



## **Conducting a Thorough Assessment of Potential School Employees**

Hiring qualified, student-focused professionals is one of the most important jobs of a school administrator. School leaders must verify the candidate has the skill set needed to effectively perform the work, while also ensuring their involvement in the school would pose no threat to students, other staff members or the district.

Although Oklahoma law requires an employee background check to be completed within six weeks of employment, districts should put additional safeguards in place to ensure they are making quality and safe hiring decisions.

This document includes resources and tasks school officials can use to research and assess candidates' backgrounds and job readiness. OSSBA recommends reviewing the list and assigning priority tasks as part of the hiring process to either the position's supervisor, the respective principal, human resource staff or a central office administrator. Procedures for candidate vetting should be clearly communicated and documented with all involved in the hiring process.

Before using the tips in this document, please note:

- A school district's employment practices cannot discriminate against candidates based on race, color, religion, national origin, disability, sex, age or genetic information. This includes any information gathered through the methods below.
- Any information found through the methods below should be verified with a document that includes the employee's photo, birth date or address; otherwise, districts could erroneously use information from someone with the same name.

- Information from this research can be used to determine if the candidate possesses the judgement necessary to properly meet the job's roles and responsibilities and the professional expectations of the district.
- Districts should not have blanket statements or requirements about when they will and won't hire people based on their background and vetting research. Instead, the information should be collectively used to make the best decision at that time for the position.

### **Resources/Task List for Candidate Assessment**

#### **Review the application carefully for red flags.**

- Have they worked for the district before? If so, check former evaluations and the reason for leaving. Contact former supervisors.
- Have they previously worked for someone you know and trust?
- Are there gaps in employment?
- Are there mid-year resignations?
- How did they answer the questions about their criminal history? Explore any "yes" more thoroughly.
- Have they signed that every answer in the application is true?
- Can the employee work legally in the U.S. or will they require visa sponsorship?
- Do they have the previous experience necessary to fulfill the roles and responsibilities required for the position?
- Are they currently under contract somewhere else?

#### **In the interview:**

- Ask questions that will determine whether the employee can complete the position's essential tasks, with or without accommodations.
- Ask questions that will determine if the employee's work habits, soft skills, education, expertise and knowledge will allow the employee to meet the district's expectations for the position.
- If appropriate, ask the candidate to complete a work assignment to demonstrate skills required for the job, such as proficiency with software.

- Allow the employee to ask questions. Try to gauge how much they understand about the position and the district.
- Ask “Is there anything I haven’t asked about you that you would like for me to know?”
- Ask “Is there anything about your past that we haven’t talked about today that, if it should become public at a later time, would be concerning for the district or cause mistrust with the public?”

**☐ Check and document references.**

- Contact former employers or seek mutual contacts, including people you know and trust.
- Reach out to references not provided by the applicant, in addition to those that are. Both can provide valuable insight.
- Ask questions related to job responsibilities, reliability and skill sets.
- Always ask:
  - If given the opportunity, would you hire this candidate again?
  - This employee will be working with or near children. Does that give you any reason to be concerned?

**☐ Check credentials.**

- If the position requires a certificate, check credentials on the Oklahoma State Department of Education Single-Sign On portal. Determine if the person has the necessary credential or has a pathway to earn the necessary credential.

**☐ Google the candidate’s name.**

- Include variations with the city where he or she lives or has lived.
- Include variations with the school districts where he/she has worked.
- Include variations with the employee’s name and the words “arrest,” “teacher” and “school.”
- Each time, click on “News” at the top to see media articles that might include more information about the individual.

**Search the Oklahoma State Courts Network -- [oscn.net](http://oscn.net).**

- Go to “Case Search.”
- Go to “Search by Party” and enter as much information as possible about the candidate.
- Use the candidate’s legal name. Remember that past interaction with the court system could have taken place using a former legal name. (College transcripts often reveal previous names.)

**Search On Demand Court Records - [odcr.com](http://odcr.com).**

- Select “Party Name” and enter as much information as possible about the candidate.
- Use the candidate’s legal name. Remember that past interaction with the court system could have taken place using a former legal name. (College transcripts often reveal previous names.)

**Search the Oklahoma Sex Offender Registry -- [sors.doc.ok.gov](http://sors.doc.ok.gov). *(Under state law, all employees’ names should be cross-referenced annually with this list.)***

- Read and approve the terms, if you agree.
- Enter the candidate’s legal name into the Basic Search form and review data, if it returns. Remember that past interaction with the court system could have taken place using a former legal name. (College transcripts often reveal previous names.)

**Search the Oklahoma Violent Offender Registry - [vors.doc.ok.gov](http://vors.doc.ok.gov). *(Under state law, all employees’ names should be cross-referenced annually with this list.)***

- Read and approve the terms, if you agree.
- Enter the candidate’s legal name into the Basic Search form and review data, if it returns. Remember that past interaction with the court system could have taken place using a former legal name. (College transcripts often reveal previous names.)

**Search social media sites including LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok.**

- Search for the candidate's name to determine if any content is public and can be reviewed. Check for content that shows illegal behavior, conduct that demonstrates poor professional judgement or information that's inconsistent with application materials.

**Conduct a pre-employment background check at the district's expense.**

- Several companies will turn results around within 24 hours.

**Post-hire, conduct the mandated National Background Check with fingerprints conducted by OSBI and the Oklahoma State Department of Education.**

- If you do not require a new background check, and instead rely on one from a previous district, you likely will not be notified if an arrest is made post-employment. OSSBA recommends that a new background check be completed for every new employee.
- If new employees make their appointment to be fingerprinted at the state Department of Education, they can choose "dual" use for both certification and school employment purposes. This saves the expense of a second background check.