

# 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 222 Principal Interview Questions

This list of questions has 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!

This year, I've organized these by category to help you find specific areas you may want to target. I suggest practicing randomly at some point - but that's your call.

## *Opening Questions for a Principal Interview*

- 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.*)
- What motivated you to become a school principal?
- What about our school led you to apply to be our leader?
- Why do you want to be a principal (assistant principal)?
- Do you have any leadership experience?
- Have you worked with students in this age range before? Tell us about your experiences.
- What did you learn most from your previous Principal?
- Why do you want this position? What motivates you to want to be a site principal?
- Please take a few minutes to tell us about your education, your teaching, and administrative experience, and yourself. Who and what are you?
- As an Assistant Principal, what strengths would you bring to the administration of this school?
- Besides work, what do you do with your time?
- Why have you applied for this position? Why should we select you rather than any of the other candidates who have applied?
- How do you know you will fit into this position effectively?
- What do you enjoy about listening to people?
- What do you think our school needs to make the next jump?

## *End of the Interview*

- What questions, clarifications or concerns do you have for us?
- There may be some questions you hoped we would ask you but have not. If so, what are those questions and how would you answer them? Why are those questions important to you?
- What questions do you have for us about this position? (Be prepared with good relevant questions)
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## *School Leadership Philosophy and Vision*

- Describe your vision of what a truly effective (elementary/middle/high) school would look like.
- How would you describe your leadership style?
- If you could describe an effective school principal in just three words, what would they be?
- Develop a metaphor to describe your philosophy of teaching and learning.
- Please share priorities for a three-year site improvement. What specific goals, actions, and outcomes would you propose?
- If you get this job, what would be the first thing you would do?
- How would this school look different in 5 years under your leadership?
- If hired, what are steps would you take to create a smooth transition into the role?
- What is your vision for our school?
- What is your impression of our school? In what areas can we improve?
- How would you organize your faculty and staff meetings?
- What is the place of unions in education?
- What do you think is missing from schools?
- How would you lead a school-wide initiative expected for an entire district?
- Describe your philosophy of education.
- If you wanted to bring about a change in your school, what process would you employ to insure a successful change?
- What is your opinion concerning the establishment of minimum performance levels for movement to the next grade level?
- We often hear descriptions of “centralized ends and decentralized means.” What does that term mean to you?
- Are we trying to do too much or too little in education? If so, what should we abandon or add?
- What makes you ready to move from being an assistant principal to become a principal?
- What is your vision? How will people know it?
- Someone once said, “Go slow so you can go fast.” What is your reaction to that statement?
- 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?
- 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?
- Why is visioning so important personally and professionally?
- As the new principal on a campus, what leadership skills would you use to build your team from existing staff?
- What do you think the keys to a successful principalship are?

## *Personal Leadership Growth and Examples*

- Describe your administrative self.
- If you have a life goal, how does this position fit into your program to meet that goal?
- Describe a time you began a new program at your school. What steps did you follow to make this successful?
- Describe a creative, original, innovative idea that you have implemented in your school.
- Conflict-resolution and communication are important parts of school leadership. Can you give examples of how you have successfully managed difficult situations at school?
- Give an example of a change you have implemented or been involved in.
- What are your biggest weaknesses as a building administrator? How do you plan to alleviate or eliminate those weaknesses?
- What problem-solving skills and techniques have you used successfully?
- Where is one area where you will need some coaching and support?
- Please describe a problem and the skills used to solve it.
- What are your greatest strengths as a building admin? How do you know these are your greatest strengths?
- Tell us about a time when you had to make a decision that you knew would be unpopular.
- What are some ways you have dealt with challenges, and how did you find solutions?
- What support do you need from district administrators to be successful?
- Describe a time you made the wrong decision.
- What experience do you have with collective bargaining?
- How have you been involved in extracurricular activities?
- Time is a scarce resource. How do you manage time to ensure that you are a peak performer?
- What does the word integrity mean to you, and how does integrity manifest itself as you carry out your professional responsibilities?
- Describe a situation that you handled recently that required great sensitivity and tact.
- Describe one person you most admire, and say why you admire that person.
- What words would your best friend use to describe you?
- What words would someone who disliked you use to describe you?
- Describe something you have tried and have failed at. What did you learn from the experience?
- What motivates you personally and professionally?
- Describe a recent professional conflict you had and indicate how it was resolved.
- 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?
- Define what integrity means to you. Share an example of when you have been out of integrity.
- Describe a student that you have worked with in the past who has demonstrated resilience and tenacity.

