expressed interest in applicants and applications/resumes that evinced this and looked especially for experience as a substitute- and student-teacher [D, CC, G]. One stated:

What a great way for an extended interview, because once they get here, I mean, you really know what kind of person they are—what kind of employee they’re going to be and that kind of thing. So I like that—particularly, substitutes...If a teacher doesn’t have a job, substitute teaching is a really great way to get known at schools. [T]

A question posed to our informants was whether they had ever hired a candidate who had never taught but had extensive professional experience in another field. Principals generally expressed an appreciation of work experience outside of education, but also expressed a partiality for degrees in education. This is most clearly demonstrated by the principals’ value of student-teaching experience—an integral part of education major and secondary education minors. Of 30 principals, 21 indicated the utility of student teaching/internship experiences. Student teaching experience was particularly valued if it was actually at their school, as this provides a sneak preview of the intern’s teaching ability.

Principals also expressed interest in applicants that had experience with specific grade levels, similar school settings and with specific programs. This was also highlighted in the discussion of teacher characteristics where some principals mentioned interested in teachers with a background in teaching reading. Sixteen principals explicitly expressed the importance of technology and having teachers that have technological savvy [F,I, D, P, L, X, N, M, R, BB, K, CC, E, C, Z, H]. Illustrating this, a principal stated, “We ask a PE teacher, we ask all of them ‘what experience do you have in technology?’ Those can be determining things in whether we hire them or not.” Four principals expressed technology being less problematic for beginning teachers than more experienced teachers [R, D, BB, K]. For example, a principal stated, “Most of our new teachers have come to us very technologically fit as opposed to us older people [laughter]!” [BB]

Recall that certification was ranked in the middle of the pre-specified list of tools as shown in Table 2. One reason it was apparently not ranked higher is that principals considered certification to be a necessity in the wake of the highly qualified provision of No Child Left Behind legislation. Typical of principal responses to this question is the following: “Because of the federal guidelines, I can’t. I can’t hire out of field....because of the federal No Child Left Behind” [AA]. We hypothesize that most principals view certification as important due to the external policy constraints, but that some ranked it low either because they personally (aside from the policy constraints) do not see it as important or because it is so important that it is not worth mentioning.

While some principals indicated that they used the TeacherInsight score to screen out applicants (N=14), others saw it as “just another tool” at their disposal (N=13), or

they did not use the information at all (n=3). As principal Kappa rationalized “it can help us narrow down some and weed out some people, especially if we have 50 applicants and we have one position. You can’t interview 50 people”.

In the occupational literature, employers use work samples as one of the tools to select applicants (Ryan & Tippins, 2004; Kogan, Wolff & Russell, 1995). Therefore one might conclude that in teaching videos of instruction and demonstration lessons might provide principals with the opportunity to see potential hires in action, thus providing an indication of potential success. Overwhelmingly, principals ranked videos of instruction and demonstration lessons low in use and importance. Principals explained that, on the whole, applicants are not providing videos of instruction as part of their application materials so they cannot view applicants’ teaching ability. Furthermore, the online application platform used by the district does not lend itself to uploading streaming video, nor does it request applicants to provide videos of instruction. Finally, they doubted its validity as a tool saying that applicants could misrepresent their teaching.

Some principals indicated that since hiring is done during the summer children are on vacation so it would be difficult to make arrangements for demonstration lessons. Moreover, they suggested that demonstration lessons would be too time consuming.

Therefore, it was understandable why during the card sorting activity, principals ranked demonstration lessons consistently low. Principals acknowledged that this would be a good way to preview an applicant’s teaching potential but that there were many constraints. For example, Principal I acknowledged that universities practice this activity, but was adamant that this would be a tough tool to use in his environment citing state and district security policies as well as supply and demand concerns:

How are you going to do that? They can't work with kids until they get a Level 2 clearance and you can't—there's no avenue to do that. Like I said, when I need teachers at this school it is in critical shortage areas. I lose the teacher if I string it out that much. I'll give you an example. The science and math teachers that I hired this year from that district hiring day you attended—they had already been called by the time that I got to them that afternoon. That is how competitive it is to get a Calculus and an advanced placement chemistry teacher and physics teacher. So, you've got to move. You just have to do the best you can in the interview and try to determine the best you can. Look at that portfolio and then get on the phone to them.

