

THESE SCHOOLS AREN'T SIMPLY HIRING TEACHERS FOR GRADE-LEVELS AND SUBJECT AREAS



When I applied to be a teacher I submitted applications to districts, included recommendations, and waited to be called for interviews. I chose districts based on their reputations and locations. If I wanted to be at a specific school, then I built a relationship with the principal so that when an opening came up at his site that I was qualified for, he would pick me to be interviewed. I mostly chose schools based on the principal and the student population. The other staff members were an afterthought. What would happen in my classroom was more important.

In my experience, conventional schools hire to fill the empty position (either grade level or subject area) with the most qualified person for the job within their budget. “Qualified” has a lot to do with credentials. Principals screen applicants from a district pool based on recommendations, college degrees, and/or certifications. Interview panels I’ve participated in mostly asked candidates about their experience with classroom management, lesson planning, discipline strategies, and parent communication.

At schools with teacher autonomy a central part of the interview process is figuring out if the candidate will contribute to the unique environment and buy into their shared purpose. Of course applicants need to be qualified to teach, but beyond that these schools are looking for staff members who will contribute to their schools and cultures *beyond* the classroom. They are looking for a community member who will add value to their school, commit to their mission and goals, and work well in a highly collaborative environment for the success of all students.

Autonomous teachers expect their colleagues to be more than their job titles. These teachers are far more than a “math teacher” or a “second-grade teacher.” They are an integral part of the learning process for all students—even if they never officially have some students on their roll sheet.

Not all of the teachers I know would want to work in the kinds of schools autonomous teachers are creating. But just as autonomous teachers create schools to serve the needs of students not being well served in conventional settings, they also create jobs that appeal to educators who are seeking something different.

The autonomous teachers I met desire enlarged professional roles not only for themselves but for their colleagues. They also want the ability to innovate so that they can better meet the needs of their students. And they are willing to take full accountability for the schools they create. For these professionals, teacher autonomy is an answer that should be more widely available.