

INTERVIEWING

A successful interview depends upon your skill to help the applicant talk spontaneously, using open-ended questions. Specific questions evoking life/work examples of how the applicant handles work related situations and how this person has performed the same or similar jobs should yield important information. Questions based on past behavior is a good way to predict future behavior.

I. Interview Preparation

The better part of the interview process occurs prior to any contact with an applicant. An investment in preparing for the interview in the right way will serve you well in the future. A result of poor preparation may be the wrong hire, unnecessary turnover, employment misunderstandings and litigation. Please take the time to prepare in the following ways:

Review the job description. It is important to have a current job description listing essential skills and tasks. Any questions you might have about the position and job responsibilities should be settled prior to interviewing. Using the essential skills, knowledge, and qualifications outlined in the job description as a basis for questions will help to offset any discrimination or bias claims you may encounter. Human Resources can help you draft a job description if one has not been written and more information on job descriptions may be found elsewhere in this chapter of the Administrator's Handbook.

Prepare Recruitment Materials: Prepare internal job postings (see process outlined in this Section of the Administrator's Handbook) and if needed, draft an ad or provide information for a SchoolSpring listing for Central Office. As an aside, it is worth the effort to network with colleagues in and out of the school community about potential candidates. The time you invest in networking may help reduce time spent on unqualified candidates or conducting unnecessary interviews.

Formulate questions that are job related. The purpose in asking questions is to create an opportunity to measure a person's potential ability and desire to perform the job. Therefore, develop open-ended questions that will yield specific data such as examples of the candidate's skills and behaviors. When formulating questions, focus on two areas:

- **Does the candidate have the technical/professional skills to successfully do the job?**

Identify specific technical and/or professional *skills* required to perform the essential functions of the job such as job or subject knowledge, preparing lesson plans, delivering subject matter, computer skills, or other relevant abilities.

- **Does the candidate demonstrate appropriate behaviors to meet the needs of the job?**

Identify *personal characteristics* that are essential to perform the job such as: collaboration, adaptability, interpersonal skills, communications, ability to manage multiple tasks, decision-making, coping skills, etc.

It is important to develop a set of questions for each job that you have available. The same set of questions must be used for all applicants that are being considered for the same job during the same interview process. Any deviation to this may result in a discrimination claim against *you and the*

school. When preparing questions, type them out on a page leaving enough space between each question to allow for your notes arising from the applicant's response. Recording verbatim, rather than interpreting their responses, will help to provide necessary documentation that will support your factual decision. Avoid making any discriminatory notations such as "pregnant" "has kids" "doesn't have car" etc.

Remember to involve interview committee members in developing appropriate questions.

Questions that are posed on the basis of any of these protected classes (gender, race, age, national origin, religion) or other non-job-related basis could be considered discriminatory. Prohibited interview questions, for example, would be asking women applicants different questions than male applicants, or asking different questions of married female applicants than single female applicants. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has issued interview question guidelines that identify such interview questions that, if used in making a selection decision, would have a discriminatory effect by screening out minority applicants, female candidates, older applicants and individuals with a disability. There are no job-related considerations that would justify asking a question based on the categories identified below:

- **Race:** Examples of discriminatory questions include: What is your national origin? What is your surname? Where are your parents from? Who are your family? What are the names of your relatives?
- **Religion:** The only consideration that would justify asking about religious convictions is if the organization is a religious institution, which may give preference to individuals of their own religion. Examples of discriminatory questions include: What religion are you? Or, an inquiry into applicant's religious denomination, religious affiliations, church, parish, pastor or any religious holidays observed.
- **Gender:** Since women are no longer protected under state wage/hour laws (limiting the number of hours worked or lifting restrictions) it is unlawful to deny a female applicant employment because she is pregnant, or planning to have a child at some future date. Avoid questions regarding height or weight restrictions as these questions may support gender or national origin discrimination claims unless their relationship to specific job requirements can be demonstrated
- **Marital status:** Any questions such as, Are you married? What is your marital status? Or, any inquiry into the number of children, childcare arrangements is not appropriate. Job related questions as to availability to work are okay, such as: Can you work the hours the job requires? Are you able to work the shift(s) required of the work? The job requires work on weekends and/or holidays; are you able to meet this expectation?

