

Sample Interview Questions

Introduction Questions

- Please share with us the following:
 - (a) Your educational background (degrees, certification, teaching)
 - (b) Your administrative experience
 - (c) Your interest in this position
- Please take a few minutes to tell us about your education, teaching and administrative experiences, and yourself. Feel free to add any other details and experiences outside the educational field that you feel will help us know you better.
- Tell us about you, your education and experiences and how they relate to this position.
- Please describe your experiences and personal strengths that qualify you for this position. What particular skills, knowledge and abilities would you bring to our district and [middle] school programs?
- Why do you want to be the principal at this school? What interests you most about this position?

The Principalship and General Questions

- You know some principals are more successful than others. What are the key characteristics of a successful principal?
- Specifically, what do you define as your three (3) most important responsibilities as the (elementary) principal? How would you ensure that each of the three (3) was achieved? What other responsibilities beyond the three (3) identified would be important to you?
- What is an emerging issue in education that will impact your role as a building leader? How will you prepare yourself to meet this issue?
- How do you balance the many demands and multiple roles of the principal position?
- What do you see as your role in working with the superintendent and administrative team?
- The most challenging ethical dilemmas you face as a leader are the “right v. right” type. What is your framework for deciding these sort of dilemmas? Please give us an example.
- How would you define your role within the district administrative team? with the superintendent?
- Describe an effective school.
- How would you describe an ideal [elementary] school? What steps would you take to move the staff in that direction?
- Name some “best practices” in elementary education. Why are they effective?

- What are some of the characteristics of effective schools? How will you promote these at school?
- We educators frequently use the term “exemplary school.” Please share your perception of the exemplary elementary school that you would create at our school, and include how you would involve or utilize students, staff, and parents.
- Describe your perspective on how you would differentiate needs of students and staff in a [high] school.

Leadership Style and Decision Making

- Please describe your learning style and your leadership style.
- Who would be involved in your school’s leadership team, and what would be their roles?
- What do you see your role being in the building and district leadership team?
- Should you be selected for this position, please tell us about the person who will be joining our leadership team.
- How would others describe your leadership style? How do you communicate your expectations and priorities to your staff? How would you provide motivation, encouragement and support to a team of hard working and dedicated professionals confronting enormous challenges?
- Sometimes the building leader is “caught” between the initiatives of the district and the priorities of the staff (and your own priorities). How would you navigate these opposing views or interests?
- How would you organize your work time as a school leader between leadership and management responsibilities?
- In leading a [grade level] school, what would be important organizational and relationship considerations and implementations?
- Please describe the decision making process we might see in your school and who would be involved in decision making?
- Give us an example of how you, as a leader, have involved staff in a decision-making process about a complex issue and what your main considerations were in establishing such a process.
- Can a leader exhibit too much empathy for a student?

Instruction and Student Achievement

- How do you propose to improve “teaching” at our school?
- What elements should be included in a total [elementary] instructional program?
- What school-wide ideas have you implemented in the area of curriculum?

- We are considering full day kindergarten. What are the strengths and concerns about this concept?
- We currently adopted a new [language arts] program. How would you implement an ideal [elementary reading/language arts] program?
- Small schools frequently have split classes. What are some creative solutions to make this practice instructionally sound?
- Helping teachers improve their practice so they can help students improve their learning is the most important responsibility of the school leader. As the person responsible for the supervision of teaching and learning in your school, how would you help teachers to improve their practice?
- The staff here has spent the past two school years moving toward a school-wide Title I Program. What is your understanding and/or experience with a Title 1 School-wide Program? What steps would you take to ensure this program is successful?
- What would you do to increase student achievement for each student?
- In trying to reduce our achievement gap, what would some of the first steps you would want to do?
- What steps would you follow if a student was struggling in your school?
- What will you do to ensure the curriculum is taught with fidelity across the school and what will you do to help those teachers who are not teaching it?

Instructional Model, Focus, Peer Coaching and Collaboration Time

- Tell us your experience with using peer coaches to improve teaching? What is your opinion about adopting an instructional model for lesson planning and instruction?
- Tell us your views about teacher collaboration.
- How might you create time for teachers to collaborate, and what do you see as your role in guiding collaboration time?
- Describe the steps you would take to build and maintain teamwork and collaboration among all staff to ensure a team approach to improving student learning/achievement.
- How would you deal with a teacher has reasonable student achievement scores yet sees no value in collaboration or working with her grade level/content team?

Assessments, Standards and Laws

- How would you define the value of the WASL in the (grade level) area of teaching and learning?
- Discuss your knowledge and understanding of student assessment data, NCLB, “highly qualified staff”, graduation requirements.

