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How to Hire Tech-Savvy Teachers

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by Don Lipper and Elizabeth Sagehorn

How to **Hire Tech-Savvy** Teachers

Hiring tips to help you fill your classrooms with teachers who *get* technology

The need for tech-savvy teachers is heating up coast to coast. But when it comes to filling your classrooms with educators who are effective teachers and capable technology users, how can you be sure you're hiring the right teachers for the job? *i.e.* magazine spoke to education leaders who have learned from experience, and here, they share their hiring tips to help you find the right teachers for your schools.

Why you need tech-savvy teachers

The kids sitting in today's classrooms are not like the kids of previous generations. "Raised in the world of interactive media, the Internet and digital messaging technologies, 'Generation Y' has different expectations and learning styles than previous generations," says Derek E. Baird, an education-technology consultant and cofounder of the Blended Edu website. "The education ecosystem is changing. When a course is revised to incorporate technology, the learning that students achieve goes far beyond the boundaries of what they are taught because individuals create meaning for themselves."

Baird says there are five basic digital learning styles that tech-savvy teachers must address to be able to meet the learning needs of today's kids – interactive, student-centered, authentic, collaborative and on-demand.

So here are some factors to consider when searching for teachers with the technology skills that are a perfect fit for your classrooms.

Experience teaching with technology

"For me, the key to hiring a tech-savvy teacher is [finding] someone who understands that we are preparing these kids for a different world where technology will be a big part of their lives," says Chris Corallo, staff development director

Tech-savvy teachers should be comfortable creating lesson plans from the Internet on the fly.

at Henrico County school district in Richmond, Virginia. "I'm looking for people who understand what that world is going to look like for these kids."

In 2001, Corallo's school district started a program to give every high school student and teacher a wireless Apple iBook notebook (that's 12,000 iBooks). The campuses were also outfitted with a wireless network. In 2003, the middle schools got the same treatment and received 13,000 iBooks. Working wirelessly was a change for both students and teachers, and it led Corallo on a search for some new teachers who could support the district's desire to enhance teaching and learning with technology.

Corallo says he uses the interview process to ask applicants how they use technology in the classroom. He can usually get a pretty good sense of their comfort with technology from the examples they give, how much of it is Web based and how technology is integrated into the instructional day.

He also suggests asking specific questions, such as how an applicant would use the Creative Commons search in Flickr to find photos for the classroom or how they would use a blog to facilitate communication between students, parents and the school community.

Dr. B. J. Fogg, a consulting professor in Stanford University's School of Education, says if you want to find out quickly how technology-savvy your applicant is, "Ask them to explain what Web services they use on their mobile phone. Ask them what their favorite gadget is and why. If they are the person everyone goes to with their tech questions, that'd be ideal for someone who will feel very comfortable using technology in an educational environment. For them, it will be fun and natural."

Continuous learning and flexibility

Don't forget that a tech-savvy teacher isn't just familiar with computers. They should also be happy and comfortable with incorporating other types of technology, including mobile technologies, interactive whiteboards, MP3 players and PDAs into their lessons.

Graham Wegner, who maintains an education blog called Teaching Generation Z, explains on his blog that this flexibility is a key quality to watch for in a technologically knowledgeable teacher.

"You want someone who is open to new challenges and wants to be at the front of the queue when the new tech tools are being wheeled in. You want some history of developing initiatives or projects that explore the boundaries of learning," explains Wegner. A teacher who isn't willing to learn new technologies should be a warning sign to someone who is searching for a tech-savvy teacher.

Doug Johnson, director of media and technology for Mankato Area Public Schools, has a similar theory. He also likes to ensure that he hires teachers who are open to learning new things.

"The question I always ask is, 'What is the last new piece of hardware or software that you learned, and how did you learn it?' If there is not a fairly ready and recent response, I worry," says Johnson.

Johnson believes that truly technologically literate teachers are flexible enough to know when to use technology and when not to use technology. He points out that a good teacher will use a variety of instructional strategies, depending on the needs of the individual learner and the skill to be mastered.

Can they customize lessons?

Ben Daley is the chief academic officer at High Tech High. The school began in 2000 as a single charter high school, launched by a coalition of San Diego business leaders and educators. It has evolved into a school development organi-

Teachers who understand technology will know how and when to incorporate technology into lessons.

zation with a growing portfolio of innovative charter schools spanning grades K–12. High Tech High has arguably the longest track record for molding tech-savvy teachers.