If you need to contact a former employer, you may ask: Have you ever been known by another name? However, a legal liability may still exist if an applicant claims that a determination of ethnicity occurred and consequently wasn't hire because of it.

- **Age:** Under the EEOC Age Discrimination Interpretive Rules, a request for date of birth on the employment application is permissible, with an appropriate disclaimer shown. Generally, this is not asked on applications. Any recruiting effort that is age-biased such as "recent graduate", or any question during the interview process that deters employment because of age is unlawful. The Age Discrimination Act of 1967 bars discrimination against persons age 40 or over.

- **Arrest & Conviction Records:** Questions relating to an applicant's arrest record are improper, while questions of an applicant's conviction record may be asked, if job related. The EEOC and many states prohibit use of arrest records for employment decisions because they are inherently biased against applicants in protected classes. The employer must establish a business necessity for use of an applicant's conviction record in its employment decision. In establishing business necessity, the employer must consider three factors to justify use of a conviction record:
 1. Nature and gravity of the offense for which convicted;
 2. Amount of elapsed time since the applicant's conviction and or completion of sentence, and
 3. The nature of the job in question as it relates to the nature of the offense committed.

- **National Origin:** An applicant may not be asked where he/she was born, or where his/her parents were born. You may ask if the applicant can provide proof, if hire, of eligibility to work in the U.S.

- **Financial Status:** An interviewer should not ask if the applicant owns or rents a home or car, or if wages have been previously garnished, unless financial considerations for the job in question exist.

- **Military Record:** Any questions about the type of discharge the applicant received from military service may not be asked. However, it is okay to ask whether or not the applicant served in the military, period of service, discharge rank and type of training and work experience received while in the service.

- **Disability:** The applicant may not be asked whether or not they have a disability. You may only ask whether or not the applicant can perform the duties of the job in question

Review the application and/or resume. After identifying the skills, abilities, and personal characteristics that are needed for the job, you are ready to review each candidate. Some things that will help to identify whether the applicant has the technical and/or professional skills to do the job include:

- Actual work experience,
- Education/training and appropriate licensure/credentials,
- Work related extra-curricular activities.

Some things that will help to identify whether the applicant has the personal characteristics to do the job are:

- The presentation of the resume: neatness, correct spelling, grammar, and punctuation, and completeness.
- Demonstrated communication style and skill through the cover letter.
- A stable work history and legitimate reasons for leaving past employment.
- No problem absences.
- The expectations of the applicant (hours, salary, work location, work load and duties) reasonably meet the expectations and budgetary criteria for the position.

Review resumes/applications and create three levels of candidates, labeling them as “A,” “B,” and “C”.

- **The “A” Group** will have all or closely fit the attributes you seek.
- **The “B” Group** will have most or some of the attributes you seek, and
- **The “C” Group** will have a few of the attributes but could potentially demonstrate an ability to do the job.

The candidates that do not meet the qualifications for the job should receive notification from the hiring supervisor/principal or hiring committee that they will not be considered further for the position(s).

Consider Legal Limitations:

The Americans With Disabilities Act: In the course of the interview process, you may encounter a qualified applicant with a disability. To make the most of the meeting and enable the opportunity for employment, the following tips might be helpful:

1. Describe the job site (location, physical surrounding, etc.). Offer a tour of the work site if that is helpful. Anticipate questions about areas the person may be interested in but may feel awkward asking about, such as the lunchroom and the rest room.
2. Just like all interviews, use the official job description as a common basis for the discussion. Stick to the facts and cover the work functions you want done on the job. State clearly your requirements for regular and reliable attendance. Focus on the end product, not simply the way it is done now or has been done in the past. Discuss the quality, quantity and timeliness of work that you will expect.
3. Ask if the person can perform all job functions. If not, is the person unable to do the essential functions and/or any nonessential ones? If the person believes there may be work related problems as a result of the disability, rely on his/her personal experience and ask if there is another way to accomplish the function or the job. Find out such things as: would special equipment help? What changes to the physical components or location would be necessary?
4. Document the interview, just as you would any other interview, with enough details to be able to evaluate the candidate’s skills fairly and to create ideas for accommodations and an opportunity for a better work environment.
5. Determine if the candidate has the skills to perform the job and if reasonable accommodations can be made. Seek the assistance of the Superintendent and others for input.

