

PEER-REVIEWED

PRINCIPALS' CRITERIA FOR HIRING TEACHING APPLICANTS IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine criteria principals prioritize when hiring physical education teachers. From an initial list of 619 elementary and secondary principals in a county in a southwestern state, 202 completed a 5-point Likert scale survey that included items from a previously validated survey (Wiley, 2016). The highest rated desired criteria were: the ability to create a fun and stimulating environment for students; demonstrate enthusiasm for teaching; strong classroom management skills, and the ability to provide a positive role model. Criteria that were rated the lowest included gender of candidate, residence that is located close to the school, possession of an MA or other advanced education degree, and cumulative college GPA. No significant differences were found when responses were compared by gender of principal for the top 16 criteria, suggesting these criteria are both objective and pervasive. The results also indicate the most highly ranked hiring criteria for physical education are very similar to other subject areas.



School principals are central in the hiring of new teachers. They are considered to be experts in teacher evaluation and bear primary responsibility in orienting new teachers to their building and providing helpful in-service education. Because there are normally multiple candidates competing for open teaching positions, principals are expected to utilize specific, uniform criteria when evaluating their qualifications. Since effective teaching is a staple of an effective school learning environment, hiring decisions may be the most important duty of principals. Consequently, it is imperative principals are able to accurately identify the best candidates based on interviews and application materials (Kimbrel, 2019).

I n order to help teacher candidates who are searching for a job, The National Education Association (Hart, 2016) has provided specific steps they can follow, such as organizing the portfolio, starting each day with a job hunt schedule, substitute teaching, adding a second area of certification, applying in locations that need new teachers, and preparing for a successful interview. The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (2007) has identified universal characteristics all teachers should possess including, classroom management skills, pedagogical knowledge, enthusiasm, and creating a fun and stimulating learning environment.

A number of studies have utilized surveys of principals to answer the generic question: Which criteria are most important to consider when hiring teachers in all subject areas? Wiley (2016) found the highest ranked characteristics for teacher candidates were enthusiasm for teaching, ability to provide a positive role model, ability to raise test scores and good classroom management skills. Other highly rated characteristics were: the ability to relate well with parents and colleagues, ability to increase student achievement of class objectives, and creating a stimulating classroom environment that engages students. Characteristics that were evaluated as low in priority included having a MA or other advanced degree in education, having traditional versus an alternative certification, distance of primary

residence from the school and gender. Stier and Schneider (2007) found that principals prefer candidates with prior successful teaching experience, but place much less importance whether candidates have an advanced degree because it does not guarantee they are a better teacher. Interestingly, almost half of the principals found that it is highly desirable to find candidates who can also coach. Cranston (2012) found that letters of reference are very important to principals in the hiring decision. Ziebarth-Bovill, Kritzer, and Bovil (2012) reported that the highest principal rated hiring criteria were enthusiasm for teaching, staff collaboration, professional responsibility, willingness to accept additional duties, classroom management skills, positive personality traits, motivational skills, maturity, self-reflection and self-management. Kono (2010) identified four domains principals consider when hiring new teachers: 1) personal traits and skills: sense of responsibility, honesty, punctuality, trustworthiness, and emotional stability; 2) professional traits and skills: communication skills and commitment to education; 3) school wide traits and skills: enthusiasm, professionalism, positive attitude, good judgment, and strong problem solving skills; and classroom traits and skills: 4) classroom management skills, planning and preparation, purposeful lessons, and respect for students. Balter and Duncombe (2006) reported that school administrators in New York public schools rated as very important, references and recommendations, teaching philosophy, pedagogical/subject knowledge, certification in subject to be taught and classroom management. In contrast, GPA, teaching portfolio, distance of the school to where the candidate lived, and potential involvement in extracurricular activities were rated as low priority.

While there are generic skills all teachers should possess, some teaching skills are specific to teaching physical education such as classroom management skills, educational background in kinesiology, and knowledge of the state standards for physical education (Graham et al., 2016). Specific skills needed to be a successful physical education teacher may vary by school, based on the principal, the facilities, the existing physical education staff, and the priorities of the physical education program. Dillon, Rocco, McCaughtry, and Hum-



mel (2010) found that physical educators are evaluated on interpersonal skills more so than on teaching capabilities, extracurricular experiences, or technology skills. In addition, they found school hiring committees normally lack physical education teachers' membership and are often comprised of just one person rather than a group of individuals.

