

# How to Market Your School and Cultivate Candidates

A strong school marketing campaign will help attract and cultivate high-quality, diverse candidates. Cultivation should start from the moment you meet a candidate until they start teaching. Regardless of when you make an offer, stay in touch with new hires throughout the spring and summer so they are excited, informed, and ready to start the school year on day one.

A cultivation plan is a plan for meaningful and targeted contact with all candidates and new teachers. Cultivation is a chance to set expectations early, build a candidate's investment in your school, and connect them to the school community. Candidates who feel invested in a school are more likely to accept offers.

**Goal: Create effective marketing materials and concrete messages to communicate about your school.**

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Position your school to cultivate high quality, diverse teachers in a competitive market.

Match your needs and candidates' skills and interests to increase teacher satisfaction and retention.

Share your school's unique programs, strengths, and community.

## A strong marketing strategy will:

### 1. Engage candidates and build excitement.

- Make sure candidates consider positions at your school despite competition from other school districts or challenges they may face. Candidates should understand the unique benefits teaching at your school offers.
- Encourage all eligible candidates to apply. Be sure to review your key message to ensure they are inclusive.
- Candidates should know that you are actively hiring (or will be) and are looking for talent.

### 2. Start to set expectations with candidates.

- Share your vision of effective teaching and other school expectations, as well as how school leaders provide support to ensure teachers reach those expectations.
- Helps build on future onboarding after a candidate accepts. They will arrive feeling informed and prepared for the first few weeks of school.

### 3. Build candidates' investment in school culture and philosophy.

- Encourage excitement and energy around your school culture.
- Show candidates your commitment to them from the time of initial interest, through the hiring process, and when the school year starts.
- Introduce candidates to your school community including students, families, local organizations, and other stakeholders.

### 4. Connect candidates with a strong ambassador.

- Candidates will feel supported and build connections with those already in your school community.
- Ambassadors can share honest and inspiring experiences of teaching in your school.

### 5. Build on strategies you're already using to cultivate teachers before the start of school.

- What strategies have you used to cultivate teachers?
- Which strategies have been most effective/least effective?

**Who should you cultivate?**

- Interested candidates, particularly high-potential teachers
- Future candidates like student teachers, strong substitutes, or classroom aides enrolled or interested in teacher certification programs
- New hires
- Strong past applicants who ultimately didn't receive offers or exited the selection process
- Transfers from elsewhere in the district

**When should you cultivate them?**

- Cultivation begins when you first connect with a potential candidate, whether that's January or July.
- Cultivation should continue throughout the spring and summer, with a touch point every other week.
- Cultivation ends when the teacher starts at your school.

**Reflect on the following aspects of your marketing strategy.**

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>What information about my school, leadership, community, and vision will be relevant for interested candidates?</p> |  |
| <p>Who can help me with this process?</p>  |  |
| <p>What information will best invest candidates in my school?</p>  |  |
| <p>What expectations should I set early?</p>   |  |
| <p>How can I ensure my strategy is inclusive and welcoming to all eligible candidates?</p>                             |  |

## Step 1: Create a school pitch

Developing a school pitch will prepare you to communicate about your school in an inspiring way to any audience. A well-prepared pitch will enable you to “sell” your school to a candidate, especially in situations where time is limited. You may meet promising candidates anywhere, unexpectedly, and a school pitch will help spark their interest in your school.

At hiring events, candidates meet dozens of school leaders. A good pitch will ensure that you stand out. Candidates are much more likely to remember you and your school if your pitch is concise, compelling, and addresses strengths and challenges of your school.

### A strong school pitch will:

- Inspire candidates
- Share your leadership style
- Provide specific details about your school and school community
- Demonstrate inclusivity
- Share student progress
- Share opportunities for teachers

### A school pitch is not:

- A list of personal accomplishments
- Your family history
- Generic, cliché statements
- A detailed description of your educational philosophy
- Your resume/CV

**Construct a 30-second school pitch to briefly summarize your school at hiring events and networking sessions. Then, expand your school pitch to 2-5 minutes to use at a school-based interview.**

What is the school name?  
What is a strength? What are your student achievement goals for this year? What makes your school community special?

What is your school’s unique mission, your leadership style, a recent accomplishment?

What should the candidate do next? (Contact you? Schedule an interview? Visit the school?)

**Delivery is crucial. With only a minute or two, a candidate’s interest is based just as much on the speaker as it is on the information.**

Your current staff members can be valuable ambassadors for your school. To get started, invite all staff to serve as talent ambassadors, share specific responsibilities and the approximate time commitment, and then have interested staff complete a quick application to demonstrate their interest and commitment. The final ambassador group should represent the diversity of the student body.

Consider adding students to help recruit candidates, the AP or lead teacher who will most closely manage the new hire(s), and a parent who can talk about community involvement.

**Who can help your efforts to inform and attract candidates to your school?**

### **How to prepare your staff to help:**

- Explain the importance of hiring effective teachers, and the impact it will have on your achievement goals
- Share the school pitch you developed in step 1 with staff
- Build buy-in by encouraging your teacher leaders to help develop marketing messages and materials
- Ask your staff to practice the school pitch with you to ensure they are communicating the right messages
- Norm your staff on the candidate qualities you're looking for and provide anti-bias training

### **Activities your staff can do:**

- Represent your school at hiring fairs or other local recruitment events
- Bring brochures with them to any teacher networking events
- Share recruitment messages on social media sites
- Conduct cultivation phone calls, and webinars, send cultivation emails (after the school leader has made outreach)
- Host informal candidate coffee dates or office hours (may happen virtually)

## **Step 2: Create a cultivation plan**

An effective cultivation plan uses a combination of strategies to attract and build relationships with candidates. Review the ideas below, then fill out the cultivation plan with the strategies you plan to use.