Areas to Avoid:

1. Do not discuss the existence, nature or severity of a person’s physical or mental impairment even when characteristics such as missing limbs are apparent. One should not assume, based solely on physical appearance, that the person is unable to perform the job functions.

2. Do not ask the applicant if they have a disability that will prevent them from performing the job. The point is to determine through job-related questions if they have the skills to perform the job and to be willing to making reasonable accommodations to help them reach potential.
3. Do not ask about a person's health (mental or physical) or that of a family member, or if he/she will need to take leave for personal treatment or the health care of someone in the family. The focus should be on outcomes and expectations of the job.
4. Do not discuss the progress of an illness even if the person volunteers information about a medical condition, its remission, or treatment. Do not ask if a person has or had a drug or alcohol problem. Do not ask about a person's workers' compensation history. Again, the focus is on determining if the skills are present and setting job outcome and expectations.
5. Do not commit to any accommodation on the spot. (Any accommodations must first be discussed with the Superintendent and others to determine reasonableness and then approved by the district.)
6. As for all interviews, do not discuss irrelevant things, such as the person's age, dependents, and other personal matters. Instead, only talk about the job and the person's qualifications for that specific job.
7. If the disability has a bearing on the job, it may be discussed after a conditional job offer has been made. This note refers to all sorts of employment situations and issues; for example, leave requests and approval.

Bona Fide Occupational Qualification (BFOQ): A bona fide occupational qualification is a specific exemption to a claim for discrimination. It is not unlawful for an employer to make a selection based on a factor covered in a protected class if:

1. The BFOQ is reasonably necessary to the operation. Such examples would be a female coach in a woman's locker room, a specific religious belief for clergy, a sighted person for a driving position or a person over the age of 18 licensed and legally able to operate heavy equipment.
2. The BFOQ is based on reasonable factors other than just the protected class and that all or substantially all those excluded from the job are, in fact disqualified. The members of the protected class who are excluded possess a disqualifying trait that could not be ascertained except by reference to the protected class.

The way in which questions are phrased is very important. It is only permissible if there is a bona fide occupational qualification. Don't ask the question if it is not job related. The following are some example of how to ask questions the right way.

Instead of Asking:	Ask
Are you an U.S. citizen?	Are you legally eligible to work in the U.S. either as a citizen or by authorization from Homeland Security and the Labor Department?
How old are you? What is your date of birth?	Are you over the age of eighteen? If hired, can you provide proof that you are over age 18?
Do you have any children? What hours and days can you work? Are there specific times that you cannot work?	Are you able to work the required work schedule?
What clubs or organizations do you belong to? List all clubs, societies and lodges to which you belong Are you a union member?	What professional groups do you belong to that may be relevant to your ability to perform this job?
What disabilities do you have?	Are you able to perform the essential functions of the job to which you are applying? (Be sure you tell the applicant what the essential functions are)
Do you smoke?	We have a no smoking policy -can you adhere to it?
Do you have a car?	Are you able to work at this location?
What type of discharge did you receive?	What type of education, training, work experience did you receive while in the military?
What is your native language?	If the job requires additional languages, inquiry into the languages the applicant speaks and writes fluently is permissible.
Any inquiries into personal information.	Who is the person to be notified in case of an emergency? Only ask after employment is accepted.
When did you graduate from high school or college?	Please furnish proof that you have obtained the credentials required of this position.
Have you ever been arrested?	Have you ever been fired or asked to resign a position? If a license is required for the position, has any licensing agency ever disciplined you or revoked your license?

II. The Interview Process:

It is important to follow the established hiring protocols to make the most of your time and to avoid unnecessary legal claims against you, the district, and the supervisory union.

Screening Applicants: The purpose of screening applicants through a telephone interview is to determine, with a limited time investment, whether or not the candidates are qualified or have an

appropriate level of interest in the position. Starting with your “A” candidates, determine the applicants: interest level, work hour expectations, job expectations, and salary needs. Explore things not listed on the application/resume and quickly evaluate education and experience. Get a feel for the candidate’s attitude and “fit” for the school. The following information may also be important to find out:

- Is the applicant under contract and do they have permission to interview for a position?
- Are they able and willing to work the available schedule?
- Are they able and willing to work at the location?
- Verify that they do have the credentials and experience that is required.
- What is their comfort level in working with student in the particular grade or setting?
- What special knowledge/interest/connections do they have of the school?
- What questions they might have?