Since school principals are primary decision makers in the teacher hiring process, it appears important to determine specific criteria they deem to be the most critical when hiring physical education teachers. By soliciting the perceptions of principals, prospective physical education teaching candidates will gain insight into the hiring process and, potentially, better prepare specifically focusing on skills and attributes that have been identified. In addition, school personnel on selection committees will be better able to develop or refine a set of uniform criteria that can be consistently applied during the selection process.

Methods

In order to develop a set of criteria, a previously validated survey, "Urban School Principals' Preferred Teacher Characteristics and How They Influence Practices" (Wiley 2016) was selected. This 16-item validated survey instrument was previously used for multiple school subjects. After a review by a panel of Physical

Education Teacher Education (PETE) faculty, including a former high school principal, one of the items was modified from "ability to raise student test scores" to "articulates specific strategies to increase student fitness scores." Nine additional items were added because they have been deemed by past researchers to be important to the physical education teacher selection process (Dillon et al., 2010): 1) knowledge of the State Standards for Physical Education, 2) recommended by others who have seen the candidate teach, 3) has a degree in Kinesiology or PE, 4) appears to be fit/athletic, 5) has past athletic playing experience, 6) is able to coach one or more sports, 7) is on-time for the interview, 8) is professionally dressed for the interview, and 9) has a high college cumulative GPA. A 5-point Likert scale was utilized to allow participants to rate each of the 24 items separately. The scale was: 1 = no priority, 2 = low priority, 3 = moderate priority, 4 = high priority, 5 = essential priority. As a result, the final survey was a combination of two previously validated instruments. The survey was tested for reliability using a test/retest format with a group of 25 physical education teachers and yielded a reliability coefficient of above .85 for each item. An eventual rank order of characteristics was determined when the means for each item were calculated.

An email list of 619 principals who were employed in a county public, elementary, middle or high school in the State of California was

obtained. An e-letter describing the study was sent, soliciting their participation in the study. Eventually, 202 of the principals agreed to participate and completed the survey using a Google form link that was provided. Principals received a follow up reminder to complete the survey two weeks after the initial email.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the means for each item, along with the percentage of “High Priority” and “Essential Priority” selected for each question. This allowed for a prioritized list of characteristics ranked from highest to lowest. For the demographic section, the participants indicated their gender, years of teaching experience, subject taught, years of administrative experience, approximate student enrollment at the school, school level they work, participant’s ethnicity, student’s population ethnicity, and degree earned.

A Qualtrics link to the survey was sent to each of the respondents. Several follow-up reminder emails were sent. The data was later downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet. Data analysis included descriptive statistics and T-tests comparing responses by gender.

Results

All 202 participants were current principals of schools in one county, ranging from elementary to high school. Of those who reported their school level (N=196), 74 worked at an elementary school (37.8%), 61 at a middle school (31.1%), 46 at a high school (23.5%), 8 at a K-8 school (4.1%), and 7 at a 6-12 school (3.6%). Principals averaged 15.4 (S.D.=8.7) of teaching experience, prior to being an administrator and had an average of 11.2 years of administrative experience (SD=6.1). Of those who indicated their ethnicity (N=190), 83 were Caucasian (43.7%), 74 were Latino/Hispanic (38.9%), 19 were African American (10.0%), 8 were Asian (4.2%), and 6 were mixed (3.2%). Of the 192 respondents who indicated their gender, 119 (62.0%) were females and 73 (38.0%) were males.

In Table 1 the ratings of the characteristics by the principals using a Likert scale are displayed with scores arranged from highest (5.0) to lowest average score (1.0). Classroom management skills (4.73), demonstrate enthusiasm for teaching (4.63), ability to create a fun and stimulating environment for students (4.53), and ability to provide a positive role model (4.47) were the highest rated characteristics. In order to compute percentages of strong agreement, the Likert scale responses, “4- High Priority” and “5- Essential Priority” were combined. This resulted in four characteristics that were rated at the ‘4’ or ‘5’ level by over 90% of the respondents: 1) the ability to create a fun and stimulating environment for students, 2) demonstrate enthusiasm for teaching, 3) classroom management skills, and 4) ability to provide a positive role model.

