



## Preparing for the Interview

### Know the school!!!

Prepare for the interview by finding out as much as possible about the school and district before the interview. Employers are usually very pleased when you've done your homework.

- School website
- School report card - <http://iirc.niu.edu/> or <http://www.isbe.net> . These websites will give you lots of info about the school – student demographics, teacher information, class size, district budget, student achievement, etc.
- Check ISBE website for info – financial watch list, early warning, etc.
- Student/parent handbook – You may need to request a copy of this from the school before the interview.
- Teacher/staff handbook – You may need to request a copy of this from the school before the interview.
- Yearbook – You may need to request a copy of this from the school before the interview.
- School Improvement Plan – You may need to request a copy of this from the school before the interview.
- Review local newspapers to find out the latest issues.
- If you know someone in the school district, call and ask them about the job, challenges, etc.
- Ask for a copy of a job description for the principal/assistant principal.
- Ask for a copy of the evaluation plan for the principal/assistant principal.

### Sample Interview Questions

- 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 does the word *integrity* mean to you, and how does integrity manifest itself as you carry out your professional responsibilities?
- Time is a scarce resource. How do you manage time to ensure that you are a peak performer?
- 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 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?
- What evidence would lead you to believe that a parent organization is effective?
- What do we need to do to empower staff to be truly effective agents for change? Where does the principal fit into that picture?
- Describe in the clearest detail possible your vision of what a truly effective (elementary/middle/high) school would look like.
- What teaching methods do you find bother you a great deal?
- What do you enjoy about listening to people?
- Describe a situation that you handled recently that required great sensitivity and tact.
- 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?
- 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.
- 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?
- What variables in a school often stifle peak performance in its staff?
- We often hear descriptions of “centralized ends and decentralized means.” What does that term mean to you?
- 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?
- 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?
- Is everything we do in education that adds value to a child’s education measurable and/or observable? What are the exceptions, if any?
- If you were hiring a new secretary, what questions would you ask applicants for the position? Why?
- Are we trying to do too much or too little in education? If so, what should we abandon or add?
- As a principal, what is your current role in the development and implementation of curriculum in the school?
- 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?

- Describe something that you have tried and have failed at. What did you learn from that experience?
- What motivates you personally and professionally?
- 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?
- 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 you would want to convey to the reader?
- What was the last book on education that you read?
- What was the last book that you read?
- 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?
- Describe a recent professional conflict you had and indicate how it was resolved.
- 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?
- Describe how you would encourage the participation and involvement of parents in your school.
- What would be the role and expectations of the counseling program, particularly in the area of student discipline?
- 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?
- Describe the process that you would use to develop a campus budget.
- As the new principal on a campus, what leadership skills would you use to build your team from existing staff?
- Describe a creative, original, innovative idea that you have implemented in your school.
- 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?
- Why do you want to be a principal (assistant principal)?

Daresh, J. D. (2002). *Marketing your educational leadership skills. How to land the job you want*. Lanham, Maryland: the Scarecrow Press, Inc., 99-101.

#### Additional questions

- How would you work with your new teachers?
- What do you think is the toughest challenge in working with a teacher who needs remediation?
- What would an ideal remediation plan look like?
- Describe your administrative self.
- 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 do you think the keys to a successful principalship are?

### **Dress**

- Make sure your clothes fit well, are clean and neatly pressed.
- Simple, but professional
- Perfume/Cologne – sparingly or not at all
- Dress in a conservative but stylish manner.

### **Interview Tips**

- When you enter the room, introduce yourself to each member of the interview team (if you can do so easily). Try and remember names. If you can, when you are seated, create a seating chart to help you remember names.
- Listen to the questions.
- Take time to think about the question.
- Pace your speech at a moderate rate and in a natural manner.
- Use those action words that demonstrate what you may do for the district.
- Make the facts clear.
- Try and build rapport with the interview team.
- Don't try to cover for something you don't know.
- Smile☺
- Be natural!