### **Cultivation strategy: Host an open house and introduce potential candidates to your school**

#### **Why an open house is an effective cultivation strategy:**

- Makes your school stand out
- Gives candidates an informed view of your facilities and staff
- Gives candidates more time to talk with members of your staff in a social setting
- Gives you a chance to organize student events or demonstrations
- Saves time by allowing you to evaluate multiple candidates at once

**How to plan an open house:**

- Identify a staff member to give a 30-minute tour
- Discuss which teachers, students, and facilities you want to highlight
- Try not to conduct the tour yourself so that the candidate feels more open to talk throughout the tour
- Have them observe your best teachers or ones that with whom they have something in common
- Provide candidates with a schedule
- Remind the tour leader of the candidate schedule for that day
- Ensure teachers know that the group will visit their classrooms
- Have the candidate take the tour prior to the interview so that you can ask about their experience
- Check-in with the tour leader to see what their opinion of each candidate was

**What to cover:**

- Time to visit classrooms and talk to teachers, as early as possible
- Time to hear from you about your mission and vision
- Important staff members who will be there to support them
- Details about the school day, start and end times, expected non-teaching contributions
- List of professional development opportunities, such as summer workshops and the yearly schedule
- Information about systems for providing instructional feedback
- Support available for parent and community engagement
- Your teacher evaluation process
- The school's student achievement goals
- Other school-wide goals

**Cultivation Strategy: Build relationships via email****Why building relationships via e-mail is an effective cultivation strategy:**

- Emails are quick and easy and can be delegated if you have additional support
- Emails create a dialogue for questions and concerns

**Tips to get started:**

- Gather all updated contact information when a candidate expresses interest
  - Have a clear goal or message for each email
  - Emails should be concise and require a response to maintain and create an open line of communication
  - In addition to bi-weekly emails over the spring and summer, you should send an email to candidates who accept an offer two months prior to the first day of school to solicit any questions about the first day
  - Use a template email and customize for each key message
- “Hello, and welcome to SCHOOL NAME’s staff! To show you more about what it’s like to teach here, I’d like to invite you to attend a school open house on DATE at TIME. Also, please write a 3 sentence introduction of yourself that I may share with your colleagues prior to the open house so they can greet you. I’d appreciate if it you could return this to me by DATE.”

**Identify three active response email questions/activities to send to your interested candidates:**

1.

## **Cultivation Strategy: Make regular phone calls to new hires**

### **Why regular phone calls are an effective cultivation strategy:**

- Phone calls personalize the hiring process
- Candidates are more likely to feel valued and committed to your school
- Calls can be delegated to other members of your staff

### **Tips to get started:**

- As the principal, you should make the first call to interested candidates, but subsequent calls can come from other staff
- Schedule them in advance or be sure to ask the candidate if now is a good time to talk.
- Have a clear goal or message for each call
- Telephone calls are meant to be short, inspiring, and informative
- Calls should be no more than 10-15 minutes
- Make 2-3 phone calls to each interested, high-potential candidate over the spring and more frequently over the summer if you still have vacancies
- When you delegate calls to other staff, give the caller a synopsis of the candidates background and the strengths you saw so they can personalize the call.
- Use a template script and customize for each key message
  - “Hi, my name is NAME and I am calling from SCHOOL. I currently teach GRADE/SUBJECT. I’d like to see if I can answer any questions and talk to your more about my experiences teaching here.”

**List three things you would like to share about your school during the phone call.**

1.

2.

3.

## **Cultivation Strategy: Build personal connections among your staff by connecting new hires with ambassadors and organizing in-person events**

### **Why staff ambassadors and in-person events are a useful cultivation strategy:**

- Ambassadors can offer candid advice throughout the spring and summer and become a familiar face for new hires during the first few days of the year if they accept an offer
- Social gatherings are a great way to let interested candidates, new hires and returning staff members build camaraderie in an informal setting
- Hosting these events can also be used to reward existing staff for their hard work

### **Tips to get started:**

- Ambassadors should be introduced early in the selection process so they can serve as a resource to the candidates throughout the spring
- Invite candidates and new hires to end-of-year school events so they have an opportunity to connect with students, parents, and other staff
- Consider hosting an optional in-person event such as a picnic, happy hour, or coffee chat. This gives candidates the chance to socialize with their future colleagues

## **Cultivation Strategy: Create discussion forums for connection between teachers**

### **Why discussion forums are an effective cultivation strategy:**

- If you are hiring many new teachers, this can help candidates connect to current and future staff interested in talking about housing and relocation logistics
- Teachers can begin to create connections to the school community
- Positive leaders in your school community can monitor and contribute to the discussion
- If one teacher has a question, others could benefit from the answer as well

### **Tips to get started:**

- If the discussion is unmonitored, information might not be correct
- Be sure to set norms for group questions and individual questions
- Make sure the current voices representing your school are diverse, positive, and encouraging
- Email or Google groups are safer than open groups on social media (e.g., Facebook)

## Draft your cultivation plan

| Add the strategies you'll use to cultivate strong candidates. |                 |  |        |
|---|-----------------|--|--------|
| Activity/Strategy   | Completion Date | Details  | Leader |
| <i>Ex: Phone Call</i>   | <i>May 15</i>   | <i>Welcome phone call, outline that other staff members will be calling/emailing over the spring. Connect high-potential hires to a positive ambassador.</i> |        |
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