



REFERENCE CHECKING FOR SCHOOLS

YOUR GUIDE TO HIRING THE BEST



THE CHALLENGE

How do you really know that you're hiring the right teacher?

Have you ever had to hire a teacher urgently? Maybe right before school starts? Or, another teacher decided to retire a year early. Perhaps your school is growing and you need to hire more teachers. Regardless of the reason you need to hire, how do you ensure that when you do make a decision to bring someone new into your school community, you aren't missing indicators of problematic behavior? You want to hire teachers with the best intentions who adhere to ethical standards, professionalism and are safe to work around children.

How do you have confidence that your final candidate is really the best fit?



THE SOLUTION

In-Depth Reference Checks

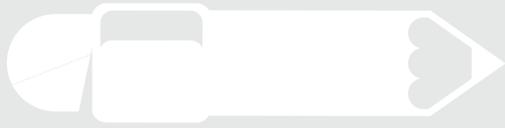
A consistent and detailed reference checking process will provide you with a full picture of each candidate and could be more revealing than the actual interview. Why? Because effective references, if engaged properly, will enjoy giving their opinion, offering their observations and explaining how the teacher interacted with them and in their school community.

How do you get the information you need from a reference?

It Only Takes 15 Minutes

Reference checking conversations need to be short - 15 minutes maximum. In that amount of time, you will be able to determine if there are any red flags and if your impression of the candidate is the same as that of their previous employers.

*How can you get all the information you need in such a short amount of time?
It's the way you put the reference at ease and engage them.*



CONSISTENT QUESTIONS ARE YOUR BEST FRIEND

Use the same reference questions for every candidate so that you can benchmark responses and develop discipline. Consistency will give you a tremendous opportunity to compare different candidates and the way their references perceive them. Put together a detailed set of reference questions to be used for every candidate and ask them in a specific order.

Here's an order we recommend:



Start with easy questions to get the reference comfortable and develop rapport.



Establish familiarity. Asking if the reference knew the candidate was applying for the position establishes how well the reference knows the candidate.



Find out about the candidate's background and if there have been issues in the past. Don't be reluctant to ask probing questions, especially as it relates to being around children.*



Ask if there is anyone else you should talk to. If a reference is uncomfortable telling you something, this question could provide you with a sign that you need to find out more.

**Unfortunately, the rates of sexual misconduct in schools are high. A recent study conducted by the National Association of Independent Schools and The Association of Boarding Schools reports that, "one out of 10 students experience educator sexual misconduct."*



THE BENEFIT OF WELL-CONSIDERED QUESTIONS



SITUATION

You're interviewing a candidate for a teaching position and they happen to mention that they had some issues with a previous employer. When you ask why, they blame the Head of School for taking a student's side during a misunderstanding. You're conflicted because the candidate seemed so dedicated and engaging for most of the interview. What can you ask the references to find out more about the circumstances?

Here are some questions we use as part of our sequence that would help learn more about your candidate's character:

- 01** How do you know the candidate? Professionally, personally or both?
- 02** Did you know that they were applying for this position?
- 03** Did you ever know of a situation where they were disciplined? If yes, are you able to tell me more about that?
- 04** Is there anyone else you think it would be important for us to speak with?

You'll be surprised by some of the things we have learned about candidates from their references!



PAY ATTENTION TO THE UNSAID

Observe the way the reference reacts to different questions. Take notice if they seem uncomfortable or try and move the conversation in a different direction. Always, stay focused on the questions you have developed. If a reference starts heading in a different direction, re-direct the conversation to ensure you have the answers you need to make an informed decision. When we interview references who deviate from answering a question, we ask it again in a different way to determine if the reference really just doesn't have an answer, or if they are actually avoiding the question.

Focus on Facial Expressions

When you're interviewing a reference on a video call, you have the opportunity to zero in on their face. You can see their expressions to better understand the way the reference views the candidate. If the reference is stiff or unresponsive, try and gauge if it's just their discomfort with being on a video call or if there is something about the candidate they're wrestling with telling you. In many interviews that we conduct with references, we analyze body language and follow up with additional questions to address the messages that are subconsciously being conveyed.



NEVER HIRE A CANDIDATE BASED SOLELY ON A REFERRAL

SITUATION

A teacher comes recommended by a colleague. You feel like you found the right fit to resolve your last-minute hiring issue and so easily at that! The candidate seems competent in the interview but one of their references would never call you back. The other would only confirm employment dates and the third sent you a short response over email. What do you do? Do you hire solely on referral and deal with it later if it doesn't work out?

Have all candidates go through your hiring process irrespective of who has recommended them for the position, even if it's the board president or Head of School. A confirmation of employment should never count as a reference. We have helped schools avoid many bad hires, after determining that references who aren't readily willing and able to speak with us, are doing so for specific reasons. Don't be fooled by the candidate who "aces" their interview, but doesn't have anyone who will vouch for them.



DON'T BE STUMPED BY TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES OR TIME ZONES

If the Zoom, Microsoft Teams or another program you are using doesn't work, have a backup plan. You can use Facetime if need be or even WhatsApp. Don't let technical difficulties prevent you from sticking to your process. If the reference really cannot make a video call work, talk to them on the phone as a last resort. Never settle for just an email reference or having them fill out a questionnaire.

If you have a candidate coming from a position abroad who provides you with a reference in that country, don't let time zones get in the way. We have conducted interviews with references around the world, remotely. The COVID-19 pandemic has even made this easier because so many people are working online.



REFERENCE CHECKS VERSUS BACKGROUND CHECKS

Many schools use background checks as the way to find out if a candidate has been convicted of breaking any laws, but it does not provide information on whether someone has criminal intentions. Schools think that if the background check is clear, they are protected from a safety perspective. However, a criminal record won't exist for someone under a current investigation. Also, a background check may not indicate whether someone's teaching license had been suspended for a misconduct related matter and then re-instated. According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, a child predator will harm 50 girls and 150 boys before being caught.

Background Checks Won't Catch Lies on Resumes

Most job candidates lie or misrepresent information on their resumes, 86 percent according to the Society for Human Resource Management. A candidate who was fired from a job may have left that position off their resume entirely. That may be revealed in a reference check but never in a background check. Hiring a teacher who is not the right fit could cost your school more than twice that teacher's salary.



YOU CAN DO THIS!

Even in the best circumstances, the hiring process may lead to bringing someone into your school who shouldn't be there. When you're rushed, it's even harder to make the right hire. A less than honorable candidate may take advantage of this hurried process. When your alumni look back on their time at your school, they remember their favorite teachers, the people who opened up their world, encouraged their critical thinking and fostered their lifelong love of learning. A solid reference checking policy will ensure that these are the people you bring into your school community.



SOS THREESIXTY, INC.

We enable schools to make faster and better hiring decisions, by conducting detailed reference checks that provide important background information about candidates during schools' interviewing process. As a team of uniquely trained child safety experts, we enhance overall success, so schools hire the very best faculty and administrators, while helping to root out those with harmful intentions. We support schools in developing policies and practices that demonstrate diligence and safeguard their communities.

