

Principal Interview Questions

The Bonus 5 - With Explanation and Suggestions

I ask at least 2 of these 5 questions in each interview. They have very specific purposes, and how a candidate responds tells me a lot about what they'll bring to the culture.

1. What is the last education leadership thing you read? How has it changed your practice?

It's amazing the number of applicants who haven't read anything recent or can't speak to exactly how they've chosen to apply (or not) the content. Leaders must embody continuous learning and improvement.

2. The district is prepared to allocate an additional \$100,000 to move student achievement in our school. Based on your review of the data, how should we use this?

This immediately tells you if a candidate has reviewed student achievement data. It then also gets at exactly how they link spending to priorities. If you want to know someone's true priorities, follow the money.

3. You are selected for this principal job. You find out that one of the teachers you now supervise interviewed and was not selected. How do you handle it?

This question isn't about the exact answer, but rather to see how the candidate takes on relationships and leadership challenges. Can they establish leadership while also empowering others?

4. Describe the most ineffective leader you've worked under. What made them ineffective?

I'm looking for the candidate to have observed and reflected on other leaders and how it may impact their leadership. Also, can they discuss this situation without being unprofessional or attacking another professional. Finally, I often follow-up this question with "How did you help make them better?" This often throws candidates for a loop, and is a great way to assess their ability to accept responsibility.

5. After an intense debate in our leadership group, we make a decision you disagree with. You are charged with implementing it in your school anyway. Describe how you would communicate the decision.

Can you work effectively as a team member? It is cheap leadership to push off decisions on others in most circumstances. Effective candidates demonstrate the ability to communicate the positive reasons for a decision. One of my favorite answers ever explicitly said, "If I believe it is harming my students, I will resign" then went on to list how they'd implement anything else that didn't despite disagreement. This is leadership courage.

The Full List of 201 Principal Interview Questions

These questions are intentionally listed in a random, uncategorized order. They've been compiled from interview question banks I've used or gathered, and lists of real questions I've been asked.

Enjoy - I hope they help you prepare!

1. Tell us about yourself. (Yes, it's trite but this still opens way too many interviews. Use it to your advantage and have a tight answer that delivers a few key messages the team will remember.)
2. Describe your vision of what a truly effective (elementary/middle/high) school would look like.
3. How would you describe your leadership style?
4. What motivated you to want to become a school principal?
5. A student enrolls in your school. During the process the student (and or parents) disclose that the student is moving as part of the process of changing gender identification. What is your response?
6. As a principal, what is your current role in the development and implementation of curriculum in the school?
7. If you could describe an effective school principal in just three words, what would they be?
8. If you get this job, what would be the first thing you would do?
9. Paraeducators and other support staff often feel like second-class citizens in schools. How would you fix this?
10. How would this school look different in 5 years under your leadership?
11. What experience do you have with school budgets, school site councils, and working with district council members?
12. What do you expect of teachers and staff members?
13. We expect school leaders to follow the union contract closely. What experience do you have with union contracts?
14. How do you empower the teachers under your charge?
15. Tell us about a situation where you had a student who was a threat to his peers and staff members. How did you handle the situation?
16. A group of students lodges a complaint against a teacher. How would you handle the situation?
17. If hired, what are steps would you take to to create a smooth transition into the role?
18. If the spring music festival were in rehearsal and an argument occurred between the instrumental and vocal teachers about the use of facilities, how would you resolve the disagreement?
19. If a teacher had classroom management problems, how would you work with that teacher to improve the situation?
20. During arrival in the morning you hear a school bus driver yelling at students on the bus. What do you do?
21. If a student reported to you that he/she had received uncomfortable sexual advances from a staff member, what action would you take?

