

Teachers key in nurturing success in children

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 15 April 2010 16:46 -

Dist. 20 administrators tell Stakeholders about district's personnel philosophy.

District 20 will never be any better than the people it employs.

That was the message conveyed to Stakeholders by school superintendent Mike Teahon, high school principal Randy Evans and activities director Seth Ryker during the last meeting of the school year.

Stakeholders are school patrons invited to meetings about various educational topics and asked to share that information with other community members.

During a presentation on "Personnel Philosophy and Strategies," Teahon said the district values the development of staff so "your children can be successful."

Part of having an excellent school system, he said, is the evaluation of educational programs which are examined yearly by administrators, counselors and school board members.

Any new programs have to be approved by school board members who also review and change district policies—some of which deal with personnel and the hiring of new staff.

When there's a vacancy or a new position added, administrators usually advertise it in the Omaha World Herald and on the Nebraska Department of Education Web site.

Applications are reviewed and references checked in addition to a criminal background examination by the Nebraska State Patrol.

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During the interview process, Evans said he wants to know if prospective employees are people persons, team oriented and experts in their fields.

Teahon noted that the team concept is important since teachers join in different groups to collaborate about teaching content, assessments and other things.

Ryker said he likes to get a feel of how a person interacts with students and whether or not a teacher candidate is willing to pitch in and help.

“We do a lot of things here that require a lot of help,” Ryker said.

One of the most unique interviews Evans has done involved band teacher Tom Belanger, who was then teaching in Minnesota. School officials used “Skype” which is software that allows people to communicate over the Internet.

Because the conversation was positive, Teahon flew to Minnesota where he interviewed Belanger a second time and watched him teach.

Ryker noted that applications for certain content areas, such as math, science, agriculture, industrial technology, music, English, Spanish, art, media and special education, are often limited.

“And we are always looking for people who can assist in extra-duty areas which we believe are an extension of the classroom,” he said.

Once on board, teachers are evaluated by their building administrator. Newer educators undergo more and longer evaluations.

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During evaluations, Evans said he likes to ask students what they're learning that day, noting that about 95% say they know the teaching topic.

"Teachers for the most part want us to come in," he said. "The key is keeping students engaged."

Time on task is important, Teahon said, especially this time of year with many students missing class because of spring activities.

If teachers need to improve in an area, Evans said an improvement plan is designed and hopefully followed.

"If I think there's room to improve, I want to give them a chance," he said.

Part of helping teachers become more successful has to do with staff development.

The district offers on-going training for all staff, mentoring for new staff and a Teacher Academy for new or non-tenured teachers.

"We want to give them the tools to be successful," Evans said.

Early dismissal of students at least once a month help teachers get together to plan curriculum and assessment. Teachers also analyze programs, look at school improvement, plan teaching units as teams and review and develop safe school policies.

Because the state sets standards that defines objectives and benchmarks for every subject area, Ryker said teachers must decide how and when standards will be accomplished.

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Consistency key

They must also insure that teachers of the grade or subject are on the same page in teaching curriculum. Collaboration is especially important here, he said, especially at the elementary level where classroom consistency is a goal.

“They may each use different methodology but the content is the same,” Ryker explained.

Finally, Ryker said educators need time to assess how students are performing and make changes where necessary.

Evans ended the meeting with a presentation about the district’s new Teacher Academy—a staff development program that incorporates strategies and interventions to develop strong teacher quality.

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