- What is your depth of understanding concerning the state's work on essential student learnings? How could you help facilitate this work at the building level?
- Outside of offering staff development, what have you done in your building to assist in the implementation of the essential student learnings?
- One of the additional responsibilities of this position will be the monitoring of one or more federal programs. What are the major concerns that you need to be aware of when you monitor federal programs or grants? What is your experience writing grants?
- If you were king/queen for a day, what changes would you make in the federal IDEA laws?
- How have you used assessment data to help improve instruction and student learning?
- What would you expect of your teachers in terms of using assessment data (what type of assessment data, how often to assess, etc.)?
- What data for you is the most important for consideration?

School Improvement Process

- Describe your experience in leading or working with groups of teachers and/or administrators in developing and implementing school improvement plans.
- Our school district has made Adequate Yearly Progress every year. What experience have you had with the Federal School Improvement Process?
- What have you learned that you can implement at our school to increase achievement for all students (OR) How would we see you requiring, encouraging and inspiring your staff to work on with students to increase learning?
- Our school did not make AYP according to NCLB in mathematics or _____ last year and is in Year One of mandated School Improvement Plan and must offer school choice to its parents. How would you balance focusing staff's attention on raising student achievement while addressing staff morale issues?
- Discuss your understanding of the school improvement plan. What is it? How do you develop it? What key features are included? How do you assess it? Who is accountable for it? What do you do with it at the end of the year?
- Describe key elements of an effective school improvement plan/process.
- Describe your experiences and skill in promoting school-wide efforts to improve instruction.
- How can you contribute to the improvement of instruction for all staff members?
- School improvement planning and implementation is a critical activity in the quest to improve learning for all students. As the building leader how would this process work in your school? What are the critical elements which need to be included in a school improvement plan?

Building Trust and Relationships

- As principal, what might we see you doing to build a relationship of trust with teachers, parents, and the district administrative team?
- If we had a panel of parents, teachers and students here from your current school and they were asked what they like most about you, what would they say? What might they say they like least about you? What would they say are your strengths and weaknesses?
- As the leader of our school, what strategies/actions would you employ to keep the school, principal and students visible to the community? What are key messages you would want to promote?
- How will you encourage parents and other community members to become involved and participate in your school?
- How would you develop and maintain effective working relationships with students, staff and the community?
- Describe the various groups you are responsible to and how you would develop and maintain an effective working relationship with each group.
- Give us examples of how you involved parents in your school or classroom and what you have done to gain community support for your school.
- Our parents often have emotional, social and economic needs. What skills and experiences do you bring that will help them develop more effective parenting skills?
- Engaging parents as meaningful partners in the learning of their child is critical to a high achieving school. How would you effectively engage parents in this important work? How would you modify your efforts to engage parents based on the diversity of the student population?
- What are ways you will use to get to know the patrons of the district?
- What role should parents play in your school?

Staff Abilities, Dynamics and Evaluation

- What qualities (both academic and personal) do you look for in a good teacher?
- How do you observe a teacher's ability to connect with students? What are key skills you look for?
- In supervising and evaluating teachers, what are key skills or strategies you would employ?
- What are you looking for in effective classroom instruction? How would you provide feedback to teachers that will result in professional growth and effective instruction? Describe the key teaching strategies and the approaches to learning that are critical to student success in a school with diverse student population.

- How would you work with a teacher who thinks they are doing fine, but you see significant areas of need in their instructional and management practices?
- Describe the best teacher you know.
- How would you evaluate teachers and other staff?
- If a teacher was showing definite signs of being ineffective in the classroom, what actions would you take? How has it worked?
- What is the evaluator's responsibility in working with an ineffective teacher? What process would you use?
- What do you hope to accomplish through classroom observations, and then, teacher evaluations?
- What do you believe is the purpose of staff evaluation? Describe your evaluation process.
- How would you deal with conflict between two staff members or staff member and parent?
- How do you handle working with a teacher whose instruction is weak?
- Knowing that it's probably the most important part of our job to "hire good people," what are the main professional and personal characteristics you are looking for when hiring new staff?
- Hiring is one of the most important jobs a principal has. What qualities do you look for when hiring a teacher? What process do you use to see that you hire teachers who exhibit those qualities?
- How would you recruit teachers to this school?

