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DEVELOPING PERSONNEL IN HCPS

In 2018, Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS) published its strategic plan for 2018 to 2025. According to *Destination 2025: Strategic Goals*, HCPS will “Recruit, retain and reward educators who nurture the whole child” (Henrico County Public Schools, 2018). I found the plan HCPS has to carry out the specific strategic goals (Henrico County Public Schools, 2019). The steps include:

- Review the new teacher mentor program to create a more consistent, comprehensive system for supporting teachers in years 0-3.
- Develop a process for gauging new teacher job satisfaction throughout their first three years of employment, including exit interview data.
- Create a new veteran teacher advisory group as a voice for veteran teachers. This group would offer counsel and problem-solving for divisionwide efforts to support and retain veteran teachers.
- Conduct a teacher survey to help steer the direction of the division’s staff development needs as well as to help support teacher career advancement.
- Develop a plan to actively recruit and retain a diverse workforce, including bilingual staff.
- Survey staff members to identify their needs and wants (such as support with nutrition, physical health or mental health) and respond to those identified needs.
- Consider a stipend position for a “wellness champion” or similar position in each school.
- Survey other school divisions, businesses, and groups to determine if additional compensation or bonuses are provided for “above-and-beyond” efforts.
- Develop a comprehensive approach to staff retention that includes personalized/differentiated pathways for professional development and micro-credentialing, as well as supporting development and career goals through the teacher professional growth plan.
- Explore ways to compensate teachers for going above and beyond for participating in outside classroom duties.
- Establish a joint government and school’s committee to annually examine employee compensation matters using input collected on the most important factors in retaining Henrico County teachers and improving job satisfaction.
- Examine, audit, and subsequently establish consistent staffing models for elementary administrators, and consider what the standard model should be related to resource teachers and assistant principals.

- Revamp new employee orientation to be less paper-intensive and to clearly reflect the innovative qualities and excellence of the school division.

By 2021, HCPS was to create “personalized/differentiated pathways for professional learning and micro-credentialing, as well as supporting development and career goals through the teacher professional growth plan” by 2021 (Henrico County Public Schools, 2018). When I looked at the HCPS website, there was a section for micro-credentialing stating that they have begun work “to define and purchase a professional development management system” (Henrico County Public Schools, n.d.). By 2023, they are “to develop and implement a plan to actively recruit and retain a diverse workforce, including bilingual staff” (Henrico County Public Schools, 2018).

According to Mary Alderson, the Human Resources Specialist for Exceptional Education & School Health for Henrico County Public Schools (HCPS), each new teacher hire in HCPS is assigned a teacher mentor from their respective department (Alderson, 2021). This mentorship continues forward until the new hire is comfortable with their position. I wanted to see what I could find online to supplement the interview with Ms. Alderson; however, the website had no direct link from the Human Resources page to professional development or a new hire process. I then Googled the terms *HCPS* and *Professional Development* and was rewarded with a hit (Henrico County Public Schools, n.d.). According to the website, the new hire process was redesigned in 2019 to “be less paper-intensive and to clearly reflect the innovative qualities and excellence of the school division” and it is a “new streamlined and welcoming experience” that includes “two Saturday orientations; orientation at locations throughout the county; using videos,

banners and refreshments to create a more welcoming environment; and including HCPS benefit partners” (Henrico County Public Schools, n.d.).

Alderson stated that staff development is carried out internally and externally. HCPS has a staff development team solely dedicated to professional development (PD). The New Teacher Academy is held for new teacher hires the week before the contract start date but due to the pandemic, it was held virtually for the 2020-2021 school year. She said that she and the professional development team pay close attention to institutional practices and emerging trends, and the research and development team partner with staff development to create necessary and dynamic PDs. She stated that for successful orientation and induction of new personnel the week-long New Teacher Academy, year-long mentorship, and continuing central office staff support to all grade levels and content specialists are vital to helping new teachers become part of the HCPS family.

The roles in which principals play vary by the principal, according to Alderson. Principals hold staff meetings regularly and support new teachers through scheduled and unscheduled observations and walk-throughs. At times, the Assistant Principal provides one-on-one support for new teachers. There is no set process as each building and principal conducts onboarding in their own way. In discussions with other RPS human resources staff, this appears to be the status quo for multiple school districts. Alderson did say that to improve the process she thought sharing of best practices amongst principals could create a more uniform process. Doing that would entail first identifying buildings operating at optimal efficiencies.

Like Richmond Public Schools, HCPS uses an online platform called TalentEd/Perform for performance evaluation. Included in the performance framework are annual objectives,

formal and informal observations with feedback sessions, and mid-year and annual performance evaluations. The platform provides the administrator with access to the staff's professional SMART Goal, the seven standards, and supporting documentation. Staff uploads their goals and evidence three times a year for review and feedback from their supervising administrator. In HCPS, the protocol or process to create and carry out an improvement plan for teachers and principals is the same for both. Performance deficiencies are identified first through a letter of concern, then letter(s) of reprimand. If performance doesn't improve, the employee moves to a Structured Growth Plan which typically lasts 60-90 days. If deficiencies continue, the employee is then moved to an Intensive Support Plan with the same timeframe.

As a division, in order to retain personnel HCPS has been conducting pay scale studies and making salary adjustments for targeted positions – e.g. all teachers, principals, instructional assistants, etc as recently as April 2021. They also provide professional development instead of requiring teachers to provide for their own, which is what many school districts do as a common practice today. HCPS is also making a concerted effort to recognize outstanding performance, such as teacher and principal of the year awards, and utilize feedback mechanisms – e.g. Teacher Action Committee. Issues of morale are addressed both individually and as a whole through effective leadership; open and regular communication channels; and monetary adjustments. On the Employee Information section of the HCPS website, I found a link to an employee recognition program called Yay of the Day where an outstanding employee may be nominated each day for 100 days (Henrico County Public Schools, n.d.). Each employee is then recognized daily by Amy Cashwell, the HCPS superintendent.

Ms. Alderson did not go in-depth on any particular area during the interview and when I emailed her follow-up questions, I discovered she had retired. I have emailed the two names she provided via return response from her email but have not had additional feedback as of yet. HCPS was much more forthcoming on answering questions than Richmond Public Schools. I contacted a number of RPS human resources personnel from the director, Darlene Currie, to other staff members to obtain information. I did not receive any responses from the HR department at RPS. This is concerning because Michelle Hudacsko, RPS Chief of Staff, stated in a previous interview that customer service was a top priority for the Talent team as was providing support RPS employees who were in administration programs (Hudacsko, 2021).

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“I have neither given nor received help on this work, nor am I aware of any infraction of the Honor Code.”

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