In summary, principals in our study drew on similar tools when hiring teachers. While the interview was the most important, they also drew on teacher experience and recommendations. They tended to discount videos of instruction and demonstration lessons. As we discuss in the next section, we believe that there are reasons that account for these preferences in tools.

### **Toward a Theory of Teacher Hiring**

In the above review and analysis, we have provided extensive new evidence about the process and tools used in teacher hiring. In this section, we use that evidence to develop a theory to explain the process for hiring teachers as well the reliance on certain tools over others. We start by discussing what past research and our new analysis indicates about what principals are looking for and therefore how they prioritize information. We then turn to the costs of the various tools and processes, which also appear to influence hiring. Finally, we return to the earlier discussion of teaching as an occupation, especially with regard to the job characteristics that have been shown to affect hiring in other occupations. We show that many of the observations made about teaching can be explained by these three strands: the costs of various tools and processes,

the role of schools as organizations, and the complexity of teaching. These three strands help explain why hiring teachers occurs the way it does and therefore leads to a new theory of teacher hiring that partly justifies some of the criticisms of hiring mentioned earlier and points towards possible directions for improvement in this important activity.

### *What Principals Look For*

We mentioned earlier that there is a logical connection between the tools and processes used in hiring and the teacher characteristics that principals look for. This connection also manifests itself in our results. Our previous findings from these same principals suggests that they “mix and match” teacher characteristics to fill important voids in racial and gender diversity, as well as skill, and to ensure that teacher candidates fit the cultural norms and values of the school as an organization. Principals therefore use tools and processes to achieve these goals, focusing on the interview to get a sense of a candidate’s personality and likely fit with other teachers and teams. Further, most principals rely on other existing teachers to help with hiring, at least partly because these teachers are well situated to assess organizational fit.

To assess a mix of skills, it makes sense that principals would also use a range of tools in addition to the interview, especially recommendations from other principals and teachers. While such recommendations tend to be biased toward positive assessments, principals reliance on them suggests that they often glean useful information. They may face little choice, since teaching skill is not easily assessed from an interview setting or from paper credentials.

Videos of instruction might seem like a useful tool, except that they are relatively easy to contrive, allowing for multiple “takes” until the teacher looks especially effective. All teachers are likely to look good in videos of instruction. This is less of a problem with demonstration lesson, but as we show below, this alternative tool also suffers from an important drawback.

### *The Costs of Tools and Processes*

Gathering any information about candidates comes with costs. These may be direct costs, such as paying a private company to use a proprietary tool such as the TeacherInsight. Hiring also requires the time and energy of workers within the organization—to administer the tool and interpret the results, such as the time of the interviewer. This is certainly one of the reasons why principals spend so little time in interviews. When teams of teachers are used, these time costs are multiplied.

When looking at hiring from this perspective, the reasons behind some aspects of teacher hiring become immediately evident. Tools such as demonstration lessons and videos of instruction are quite costly, requiring the observation time of the principal and others involved and the arrangement of hypothetical, but still real-world, work situations. This is particularly difficult in teaching where hiring is done typically in the summer when there are no students in the school. In addition, state laws and local district policies increasingly involve strict safety requirements and background checks for anyone coming in contact with children—including, in this case, the teacher candidates.

Returning to videos of instruction, it is also worth noting the potential costs to the applicants and the possibility that some hiring techniques may harmfully reduce the pool

of candidates. Suppose that principals required candidates to submit videos of instruction, but they many did not have them available. We discuss below how this problem may call for changes in state policy that colleges of education and alternative certification programs to have students prepare such videos as part of their preparation.

In short, this discussion of costs helps to explain why inexpensive tools and that to the degree that expensive ones such as interviews are used, the process is carried out to minimize these costs—hiring in a “blink” instead of prolonged gaze.