22. How do you evaluate instructional programs?
23. As a teacher, how did you ensure that your instructional pace was sufficient enough to cover all of the curriculum standards before the end of the school year?
24. Have you lead or participated on a curriculum development team?
25. What makes for effective schoolwide discipline?
26. A parent demands their students be assigned to a different teacher. How do you respond?
27. What classroom management strategies worked for you?
28. Describe your experience with managing a school budget.
29. What experience do you have with increasing parental engagement in a school?
30. How is parent engagement different than involvement?
31. What types of student assessment are most effective? Why?
32. Have you worked with students in this age range before? Tell us about your experiences.
33. Are you comfortable with giving presentations and speeches to community stakeholders? Tell us about one you've given.
34. Tell us about a situation where you had to apply your knowledge of school law. How did it turn out?
35. What type of adult culture do you want to build in our school?
36. If a child is acting out, at what point do you involve their parents.
37. How would you work to increase the school's relationship with the community?
38. Do you have any leadership experience?
39. What is your vision for our school?
40. One teacher in the building is referring students for discipline at a high rate. What do you do?
41. How do you stay current with emerging trends in the field of education?
42. What is your impression of our school? In what areas can we improve?
43. Tell us about a time when you had to make a decision that you knew would be unpopular.
44. How would you deal with someone who consistently shows up negatively in staff meetings?
45. What is your ideal discipline policy and how might you develop that?
46. What did you learn most from your previous Principal?
47. What is your equity stance?
48. How might you deal with an upset parent who wants you to make a decision that supports their child but is against your values and/or takes away from an underserved group of students?
49. What are some ways you have dealt with challenges, and how did you find solutions?
50. What support do you need from district administrators to be successful?
51. What advice would you give to a new teacher?
52. Describe a time you made the wrong decision.
53. What advice would you give to a veteran teacher in need of improvement?
54. How do you de-escalate a student?
55. Give some examples of how you have communicated with parents of challenging students.
56. What would be your ideal school environment, and how would you encourage that kind of culture?

57. Explain your experience with professional learning communities and how you have used data to promote student achievement.
58. What biases do you bring to this position?
59. How do you work to mitigate the effect of bias on your leadership?
60. What is your philosophy of education assessment?
61. What experience do you have with hiring teachers and other critical staff members?
62. What do you think is missing from schools?
63. Some teachers feel like they don't receive enough support from their principal. How would you address their concerns?
64. Tell us about a situation where you had to hand out negative feedback to a veteran teacher. How did they take it?
65. Explain how you would ensure all students and community members are included in learning.
66. What is your philosophy of teaching?
67. What advice would you offer teachers whom you are supervising?
68. Describe a creative, original, innovative idea that you have implemented in your school.
69. What are two or three significant issues facing educators in our state, and how do you plan to address these if you become our principal?
70. When is it acceptable to put hands on a student?
71. Why do you want to be a principal (assistant principal)?
72. How would you work with your new teachers?
73. What do you think is the toughest challenge in working with a teacher who needs remediation?
74. Conflict-resolution and communication are important parts of school leadership. Can you give examples of how you have successfully managed difficult situations at school?
75. How would you lead a school-wide initiative expected for an entire district?
76. What questions, clarifications, or concerns do you have for us?
77. How would you implement a one-to-one technology initiative at the (high/middle/elementary) school level?
78. Describe a time you began a new program at your school. What steps did you follow to make this successful?
79. Are you comfortable making budget cuts, monitoring the budget, and reallocation fiscal resources to address student needs?
80. What experience do you have with managing school buildings and facilities?
81. Are you familiar with school safety protocols?
82. How do you build a positive school culture or climate? Give examples of how you would do that here.
83. Describe the way you interact with stakeholders in the community?
84. How do you handle relationships with direct supervisors even when you may not always agree?
85. How do you recruit and maintain quality teachers and staff members?
86. Why do you want this position? What motivates you to want to be a site principal?