Daley recommends that tech-savvy teachers be project oriented, and their ability to create customized lessons, based on students' talents, is an important trait. He paints a picture of a class learning circuits in order to build robots. One advanced student is given college-level physics robot-

ics problems to chew on while, at the same time, a struggling student is given robot-related fraction problems to solve. A tech-savvy teacher has to learn how to create multiple tracks within a lesson plan.

This type of teacher also needs to learn how to adapt lesson plans at the drop of a hat when news presents teachable moments. Instead of relying on old textbooks, these teachers need to know how to create a lesson plan from the Internet.

Consider the recent changes in Pluto's status as a planet – every textbook says there are nine planets in our solar system. Because educators can now deal with primary-

Hiring "Dos" and "Don'ts" from Ben Rimes of TechSavvyEd.net

Do hire someone who was trained as a teacher, not a technology expert. They are more likely to provide engaging and meaningful technology lessons that are driven by the content, not just the technology.

Do look for someone who has a decent knowledge of state and national technology benchmarks, especially the ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education) benchmarks

Do hire someone who belongs to and is an active member of a state or national education technology organization

Do hire someone who has decent knowledge of the technical side, such as how servers and Internet filters work.

Don't hire someone who has little or no education training. You want someone that understands education theory.

Don't hire someone who is unwilling to learn new programs or expand their own horizons

Don't hire someone who only views technology as an extra layer of fun mini-games for learning (math games, spelling and word games, etc.). These teachers are just creating electronic worksheets with little real educational value.

source material rather than a five-year-old textbook, there are plenty of resources out there to teach an accurate lesson on the planets – using the recent information from editorials, scientist blogs or even NASA sites.

Weigh teaching skills against technology skills

It's important to remember that just being tech-savvy doesn't make a great teacher. However, many great teachers will see the benefits of understanding technology. "Highly successful teachers have a certain degree of risk taking built

century, you shouldn't confuse their technology comfort level with technology teaching skills.

"A lot of young teachers know how to use the latest technology, but they don't know how to teach with technology," says Mao. "On the other hand, highly experienced teachers who don't use technology a lot learn a few simple technology tricks to leverage what they know while the young teachers are still trying to keep the kids in chairs."

Will Richardson, supervisor of instructional technology and communications at Hunterdon Central Regional High School in Flemington, New Jersey, and creator of Weblogged, takes a similar approach to finding teachers. "From a hiring perspective, if you hire learners who can teach, the technology will take care of itself. If you hire teachers who aren't really lifelong, continual learners, then you'll have problems, not just with technology."

What's the cost factor?

Cost is always a consideration when it comes to hiring. However, the question of whether more tech-savvy teachers can command a higher salary than less technologically gifted teachers is mostly a matter of what kind of school (private, charter, public) is launching the program. The tech-savvy teaching market hasn't hit the fever pitch (seen in other employment sectors) of school districts with the will and the wallet lavishing large signing bonuses for star players. But basic economic principles still apply. If your school can pay more, you'll get a wider selection.

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in. They try new things and think outside the box," says Jeff Mao, coordinator of educational technology for the Maine Department of Education.

In 2002, as part of the Maine Learning Technology Initiative, the Pine Tree State and Apple Computer Inc. signed a four-year, $41 million contract to equip 32,000 seventh- and eighth-grade students and 4,000 teachers with iBook notebook computers, wireless networks, training and technical support.

Mao and his colleagues had to hire tech-savvy teachers to support this initiative, so they learned firsthand what to look for.

Mao stresses that when you are discerning whether an applicant has what it takes to lead the charge into the next

However, hiring a teacher who is truly skilled with technology doesn't have to be a budget buster. A tech-savvy teacher knows how to leverage what's free and already out there. "This will help encourage other students, teachers and educators to replicate and improve upon your results instead of worrying about finding the money to purchase the fantastic software," says Ben Rimes of TechSavvy Ed.net.

Salaries aside, High Tech High's Daley says that remembering why you're trying to hire a teacher in the first place will be the best way to gauge a candidate's suitability. "It's not about technology. We are looking for adults who connect with kids. They must have deep content knowledge and be flexible in their thinking."