### *Hiring and the Occupational Characteristics of Teaching*

The tools and processes used in teacher hiring are also consistent with what we would predict based on the characteristics of teaching and of schools as organizations. As suggested in the occupational research on hiring, teaching has certain characteristics that result in certain processes and tools being favored over others. Here, we review some of the basic characteristics of teaching to identify these characteristics. We follow this section with our proposed theory of teacher screening and selection.

Teaching is an occupation that in which its members need social skills and motivation to work with children and adolescents. Teachers work in organizations and must interact with students, other teachers, administrators, and parents as part of their normal routine. As members of an organization, they must also be successful in interacting with multiple members of the community such as parents (Lortie, 1975). From the P-O, P-G, and P-J fit perspective, teaching requires skills at all three levels, although educational researchers differ in the extent to which teaching emphasizes P-O, P-G and P-J fit.<sup>17</sup> For example, certification requirements suggest that the P-J fit is most

important, as candidates need to show that they have a certain knowledge base related to the age of students. Differences between the age, academic level, and needs of students mean that teaching requires different skills and knowledge in different contexts. But studies at the organizational level show that organizational coherence leads to more effective schools with more content faculties and higher student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996; Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001). Finally, teachers are organized at the group level, in grade teams or subject matter departments. Studies at this unit of analysis, particularly in high schools, have found that this is an important locus of teacher identity and community (Siskin & Little, 1995; Stodolsky & Grossman, 1995).

Teaching has been described as a semi-profession (Etzioni, 1969). Teachers are college educated, yet the occupation does not have consensus on a codified and specialized knowledge base nor does it have the related professional organizations that protect entry and access in formal professions such as law and medicine. This is due in large part to the debate regarding the knowledge base of teachers and what they should know. Does teaching have a codified body of knowledge (Shulman, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 1998) or is it a semi-profession without a clear knowledge base, centered on helping others and requiring members to consistently show empathy and caring (Etzioni, 1969)? The lack of consensus on teachers' knowledge base is also reflected in the debate about what credentials teachers need to teach. Public school teachers usually gain access through traditional teacher training programs but they can also enter through alternative programs that spend less time on subjects such as pedagogy and child psychology.

Private schools often do not require more than a college degree with many teachers skipping these courses entirely.

In terms of job complexity, Rowan (1994) compares teaching to other occupations using data from the Department of Labor and finds that by level of complexity, teaching shares characteristics with both professional and non-professional occupations. In terms of worker functions, however, teaching ranks second highest on seven-point scale in the level of complexity involved when dealing with data and people. It ranks second highest on a scale of five in using reasoning and language and in the middle on the same scale for mathematics. These findings suggest that in terms of skill requirement and level of formal training, teaching is located in the upper quartile of occupations. These findings also reinforce the importance of having candidates that can meet the P-J, P-G and P-O fit.

Increasingly, school and teacher performance is being measured by how well students perform on standardized tests. Whether they are assigned to a grade level or to a specific subject, teachers are responsible for facilitating the learning of individual children grouped in one room, and they are responsible for ensuring that all children make progress (Larabee, 2000)<sup>18</sup> As schools are held to specific standards, administrators and teachers they are increasingly being scrutinized based on how well their students perform on standardized assessments.

Our review of evidence on other occupations also suggested that hiring practices vary by the level of compensation, presumably because organizations have more to lose if they make a poor decision with a higher paid employee. We would therefore expect organizations to invest more in the hiring process for those employees and less when hiring lower paid employees such as teachers. It is well known that teachers earn less

than other occupations that require the same level of formal education. For example, Harris and Adams (forthcoming) show that teachers earn 31 percent less per week than accountants who have quite similar educational backgrounds.<sup>19</sup>

Given these characteristics of teaching, how do we account for the process and tools of hiring? The comparison of teacher hiring and our own findings to the research on hiring more generally finds that hiring teachers is not that different from other occupations that have a high degree of work complexity. When hiring teachers, district administrators and principals draw on the majority of the same tools used by other employers including resumes, college transcripts, recommendations, work experience, certification status, personality assessments (Teacher Perceiver scores) and interviews. If decisions in hiring are mediocre and do not result in the hiring of the strongest candidates (Baker and Cooper, 2005; Ballou, 1996), then it is not due to a dearth of information about a given candidate. It is rather explained by the ways in which information is prioritized, ideas about what makes an effective teacher as well as the costs of a given tool. Here we turn to evidence from prior research and our own study to explore these explanations.