The lowest rated characteristics in terms of both average Likert scores and percentages of “High Priority” or “Essential Priority” were: 1) gender of candidate (1.63 and 3.4%), 2) candidate lives reasonably close to the school (1.89 and 4.4%), 3) college grades (cumulative GPA) (2.10 and 7.4%), and 4) earned an MA or other advanced education degree (2.15 and 8.4%).

A one-tail t-test was used to compare the Likert scale means by gender for all 24 items. No significant differences for any of the top 16 of the 24 items, however, the means for males were significantly greater ($P < 0.05$) than females for three items: 1) Candidate lives close to the school (2.11 vs. 1.73), Gender of the applicant (1.89 vs. 1.47), and Applicant can coach a sport (3.15 vs. 2.70).

Discussion

The results of this study are similar to Kono (2010), Maynes and Hatt (2013), and Wiley (2016) who also found that principals rated a teacher candidate’s enthusiasm for teaching, classroom management skills, and the ability to provide a positive role model as highly desired traits. The consistency of these findings suggests the criteria principals utilize for selecting physical education teachers and teachers of other subject areas are quite simi-

Table 1. Principals' 5-Point Likert Scale Ratings of Criteria for Prospective Physical Education Teachers

Teacher Characteristics	Likert-Scale		% who rated item as High (4) or Essential (5)	
	Mean	S.D.	N	%
Classroom management skills	4.73	0.49	198	97.5
Enthusiasm for teaching	4.63	0.54	196	96.6
Able to create a fun and stimulating classroom environment	4.53	0.57	194	95.6
Provide a positive role model	4.47	0.60	191	94.1
Is on time for interview	4.25	0.83	168	82.1
Relates well with colleagues	4.18	0.71	169	83.3
Philosophy of learning is a good fit with school mission statement	4.16	0.80	162	79.8
Articulates specific strategies to increase student achievement	4.14	0.77	154	75.9
Knowledge of the state Standards for Physical education	4.05	0.86	156	76.8
Professionally dressed for interview	4.02	0.96	149	73.4
Articulates specific strategies to increase student fitness scores	3.98	0.85	154	75.9
Relates well with parents	3.95	0.85	144	70.9
Recommended by others who have seen the candidate teach	3.83	0.88	136	67.0
Has a degree in Kinesiology or PE	3.11	1.24	83	40.9
Has documented prior successful teaching experience	3.04	0.96	60	29.6
Has completed a high-quality undergraduate or graduate program	3.00	1.06	64	31.5
*Is able to coach one or more sports	2.89	1.21	67	33.0
Completed a traditional rather than alternative teacher cert. program	2.75	1.20	48	23.6
Appears to be fit/athletic	2.63	1.16	48	23.6
Has past athletic playing experience	2.39	1.09	39	19.2
Has earned an MA or other advanced education degree	2.15	0.93	17	8.4
High college cumulative GPA	2.10	0.93	15	7.4
* Lives reasonably close to school	1.89	0.89	9	4.4
* Gender of participant	1.63	0.98	7	3.4

*Indicates significantly higher means for males than females, $P < 0.05$

lar. The results are also consistent with other studies that found low priority was given to such factors as college GPA, the possession of an advanced degree such as an M.A. and how close the candidate lives to the school (Balter & Duncombe, 2006; Cranston, 2012).

The findings indicate principals want physical education teachers who can keep students engaged in a positive manner and maintain control of their classroom. Keller et al., (2014) stated when there's a positive enthusiasm towards teaching and students, student interest increases as well, as opposed to teachers who do not show enthusiastic behavior or enjoyment. Consequently, it appears as though principals believe if a teacher is enthusiastic about their subject area, they will be more likely to generate student interest and engagement in their classrooms.

It is encouraging no statistical differences were found by gender for any of top 16 items. This result suggests that both male and female principals, in general, share a desired set of characteristics for teaching candidates. This finding also suggests objectivity, rather than subjectivity, among principals in regards to the primary criteria used to select physical education teachers.

It is encouraging that over 75% of the principals rated the candidates' knowledge of the state standards for physical education and ability to articulate specific strategies to increase student fitness scores as a high or essential priority in the hiring decision. This finding suggests most principals understand the central purposes of physical education curricula and want to hire individuals who can help students develop competencies in all three domains of learning and live more physical active lifestyles. In contrast, low percentages of principals rated having a degree in Kinesiology or PE, appearing to be fit/athletic, or having past athletic playing experience as high or essential hiring criteria. A possible explanation for this finding is that the

principals felt that even if a candidate possess these attributes/experiences, there is no assurance they will be effective teachers.