It is important to help reinforce/create a professional, courteous impression of the school.

- **Identify yourself** at the beginning and end of the conversation. Be sure to give the spelling of your name and provide your telephone number.
- **Reschedule the call** at a mutually acceptable time if it isn’t a convenient time to talk for the applicant.
- **Provide information on what will be the next steps** by either scheduling an on-site interview, mutually agreeing that it is not the right “fit,” or sharing the decision that the candidate does not meet the essential requirements for the job. This information will eliminate unnecessary calls, confusion, or embarrassment from the candidate. If you’re unsure of their status, state that you have other candidates you want to contact before you select candidates for on-site interviews. Let them know when you will get back to them, and do it.

The on-site interview: Once you have reviewed/screened all qualified applicants, select the top candidates for an on-site interview. The on-site interview will serve many purposes such as:

- Allowing the candidate(s) to see the workplace.
- Spending time questioning the candidate on important, job-related points.
- Evaluating, first hand, the candidate’s skills and personality.
- You may also ask for writing samples, or other types of work samples during the interview.

Steps to Take:

1. Create an interview team (ideally 2-4 persons) who will provide unbiased, informed opinions about the candidates. Include a mix of board members, parents, students, teachers, administrators, or staff members from the school whenever available and appropriate.
2. Each member of the interview team should be aware of their interview responsibilities and be prepared with established questions.
3. Plan at least an hour for each interview and sufficient time to evaluate the candidate immediately following the meeting.

4. Make the candidate comfortable; small talk helps but remember to avoid subject areas that may be considered discriminatory or infringe on personal rights. The more open the candidate feels, the more forthcoming the information and the better to make a decision.
5. Focus attention on this “human resource” investment and concentrate on what is being said.
6. Use your listening skills-listen to the total meaning, what is being said as well as how it is being said, tone of voice, word choice, and proper grammatical usage.
7. Be prepared to answer such questions as: the school, culture, job requirements, and benefits.
8. Retain all interview notes in a personal, confidential file for three years. This is the time limit allowable to bring any claim against you, the school and/or the supervisory union. Of course keep them longer if there is a chance for any litigation.
9. Use the same questions for each candidate, regardless of their status as an internal or external candidate. Make room to take notes on these forms. For team interviews, each member should have prepared questions and avoid deviating from the script.
10. Questions must be job-related only. No other questions should be asked. Keep your comments and small talk general.
11. Don’t allow the conversation to be brought into areas that are questionable. If the applicant brings up areas of concern, note that the applicant raised the issue or made the comment, rather than you.
12. Keep prejudices and biases out of the hiring decision. Remember that we are “An equal Employment Opportunity Employer.”
13. If you’re not sure if it’s appropriate to ask, then don’t ask it.
14. Be aware of and keep informed on employment issues.

Set a Tone

The right interview environment will help to focus everyone’s attention on the candidate and to put the team in control of the situation by either creating or alleviating pressure on the candidate.

- Reserve a quiet space
- Be attentive to the surroundings: lighting, seating, climate, windows, cluttered desks,
- Offer a beverage when available: tea, coffee, or at least water.
- Guard against your own prejudices and/or biases.
- Avoid distractions and avoid interrupting the candidate’s train of thought.
- Schedule enough time, put your phone on forward and let other know not to interrupt you.

Conducting the Interview

1. Explain to the candidate the purpose of the interview and that the team will be taking notes throughout the interview, to ensure that accurate information on the interviewee's skills is obtained. Take verbatim notes and avoid interpreting the candidate's answers.
2. Begin the interview with rapport-building questions to open the interview on a friendly, conversational tone. Encourage descriptive answers by asking open-ended questions. Ask for specific examples of past behaviors and situations. Remember that it takes time to recall examples from the past so be encouraging and tolerate silence. Use the silent pauses to add to notes or note areas for follow up or clarification.
3. If the team is unable to gain a valid or balance profile of the candidate's strengths and weaknesses, ask probing questions in an effort to seek contrary evidence. Control the interview in order to gain as much job related information as possible. You may have to prod the non-talker and redirect the focus for persons who digress.
4. To avoid discrimination claims, make sure all questions pertain to the job. Ask only bon-fide job related questions and ask the same question for each candidate.
5. It is best to wait until after the interview to provide a copy of the job description. By doing so, it will allow the team to better control the interview and it avoids having the applicants respond in a way that they think you want, rather than answering the direct question.
6. At the end of the interview, provide an opportunity for the candidate to ask questions. Explain the timeframe the hiring decision will be made, as well as how and who will notify them about the decision.