To understand how information about a candidate is prioritized, we turn to the idea of the P-J and P-O/P-G fit. In our study we find that administrators attend to both the P-J and P-O/P-G fit during the screening process but primarily the P-O/ P-G fit during the selection process. In the screening phase, principals are interested in how well the applicant fits the individual job tasks as well as the particular team and school. They report looking at an applicant's professional characteristics through tools such as certification status, resume with work experience and transcripts. They also make sure the

candidate fits the particular position, such as first grade or geometry, for which there is a vacancy and whether the person has the education and experience that matches the job requirements of that specific position. At the same time, principals also screen for the P-O/P-G fit. Principals report using tools that reveal personal characteristics such as from recommendations and the Teacher Insight score. These tools allow principals to screen those applicants for characteristics such as the motivation and enthusiasm to work with children.

It is possible that it is at this screening phase that districts and principals are not setting high enough standards. Instead of looking at specific indicators of teacher quality, such as years of experience, strong grades or college selectivity, principals are content with a minimum level of competency. Put differently, principals identify those applicants who should not be considered due to poor recommendations, poor scores, or lack of experience, keeping those who meet a low bar. Principals have the discretion over which tools and characteristics they believe give them the best information in an applicant.

At the selection stage, we find that principals are primarily concerned with the P-O/P-J fit. Principals, both in the research on hiring and our own study, place importance on the interview as the best way to determine the personality and fit of an applicant. At this stage, principals also draw on other members of the school to help in the process, thus further emphasizing the P-O/P-G fit, although the involvement of teachers may be a reflection of the size of the district.<sup>20</sup>

The centrality of the interview as a hiring tool is reinforced by the characteristics that administrators report looking for. While studies find that principals differ in the characteristics they consider important, with some prioritizing professional

characteristics, some prioritizing personality characteristics and others both (Authors), principals use the interview to build on screening and to ascertain personality characteristics. In this way, the interview serves as an important step in identifying whether a candidate will supplement or complement the school organization.

Now we return to the question of why our case study district allotted so little time to the interview at the district hiring fair. If the interview is considered so central, then why weren't principals given more time to assess the characteristics of the applicant? One explanation may be that the district places more emphasis on screening and does not think that the principals need a lot of time to ascertain the personality characteristics. Another explanation is that both districts and principals believe that they can capture "effective" teachers through good screening and a short interview.<sup>21</sup>

How do ideas about teacher effectiveness affect the process and tools in teacher hiring? Studies on the characteristics preferred find that principals look for a variation of qualities, as discussed earlier, suggesting that hiring in teaching is fundamentally shaped by the lack of consensus on what teachers should know and the definition of an "effective" teacher. With little agreement on what comprises the core knowledge of the occupation, principals have the discretion to draw on their own personal beliefs and school needs when hiring. This could be construed as a positive as it provides for administrators to use their own discretion when trying to make the person-organization and person-job fit. Yet, it also means that often principals focus on personality characteristics over the professional characteristics that are associated in the research with higher quality teachers. If there were greater consensus on the types of knowledge,

skills and background related to effectiveness, one could imagine more targeted interview protocols.

Why is hiring different in small versus large school districts? One reason for this may be the diminished costs associated with economies of scale. For example, in a small organization it might not make sense for someone to research potential screening tools (e.g., personality and intelligence tests) and learn how to interpret the results. But, in large organizations, that one person can affect the hiring of a large number of employees and such an investment of time might be more worthwhile. Consistent with this theory, there is evidence that larger organizations tend to use a larger number of tools in the screening process. This is different from last minute hiring, however, in which principals accelerate the process thus compromising the match between the school and the applicant (Liu & Johnson, 2006).

### **Implications for the Hiring Process**

The process and tools used to hire teachers are similar to other occupations with similar levels of complexity. When hiring teachers, administrators use a variety of tools. Improving the hiring process is not a question of including more tools, it is a question of whether the process and tools that are currently being used are able to identify the most effective applicants.

