

HOW TO RECRUIT A GAME-CHANGING DISTRICT DATA ANALYST

Just picture it: reports are up-to-date, data is cleaner, trainings are delivered expertly, helpdesk tickets are resolved efficiently, and you have more time for your other projects. It’s all possible with a data analyst on your team, but how can you find the right person in time for the next school year?



Justify the Investment

First, the position needs to exist, but budgets are always tight in K-12. This can derail your hiring plans if decision-makers don’t fully understand what it takes to operate a data ecosystem or aren’t yet committed to data-driven decision-making. The key? Start with the return-on-investment.

- ▶ **Better results for students:** Are principals, teachers, administrators, and district leadership able to track their progress toward strategic goals, or are they steering in the dark? Mention specific initiatives that the district has already prioritized that might be improved with access to data.
- ▶ **Time savings:** What would other staff members accomplish if a data analyst could do some of their work instead? Aspire Public Schools tackled this issue by interviewing staff members who created reports manually each week. By adding up their report-building time, it became clear that hiring someone to automate all reports made the most fiscal sense.
- ▶ **Fiscal savings:** This depends on your current budget and what tasks this employee would be performing. Here are a few ideas:
 - Compliance management: Could a data analyst focused on compliance help you achieve better results in metrics that determine funding? The classic example is average daily attendance, a common determinant of state funding.
 - Consultant or contractor fees: Could full-time personnel either minimize costs or significantly reduce onboarding time?
 - Program evaluation: Is your district already spending heavily in an area it can’t evaluate? The ability to change course could result in significant savings.

Finally, be ready to walk the decision-maker through alternatives to prove that hiring is the right choice. In some cases, switching to a vendor with strong partnership potential, moving your data to a more easily-maintained system (like a hosted data warehouse), or developing your existing team might better fit your needs.



Attract the Right Candidates

A clear, compelling job description can make a great first impression. Here are a few ideas:

- ▶ **Include a mission-driven general description:** If a student-centric approach is loud and clear, you’ll cut through the job-hunting noise for candidates who care. Chicago Public Schools simply [uses its mission statement](#). [San Francisco Unified School District](#) goes into more detail: note that the first few paragraphs include words like “equity,” “inclusive,” and “social justice,”—what the district cares about stands out.

- ▶ **You have to sell it:** Explain the benefits honestly, whether they be leadership opportunities, a wonderful team, sustainable work-life balance, generous benefits, professional development, or the chance to make a difference for kids. For example, [Rhode Island's Office of Innovation](#) offers “rapid professional growth”; “diverse, exciting, and challenging work experiences”; and “access to education thought leaders.” Sounds appealing!
- ▶ **List both concrete and intangible qualities:** Sure, you may need someone with excellent Excel, SQL, or Tableau skills, but don't stop there. Perhaps this role requires strong organizational skills or the ability to handle ambiguity. DC Public Schools painted a picture of what each “personal quality of top candidates” would look like in [this job description](#); make sure you do too.
- ▶ **Separate required and preferred attributes:** If a candidate can see how important each quality is to you, he or she will more accurately understand which ones to highlight for you in the application.
- ▶ **Narrow confidence gaps:** Studies have shown that candidates from marginalized groups are more likely to believe they aren't qualified for a position than others with the same amount of experience. Make your hiring search as inclusive as possible by including language like, “We encourage you to apply even if you don't have all the experience listed above.”
- ▶ **Eliminate biased language:** Subtle signals about “who belongs” show up in job descriptions even when you have nothing but good intentions, which means some great candidates won't apply. For example, words like “analytical” may not attract as many female candidates as alternative phrasing like “thoughtful” and “curious”. Get others' input on your language, or, better yet, use a service like [Textio](#) to catch your blind spots.



Spread the Word

Of course, an appealing job description won't draw candidates if it's not seen. In addition to posting on your website, consider sharing with the following:

- ▶ **Others who already operate in your data ecosystem:** For example, student information system administrators, assessment coordinators, RTI coordinators, and school site staff. These people are likely to onboard quickly because they will already have plenty of context.
- ▶ **The [job board on Data Champion Hub](#):** Schoolzilla's open community forum for district data professionals.
- ▶ **Professional development programs specializing in education data:** Great examples include [Education Pioneers](#) and [Harvard University's Strategic Data Project fellows](#).
- ▶ **Education programs that offer data specialties:** Contact their career centers to connect with graduates or to ask about alumni networks.
- ▶ **Former educators of any ilk:** Their empathy for the passion and strain that comes with serving students will be invaluable when serving educators in a data role.
- ▶ **Any data-centric forums or meet-ups in your area, even if outside the education world:** Plenty of analysts care deeply about making a difference; you might have just the right opportunity to offer them!