

Hiring and Retaining Strategies for Muslim Schools

Results of Presentation Outline

Presenters: Omar Ezzeldine & Matthew “Musa” Moes

Note: This outlines the joint presentation for both of us while each one of us will submit our own separate research papers on the topic for the handbook. These will serve as references to compliment the workshop.

Format: Socratic/Interactive. We will pose a series of questions to the attendees in order to form a discussion and provoke varying viewpoints from the participants. We will jointly moderate the ideas from the floor and guide the discussion with comments and references to our own research. We hope this format will keep the workshop interactive, engaging, and informative.

I. Introduction

- A. The presenters, their credentials and research on the topic;
- B. Explanation on the format of the session;
- C. Overview of the topic, our assumptions, and presentation of the questions;

II. Discussion Questions

A. Recruiting and Hiring

1. Where do you recruit your teachers?
 - Job fairs,
 - newspapers,
 - word of mouth (friends, colleagues, leaders in the community, masjid).
2. What technical protocols are followed for checking references, background, credentials, etc.
 - Call the people they list, imam at their masjid, ask the applicant to list the names.
 - Sign a statement of disclosure,
 - fingerprints to Police as well as Department of Justice. “Volunteer Select” does background checks done on people.
 - Have the students write personal statements on the spot.
 - Check/Verify credentials – call the universities/colleges. Beware of fake resumes.
3. Are your interview questions legal?
 - Get a statement of disclosure allowing you to contact previous employment.
 - Follow state, public school protocol.
4. Do you use hiring incentives to attract new staff?
 - Sell the environment, ask them to sub once or twice to get a feel.
 - Class sizes,
 - demonstrate participative management structure.
 - Benefits (tuition, on-site day care, health care, professional development).

- Sell the school’s mission and vision, educational approach.
 - Demonstrate the school’s reputation (accreditation, graduates) and discipline policy.
5. Should you hire an uncertified/unqualified teacher?
 - You may attract the uncertified and use professional development as a caveat for employment.
 - Probation (don’t invest in a credentialing program until they’ve indicated their commitment).
 - Professional development should be a requirement on any applicants, even those that are certified.
 - Be willing and able to invest time and money into developing the new, uncertified/unqualified teacher.
 6. Are you willing to hire a non-Muslim teacher?
 - Prioritize a standard of professionalism.
 - Non-Muslims must be hired and well-inducted to be aware of the school’s cultural goals.
 - It is critical that the teacher for a Muslim student be a role-model, even in “secular” subjects (this does not preclude non-Muslims from being good role models).
 - You do want to show good Muslim-non-Muslim relations, but that should not compromise the overall climate you are trying to create. Even non-Muslims can be a part of a Muslim community.
 7. What is the human resource potential your external network? (Ex. Intern program with local colleges/universities, etc.)
 - Does not necessarily have to be “active” recruitment of college students.
 - Create job fairs that present teaching as a career choice.
 - Scholarships for college students willing to give time to their local Muslim school.
 - Intern Muslim or non-Muslim credential candidates in your school as part of their credentialing requirements.
 8. What is the role and extent of your volunteers’ responsibilities?
 9. What are staffing goals, short and long-term?

B. General Retention Issues

1. What are your goals for retention/turnover?
 - Some turnover (10%), brings in a fresh group.
2. Why do you think your teachers leave?
 - Teachers find out after a few years that their ideas about teaching were not realistic. This ties into recruitment and how you present teaching as a profession.

- Pressure from parents – “I am paying for my kids to get an ‘A’, not a ‘B.’”
 - Pressure on the administration is trickled down onto the teachers.
3. Why do you think they stay?
 - Love of teaching,
 - feeling of value,
 - non-high stakes environment.
 - Feeling like they matter.
 4. What about you (administration) makes your teachers want to stay?
 - Leadership must plan for the “energy” that comes from the parents and channel it appropriately.
 - Focus totally on the needs of the student.
 - Value the opinions of the teachers.
 - Ask for input on important things such as discipline.
 - Be on the side of the teacher, consult with a teacher before you take action regarding a parent complaint.

Stay focused on the vision of the school. Inconsistent policies. For Principals, the same applies from the perspective of Board Management.