Yet there remains a debate about what constitutes an effective teacher. Individual district and school administrators differ in their definitions of effectiveness and thus look for different characteristics in an applicant. Further, they seek to meet local concerns and mix and match with the teachers already present in the school (Authors). Principals do

not receive clear messages from the research community either. Beyond the importance of experience, educational researchers offer mixed data on characteristics of effective teachers, with many characteristics still untested, such as enthusiasm and creativity. As long as there is an ambiguity regarding the characteristics that comprise an effective teacher, it will be difficult to advocate for specific tools and processes over others. While this may have the advantage of giving principals the discretion to make decisions based on the particular needs of their school, there is clearly room for principals to make better decisions with improved processes and better prioritizing of tools.

One area of focus would be greater scrutiny on the process and tools themselves. How do the different ways that the process is organized affect hires? How do principals prioritize the different tools and why? While studies have observed the hiring process and asked principals about their preferences, no studies have followed actual hiring decisions and the specific tools and processes that principals used in their decision making. This would be a fruitful line of research as it would provide a clearer view on the specific ways that principals use these tools and how it affects the candidates that they prefer. For example, does a principal who places more weight in Gallups' TeacherInsight instrument choose different applicants than one who is more interested in applicants experience in teaching? How about a principal who uses high cost tools such as demonstration lessons? Does this result in a stronger hire?

Greater focus on the screening process may have implications on the role of the district in the hiring process. Studies on hiring have found that districts vary in their level of involvement (Liu & Johnson, 2006). Yet districts can serve an important screening role, identifying those candidates who do not meet a set minimum threshold. This would

put the district in the role of managing those characteristics identified with a stronger P-J fit, and giving principals and teachers more control over the P-O/P-G. Of course the downside to this model is that principals would lose local discretion.

More scrutiny on the interview phase of teacher hiring would also be worthwhile. Do principals make better hires when they are faithful to scripted interview protocols, as suggested in the occupational research? Why do principals resist using these protocols? What are the implications of including teachers and other faculty in the interview process? Are hiring decisions “better” in terms of test scores if teachers are involved? If teachers are involved in the process, do they prefer professional or personality characteristics? Does teacher involvement serve to make a better match with faculty members or does it lead to a prioritizing of the P-O/P-G fit over the P-J fit?

Given the importance of teacher hiring, we believe this is a fruitful line of inquiry. Our findings demonstrate that hiring teachers is already a complex process. Yet, clearly there is room to improve the process of hiring and the ways that districts and school administrators prioritize the information they receive about candidates and make the decision of who to hire.

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*Table 1: Sample School and Principal Characteristics*

School Code	Level	School Characteristics (2004-2005)			Principal Characteristics			
		% White	% Minority*	% Free/Reduced Lunch*	Title I Status	Race	Gender	Years as Principal
A	elementary	25	75	65	Y	W	M	13
B	elementary	30	70	65	Y	W	F	5
C	elementary	80	20	10	N	W	M	12
D	elementary	75	25	30	N	W	F	7.5
E	elementary	60	40	40	N	W	F	4
F	elementary	75	25	20	N	W	F	5
G	elementary	20	80	85	Y	W	F	3
H	elementary	60	40	60	Y	W	M	6
N	elementary	70	30	20	N	W	M	1
O	elementary	15	85	70	Y	W	F	1
P	elementary	75	25	9	N	W	F	10
Q	elementary	5	95	90	Y	B	F	3
R	elementary	50	50	40	N	W	M	3
Y	elementary	5	95	90	Y	B	F	2
Z	elementary	50	50	40	N	B	F	2.5
AA	elementary	5	95	80	Y	B	F	8
V	K-8	90	10	50	N	W	M	12
J	middle	80	20	7	N	W	M	6
K	middle	30	70	55	N	B	F	5
W	middle	25	75	50	Y	W	M	5
BB	middle	45	55	40	N	W	F	9
CC	middle	60	40	30	N	W	F	.5
DD	middle	70	30	20	N	W	F	10
I	high	85	15	4	N	W	M	3
S	high	70	30	10	N	W	F	5
T	high	60	40	15	N	W	F	9
U	high	20	80	40	N	B	M	4
L	special	50	50	55	N	W	F	9
M	special	15	85	65	N	W	M	4
X	special	35	65	75	N	W	F	7
		Mean=48	Mean=52	Mean=44	Yes=11 No=21	White=24 Black=8	Male=12 Female=20	Mean=6

\* Rounded to the nearest 5 to help maintain confidentiality.