School Climate

- What do you believe would make a good teaching and learning environment for teachers and students?
- What factors most affect positive school climate in a [grade level] school?
- How do you motivate students to take an active role in creating a positive school climate?
- What could you tell us that would convince us that as a principal you would be a key player in creating a positive school climate? How do you motivate students and staff to take an active role in creating a positive school climate?
- What are effective strategies of ensuring each student and parent is fully engaged in this school?
- What would you do to make this school a welcoming and safe environment for students of diverse backgrounds? What strategies would you use to reach out to minority students, especially those from our _____ and/or _____ communities? How would you shape a sense of community among a diverse group of students?

- Probably nothing is more important to students, staff, and parents than the culture of the school. What are the attributes of school culture that are important to you? How would you as the leader establish or enhance the school culture for faculty and students?
- What do you see as the greatest challenges facing the primary grade students and the high school students?

School Safety and Student Discipline

- Give us your vision of a school-wide management/discipline program. Where do you see the assistant principal's/principal's role in this system?
- Please describe the process you have used to manage student discipline from minor infractions to students who have chronic discipline problems.
- What is the role of principal in dealing with student discipline problems in the class, bus, playground, etc.? How do you handle inappropriate behaviors? Give us a specific situation—possibly using a repeat offender with escalating problems as an example.
- How do you investigate and handle an allegation of a rule violation at school?
- What interventions or progressive steps do you use with repeat offenders?
- What is your main goal with student discipline and to what extent do your student discipline procedures involve others? (teachers, parents, counselors)
- Describe effective efforts to ensure you have a safe and civil school.
- The personal safety of students and staff is very important. What are some key considerations when designing a school safety plan?
- What do you consider to be the key elements of establishing and maintaining a safe and secure learning environment?
- What elements should be in a strong disaster/emergency plan? How will you assure that the process is understood?
- What are some of the most difficult problems encountered in sports?

Understanding of Diversity and ESL Learners

- Please describe the diverse ethnic populations with whom you have worked. What kinds of challenges and successes have you had in working with diverse populations in your schools?
- What are some accommodations you feel are appropriate for ESL learners and how would you propose to deliver them? (language assistance, lesson modification, family assistance, understanding culture, etc.)

- Well over 50% of our students qualify for free and reduced lunches. Additionally we possess a significant level of ethnic diversity. What strategies would you implement to ensure that each student and his/her parent are fully engaged in the school?
- What leadership skills and experiences do you bring to our ELL students and their parents?
- How have you demonstrated advocacy for all students?

Understanding of Special Education

- Describe the role of a principal in a (grade level) school in working with special education.
- What are key points to keep in mind when considering discipline or suspension for a special education student?
- Share a situation in which you have worked with a special education student and their parent.
- Students with special (remedial and/or gifted) needs are a part of the regular program. What experiences have you had in this area? What successes and problems have you encountered in this process?
- You are the new principal in the building. The building houses neighborhood students, a gifted program and a classroom of special needs students. This results in diversity both in student population and parent involvement. How would you approach this situation? What would your priorities be and why?
- What community resources have you accessed in working with special education students and parents in the past?
- How would you coordinate with the special services itinerant staff (psychologists, SLP, OT/PT) to ensure that the needs of our students and staff are met? You have a parent of a child with special needs who never seems to be satisfied with the special services the school is offering her child, despite many attempts by staff to re-adjust the program in response to the parent's request. How would you manage this situation?
- Our school has implemented an "integrated class" approach to mainstreaming special education students. What is your philosophy and experience with special education services?
- A parent calls and is concerned that their child is in a class "one of those" students (special education) and continues to disrupt the learning opportunities of this child. She wants "that child" removed. Share with us how you would address this situation.
- What are key points to keep in mind when developing and implementing a 504 plan?
- What do you see the role of the principal in the IEP process?

Professional Development

- To what extent have you studied the research on effective teaching and student learning in reading? What have you read or received training in?
- What is your level of understanding of the K-12 reading model and reading strategies?
- What have you provided in terms of inservice to teachers regarding reading?
- How would you plan to work with your staff to further improve student skills in writing and mathematics?
- What other kinds of professional development would you work on with your staff?
- How would you model your own professional growth to your teachers?
- What kinds of recent training experiences have you had that make you a strong candidate for this position?
- Your first professional development in your building will be in (upcoming month). How will you prepare and plan for that inservice day?

Skills

- How do you know you are doing a good job of listening to someone?
- How important are deadlines for you? How do you feel when others do not meet deadlines?
- Describe how you organize your work day and week.
- What does a typical day look like?
- If we could shadow you for a day as a principal/AP, what would we be likely to see? How would you/do you typically structure your time, activities and priorities?
- Our staff is accustomed to an involved and supportive principal. What would “visibility” and involvement mean to you in your school as principal?
- What kinds of interaction would we see between you and our students?
- When bring about a change in your school, what process would you employ? What are vital parts of the change process? Give an example of a change effort you initiate and what did you learn from that effort?
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- Effective buildings have effective communication. What communication strategies would you initiate with teachers? classified? students? parents?