Questions from Interviewees: Applicants will want to determine whether or not they are compatible with the school's culture, policies, work environment and expectations. Some sample questions applicants may ask include:

- What is the mission and strategic goals?
- What is the culture and expectations of the hiring school?
- What is the size of the school and what is the relationship to the supervisory union?
- What types of changes has the District undergone over the last few years and what are the major challenges it faces?
- What opportunities are there for personal and professional growth?
- What benefits are provided?
- What is your supervisory style?

III. Post Interview Process

Rating the Candidate's Interview: Immediately following the interview, use a standard interview evaluation form to objectively rate each candidate on technical/professional skills and personal characteristics. Refer to your notes and use a separate evaluation form for each candidate for each position.

Visiting The Candidate in Their Work Location: An effective way to evaluate a candidate is to visit them in their current work environment. Normally, for teacher and administrator positions, narrow the pool to 2-3 final candidates and arrange to view the candidate at their current work location, to better evaluate their teaching techniques and interpersonal skills. Permission from the school official is, of course, required. Observing candidates on the job helps to see first hand how they interact with others (students, staff, community members), how they manage their time, the classroom, and unexpected events. This is especially helpful in selecting administrators and teaching professionals.

Reference Checking: It is not enough to accept letters of recommendation at face value. Conduct at least three professional reference checks. Formulate questions that will either affirm or question the candidate's abilities using the standard reference-checking format.

Saying "No, thanks..." Applicants deserve to be told the status of their candidacy. When conveying unfavorable information to the applicant, be firm yet tactful when conveying information. Say as little as possible, such as "Thank you for applying. We have chosen another candidate whom will more closely fill the needs of the position."

Remember the old adage that "no good deed goes un-rewarded". Therefore, any comments you make with regards to the candidate's shortcomings may come back to haunt you through a discrimination claim. It is best to remain neutral and allow the candidate to seek out assistance from the library, college resource center or professional job counselor for interview tips and techniques.

IV. Sample Questions

Closed Questions: "Closed" questions evoke a "yes" or "no" answer. Closed questions are good for quickly screening a candidate or for a simple verification or response.

Open Ended Questions: "Open" questions require a thought process and more involved answers. The answers may demonstrate an attitude or opinion. Open questions are good for selection interviews and usually start with "who, what, where, when, how and why." Probing questions are usually open-ended questions and are used to follow up to an introductory open question. Probing questions are asked to search for deeper meaning or clarification. These are good questions to use during an interview as it helps to put the interviewer in control.

Questions You Must Never Ask:

"Loaded" Questions: are ones that could not possibly be answered correctly. If answered either affirmatively or negatively it is always wrong. These types of questions are usually asked when biases are in the way.

"Leading" Questions: are ones that prompt the candidate to respond in a way that is expected by simply regurgitating what has already been stated. There's nothing to learn from the candidate with this type of question.

Topical Sample Questions:

Trust, Honesty, Integrity

- Discuss a time when your integrity was challenged. How did you handle it?
- How would you react if someone asked you to do something unethical?
- Have you ever experienced a loss for doing what was right?
- Have you ever asked for forgiveness for doing something wrong?
- In what work-related situations do you feel honesty would be inappropriate?
- If you saw a co-worker doing something dishonest what would you do?