\*\* Enrollments provided by District website and reflect the October, 2004 count and are rounded to the nearest 50.

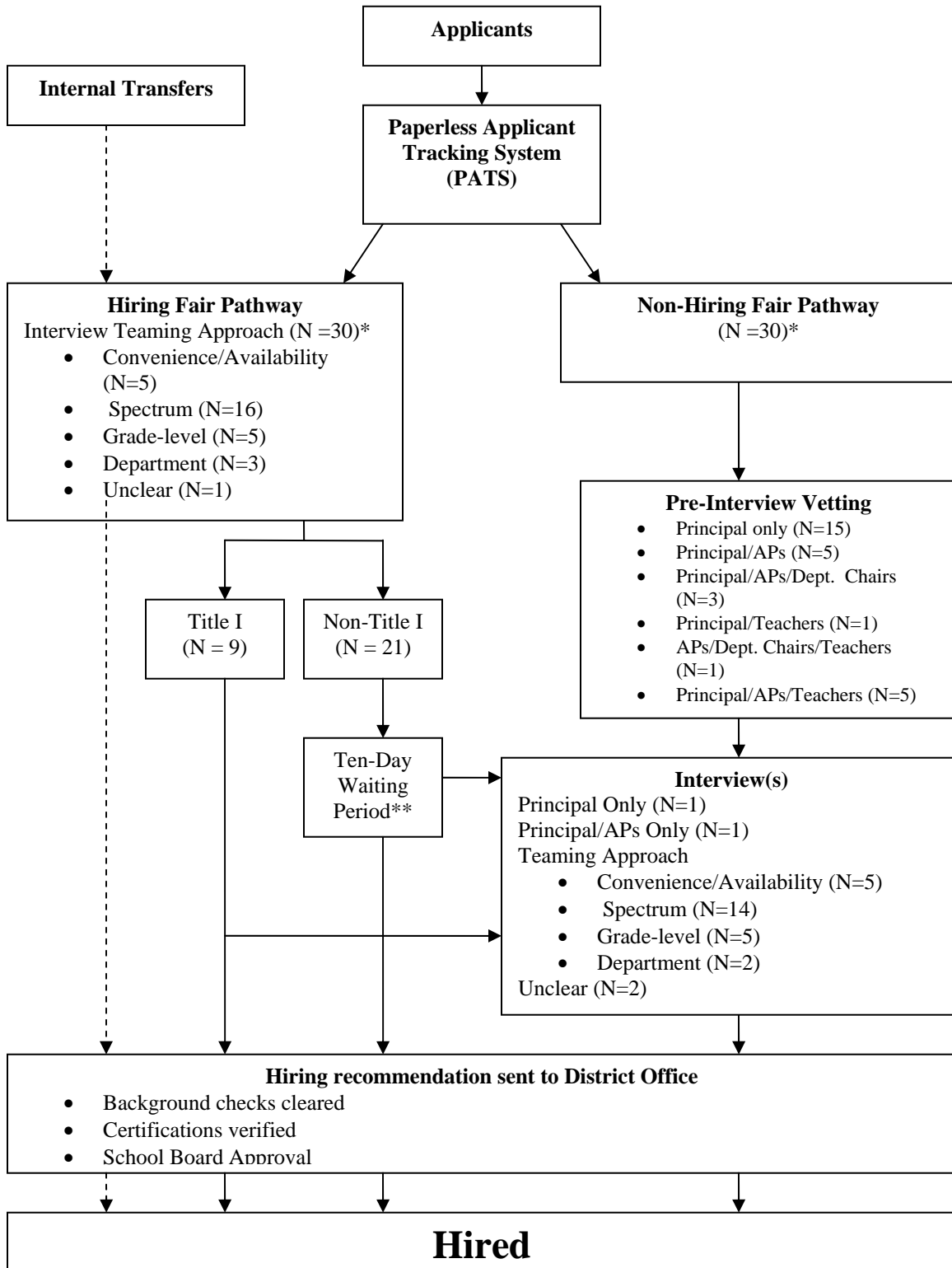
\*\*\* Free and Reduced Lunch data for 2005-2006.