- How would you organize your administrative team so as to ensure effective communication and administration of the school?
- An effective principal maintains excellent communication with the parent community. What have you done to connect with and involve parents in your school? In your answer please include how you involve parents from low income and minority populations.
- What steps do you take to de-escalate angry parents?

Budget and Building Needs

- What experience have you had with budget allocations and expenditures for the building?
- How would you go about supporting curriculum and staff development with a small building budget and little monetary support from the district level?
- If you were given \$50,000 to spend at our school, what priorities would you use to determine how you would spend the money?
- We are beginning a process to build a new elementary school. What do you see as your role in supporting the project?

Vision and Future Aspirations

- What is your vision of this school in five years?
- How would you measure the success of this school?
- What would be your short- and long-term goals for this school?
- Your first thirty (30) days at the start of school—what would be your priorities, areas of focus, things to learn and do?
- What do you hope to accomplish the first year as principal here?
- What are your future career aspirations? What do you see yourself doing in 5 years? 10 years?
- After your career as a principal, what do you want people to remember most about you? (What do you want to be remembered for?)
- If hired, what would you do between now and the end of June? during the summer? the first six weeks of new school year?
- If hired, what are some immediate steps you would take to insure a smooth and effective transition into this position?
- If hired, how will you go about learning about your school, colleagues and community?

- What would you do to help make a smooth transition to this new position?
- Your first several weeks in this new position will be important to your success. What are some of the things you would pay attention to and do in your first four weeks? Why?
- What would you do in your first 30 days to assess the school's strengths and weaknesses? From that, how would you establish your priorities for your first year as principal/AP? How would you go about establishing positive relationships with students, staff, parents and the community?
- Imagine that you receive this position. What will be your initial steps to assume leadership with the staff and with parents between now and the end of August? What would be your key activities during your first year?

Situational Questions

- Please discuss the strategies you would use when:
 - A parent you are meeting with begins to exhibit a great deal of anger.
 - A teacher has clearly violated a policy or procedure.
 - Two teachers share with you a concern about another teacher's classroom management practices.
 - Planning your opening day staff meeting as a new building leader.
 - A student reports to you that another student is harassing her.
 - The athletic director reports to you that several starting basketball players were at a party last weekend (and the state tournament is this weekend.)
 - A teacher shares with you she has evidence a student cheated on an assignment.
- A parent calls you, extremely angry, to tell you that she has spoken with her son's teacher on several occasions about the instructional practices in the room. She wants to observe the teacher in the classroom by becoming a volunteer. What do you do?
- A parent calls you, extremely angry, to tell you that he has spoken with his son's teacher on several occasions about the instructional practices in the room. He says the teacher is nice enough on the phone but simply ignores him in practice. He is demanding to have his student moved to another classroom. What do you do?
- The parent of an ESL student comes to school very upset, saying that the bus driver told students they would get a bus ticket if they speak Spanish on the bus. How would you handle that?
- A natural parent tells you that she and her husband are (1) separated or (2) divorced; she does not want her spouse/ex-spouse to contact the child(ren). Explain your actions under both circumstances.
- After going through several interventions and discipline steps, a student with chronic discipline problems receives short term suspension for fighting on the playground. The parent denies there is a problem and

disagrees with the suspension, telling you that you can't discipline the student without parent approval. How would you respond?

- During the day you made a judgment call based on detailed input from a teacher and administered disciplinary action to a student. The next day the child's parent arrives in an extremely hostile mood and wants to discuss the actions of the previous day. During the discussion with this parent, you realize the parent's point is correct. Share with us what actions you would take.
- You've just come back from a holiday and one of your staff has not returned. They are out sick for another week. You find out they are on a ski trip. What do you do?
- It is early May and a mom is in the lobby with her child. She wants to sit in every 4th grade classroom. What would you do?

Closing Questions

- Why should we hire you?
- What would you bring to this school/position that is unique?
- What makes you stand out as a candidate for this position?
- What interests you in this position?
- What do you value and prioritize?
- What information did we not hear from you during this interview you would want us to know as we begin making our decision?
- What else would you like us to know about you as we make our decision?
- How will you make a difference?
- What questions do you have for us?

Questions You Might Ask the Interview Team

- What are you looking for in the person you hire?
- What do you see as the largest opportunity the new principal will have in assuming leadership?