## *Distance Learning / Pandemic Response (Added for 2021)*

- What makes for an effective distance learning program?
- How did you respond to the instructional challenges of the pandemic?
- How do you effectively assess students in a distance learning model?
- What is the correct blend of in-person instruction, individual practice, and online learning?
- During the pandemic, how did you ensure your families had the resources they needed to be successful?
- What supports do staff need to transition to (and from) online instruction to in-person instruction?
- Did you learn anything from providing instruction during the Covid-19 pandemic to improve education for the future?
- Most data indicates a significant learning gap emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic. How will you close that gap for students now?
- What do you feel was the biggest challenge schools faced during 2020?
- If we face another pandemic in the future, how do you think schools should adjust their response?

## *Special Education Principal Interview Questions*

- What are the responsibilities of a school administrator in implementing an Individualized Education Plan?
- What is the inclusion model of special education and how would you implement it at a school?
- How do you effectively integrate special education expectations into the core instructional program?
- Describe your experience in implementing and/or supporting a special education program?
- What steps are important to take to ensure you aren't exposing the school/district to special education liability?
- Please give an example of when special education requirements clashed with a teacher's personal belief. How did you work to resolve it?
- Your background is primarily classroom instruction. How will you work with and support specialists such as speech language pathologists, school psychologists, and occupational / physical therapists?

## *Budget and Facility Operations for School Principals*

- Describe your experience with managing a school budget.
- Are you comfortable making budget cuts, monitoring the budget, and reallocating fiscal resources to address student needs?
- What experience do you have with managing school buildings and facilities?
- Your school is getting frequently tagged by graffiti. What do you do?
- Are you familiar with school safety protocols?
- In a resource-constrained system, how do you balance the physical appearance of the school with the instructional program?
- Describe the process that you would use to develop a school budget.

## *Equity and Social Justice Principal Questions*

- What does a racially affirming school environment look like?
- What is your equity stance?
- 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?
- Describe your understanding of the relationships between equity, diversity, and inclusion.
- One teacher in the building is referring students for discipline at a high rate. What do you do?
- What biases do you bring to this position?
- How do you work to mitigate the effect of bias on your leadership?
- 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?
- How should a school use data to ensure equitable outcomes for students?
- Explain how you would ensure all students and community members are included in learning.
- How does your racial, gender, and class identity influence your leadership?
- What is your viewpoint concerning student involvement in curriculum development?
- 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?
- What role do police officers have in the school community?
- 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?
- Tell us about yourself and your work with diverse populations.
- A parent approaches you with concerns about “CRT” from cable news. How do you respond?
- 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?

## *Curriculum and Instructional Leadership*

- As a principal, what is your current role in the development and implementation of curriculum in the school?
- In your opinion, what is the most powerful indicator of student success?
- How do you lead a strong, experienced staff to collect, analyze, and use data for student learning?
- How do you evaluate instructional programs?
- 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?
- Have you lead or participated on a curriculum development team?
- What types of student assessment are most effective? Why?
- How do you stay current with emerging trends in the field of education?
- Explain your experience with professional learning communities and how you have used data to promote student achievement.
- What initiatives have you designed or led to address students who are reading significantly below grade level?
- What is your philosophy of education assessment?
- What is your philosophy of teaching?
- How would you implement a one-to-one technology initiative at the (high/middle/elementary) school level?
- What is individualized instruction and what is its place in a school instruction program?
- When should a student be retained at their current grade?
- How does a school administrator affect curriculum implementation?
- 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?
- 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?
- What experience do you have using Improvement Science?
- What teaching methods do you find bother you a great deal?
- Is everything we do in education that adds value to a child's education measurable and/or observable? What are the exceptions, if any?
- What are the components of an effective English Language Learner program?
- How would you set up an elementary reading program?

## *School Culture*

- What type of adult culture do you want to build in our school?
- [Paraeducators](#) and other support staff often feel like second-class citizens in schools. How would you fix this?
- How would you deal with someone who consistently shows up negatively in staff meetings?
- What would be your ideal school environment, and how would you encourage that kind of culture?
- How do you build a positive school culture or climate? Give examples of how you would do that here.
- This school has a heavy union presence. How will you handle that?
- What is your experience with inclusive leadership?
- If you were appointed principal of a building in which the faculty/staff morale was poor, what actions would you take?
- If you visited a school and determined that site-based decision-making was alive and well, how would you know it?
- We are concerned about developing a 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?
- How do you define self-esteem, and how do you build and enhance self-esteem in your staff?
- What are norms, and how might they be used to enhance decision making at the school site?
- 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?
- How will you distribute leadership in your new role?
- How do you determine the culture where adults work in school?
- As a new leader, how would you propose to shift the culture from adult centered to student centered?