*Table 2: Relative Ranking of Tools by School Type  
(Means and Standard Errors)*

Tools	Mean n = 27	School Level			Title I Status		School Grade from State Accountability System		
		Elem. n=17	Middle n=6	High n=4	No n=18	Yes n=9	A n=14	B n=9	C- F n=4
Interview	1.23 (.13)	1.29 (.19)	1.00 (.00)	1.25 (.25)	1.06 (.06)	1.56 (.34)	1.00 (.00)	1.56 (.34)	1.25 (.25)
Experience	1.77 (.15)	1.82 (.20)	1.6 (.40)	1.75 (.25)	1.82 (.18)	1.67 (.29)	1.69 (.21)	1.78 (.28)	2.00 (.41)
Employers Recommend	1.88 (.18)	1.82 (.13)	2.00 (.32)	2.25 (.25)	2.06 (.13)	1.67 (.17)	1.92 (.26)	2.11 (.33)	1.75 (.29)
Cooperative Tch Recommend	1.92 (.11)	2.00 (.23)	1.60 (.40)	1.75 (.48)	1.82 (.23)	2.00 (.29)	1.85 (.15)	2.00 (.20)	1.50 (.25)
Certification Status	2.19 (.25)	2.35 (.32)	2.20 (.58)	1.50 (.50)	2.35 (.30)	1.89 (.45)	2.69 (.35)	1.78 (.40)	1.50 (.50)
Personal Knowledge of Candidate	2.62 (.19)	2.47 (.26)	3.20 (.37)	2.50 (.29)	2.59 (.24)	2.67 (.33)	2.77 (.28)	2.11 (.26)	3.25 (.48)
Candidate's Portfolio	2.65 (.20)	2.76 (.25)	2.20 (.37)	2.75 (.63)	2.59 (.26)	2.78 (.32)	2.77 (.32)	2.44 (.34)	2.75 (.25)
Demonstration Lesson	2.69 (.21)	2.82 (.23)	2.60 (.40)	2.75 (.63)	2.82 (.25)	2.67 (.29)	2.54 (.29)	3.00 (.33)	2.50 (.65)
Candidates goals	2.77 (.19)	2.523 (.26)	2.80 (.49)	3.25 (.48)	2.65 (.24)	2.78 (.40)	2.69 (.26)	2.78 (.36)	3.00 (.41)
University transcript grades	3.23 (.18)	3.18 (.20)	3.80 (.20)	3.75 (.25)	3.53 (.15)	3.11 (.31)	3.00 (.25)	3.44 (.34)	3.50 (.29)
Video of Instruction	3.38 (.15)	3.18 (.21)	3.60 (.24)	3.00 (.71)	3.18 (.25)	3.33 (.24)	3.31 (.17)	3.67 (.17)	3.00 (.71)
Candidate's University	3.73 (.13)	3.76 (.16)	3.80 (.20)	3.50 (.50)	3.71 (.17)	3.78 (.22)	3.92 (.08)	3.33 (.33)	4.00 (.00)

Notes: the table reports simple mean rankings. Unadjusted standard errors in parentheses. See text for discussion of Friedman tests of significance.

Figure 1: Hiring Process in Hillyer County



Notes: \* N sizes are of sample only (see Table 1). \*\* Ten day waiting period is not applicable to Non-Title I schools if position is one determined to be a high-need area (ie., math, science, special education).

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> We choose to focus on screening and selection because they are the two steps of the process that are primarily under the control of school and district administrators. Recruitment of teachers involves district, state and federal actors. The job offer is usually a formality overseen by the district.

