

T&L/ETWD/Educator Development

Principles for Principals January

For questions or comments, please contact LouisianaLeaders@la.gov.

January's Topic: School Operations/Management - Administrative Operations

Interviewing and onboarding new staff are critical yet challenging tasks for principals, who must assess candidates' fit for their school and effectiveness with students. Developing an effective interview process is often learned on the job, as no formal training fully prepares leaders for this. This article highlights interview questions from two experts to help principals refine their hiring approach.

Below are real-life examples of interview questions and the rationale behind them, allowing you to scrutinize your questions and a process to help strengthen your approach to new hires. Ultimately, each hire is a gamble, but the more we can reveal about the candidate through our interview process, the better the chance of hiring teachers who will help our students.

Teacher Excellence Questions

In *Defining Teacher Excellence: The Characteristics, Practices, and Experiences of Highly Effective Teachers*, Dr. Keith Leger interviewed 10 teachers who had reached the highest levels on the evaluation system in one South Louisiana School System. From those interviews, he developed four specific questions that leaders can use to compare the candidates' answers against his results. Through this process, leaders can assess how prospective teachers will perform compared to excellent teachers already in the field.

His four questions are:

1. **How would you define highly effective teaching?**



Dr. Jenny Blalock
Principal
A. E. Phillips Lab School

My 3 Three Things

1. **One thing I wish I would have done differently my first year:** I would have met with my mentor more often and felt vulnerable enough to share my challenges instead of shouldering everything on my own.
2. **One thing I was glad I did my first year:** I am thankful we focused on school environment and teacher appreciation. Cultivating a team that shares a common vision and love for students is unstoppable.
3. **One thing every principal should know/do:** Educational Leadership is not for the faint at heart. It is a tough job, but so very purposeful and rewarding.

- a. Looking for answers that demonstrate the teacher's ability to produce interesting and meaningful activities, with a high level of energy and enthusiasm, who has high expectations, and maintains an ordered classroom.

2. What characteristics and knowledge contribute to highly effective teaching?

- a. What personal ownership do they have over their work? Can they synthesize their previous experience into learning and knowledge? What emphasis do they place on content knowledge, student knowledge, best practices, etc?

3. What practices contribute to highly effective teaching?

- a. How do they help students “process” learning? What are their routines? Do they have routines? How do they assess student learning informally?

4. What types of support systems contribute to highly effective teaching?

- a. How do they communicate with parents, peers, and administrators? How do they want parents, peers, and administrators to communicate with them? What are their expectations? How do they desire/respond to feedback?

Unfortunately, the space here does not allow for full inclusion of all explanations, but there is much more to these questions, and for more information, you can read:

Leger, K. E. (2018). Defining teaching excellence: The characteristics, practices, and experiences of highly effective teachers. Independently Published

Teacher Personality Questions

Student growth IS dependent upon teacher effectiveness, but teacher effectiveness is dependent on more than just content knowledge and delivery. It also depends on their ability to fit within the team and the school's environment. Identifying that in a single interview is difficult, given that the interview process is a “put on your best” contest. Interviewees are trying to win over administrators, and administrators are trying to win over interviewees. Cutting through the “image” being portrayed can be challenging. Below are questions from Dr. Steve Perry’s book *Push Has Come to Shove* that can “push” the interviewee into demonstrating who they are and what they are really about.

1. Are you a good teacher? Prove it? Teach me how to do something.

- a. Dr. Perry asks this to allow the interviewee to point to specific examples of students' learning. Additionally, it gives him a chance to see how quickly the interviewee can move from a reflex position to a control position and back again.

2. What would be your reaction to 20% of your students failing an assignment?

- a. He wants to see their action steps. Have they encountered this before? Do they know how to handle this? How much do they care about the fact that one-fifth of the class failed?

3. Tell me why I should care about your subject matter?

- a. For this, he wants to know if they can “sell” their lessons/materials/content. Students are predisposed not to engage, even when it is in their best interest. How can the teacher engage the students? Are they able to communicate the importance of the work and build motivation for students?

4. We win here at _____ - prove that you are a winner.

- a. “My asking candidates to prove they are winners is self-explanatory. Losers lose. Winners win at all costs. We are playing for kids’ lives. Losing is not an option.”

Perry, S. (2011). Push has come to shove: Getting our kids the education they deserve — even if it means picking a fight. Crown.

Again, these are just a sampling of questions and provide insights into two different styles of interview questions. Their inclusion here does not serve as a direct endorsement of these questions, but rather to give you a perspective on various approaches.

Questions for Reflection:

Based on this month’s topic.

1. Both Dr. Perry and Dr. Leger emphasize that each interview question has a specific purpose and is designed to meet the needs of their school. How aligned do you feel your questions are with the “purpose” of your school?
2. Throughout your career, have interviewers used questions that you felt were more engaging than others? What were those questions? What might be the purpose behind those questions?
3. Throughout your career, have interviewers asked questions that you felt were just filling time or did not serve a purpose? What were those questions? How might you avoid them in your process?
4. How do you incorporate questions that evaluate a candidate’s response to challenges, such as student failure, and their ability to adapt and take action?
5. With a mentor or close peer, compare and contrast your interview processes and the questions you ask. What do you think works? What does not work? How can both of you strengthen your approaches?