87. Explain how you would build positive relationships with leaders across sites while working together for district-wide goals?
88. This school has a heavy union presence. How will you handle that?
89. Describe your philosophy of education.
90. If you have a life goal, how does this position fit into your program to meet that goal?
91. What experience do you have using Improvement Science?
92. Please take a few minutes to tell us about your education, your teaching, and administrative experience, and yourself. Who and what are you?
93. Besides work, what do you do with your time?
94. As an Assistant Principal, what strengths would you bring to the administration of this school?
95. What are your biggest weaknesses as a building administrator? How do you plan to alleviate or eliminate those weaknesses?
96. What problem-solving skills and techniques have you used successfully?
97. What is the place of unions in education?
98. Please describe a problem and the skills used to solve it.
99. What are your greatest strengths as a building admin? How do you know these are your greatest strengths?
100. Why have you applied for this position? Why should we select you rather than any of the other candidates who have applied?
101. If you wanted to bring about a change in your school, what process would you employ to insure a successful change?
102. Give an example of a change you have implemented or been involved in.
103. How would you organize your faculty and staff meetings?
104. What is your opinion concerning the establishment of minimum performance levels for movement to the next grade level?
105. How do you know you will fit into this position effectively?
106. What is individualized instruction and what is its place in a school instruction program?
107. What is your experience with inclusive leadership?
108. Where is one area where you will need some coaching and support?
109. What are some advantages and disadvantages to individualized instruction?
110. What do you know about the PBIS framework?
111. If you were appointed principal of a building in which the faculty/staff morale was poor, what actions would you take?
112. When should a student be retained at their current grade?
113. How does a school administrator affect curriculum implementation?
114. What do you think is the proper role of paraprofessionals in the instructional program? What leeway do you think a principal should have in utilizing paraprofessionals in the instructional program?
115. What is your viewpoint concerning student involvement in curriculum development?
116. What experience do you have with collective bargaining?
117. Please explain how you view the media specialist's role in the educational program of your

school.

118. What is your process for helping new and novice teachers improve their instruction?
119. In analyzing test score data from your school, you notice a higher percentage of African American and Hispanic students in the lower quartile. What is your course of analysis and action?
120. What is your view of student government. What do you believe is the best relationship to establish and maintain between the ASB and the administrators?
121. How have you been involved in extracurricular activities?
122. A student tells you they were hit by their father at home yesterday. What steps do you follow?
123. Please share priorities for a three-year site improvement. What specific goals, actions, and outcomes would you propose?
124. Give examples of your supervision, evaluation, and accountability standards in managing highly effective teachers and staff members.
125. How do you include all groups in a school community in the education and support for students?
126. If you were a guest at a local club in your school district and were asked to give a brief talk about the impact of the excellence studies on education, what points would you stress?
127. Time is a scarce resource. How do you manage time to ensure that you are a peak performer?
128. What does the word integrity mean to you, and how does integrity manifest itself as you carry out your professional responsibilities?
129. From a principal's perspective, what does it mean to monitor the educational program of a school? How do you do it in a way that is acceptable to your staff?
130. If you visited a school and determined that site-based decision-making was alive and well, how would you know it?
131. We are concerned about developing nurturing, challenging, and disciplined environment in our schools. What specific things do you like to see happen in a school in order for that to occur?
132. Describe an effective teacher evaluation system.
133. What makes for an effective parent organization?
134. What is the purpose and value of extra activities to students and the community? Go beyond athletics only.
135. What do we need to do to empower staff to be truly effective agents for change?
136. What teaching methods do you find bother you a great deal?
137. What do you enjoy about listening to people?
138. Describe a situation that you handled recently that required great sensitivity and tact.
139. How do you define self-esteem, and how do you build and enhance self-esteem in your staff?
140. What are norms, and how might they be used to enhance decision making at the school site?

