

Hiring The Best Instructors

By: Bob Schaffer, LCHS Headmaster

Liberty's team of classroom instructors is widely regarded as being among the nation's best. Our school's rigorous screening and hiring processes contribute to the school's history of consistently attracting and retaining high-quality instructors in classrooms spanning kindergarten through twelfth grade.

On a near-weekly basis, school leaders from throughout the state and country (and on a few occasions, from other nations) visit Liberty to observe our instructors in action. The first questions these visitors pose are almost always the same: How do you find these outstanding teachers, and how do you persuade them to work here?

Liberty Common School hires only the best professionals in their field and scope of practice. All applicants are thoroughly and rigorously screened before even being considered for employment.

An applicant's philosophical alignment with the school is crucial. The sixth of seven principles upon which Liberty Common School's Mission Statement is derived asserts:

Teachers are professionals. This implies considerable autonomy, mastery, and independence. Having accepted the academic and philosophic mission of a school, the teacher needs to be free to exercise informed judgment in order to fulfill his or her primary role as an educator.

As a charter school, Liberty employs all instructors, administrators and support staff on an "at will" basis. All employment contracts are individually negotiated with each instructor.

This means Liberty instructors are hired on a truly professional basis (not on a union-wage scale) earning compensation commensurate with their contribution to the organization and professional growth as determined by thorough and routine professional evaluations. Annual pay raises are a direct function of demonstrated classroom performance and institutional leadership.

Holding a state teacher license is not required for employment at our school. We agree with 2012 findings of Colorado Commissioner of Education **Robert Hammond** and State Director of Professional Licensing **Dr. Jamie Goetz** that a state-issued teacher license is not an indication of one's ability to teach and is unreliable in affirming one's instructional competence.

When Liberty posts job openings, we stress first and foremost the importance of content expertise. We prefer teachers whose fields of study align with what they will teach to our students. We recruit in atypical ways.

For example, when we need an economics instructor, we contact business schools at multiple universities and spread the word directly to economics majors and graduates. We contact academic institutions, policy organizations and think tanks, even specific prominent college professors we think might best help us alert top candidates to our job posting.

To get an interview, an applicant must demonstrate strong background knowledge and an appreciation of classical methods of education and curriculum. We require a letter of application, a current resume, college transcripts, professional references, and a statement of educational philosophy. As a result, we typically receive applications from throughout the country for job openings at our school.

Our interview panels are comprised of key administrators, Members of the school's Board of Directors, school founders, grandparents, and parents with professional expertise relevant to the discipline for which we are hiring.

The first portion of our interviews covers education philosophy and pedagogy. Then we quickly dive deeply – very deeply – into the most important part of the conversation – content expertise.

Our interview documents guide us through fundamental and expert-level academic questions. Interviewees must demonstrate legitimate mastery of their subject matter, and they must be articulate in their explanations.

Our inquiries plumb the depths of an applicant's academic preparation and training. We simultaneously assess how clearly they explain things. Do they communicate like an adept teacher?

We also mind what a potential employee believes about the principles of education. Is it more important that students commit key information to memory, or be able to find it when needed? What is the proper role of parents in a school? Do you embrace the school's foundation-stone and capstone virtues? If so, how should these virtues be reinforced through curriculum, in the classroom, and throughout the school?

Our interviews can last a couple hours; often more. On the school's website, you can find a video of LCHS instructors recalling their personal experiences interviewing and becoming an instructor. It is quite revealing, and certainly worth watching.

Those who rise to the top of our interview process are often asked to return to the school and teach a demonstration lesson to our students. Adult observers typically line the back row of the classroom taking notes and critiquing the performance. Participating students fill out a survey after the lesson indicating which aspects of the mock lecture, in their opinion, had the greatest impact. The lesson is videotaped.

Once we are confident we have divined our top teacher candidate, an invitation is extended to join our organization, and a compensation offer is tendered. Upon acceptance of agreeable terms, we announce to the school community the addition of yet another outstanding member of the Liberty Common School faculty.