<sup>2</sup> This could be an offer of a new position to a current employee or a first appointment for a new employee (Gatewood and Field, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Other tools not included in the text are Biographic Application Blanks (BIBs) and Weighted Application Blanks (WABs). Both represent more structured ways of considering information generally available to potential employers, such as that found in resumes.

<sup>4</sup> In the context of this paper, we discuss teacher selection in relation to applicants' first employment at a particular school and not to their movement to other teaching positions within the same school. Selection may be from a pool of applicants who are seeking their first job within the profession, or first job at a particular school. Gatewood and Field's (2001) definition of selection includes offers of employment to persons already employed within an organization. However, since there is little job differentiation within teaching as an occupation, opportunities for teachers to move to different jobs within the school organization are limited (Schlechty & Vance, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> The 39 principals were from 35 schools. Some principals who were interviewed in the first year retired or left in the second year. The principals who replaced them were included in the second interview. Two informant from this sample of 39 were officially assistant principals who were involved in the teacher evaluation process. One was given full authority to put forth hiring recommendations as an onsite school administrator.

<sup>7</sup> A number of the schools in our sample are also designated magnet schools and programs. In our analysis, the K8 school was grouped with elementary schools.

<sup>8</sup> The national data on principals comes from the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) as reported in the Digest of Education Statistics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Also, part of the reason that this sample of principals has higher levels of educational attainment is that Florida law makes it difficult to become a principal without a master's degree.

<sup>9</sup> In their study of hiring in four states, Liu and Johnson find that 45.9 percent of teachers are hired directly by the school principal, another 23.2 percent are hired directly by the district and rest are hired through a hybrid process in which the district oversees the organization of materials and principals oversee the selection of teachers. While our sample district collected applicants' materials through a website, principals oversaw the screening and selection of teachers.

<sup>10</sup> All applicants were required to complete a common form including experience and education, Gallup's Teacher Insight assessment and Florida's teacher certification assessment. They were also expected to provide their university transcripts.

<sup>11</sup> While there is an ample supply of teachers in the sample district, this does not mean that individual schools are unconstrained. There are many opportunities for within-district transfers that affect the supply of teachers in individual schools. As one principal of a Title I school noted, "we see even our very, very most effective [teachers] pick up and go to one of those [high-SES] schools . . . and then they're there for a long time." Conversely, a principal of a high-SES school noted that "I have none that transfer out of here to another area school. I am fortunate . . . it just happens to do with being a big, new beautiful school."

<sup>12</sup> All of the principals in the study reported including teachers in the hiring process as members of the hiring team and as interviewers. Principals also all reported that while they considered the recommendations of teachers in the hiring decision, they were responsible for the final decision.

<sup>13</sup> It is also of note that this principal is from a school with very little turnover, high SES, and a large number of requests to transfer into the school.

<sup>14</sup> The specific open-ended questions was, "Please describe the tools and indicators that you use to best assess the quality of [position description, school level contingent]."

<sup>15</sup> The specific wording was, "I'm now going to give you note cards with 12 indicators that are typically available in written applications and ask you to rank them as you did earlier." This question is somewhat shorter than that for the teacher characteristics exercise because the principals had already carried out this exercise for characteristics and were therefore familiar with what the exercise entailed.

<sup>16</sup> In Florida, teachers receive a “professional service contract”—the state’s equivalent of tenure—after their third year. As in nearly all public schools, once teachers reach this stage, it is much more difficult for principals to dismiss those they view as poor performers. The local school board must provide a professional service contract to instructional staff that hold a professional certificate; have completed three years of probationary service in the district in a period not in excess of five years; and have received the recommendation of the superintendent for such contract and reappointment by the school board based on successful performance of duties and demonstrated professional competence (Beckham & Raiford, 2003, p. 121).

<sup>17</sup> For a discussion on different models of the organization of teaching, see Darling-Hammond, Wise & Pease, 1983.

<sup>18</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The difference is greater when considering annual earnings because teachers have most of the summers off and go unpaid.

<sup>20</sup> In their study, Liu and Johnson, however, find that teachers are involved in the hiring process only 34% of the time.

<sup>21</sup> We found no other study that looked at the length of the screening and selection process.