141. Describe how you would lead a meeting in which you know that all participants have had numerous heated arguments and disagreements about the central topic of the meeting.
142. Describe one person you most admire, and say why you admire that person.
143. What words would your best friend use to describe you?
144. What words would someone who disliked you use to describe you?
145. What variables in a school often stifle peak performance in its staff?
146. We often hear descriptions of “centralized ends and decentralized means.” What does that term mean to you?
147. What do the concepts of quality, equality, and equity mean to you? What have you done in the past to enhance each concept in schools?
148. How do you feel about the evaluation of staff, and what do you feel must be done in order for the process to be mutually beneficial?
149. If you were to ask someone to facilitate a group process in your building, what specific qualities would you look for in the person you chose?
150. How do we develop an atmosphere of high expectations for self and others?
151. Is everything we do in education that adds value to a child’s education measurable and/or observable? What are the exceptions, if any?
152. If you were hiring a new administrative assistant, what questions would you ask applicants for the position? Why?
153. Are we trying to do too much or too little in education? If so, what should we abandon or add?
154. What makes you ready to move from being an assistant principal to become a principal?
155. What is your vision? How will people know it?
156. How do you balance a sense of urgency with the need for inclusive process?
157. What do you think our school needs to make the next jump?
158. How does your racial, gender, and class identity influence your leadership?
159. Someone once said, “Go slow so you can go fast.” What is your reaction to that statement?
160. What is it like to take a risk in a school? How do you feel about risk taking on the part of yourself and your staff?
161. Describe something that you have tried and have failed at. What did you learn from that experience?
162. What motivates you personally and professionally?
163. There is a growing concern that we are using only a small part of our collective potential in schools. What operational essentials must be in place if we are to maximize our collective potential?
164. Why is visioning so important personally and professionally?
165. If you could take a year off and write a book, what would the title of your book be and what would be the essence of the message?
166. What was the last book on education that you read?
167. If you were to go to your last school a month after you left and asked the staff what your legacy had been, what would they say?

168. Do you speak multiple languages?
169. Describe a recent professional conflict you had and indicate how it was resolved.
170. How would you delegate responsibilities to other administrators and staff members to ensure the success of the many activities in the school?
171. What qualities would you look for when hiring new teachers on your campus?
172. Describe how you would encourage the participation and involvement of parents in your school.
173. What would be the role and expectations of the counseling program, particularly in the area of student discipline?
174. How would you work with a site-based school improvement team to develop an effective school plan, including a strong evaluation component to measure success?
175. Principal positions require intense time-management. Please give examples of how you organize your day to meet the various demands and commitments required as a school principal.
176. Describe the process that you would use to develop a school budget.
177. As the new principal on a campus, what leadership skills would you use to build your team from existing staff?
178. What would an ideal remediation plan look like?
179. Describe your administrative self.
180. New principals are often judged by the way they handle student discipline. If you could design your own student discipline program, what would it look like?
181. What do you think the keys to a successful principalship are?
182. How would you set up an elementary reading program?
183. Tell us about yourself and your work with diverse populations.
184. If you were to be selected for this job, what would be the first steps you would take to determine the equity challenges in your school?
185. What initiatives have you designed or lead to address students who are reading significantly below grade level?
186. How would you build a governance structure that fosters a collaborative environment?
187. How will you govern? Who will you involve?
188. How will you distribute leadership in your new role?
189. In your opinion, what is the most powerful indicator of student success?
190. How do you lead a strong, experienced staff to collect, analyze, and use data for student learning?
191. Describe how you coach, mentor, and evaluate teachers. Explain the steps you would take in working with an underperforming teacher.
192. What does a racially affirming environment look like?
193. How do you determine the culture where adults work in school?
194. As a new leader, how would you propose to shift the culture from adult centered to student centered?
195. What strengths and weaknesses do you bring to this position that will assist you in linking

with the community? The district office?

196. Develop a metaphor to describe your philosophy of teaching and learning.
197. Define what integrity means to you. Share an example with us of when you have been out of integrity.
198. Describe a student that you have worked with in the past who has demonstrated resilience and tenacity.
199. What is your greatest fear in assuming this new role?
200. There may be some questions you hoped we would ask you but we have not, if so, what are those questions and what answers do you have for them? Why are those questions so important to you?
201. What questions do you have for us about this position? (Be prepared with good relevant questions)