### **End of Interview**

- You will normally have an opportunity to ask any final questions, be ready with an appropriate job related question.
- Bring up any related strengths that have not been addressed.
- Thank the interview team. Make eye contact and shake their hands.
- Do not ask about salary, vacation, or benefits at this point. These questions are appropriate for the second interview or during the discussion of a job offer.
- Do not press for an early decision.
- Do not show discouragement.
- Do not ask for an evaluation of your interview performance at this time.

### **After You Go Home**

- Replay the interview and make notes: What are some of the questions that were asked? They may come up in another interview. If you were not confident about your answers, do some research on that topic before your next interview.
- Record details about the interview so you can do a proper follow up.
- Send thank you notes immediately. Make sure and have the correct spelling of the interview team's names before you leave the interview.
- Celebrate! You made it to and through the interview.

### **You Are Offered The Job....**

- This is the time to focus in on salary, benefits, expectations, contract, etc.
- Ask to spend a day at the school. This will give you an opportunity to get to know the school and staff. Ask for time to meet with the faculty and meet with the staff. This is a time to ask them what they think the strengths and weaknesses of the school are, what are upcoming challenges, their expectations of the new principal, etc.
- Inquire about the total employment package
  - Salary – the first year salary and the potential for increased growth over time.
  - Professional Growth
    - Tuition Reimbursement
    - Professional Membership Fees
    - State, Local and National Conference Attendance
  - Benefits
    - Health Insurance: Single coverage and/or total family.
    - Life Insurance
    - Car and/or mileage allowance
    - Deferred Compensation or IRA's
    - Board Paid Retirement contributions
    - Vacation and other personal release time
- Once you have negotiated the details of your employment it is highly recommended that you contact someone to assist you with final review of the contract. The Illinois Principal's Association is very willing to assist you with questions related to your contract of employment.
- Remember your response to the offer of employment is critical. Collect your data quickly and review the information carefully. It is important that you do not leave the school board guessing for an extended period of time. Keep in contact with them while you are reviewing the information needed for you to make your final decision. Please request of them a reasonable and appropriate time needed for your review. It is suggested that you not exceed more than seven days.

### **You Accept the Offer of Employment**

- Discuss the contract options that are available.
  - One year
  - Multi Year

Effective January 1, 1998, employment contracts between Illinois boards of education and superintendents (as well another administrators) may range in duration from a single year to a multi-year period up to five years.

Determining the length of a contract depends on many factors. Their distinguishing features, however, greatly influence the decision to use a **single-year** or **multi-year contract**.

**Under one-year contracts**, administrators gain and retain their tenure rights and are not subject to performance-based contract extension requirements. Thus, an administrator employed under a one-year contract gains tenure after being employed for two consecutive school terms, or, if first employed after January 1, 1998, after four consecutive school terms. Although an administrator does not receive tenure in a specific position, a tenured administrator has the same due process rights as a teacher.

**Under multi-year contracts**, administrators waive all tenure rights. A multi-year contract must include specific performance-based components. The parties may, by mutual agreement, amend the performance-based contract anytime during a multi-year contract's term. If the performance goals are not met during the contract, the contract may not automatically roll-over, although the parties may enter into a new contract.

- **Section 10-23.8 of the Illinois School Code** contains the “performance-based” provisions applicable to multi-year employment agreements:

“Performance-based contracts shall be linked to student performance and academic improvement within the schools of the districts. No performance-based contract shall be extended or rolled-over prior to its scheduled expiration unless all the performance and improvement goals contained in the contract have been met. Each performance-based contract shall include the goals and indicators of student performance and academic improvement determined and used by the local school board to measure the performance and effectiveness of the administrator and such other information as the local school board may determine.”

- Be cautious how you establish your performance goals for your contract. Seek assistance before you agree to final goal language for your contract.

### **Once You Have The Job...**

- Send a planter or something to the building saying you are looking forward to joining the team ...
- If you have an opportunity to meet with staff before the beginning of the school year, do so. This is an excellent time to learn their expectations, identify challenges the school is facing, etc.
- Get to know the community!