5. What about your staff makes your teacher want to stay?

C. Orientation and Induction to the School Culture

1. What do you do for orientation and/or induction?
 - Benchmarks,
 - standards,
 - curriculum guides,
 - student aptitude – set individual goals.
 - Policies.
 - Have a workshop on goal-setting – how to set goals for yourself, etc.
2. How would you orient a non-Muslim employee?
 - Similar to the next question.
 - It’s on-going, requires a lot of time.
 - Be careful to draw the lines between informing and proselytizing.
3. How do you match a potential applicant to your school cultural?
 - Servant leadership, teams (what teams have you been on?).
 - Consider Alumni as an applicant pool – they already know the culture.
 - A “Hall of Honor” for graduates and alumni that are now successful in their professions.
 - Invite them back to the school for presentations.

4. Have you defined the culture of your school?
 - Practices, mentality – how you feel about yourself, your school, politics.
 - Age (seniority/experience) can create a barrier, but not necessarily. For example, a college-oriented culture – everything points in that direction.
 - Schools focused on the arts – are decorated as such.
5. How prominent are the school’s mission, goals, and philosophy?
 - It is important to ensure that everyone revisits and clearly understands/adopts these goals/ideals.
6. What impact does the administrator/leader have on the school culture?
 - Consistent method of handling student discipline – set an example for how all kinds of conflict in the school is managed.
 - Demonstrate how conflict between staff and even the board should be handled.
 - Reinforcing/reward what you perceive the culture to be – awards assemblies, etc. “Super Muslim of the Month.” (Based on being helpful to others).
 - Activities and competitions based on these themes.
 - Value of the month – if it’s just announced at the beginning of the month vs. an environment that surrounds these values, etc.
 - Potential is huge and administrators need to “plug in.”
7. To what extent is the handbook relied upon and implemented?
8. Are the Standard Operating Procedures clearly defined?
9. Is the discipline policy effective?
10. How do you create a stable working environment for your staff and a stable learning environment for your students?
 - Keep a handle on “toxic” cultures –where people get together and talk about negative things.
 - Identify the roots of these negative feelings and while encouraging professionalism, seek the source of the negativities.
11. What do you do for teambuilding? To what extent is leadership and responsibility for school success shared?
12. What do you do to create a positive working environment?
13. How would you define and “Islamic Environment?”
14. What do you do to create a spiritual benefit in the school?
 - This can affect the culture as well.
 - It is infused in the curriculum and attitudes of the teachers as they teach.

D. Human Resource Development

1. What do you think belongs in a formal mentorship program?
 - Create a stratified teaching schedule (inductee, specialist, teacher leader, steward)
2. What formal interest do you take in the professional development of your staff?

- There must be a driver behind the professional development of your staff – even it is reading a certain amount of Qur’an daily.
3. How does the school encourage and facilitate their staff’s achievement of personalized professional goals?
 - Incentives.
 4. What good are your in-services and/or teacher workdays?
 - Staff must model the “life-long learning” attitude you want in your students. It can even be a book club that they are a part of.

E. Compensation

1. How do you compensate your teachers?
 - Must establish a long-term financial plan that includes salary increases as your teaching staff matures professionally and in experience.
2. What is offered in your benefits plan?
3. What are your goals for making compensation competitive?
4. How do you show appreciation for your teachers otherwise?

F. Questions from the floor not included here?

1. How do you fire teachers? What is the process? Why would you fire a teacher?
2. What is your process for retaining a teacher for another year? Programs for having teachers develop and revisit their own goals.
 - Some programs have each teacher determine from the beginning of the year what goals that teacher will have for himself/herself and every evaluation is focused toward that pre-determined goal.
3. How do you prevent issues before they come up?
 - Administrators must stay in touch with the culture and “vibe” of their school community (including parents and students). With experience, you get good at predicting (just before a holiday, just after a holiday, right after grading periods, etc.).
 - It’s good to have a teacher represent the opinions/feelings of the staff (especially if the administrator is not easily open to comments/feedback). It helps give the administrator a heads up on things they would not normally go unnoticed.
4. How should teachers vent issues?
 - Anonymous comments in the suggestion box (if the administration is not open), that are absent the personal “fire.”
 - Subtle, anonymous hints like a book on shared leadership, etc.
 - Rather than be anonymous (for open minded administrators), take the “sting” out of the comments.
 - Regular venting sessions that the principal may or may not attend to hear and listen to issues. It can bring about a healthy environment of trust and eventual good-will.