Personality/Temperament/Ability to Work with Others

- What brings you joy?
- If you had to describe yourself in only three words, what would those words be?
- How would you describe your personality?
- What motivates you the most?
- What will your references say about you?
- Do you consider yourself a risk taker? Describe a situation in which you had to take a risk.
- In what kind of environment would you like to work?
- With what kinds of people would you rather not work?
- What kinds of responsibilities and/or tasks would you like to avoid in your next job?
- What are two or three examples of tasks that you do not particularly enjoy doing? How do you remain motivated to complete those tasks?
- What kinds of people bother you?
- Tell me about a work situation that irritated you.
- Have you ever had to resolve a conflict with a co-worker, student, parent, vendor or client? How did you resolve it?
- Describe the appropriate relationship between a supervisor and subordinates.
- How do you relate to co-workers who are at the same level, above and/or below you?
- Have you worked as a member of teams in the past?
- Share with me when you've had to get cooperation from various groups. What did you do?
- What is your management style? How do you think your subordinates perceive you?
- Have you ever fired anyone? If so, what were the circumstances, and how did you handle it?
- Have you ever had a project returned to you for errors? What effect did this have on you?
- What previous job was the most satisfying and why?
- What job was the most frustrating and why?
- Tell me about the best boss you ever had. What made it great to work for him/her?
- Tell me about the worst boss you ever had. What made it tough to work for him/her?
- Explain a work relationship, what do you owe your employer and what does your employer owe you?

Past Mistakes

- In a previous job, tell me about an objective that you failed to meet and why.
- When is the last time you were criticized? How did you deal with it?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- Tell me about a situation where you "blew it". How did you resolve or correct it?

- Tell me about a situation where you abruptly had to change what you were doing.
- If you could change one decision you made during the past two years, what would that be?
- Tell me about a project that didn't work out the way it should have. What did you do?
- If you had the opportunity to change anything in your career, what would you have done differently?

Creativity/Creative Thinking/Problem Solving

- When was the last time you thought creatively about a problem and how did you solve it?
- What have you done that was innovative?
- What was the wildest idea you had in the past year? What did you do about it?
- Give me an example of when someone brought you a new, odd, or unusual idea. What did you do?
- If you could do anything in the world, what would you do?
- Describe a situation in which you had a difficult work-related problem. How did you solve it?
- What is the most difficult decision you've had to make? How did you arrive at your decision?
- Describe some situations in which you worked under pressure or met deadlines.
- Describe a situation in which you had conflicting deadlines given to you by different people? What did you do?
- What is your approach to solving problems and what works best for you? Give me an example of when you solved a tough problem.
- When taking on a new task, do you like to have a great deal of feedback and supervision at the outset, or do you like to try your own approach?
- You're behind on project that has deadline coming up soon and you have interruptions like a parent seeking to resolve a problem, your boss requesting important information for a meeting in an hour. What do you do?

Miscellaneous Questions

- How do you measure your own success?
- What is the most interesting thing you've done in the past three years?
- What are your short-term and long-term career goals?
- Why should we hire you?
- What responsibilities do you want, and what results do you expect to achieve in your next job?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in a school like ours?
- How did your best manager motivate you to perform well? Why did that method work?
- What is the best thing a previous employer did that you wish everyone did?
- What are you most proud of?
- What is important to you in a job?
- What did you expect to find in our school/position that you don't have now?
- Is there anything you want us to know about you that we haven't discussed?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Interview Questions

(Sample)

Candidate: _____ Date: _____

Position: _____ Interviewer: _____

Review Applicant's Resume: Verify positions held, duties, dates, potential reference names and numbers.

Performance Skill Questions:

1. Organization/Planning:

- How do you organize your work in your present position?
- What happens to your plan when emergencies come up?
- How do you keep track of things?

2. Interaction:

- Tell me about a time when you became involved in a problem faced by a coworker/student/supervisor.
- What part did you play in finding solutions?
- How did it work out?

3. Commitment to Task:

- Have you found it necessary to perform jobs that did not match well with your interests or abilities? Be specific.

4. Coping:

- What types of pressures do you feel on your own job?
- How do you cop with these pressures?

5. Problem solving/Decision Making:

- What has been the toughest problem you've had to solve?
- Describe your method of dealing with it.

6. Initiative:

- Describe a way you have changed your job or gone beyond the scope of your job?

7. General Work Related:

- What have been your biggest contributions to your organization in the last two years?
- What environment/tasks/work hours/people are necessary for you to remain motivated on the job?

Technical/Professional Job Skills: (To be developed by the Interview Team)

1.

2.

3.

4.

Wrap Up Questions:

1. What other job related skills, experiences, or interests do you have that are important for us to hear about?

2. What questions do you have concerning the selection process; the position available or other policies/procedures that we could answer or help you get the answer to?