The study was limited to only principals who were administrators for schools in a large county area school district. Over 600 emails were sent to principals and 202 completed on-line surveys; a 33% return rate. The return rate may not have been representative of the entire county and consequently, limits the generalizability of the findings to other groups.

Future research could include assistant principals, since they often sit on interview panels for hiring potential teaching candidates and many will eventually become principals. A qualitative study with open-ended question could be implemented so principals could more fully

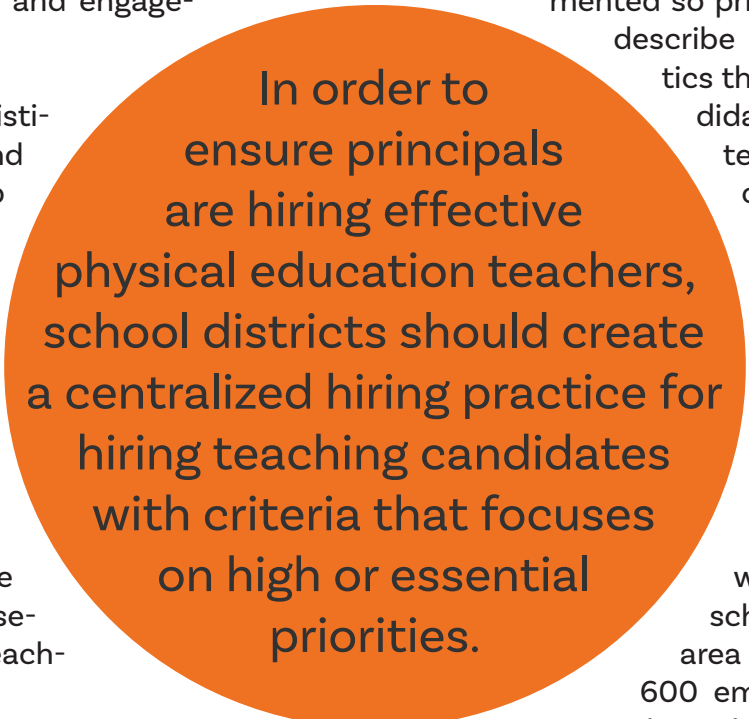
describe important characteristics they seek in teaching candidates. It would also be interesting to determine the composition of interview committees candidate possesses these attributes/experiences, there is no assurance they will be effective teachers.

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surveys; a 33% return rate. The return rate may not have been representative of the entire county and consequently, limits the generalizability of the findings to other groups. Principals could also be asked about their knowledge and/or experiences in physical education, including the national and state content standards to see if that impacts their hiring decisions.

Recommendations for Professional Practice

In order to ensure principals are hiring effective physical education teachers, school districts should create a centralized hiring practice for hiring teaching candidates with criteria that focuses on high or essential priorities. School districts



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should also evaluate the quality of past hiring decisions to determine whether those teachers were later effective in the classroom. If some of those hires turned out to be less than satisfactory, then school districts should reexamine the hiring criteria as well as the composition of the interview committees. It also appears to be important to list the specific criteria in physical education job announcements and emphasize the importance of documented competency for each of the criteria.

Physical education candidates can use these findings to better prepare for interviews for potential openings and/or while completing their teaching credential program. During their student-teaching, teaching candidates can practice implementing and developing the characteristics principals have identified as essential.

University PETE faculty can reinforce the importance of implementing classroom management skills and emphasize the importance of creating a stimulating and engaging learning environment while physical education teacher candidates are under their supervision. University supervisors should also observe teaching candidates during their pre-service field experiences to determine whether they are being enthusiastic about their teaching, providing a positive role model, and utilizing a classroom

management system that fully engages students in activities. In addition, participating in mock interviews will allow teaching candidates to receive feedback from PETE faculty regarding how effectively they can explain what they have learned through practice lessons, field work and student teaching, as well as their teaching philosophy. The Society for Health and Physical Educators America (SHAPE, 2015) created a guidance document which includes many suggested job interview questions for prospective physical education teachers. Hopefully, by incorporating these practices, prospective physical education teachers will be better prepared and interview teams will make prudent hiring decisions.

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