## *Community and Stakeholder Involvement*

- How do you include all groups in a school community in the education and support for students?
- What experience do you have with increasing parental engagement in a school?
- What strengths and weaknesses do you bring to this position that will assist you in linking with the community?
- How is parent engagement different from parental involvement?
- Are you comfortable with giving presentations and speeches to community stakeholders? Tell us about one you've given.
- How would you work to increase the school's relationship with the community?

- What experience do you have with school site councils, and working with district council members?
- A parent demands their students be assigned to a different teacher. How do you respond?
- Give some examples of how you have communicated with parents of challenging students.
- Describe the way you interact with stakeholders in the community.
- 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?
- What makes for an effective parent organization?
- What is the purpose and value of extra activities to students and the community? Go beyond athletics only.
- How do you balance a sense of urgency with the need for inclusive process?
- Describe how you would encourage the participation and involvement of parents in your school.
- How would you build a governance structure that fosters a collaborative environment?
- How will you govern? Who will you involve?

## *Student Management*

- 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?
- What makes for effective schoolwide discipline?
- 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?
- What classroom management strategies worked for you as a teacher?
- If a child is acting out, at what point do you involve their parents?
- What is your ideal discipline policy and how might you develop that?
- How do you de-escalate a student?
- What do you know about the PBIS framework?
- When is it acceptable to put hands on a student?
- How often and when should students be removed from a classroom?
- What would be the role and expectations of the counseling program, particularly in the area of student discipline?

## *Staff Expectations. Support and Evaluation*

- Describe how you coach, mentor, and evaluate teachers. Explain the steps you would take in working with an underperforming teacher.
- Give examples of your supervision, evaluation, and accountability standards in managing highly effective teachers and staff members.
- What do you expect of teachers and staff members?
- What experience do you have with hiring teachers and other critical staff members?
- 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?
- We expect school leaders to follow the union contract closely. What experience do you have with union contracts?
- A group of students lodges a complaint against a teacher. How would you handle the situation?
- How do you empower the teachers under your charge?
- 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.
- What variables in a school often stifle peak performance in its staff?
- 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?
- What advice would you give to a new teacher? (Stick to professional advice for your answer, but here's my [money advice to a new teacher!](#))
- What advice would you give to a veteran teacher in need of improvement?
- If a teacher had classroom management problems, how would you work with that teacher to improve the situation?
- During arrival in the morning you hear a school bus driver yelling at students on the bus. What do you do?
- If a student reported to you that he/she had received uncomfortable sexual advances from a staff member, what action would you take?
- Some teachers feel like they don't receive enough support from their principal. How would you address their concerns?
- Tell us about a situation where you had to hand out negative feedback to a veteran teacher. How did they take it?
- What advice would you offer teachers whom you are supervising?
- How would you work with your new teachers?
- What do you think is the toughest challenge in working with a teacher who needs remediation?
- How do you handle relationships with direct supervisors even when you may not always agree?
- How do you recruit and maintain quality teachers and staff members?

- Please explain how you view the media specialist's role in the educational program of your school.
- What is your process for helping new and novice teachers improve their instruction?
- Describe an effective teacher evaluation system.
- What do we need to do to empower staff to be truly effective agents for change?
- 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?
- 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?
- How do we develop an atmosphere of high expectations for self and others?
- If you were hiring a new administrative assistant, what questions would you ask applicants for the position? Why?
- How would you delegate responsibilities to other administrators and staff members to ensure the success of the many activities in the school?
- What qualities would you look for when hiring new teachers on your campus?

### *Misc / Uncategorized*

- Tell us about a situation where you had to apply your knowledge of school law. How did it turn out?
- Explain how you would build positive relationships with leaders across sites while working together for district-wide goals?
- A student tells you they were hit by their father at home yesterday. What steps do you follow?
- 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?
- Do you speak multiple languages?
- If you could take a year off and write a book, what would the title of your book be and
- What was the last book on education that you read?
- What is your greatest fear in assuming this new role?

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